Pathways for Recovery Final report

December 2023

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Contents

Executive Summary

Unemployment, particularly prolonged unemployment, is associated with adverse effects on individual and community well-being (Creed et al., 1999; Nichols et al., 2013; Blustein, 2019; Marrone and Swarbrick, 2020; Pratap et al., 2021). The detrimental impact of unemployment has been further heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic (Blustein et al., 2020). The Pathways for Recovery programme is a partially funded initiative by the European Social Fund and the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP). It constitutes a comprehensive employment support initiative delivered through a regional partnership comprising specialist support providers, employment and skills organizations, and strategic stakeholders. The programme aims to assist job seekers and economically inactive individuals, including those facing long-term unemployment and individuals distanced from the labour market, by providing the necessary support for their reintegration into employment. This report outlines the findings from the research evaluating the Pathways for Recovery programme conducted between July 2022 and November 2023, focusing on its efforts to address the challenges faced by individuals most affected in our communities due to the impact of COVID-19.

The research evaluation outlines the experiences of programme participants and delivery partners, using a mixed method approach. The quantitative data presented in this report were gathered through an online questionnaire (shared in English, Ukrainian, and Polish) on the employment and psychological benefits, in particular self-efficacy and well-being, of the programme. A total of 112 responses were collected, with 91 for the initial survey and 21 for the follow-up survey. Qualitative data were collected through a comprehensive set of interviews involving 20 programme participants and 19 delivery partners. This included 27 semi-structured interviews and three focus groups with a total of 12 participants. The combination of both quantitative and qualitative data provides a holistic understanding of the program's impact and effectiveness.

The findings in this final report show that Pathways for Recovery is performing strongly, enabling the programme participants to improve their wellbeing, confidence and self-esteem, as well as their employability skills and their social skills. Figure 1.1 below summarises the benefits of the programme and the opportunities for improvement captured through the evaluation.
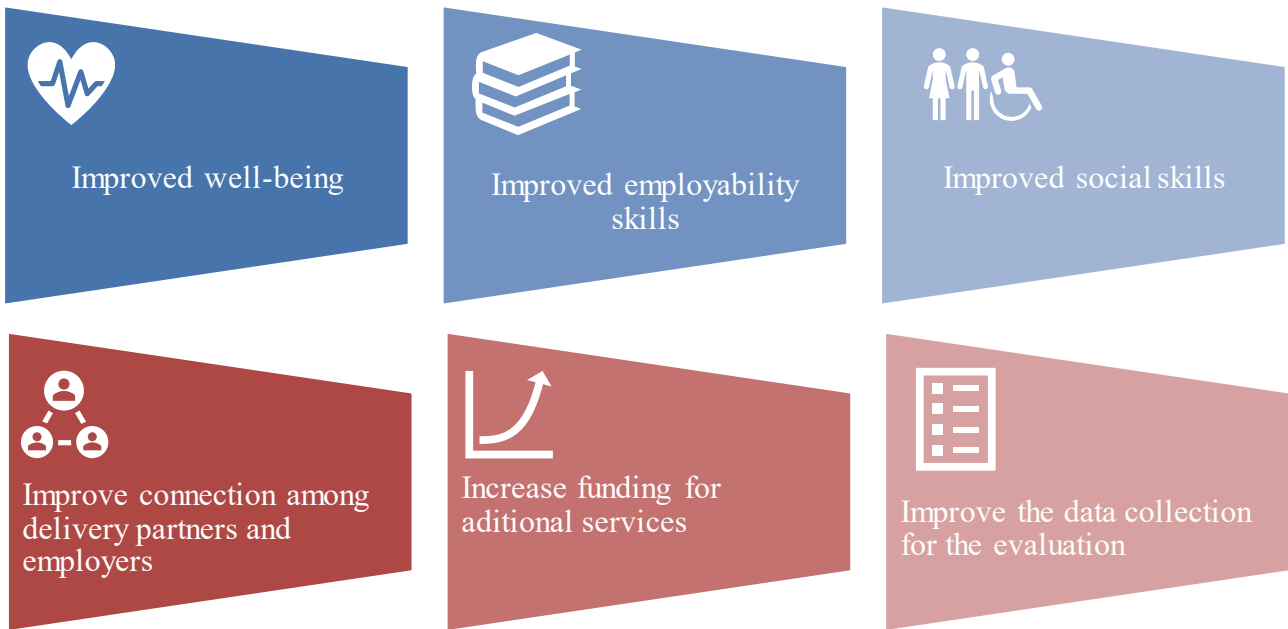
Figure 1.1. Pathways for recovery benefits (top) and opportunities for improvement (bottom).

Finally, the data gathered in relation to the social impact of Pathway for Recovery and reported in Section 6 (see also Appendix A), demonstrates that the total maximum impact created by Pathway for Recovery equates to £1,139,372.90. However, when attribution, displacement and deadweight is accounted for, the overall impact value created is **£817,012.19**.

Based upon the data outlined in this report, the research team proposes the following key recommendations for future projects:

- **Creating networking opportunities for delivery partners and employers:** Enhancing collaboration between delivery partners and employers would provide delivery partners with a better understanding of the opportunities available to programme participants. Networking opportunities with employers have been provided throughout the project, with an increase in local employer networking events in the latter part of the program. These events are crucial to ensure participants actively engage with local employers. Nevertheless, there is room for improvement by expanding opportunities across different locations and incorporating additional virtual networking opportunities. This recommendation has already been highlighted in the Annual report (June 2023), and both the programme organisation and delivery partners have responded by increasing networking opportunities. Despite these efforts, participants with additional needs still encounter challenges with employer

networking opportunities, particularly for participants who struggle in environments that are loud and/or busy.

- **Increase funding:** Providing additional funding to support delivery organisations would enhance the quality of activities and support offered. This financial boost would enable these organisations to assist participants in covering transportation costs for both activities and employment opportunities. Additionally, it would facilitate the provision of more sustained and extended support, allowing delivery partners to effectively assist participants over a prolonged period. This recommendation holds significance not only for the specific programme but also for the broader funding system in the area. There has been ongoing discussion about the advantages that larger organisations may have within the existing funding system. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that these larger organisations might not be the most suitable option for participants with higher needs, those who cannot commute, or individuals with caregiving responsibilities that limit their ability to travel. Addressing these considerations is essential for ensuring inclusivity and accessibility for all participants.

- **Improve the data collection for the evaluation:** Evaluation is a crucial component of any program, serving as a means to highlight its positive impact and identify areas for improvement. The questionnaire data, especially when collected from participants at the beginning and end of the program, provides a quantifiable measure of the changes they have undergone. The inclusion of validated scales for self-efficacy, well-being, and work readiness further enhances the ability to quantify participants' experiences in these domains. The interviews offer a more in-depth understanding of the participants' journey, their motivations for joining the programme, and the ways in which the programme supports them in achieving their goals. However, it is noted that not all delivery organizations have actively engaged in data collection, resulting in an insufficient number of questionnaires to comprehensively investigate the impact on participants who are completing the program. Similarly, the interviews may not fully capture the diverse range of interventions provided. Therefore, a key recommendation is that all participating organizations in Pathways for Recovery should actively participate in any future evaluations by engaging in both questionnaires and interviews. This collective effort will contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the programmes' effectiveness and areas for enhancement.

1. Introduction

Pathways for Recovery is a part funded European Social Fund, South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP) wide comprehensive employment support initiative delivered by a regional partnership that includes specialist support providers, employment and skills organisations and strategic stakeholders. It focuses on the SEMLEP area which occupies a strategically important location, linking Oxford, Cambridge, London and the Midlands. This area is composed of local authority including Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire, Luton, Milton Keynes, North Northamptonshire, and West Northamptonshire[1]. Overall, Pathways for Recovery aims to:

- build a locally integrated employment service that tackles the significant impact that COVID 19 has had on the region. Their aim is to support those who have been most affected by the pandemic, both financially and individual's mental health/well-being.

- address barriers by providing specialist support to clients who need advice and guidance. They will help the participants gain the necessary confidence needed to engage with the job market and progress to sustainable employment, education and/or training, improving social inclusion and mobility.

- focus on job seekers and inactive people, including the long term unemployed and people far from the labour market who need support to get themselves back into employment.

This report presents the results from a research evaluation implemented from July 2022 to November 2023 to examine the Pathways for Recovery programme, which started in November 2021. Pathway for Recovery aims to help those most disadvantaged in our communities due to the impact of COVID-19, also known as SARS-CoV-2, including individuals experiencing long term unemployment and people far from the labour market who need support to get themselves back into employment. The evaluation is mixed methods, using both quantitative and qualitative data collection. The quantitative data presented in this report were gathered through an online questionnaire (in English Ukrainian, and Polish) on the psychological benefits, in particular self-efficacy and well-being, and employment benefits of the programme[2]. A total of 112 responses were collected, with 91 for the initial survey and 21 for the follow-up. Qualitative data were collected through a comprehensive set of interviews involving 20 programme participants and 19 delivery partners. This included 27 semi-structured

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[1] https://www.semlep.com/south-east-midlands/.

[2] Due to the low number of questionnaires collected, this report includes only the descriptive statistics of the respondents' demographics.

2. Literature Review

This section endeavours to offer an overview of existing literature, centring on the fundamental issues encountered by participants within the Pathways for Recovery program. Various factors can act as barriers to accessing employment, and while each individual's journey is unique, participants in Pathways for Recovery are primarily characterised as unemployed, non-native English speakers, and/or individuals facing challenges related to low levels of well-being and mental health.

The latest data for the Midlands reveals unemployment levels that align with the averages for England and Great Britain. Notably, the areas more significantly impacted by unemployment and inactivity are Bedford Borough and Luton (data from May 2023 – July 2023) (NOMIS, 2023).

Areas	Unemployment	Inactive
Bedford Borough	4.2%	18.4%
Central Bedfordshire	2.7%	16.3%
Luton	5.8%	24.4%
Milton Keynes	3.3%	18.4%
North Northamptonshire	3.2%	17.1%
West Northamptonshire	2.9%	16.8%
West Midlands	5.0%	20.8%
East Midlands	4.1%	20.6%
East	4.3%	19.2%
England	3.8%	21.0%
Great Britain	3.7%	21.4%

Table 2.1. Unemployment levels (NOMIS, 2023).

The relationship between unemployment and mental health is robust, with unemployment significantly impacting mental health (Karsten and Klaus, 2009). Unemployment serves as a stressor that can affect both psychological and physical health (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005), influencing aspects such as self-esteem and quality of life (Peláez-Fernández, Rey, and Extremera, 2021). Beyond providing income and financial security (Freyer, 1997), employment fulfils essential psychological needs, including social inclusion, a sense of purpose and activity, structured time planning, and status (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Karsten, and Klaus, 2009). Moreover, unemployment triggers a cascade of consequences that introduce additional stressors and exacerbate overall well-being. These consequences include financial instability, as well as challenges in family and marital relationships (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). The holistic impact underscores the importance of not only addressing

unemployment from an economic standpoint but also recognising its profound effects on individuals' mental health and overall life satisfaction.

Some of the programme participants are immigrants and/or asylum seekers. Multiple stressors exist in the lives of immigrants and asylum seekers, including a lack of social support or network, indefinite legal status, unemployment, and poor English proficiency (Salvo and de Williams, 2017). While English proficiency is important for accessing employment, its significance extends beyond the job market. Insufficient English language skills can create barriers in various areas, affecting access to health services (Kang, Tomkow, and Farrington, 2019), legal support (Salvo and de Williams, 2017), community involvement (Morrice, 2007), and even the process of acquiring British citizenship (Bartram, 2019). Moreover, poor English proficiency can impact psychological well-being (Montemitro et al., 2021), socialisation and community engagement. Proficiency in English is not only a linguistic skill but also a determinant of social inclusion and the ability to express feelings, while a lack of proficiency can lead to social isolation. Montemitro et al. (2021) found that low language proficiency is associated with a "higher prevalence and/or severity of psychiatric symptoms and mental disorders" (Montemitro et al., 2021:15). Long-term unemployment, coupled with challenges such as language barriers, compound the negative impact on the well-being of immigrants and asylum seekers. These interconnected stressors highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of the challenges faced by this population.

Long-term unemployment exerts a significant negative impact on individuals, as highlighted by research conducted by Thomsen (2009). This study demonstrated that the duration of unemployment is directly proportional to the negative effects on individuals, with individuals experiencing long-term unemployment (those unemployed for more than one year) being over three times less likely to secure a job (Thomsen, 2009). Studies (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Pinquart and Sörensen, 2000) have underscored the role of social relationships in helping unemployed individuals cope. However, the reduction in supportive relationships, exacerbated by factors such as COVID-19 and social distancing measures, has heightened the impact on well-being. The connection between an individual's motivation, well-being, and personal accomplishment is closely tied to their efficacy beliefs, which, in turn, influences their choices and subsequent actions (Pajares, 1996). In the employability context, promoting self-efficacy is crucial, as individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy are more confident in their abilities to succeed in gaining future employment (Lucas and Cooper, 2005). Previous research consistently indicates predictive relationships between increased self-efficacy, effective job

searching, and successful job procurement (Creed et al., 2001; Eden and Aviram, 1993; Meyers and Houssemand, 2010).

The challenges faced by individuals, particularly those seeking employment, have been exacerbated by the global COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 is a virus that has spread worldwide, primarily affecting the respiratory system, with various other effects still under investigation. As of February 2021, the United Kingdom had reported over 3.5 million confirmed cases and 106,000 deaths, while globally there were over 111 million confirmed cases and nearly 2.5 million deaths. The impact of COVID-19 on mental health and well-being has become a prominent concern, leading the UK government to release guidance addressing these issues (Public Health England, 2020). Research indicates that infectious diseases, such as COVID-19, can significantly contribute to heightened levels of anxiety and stress in individuals (Xiang, 2020). The pandemic has notably affected individual well-being, leading to feelings of sadness, isolation, anxiety, and, in some cases, suicidal thoughts (Khan et al., 2022; World Health Organization, 2022). Moreover, those who were not employed experienced substantial challenges during the pandemic (Cui et al., 2022). However, the comprehensive impact of COVID-19 on various aspects of people's lives, including financial security, well-being, and safety, is still not fully understood. Service continuity during the pandemic has been a complex and ongoing challenge for organizations, requiring rapid adaptation to circumstances beyond their control, such as lockdowns and government restrictions.

3. Methodology

This report presents the results from the research evaluating Pathways for Recovery which seek to answer the following specific research aims and questions:

Research Aim 1: To explore and understand the participants journey through the project. Including:

Q1: What are the needs of participants joining the project and what barriers have participants experienced in relation to employment?

Q2: What were participants' thoughts and experiences with delivery partners on the project?

Q3: How far has the project improved the knowledge and confidence of its participants whilst equipping them with the necessary skills and qualifications to seek employment?

Research Aim 2: To assess the efficacy of Pathways 4 Recovery in working with its partners and participants with complex needs. Including:

Q4: How flexible and responsive have the partners been to participants needs' and/or changes resulting from COVID-19 in society?

Q5: How have partners reviewed and developed good practice through the project?

Research Aim 3: To develop a social impact measurement framework to evaluate the impact of the project for participants and society. Including:

Q6: What has been the social impact of the Pathway for Recovery project?

Q7: What benefit does the programme offer to participants and the wider society?

The research used a longitudinal mixed method design across the evaluation, with both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Although the research included both research methods, emphasis is placed on qualitative information gained through the participants' personal narratives.

3.1. Qualitative data

The research aimed to capture qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with participants, along with input from key internal and external stakeholders. The participant interviews were conducted longitudinally, involving initial interviews and follow-up interviews, to gather rich and in-depth data on the evolving impact of the programme on individuals over time. The participant interviews focused on various aspects, including participants' life and needs, the impact of COVID-

19 and associated physical distancing measures, perceptions about the program, positive and negative outcomes, and suggestions for programme improvement.

The interview questions for delivery partners centred around their engagement in the program, understanding participants' life and needs, the impact of COVID-19 and physical distancing measures on both participants and programme delivery, perceptions about the program, positive and negative outcomes, and suggestions for programme enhancement. Notably, the researchers embedded themselves within the partnership, actively participating in and observing the day-to-day operations (tactical level data gathering) and strategic aspects of the project (e.g., attending regular steering group/board meetings). This immersive approach was crucial for developing a comprehensive understanding of the project and establishing rapport with key project partners.

3.2. Quantitative data

The research team collected longitudinal outcome data, which included a brief, user-friendly survey with academically validated, and robust psychological scales. The survey was collected from participants at two distinct points in their engagement, with the first data collection occurred at the start of their involvement (Time 1), and the second took place at a later stage (Time 2)[3]. Additionally, the research team collected quantitative data, from Pathway for Recovery deliver organisations, concerning the social impact delivered to society. This involved the research team engaging with secondary data to develop frameworks that could be used to identify the fiscal and social impacts of the intervention.

3.3. Social Impact Matrix

The team sought to develop the Social Impact Measurement Framework based on the project and the programme's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) identified. This allowed for the investigation of the social impact of Pathway for Recovery and the benefits that the programme offered to participants and the wider society. The University of Northampton's 'Social Impact Matrix' utilised the prior work of McLoughlin et al. (2009) and combined it with the 'triple-bottom line' that is present in the business models of social enterprise and also the delivery of public services. The triple-bottom line consists of economic, social and environmental impacts that are delivered by organisations and (in the absence of a current theoretical definition of social value) used as a proxy for social value. Any organisation that seeks to use the model to develop their own social impact matrix has to first decide what specific areas of impact that it has in the economic, social and environmental spheres. Once

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[3] Time 2 is dependent on length of engagement and will be agreed with delivery partners.

these areas have been defined the organisation must then identify what its specific outputs, outcomes and impacts are for these areas of impact and then develop or identify tools or formula that can be used to measure these specific outputs, outcomes and impacts. A simplified example of this would be if a social enterprise that works in the work-integration sector sought to evaluate its social impact. First, it would map the economic, social and environmental areas that it operated in. One example of this would be employment, which would be present in both the economic and social elements of the model. An employment related output would be the number of jobs created; an employment related outcome would be the psychological benefit to an individual of being employed; an employment related impact would be the savings to the state of reduced welfare payments. Specific tools would then need to be selected in order to capture this data. This would be simple for the number of jobs created; however, for the outcomes and impacts specific tools or formula would need to be utilised/created. Psychological scales that measured constructs such as well-being, self-efficacy or anxiety could be employed to measure outcome. Impact could be measured by adopting a formula that multiplied the number of jobs created (J) by the annual income of an individual on job-seekers allowance (B). The result of this calculation could also be added to the increase in income tax and national insurance income created by the new employment (T). This would give a calculation that would provide the fiscal savings to the state of the intervention [(J x B) + T].

