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Prince's Trust

Talent Match Middlesbrough: Evaluation

Final Report (2018)



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*“From where I first started to where I am now,
Talent Match has helped me change my life
dramatically....*

Thank you Talent Match”

Middlesbrough TM participant now in full-time employment.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank all the organisations, businesses and individuals who have given their time to take part in this evaluation study.

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We would like to thank all the Talent Match young people who attended the YPP (Young People's Panel) session on evaluation (4th June), those providing comments at the Legacy Planning workshop (19th March) and young people in the workplace.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The **Talent Match Middlesbrough** programme was awarded £1,481,349 and was formally announced as one of the 21 participating Talent Match programmes nationally, in January 2014.

In line with the national objectives established by the Big Lottery Fund as part of its £108 million Fulfilling Lives programme, Middlesbrough's programme's core objectives focused upon supporting young people 18-24, who have been unemployed for a minimum of 12 months and those who are effectively "hidden" from the welfare system, to progress towards employment and find and secure work.

Talent Match recognised that for many young people, on the periphery of the labour market and on the margins of society, the "barriers" to accessing employment and sustaining a job or career path can be multi-faceted and deep rooted. They require a range of interventions or support measures to help turn become more employable. Barriers can include a lack of good qualifications, skills, previous work experience and general attitude or outlook. Yet these issues can characterise many people looking for work and claiming benefits such as JSA (Job Seekers Allowance).

Talent Match helps provide support for those a long way from the labour market – young people who cannot be easily placed into work or training. They typically have more entrenched and personal barriers, for example: **isolation, chaotic home lives, anxiety, depression, mental health issues, disability, drugs and alcohol dependency, debts, other health issues, a lack of friendships within their peer group, little social interaction with others and a lack of routine in their daily lives.** Compounded by poor experiences of school or college (and, for some, university) and possibly poor experiences of other "quick fix" training schemes or careers advice, the young people that Talent Match was designed to help often require more personalised and sustained support over a longer period of time.

TMM aimed to engage and support 435 young people, helping 150 to find employment and 100 of these to sustain their employment. It has exceeded all three key targets.

The average length of time a TMM young person had been out of work prior to engaging with the programme was 30 months – the longest period of all five Prince's Trust TM programmes. The longer the duration someone is out of work, the more likely they are to become more frustrated and less confident in their abilities to secure a job. Their outlook can become more negative. *Quick fix* methods and short-term course / support are less likely to help them to "turn their lives around" and make sustainable positive changes. This is where the Talent Match model has added real value to the employability arena with an approach, and resources that have made a real and lasting impact.

The four main reasons cited by young people as barriers to them accessing work, were: a lack of confidence (47% said this was a barrier); a lack of job opportunities – real or perceived (45%); a lack of qualifications (45%); and, a lack of work experience.

What has also been evidenced from our work is that:

- The main key public and VCS sector stakeholders have been engaged throughout at strategic level and support for the TM approach to helping young people has been robust
- The involvement of young people at the heart of Talent Match Middlesbrough has been a very strong feature and a success story for TMM. The growth and sustainability of the Young People's Panel and its role in programme design, influence policy, commissioning services etc. It has a major opportunity to influence policy and practice across Middlesbrough in the future, if stakeholders continue to support it and is helping employers to make recruitment procedures more "youth friendly" and accessible
- The five year implementation timeframe has provided freedoms and flexibilities to "test and learn" – to trial approaches and adjust during implementation. That said, the fundamental project delivery model and array of partners changed very little over the course of the programme
- The front-line Advocacy role – one to one, long term mentoring support – is the most fundamental aspect of helping provide a different quality of service to help young people with multiple needs and barriers
- A high proportion of TM young people who were supported into work then sustained that employment.

Key features of success – what works?

From our research and consultative work, we would highlight the following as key features of success of the Talent Match Middlesbrough programme:

- **Flexibility:** in terms of time and interventions, allowing young people to progress according to need and appropriate to the barriers they face. This contrasts with many of the mainstream welfare to work programmes, which are more time regulated.
- **Voluntary not mandatory provision:** this plays an important role as a starting point for engagement and participation - giving a sense of self-determination rather than feeling mandated to join and engage.
- **Person centred:** at the core of the model has been a responsiveness centred around each participant. Each person is unique and each “journey” has been unique. The service providers have been able to demonstrate a robust ability to work with the participants through a range of key interventions.
- **Building the foundations:** low levels of self-confidence, low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, introverted behaviours are all common place amongst young people that engage with Talent Match. These fundamental issues need “working on” through sensitive and tailored support and encouragement. The programme helps “build up” the individual, to enable them to develop more self-confidence, to build motivation, to take steps forward, improve their outlook and progress towards and into work. Investment in personal development and tackling deep-seated behaviours, routines and attitudes, is core component of the TM approach.
- **One to one support:** Providing intensive and longer term one to one support is at the heart of the TM model and is essential in building rapport and trust between a young person and the “support system” (which, in the past has often been seen to disappoint them). The continuity of a dedicated Mentor / Advocate, throughout their journey also provides comfort and a continual thread to the support mechanism, which is rarely found in other employability programmes.
- **“Stepping stones” approach - volunteering, work experience and exposure to the workplace:** all these can help build confidence, help young people acquire / develop soft and job specific skills and help put them in a better position to compete for job opportunities in the future. Gaining awareness and experience of work and workplaces by taking stepping stones
- **Supported pathways through to work and sustainable employment:** the programme, whilst flexible, provides structure and a step-by-step route to help young people progress. The number of TM participants that have moved into employment and sustained their position is impressive.

1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Format of this report

The report format is consistent for each of the five Talent Match evaluations. The report structure is as follows:

Section 1: This section includes a commentary on the brief and methodology for the evaluation assignment; an outline of the Big Lottery's overall Talent Match programme; and an overview of the Prince's Trust role with regard to Talent Match.

Section 2: This provides a synopsis of the Talent Match Middlesbrough programme – characteristics of the cohort of young people the programme aimed to support.

Section 3: This section focuses upon the strategic and operational issues – the “model” adopted in Middlesbrough and the local partnership; feedback and “key messages” regarding the strategic and delivery/operational issues gained from our qualitative evaluation work.

Section 4: This clarifies the agreed targets the project is contracted to deliver, the progress to date and a reflection on key achievements and issues of performance.

Section 5: This is a fundamental part of the report, reflecting on the wealth of feedback we received from young people that had participated / benefited or are currently participating / benefiting from the Middlesbrough programme. Their personal stories, their experiences of how they have been helped, the progress they have made and the impact of Talent Match Middlesbrough feature within this section.

Section 6: This section issues and comments from an employers' perspective and issues relating to the “employability” of young people supported by Talent Match, moving into work – whether that be work experience, careers awareness or securing part-time / full-time employment.

Section 7: Finally, we set out our concluding comments and key “learning points” from the Middlesbrough Talent Match programme. For partners, stakeholders and wider strategic partners seeking clarity on “what has worked?” and “why?” – the key ingredients of success, and the challenges, are explained here.

This report represents the culmination of an evaluation process across five Talent Match programmes overseen by The Prince's Trust, but it is focused on findings for the Middlesbrough Talent Match (TM) programme. An over-arching evaluation which brings together findings from reviewing the five TM programmes, is available as a separate report and can be read as a companion piece to this report.

Note on terminology: We tend to refer to the local scheme as a “programme”, for example – the Middlesbrough Talent Match programme, rather than use the term “project” but we appreciate some staff and partnership representatives tend to favour “project. The two descriptors are inter-changeable, for the purposes of this report.

1.2 Consultancy brief and methodology

In November 2017, The Prince's Trust issued a consultancy brief, to call for an independent evaluation of the five Talent Match programmes managed by the Trust.

A consultancy team of Chimera Consulting and Blinkbright submitted a proposal and were successful in being appointed (December). An Inception Meeting was held in January 2018 at The Prince's Trust's Leicester office with the client lead, Jonathan Dawson. This was to gain an insight into the five programmes, the client's role and responsibilities, scope of works and plan of action for the study.

The objectives of the assignment were to evaluate the five Talent Match (TM) programmes (Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, New Anglia (Norfolk and Suffolk), South East (Essex, Kent and East Sussex) and Middlesbrough) with a focus on:

- Assessing quantifiable progress to date
- Highlighting key features of success and key achievements
- Understanding challenges faced by local partnerships and areas for improvement
- Recommending how findings can be used to drive local policy and practice change
- The evaluation across the five TM programmes also feeds into an over-arching evaluation report we have compiled for the Prince's Trust.

Some individual TM programmes had previously commissioned their own local evaluation studies and issue-specific research, and whilst our work was not to duplicate this, we devised a robust methodology as a model we could implement for each. This included a review of quantifiable evidence (by assessing the monitoring and officially recorded data sets), but with a focus upon qualitative aspects – consulting those involved in TM at all levels, to gather their views and opinions on a range of key lines of enquiry we agreed with the client. Our consultee “audiences” included those involved at a strategic level (Partnership Group / Board); operational / delivery partners – service providers, TM coaches/mentors etc., young people on the TM programme and employers that had been involved. These took place over Spring / Summer 2018 and comprised a mix of one to one and group meetings, some “observational” work, and telephone interviews. In the main, face to face meetings were the preferred method.

A final evaluation report will be provided at the end of the programme, updating this report with the latest available set of monitoring data – so that the achievements of the full five years of the programme, can be accounted for.

1.3 The Lottery funded Talent Match programme

Talent Match is a Big Lottery Fund strategic programme, launched in 2012, to help long-term unemployed young people on a *pathway* towards and into work.

Talent Match represented a significant investment by the Big Lottery, with £108 million allocated across 21 areas in England, targeting “youth unemployment hotspots”, over five years (2014 through to 2018). The guidance issued by the Big Lottery called for local organisations to form partnerships to devise innovative and creative approaches to support young people on this path by overcoming the barriers they experience in finding and securing work. Partnerships were to be led by the VCS (voluntary and community sector) but were to involve appropriate public, private and other community stakeholders and importantly, to encourage young people to be at the heart of programme development. Invites to bid for this investment, were made to groups that could bring together organisations across a Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) geography, although targeting was encouraged at smaller locality levels where issues were most pronounced.

At the time the programme was launched, it was estimated that 1.5 million young people (18-14 year olds) in England were NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). In addition, it was believed there were many young people who were categorized as “hidden” NEET – those who were not in work, education or training but who were not claiming benefits and therefore not “known” to any relevant local organisations.

Big Lottery’s call for youth-centred and VCS-led proposals, marked quite a departure from other “employability” programmes. It encouraged a **test and learn** approach – to trial or test new ways of supporting young people; to learn from “what works” and “what does not work”; and for evidence of good practice / key learning points to be used to help influence policy and improve practice.

Talent Match has recognised that for many young people, on the periphery of the labour market and on the margins of society, the “barriers” to accessing employment and sustaining a job or career path can be multi-faceted and deep rooted. They require a range of interventions or support measures to help turn become more employable. Barriers can include a lack of good qualifications, skills, previous work experience and general attitude or outlook. Yet these issues can characterise many people looking for work and claiming benefits such as JSA (Job Seekers Allowance).

Talent Match helps provide support for those a long way from the labour market – young people who cannot be easily placed into work or training. They typically have more entrenched and personal barriers, for example: **isolation, chaotic home lives, anxiety, depression, mental health issues, disability, drugs and alcohol dependency, debts, other health issues, a lack of friendships within their peer group, little social interaction with others and a lack of routine in their daily lives.** Compounded by poor experiences of school or college (and, for some, university) and possibly poor experiences of other “quick fix” training schemes or careers advice, the young people that Talent Match was designed to help often require more personalised and sustained support over a longer period of time.