4. Quantitative data analysis

4.1. Demographic characteristics

From November 2022 to November 2023, quantitative data was collected using an online survey translated in English, Ukrainian, and Polish. The programme participants (886 up to the end of September 2023) were asked to reply to the survey, on a voluntary basis, for the first time at the beginning of their participation in the programme and for the second time at the end[4]. In total, 112 responses were collected, 91 for the first time and 21 for the second time[5]. This means that only 10.3% of participants completed the survey.

The participants' minimum age is 17 years old and the maximum is 66 years old, with an average age of 34.6 years old (standard deviation of 13.0 years old). The participants' age distribution is similar to the average UK unemployed population. However, the sample age is slightly more concentrated between 25-34 years old (sample is 24.1% and UK population is 21.2%) and 35-49 years old (sample is 25.9% and UK population is 20.8%), while the UK unemployed population is more concentrated between 16-24 years old (sample is 31.5% and UK population is 36.4%) and more than 50 years old (sample is 18.5% and UK population is 21.7%).
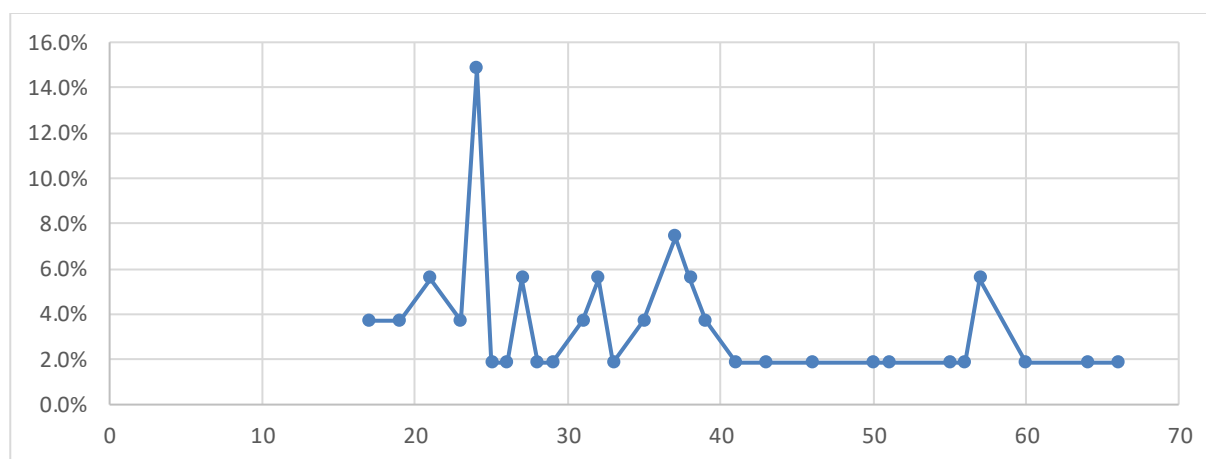
Figures 4.1. Respondents' age distribution (N=54).

The data indicates that initially, there are more female participants (56.8%) than males (43.2%) based on sex (Figure 4.2). However, when further investigating gender identity, the percentages for males and females decrease (respectively 30.5% and 42.7%), as some participants identify as gender neutral

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[4] This section, unless specified otherwise, will include only the data from the respondents that replied to the questionnaire for the first time (at the beginning of their participation) since those that replied the second time should have the same demographic characteristics.

[5] The number of responses is not high enough to draw inferences about the impact of the programme, therefore this section will present only the descriptive statistics of the respondents' demographic data and their permanence in the programme. Caution should be exercised when interpreting the results and analysis due to the low number of respondents.

(15.9%), non-binary (4.9%), other (3.7%), or transgender (2.4%) (Figure 4.3). This data suggests a diversity of gender identities among the participants, highlighting the importance of acknowledging the broad spectrum of genders, beyond the traditional binary classification of male and female.
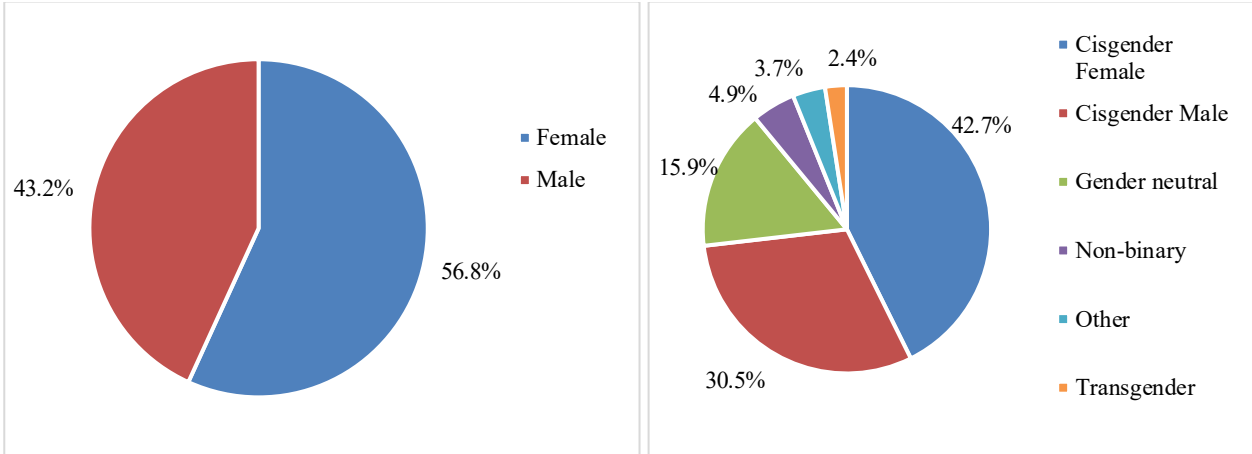
Figures 4.2 and 4.3. Respondents' sex (N=88) and gender (N=91).

The predominant ethnicities in the participating population are White (42.9%) and White British (17.6%), as indicated in Figure 4.4. However, this distribution differs from the broader UK population, where ethnic minorities face a higher unemployment rate (7.5%) compared to individuals from a white ethnic background (3.8%) (Powell and Francine-Devine, 2023). In fact, minorities present a higher risk of unemployment (Longhi, 2020) and have lower earnings (Li and Heath, 2020).
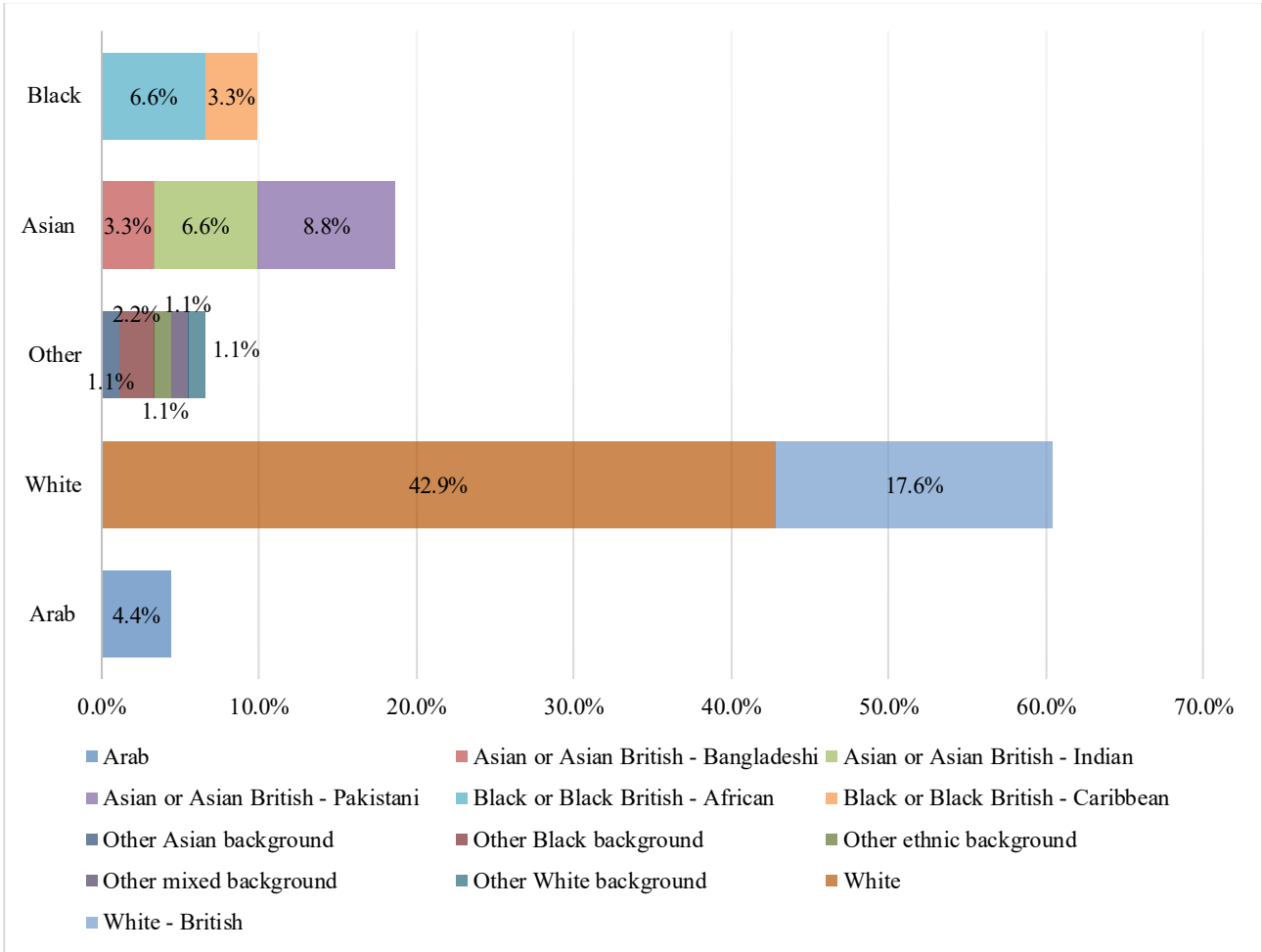
Figures 4.4. Respondents' ethnicity (N=91).

The respondents' educational attainment spans across various levels, with 22.0% holding qualifications at level 1 and below (NVQ Entry Levels 1-3), 18.7% at Higher Education & professional/vocational equivalent (NVQ Level 6), and 15.4% at GCSE/O-Level grades A-C & professional/vocational equivalent (NVQ Level 2) (Figure 4.5). This data shows lower levels of education with respect to England and Wales, where, in 2021, 9.6% of the population had Level 1 and entry level qualifications (1 to 4) and 13.4% of the population had Level 2 qualifications (5 or more GCSEs) (ONS, 2021). Literature consistently establishes a negative relationship between education and employment (Núñez and Livanos, 2010), with lower levels of education correlating with an increased probability of unemployment.
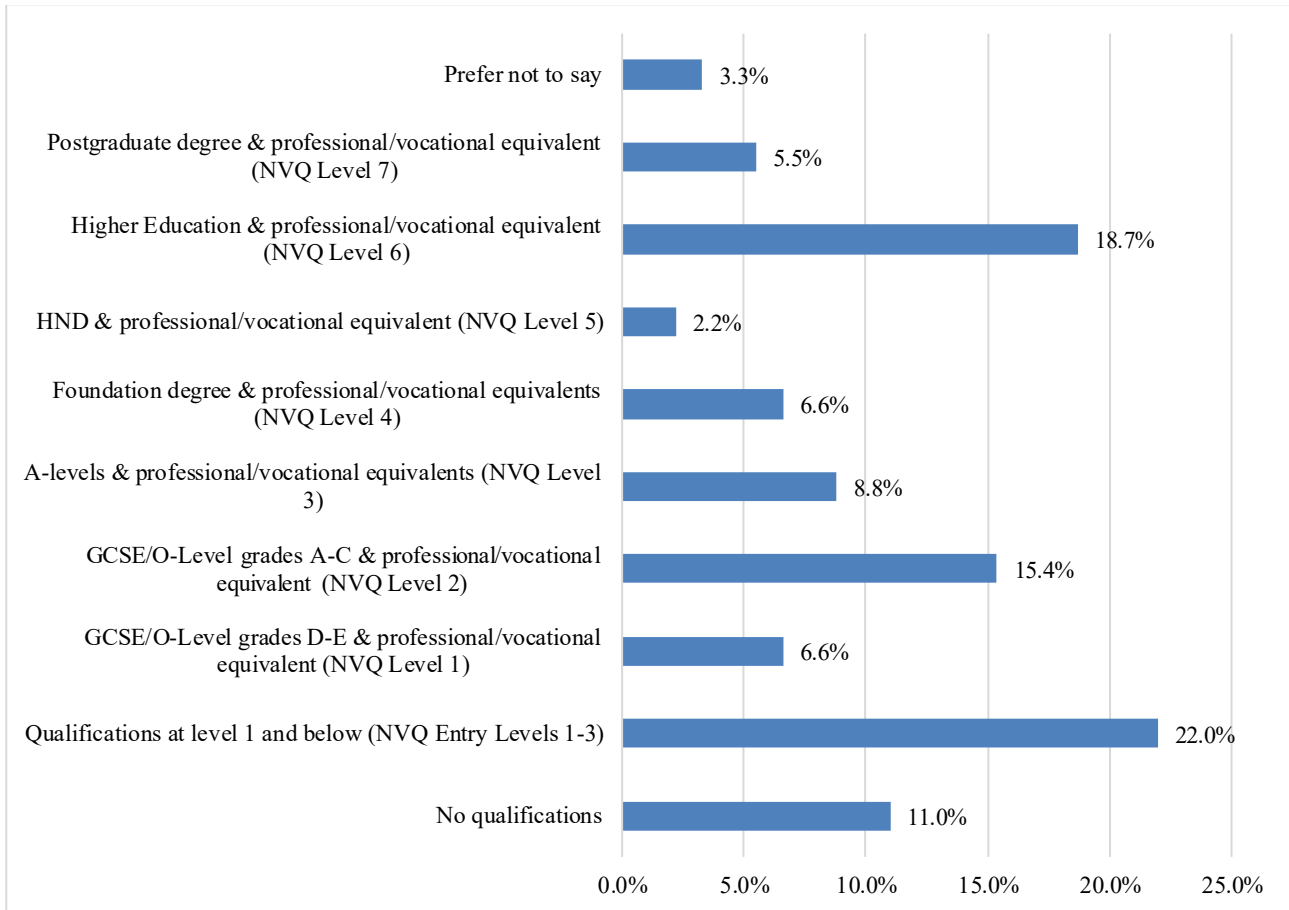
Figure 4.5. Respondent's education level (N=91).

The respondents were asked to identify with one of the target groups for the programme (respondents were able to select more than one option). At the beginning of the journey in Pathway for Recovery, the first time doing the questionnaire, half were unemployed (50.9%), and the other half of the responses were mainly distributed around people with mental health challenges (10.2%) and students (10.2%). The respondent selecting 'Other' specified "I left the country because of the war". Moreover, some respondents replied 'Prefer not to say' but these were not included in the count so as not to skew the responses. When answering for the second time, at the end of the journey, the respondents who were unemployment was slightly lower (38.2%) and those not working but not claiming benefits was zero. Moreover, those with physical disabilities, difficulty as English is not the first language, and students decreased. However, those experiencing learning needs and mental health challenges increased.