In short, these are young people in need of greater levels of assistance, requiring a more bespoke and flexible package of support to help them engage more effectively with society generally, to address barriers and equip them with the skills and confidence to help them become more employable. Many have very low self-confidence / self-esteem and are “drifting” in life without much of a focus or ambition, and indeed hope. Bespoke support afforded through Talent Match is aimed to help stabilise and then turn their lives around and put them on a different and more positive path. Key principles are set out in Figure 1 below.

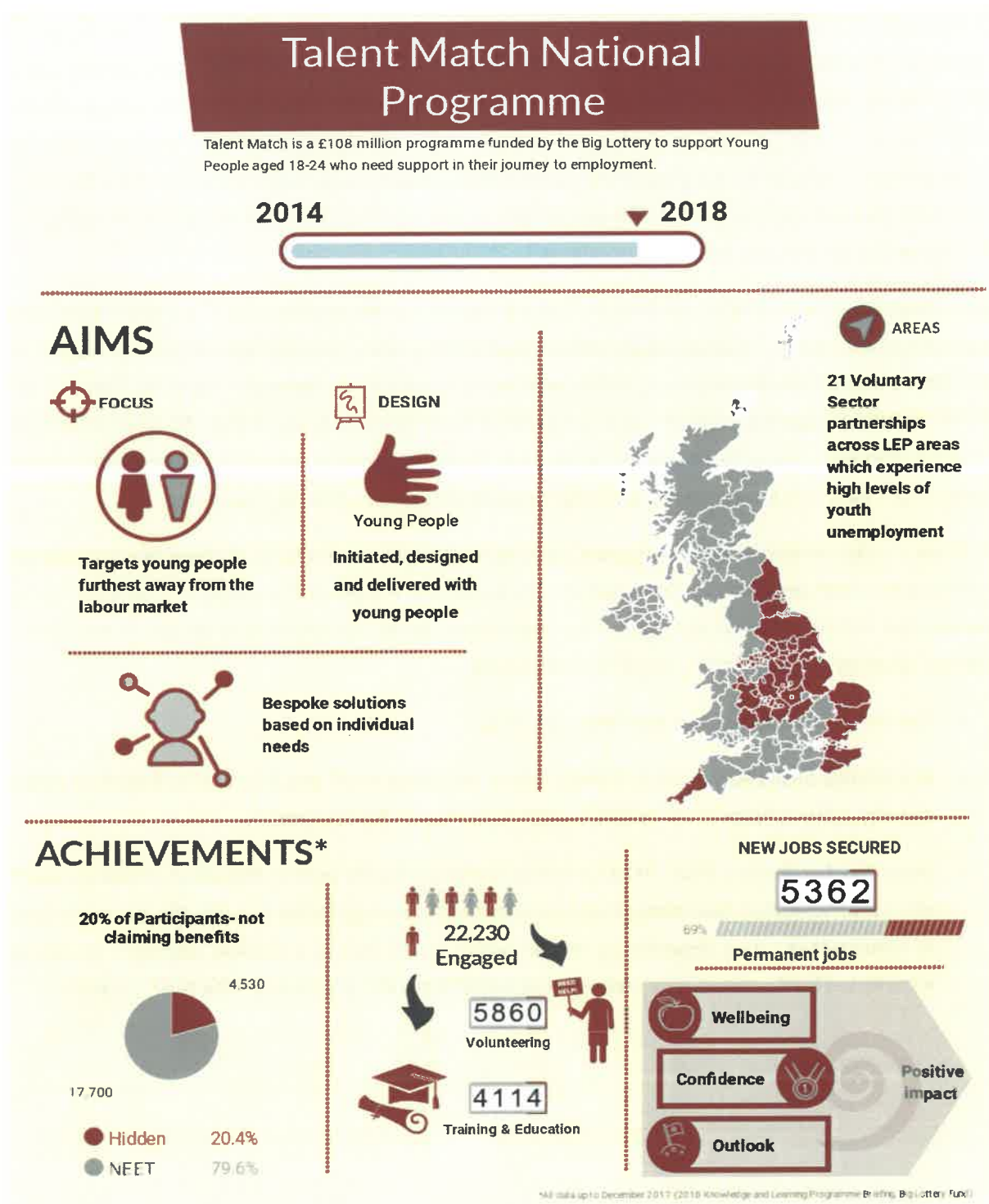
Figure 1: Principles of the Talent Match approach



Combining the targets of the 21 Talent Match programmes that were approved by the Big Lottery, over 29,000 young people were expected to be engaged and supported, to help them move closer to and, (for some) into employment. It was planned that at least 8,100 (28%) would find sustainable employment (work that lasts for 6 months or more) or self-employment. Some of the main aims and achievements are set out in the Figure 2 graphic on the next page. The average costs per beneficiary, based on the approved programmes, was £3,658. With Big Lottery encouraging local solutions to be devised and for allowing a test and learn approach, this led to some variances across the 21 schemes, such as:

- Partnerships vary in composition and size (from 7 to over 20 organisations) but most have VCS and public sector stakeholders heavily engaged
- The approach to spatial targeting varies from programme to programme – and many have sought greater flexibility in geographical targeting over time, as youth unemployment has declined nationally
- About one third of partnerships have adopted significant demand-side interventions such as wage subsidies or an “Intermediate Labour Market” type model, but most, if not all have some job brokerage and work placement component to their programme.

Figure 2: National Programme – summary aims and achievements



1.4 The Prince's Trust

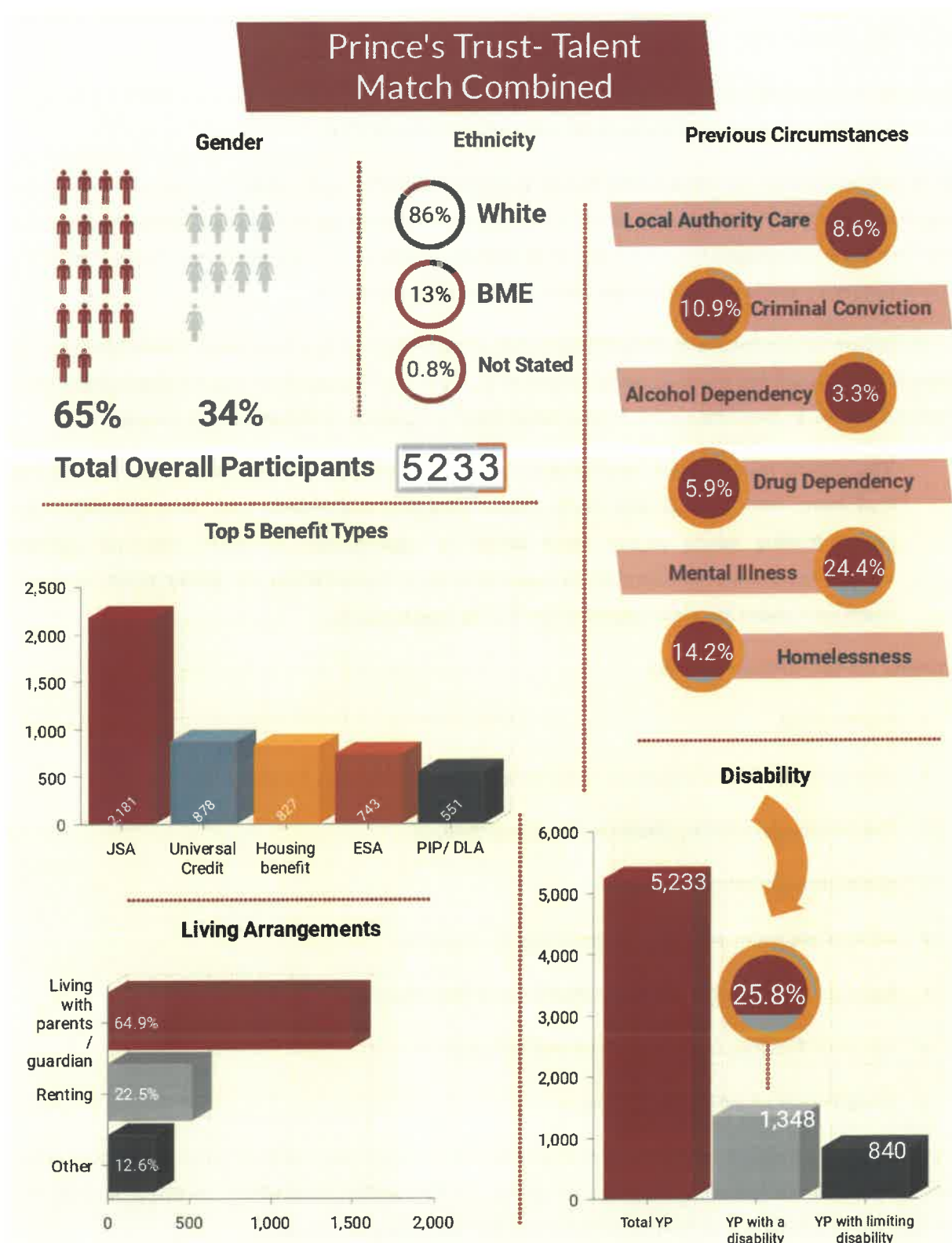
The Prince's Trust, a Prince of Wales charity, was established in 1976 to help transform the lives of young people living in the U.K. It has had a focus on helping 11-30 year olds who are struggling at school or unemployed. Many are in or leaving care, face issues such as homelessness and mental health challenges, or have been in trouble with the law. Over its long track record, it has provided help to 870,000 young people and continues to provide a range of support through various programmes to help disadvantage young people: to help stabilise their lives and provide practical and financial help; to enable them to develop their skills; and to boost their confidence and outlook through personal development courses.

Talent Match was a "natural fit" for the Prince's Trust with its focus on the employability of young disadvantaged people. It had a number of advantages to become involved in Talent Match: its geographical reach, its reputation and scale, its pool of volunteer mentors, and its expertise in supporting young people into work. These placed the Prince's Trust in a good position to lead on a number of Talent Match bids and engage the commitment and support of other local organisations, and young people, to develop respective partnerships. It succeeded in being awarded five Talent Match programmes including the £1,481,349 Middlesbrough programme.

The Prince's Trust provides project management, contracting, financial, marketing and evaluation support across the five Talent Match programmes. Combined they have aimed to engage with and support over 5,200 young people across their target areas and Figure 3 (overleaf) shows some characteristics of the combined Prince's Trust-led Talent Match programmes. Some key features are:

- Two thirds of TM participants have been / are male
- 86% identify themselves as white ("White British" or "White Irish") and 13% as from a black or ethnic minority, which is lower than the 22% average across the 21 TM Partnerships
- Across the five Prince's Trust TM programmes, there is a slightly greater proportion of young people who have had alcohol dependency issues compared to the average for the 21 nationally, but with regard to homelessness, drug dependency, mental health issues, having a criminal conviction or having experienced local authority care, that national averages are all higher than for the Trust's average.

Figure 3: Prince's Trust (combined 5) Talent Match programmes - snapshot



2: TALENT MATCH MIDDLESBROUGH - SYNOPSIS

2.1 Project introduction

The **Talent Match Middlesbrough** programme was awarded £1,481,349 and was formally announced as one of the 21 participating Talent Match programmes nationally, in January 2014.

In line with the national objectives established by the Big Lottery Fund as part of its £108 million Fulfilling Lives programme, the Middlesbrough programme's core objectives focused upon supporting young people 18-24, who have been unemployed for a minimum of 12 months and those who are effectively "hidden" from the welfare system, to progress towards employment and find and secure work.