University of Northampton
Institute for Social
Innovation and Impact

European Union
European
Social Fund

PATHWAYS4RECOVERY
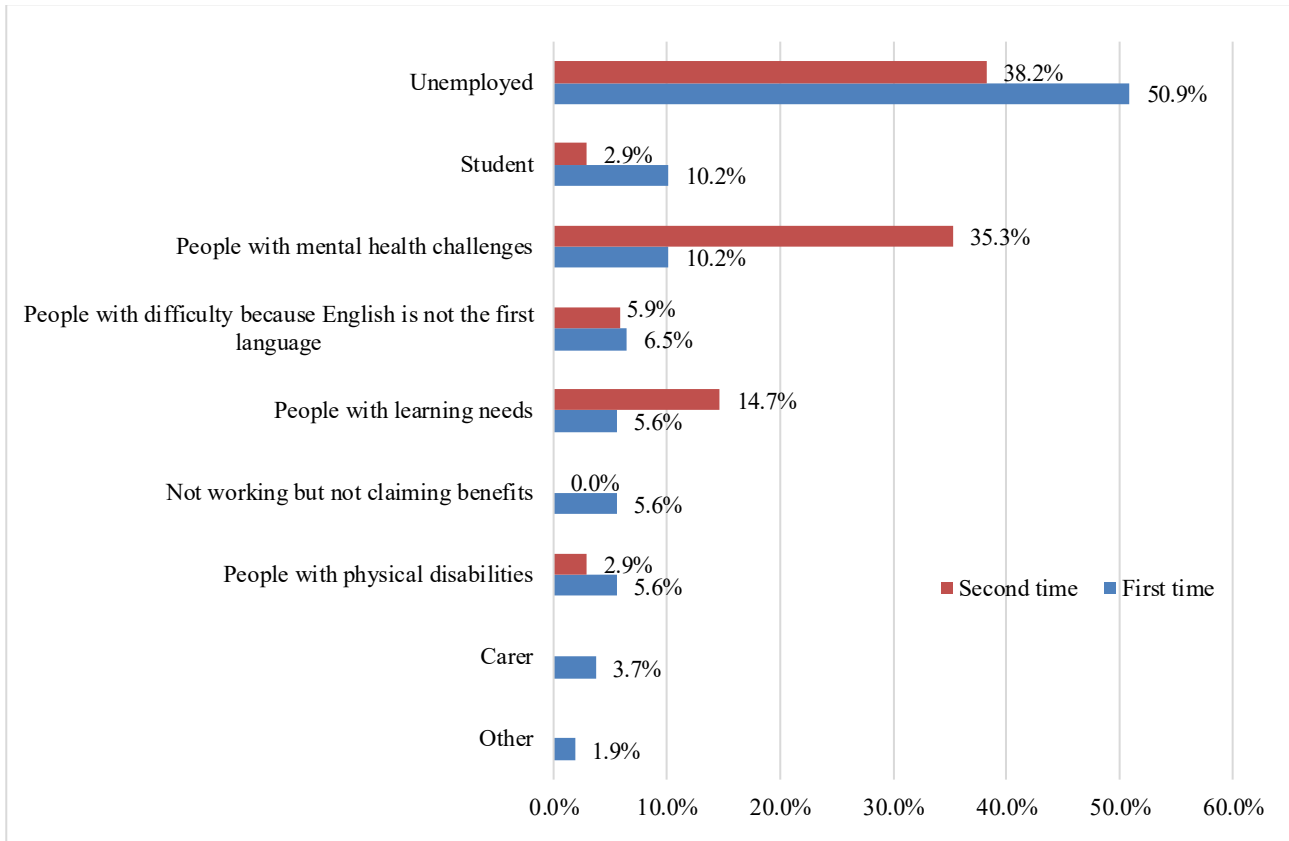
Figure 4.6. Programme respondents' vulnerability (N=108 the first time of completion, N=34 the second time)

A section of the questionnaire investigated the impact of COVID-19 on the programme participants. Most of the respondents did not belong to the high or moderate risk groups for COVID-19 (63.7%),11.0% belonged to the high-risk group (therefore people previously identified as Clinically Extremely Vulnerable - CEV - because of precondition or GP judgement), 17.6% to the moderate risk group (therefore people previously identified as Clinically Vulnerable - CV), and 7.7% preferred not to say. Half of the participants did not have their well-being affected by COVID-19 (52.7%) although around a third (37.4%) noted that their well-being was affected. Among the 34 that noted their well-being was affected, most felt that their anxiety increased (24.6%), their routine changed and they found it difficult to cope (21.9%), and they felt alone and isolated (21.1%). Those who had their ability to find a job affected by COVID-19 third (38.5%) (Table 4.1) was similar to those declaring to have experienced reduced well-being because of COVID-19. Research showed that COVID-19 lockdown had a negative effect on individual well-being and mental health (Czeisler et al., 2020), in fact, it heightened levels of anxiety and stress in individuals (Xiang, 2020) and led to feelings of sadness, isolation, anxiety, and, in some cases, suicidal thoughts (Khan et al., 2022; World

Health Organization, 2022). Moreover, those who were not employed experienced substantial challenges during the pandemic (Cui et al., 2022).

| Belonging to the high or moderate risk groups for COVID-19	Absolute value	Percentages
No	58	63.7%
Prefer not to say	7	7.7%
Yes, I belong to the high-risk group (clinically extremely vulnerable)	10	11.0%
Yes, I belong to the moderate risk group (clinically vulnerable)	16	17.6%
Total	**91**	**100.0%**
COVID-19 affected respondents well-being		
Prefer not to say	9	9.9%
Yes	34	37.4%
No	48	52.7%
Total	**91**	**100.0%**
If COVID-19 affected respondents well-being, how?		
I don't feel safe at home	1	0.9%
Other	1	0.9%
Someone in the household got sick	4	3.5%
Someone in the household lost the job	5	4.4%
I had additional responsibilities (childcare and/or caring for family members) and found it difficult to cope	7	6.1%
I lost many stimuli	8	7.0%
I have additional support needs that were not fulfilled during the lockdown	11	9.6%
I felt alone and isolated	24	21.1%
My routine changed, and I found it difficult to cope	25	21.9%
My anxiety increased	28	24.6%
Total (of the respondents replying to this question)	**34**	**100.0%**
COVID-19 affected respondents' ability to find a job		
No	38	41.8%
Other	1	1.1%
Prefer not to say	17	18.7%
Total	**91**	**100.0%**

Table 4.1. COVID-19 impact.

From the 44 respondents reporting their unemployment length, unemployment ranged from 1 month to a maximum of 120 months (mean of 28.9 and standard deviation of 37.7). Therefore, most of the Pathways for Recovery participants can be categorised as long term unemployed as they have been unemployed for more than a year (Eurostat, 2020). Among these, 16 reported how long they have been claiming unemployment benefits, with the minimum length is zero months, and the maximum is 120 months (mean of 24.2 and a standard deviation of 28.3).

4.2. Service delivery

Most of the respondents were from TRACK NN (22.0%), University of Bedfordshire (19.8%), 1MPACT (16.5%), PBIC (14.3%), and Evolve Your Future (13.2%) (Figure 4.7).
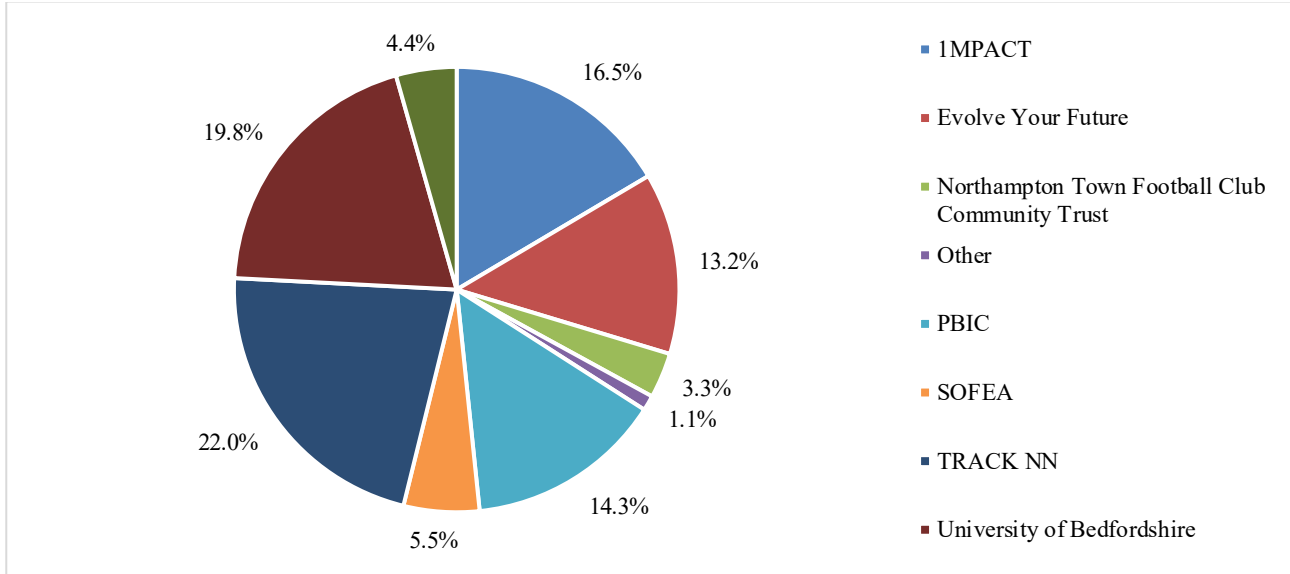
Figures 4.7. Respondents' delivery organisation.

The majority of respondents who completed the questionnaire for the first time were at the initial stages of their journey, with most being part of Pathways for Recovery for less than 1 month (25.3%), followed by 1 - 3 months (19.8%), and 3 - 6 months (20.9%). Understandably, those who responded for the second time had been participating for a longer duration, with most participating for 3 - 6 months (42.9%) or more than 12 months (38.1%). Table 4.3 offers a detailed breakdown of the respondents' participation in the program.

Length of support	First time	Second Time
Less than 1 month	25.3%	0.0%
1 - 3 months	19.8%	14.3%
3 - 6 months	20.9%	42.9%
6 - 12 months	14.3%	4.8%
More than 12 months	12.1%	38.1%
Prefer not to say	7.7%	0.0%
Total	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

Table 4.3. Involvement in the programme

4.3. Pathways for Recovery Outcomes

The research aimed to investigate the impact of Pathways for Recovery and to explore and understand the programme participants' experiences. Those respondents who reached the end of their journey with Pathways for Recovery completed the survey for a second time. In this follow-up, they were asked to describe the support they received, including activities, courses, qualifications, etc., and articulate how this support has benefited them. Among the 21 participants who completed the questionnaire for the second time, outcomes varied. One participant transitioned from being economically inactive (e.g., a student, caregiver, managing long-term illness, etc.) to being unemployed, 13 participants shifted to volunteering, six moved into employment, and one indicated 'Other' as their status. Furthermore, participants detailed the support they received, showcasing variations across different areas.

Employment

- *"Shown how to do picks in the warehouse, supported to learn how to lead a team, talking to people/better communication"*
- *"I am pleased to say [the organisation] has offered me 15hrs of work a week"*
- *"I have had help from [the delivery partner] who has supported me in getting a volunteer job in the theatre"*
- *"I am now volunteering and helping others in the same situation I was in"*
- *"I have had the support from [the delivery partner] to get myself a part time job …"*
- *"I am doing a cookery course at cafe track"*
- *"Cooking course"*

Education

- *"Btec sport level 1, Entry level 1 English, Entry level 1 maths"*
- *"This is my first English course, the teacher is excellent and explains very well and I am very happy that I can participate in this course because it means a lot for me in the future to find a better job"*
- *"I did ESOL A2 and ESOL B1 "*
- *"Now I am able to speak with doctor is very good."*

Mental health

- *"[The organisation] helped me build my confidence up and social skills after covid to go and volunteer (my dream)"*

- *"I am now volunteering at [the organisation], its helping me to socialise and help with my people skills next step a job I hope"*

- *"With the support I am now volunteering …"*

- *"I have been with [the organisation] off and on for 4years, they have supported me through my hard times, I am now training to become a chef at a pub"*

- *"I am doing a mosaic project"*

- *"1:1 support from [the delivery partner] [on] anxiety, nervous, and self believe"*

- *"The support from [the delivery partner] and team have been outstanding, I feel more able to socialise"*

- *"[The delivery partner] has given me tools to help with my needs and is always there for us. At the moment I have started to help around [the organisation]"*

- *"I have gained some self believe in myself since COVID-19"*

- *"I have gained my confidence back"*

In addition to exploring programme participants' outcomes, all respondents were presented with three academically validated scales to assess psychological benefits (self-efficacy), health and well-being, and employability skills. These scales included the General Self-Efficacy (GSE) Scale, the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale, and the Employment Scale. As mentioned earlier, participants were invited to complete the questionnaire twice during the program, allowing for a comparison of their self-efficacy, well-being, and employment skills. Out of the 112 questionnaires collected, 91 were completed at the start (T1), and 21 were completed for a second time at the end of the journey (T2). The intention was to understand changes over time experienced by the programme participants. However, it's important to note that due to the low number of questionnaires completed at the end of the program, the results do not include statistical tests typically used to explore the significance of changes over time. Therefore, any conclusions drawn from these results should be interpreted as indicative only.

4.3.1 Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy was assessed using the General Self-Efficacy Scale developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995). This scale consists of 10 items on a 4-point Likert Scale (1 = not at all true, 2 = hardly true, 3 = moderately true, 4 = exactly true), yielding scores ranging from a minimum of 10 to a maximum of 40. Self-efficacy is defined as "an individual's belief in their ability to complete a task

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and the strength with which this belief is held" (Hazenberg, Seddon, and Denny, 2015:278). Research indicates a strong link between self-efficacy and unemployment, where a lack of employment is associated with reduced self-efficacy (Scherbaum et al., 2006). Additionally, experiences related to unemployment, such as financial struggles, challenging living conditions, and loneliness, contribute to a decline in self-efficacy (Scherbaum et al., 2006). Over the course of the program, participants' self-efficacy changed, with a mean self-efficacy score of 28.3 at the program's outset and a mean score of 30.9 at its conclusion. Figure 4.7 illustrates these changes over time. Among the 12 participants who completed the questionnaires twice and were identifiable, 10 reported an increase in self-efficacy, one reported a decrease, and one did not experience a change.
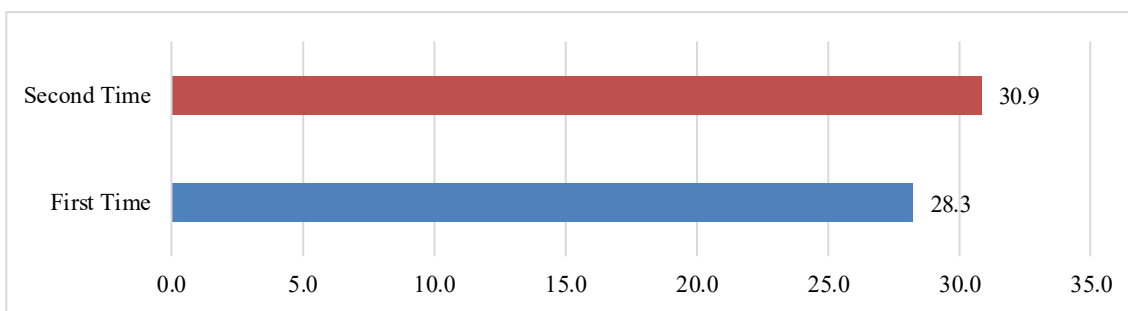
Figure 4.7. Personal Confidence Changes Over Time (%)

When examining which groups have benefited the most from increased self-efficacy, it is evident that all education levels have shown improvement, particularly among those with no qualifications, individuals with a Foundation degree & professional/vocational equivalents (NVQ Level 4), and those with GCSE/O-Level grades D-E & professional/vocational equivalent (NVQ Level 1). Notably, both males and females appear to have experienced a similar degree of improvement. Finally, it appears that the youngest and the oldest participants have experienced the greatest increase in self-efficacy, as highlighted in Table 4.4.

Level of education	Average T1	Average T2
GCSE/O-Level grades D-E & professional/vocational equivalent (NVQ Level 1)	21.5	27.3
Foundation degree & professional/vocational equivalents (NVQ Level 4)	25.5	30.0
No qualifications	25.2	32.5
Qualifications at level 1 and below (NVQ Entry Levels 1-3)	27.0	30.0
GCSE/O-Level grades A-C & professional/vocational equivalent (NVQ Level 2)	26.4	30.8
HND & professional/vocational equivalent (NVQ Level 5)	29.5	
A-levels & professional/vocational equivalents (NVQ Level 3)	29.3	33.5
Prefer not to say	28.5	34.0
Postgraduate degree & professional/vocational equivalent (NVQ Level 7)	33.4	
Higher Education & professional/vocational equivalent (NVQ Level 6)	35.1	
Sex		
Female	29.0	31.1
Male	27.9	30.3
Age (categorised)		
17-24	25.7	31.5
25-34	29.8	29.5
35-49	29.6	31.3
50+	27.1	30.4

Table 4.4. Self-efficacy averages at the beginning and at the end of the journey.

4.3.2 Mental Health and Well-Being

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale was used to investigate the well-being of participants. Participants were invited to answer seven questions in relation to their well-being on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = none of the time, 2 = rarely, 3 = some of the time, 4 = often, 5 = all of the time). The individuals' final scores are defined by the sum of the single items, thus ranging from 7 to 35[6]. Low well-being has been associated with unemployment (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005), with transition into employment proven to increase individual well-being (Zhou et al., 2019). To assess participants' mental health and well-being at the beginning and end of the program, the average results of the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale were examined for respondents completing the

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[6] As indicated in the Warwick Medical School website, the results of the 7-items scale were transformed using the provided conversion table (https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/using/howto/ last accessed 23/05/2023).

questionnaire for the first time and those completing it a second time. The findings indicate an overall increase in well-being from the first completion to the second, with a mean well-being score of 22.1 at the start of participation rising to a mean of 23.4 at the end (Figure 4.8 illustrates these changes over time). Among the 12 participants who completed the questionnaires twice, it is noteworthy that nine reported positive changes, two experienced a decrease in well-being, and one reported no change. These results highlight the varied impact of the programme on participants' mental health and well-being.
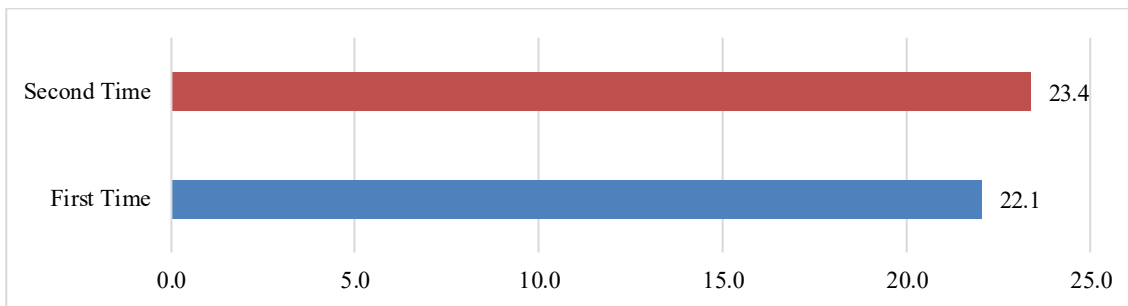
Figure 4.8. Health and Well-being Changes Over Time (%)

When examining the various groups that have experienced an increase in well-being, it is evident that those with GCSE/O-Level grades, A-C & professional/vocational equivalent (NVQ Level 2) and those with A-levels & professional/vocational equivalents (NVQ Level 3) stand out. Both males and females appear to have undergone a similar increase. Interestingly, the youngest participants, aged 17 to 34 years, experienced the greatest increase in well-being across the programme. In contrast, those aged 35-49 appear to have experienced a decrease in well-being, as illustrated in Table 4.5.

Level of education	Average T1	Average T2
GCSE/O-Level grades A-C & professional/vocational equivalent (NVQ Level 2)	20.5	23.5
Higher Education & professional/vocational equivalent (NVQ Level 6)	27.8	
HND & professional/vocational equivalent (NVQ Level 5)	22.4	
No qualifications	20.2	23.4
Prefer not to say	20.5	28.1
Qualifications at level 1 and below (NVQ Entry Levels 1-3)	20.9	22.3
Foundation degree & professional/vocational equivalents (NVQ Level 4)	21.0	20.0
GCSE/O-Level grades D-E & professional/vocational equivalent (NVQ Level 1)	18.3	21.3
A-levels & professional/vocational equivalents (NVQ Level 3)	22.6	27.9
Postgraduate degree & professional/vocational equivalent (NVQ Level 7)	23.1	
Sex		
Female	22.6	23.6
Male	21.7	23.1
Age (categorised)		
17-24	22.1	24.2
25-34	22.9	24.1
35-49	23.7	22.3
50+	21.1	21.4

Table 4.5. Mental Health and Well-Being averages at the beginning and at the end of the journey.

4.3.3 Employment

Participants were invited to answer five questions in relation to their expectations of securing future employment on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all well, 2 = somewhat well, 3 = considerably well, 4 = very well, 5 = extremely well). The scores range from a minimum of 5 to a maximum of 25. This scale investigates participants' expectations of securing future employment including their ability to apply for jobs. To understand the participants' employability skills and confidence to secure employment at the beginning of the programme, we investigated the average results of the Employment Scale for the respondents that did the questionnaire for the first time and the second. The confidence in securing future employment showed an increase over time, with a mean expectation of securing future employment at 14.8 at the start of the programme and a mean of 15.9 at the end (Figure 4.9 illustrates these changes over time). Among the 12 identifiable participants

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whose responses could be linked between the two different times of completion, it was observed that nine showed an increase, two participants experienced a decrease in their employability skills and confidence, and one reported no change. These results suggest an overall positive trend in participants' confidence regarding their future employment prospects.
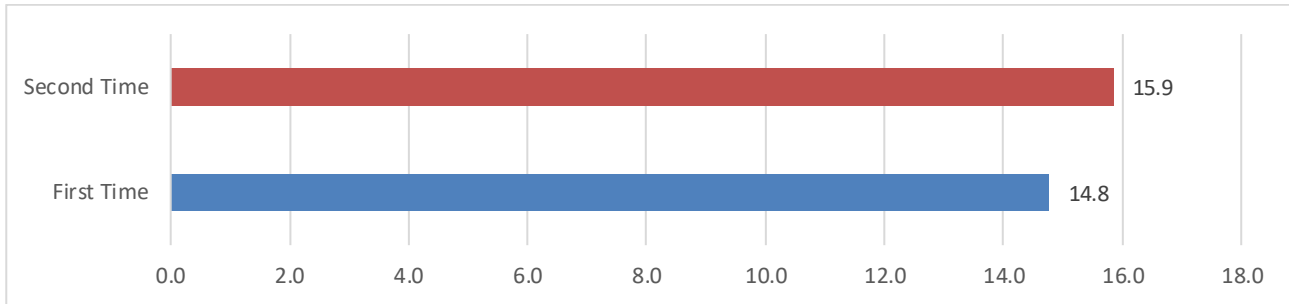
Figure 4.8. Employment Changes Over Time (%)

Respondents across all levels of education appeared to experience an increase in employability skills and confidence, with notable improvements, especially among those with GCSE/O-Level grades A-C & professional/vocational equivalent (NVQ Level 2), GCSE/O-Level grades D-E & professional/vocational equivalent (NVQ Level 1), and A-levels & professional/vocational equivalents (NVQ Level 3). Males demonstrated a greater improvement in employability compared to females. Lastly, the youngest participants, aged 17 to 24 years, experienced the greatest increases, while those between 35 and 49 years old showed a decrease, as indicated in Table 4.6. These findings suggest variations in the impact of the programme on employability skills and confidence across different demographic groups.

Level of education	Average T1	Average T2
GCSE/O-Level grades A-C & professional/vocational equivalent (NVQ Level 2)	13.2	16.7
Higher Education & professional/vocational equivalent (NVQ Level 6)	19.1	
HND & professional/vocational equivalent (NVQ Level 5)	14.5	
No qualifications	10.5	15.0
Prefer not to say	16.5	18.0
Qualifications at level 1 and below (NVQ Entry Levels 1-3)	13.7	14.8
Foundation degree & professional/vocational equivalents (NVQ Level 4)	15.0	15.0
GCSE/O-Level grades D-E & professional/vocational equivalent (NVQ Level 1)	10.8	13.0
A-levels & professional/vocational equivalents (NVQ Level 3)	17.0	21.0
Postgraduate degree & professional/vocational equivalent (NVQ Level 7)	19.6	
Sex		
Female	14.9	14.8
Male	14.8	16.2
Age (categorised)		
16-24	14.2	17.9
25-34	16.2	16.5
35-49	14.3	12.8
50+	14.5	15.2

Table 4.6. Employment averages at the beginning and at the end of the journey.

5. Qualitative data findings

From November 2022 to September 2023, a comprehensive set of interviews involving 20 programme participants and 19 delivery partners was conducted. This included 27 semi-structured interviews and three focus groups with a total of 12 participants. All individuals voluntarily participated in these semi-structured interviews, ensuring a commitment to maintaining anonymity and confidentiality. Consequently, the results presented in this report are anonymized[7]. The interview and focus group data was analysed through a thematic analysis approach. This methodology, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), involves six distinct steps that empower researchers to identify, analyse, and report emerging themes from qualitative data, such as those obtained from interviews and focus groups. Through this process, the researcher distils the rich qualitative dataset into themes, which not only represent the most frequent and representative patterns but also establish connections with the broader dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Four main themes identified: participants' needs (composed of 'unemployment, and the multiple needs that hid behind' and 'COVID-19, a further barrier'), a wide range of support, impact on the participants, and opportunities for improvement on Pathway for Recovery (composed of 'the objectionable aspects of Pathways for Recovery' and 'more tailored support through fundings'). The quotes presented in the following sections have been selected to highlight the themes, but additional quotes are available upon request.

5.1. The needs of unemployed individuals in Pathways for Recovery

5.1.1. Unemployment, and the multiple needs that hid behind

All participants in the programme share a common background of unemployment, characterised by diverse circumstances such as being caregivers, immigrants or refugees, lacking confidence, or aspiring to establish their own businesses. Despite these varied backgrounds, the common thread among all participants is the primary need for employment. In recognition of these multifaceted challenges, the programme is intricately crafted to address and enhance a spectrum of skills. Whether it's providing support for caregivers to re-enter the workforce, aiding immigrants or refugees in navigating the job market, instilling confidence in those lacking it, or offering guidance for aspiring entrepreneurs, the programme is tailored to meet the unique needs of each participant. The overarching objective, to foster growth and development in these specific areas, ultimately empowering participants to secure meaningful employment, remains consistent.

> *"They've had no experience of working anywhere else before and they just want to have experience. […] We've got one or two who have been brought in by parents who are very*

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[7] The research team labelled the Delivery Partner' feedback as "DP(numbers)" and Participants as "P(number)" .

supportive but they are so timid and shy that they just need to build their confidence and feel welcomed somewhere, get an idea of what the workplace is like but with the extra support so if they feel they need to step out of the [work environment] and come and have a cup of tea and a chat then they can. So, it's easing them into preparing for work." (DP1)

"I think a lot of the time it's the confidence to work and to go into employment. It's also routine and structure and the motivation to get up every day and turn up. It's in preparation for employment so this is a trial for them to be here twice a week or three times a week and turn up for the time they said they would turn up and help in the [work environment], do the work experience. So, I think it's the confidence building, the routine and structure, the social skills, to be around other people." (DP2)

"In general, there have been employability problems because they don't have, for example, GCSEs or something equivalent to help them get a job or they don't know how to start even looking for a job." (DP6)

"Yes, I was a full time carer for [...] my parents for the past seven years and I've got two kids. Recently [my parents] passed away so I was looking for voluntary work and that's when I met [the delivery partner] from [the delivery organisation] at the job fair. [...] That's the thing about me right now, because I'm just at home with my two kids. However, now I've started the voluntary work remotely, and that's it really." (PP10)

"Before the war we had a good life, of course [...] Of course, you had your life; I've had a good job. [...] I think my English is not enough, especially for listening and understanding because when I hear other people with other accents, of course sometimes I didn't understand. Especially in my job, I have a lot of interviews in the UK, I have a very good experience; I have very best CV. When I send my CV, usually a researcher calls me but when I had an interview, the employer hears how I speak - not enough." (PP6)

"They have a variety of needs. Some of them are looking for work, so they are looking to find a way to find a job or to start a business, to become self-employed. Others are just interested in support to help them upskill, to broaden their knowledge. But the majority are looking to either start a business or to find a job." (DP11)

Among the participants, there is a subgroup that requires support in building their business. For some, this marks their first attempt at navigating the business world, while others have had prior

entrepreneurial experiences, and due to closures, they now require assistance to restart their businesses.

> *"I said to [the delivery partner] I'm looking for the right legal structure for my business once I'm ready to register and I think it's this. I don't know what I'm talking about because I'm not a business head and he said, 'I know somebody who might be able to give you that information'. [...] So, the programme didn't do much for me, though I've taken away the slides that I will read and see if I can understand again, maybe a second time round. But at least I made a connection with [the delivery partner] and [the delivery partner] has now put me in touch with this PhD gentleman who is doing a little bit of hand holding and feedback on what I'm trying to do with my business. So, yes, there's been one positive out of that."(PP13)*

> *"I wanted something or someone or some organisation to help me because I was thinking of opening my own business. Because I'd come out of early years where I'd worked for people I realised that maybe it was about time I did something for myself but I didn't know where to turn to. So, since claiming universal credit, it just opened doors for me in that sense and Pathways was one of those doors." (PP14)*

> *"When I was doing my business, a lot of thigs have changed from what I thought I knew. Things have evolved, things have moved on, so I needed to get in touch. I'm glad that there is a thing called Recovery and a pathway, I'm very glad for it, they are a big help." (PP18)*

Certainly, while unemployment is a common factor among programme participants, their needs beyond unemployment are diverse. Some participants come from disadvantaged backgrounds, while others struggle with high levels of anxiety and mental health difficulties, disabilities, and struggles with confidence. The programme recognises and addresses the diversity of participants by providing a holistic approach to tackling participants' needs. Indeed, unemployment is widely recognised as a risk factor for both physical and mental health and well-being (Virgolino et al., 2022). It can be a stressor that can affect psychological and physical well-being (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005), self-esteem, and quality of life (Peláez-Fernández, Rey, and Extremera, 2021). Moreover, the uncertainty and financial strain associated with unemployment can contribute to stress at the individual and family level (Karanikolos et al., 2013).

> *"We might have ten people come in and they all have similar needs and then we'll have someone come in who's got completely different needs. [...] I would say the main need I've noticed is there's a lot of anxiety. The majority I would say are capable of working but they are very, very*

anxious to go out and socialise, learning. We've had some that perhaps have had additional needs that may not have been diagnosed so they struggle a little bit […] Whereas we have some that come in who are so capable but it is just their confidence and once they've done that you see them move on quite quickly, which is great. It's what they want." (DP1)

"[…] some of them come from such disadvantaged background, even having a laptop or setting things up, they would be struggling." (DP2)

"What I'm seeing a lot is it tends to be self-esteem more than anything, a lot of lack of confidence within themselves. With the nature of some of our work, one of our biggest departments is Disability and Inclusion […] So I think a lot of them there's been a bit of self-doubt into work. A lot of nature of learning difficulties from disability, because they've got a learning disability they don't see themselves as good enough to work or they can't access the work. […] So that's the main one I've come across at the moment, learning difficulties." (DP3)

"It would be to help and support particularly those with barriers, so that could be anxiety, depression, long term unemployment, mainly to get back into work; back into some sort of training. So just motivating them through that process." (DP5)

"Confidence and trying to find a job, both at the moment, it's difficult." (PP1)

"A lot of the time I felt it was generalised anxiety because you are that sort of age when you are anxious about school and everything about that. I always felt there was a root cause for it. It was by chance really that I got told. I dropped out of school; […] what was I doing? I tried to start up at college, […] , and it was only when I spoke to the guidance councillor there, she had two autistic sons and she was like, 'I think you should pursue getting diagnosed about this'. It never really came into my head about it but since then it's been a complete weight off my shoulders. Whereas I used to be anxious about everything, now I'm just like, 'That's the way I am'. Less comparing myself to other people now, I know it's a different path in life. […]" (PP15)

"Our participants have been mainly school parents and pretty much the same. The only thing that has changed has been some of our work in [an area] we were referred a bunch, quite a large cohort of Ukrainians which wasn't something we anticipated getting. At the start of the project we were planning - we thought it would be the same group, so they had slightly different, I suppose, requirements from our traditional […]. We still treated them the same and they got

"I think part of that - we're seeing more people with mental health conditions and I think a lot of that is probably off the back of the pandemic, without wanting to cause and effect them. But I think we're experiencing people now with probably higher levels of anxiety than I've ever known in terms of social settings, in the [delivery organisation] but also from an employment point of view with not knowing what to do or not knowing where to go. And also with there being a lack of available other options to them, so there's lots of other good schemes in the town but maybe they don't - the benefit of this pathway has been it's not been overly prescriptive. It can support people at their own pace as they are needed rather than, 'You have to do six full weeks now or if not you are gone.'" (DP16)

Participants with backgrounds as refugees and/or migrants often faces challenges, including difficulties arising from waiting for the right to work[8] or obtaining a visa. For immigrants and asylum seekers, multiple factors contribute to stressors, such as the lack of social support or networks, indefinite legal status, unemployment, and limited English proficiency (Salvo and de Williams, 2017). However, the predominant barrier identified by programme participants is the English language. A poor level of English can have cascading effects, impacting access to essential services, including health services (Kang, Tomkow, and Farrington, 2019), legal support (Salvo and de Williams, 2017), community involvement (Morrice, 2007), and even hindering the process of obtaining British citizenship (Bartram, 2019). Recognizing and addressing language barriers is crucial for facilitating the integration and well-being of refugees and migrants in their new environment.

"I've done a fair bit of work with refugees as well. Obviously that process is waiting for the right to work, the visa side of things and a bit of a language barrier. So we have tried to enrol as many as possible on English speaking courses to build up their English skills." (DP3)

"Quite often it's because they are migrants so quite often they are new to the country so they don't really know what to do, what their next step should be so they come to us and we help them to action plan their next steps, what they should do. We help them, point them in the right direction." (DP4)

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[8] Participants are not eligible for the programme unless they have the right to work, therefore the participants should have the right to work before coming into the programme.

"I have no work. I did not know very much about how it works here, how to find work, how to apply for benefits and all the things like this. And I was a little but frustrated as well".(PP4)

"I want to improve my English, my education - lady health visitor. I do a job in medical - family planning, I do family planning. I had a job in Pakistan, in Pakistan I usually speak Urdu and in Spain I usually speak Spanish. And here I thought I should improve my English, speaking skills and writing skills. [...] I so enjoy because here I have no job. [...] All the time home, I feel I am tired and I am so worried. I have some anxiety. I come here, I feel good and improve my skills, English speaking skills and listening and writing and I am so happy to come here."
(PP7)

"Because I need to learn English to improve my language skills and to improve my confidence. When I go outside my home I want to speak with all the people, that's it." (PP10)

"Sometimes I need to arrange up with someone, somebody in English, I like this." (PP20)

A notable portion of the participants were parents or women facing isolation, particularly those who are immigrants or refugees with limited proficiency in the English language. This aligns with the quantitative data, where 6.5% of the respondents initially reported difficulties due to English not being their first language (this percentage decreased to 5.9% at the end of the program). Immigrants moving to the UK for asylum tend to have higher levels of unemployment (14%) in comparison to those moving to the UK for other reasons (6%) (Fernández-Reino and Rienzo, 2022). As previously discussed, multiple factors can negatively impact the lives of immigrants and asylum seekers (Salvo and de Williams, 2017). Furthermore, a poor command of the English language can affect psychological well-being (Montemitro et al., 2021). Proficiency in English is crucial for social inclusion and the ability to communicate feelings, while a low level of English can contribute to social isolation. Addressing language barriers is thus essential for enhancing the overall well-being and integration of immigrants and refugees in the community.

"We do help women who are care givers for their children, their husbands go off to work, so they are left with children at home. So it's a matter of getting the children to grow up so they have more time to be able to help themselves and start looking for a job or help their confidence, maybe take up another English course in a college or in a language centre that can give them that accreditation to find a job." (DP6)

"Most of or participants will be parents who have travelled from Pakistan, India. We've also had some parents who have come from Ukraine now or the Arab countries [...]" (DP9) "Most

of the students currently are housewives or children who lack confidence and lack the English skills that are needed to help them have independent lives and get on and able to help their children and themselves lead a better life for themselves. Better than what they are used to from their own countries because they will support themselves as well as people that depend on them." (DP6)

"And where we see the needs are, is with their social skills. With the cohort of parents that we have, quite often we see that they can or have become quite isolated, quite often they might be new to the country so have no English at all and have no ability to be able to access any support within their community. So, this has been really useful." (DP8)

"This course is a real need for me because I'm not good with my English, especially understanding and speaking. I can write better but it's difficult to speak. [...] And it's a real need for me, and all mothers which are not good in English, for surviving in the UK for shopping, to go to the doctors-" (PP9)

5.1.2. COVID-19, a further barrier

As highlighted in the literature review, the economic situation of individuals has been exacerbated by the impact of COVID-19 and the physical distancing measures, leading to increased anxiety (Xiang, 2020; Kwong et al., 2021) and mental health challenges (Pierce et al., 2020). These results are in line with the quantitative findings where a third of the participants' well-being was affected by COVID-19 (37.4%) and a third experienced difficulties in finding a job (38.5%). Among those who were affected, most felt that their anxiety increased (24.6%), their routine changed and they found it difficult to cope (21.9%), and they felt alone and isolated (21.1%). The pandemic's broader societal impact underscores the need for targeted support to address the mental and physical well-being of programme participants during these challenging times. These issues are evident among the participants in the Pathway for Recovery program, with individuals experiencing anxiety, mental health issues, and difficulties related to physical health.