A core partnership was developed, involving key public, private, community and voluntary stakeholders working across Middlesbrough and involving young people at its heart. The "Project Plan" was developed (June 2013) which established an over-riding vision for the Talent Match programme in Middlesbrough, namely:

'[To] provide more positive, innovative opportunities to develop and value young people as well as their home town. To help stop young people struggling and improve their lives, creating better futures. Making young people more aware of opportunities to make informed, positive choices. Improving communication between companies, organisations and young people so that it opens up avenues for career opportunities that benefit everyone.'

Partners: The Core Partners included:

- Prince's Trust
- Middlesbrough Council (Economic Development Team and Stronger Families / My Place)
- Middlesbrough Voluntary Development Agency (MVDA)
- Middlesbrough College
- Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Cleveland
- National Careers Service (CfBT Education Trust at time of plan)
- JobCentre Plus (Department for Work and Pensions)
- Young People's Panel representative.

In the early stages it also included the Local Enterprise Partnership (Tees Unlimited, which is now part of the Tees Valley Combined Authority) that also Chaired the Core Partnership Group (CPG) but reluctantly withdrew due to resource pressures and the need to focus on Tees Valley-wide initiatives).

Needs: Project need was researched through a combination of:

- Consultation with young people in Middlesbrough
- Desk based work
- Consultation with stakeholders.

In Autumn 2012, 81 young people were consulted through a combination of focus groups and questionnaires with the aim of understanding the needs of young people, their perceptions of Middlesbrough and where they thought there were gaps in services. Their general views of Middlesbrough were negative, and they had a lack of hope about the future. Most believed it was necessary to leave Middlesbrough in order to seek employment and realise their aspirations. Needs identified included:

- | | |
|--|---|
| • Low self-esteem | • The challenges of travel and childcare expenses |
| • Offending behaviour | • No or low qualifications |
| • Health issues (including mental health and disabilities) | • Low levels of literacy and numeracy |
| • Lack of work experience | • Alcohol and substance misuse |
| • Chaotic lifestyles | • Finance and debt management |
| • Negative portrayal of young people in the media | • Coping with chaotic lifestyles. |

During this consultation phase there was an overwhelmingly positive response to the idea of Talent Match employing mentors within communities to engage with young people, which was central to the development of the Youth Advocate delivery model.

Targeting: The project was to support young people (18-24) who had been unemployed for a year or more and were “furthest” from the labour market. The plan drew upon IMD (Index of Multiple Deprivation data, 2010) and the April 2012 JSA claimant statistics to help identify geographical targeting of “hotspots”.

These included the wards of: Gresham, University, Middlehaven, North Ormesby and Brambles Farm, Thorntree, Pallister, Park End and Beechwood, all ranked within the top 103 most deprived nationally at that time. There was a focus upon these areas but young people meeting the eligibility criteria could access Talent Match support if they lived within the Middlesbrough local authority boundary.

Priorities: The Middlesbrough Partnership established three priorities:

1. To target hidden NEETs not claiming JSA:

Hidden NEETs will be the highest priority target group, largely because they will be the furthest from the labour market and may not have received support from statutory agencies and, possibly little support from local agencies (although some will be known to them). Hidden NEETs who will fall into the Talent Match target group include:

- Young people who are sustaining themselves through illegal activity.
- Young people who have disengaged from JCP support, possibly after being sanctioned or referred to but not attending the Work Programme.
- Young people who are part of traveller families.

2. To target NEETs who have been unemployed for 2 years or more and have failed to engage or progress after mandatory support, including the Work Programme

- Young people engaging with their JobCentre Plus but not engaging / fully engaging with the Work Programme – young people with complex needs who did not attend or only sporadically.

3. To target young people unemployed for 12 months or more, engaged with the Work Programme but not progressing

- Young people not attending Work Programme appointments or who were attending but were identified as requiring extra support.

Targets: The core targets established were to help:

- 500 young people (later reduced to 435) engage with the programme
- 150 of these young people to move into work
- 100 of those into work, to then sustain that employment (16+ hours a week for a minimum of 6 months).

As with the other Talent Match programmes nationally, the Middlesbrough programme also established a series of other key performance indicators in response to the evidence of need researched. These included:

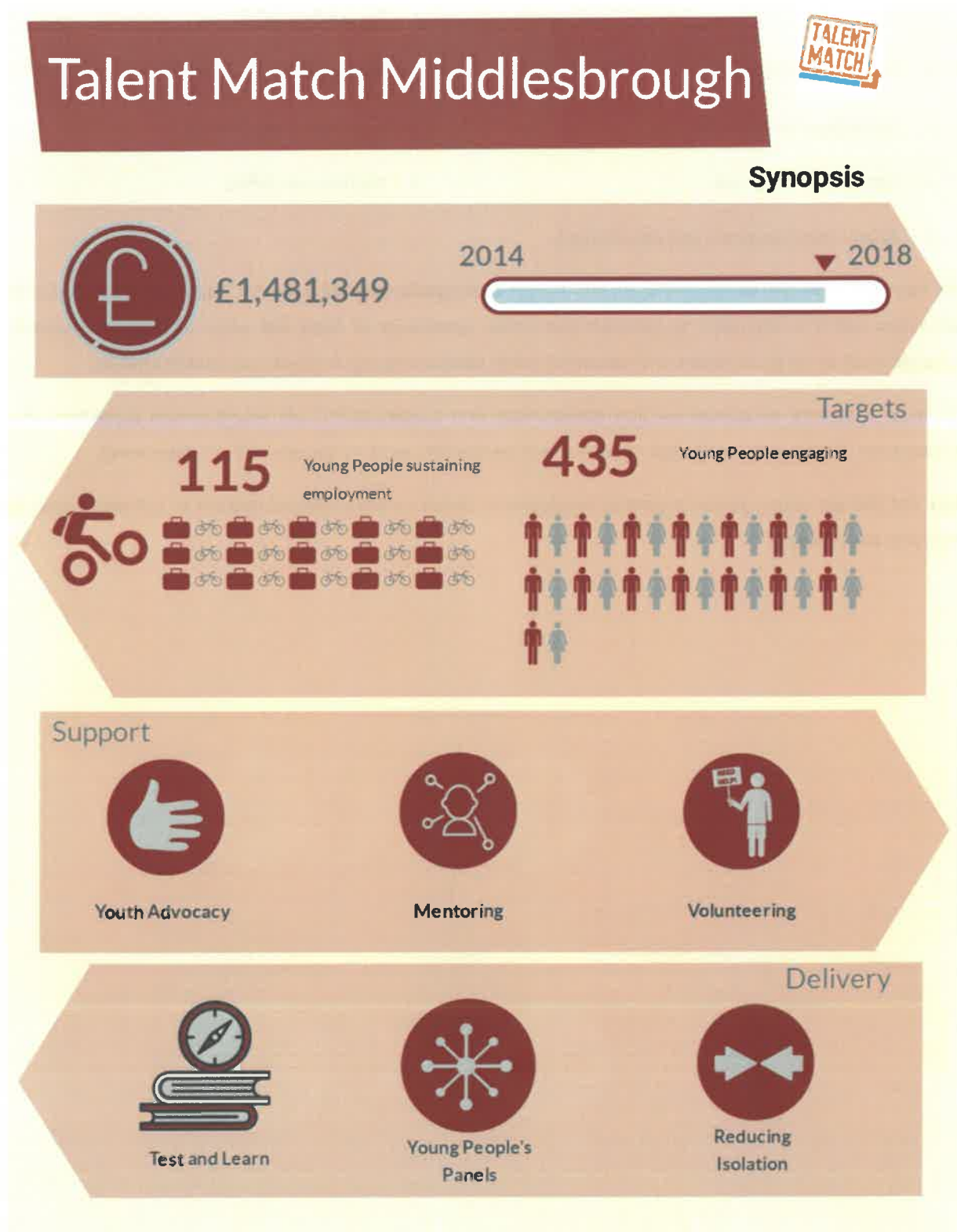
- Volunteering
- Basic Skills Training
- Work Experience Placements
- Securing Employment
- Apprenticeships (entry and completion)
- Formal Education
- Mentoring
- Employer Engagement
- Opportunity Offers.

The core unit cost per beneficiary is £3,405 (target participation/overall budget). This however is a simple calculation and it is important to consider cost versus complexity of need and wider efficiencies / savings achieved, such as via social return on investment, when considering any detailed cost-benefit analysis.

The basic unit costs calculation can also demonstrate that it costs £8,007 per young person supported into employment (if we use the projected outturn of 185 people into work by the end of the programme).

Also, £12,881 per young person sustaining employment, based on the projected outturn of 115 young people achieving this measure.

Figure 4: Middlesbrough Talent Match Synopsis



2.2 Distinctive characteristics

Out of the five Talent Match programmes managed by The Prince's Trust, Middlesbrough has the most tightly defined geographical area and the is the most predominantly urban in context. This has the advantage of relatively easier access to services and employment / volunteering / training opportunities, with providers and employers concentrated within the locality.

One issue that stands out regarding Middlesbrough's TM participants, is the average duration of unemployment, prior to accessing TM support. In Middlesbrough it is 2.5 years, which is significantly higher than the average for the 5 Prince's Trust TM programme which is 2.0 years. Furthermore, 55% had never worked before, comparable to the 57% figure as the average across the Prince's Trust's five TM programmes.

From consultations with partners and young people, it was clear that issues such as Autism and Asperger's were quite prevalent amongst the Talent Match cohort. Some of the support needs are explored in the consultation feedback sections of this report.

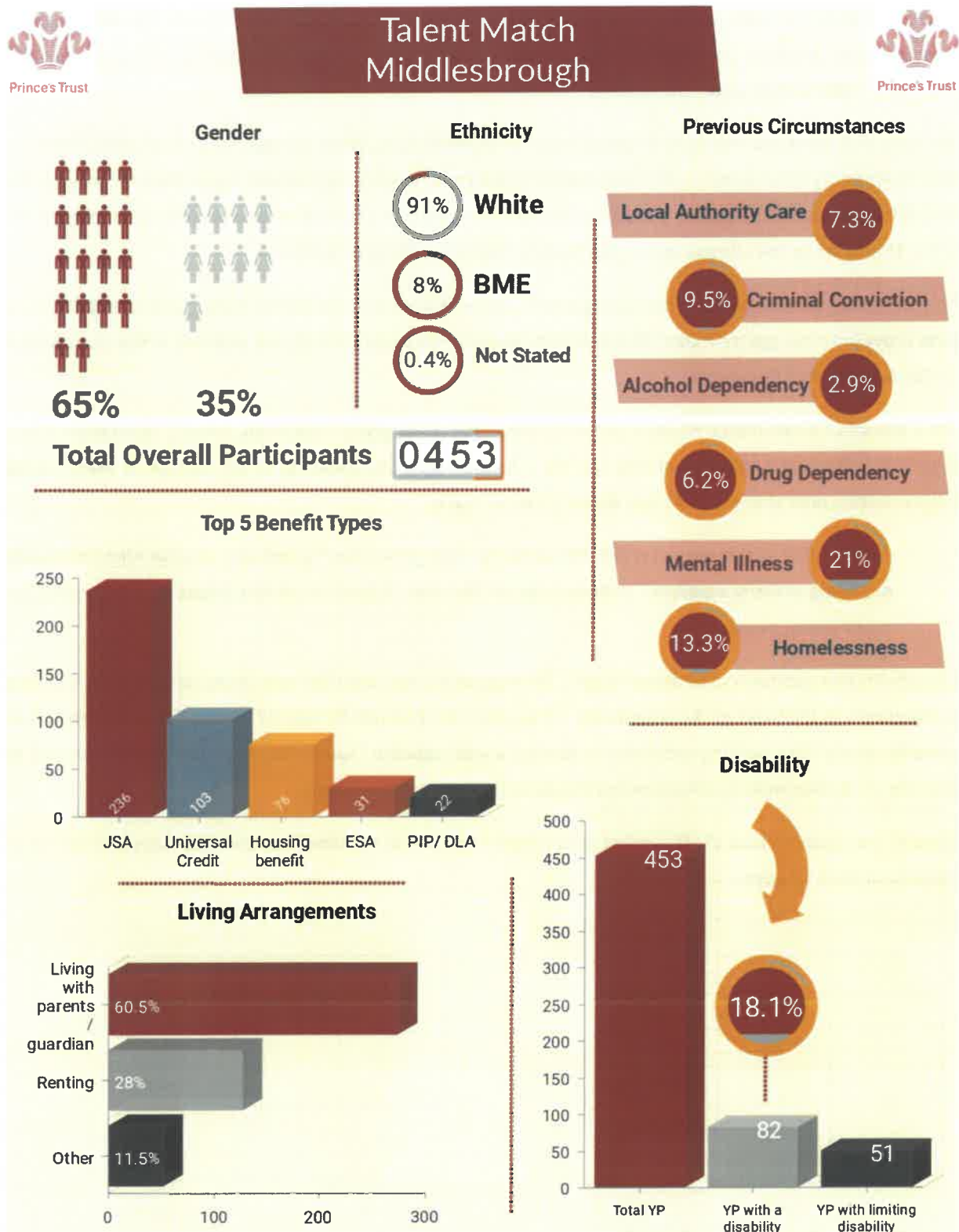
Like many other programmes, issues of social isolation, lack of per-group friendships, anxiety, depression, a lack of self-confidence and self-esteem and, frankly, a lack of hope and positivity in the outlook of many young people, were typical challenges. As one delivery partner put it:

"At the start of this process it felt like we had a "lost generation" wandering around Middlesbrough, not being actively supported without hope or direction. Talent Match has helped to change that for many young people."

A key distinctive approach to Middlesbrough's TM programme has been the very strong emphasis on involving young people at the heart of the programme – engaging young people far beyond being a "sounding board" or consultee group - but working with them to develop a well regarded "Young People's Panel" that is involved at all levels of decision making, influence and indeed in commissioning services.

Some of the characteristics of Middlesbrough's cohort, recorded at baseline (engagement) stage, are set out in Figure 5 on the next page.

Figure 5: Characteristics of Middlesbrough Talent Match participants on joining the programme

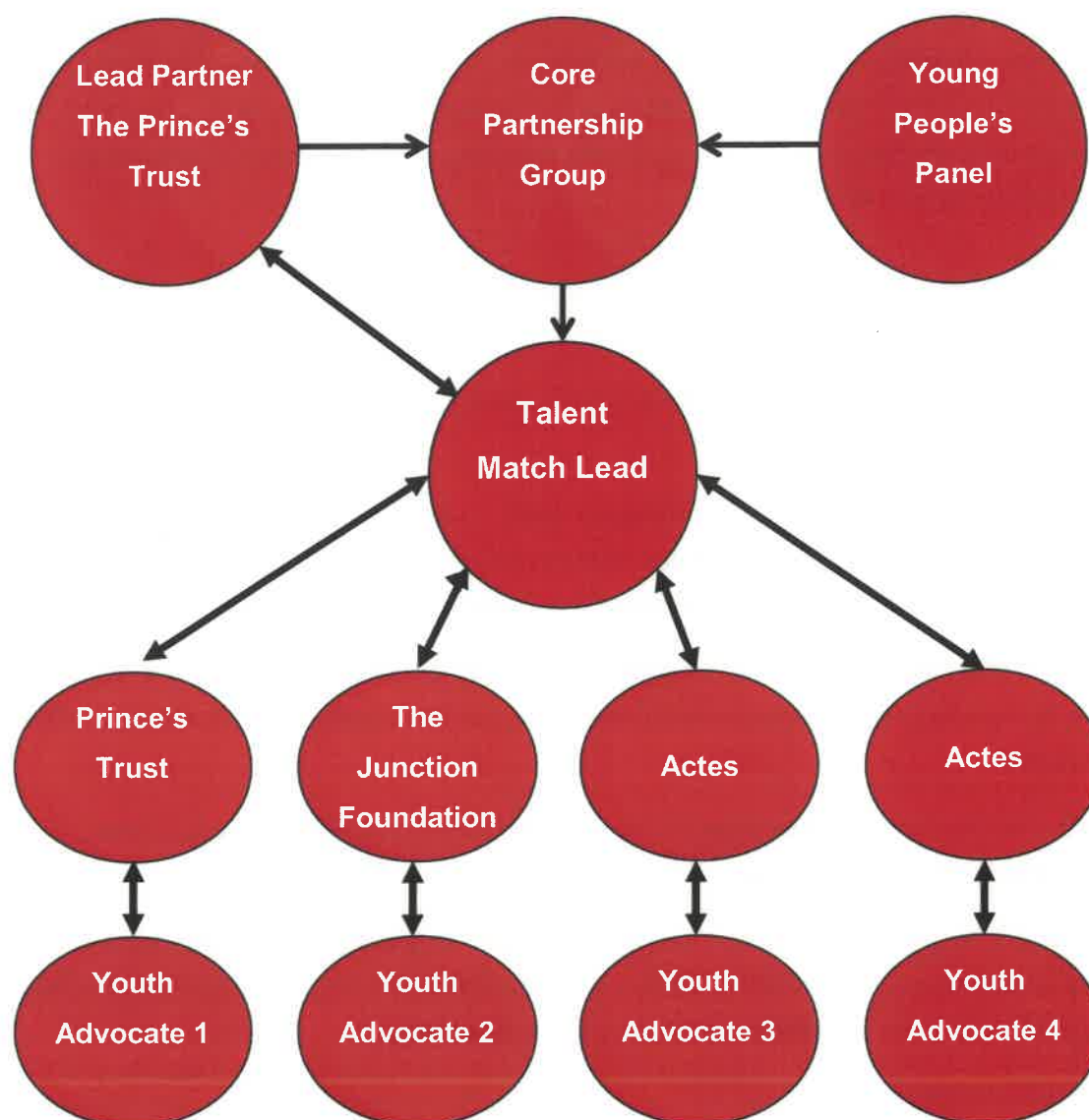


3: THE MIDDLESBROUGH MODEL

3.1 The partnership

The model adopted by partners is set out diagrammatically in Figure 6 below (from the original Project Plan).

Figure 6: Middlesbrough Talent Match structure



CPG:

The core partnership drew upon the main organisations and agencies with a responsibility for and / or a stake in helping young people generally but also specifically around employability issues. The CPG (Core Partnership Group) has been chaired by MVDA, Middlesbrough's lead voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisation, for some time. The members are set out in Section 2.1.

Prince's Trust act as lead accountable body and managing agent (including CPG facilitation, project management, finance, monitoring, marketing etc.) and operational management of the delivery partners, in addition to some employer engagement activity in later years. The CPG has overall strategic responsibility for the programme and inform and support the effective management, co-ordination and delivery of Talent Match Middlesbrough. The CPG has links to wider stakeholders

Delivery partners:

The main delivery organisations have been:

- **The Prince's Trust** – project management, finance, risk management, marketing, monitoring and employer engagement.
- **Actes (Achieving change through enterprising solutions)** – a North East charity, established in 2001, providing a range of support around employment, training, money management and life coaching, for example. Actes has provided 2 to 3 Youth Advocate positions to the Partnership.
- **The Junction Foundation** – a charity that provides support for children, young people and families, to empower communities and improve mental health. Junction has provided a Youth Advocate to the programme.
- **MVDA** – in supporting and facilitating the Young People's Panel and leading on legacy issues, via a commissioned "Change Agent" role.

Responsibilities have included delivering the vital "front of house" support work – engaging young people, providing the ongoing one to one mentoring support, which has comprised the Youth Advocates' caseload. MVDA has acted as lead on the facilitation of the Young People's Panel (YPP).

Young People's Panel (YPP):

A key ambition of this programme has been to engage young people in a meaningful way, to provide them real input into decision making and involvement and responsibility for commissioning. YPP is represented as an equal partner on the Core Partnership Group and the CPG has sought to devolve more powers to the YPP, as the Talent Match programme has progressed. Partners have been focused on retaining the YPP beyond the Big Lottery contract, as the main legacy model, to help shape and influence future strategy and delivery of support service for young people in Middlesbrough.

3.2 Feedback – partnership and strategy

We consulted five CPG members on a one to one basis (DWP, MVDA, Prince's Trust, National Careers Service, Middlesbrough Council). All CPG members were offered the opportunity to be consulted on a one to one basis. In addition, we attended a CPG meeting in summer 2018, to feedback key messages emanating from our research fieldwork / consultations at that stage, and to observe the CPG in its group environment and a YPP meeting, facilitated by MVDA, to discuss evaluation issues,

Overall the feedback from Talent Match partners has been very positive. Partners involved in the Core Partnership Group believed that the programme has adapted and evolved in a manner that has responded to changing labour market conditions and the emergence of new NEET provision and funding programmes (such as Youth Employment Initiative, funded by European Social Fund).

A person-centred and voluntary approach that provides the necessary support and time for people to *turn their lives around* and for young people to be *listened to*, is strongly endorsed by strategic partners. Our interviews and research showed that few, if any, barriers to progress cannot be addressed (travel, equipment, confidence building, CV support, training, workplace or volunteering experience etc.) by the programme. For young people who are out of work, anxious, in some cases depressed, vulnerable, isolated and lacking in confidence, a different approach to supporting them is required. Talent Match has provided this and CPG members, delivery staff, employers and young people themselves recognise this.

The (relatively) long-term nature of a 5 year programme and the flexibility in allowing a “test and learn” approach, was warmly welcomed. It was also widely acknowledged that it had been important to have the Prince's Trust playing an instrumental role from the bidding stage and throughout the implementation process – the Trust's profile, reputation, credibility and national reach as well as its four decade track record of supporting young people was seen as a significant factor, in securing the programme and its subsequent management, delivery and co-ordination.

There was a sense of regret, expressed by some, that more had not been done to engage more employers, particularly with nurturing links with private sector employers. Many of the employers involved in providing work placements, apprenticeship opportunities and indeed longer-term work and careers, were mainly in the public and VCS sectors. A longer term strategy and campaign to build links with employers, including SMEs that have a strong sense of social value, a robust CSR strategy and local roots, would be something we would advocate.

The role of and responsibility given to young people through the YPP, was well recognised and, we believe, sets Middlesbrough apart from other programmes we have seen, in terms of how seriously there has been a commitment to (and a reality of) having young people at the heart of the programme and having real influence.

Some opportunities to do more, such as maximise the links to Actes through its Youth Advocates team and NCS (National Careers Service) with its careers advice and events, were articulated to us. Actes would have

welcomed being more involved with regard to provide advice and a steer at service commissioning stages and believed their local knowledge and track record could have been drawn upon more fully by the Partnership. Regarding NCS, they commented that their programmes and support could have been utilised more but there was recognition too that there can be a divergence between the levels of “job readiness” of their typical client base compared to those young people on the Talent Match programme. Also, that the latter cohort requires more intensive 1:1 support throughout their employment “journey”, which is not necessarily an easy fit with NCS delivery methodology. The overall reflection is one of a missed opportunity to integrate careers support already available, with the wider TMM model.

In summarising the feedback we obtained, we have brought the *highlights* together into Table 1 below, setting out the main strengths (or “positives”) and some of the main challenges that have been faced at a strategic / partnership level.