"Some of the young people are perhaps prone to anxiety or have autism of some sort, then they've 'been at home, it's harder for them to socialise and mix anyway but then they've had that period at home which has just taken them back. So, it's integrating them back into the work place - and being around people day to day and having a routine again. But I do think it has been influenced by that, yes." (DP1)

"Maybe in terms of their confidence and anxiety levels, potentially because some of them haven't left their houses for three years or longer because of Covid or have limited contact with people. That's made them more anxious to speak to new people and build friendships. […] I haven't seen that much difficulties but I do know that could play a role. […] I think Covid plays an element, but I think the majority of them, they either have anxiety difficulties or they are anxious to meet new people, or just lack confidence to come out. […]" (DP2)

"It seems to be for the younger generation between 18 to the early-20s gap - I've worked in education through different roles, and I've seen quite a lot of struggle in social interactions. It seems to be when what would have been the college phase of 16-18, the ones that missed out on the full two years of 16-18 education seem to have the biggest trend in lack of social skills. That's something I've noticed myself." (DP3)

"I think a lot more people are a bit more anxious, particularly going out is still an issue but also if they were already unemployed prior to Covid, that's added an extra amount of time, so it does knock their confidence." (DP5)

"Do have clients who still suffer from long Covid and even though before they got ill they were perfectly active and healthy, now they struggle to get back into employment purely because of their health." (DP4)

"I think we are a predominantly Muslim school, the same for the community that they live in. So, for most of them the community is a massive part of their lives. Not being able to move around freely has definitely impacted. We've seen it with the children and the parents. […] We've seen it within the mental health of the children and parents" (DP8)

"I was very outgoing, I used to socialise virtually every weekend and evenings. I used to go to the gym and all of that stopped. Even at work it wasn't the same. At home with the kids, it mentally impacted them as well. I don't know, it actually had a massive shift in my life." (PP14)

"Oh, terrible. Although I had to stay at home for weeks on end, it still made me anxious because it wasn't just me I had to worry about, it was my dad and it was other people. And then I had to worry about getting sick and how that would affect other things." (PP16)

"In the world of Asperger's/autistic they follow the letter, they take on everything that was said: 'Don't leave the house, don't do this, don't do that - don't, don't, don't', and they don't. So, then they become reclosed, they are just in their own bubble. So, Covid really did knock a lot

of - well, I'd say half of our team. And it's still a knock-on, they are still worried. They are wearing their masks, glove. Work-wise they don't want to go out; it's such a thing to get on the bus so a few people are walking. I tried to get them into the [deliver organisation], doing one to ones when we were allowed to do that but it wasn't nice to see, seeing where we'd come just before lockdown, how many people we'd got out of their bedrooms and getting on a bus and suddenly noting, 'You are not allowed to do that now'. It wasn't nice, it was heartbreakingly actually." (DP11)

The participants' employment, volunteering experiences, and educational levels have declined due to the impact of COVID-19, affecting their ability to accumulate the necessary experience for entering the workforce. According to the participants, they have been inactive, on average, for 28.9 months (more than two years), encompassing periods of unemployment, being a student, looking after children, acting as an unpaid carer, facing long-term illness, or retiring early. This extended period of inactivity is a cause for concern, given findings from research by Thomsen (2009) that the longer an individual remains unemployed, the more pronounced the negative effects, with the long-term unemployed (exceeding one year) being over three times less likely to secure a job. Furthermore, the pandemic's physical isolation measures have had repercussions on language exposure, delaying the learning of the English language and its understanding in social contexts. This is particularly relevant given the importance of language proficiency for social inclusion and employment opportunities. Addressing these challenges becomes crucial for the successful reintegration of participants into the workforce and society.

"I think it probably has been affected by Covid because they've had a longer gap and then there's a gap on a CV, they've not carried straight on from school or college, they have this huge gap and they have not - Whereas I think when you've been in the routine of going to school, the routine of carrying on at college or workplace just continues whereas when you've had a huge break [..]." (DP1)

"Yes, I think it's probably held them back for a short time. Where they would have been able to maybe have gone out and got a job or enhance their English speaking skills, maybe they have been held back for a couple of years."(DP7)

Some of them, because they've been stuck indoors with their children and some of them, they weren't able to talk to anybody or some didn't know who to talk to because they lack the English." (DP6)

5.2. A wide range of support

The delivery partners play a crucial role in providing comprehensive employment support through a regional partnership involving specialized support providers, employment and skills organizations, and strategic stakeholders. With the ultimate goal of moving participants into employment, the delivery partners offer support in various areas. This includes addressing the well-being of programme participants, providing confidence support, assisting with CV writing, and aiding in completing general paperwork. This multifaceted approach reflects a commitment to addressing both the practical and personal aspects that contribute to participants' successful integration into the workforce.

"We might have ten people come in and they all have similar needs and then we'll have someone come in who's got completely different needs. Then we have to have conversations, which we do, 'What will the process be for this young person? How long do you think we'll be working with them? Do they need one of us supporting them one to one in the [work environment] for their well-being and building their confidence? Do we need to pair them up with someone? Is there any outside support that we would be able to eventually move them on to? What do they want as well essentially?[...] We also have men's group that they go to and some participate more than you think but actually it integrates them amongst some of the other people there, learning to speak out a little bit and mix in. The ultimate goal is that they move on." (DP1)

"We also do one to one check ins with them and complete an assessment [...] which assesses their mental well-being state, just to see do they feel useful, do they fell they have a purpose in life, do they feel loved? Or do they feel cheerful, it's just a quick snapshot, a couple of questions to see where they are at in terms which well-being and then we can maybe help them. Once I did it with somebody and he said that he felt not very useful. I asked why and he said because he feels like he's not contributing at home, he's not helping his mum with bills or money or anything, he just feels a bit like a burden because he's sitting there eating and not helping. So then we started looking for a job because he felt he was ready. Now we've got him a part time job, so from that assessment, that questionnaire, we've identified he is really ready and needs to do something, so he's now moved on." (DP2)

"[...] quite often when they come to our office they are unemployed or it can be a single mother. So, the first thing we need to do for them is apply for benefits and at the same time start searching for jobs and point them in the right direction regarding their language needs because it is quite common that their English is not very good so that's where we start. We just try to

help them to make a difference in their life. Obviously, our ultimate goal is to help them get into employment because they are unemployed." (DP4)

"And structure and routine as well, they get it so they are ready for if they want to move on forward professionally, if they want to go for advanced education then coming face to face, attending classes regularly, keeping up with the timetable, that gives them that structure.[...] And it also supports them in having conversations with their GP, when they go to the shop or they come to school, so they also do a lot of role play. Whenever I've been with the teacher, the teacher is encouraging them and because she can speak the language - for example Urdu and Punjabi, so if they don't understand something she can then switch: 'This is what it means', and that really helps the parents. [...] And I think that helps our attendance as well hugely because they feel comfortable, they don't feel they are going to be judged, or they know the teacher. As soon as we say the teacher knows the language they feel comfortable. "(DP9)

"Initially it was just like - I don't know the first thing about self-employed or anything so going to these workshops, it gave me a bit of understanding of how businesses work, what a limited business is. [The delivery partner], she's amazing, I've learned so much from her in that sense." (PP14)

"It's just bringing them in slowly and then hoping to get them either back into education, because we start from 16 so I think sometimes that's a priority, so then they get the education then they go into wok. [...] Or it's on a voluntary, we will bring them in. I've had a couple of people go off to charity shops, just to build their confidence up. They are doing training and then hopefully they will get a part time job in the actual shop or they get moved onto something else. [...] It's part time, we'll start off with a few hours a week then it will build up slowly. We find that going in full time is too hard for anybody, that's setting people up to fail, definitely. They've had so many bad experiences where they've got to go in and do 39 hours that two days later they've walked out." (DP11)

"I did one to one and I came in also into [delivery organisation], did a course on business and ran through profit, how to do your costing and stuff like that. It was really good, I found that really interesting. Because of what I'm doing it's difficult to cost because I haven't really got a role model for it at the moment." (PP18)

The flexibility and ongoing nature of the programme were positively highlighted by both participants and delivery partners. The ability to respond flexibly and tailor the programme to the individual needs

of participants, without rushing them, has yielded positive results. This adaptive and personalized approach acknowledges the unique challenges and circumstances of each participant, contributing to a more effective and impactful programme overall.

> *"[…] we try and be flexible in terms of the needs of the individual So, rather than just looking at one size fits all we try and be as flexible as possible to try and accommodate the needs of those particular individual participants. Rather than having a one size fits all solution, we try and be as flexible as possible to support the individual. That's how we try and differentiate. We also have tried to bring in as much resource as we can at our disposal to offer that flexibility."*
> *(DP11)*

> *"I think it's the ongoing nature of it, it's not just a full week and then you have passed a course and off you go. It's being able to support people and there's no end date. Because again, especially with working with more diverse individual's, to say to someone, 'You've got 12 weeks', it might take you eight weeks to get any engagement or communication and then it's finished. And I think that continuation of it is the value that this adds that other courses don't."*
> *(DP16)*

> *"It's good being more flexible, like you said, in the approach, so it's not stringent and you are having to tick a box to say something's done. You can work with them on a personal level, get through that barrier and then work with the employability side of it afterwards. So, the long term support is really helping. […] Being relatable I think and just dealing with any personal barriers and getting to know them first is you build their trust because a lot of people with anxiety have been through a lot of other programmes and other things that haven't helped them. So being able to be more personal in your approach on a one to one level rather than going, 'Come to a group session', you can do one to one, that's what you have to overcome first and that part is the most difficult part a lot of the time." (DP15)*

The flexibility mentioned earlier was made possible, in part, due to the one-to-one support reported by both programme participants and delivery partners. As noted by the delivery partners, some participants found significant support through having a mentor or a dedicated person they could confide in. The presence of mentors played a crucial role in providing individualized assistance and guidance tailored to the unique needs and challenges of each participant. Additionally, a delivery partner highlighted the positive impact of peer support within the program. Creating a space where participants could share their experiences and successes not only fostered a sense of community but also contributed to an accumulation of knowledge. This peer-to-peer interaction provided practical

insights and served as a source of motivation and encouragement for participants, contributing to a more comprehensive and supportive programme environment.

"I think they benefit the most with having a mentor in the [work environment], somebody buddied up with them and showing them the stuff. [...] But being with somebody is one of the biggest, I think, to keep them coming back and doing the work." (DP2)

"I think it's more the fact that it's one to one bespoke support for each participant. That's easy to do now while the numbers are a bit lower but maybe moving forwards when they are bigger there might be an opportunity to do things group. But I think at the moment because it's one to one the participants benefit more from that bespoke support.[...] It helps and that is a real advantage, the fact that you can focus in on that person's individual need rather than trying to do it as a collective, which doesn't always end up with the positive outcomes." (DP5)

"Previously I have had myself when I used to work - I worked with organisations who help people get back into work and none of them were like [the delivery organisation] because [the delivery organisation] goes on a personal level, they help you on a personal level. I feel this is very important, especially when you haven't worked for so long, for whatever reason. [...] And because it benefitted me, I feel I really do owe it to [the delivery organisation], it that makes sense, because they've done so much for me in such a short space of time and mentally I was in survival mode. Now I know my goals, I know where I'm going, my direction. [...] it's not face to face because sometimes some people who have anxiety, they don't feel comfortable, they might not even attend the interview or the sessions. This is another good thing about [the delivery organisation], they call you at your time, at your convenience." (PP10)

"Yes, in terms of want we do, it is we believe in the power of peer mentoring. So, the more often that we can bring groups of people together who - we can share experiences. So, we've been delivering workshops but also delivering those activities where we can bring in entrepreneurs that have set up a business so they can tell their story and explain what it was like for them." (DP11)

"Feedback we get from our people is they don't want to go to the city centre, they want to come to us because we're local. We bring the service to them and bigger organisations, just because of the way they operate financially, they don't see it like that. Maybe they can't see it like that because of their business model." (DP15)

One of the delivery organisations also managed to secure a customised space for providing support and classes. This proved to be highly beneficial for participants, particularly for mothers, as it eliminated the need to seek additional support and allowed them to participate without disrupting their daily routines. The availability of this tailored space enhanced the accessibility of the programme, making it more accommodating for participants with specific needs and responsibilities.

"Also lots of our parents, particularly our ladies, our mums, may not drive, that's also a factor. So its enabled them, because it's local, because it's on site and within their community, I think we've been able to tear down many of those barriers that we know – […] We really struggle getting our parents to engage and this has been so popular and the engagement, even via Zoom it continue to go ahead, we still had really good uptake, so that was very, very positive." (DP9)

The delivery partners have worked with the programme participants in different areas. Specifically, the process of building confidence, self-esteem, and self-worth emerges as a powerful tool to facilitate the integration of programme participants into a daily routine, enabling them to engage with new individuals and instilling a sense of self-trust. Self-esteem and self-efficacy are concepts related to an individual's perceptions of their abilities and self-worth (Maddy III, Cannon, and Lichtenberger, 2015). Lower levels of both self-esteem and self-efficacy can significantly impact the reemployment prospects of individuals who are unemployed (Albion, Fernie, & Burton, 2005). These psychological factors play crucial roles in shaping an individual's confidence, resilience, and readiness to navigate the challenges associated with seeking and securing employment.

"No, they all start here in the [work environment] but we will monitor them and see their confidence build up. When their confidence builds up we'll have the conversation with them if they want it. The majority of them will want to start working to get some money, I suppose." (DP1)

"So, they have the support to ask questions, that helps them to build confidence. Then we do have community outings which is open to the Pathways as well. We might go and play mini golf, we do it as a trip together. Next month we want to go to the Birmingham Christmas market, so it's also open to the Pathways. We have the education programme at [the organisation] but we also have the Pathways so it's open to both so they can come. We do stuff like that to increase their social skills to come out." (DP2)

"I think mainly it's the confidence to tell them, 'You can do it, it is possible for you', that boost to give them that – […] That's the main thing. And once you tackle that barrier then the rest of

it is somewhat easier, that here you can find a job, you can go to the Job Centre and they can help you. Or if you write a CV and go to shops and give them out, they can do that slowly, slowly then." (DP6)

"It's the confidence. We see when they start they are quite reserved, quiet, hesitant to join in. But as the weeks go, especially when they go from one course to the other they come up to us and ask, 'When is the next one starting? What's happening next?'" (DP8)

"[The clinic that diagnosed the participant] recommended the [delivery organisation] for me actually. When I went to get diagnosed they recommended social groups and places like that [...] I was lazy and used to stay at home so actually getting out of the house and doing something three times a week at that point, it was a good opportunity to keep me busy whilst I worked out how I was going to live going forward [...] I think it's because they gave me the platform whilst it was the perfect environment, where it had that safety net of being, 'This is a voluntary basis; we understand who you are, how you operate, we will work around you'." (PP15)

"Supporting by being here, listening, giving them the confidence and giving them the look, 'You are going to-', and they are like, Oh, alright then'. It's just building them up, it's just a real slow process. You can hear them talking up there now and that just brings - because they wouldn't normally, no one would be talking. They would all try and hide out the back. [...] It's the confidence building of them all and just saying to them, 'You can't do anything wrong because if you do, if you think you do it wrong, I can put it right; when you are in here you can't do anything wrong because I can put it right'. It's a learning curve for all of them and putting them on the right track to guide them through the next. And I'll always be here." (DP11)

Furthermore, the program's delivery partners played a pivotal role in supporting participants' holistic development of employment skills. This encompassing assistance involved providing guidance on fundamental aspects such as CV writing, crafting of cover letters, effective job search strategies, interview preparation, participation in relevant courses, and the enhancement of English language proficiency. This comprehensive approach reflects the commitment to addressing various facets of employability, recognising the interconnected nature of skills development. The inclusion of support for English language proficiency acknowledges the importance of linguistic competence as an integral component of participants' overall employability journey. Through this multifaceted support, the programme's delivery partners aim to empower participants with a diverse skill set, equipping them for success in the competitive employment landscape.

"We support with CVs, looking for jobs, applications, assessing whether we feel that they are ready to make applications for things. Also documents, things like ID and completing the general paperwork as well. […] So, we do a lot of one to one stuff." (DP1)

"I think it's a structured programme, or we have structured it at [the organisation], from the day they come through the door, looking around, doing the paperwork, signing them up, getting all the documents. Being in the [work environment] then assessing if they are ready for employment, to do their CV, cover letter, finding employment, that's all advantage because we definitely try and move them on. […] I think it's what we were just talking about, they are quite often new the country so they don't really know how it works here. Sometimes they have no idea how to start creating their CV because, for example, in their country the CV had a completely different layout." (DP2)

"Build up work experience, the skills and then we can signpost them to other vacancies." (DP3)

"I work with participants on a one to one basis mainly. We do some group activities but mainly one to one, and that's a mixture of face to face, Teams, phone calls, so regular support to talk through supporting with CVs, job searching social media activity to get back into work. We've got customers looking for self-employment opportunities and looking for training as well." (DP5)

"I was settling in, finding a job, applying for benefits, just answering questions they have about living here, helping with my CV and a lot of other things. So, I agreed to take part and to use this chance for my benefit." (PP4)

"So, we have a lot of that, and we do try and help them as much as we can. We have CV writing or we have job hunting sessions or how to do an interview, what to expect in the interview, what type of jobs there are out there. We have sessions like that that we cover, so we help them in some way." (DP6)

"She asked me to show her my covering letter and she said, 'You have to make it specific to the job title', but […] she told me, 'You have to tell them, be honest with them, tell them about your circumstances, what hours you can do, what hours you can't do because-'[…] Looking after my parents for over seven years I thought I didn't learn any skills whereas she told me, 'Yes you have'. […] She gave me all these hints. She didn't write for me but she gave me the right guidance. […] And I wrote that and I wrote it to three different organisations and three of them

got back to me. Out of the three, I started a voluntary role with [an organisation] and the second one is connection support, I will be starting with them in a month or so." (PP10)

"Actually they gave me a lot of tips to find jobs, apply for jobs. Initially I used a CV so during that period my CV was not selected from most of the jobs. [...] Initially I applied for - 10-20 jobs, I applied with the same CV, same format and it never worked, all the time it was rejected. So they found it and the team were the people who told me how to change my CV, how to tailor my CV according to the job and the company I'm applying to and how to change the cover letter. [...] So according to their instructions and advice, that was really great. I never knew that it would work like that. [...] I would never have got an interview without [the delivery organisation] support. I should say that because always they gave me feedback and monitored what I was doing during the job search process. So that was great support for me." (PP12)

"[...] it's doing the courses. We are doing food courses here as well; we have two teams that come in after we've shut so it's more of a socialising and everybody talking and bringing everybody together. Once a month or something - who's on the pathway, who can make it? We'll all come in, discuss what were all doing; if they are building a CV, if they are building something else." (DP11)

As discussed in the first theme, enhanced English proficiency is identified as one of the primary needs among participants, with 6.5% experiencing difficulties due to English not being their first language. In response to this need, some delivery organisations offer support for English language development which is crucial for participants hoping to secure employment. Research also indicates that language proficiency can be a significant obstacle to accessing employment, underscoring the importance of addressing this need in the programme (Brando and Morales-Gálvez, 2023) and a poor command of the English language can impact psychological well-being (Montemitro et al., 2021). Proficiency in English is not merely a linguistic skill; it can also contribute to social inclusion and the ability to express emotions effectively, while a low level of English proficiency may lead to social isolation. This underscores the importance of language support within employment programs to address both practical and emotional aspects of the participant's journey.

"Actually I improved my spoken English and I improved my reading in English but I still have problem in my writing and my dictation." (PP1)

"If they are unemployed, if they are searching for a job we will help them with that. If they need a CV, if they are searching for courses, they want to develop their English skills, we also find

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them ESOL courses. [...] We do have work for employability skills - we help them prepare for interviews, we teach them how to create a CV, how to change them depending on the job role they apply for. And we also teach them how to actually search for jobs. For example, the importance of social media and how to search for jobs online, these kind of things. [...] ESOL, the whole idea of learning English. Basically it's the most important skill when you live in this country, if you want to go into employment you need to have quite good English skills. The other thing is the whole idea of searching for jobs online or even connection with local labour market, that we have some sort of connection with employment agencies and we can connect them with these agencies. And sometimes agencies actually contact us and tell us that they, for example, need people for [work environment] or factories locally so I think they do appreciate this kind of support." (DP4)

"In our sessions what we like to do is teach them English, so the main skills - reading, listening, speaking and writing - but we also focus on confidence and how to help them book a doctor's appointment or talk to somebody new. Or don't have the hesitation to make a mistake when talking to somebody." (DP6)

"The course consists of various topics, everyday topics, and we cover those topics during the lessons. There is a lot of interaction with the students so they have exercises to do, they have a bit of speaking to do, they have a bit of listening to do. So tie really helps them master their key skills and also it helps in [...] It shows me the areas that they lack the expertise in so obviously it helps me to understand where they need to work harder, what areas they need improving and things like that." (DP7)

In addition, the delivery partners played a vital role in providing support to programme participants with administrative tasks, such as assisting in the application processes for benefits or school enrolments for their children. This assistance is particularly significant due to the isolation resulting from low English proficiency, low self-esteem, and a lack of social network, which often leaves individuals' struggling to navigate through complex institutional services and paperwork. By offering guidance in these practical matters, the delivery partners contribute to breaking down the barriers created by poor English proficiency and social isolation.

"Or simply even if they are disabled and they need help applying for benefits, all sorts of things. Sometimes they even struggle to apply for schools for their children, we also help with this." (DP4)

"[The delivery organisation] helps me a lot and my family as well, another son who came with his family too. She helps me to do all documents, pension credit and she gave a lot of advice on how to act, how to behave also. When we came [...], we didn't know the laws of your country - where must we go, where should we go, what should we do, how to begin - and she helped a lot. I like this agency, [...] because a lot of people come there and have a lot of help from that organisation. They are very active people and they do much for people, for Ukrainians as well." (PP3)

5.3. Impact on the participants

The interviews highlight the first impact as an improvement in well-being. According to the feedback, particularly from delivery partners, the programme significantly influences participants, making their lives brighter. It helps them feel part of a community and facilitates progress toward a better life through education and employment opportunities. This positive impact aligns with findings from Morrish and Medina-Lara's (2021) systematic search, which consistently showed a positive association between unemployment and loneliness. Moreover, research indicates "that perceived social support from friends, relatives and the community through social contact maintains self-esteem and helps individuals to better cope with unemployment" (Virgolino et al., 2022:439). This underscores the significance of supportive social networks in alleviating the psychological impact of job loss and promoting resilience during challenging periods.

"Sure, just one thing, I'm going to request for this programme to continue because - I don't mean to exaggerate but it can save lives, it really can." (PP10)

"I feel like they have given us the reins to support these people in ways where they feel they can go out in the world, achieve something. Whether it's even talk to somebody new, make a friend. I feel in the sessions that is the main thing that we achieve, making new friends, getting that support circle where they - just within the classroom but outside the classroom - talk to each other. [...] I think there are so many advantages that the list just goes on and on. But I think the main thing is its giving them those English skills to help them make their life brighter and people depending on them brighter as well. Giving them the sense of hope that they can achieve things that they are hoping to achieve." (DP6)

"I think it's definitely helped mental health because they've been able to feel part of the community. And what we've seen is that they've made friendships and they've also developed relationships, even if they have different languages, to the point that at the end of their session there will be food celebrations and they all cook and it's really lovely. [...] something so simple

that we take for granted has been really useful. It's also been a pathway for parents to not only gain their own personal qualifications and knowledge and skills but for lots of them it's given them the ability and the confidence to be able to move on and seek employment or volunteering which a year ago they may never have considered doing." (DP10)

"It's like a community, there's always someone that you can talk to about something." (PP16)

"I just like doing it, meeting new people and socialising." (PP17)

The impact on well-being and mental health appears to be supported by two main pillars: enhanced confidence and increased self-efficacy. These observations align with the quantitative findings, indicating an improvement in well-being over the program's duration, with the mean well-being score increasing from 22.1 at the start of participation to 23.4 at the end (see Section 4.3.2). Confidence and self-efficacy differ since "confidence reflects a degree of certainty about a perception, event, or outcome" (Cramer et al., 2009: 9), and self-efficacy "is a specific perception about one's ability to conduct a particular behaviour" (Cramer et al., 2009:9). Despite the differences, it is evident that Pathway for Recovery has a role to play in enhancing confidence and self-efficacy in participants. Confidence has been discussed positively in relation to both participants' needs and the support provided by delivery partners, forming a crucial component of the Pathways for Recovery project. Both delivery partners and programme participants highlighted the program's role in instilling confidence, not only in their overall abilities but also in their employability skills, social skills, and English proficiency. This newfound confidence was seen as instrumental in fostering independence and improving ones self-efficacy. The development of self-efficacy has been recognized as a key pillar for successfully navigating the employment landscape (Hirseland and Kerschbaumer, 2023) and, in fact, higher levels of self-efficacy combined with increased job search activity can vastly improve employment prospects (Zikic and Saks, 2009; Maddy III, Cannon, and Lichtenberger, 2015).

"Confidence, definitely confidence; being around other people, feeling like they can talk to colleagues or staff. We praise them when they are doing well and we try and build them up. But I would say that's the biggest thing, the main thing I notice when young people come in is the lack of confidence. Anxiety is very prevalent in here, it seems to be quite a big thing but the more they come in and stick with their routine, get praised, do well, you see their confidence grow. That's the main thing.[…] And the fact that we've been able to move people on to jobs with it, earning a nice amount of money and get independent, that's brilliant and really satisfying to see as a member of staff." (DP1)

"Definitely confidence, the first day they walk through the door they are very quiet, very timid, very shy; maybe the parents talk for them. And after a couple of weeks and months they come and find you and will be like, 'Can you help me with my CV? Can you help me apply for a job?'" (DP2)

"They are getting more confident, they start believing in themselves. It does happen that we have people who think even though they are well qualified in their countries and they have a good education they don't believe in themselves, they think, 'How would I be able to progress with my career? I can only do cleaning jobs or be a factory worker'. We help them to believe in themselves and be much more open minded and just be brave enough and confident enough to make this first step towards changing their career for better. So I believe they feel more confident and more empowered to actually make that change and take steps towards a better future." (DP4)

"I'd say my confidence in working has gone up a bit." (PP1)

"I like to come here because it gives me more experience and once I get all the experience I need I can go and find a job. So hopefully I can get a job.[...] I would say confidence and getting a job." (PP2)

"I think there's lot of confidence now. I sense that [...] while they are working, for example, where they ask a question, a few hands will go up. So, there is definitely that sense of confidence that has been instilled in them whereas they are able to [...]make their point or answer a specific question or give their opinion, give their views. So, they are able to speak at that level, which is really nice. [...] Definitely. I think it all goes hand in hand because the more confident they are, the more they will be able to move on with their futures and obviously think about getting a job or a specific area of work. So, to get involved, maybe even in voluntary work, so it's a step forward, definitely." (DP7)

"After these classes, the English courses, my confidence is much better from the first. Before, I'm confused, I talk or not talk. I know with much confidence I can talk and I don't hesitate. When I was wrong then the other person gave me the - what is wrong. [...] I feel more confident after doing these classes. [...] when our children were little and go to the doctor to book an appointment is very difficult for me. Now after, it's an easy task for me. [...] And go to the shopping and a question, ask for something that I can't see - I can ask the question, the market person, if there's a thing which I need. And before I see - when I don't have to come back home

because I hesitate to answer. How can I ask them, 'I need that thing', and it's a very helpful for this, after this course I'm confident." (PP9)

"I came here and started in the English course and my mental health is good. And my confidence, yes, is much better when I speak." (PP11)

"They are proud of themselves, so proud, and you can see by the big smile. [...] I know some outcomes are they've got to be in work or training but with our family it's more of the confidence and watching them just blossom. And sometimes we might not get the outcome that we really need but the outcome for them is more for them. It's giving them that chance to build their confidence and get rid of their anxiety and just roll with life and feel accepted." (DP11)

The support provided by delivery partners has had a positive impact on participants' self-efficacy and self-esteem, consequently fostering increased confidence and belief in their abilities. Enhancing self-efficacy is particularly crucial as "a person with the same knowledge or skills may perform poorly, adequately, or extraordinarily depending on fluctuations in self-efficacy thinking" (Bandura, 1993:119). Research underscores the importance of employment interventions in supporting the development of skills and traits that can boost self-efficacy and self-esteem, especially within disadvantaged groups (Cedefop, 2016). The skills cultivated during the Pathways for Recovery program, as detailed in Section 5.2 on a wide range of support, have contributed to the elevation of participants' self-efficacy and self-esteem. This aligns with the quantitative findings, indicating that over the course of the program, participants' self-efficacy underwent positive changes. The mean self-efficacy score increased from 28.3 at the program's commencement to 30.9 at its conclusion (see Section 4.3.1), highlighting the program's efficacy in bolstering participants' confidence in their capabilities.

"Some of them have gone into work and they've seen that they are capable despite thinking of their learning difficulties." (DP3)

"I think first and foremost Pathways for Recovery allows the initial interaction of the participant coming to you. The consistent work with the participant, it allows breaking the barriers [...] Some of my participants, again going back to the learning difficulties, they have the self-esteem that they are not good enough to work. We've got them work experience and they've seen for themselves that they are capable of work. So yes, getting to know the people, working with the people and then the follow-up work comes from itself really." (DP4)

"I've felt more calm and acquainted with procedures here in the UK and I know where to look for jobs, different websites, and what a job application process looks like. And it was nice to talk to the advisers at [PPAC] because they are very attentive and empathetic. So, for me it improved my self-esteem." (PP4)

"I feel very supported, I feel that I'm not alone. Initially before joining them I was alone, I didn't know the solutions to my problems so I felt like I'm alone, nobody to help. [...] So, after joining I felt very motivated and encouraged. And before that I don't want to apply, I will keep waiting for some time, I'm so disheartened earlier. [...] But after joining with them I'm never disheartened. I kept on applying, even though I failed, I never stopped, I kept on applying, applying and trying harder because they encouraged me, they motivated me. So, I should say that." (PP12)

"More sociable, more come out of my comfort zone. I'm less shy now than I used to be. I used to be shy and not speak to anyone but now I'm more independent with myself." (PP17)

Employment emerges as a significant area of impact for programme participants, linked to increased confidence and self-efficacy, as expressed in various quotations. Participants express heightened confidence in successfully navigating the employment-related tasks required for job applications and appointments. This emphasis on employment is further supported by the observed increases in confidence in securing future employment over the course of the programme. The mean expectation score rose from 14.8 at the program's outset to 15.9 at its conclusion, indicating a positive trend in participants' confidence regarding their prospects for future employment (see Section 4.3.3). This positive shift underscores the program's efficacy in instilling confidence and optimism in participants as they contemplate and pursue employment opportunities.

"So being able to support people on the path to getting back into employment is very important, I think that's the biggest advantage of the project, that we can spend lots of time with them and support them on their way back into employment. [...] we're really actually happy that we can actually help people under this project. We see that it is huge impact so it's good for us as a charity organisation to be able to work under the project and help people. It gives us the opportunity to spend lots of hours with them and support them in many shapes and forms." (DP4)

"Yes I enjoy it. And it helped me, I had some meetings and I was told about career advice here and how it works. They helped me with my CV and with [....] my diplomas." (PP4)

"I'm enjoying it very much, they've been very helpful. My business plan is almost finished. I understand much better now the community interest company, because that's what I am. [...] they've been very good. They've been giving me help, I've been going onto the one to one, we've been talking - where I am. They've been asking me what help I need, it's really nice to have that behind you." (PP18)

While the programme shows positive impacts on a majority of participants, it is noted that certain individuals may derive greater benefits than others. Specifically, according to feedback from delivery partners, male participants and young people are perceived to be the groups that benefit the most from the programme. This recognition of the different degrees of impact among different participant groups underscores the importance of tailoring support and interventions to address the unique needs and circumstances of diverse individuals within the programme.

"I think the one way to put it, the nature of [the organisation and the work provided] sometimes think that some of the guys, the boys, they benefit a bit more than the girls because a lot of girls that come through the door are not big fans of being in the [work environment]. I don't blame them, some of the girls. Some girls really like it and enjoy it but others come in and they are like, 'Oh, it's cold', they don't want to be in there. At which point it's difficult because then what else can we offer them? We sometimes give them cleaning and maintenance jobs like hoovering and doing the laundry, dishwashers, other stuff, life skills. Some of the guys benefit a lot more [...] because they are happy to do that. I think for girls it's a little bit harder at times. (DP2)

"Going back to the Covid-19 of the younger generation between 16 and early 20s, I'm seeing a lot of struggling engagement. With going to the youth group through the Job Centre, they've said the same things, it's always other providers such as Princes Trust, the Job Centre, Prospects, they've all had a lack of engagement from that band of people. Whereas people who genuinely want to go into work, they will engage and get into work." (DP3)

"Definitely those who have a higher level of need I think are the ones that benefit more. I wouldn't necessarily say an age group or anything like that, I think it's just those who have more challenging needs, maybe, and more barriers who would benefit more." (DP5)

5.4. Opportunities for improvement on Pathway for Recovery

5.4.1. The objectionable aspects of Pathways for Recovery

While the organisation demonstrates an ability to provide support for participants with higher needs, there is an acknowledgment that the extent of assistance has limitations, particularly in the context of employment support. This recognition illustrates the complexity of addressing diverse needs within the programme and signals a need for further exploration and potential enhancements in strategies to effectively support participants with higher needs, especially in the realm of employment assistance.

> *"Negatives I would say is when we have young people who have much higher needs, that they can only do - like I said, we've got one young person who hasn't got any diagnosis but my view would be that he has additional needs. He will only do one particular job, so he'll only move around the Pot Noodles from one place to another. He's very happy coming here and we're happy for him to come here, we all really like him and are really glad he feels there's somewhere he can come where he can talk to people, sit and have a cup of tea with people. But realistically long term it would be very difficult to move him on to employment unless it's aimed at - to be supportive – Even with the additional needs they all want to feel valued and that they are doing a job and earn a bit of money and through Pathways they don't get any money. It's done through choice and they don't get any payment. I think that would be my only concern. But we're doing what we can and they feel very comfortable and happy coming in but you wonder long term, 'How are we going to move this person on to somewhere where he feels valued and can actually earn a bit of money?'" (DP1)*

Another area for improvement was associated with the creation of more connections with employers, with the aim of expanding the range of work opportunities available to programme participants. The delivery partners discussed how the programme participants might struggle upon entering employment thus having strong connections with employers can help them with the settling in process[9]. This is particularly crucial for individuals with additional needs who may benefit from additional support when transitioning into employment. Strengthening ties with employers not only broadens the scope of employment possibilities but also enhances the potential for tailored support and a smoother integration for participants with diverse needs.

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[9] During the programme operational groups and through online communications, several Employer jobs fairs to which delivery partners and participants can attend have been suggested. Therefore, the delivery partners' recommendations have been addressed throughout time. Moreover, the delivery partners are offered operational groups every two months to support the networking with other delivery partners.