Table 1: Strategic / Partnership positive highlights and challenges

Key positives	Main challenges
Stability of a longer-term funding contract to support young people toward employment	More private sector employer engagement. A more dedicated resource deployed for this purpose and widening the job brokerage roles may have paid dividends
Flexibility to try new / better ways of working	Danger that momentum could diminish once the Talent Match contract ends
Involvement of young people in decision making and role of YPP in influencing and shaping programme development and in a “semi-leadership” role	Some feedback of some young people having “poor attitudes” and a lack of desire to take up opportunities presented to them
Opportunity to add real value to existing provision and provide the time and support for young people with multiple barriers to engaging in the labour market	Combining realism with ambition: very positive to unlock young people’s (ambitions / dreams), but also a sense of reality is required to what is achievable. Advocating a realistic “stepping stones” approach to progress
Opportunity to provide a “no excuses” approach to a bespoke package of person-centred support (i.e. finding a way to address all barriers to progress)	Danger that intensive support can become a “prop” unless young people are encouraged to become more resilient and independent

Table 1 continued

Key positives	Main challenges
Relatively generous resources, in comparison of other “employability” schemes	A recognition that some young people will either never find work or will find it very difficult to compete in the labour market, even with all of the support made available through a programme like TM
Increased the power base and influence of young people in policy and practice	Careers advice support could have been grasped more readily and integrated into the wider package
Many positive opportunities for Middlesbrough and for wider stakeholders to take a new approach to strategic commissioning	A number of change-overs in Project Manager personnel have made it challenging to retain continuity
The programme has involved the main public and community sector partners and stakeholders at strategic levels, building on robust expertise and track records of well established organisations	A more direct link between the Youth Advocates team and the CPG would have been welcomed by some, to draw upon expertise and local intelligence
Programme more creative and innovative than other employability initiatives and the approach of putting the person centre stage and supporting them on a longer term “journey” of progression was unanimously supported	
Impact on DWP, with JobCentre Plus learning from TM experience, adapting its style of mainstream delivery so that more flexible support can be provided by Work Coaches	

3.3 Delivery model

The delivery model involves a core “frontline” team of Youth Advocates, from three organisations (Actes, Prince’s Trust and The Junction Foundation) working to a common system to provide a supportive pathway to employment. The pathway is a linear-based approach for participant support: starting with outreach and engagement, through to referral, 1:1 advocacy/caseload management and then a gradual focus towards employability support and employment outcomes. Referral into the programme is open, from across DWP, Local Authority, voluntary sector and self-referral routeways.

At the first meeting with a young person, the Advocate explains what Talent Match is about, how it operates and how it could help them. We were informed that it typically took two or three meetings (usually once a week) before a young person would commit and “sign up” to the programme. The programme is voluntary. Young people are not mandated to attend. The model is not strictly time limited nor does it take a “one size fits all” approach. It is a person-centred approach designed to be flexible, based on addressing a young person’s needs, addressing their barriers to progressing towards / into work and helping them achieve ambitions.

Initial engagement involves assessment and a “baselining” of need(s) that considers the range of issues a young person may face. This could include: a lack of work experience and education /employability barriers, through to complex issues linked to domestic circumstances, health and wellbeing, accommodation issues, local authority social care contact and any involvement with substance misuse or ex-offending. Progression through Talent Match is then responsive to individuals’ circumstances and the appropriate intervention agreed between the young person and their Youth Advocate (caseload manager).

Whilst, as mentioned, support is not strictly time limited, there is an expectation that support may last for a period of up to 18 months. Some young people need more time and some need less, hence flexibility being an important feature. What is different to other schemes is that young people will have a consistent point of contact (their own Advocate) throughout their Talent Match journey – someone they can build trust and a rapport with, and someone who can provide a regularity / intensity of support that they would not otherwise be able to access.

For many young people with pronounced and multiple needs / issues in their lives, helping them develop self-confidence, helping them to “see a way forward” and improving their overall outlook, are fundamental building blocks that need to be addressed before the young person is even close to thinking about the world of work. Isolation and patterns of behaviour / routines ill-suited to the workplace, seem to be quite common amongst young people accessing TMM support. With poor experiences of school / college / university, few (if any) retained friendships from the education system and no work colleagues or peers to turn to, many become quite inward looking. Without intervention, many would continue to live with little direction in life, and without much motivation or stimulus to change their way of living. TMM seeks to work to improve attitudes, self confidence, self esteem, team working, build aspiration and ambition – these are all important features of helping to build foundations upon which young people can move forward and take a more active role in the economy and society.

3.4 Feedback – delivery model and operational issues

From consulting the Youth Advocates and from comments received by Talent Match stakeholders and CPG members, with regard to the delivery model, the following main areas were highlighted.

- **Frontline advocacy:** there was unanimous support for the one-to-one support model with a Youth Advocate having a caseload of young people to build positive relationships with and support them on their “journey”. This aspect of the model requires time, patience, compassion and an array of skill sets. In effect a mix of youth support, counselling, mentoring, coaching and a general “hand-holding” support service. This provides longer term assistance and, crucially, a reliable and a consistent point of contact for the young person throughout their journey. This latter point is a vital strand of the success features of Talent Match. Many young people have been passed from one provider to another, from one short course to another and have lacked a constant supporting agent acting as their advocate and being “on their side”. It also takes time to build trust and for some young people to become more open to someone in an official position. Talent Match allows for a longer term and more fruitful and supportive relationship to develop.

That said, a number of consultees highlighted that for some young people, there was a danger that they could view this as a “prop” or “crutch” and become too dependent on their Advocate. One Advocate actually commented that some young people, who have perhaps not had much guidance from their own parent(s), look to their Advocate as delivering a parental-type role. They said there can be a fine line to navigate between being helpful and supportive and being more forceful with an emphasis on coaxing / encouraging a young person to become more independent, to do things for themselves, to move out of their comfort zone and to grab opportunities. As one advocate colourfully commented: *“sometimes they need a lot of help and support and sometimes they need a rocket up their backside!”*.

A real benefit for many young people on the Talent Match programme, in having an Advocate is that it can help them in their dealings with JobCentre Plus or with landlords, benefits advisors etc. Having a professional to act as an accompanying support, at times when dealing with “officialdom”, is very well regarded.

An Advocate can also be available to a young person once they have secured employment. This might be for a couple of months, until such time the young person has received one or two monthly pay cheques and is seen to be settling into the workplace.

- **Addressing fundamental challenges:** As has been mentioned, many young people entering Talent Match typically present with a number of inter-linked concerns, and issues and negative patterns of behaviour. By finding out what young people want to do, by actively listening to them the Advocate can then explore options and work in partnership in devising a unique plan. This is a fundamental starting point. Encouraging young people to talk about their hopes and ambitions, to build self-confidence and

to start to turn their lives around - from a generally negative outlook to one that can offer a positive way forward - is essential in building a robust foundation from which other support work can then be brought into play. These are likely to be small and incremental steps over time, but for the young people concerned, can be significant changes to their lives and routines.

Isolation, a lack of in-person friendships (several reported to only have “internet friends”), daily routines out of sync with the general workforce, poor hygiene and taking little care over personal appearance, can all feature as real experiences for young people.

As one CPG member commented: ***“Creating self-belief is key. We see too many young people with a chronic lack of self-belief”.***

- Mental health:** In addition to anxiety, negative thoughts and depression being quite common amongst young people engaging with Talent Match, other challenging issues can be quite prevalent also. This can include dyslexia, dyspraxia, autism, Asperger’s and OCD behaviours. These can present a number of challenges to young people adapting to workplace environments and working with colleagues as part of a team. More specific support can be accessed through Talent Match but the role of the YPP in bringing young people together has also played a key role in helping people with these issues, to mix with peers and to develop greater self-confidence. Typically, they will have not responded well in group work environments previously and will continue to struggle. Some will find it hard to ever find long term employment, but Talent Match seeks to help people “improve and progress” even if the workplace may be out of reach.
- Fear of change:** It was commented by a number of staff that some young people can “sabotage” their own opportunities (such as failure to turn up to a job interview) for various reasons. Sometimes this can be due to a fear of the unknown. Securing a job might be seen as a positive development for most people, but for a young person on Talent Match, it may trigger anxiety. Change, or what is viewed as progress by their support staff, may be seen by the individual as something that worries them. In addition, there have been cases whereby a parent has intervened to prevent them attending a job interview, for fear that if they secured it, that would have a negative impact on their “family benefits” and general lifestyle at home. Some young people may also have caring duties for siblings / parents and any change to the overall family routines might be seen as a threat by the head of a household.
- Exit routes:** A number of consultees mentioned that more and better exit routes (jobs education / training opportunities) would have been welcomed by some staff we consulted.

4: TARGETS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

4.1 Targets and achievements

Table 2 below sets out the agreed targets for the TM Middlesbrough Partnership over its five-year lifetime and its progress (achievements) towards meeting those targets, by the last available recording period (end of July 2018). The table also includes project outturn figures the Partnership forecasts it will achieve by the end of the programme (end of December 2018).

Table 2: Output targets and achievements

Indicator (number....)	Target	Achieved (as at 31 July) - official CRESR records	Achieved (as at 31 July) - Local Manager's "self reported" records	Projected forecast to end of programme (end Dec)	Difference between achievements and targets (Self reported stats)	Difference between end Yr 5 projections and targets
Young people engaged	435	451	453	457	18	22
Previously hidden	50	49	79	79	29	29
Into volunteering	145	134	185	190	40	45
Into basic skills training	90	48	135	150	45	60
Work experience placements undertaken	90	34	69	80	-21	-10
Securing employment	150	139	174	185	24	35
Securing sustained employment	100	63	100	115	0	15
Into Apprenticeships	30	37	41	45	11	15
Completing Apprenticeships	15	14	32	36	17	21
Into formal education	15	23	19	20	4	5
Receiving peer mentoring	30	26	7	15	-23	-15
New employers engaged	10	0	26	30	16	20
New work experience placement opportunities offered	20	34	8	20	-12	0
New volunteer placements offered	30	0	7	15	-23	-15
New Apprentice posts offered	15	4	4	10	-11	-5

Note: The "official" records are those tracked and logged via the national evaluation system, maintained by CRESR (Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research) at Sheffield Hallam University. The "self-reported" figures are those that the Talent Match Partnership believes provide a more accurate reflection of what has been delivered by the local programme and, as we can see, there are some discrepancies.

Feedback from the Prince's Trust Project Manager has pointed to the issues of the official method of capturing performance management information as milestone "snapshots" rather than continuously (where outputs occurring in between formal milestone data capture points are omitted). In addition, it has proven challenging to successfully follow-up participants at the required milestone stage and complete a feedback form.

Three of the most significant targets, for all TM Partnerships, are: the number of young people engaged ("signed up" to Talent Match); the number who are supported into work; and the number who sustain work (that is, remain with an employer for a minimum of six months).

- **Young People Engaged:** the original project plan target was set at 500 young people engaged into the programme. A variance was agreed with Big Lottery to reduce this target to 435. As of 31st July 2018, the Talent Match Middlesbrough programme had engaged 451 formally reported through the CRESR management information and 453 via self-reported performance. This target has therefore been exceeded and an outturn of 457 is forecast by the end of December for the full 5 years of the programme. This is a positive performance and, we believe, reflects the strength of the partners referring into the programme together with the work of Prince's Trust, Youth Advocates from Actes and The Junction Foundation plus MVDA and others in engaging with and converting enquiries into active "sign ups" onto the programme.
- **Young People Securing Employment:** working to a target of 150 young people to be supported into work, the programme has achieved 139 (as at 31st July 2018) according to CRESR management information, but 174 (exceeding the target by 16%) according to self-reported data. With a projection of 185 by the end of the programme which would amount to exceeding the target by 23%.
- **Young People Sustaining Employment:** working to a target of 100, the Partnership reports that by the end of July it had precisely met this target, although the CRESR data shows a figure of 63. The projection through to the end of the year is 115, which would be a healthy outturn figure. Nationally, across Talent Match programmes, 1 in 4 (24%) of those who find employment go on to sustain employment (stay in that job for 6 months or more). The Middlesbrough self-reported figures show a very encouraging 57% of those funding work go onto stay in work for 6 months or more (100 out of 174), well over double the national "conversion" rate. TMM will have also created a "pipeline" that should lead to more young people achieving sustainable employment in 2019 and beyond, after the Big Lottery contract has ended.

We should not lose sight of the fact that there are young people who have been supported by the programme but have yet to find work, and it may take more time for them to progress into work that within the confines of a time-limited programme. Talent Match has provided intensive support to help stabilise many young people and start to turn their lives and lifestyles around and this "groundwork" has been essential. here is a "pipeline" of young people who may progress into work after the Lottery contract ends, but there are also some who will not gain employment in the near future and are likely to need further intervention support.

Looking at the wider array of targets, based on projects to the end of the year compared to targets, there are four targets that the Partnership indicates it will not achieve:

- Work experiences placements (80 / 90) – projection of 80 against target of 90
- Young people receiving peer mentoring (15 / 30)
- New volunteer placements offered (15 / 30), and
- New Apprentice posts offered (10 / 15).

This may be a reflection of some of the challenges around employer engagement with wider private sector employers, as commented on by the Partnership.

On a positive note, projections forecast to exceed targets include the number of young people going into volunteering, into basic skills training, into and completing apprenticeships and into formal education. These are all robust pathways on the longer term journey towards and into employment. Indeed, all targets have been achieved or exceeded as at end of July according to the locally self reported management information.

5: IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE

5.1 Progression made by young people

Starting point:

For many, if not all of the young people who engaged with Talent Match, were experiencing at least one of the following issues: anxiety; depression; loneliness; isolation; a lack of self-confidence and low self-esteem.

Many have learning difficulties and mental health issues. Young people with Autism and Asperger's seem to be more prevalent among the Talent Match cohort than amongst the population generally. In some cases, young people have admitted to having had suicidal thoughts.

What is fairly typical is that these young people have often had a "poor" experience of school / college / higher education, have poor associations / memories of the education system and indeed of any "support" they have received from organisations such as training providers and their local JobCentre. For many, they have been leading quite isolated lifestyles with few peer group friendships. Some come from a "chaotic" home life, whereas some others have quite comfortable home lives and have not felt an urgency or desire to lead a more independent lifestyle. Many have been "drifting" with little experience of the work place, of routine / patterns to their day to day lives and few *real-world* friendships (rather than "internet friends") and support structures.

In Middlesbrough, the average length of time a young person was out of work before engaging in Talent Match was 29.5 months, almost half a year longer than the average across the combined five Prince's Trust programmes. Some come from a family background where their parent(s) have been on benefits for years and indeed their grandparent(s) may have been too. A lack of work, a lack of self-confidence, and quite directionless lifestyles have impacted on many young people, who have then found they have little ambition or feel a sense of hope. Talent Match aims to break this cycle of despair and start to "turn their lives around". Young people on Talent Match typically require a lot more support, encouragement and mentoring to help them change their lives for the better.

Expectations:

Whilst helping young people into work is at the heart of the programme, there is much groundwork and intensive support required at the pre-employment stage, to help young people on that progression route. Young people engaging in Talent Match are coming to the programme for employment reasons in the main, but need varying degrees of support to be put in place first. Of critical importance is the relationship with and time given by their Youth Advocate: to listen to them, understand their "situation", find out about their hopes and ambitions, and develop a personalised plan of action to help them progress step-by-step towards work.

It was very common to hear comments from young people that Talent Match differed from other support insofar as the programme (in the form of the Youth Advocate) spent time actively listening to them and finding out

about their interests, what they wanted to do in life and offering a supportive way forward. Regarding exposure to other support (the education system, previous employers or advisors in the field of training and skills), TMM beneficiaries tended to have negative experiences: *“They never asked me what I wanted” / “They didn’t seem to take an interest in me” / “They didn’t seem to want to help me”*, were typical of the comments we received.

Changes and progression:

Talent Match participants are required to complete a form at the start of their journey (baseline position) then at 3, 6, 12 and 18 months providing a wealth of information. One aspect is to help ascertain the amount of progress they have made on six “soft” skills: communication, confidence, reliability, teamwork, motivation and coping skills. They self-assess by scoring themselves on a scale of 1 to 6, with an explanation of the scores as follows:

- 1: “I find this skill really difficult and I don’t care”**
- 2: “I find this skill really difficult, but I want to improve, and I don’t know how”**
- 3: “I am sometimes OK, but I often struggle and need a lot of support to improve”**
- 4: “I am quite good at this skill but need some support to improve”**
- 5: “I am good at this skill and only rarely have problems with it”**
- 6: “This skill is a strength of mine, I excel at it”.**

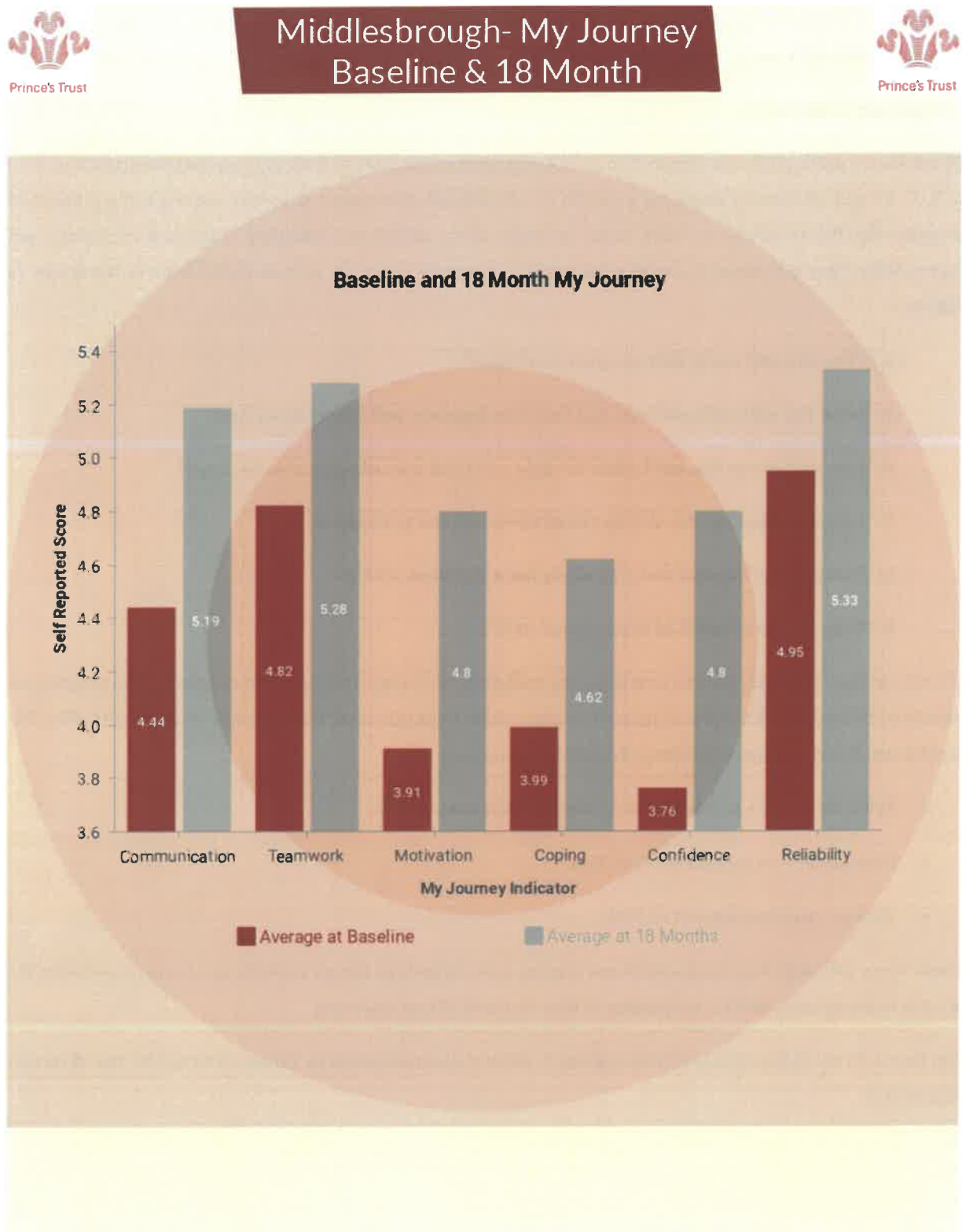
We can see that in Figure 7 (on the next page), by analysing the change from scores at the start of the programme (baseline) through to 18 months of support, young people have recorded improvement on all six soft skills. The most pronounced changes of positive progression have been:

- Self-confidence – an average improvement on scores by 17%
- Motivation – an improvement of 15%
- Coping – an improvement of 12%.

These three soft skills had the lowest three starting point (baseline) scores so there was more opportunity for greater improvement, but it is interesting to note the level of improvement.

The scores for reliability (5.33), communication (5.28) and communication (5.19) are all strong for the 18 month assessment.

Figure 7: Impact - amount of change



Challenges:

Some young people had the relative safety net of living with a parent(s) / guardian. In effect they had their basic needs met (a roof over their head, were being fed and clothed) but were not necessarily in need of a better economic situation for themselves or motivated sufficiently to live an independent lifestyle. Many were “drifting” in life with little direction. Many joined Talent Match with few, if any, real-world friendships and were quite isolated from peers (aside from those involved in internet gaming with an online community they viewed as their friends). Progression into work, for some, represented a change that posed as a threat to their lifestyle and what they were used to. Some partners referred to this as “*self-sabotage*”. Fear of the unknown can be a significant barrier to progression, especially if self-esteem and self confidence levels are low.

Furthermore, some had parents unsupportive of them going into work due to the potential negative impact on family benefits and lifestyles. Again, change being viewed as a threat. That said, young people participating in Talent Match were doing so voluntarily so that suggest they could see the benefits of getting regular support from their advocate and access to wider help from the programme.

5.2 Feedback from young people

We obtained feedback from young people in a variety of ways: through the YPP evaluation session (4th June) facilitated by MVDA; from discussions with young people at the Legacy Planning Event (19th March); and from interviewing young people in work / on apprenticeships with employers. We consulted and obtained views from approximately 25 young people directly through these opportunities. We also reviewed materials, such as reports and YPP session notes, provided to us.

The overwhelming message is one of undoubted praise for the quality of support they have received and recognition as to how that has helped them turn their lives around.

What was their life like before Talent Match?

There were many consistent messages provided by young people to articulate what their life was like before they engaged with Talent Match Middlesbrough, and how they were feeling at the time. The following words and phrases give a flavour of the comments made by young people about how they were feeling:

- Bored and depressed
- Uncomfortable around other people
- Closed off (inward looking)
- Stuck in a rut / directionless
- Home wasn't the best place (for me)
- Family was the only real relationship I had
- I had toxic relationships with everyone
- Felt worthless
- Felt alone
- Felt anxious
- Abused mentally
- Frustrated
- Chronic depression
- Self-control issues
- Low confidence
- Low self esteem
- Problems with addiction
- Low socialisation
- Felt sad
- Vulnerable
- Voiceless
- Envious
- Humiliated
- Manipulated

We thought it worth highlighting these words above as they seem common place in the mind set / outlook of young people that Talent Match has engaged with and supported. Others reflected that they were happy, or were "ok" or felt "fairly good at times" but, overall, it paints a very stark and bleak picture of the feelings experienced by young people. It also helps us to understand the context and the "starting point" of their journey, which Youth Advocates are faced with seeking to address.