"Somewhere to improve for us personally is making connections with other employers around the surrounding area. We've got some connections with John Lewis and Ikea […]. Some of the young people, they are perfect, they can do the work but initially they are going to come across there as shy and timid but they can do the work. You just have to give them the chance to settle in for a month and then they can do the work. But it's finding these connections to other employers, to understand and work together. They are very capable of doing the job, you just need to be understanding and give them the support that they need. […] It's building those connections. They can be in Pathways and come through but maybe if they don't want the [work environment] we could find some alternative to work with them together to give them the right work experience. […] Another one, like I've mentioned for the girls, I would like to find alternative work experiences for them, whether it's hairdressing or working in a cafe or something like that, that's something I have been working on." (DP2)

"I think we need to be a bit more transparent of what everyone brings to the table; what does everyone offer? And how can we incorporate everyone's skill set to redirect participants between each other. From my point of view, I might not be an expert in catering, as an example, so if I get a participant who wants to work in food, catering, I might refer them to Café Track who deals with the café side of things, so that might be a good referral. And if there is other training that - I've forgotten the name - if we can signpost each other to allow the best opportunity for the person. So, Café Track, for example, they might get someone who really wants to do sport, signpost them to me and if I've got someone who wants to do catering I signpost it to him. I know everyone brings different stuff to the table, I think we just need to be a bit better in referring each other within the project, not seeing each other as competitors but actually working together." (DP3)

"I think it's just really finding that way to engage with more the community. So, perhaps we could have done more community outreach but obviously the project is due to finish in the next two or three months. That's something that maybe if we looked at it again we would try and do a bit more community outreach and see if that would attract more participants" (DP11)

"No, I just think it's important to have external employers available so when they finish with Pathways and they are ready to move on- […] and also a special needs because some of them, you don't know where to move them on to, you don't know where to take them. […] But I think that's really important, after Pathways, to move them on to more meaningful employment." (DP2)

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These views were shared by programme participants who noted the importance of arrange networking events with employers.

"If they could try to arrange something to connect us with employers or even more because I connected through LinkedIn myself, I did it in a hard way. If they can have maybe an event or something like that, they can create an event or something to connect with employers and approach even more closely, that would be great." (PP12)

It should be noted that these suggestions have been actively considered by the Pathway for Recovery group, resulting in the identification and planning of additional events for delivery partners and participants to attend. This responsive approach reflects a commitment to addressing shortcoming identified in the programmes in addition to fostering increased engagement, improving networking opportunities, and supporting programme participants. The implementation of additional events demonstrates a proactive stance in refining and enhancing the programme based on valuable feedback and insights from various stakeholders. Nevertheless, it's acknowledged that these events may not fully cater to the needs of participants with additional requirements who may still not feel completely safe and at ease. This recognition illustrates the need for ongoing commitment to further refine the programme by promoting inclusivity and ensuring that the programme evolves to create an environment where all participants can thrive and feel supported.

"I think from our point of view it's worked well because we've made use of the resources that are available, so we've got the links to be able to say to people, 'This is what we've got; this is what we like', which we were directed to do. […] We've had the invitations to Chamber exhibitions and the opportunities there, which again in some ways you wish there were a million more of them but actually there are only so many hours in a day, you can't attend all of them. So I think again for us it has worked well because we've been able to utilise those links where we can and say, 'This is who we've got, have you got anything?', which I think is probably the most useful way. And again I think because our candidates are quite niche it's not always about - you could have a complete autism friendly exhibition version but it's not really going to happen because it's not a business type thing. I think for us it's worked well because we've utilised what's there. You could have a hundred more events but I can't attend them because I've only got so many hours in a day, if I'm being really honest." (DP13)

"I struggle with networking events. You always get the same big names at these events and similar to what you were saying, the demographic of people we work with don't always match

the organisations that are there so it's a bit of a Catch-22. Sometimes yes, they are brilliant and you do get these disability friendly organisations, but that could be one in five." (DP14)

The effectiveness of networking is also contingent on geographical considerations, and in this programme, a challenge is that the areas are widely dispersed. The geographical spread presents a unique challenge in fostering connections and collaboration among participants, delivery partners, and employers. Addressing this spatial diversity may require tailored strategies and innovative approaches to ensure that networking opportunities are accessible and inclusive for all involved, despite the geographical dispersion.

"I think that's one of our strengths and challenges, that we are so spread out and I think that's where again it's more the local networks. There's probably some good practice and I think that's where again I'd rather meet in person, but sometimes it's really hard because it takes out an hour before and an hour afterwards and actually it's worked quite well on Teams, just being able to do that. (DP13)

"I think I agree. We are everywhere, aren't we basically? And the thing we felt was that with all respect […] things in Northampton, our people are simply not going to come and get work in Northampton, it's just not going to happen. We struggle to get them to where we are […] sometimes, let alone do that." (DP16)

"So there is still an opportunity to actually get in touch with people. I appreciate it's a longer term but things like that, you've got nothing to lose and I'm more than happy to email [local employers] and say, 'We've got this; we've got that; can we get in touch with some-', […] I would like to have got something put together with some of the employers from those areas, bringing some of the participants down and have coffee and cake, nothing formal as in 'This is a job interview type opportunity'. […] Just more about, 'These are the types of employers who have got the right ethos, who will sit and talk to you as a person rather than someone who has got a disability or someone who has got a challenge in life', because that's why you do these things." (DP14)

The geographical distance, noted above, poses challenges for participants in terms of commuting. Some individuals are unable to afford transportation costs, and this financial barrier significantly hinders their ability to access employment opportunities[10]. For those facing multiple disadvantages

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[10] Transportation costs should be covered by the delivery organisations.

or financial challenges, compounded by the current cost-of-living crisis, accessing employment opportunities beyond their local areas becomes especially difficult.

"Sometimes transport costs, some people don't have money to come in so they haven't got the budget or they are living on universal credit and then taking the bus to come and go-" (DP2)

"There's a lot of need for [the organisation type of] work at the minute but I've got participants who are willing to work and want to work but they physically can't get there because it's an A-road or dual carriageway, too far away or public transportation doesn't get them there. So that's a big barrier. I've got big companies like Panther, that's quite local to Duston so it is walkable, but I've got Royal Mail, Cummins, some big named organisations who were asking for the people but I can't get the people there. Yes, that's definitely a big barrier. With the nature of people we work with, they are not going to be financially on top of things so they are not going to have the money up front for public transport or a car or whatever transport it is. That is a massive barrier; it's getting to the point where it has to be pretty much walking distance or the public transport literally takes them directly there." (DP3)

The opportunities for improvement are not only focused on improving networking opportunities and financial support for programme participants, with delivery partners encountering challenges with paperwork. The difficulty does not solely stem from bureaucratic processes but rather from specific requirements imposed by the programme once participants secure employment[11]. This suggests a need for clearer communication and streamlined documentation processes to alleviate the burden on delivery partners and ensure a smoother transition for participants as they navigate the requirements associated with employment within the program

"I have to be honest, compared to other projects the bureaucracy is, I would say, better with regard to not that much paperwork with regard to that, definitely, because we have similar projects and the paperwork was very challenging; this one is definitely easier. [however] One thing that actually is giving me lots of worries is that when the clients secure employment they need for us to be able to claim outcome [...]. And that is a tricky one because obviously--when they go into employment it's very difficult to get hold of them, [...]. The other thing I can think of as a disadvantage is when we have a person who is employed as an agency worker but they have not been called to work for quite a long time, technically they are unemployed but they

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[11] The information needed when the participant exits are the name of the employer and the stating date.

have not received a P45 and obviously they still are employed so we can't really enrol them on the project. That is a tricky one." (DP4)

"I think the paperwork is quite lengthy but I think that's just something that comes with all of these projects. Getting through that initial sign-up process for a participant can be a bit of a challenge sometimes. That can delay a little bit them starting, so it can be." (DP5)

"My main concern is the paperwork, if it could be downsized. Obviously I know where paperwork comes from and I know its got to be done for legal reasons but it I think it would be nice if you did get any more organisations in with the Asperger's/autistic side if the paperwork could be combined, that it's not all sheets, 'Sign here, sign here'. [..] few sheets obviously because you need your main bits but there are certain things – [...] And they don't like to share ID, so that as one of my main concerns because of fraud and they've always been taught not to share, not to do this, not to do that so - black and white, they don't. They didn't mind me looking and observing that I could see but they didn't want me to take copies. Some were okay but it's finding that line as well on the paperwork." (DP11)

"The only problem I'm having is when I'm on the internet trying to fill out the form. Because of my dyslexia I'm a bit slower than normal, I have to keep reading, reading and the time is out, and when the time is out you have to start it again." (PP18)

"I still think the barriers for a lot of people is the perception of 'I'm coming to get support'. And actually it's then providing the evidence which we get why we need a passport, we need this- [...] I think the paperwork of it and I think this is way more flexible than others where you have to provide all of this at the start. This has been a lot better for that but I still think that is a barrier for people because it's, 'Why am I having to show my passport? Why am I having to show this? I haven't got a national insurance number', or don't know what it is." (DP16)

"[...] And I think that's where we've adapted throughout the course of it. The paperwork for this is way less than others which I think helps people and can be done a little bit more smoothly. So actually you get a lot of it from a conversation, 'Is this all correct?', as opposed to we need to sit down. Because I think the barrier is the perception." (DP15)

5.4.2. *More tailored support through funding*

Aligned with the previously mentioned challenges, both the delivery partner and programme participants have suggested an increase in funding. This proposed boost in funding aims to address two key aspects: firstly, to assist participants in reaching various activities and employment

opportunities, alleviating the financial strain associated with commuting; and secondly, to expand the provision of services. This recommendation illustrates the recognition that additional financial support can significantly contribute to overcoming barriers and enhancing the overall effectiveness of the programme.

> *"[…] they are spending money to come here, the money that they don't really have. So that can be a barrier sometimes to turning up. We've had that with a few people. It's difficult, so that would be something. And also, some of our community activities, social activities, we very much try to find the funding for it but it would have been nice if there was something Pathways also had for the social interaction skills, to do some fun activities. We don't want people to just come in, do the work and go home, we need to build a bigger picture - their social skills, building friendships, being happy when they come here because that's how you keep them engaged. If you just put them in the [work environment], they do two hours of work and go home, after a while it's not enough. They need to have more of a connection, more friendships, do some nice activities, feel part of the family and the service. Right now, it's possible because we've requested fundings everywhere else but it would have been nice to also get that from Pathways." (DP2)*

Indeed, additional funding has the potential to translate into the provision of extra courses for programme participants. As emphasised in Section 5.3 on the 'Impact on participants', the development of skills and traits has been identified as instrumental in boosting self-efficacy and self-esteem, particularly among disadvantaged groups. The infusion of more resources can facilitate the expansion of educational opportunities, providing participants with a broader range of courses and skill development opportunities. This, in turn, contributes to the overarching goal of empowering participants and enhancing their overall well-being and employability (Cedefop, 2016).

> *"[…] maybe it might be more range of services. […] For me it would be maybe some counselling even, people in a situation like me suffered from war experience. I don't know if it can be done under this particular project." (PP4)*

> *"I think if there was some money or funding available for participants to access external training. So if they wanted to become self-employed and they wanted to upskill in - for instance, if they want to be a cake maker and they want to learn how to do that professionally, it's a bit restrictive because there isn't any sort of funding available for me to say, 'Here's a course, off you go and do it'." (DP5)*

"For example, put through one funding. A lot of the learners, we can't put them through two or three classes, you can only give them one or two. They want more sessions, and we can't offer them that because there's no funding available to put them through. I think that's the thing. […] And then if the things - so what's available for them to move on. Some of them would like to do more courses but it's just childcare based, for example, they want to go for a job or more just employability skills or GCSEs, like a little jump to GCSEs - maths skills or if they want to work in hospitality, something specialised to that." (DP6)

"I think because this is intermediate level they do tend to ask if there is another level after this, so maybe a continuation would be good for them. Or maybe if the course was a little bit longer, because this one goes on from January until May/June time so it's almost six months, but we have breaks in between." (DP7)

"Yes, that's a big thing in this area, they have quite a few children, three and four and five families are not - they are just normal. So, by the time the parent is going back to a course or volunteering or starting for something for herself, it's normally around that time when the first one is maybe aged five and starts school or in reception. We know without a doubt that's a barrier so that would be for me a consideration." (DP10)

"We need to start from the starting point but after this I want more classes, taking more classes while searching [for a] job." (PP8)

The issue of additional funding is also pertinent to the conclusion of the programme, where delivery partners are actively seeking ways to integrate participants who have not completed the programme without any funding. Additional funding could play a crucial role in developing strategies and initiatives to support the ongoing engagement and integration of these participants, ensuring that the benefits and support extend beyond the formal duration of the programme. This underscores the importance of sustained financial support in fostering long-term positive outcomes for all programme participants.

"I think with that it's going to be a real struggle because we're relatively small, quite niche area that we will find a way of supporting them but that would probably be unfunded to start with and we won't be able to take additional people on because we haven't got the other projects yet. It's the sustainability, because the people that are on it we wouldn't just go, 'Right, December 31st, out you go, we'll never see you again', we're not that kind of people. […] But there would be a business case to go, 'We're not receiving any support for this anymore'. […]

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We won't do that but in reality, when you are looking at it, those people who will try and move into - whether it's voluntary roles or trainee roles or whatever we can call them, the funding streams aren't there to carry it on." (DP16)

"I think as well, for us we do outreach in some specific places so there's not provision in those places and it's the same thing we are a little bit like. We are kind of referred in to us by school and there's just nothing for them. We know people want this service and want it to continue so that the support they'll get beyond it would be going back to the schools. But they've obviously got a million other things going on" (DP14)

"Yes, the same with us."(DP13)

""I think this is where - and I'm not putting pressure on the University, I'm praising the University here - I think the University is almost a magnet that brings it all together because ultimately we'd all be part of something but we haven't got enough hours and the time to lead it, which is where the University role has been absolutely crucial in it [...] And then the University has brought all of them together, and I think that's where the carry on part of it is. The admin - and I'm praising [here the manager od the programme] - it's not the glamourous bit but without that there's no way we as an independent small social enterprise could do what we do because you haven't got that." (DP13)

"I don't know about yourself but we wouldn't have had access to this without the University." (DP16)

5.5. A case study, Insight into Non-English speaker

Four additional joint-interviews were conducted, comprising six programme participants and two delivery partners. The purpose of these interviews was to gain further insight into the needs and experiences of a specific participant group, namely participants who are non-English speaking immigrants. Within this group, the majority are mothers who experience challenges in communicating with professionals (including their children's teachers or doctors) providing assistance with their children's homework, and who experience limitations in their social lives.

"I am a housewife, I have my two children, one girl and one boy - one girl four years and one boy two years. I have a happy life. Because my English speaking and listening skills are no better, no good. That's why I joined this ESL course. " PP22

"I can't understand English, my daughter is here, not homework helping because I help with the teaching; I do not understand English and I started this one class and I improved my English. My son, he had an operation and when I go to the hospital I face problems speaking and listening. Now it's maybe better." PP21

"Before English I we can't speak English in my home because we can't speak English in the home. My son comes in this school and he says, 'Mummy speak English'." PP24.

"Some of them will have come here 5-10 years ago, some of them come here newly. I think it is varied. Some of them will have families here, living with husband, children. Some of them will be here as a single parent with children. So, it's very different backgrounds."(DP21)

"They do have young kids; they don't work because of that. I think that's probably the vast majority of us tick the same boxes, because they are all in the same situation because of where we recruited them from." (DP20)

The reason why this delivery organisation attracts such an homogeneous group (non-English speaking mothers) is because the activities are conducted within the school premises. This setup enables mothers to seamlessly fulfil their childcare responsibilities while engaging in the programme.

"I think that's probably because of where we recruited, where we are. We are at a school so it's going to inherently be mothers and maybe culturally, I'm not sure, they do tend to be housewives. They do have young kids; they don't work because of that. I think that's probably the vast majority of us tick the same boxes, because they are all in the same situation because of where we recruited them from." (DP20)

"I think building confidence, independence, because they are, as we said, housewives, they are looking after children. Their husbands will be off to work, they spend all day at work and they are having to deal with the school, children, the homework, talking to the teachers- They have quite limited social lives, I would say. -booking doctors appointments, all of that social skills, life. And it's helping themselves to do better and helping the children to do better as well." (DP21)

Delivering programmes in locations with childcare allows participants who have childcare responsibility to access the support that would otherwise be unattainable. This helped the participants to access the courses by removing childcare barriers as well as other barriers such as commuting.

"They are already on site, dropping kids off or picking kids up, popping into the classroom for a couple of hours to do the course, it's almost a natural thing for them to do. […] From my point of view it's because ESL classes are inherently run at colleges or other schools or evening classes etc where they are not as outreach as we are. We bring the ESL to them, that's what I was trying to say about the fact we are doing it here, because they are here anyway, we are bringing the support to them. […] It's probably all about knocking down as many barriers as possible because they are not able to overcome them anyway." (DP20)

"Yes, it's accessible here, the course. Whereas a lot of them live in this area, they won't be able to go to colleges or go to the town centre […] learning to do a course because of travel issues or picking children up from nurseries or from school, they won't be able to do any of that." (DP21)

Pathway for Recovery not only provided opportunities for participants at the *right* time but also provided participants' with a significant boost in confidence in the English language. Learning English has benefits for securing employment but also empowers participants to operate independently in their lives, enabling visits to the doctor, shopping, communicating with their children's teachers, and actively assisting with homework.

"Yes, I like to come here. I like to help my kids in speaking and writing, listening. […] especially homework." (PP21)

"Now my confidence level is built up. First my confidence is not good, my speaking, listening skills are no good, now it's improved." (PP22)

"I joined this class because my English has improved. I finished this course, I searched for a job and I do a job. […] So, after this course, I speak English in my home with my husband. My confidence level has improved and I talk with my teacher and if we talk I will understand English and speak. […] Before, I had my brothers to talk to the doctor and shopping centres. After this course I think I improved English. I talk to doctors and shopping centres, talk to people." (PP24)

"I am a graduate from Pakistan and after this course finished I found my job. I also found a job in this school. […] I feel confident because when I joined the class my English speaking was not good, when I joined this class, so my speaking skill is very good. So, I am being more confident to speak with anyone. I improved my English speaking so that's why I joined this course. […] Yes, when I go to the doctor I talk to the doctor about what I have. If I have a fever

6. Social Impact Matrix

Social Impact measurement allows organisations to understand the value of services and activities for individuals, organisations and society. The Social Impact Matrix© developed by the University of Northampton fills this gap by providing a holistic Social Impact measurement approach that can be used to develop a bespoke measurement framework (see Section 3.3). The following section presents the estimated social impact for support delivered by Pathway for Recovery from January 2022 to October 2023[12].