A number expressed that they wanted to work and to earn and (for some) to become independent, but lacked direction, motivation and support. Ambitions for a career – knowing what that might be or how to achieve it, were notably absent.

The range of circumstances experienced included: coming from a care home; drugs and / or alcohol addiction; no family; mental and / or physical abuse; lack of friendships; lack of support; depression; poor mental health and for a couple of people, they had PTSD.

Views on the support provided by Talent Match

Comments received were very positive regarding the type and quality of support provided on their Talent Match “journey”. In addition to supporting their mental and emotional resilience, young people highlighted that Advocates helped them gain more self-belief (by believing in them), encouraged them to take charge of their own journey and allowed them to be open and talk about whatever they wanted. Some comments illustrate this:

“I could speak my mind and not be judged”

“They pushed me to do well”

“My support worker stayed after work to help me finish the application form. As a result, I got an interview and I got the job”

“I was given lots of opportunities to attend events and work out what I wanted to do”.

There was a high degree of acknowledgement of the help they received from Advocates: for example, with applications for jobs, training and volunteering opportunities, work placements; preparing for interviews, and general support through the entire journey. Some mentioned the assistance they received was for travel to the opportunities that they accessed – work, college, volunteering etc. and, in general, helping them to become more independent.

Table 3: Feedback on opportunities accessed

Opportunity	Comments	"Good" experience	"Ok" experience	"Bad" experience
Volunteering	- Gave me confidence - New / interesting experiences - Part of a team and learned a lot	75%	17%	8%
Work experience	- Progress to paid work - Experience of what it's like in the workplace	60%	10%	30%
Work trials	- Treated like a person - Better understanding of job role	67%	33%	0%
Training	- Added to my skills - Felt more confident	56%	44%	0%
Apprenticeships	- I got told I was not good enough (after 11 months) - I liked it and have learned amazing skills	50%	0%	50%
Paid employment	- My first paid job - Getting a wage - I am helping my family out and now able to buy things	100%	0%	0%

Table 3 highlights feedback from a small sample size (12 young people) but gives a sense of what they felt they had gained from these opportunities and how they rate them. Encouragingly, more than 50% of those that had taken part in any opportunity, rated it as "good" with 75% rating volunteering and 100% rating paid work as being "good". Feedback on apprenticeships was poorest but we need to take into account only two young

people in the feedback loop had experienced being in an apprenticeship. Also 3 out of the 10 that had undertaken work experience rated it as “bad”. One saying the employer had not listened to what they need (due to poor mental health issues), one complaining of an “arrogant manager” and another that they did not enjoy it. That said, 6 out 10 said it had been a good experience and one said it had been “ok”.

In comparison to their experiences of other support, the comments received included:

- An appreciation that TM is voluntary
- That it was focused upon an individual’s needs and Advocates had their best interests in mind in the support they provided and in the way it was provided
- They felt empowered to do things for themselves and have more degree of control
- They appreciated that achievement and progression were recognised
- Constructive relationships were built that supported yet pushed young people to help them progress
- Involvement of young people in commissioning activities helps with a sense of ownership and is highly valued.

Views on the change / impact on their lives and outlook now compared to pre-Talent Match?

At the YPP evaluation session, we asked a small group of Talent Match participants as to how their lives had changes as a result of support from the programme. They all recognised their lives had changed for the better and they were in a “better place” now than at the time they engaged with the programme. **People felt more confident, had a more positive outlook, had more friends and were more able to speak up for themselves.**

One said they were much more able to “stand their ground” against stigma they had experienced, and generally there was a sense of a more positive outlook, feeling better equipped to deal with challenges and being more confident in looking for and taking advantage of opportunities.

Improvements

There were few aspects to the programme that young people would have changed but those they highlighted included, to:

- Make more use of social media (e.g. Twitter) to reach out and promote activities more widely;
- use less jargon;
- have more Advocates; and
- provide more support on financial advice.

Specific mental health support was also raised as an issue. It had been identified in Year 3 as a service to consider commissioning, but a decision was taken to make more use of existing local mental health service provision.

Priorities for the future

A lot of work has gone into developing a legacy plan, centred around the Young People's Panel and five key messages and three priority areas have been agreed.

Key Messages:

- Having a voice and influencing services is the most important aspect of the YPP
- Young people value bringing people together from similar circumstances in a non-judgmental way and having the opportunity to work together
- Young people need information and to be involved in consultation processes to influence matters that concern them
- Young people should be involved in recruitment as they are best placed to judge if a person can relate to them and the issues they face.

Priority areas:

Young people said they needed:

- Information that is consistent and relevant (and accessible)
- Personalised 1:1 support from someone who can advocate on their behalf and help them navigate systems
- Employment opportunities and basic skills training.

These build upon understanding what aspects of Talent Match have worked well, from the beneficiaries' perspectives, and provide a focus for the YPP in its strategy to have a wider influence across policy making and service provision in Middlesbrough, beyond Talent Match.

5.3 Case studies

Middlesbrough Talent Match



Case Study

Overcoming Hidden Disabilities

PARTICIPANT A >>> **"I have hidden disabilities that have affected me for my whole life. I had been told to "give up now" because I'd never make anything of myself. With Talent Match's encouragement I applied and gained a place at University"**



>>> **Young person A wanted to "get out the house" and build up her confidence and skills.**

She engaged in the programme then got involved with the Young People's Panel, taking an active role and realising that her opinion mattered. She made new friends and saw her confidence "rocket".



She was proud to be part of a project that helps young people overcome challenges and find work, and through encouragement from her advocate and the support of Talent Match, secured a place at University.



Middlesbrough Talent Match



Case Study

Finding Direction

PARTICIPANT B >>> **"I was looking from some direction and, after meeting my Talent Match mentor, I started to rebuild my life, improve my basic skills. I enrolled on courses, gained a work placement and was a finalist for a Prince's Trust award."**



>>> **Young person B struggled at school with undiagnosed dyslexia and battled with anxiety and depression.**

Looking for some direction, she found details of Talent Match on the Prince's Trust website, met a mentor and started to re-build her life.

Accessing literacy and numeracy support and a couple of "Get Into" courses, she then found a placement with a dog care centre which she loved and then secured finance to purchase necessary equipment an apprenticeship in dog grooming.



Middlesbrough Talent Match



Case Study

From Volunteer to Employee

PARTICIPANT C



“My life is very different to how it was before I started on Talent Match 3 years ago. There have been so many highlights, in the support I have received as a volunteer and then in securing a job with the same employer. I am so grateful.”



Young person C went to Middlesbrough College after school and gained qualifications in welding.

He wanted to work locally but believed there were few jobs available. Jobcentre Plus referred him to Actes and after some support there he gained a volunteer position at Tees Valley Wildlife Trust.

He relished the role and then secured a role as an apprentice, which gave him additional job-specific skills. This saw his confidence grow even more and then secured a job within the organisation, which he clearly relishes and is proud he has been instrumental in helping his employer reach out to a young audience.



6: EMPLOYABILITY

6.1 Employer engagement

The Talent Match Middlesbrough programme has made direct links to employers to help young people on its programme to access jobs but also for other experiences to help them become better equipped to enter employment: to gain valuable work experience opportunities, apprenticeships and support in interview techniques. Also, general “awareness raising” about work opportunities and what to expect in the “world of work”, with employers able to articulate their expectations to TMM participants.

The “employer engagement” activity has comprised TMM delivery team members, including Youth Advocates, making contact with local employers to highlight the TMM programme and understand if employers were prepared to become involved in some way, then nurturing the most productive relationships. The majority, although not all, of the employers supporting Talent Match have been in the public and VCS sectors. These have been able to offer work experience opportunities, apprenticeships and jobs. To gauge feedback from employers, to ascertain their experiences of Talent Match and the young people they had helped, we consulted five and their views are set out in Section 6.2.

Private sector employers have been harder to engage. Strategic and delivery partners we consulted recognised that this had been an aspect of the programme that felt somewhat short of expectations. In the final two years, the programme accessed some dedicated “employer engagement support” through the Prince’s Trust North East Regional team. This has provided links to some large commercial operators: Costa Coffee, Marks and Spencer; Tesco Teesport distribution, Jury’s Inn and NRG recruitment agency via activities such as:

- **“Get Hired”** events: 4 events (with 12 TMM participants able to attend each) which provided advice on interview techniques and then one-to-one sessions with the respective Human Resources Manager, in the form of a “soft interview”.
- **“Get Into”** courses: Talent Match ran a bespoke 2 week course called “Get Into Logistics”, where 9 young people attended Get Into Warehousing which was delivered by NE logistics Training Academy. One young person left in week one having gained a job in Debenhams, another decided that logistics wasn’t the job for her and seven young people completed the programme gaining qualifications in: Novice Counter balance Forklift Truck driving license; Health and Safety at work; First aid; COSHH certificate; RIDDOR; and Manual Handling.

As part of the course the young people also took part in an employability work shop, visited Trending (TMM’s commissioned social enterprise course) to sort work clothes and took part in mock interviews with Prince’s Trust Volunteers. Four young people are now in employment and one has a volunteering role with Trending, resulting in five positive outcomes.

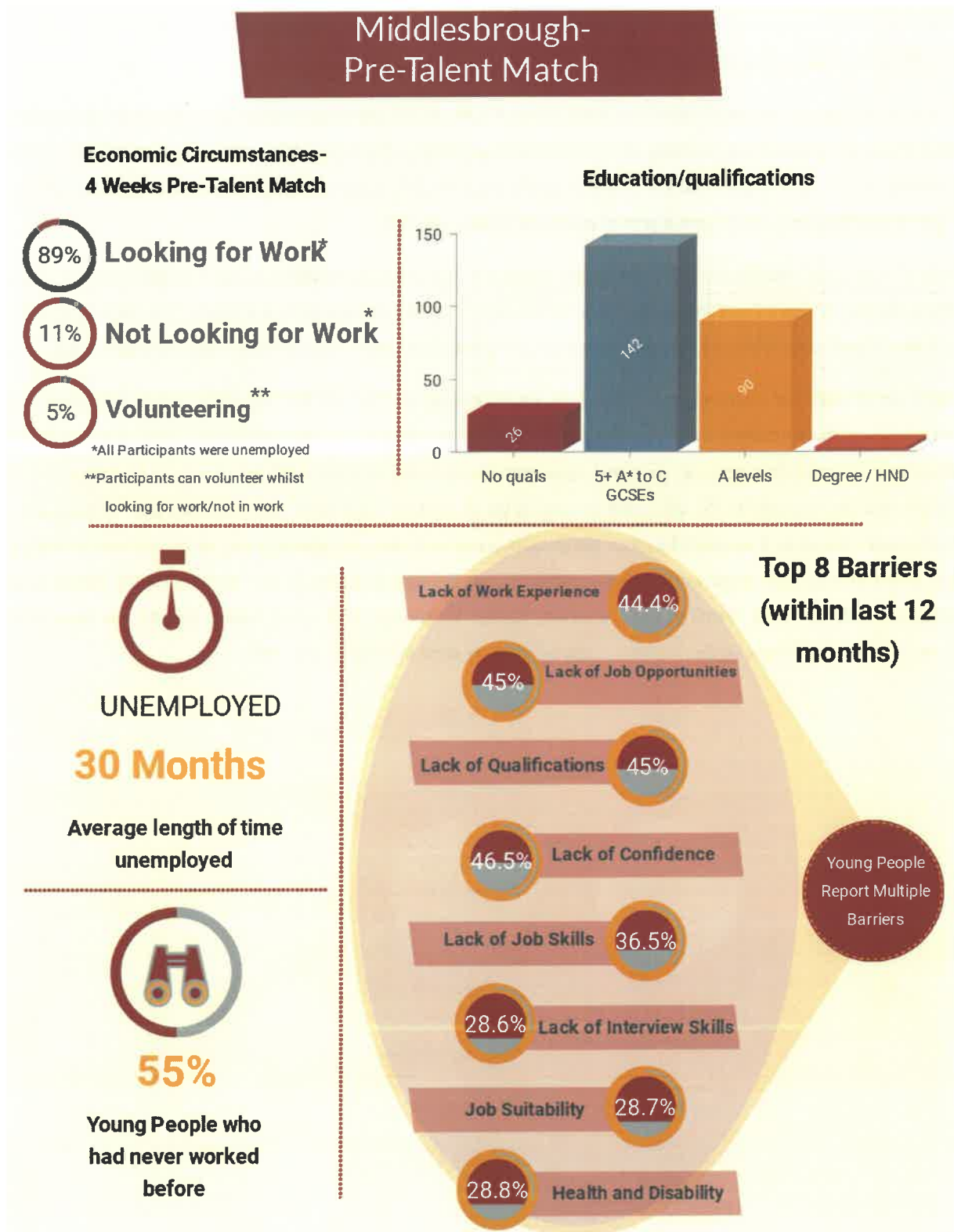
Gaining even some short-term exposure with employers, at events and courses like these, and getting support via mock interviews and advice on CVs, can help young people on their progression towards and into work. We understand that some employers' feedback from these was that they were "pleasantly surprised" by the calibre and attitude of the young people they met.

As we see in Figure 8 overleaf, there are many barriers (perceived and real) impacting on young people on the Middlesbrough programme, in being able to secure employment. From young people's perspectives, the most prominent barriers they perceive are: a lack of confidence (46.5%); a perceived lack of job opportunities (45%); a lack of qualifications (45%); and a lack of work experience (44.4%).

On the latter issue, Middlesbrough's TM cohort have been out of work, on average, much longer than for those across the five Prince's Trust TM programmes combined. 2.5 years compared to 2.0 years. This impacts on self-confidence and exacerbates the barriers towards taking the "first steps" into (or back into) the work place.

Being out of work for a long period of time, or, never having worked can lead to other issues or patterns of behaviour which can make it harder to compete in the jobs market. Issues highlighted by employers and Youth Advocates included time keeping, personal appearance and ability to cope work environment routines. Young people who are not used to the discipline of turning up to work for a set time every day, are not "looking after themselves" as well as they could be (poor personal hygiene and care over appearance), or simply lead a lifestyle that is *out of sync* with most working hour patterns, can struggle to adapt to the rigour of work. Patterns of behaviour can be habit forming and therefore harder to change and some young people we consulted recognised some of these issues in themselves which they were striving to overcome.

Figure 8: Employability and challenges for TM participants



6.2 Feedback from employers

Most of the employers we consulted, had specific roles / vacancies that they were able to offer to the Talent Match programme. They all had a strong approach to CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) and believed in giving young people a chance, to help them feel valued, increase their confidence and develop their skills in the workplace. They realised that young people coming through the Talent Match programme were likely to have more challenges in adapting to a workplace environment and greater need for active employer supervision. One commented that it had been “a real eye opener [to us] as to how pronounced some of the issues were” and this tended to be reflected in wider comments about shyness, anxiety, a lack of self-belief, poor grasp of basic Maths and English, and low self confidence levels and, for some a “poor appearance”.

In general terms, their experiences as employers of Talent Match participants have been very positive. Three employers had offered more than one opportunity, clear that their experiences had been positive, and this was a reflection on the “success” of the young people they had supported. Comments we received included:

“We were desperate to get them into work after their apprenticeship with us”

“We recognise they want to better themselves, they have gained qualifications [here], they have developed their outlook massively and they want to overcome challenges”

“Their work ethic has been excellent”

“They are very good at supporting each other and talk about their growth in friendships”

The “business benefit” of Talent Match providing a free recruitment service was mentioned by one employer and the opportunity to provide fresh thinking and a young person’s perspective, was a major benefit to some employers. Indeed, one was looking to specifically reach out with its services to a wider and younger audience, and their Talent Match placement had been invaluable in helping them build relationships with schools and younger members of the community more generally.

There was recognition that more supervision and staff management time was required with a more intensive level of workplace support than they might otherwise need to devote to a young recruit. One employer mentioned the “pros and cons” of their experience – fulsome in their endorsement of the need to provide additional support to young people with a variety of challenges, but also aware that they had significantly underestimated the time they need to devote to supervision. Instead of their recruit being able to become a little more self-sufficient over time, and take on some workload, to ease the burden on existing staff, they had required more supervisory time to be redeployed to help support them in the workplace. Behavioural volatility was hard to manage and with hindsight, the employer would have sought to share the duties of their Talent

Match employee across two or three people. Another commented on their TM placements having quite a low level of maturity in comparison to their peers, but as employer they were strict and blunt with them and provided a very structured working environment which the young people responded well to. They said they had seen the growth in their confidence, the improvement in their behaviour and appreciated that they had developed dramatically in their time at work.

On a wider level, we understand that young people have become involved in supporting a “youth employment accessibility research” scheme which will lead to companies in Middlesbrough having their jobs / careers section on their website assessed against young people’s expectations. This recent development is to help show local employers the problems young people have in gaining work. Talent Match Middlesbrough identified inconsistencies in recruitment practices and felt they were overlooked much of the time due to their age and lack of experience and / or qualifications. It wanted to explore whether this could be improved and as a project what could we share with employers to support future generations, and it is encouraging that young people have forged an important role in supporting employers’ recruitment in the longer term – change brought about by Talent Match.

Middlesbrough Talent Match



Employer Testimony

Tees Valley Wildlife Trust

“Working with Talent Match has enabled us to help lots of young people across Middlesbrough, providing two programmes which has provided work experience and different types of heritage craft skills. Not only that, it has enabled us to improve their health and well-being.

We believe that health and well-being is pivotal in anyone’s life, to ensure young people can secure future employment. If they have developed negative patterns previously, their time with us can create new positive behaviour patterns.”

»» Tees Valley Wildlife Trust had good links with schools and people over 30 but had a gap in engagement with younger adults. It ran two, 12 week courses for Talent Match, with 12 on each course. Nine young people, mostly from urban communities, completed the courses which set physical and mental challenges with rewards available. One young person completing this course then moved onto a year’s apprenticeship with the Trust and subsequently gained employment with a role in recruiting 18-25 year olds to join the Trust as volunteers and improve links to sixth forms / colleges. Their Talent Match recruit has also helped the Trust with a better social media presence, improved links and awareness with young adults and a greater appreciation of the natural environment.

7: CONCLUSIONS AND LEARNING POINTS

7.1 Overall conclusions

The Talent Match Middlesbrough programme sought to help 435 young people (aged 18-24) who were out of work aligned to three priority categories:

- Hidden NEETs not claiming Job Seekers Allowance – those furthest from the labour market
- NEETs unemployed for more than 2 years who have failed to engage with or progress after mandatory support (including Work Programme)
- Young people unemployed for 12 months or more engaged with the Work Programme but not progressing.

With the national fall in the numbers of young people who were unemployed, those young people “left behind” by the uplift in the jobs market, tend to be those with more complex needs and more pronounced barriers to engaging with work, training and volunteering. Put simply, they need more intensive and longer term support to help them move towards and into work opportunities.

The Middlesbrough programme has worked with many young people with such needs, and it is interesting to take stock of their feedback (Section 5.2) which shows the stark reality of their mental well-being before they engaged with the programme.

Whilst these issues are quite common place across the cohort of young people supported by The Prince’s Trust’s five Talent Match programmes (and indeed others we have evaluated), these challenges are exacerbated in Middlesbrough by the fact the length of time young people have been out of work before starting the programme. It is 2.5 years in Middlesbrough (compared to 2.0 years for the Trust average) and over half have never worked before. The longer the duration someone is out of work, the more likely they are to become more frustrated and less confident in their abilities to secure a job. Their outlook can become more negative. *Quick fix* methods and short-term course / support are less likely to help them to “turn their lives around” and make sustainable positive changes. This is where the Talent Match model has added real value to the employability arena with an approach, and resources that have made a real and lasting impact.

A summary of main conclusions:

- The main key public and VCS sector stakeholders have been engaged throughout at strategic level and support for the TM approach to helping young people has been robust
- The involvement of young people at the heart of Talent Match Middlesbrough has been a very strong feature and a success story for TMM. The growth and sustainability of the Young People's Panel and its role in programme design, influence policy, commissioning services etc. It has a major opportunity to influence policy and practice across Middlesbrough in the future, if stakeholders continue to support it and is helping employers to make recruitment procedures more "youth friendly" and accessible
- The five year implementation timeframe has provided freedoms and flexibilities to "test and learn" – to trial approaches and adjust during implementation. That said, the fundamental project delivery model and array of partners changed very little over the course of the programme
- The front-line Advocacy role – one to one, long term mentoring support – is the most fundamental aspect of helping provide a different quality of service to help young people with multiple needs and barriers
- A high proportion of TM young people who were supported into work then sustained that employment
- A missed opportunity was considered to be the lack of dedicated employer engagement activity, in particular, nurturing productive relationships with private sector employer
- Talent Match has started to impact on how some key strategic partners deliver services for young people with issues and challenges experienced by this cohort. For example, DWP stated they were changing how some of the Work Coach support is delivered, to be more flexible and adopting a more person-centred approach, having seen the positive impact of the TM approach.

7.2 Key features of success – what works? Learning points

From our research and consultative work, we would highlight the following as key features of success of the Talent Match Middlesbrough programme:

- **Flexibility:** in terms of time and interventions, allowing young people to progress according to need and appropriate to the barriers they face. This contrasts with many of the mainstream welfare to work programmes, which are more time regulated.
- **Voluntary not mandatory provision:** this plays an important role as a starting point for engagement and participation - giving a sense of self-determination rather than feeling mandated to join and engage.
- **Person centred:** at the core of the model has been a responsiveness centred around each participant. Each person is unique and each “journey” has been unique. The service providers have been able to demonstrate a robust ability to work with the participants through a range of key interventions.
- **Building the foundations:** low levels of self-confidence, low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, introverted behaviours are all common place amongst young people that engage with Talent Match. These fundamental issues need “working on” through sensitive and tailored support and encouragement. The programme helps “build up” the individual, to enable them to develop more self-confidence, to build motivation, to take steps forward, improve their outlook and progress towards and into work. Investment in personal development and tackling deep-seated behaviours, routines and attitudes, is core component of the TM approach.
- **One to one support:** Providing intensive and longer term one to one support is at the heart of the TM model and is essential in building rapport and trust between a young person and the “support system” (which, in the past has often been seen to disappoint them). The continuity of a dedicated Mentor / Advocate, throughout their journey also provides comfort and a continual thread to the support mechanism, which is rarely found in other employability programmes.
- **“Stepping stones” approach - volunteering, work experience and exposure to the workplace:** all these can help build confidence, help young people acquire / develop soft and job specific skills and help put them in a better position to compete for job opportunities in the future. Gaining awareness and experience of work and workplaces by taking stepping stones
- **Supported pathways through to work and sustainable employment:** the programme, whilst flexible, provides structure and a step-by-step route to help young people progress. The number of TM participants that have moved into employment and sustained their position is impressive.



November 2018 Publication

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