6.1. Employment and Training

Pathway for Recovery is a part funded European Social Fund, South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP) wide comprehensive employment support initiative delivered by a regional partnership including specialist support providers, employment and skills organisations and strategic stakeholders. It helps job seekers and economically inactive people, including people experiencing long-term unemployed and people far from the labour market who need support to get themselves back into employment. This support enables programme participants to develop the capabilities required to overcome challenges to obtaining employment which are essential for improving outcomes. The added value of this support is associated with receiving support for employment, securing employment and receiving training and qualifications.

Information and advice on employment, education, training and volunteering was offered to 886 programme participants, with the average cost of employability courses being £300. This support is essential in helping programme participants to improve their confidence and self-efficacy which is essential in securing employment (Scherbaum et al., 2006). Pathway for Recovery supported 93 individuals to secure employment which contributes to national insurance and tax contributions, and benefit savings. Unfortunately, information on whether employment is full-time or part-time is unavailable therefore an average salary is applied in calculating the national insurance and tax contributions for participants who secured employment.

Training and qualifications are provided to programme participants on the Pathway for Recover project including NVQ Qualifications (Level 1 and/or Level 2), ESOL, Construction Skills Certificate Scheme (CSCS), and Operating Training. The cost of each training and/or qualification is factored into the overall value, with ESOL costing £199 per person, CSCS costing £488 per person, Operating

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[12] Training, additional support and volunteering data is only applicable to PBIC, SOFEA and Evolve.

Training costing £400 per person, and other training (i.e., GDPR, Hygiene and Catering, IT) costing £212 per person. NVQ Level 1 and/or Level 2 cost £900 and £1,448 respectively however added life-time value can also be calculated for these areas. Whilst NVQ Level 1&2 qualifications are estimated to be worth an additional £17,728 - £42,441 over a lifetime, this estimation only covers the lifetime value. Thus, an annual figure estimation can be calculated (based on dividing the life-time value with average life expectancy)[13].

These numbers were analysed and applied to the support offered to calculate the overall impact (Table 6.1). The net value of social impact delivered by Pathway for Recovery in this area is equal to **£693,311.99** when attribution, displacement and deadweight are accounted for.

Support	Total Impact	Costs, Attribution, Displacement & Deadweight	Net Impact
Information and advice given on employment, education, training and volunteering	£265,800.00	886 participants * Average costs of employability course [Reed's Employability Course - £300 - https://www.reed.co.uk/courses/reeds-employability-skills/277001#/courses/?keywords=employability] [Attribution of 20% and Deadweight of 10% applied]	£186,060.00
Secured Employment - Tax and National Insurance	£109,588.00	135 participants * National Insurance and Tax for employed programme participants @ salary of £16,289.00 (Average wage for full time [35 hours] employee) [Attribution of 20% and Deadweight of 10% applied]	£76,711.60
Secured Employment -	£524,394.00	135 participants * Benefit payment (i.e. JSA) for programme participants @	£367,075.80

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[13] Average life expectancy for adults in Northamptonshire is 78.7 (PHE, 2019) thus the average annual value for NVQ Level 1&2 can be calculated as £324.10 (£17,728/54.7).

Reduction in benefits		salary of £74.70 per week [Attribution of 20% and Deadweight of 10% applied]	
NVQ Level 1&2	£23,001.70	17 participants * Average life-time value of NVQ Level 1&2 (£324.10) plus cost to delivering courses (£900 for NVQ Level 1 and £1,448 for NVQ Level 2) [Attribution of 20% and Deadweight of 10% applied]	£16,101.19
ESOL	£29,850.00	150 participants * Average ESOL course cost (£199) https://www.tefl.org/courses/advanced/esol-course) [Attribution of 20% and Deadweight of 10% applied]	£20,895.00
Construction Skills Certificate Scheme (CSCS)	£3,904.00	8 participants * Cost of CSCS (£488) [Attribution of 20% and Deadweight of 10% applied]	£2,732.80
Operating Training	£32,000.00	80 participants * average course costs (£400) [Attribution of 20% and Deadweight of 10% applied]	£22,400.00
Other (Hygiene, GDPR, IT)	£1,908.00	9 participants * average course costs (£212) [Attribution of 20% and Deadweight of 10% applied]	£1,335.60
Total	£990,445.70	**N/A**	**£693,311.99**

Table 6.1. Education, Employment and Training[14]

6.2. Mental Health, Well-being and Confidence

Unemployment, especially long-term unemployment, has significant negative effects on individual and community well-being (Creedet al., 1999; Nichols et al., 2013; Blustein, 2019; Marrone and Swarbrick, 2020; Pratap et al., 2021). Health and well-being are measured as *general well-being* defined as one's perception of their satisfaction of life and life stability. Research (Cox, Bowen and Kempton, 2012; Maccagnan et al., 2019) has suggested that improving an individual's well-being could be valued at £10,560 per individual, which illustrates the importance of capturing information on well-being. Support from Pathway for Recovery had an impact on programme participants' well-being with nine programme participants reporting that well-being increased across the project, two programme participants reporting that well-being reduced and one reporting no change. Overall, improvements in well-being can be calculated for seven programme participants.

Self-efficacy, on the other hand, is an individual's belief in their ability to complete a task and the strength of this belief. An individual with high self-efficacy will attempt to complete a task even after repeated failures thus improving self-efficacy is essential for ensuring positive outcomes. Self-efficacy scores are collected using the 10-item Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) Generalized Self-Efficacy (GSE) Scale, scored on a 4-point Likert scale. Identifying a suitable proxy for self-efficacy is complex however an average cost of self-efficacy improvements can be calculated at £1,017 (based on proxy calculations from www.hotcourses.com / Cox et al., 2012). Support from Pathway for Recovery has an impact on programme participants' self-efficacy with ten programme participants reporting that well-being increased across the project and two programme participants' reporting no change. Overall, improvements in self-efficacy can be calculated for ten programme participants.

Analysis reveals that the net value of social impact delivered by Pathway for Recover in this area is equal to **£58,863.00** when attribution and deadweight is accounted for (Table 6.2)

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[14] Given the fact that other provision does exist for this level of support, a deadweight ratio (10%) and attribution (20%) was applied across all areas. Displacement was included for tax and national insurance.

Support	Total Impact	Costs, Attribution, Displacement & Deadweight	Net Impact
Improvements in self-efficacy	£10,170.00	Improvement in self-efficacy (n=10) * £1,017 (average cost of improvements in self-efficacy). [Attribution of 20% and Deadweight of 10% applied]	£7,119.00
Improvements in well-being	£73,920.00	Average well-being financial proxy of £10,560 (Cox, Bowen and Kempton, 2012; Maccagnan et al., 2019) * improvement in wellbeing (n=7). [Attribution of 20% and Deadweight of 10% applied]	£51,744.00
Total	£84,090.00	**N/A**	**£58,863.00**

Table 6.2. Mental Health, Well-being, and Confidence[15]

6.3. Additional Support

Programme participants supported though Pathway for Recovery are offered additional support to improve engagement in activities. Additional support is offered through the provision of ID, laptops, DBS checks and food vouchers. Analysis of additional support reveals that the net value of social impact delivered by Pathway for Recovery in this area is equal to **£4,818.00** (Table 6.3).

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[15] Given the fact that other provision does exist for this area of support, the lower deadweight ratio of 10% was applied across all areas as well as 20% attribution for other service provisions. No displacement was included in this calculation.

Support	Total Impact	Costs	Net Impact
ID support	£2,828.00	Number of programme participants receiving ID support * average cost purchasing ID [£28.00]	£2,828.00
DBS	£100.00	Number of programme participants * DBS cost (£50)	£100.00
Laptops	£800.00	Number of laptops provided on loan * average cost of laptop [£400]	£800.00
Food vouchers / free food	£1,090.00	Number of food vouchers or free food* average cost per [£5]	£1,090.00
Total	**£4,818.00**	**N/A**	**£4,818.00**

Table 6.3. Additional support

6.4. Volunteering

Pathway for Recover helps job seekers and economically inactive people, including people experiencing long-term unemployed and people far from the labour market who need support to get themselves back into employment. Securing volunteering opportunities for programme participants forms part of the support offered, moving programme participants closer to the labour market. The Community Works organization[16] suggests that the economic value that volunteers bring to an organisation can be calculated by multiplying the total volunteer hours by an hourly wage rate. This could be the national minimum wage[17] or a median hourly wage. The minimum wage is likely to underestimate the value, while the median wage may overestimate it. The value for volunteering is £10.42 per hour (average[18] minimum wage for adults). Analysis of volunteering reveals that the net

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[16] https://www.bhcommunityworks.org.uk/voluntary-sector/volunteering/good-practice-guide/evaluating/working-out-the-economic-cost-of-volunteering/
[17] https://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage
[18] Average minimum wage - https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/minimum-wage-rates-for-2023

value of social impact delivered by the Pathway for Recovery in this area is equal to **£60,019.20** (Table 6.4).

Support	Total Impact	Costs	Net Impact
Volunteering for Programme participants	£60,019.20	Number of programme participants' volunteering * The value for volunteering is £10.42 per hour (minimum wage)	£60,019.20
Total	**£60,019.20**	**N/A**	**£60,019.20**

Table 6.4. Volunteering

6.5. Impact Overview

The data gathered in relation to the social impact of Pathway for Recovery and reported in Section 6 (see also Appendix A), demonstrates that the total maximum impact created equates to £1,139,372.90. However, when attribution, displacement and deadweight are accounted for, the overall impact value created is **£817,012.19**. Figure 6.1 below illustrates the breakdown of these social impact figures across the key areas.

Figure 6.1. Social Impact

It should be noted that these figures do not account for all impact created through the support offered to programme participants (i.e., 1:1 support) and staff (i.e., staff upskilling through accredited education and training to deliver Pathway for Recovery interventions) therefore there are opportunities to capture further social impact. The research team recommends that caution is exercised in interpreting the true social impact due to the limitations resulting from limitations including the lack of counterfactuals or randomised control group data for comparison.

7. Conclusion and recommendations

This report illustrated the findings from the Pathways for Recovery, a programme part funded European Social Fund, SEMLEP wide comprehensive employment support initiative delivered by a regional partnership including specialist support providers, employment and skills organisations and strategic stakeholders. This programme aims to help those most disadvantaged in our communities due to the impact of COVID-19. The primary objective of this programme is to assist individuals facing significant disadvantages in our communities, particularly those affected by the repercussions of COVID-19. It targets individuals dealing with long-term unemployment and those distant from the labour market, providing the necessary support to facilitate their reintegration into employment.

The evaluation of the programme encompasses both quantitative and qualitative data collected between July 2022 and November 2023. Quantitative data, presented in this report, were obtained through an online questionnaire completed by participants in English, Ukrainian, or Polish, first at the programme's commencement and then at its conclusion. The questionnaire covered demographic characteristics, psychological benefits, specifically focusing on self-efficacy and well-being, and employment-related benefits of the programme. A total of 112 responses were collected, with 91 for the initial survey and 21 for the follow-up. Qualitative data were collected through a comprehensive set of interviews involving 20 programme participants and 19 delivery partners. This included 27 semi-structured interviews and three focus groups with a total of 12 participants. The combination of both quantitative and qualitative data provides a holistic understanding of the programme's impact and effectiveness.

The report highlights the robust performance of Pathways for Recovery, indicating its effectiveness in meeting the diverse needs of participants. Upon entering the programme, participants exhibit a range of needs, all linked by the common thread of unemployment. However, the underlying needs are diverse, reflecting the unique challenges each participant faces. Some individuals come from disadvantaged backgrounds, while others struggle with heightened levels of anxiety and mental health difficulties, disabilities, and confidence issues. Some aspire to build their own businesses, while others, as immigrants or refugees, aim to enhance their English proficiency, integrate into society, and attain independence. Notably, some participants have experienced an exacerbation of their existing conditions due to the impact of COVID-19 and the accompanying physical distancing measures. Through a flexible and tailored support approach, Pathways for Recovery demonstrates its ability to effectively address these varied needs. The programme plays a crucial role in fostering the development of confidence, self-esteem, English proficiency, and employability skills among

participants, ultimately contributing to their successful journey towards finding employment. Participants exiting the programme experience a notable uplift in confidence and self-esteem. Armed with expanded knowledge and enhanced employability skills, they emerge more socially connected, less isolated, and equipped with improved social skills. The overarching impact extends beyond employment, as participants gain a heightened sense of independence and increased comfort within society. The programme's multifaceted approach succeeds not only in boosting participants' employability but also in cultivating a more empowered and socially integrated individual. Figure 7.1 below summarises the benefits of the programme and the opportunities for improvement captured through the evaluation.
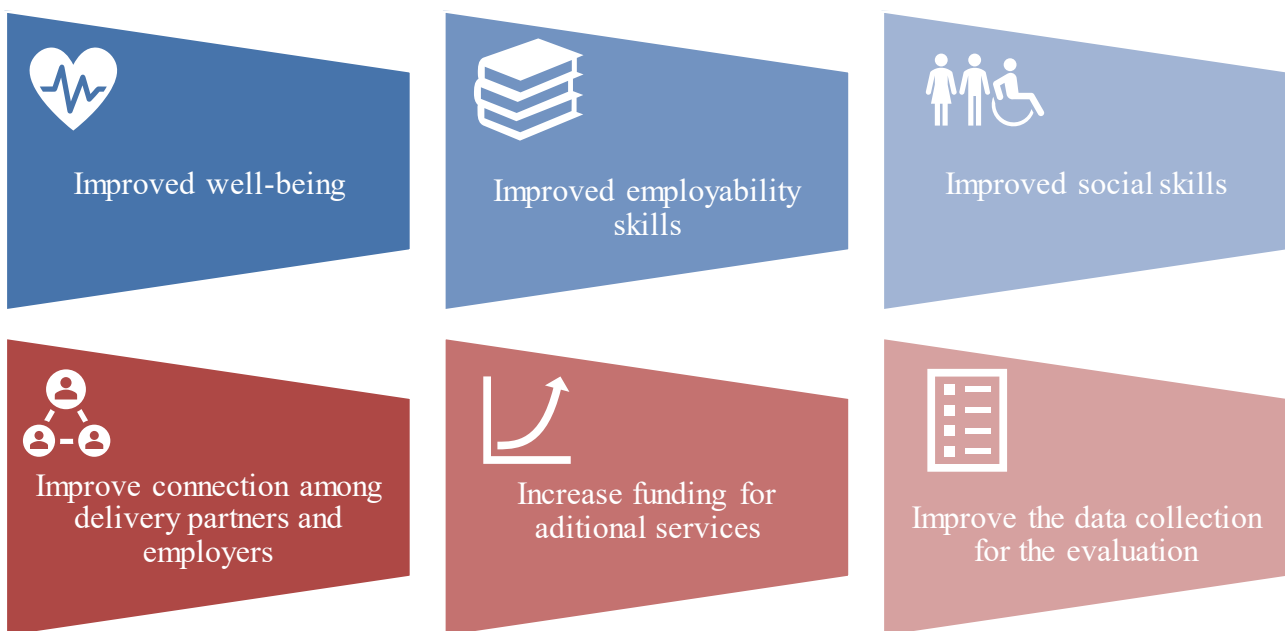

Improved well-being

Improved employability skills

Improved social skills

Improve connection among delivery partners and employers

Increase funding for aditional services

Improve the data collection for the evaluation

Figure 7.1. Pathways for recovery benefits (top) and opportunities for improvement (bottom).

Finally, the data gathered in relation to the social impact of Pathway for Recovery and reported in Section 6 (see also Appendix A), demonstrates that the total maximum impact created by Pathway for Recovery equates to £1,139,372.90. However, when attribution, displacement and deadweight is accounted for, the overall impact value created is **£817,012.19**.

Based upon the data outlined in this report, the research team proposes the following key recommendations for future projects:

- **Creating networking opportunities for delivery partners and employers:** Enhancing collaboration between delivery partners and employers would provide delivery partners with a better understanding of the opportunities available to programme participants. Networking

opportunities with employers have been provided throughout the project, with an increase in local employer networking events in the latter part of the program. These events are crucial to ensure participants actively engage with local employers. Nevertheless, there is room for improvement by expanding opportunities across different locations and incorporating additional virtual networking opportunities. This recommendation has already been highlighted in the Annual report (June 2023), and both the programme organisation and delivery partners have responded by increasing networking opportunities. Despite these efforts, participants with additional needs still encounter challenges with employer networking opportunities, particularly for participants who struggle in environments that are loud and/or busy.

- **Increase funding:** Providing additional funding to support delivery organisations would enhance the quality of activities and support offered. This financial boost would enable these organisations to assist participants in covering transportation costs for both activities and employment opportunities. Additionally, it would facilitate the provision of more sustained and extended support, allowing delivery partners to effectively assist participants over a prolonged period. This recommendation holds significance not only for the specific programme but also for the broader funding system in the area. There has been ongoing discussion about the advantages that larger organisations may have within the existing funding system. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that these larger organisations might not be the most suitable option for participants with higher needs, those who cannot commute, or individuals with caregiving responsibilities that limit their ability to travel. Addressing these considerations is essential for ensuring inclusivity and accessibility for all participants.

- **Improve the data collection for the evaluation:** Evaluation is a crucial component of any program, serving as a means to highlight its positive impact and identify areas for improvement. The questionnaire data, especially when collected from participants at the beginning and end of the program, provides a quantifiable measure of the changes they have undergone. The inclusion of validated scales for self-efficacy, well-being, and work readiness further enhances the ability to quantify participants' experiences in these domains. The interviews offer a more in-depth understanding of the participants' journey, their motivations for joining the programme, and the ways in which the programme supports them in achieving their goals. However, it is noted that not all delivery organizations have actively engaged in data collection, resulting in an insufficient number of questionnaires to comprehensively investigate the impact on participants who are completing the program. Similarly, the

interviews may not fully capture the diverse range of interventions provided. Therefore, a key recommendation is that all participating organizations in Pathways for Recovery should actively participate in any future evaluations by engaging in both questionnaires and interviews. This collective effort will contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the programmes' effectiveness and areas for enhancement.

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