



A programme led by

GMCVO

# Greater Manchester's Hidden Talent's response to the Covid-19 crisis

GM's Hidden Talent Project Team  
July 2020

Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation

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St Thomas Centre  
Ardwick Green North  
Manchester M12 6FZ  
[www.gmcvo.org.uk](http://www.gmcvo.org.uk)

☎ 0161 277 1000  
✉ [gmcvo@gmcvo.org.uk](mailto:gmcvo@gmcvo.org.uk)  
🐦 @gmcvo / @GMsHiddenTalent

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# The GM's Hidden Talent delivery model

The Greater Manchester's Hidden Talent programme is led by Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation (GMCVO).

GMCVO, through a Project Team of five staff members, provides infrastructure support to nine Delivery Partners who identify and support hidden young people<sup>1</sup> across all 10 Greater Manchester local authority areas. Eight of the nine delivery partners are local, community based VCSE organisations.

The Delivery Partners support hidden young people through one-to-one, holistic long and short-term, (dependent on need) support provided by a Talent Coach, who are employed by the Delivery Partners. There are 13 Talent Coaches working on GM's Hidden Talent.

For young people who joined the programme at launch in March 2019, support could last for the entirety of the programme (two years). Support can continue after a young person has found work. Talent Coaches provide support in all areas of a young person's life. It was a support model that ran successfully on Greater Manchester Talent Match, a youth employment programme led by GMCVO from 2013 to 2018.

All Talent Coaches can refer any of their young people to work with one of two **mental health practitioners**, employed by young people's mental health charity 42<sup>nd</sup> Street (who are an additional Delivery Partner). These practitioners are exclusively available to support GM's Hidden Talent participants for a combined four days a week. Effectively, this means young people have immediate access to support (as soon as they either self-refer, or, as is usual, they agree to their Talent Coach making a referral to 42nd Street).

GM's Hidden Talent is a voluntary programme: young people are not mandated to register and are free to stop receiving support if they want to.

The Delivery Partners have a range of expertise pertaining to work, skills and employability. They all operate a range of community-based services outside of their work on GM's Hidden Talent.

## Introduction

This report has three aims:

- **To explore and explain how GM's Hidden Talent's employability support has adapted to young people's evolving needs throughout the Covid-19 crisis**
- **To illustrate the impact Covid-19 has had on the progress young people are making**
- **To spotlight emerging themes that require close monitoring and action for the remainder of the GM's Hidden Talent programme**

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<sup>1</sup> Hidden young people are those who are not in employment, education or training and not claiming any welfare benefits.

GM's Hidden Talent has had to adapt to the unprecedented demands of living with Covid-19.

As a one-to-one employability support programme built on the principles of attending to the holistic needs of the individual; operating under the restrictions of social distancing has posed substantial challenges.

Prior to Covid-19, Talent Coach support was overwhelmingly delivered through face-to-face interaction with a young person. These meetings would take place in many different locations, at different times often determined by a young person's progression needs. For example, if a young person was struggling with severe social anxieties, a Talent Coach may begin meeting them in the home, before moving meetings into public spaces or that Talent Coaches' offices. First and initial meetings with a young person would sometimes happen in informal and 'neutral' public locations, where the person is at ease, like coffee shops. Specific examples of where and what Talent Coach delivery looked like pre Covid-19, will be examined throughout this report when contrasting with changes to working circumstances.

Between 23<sup>rd</sup> March and 1st June 2020, face-to-face meetings were no longer a possibility under government social distancing rules. Both the Project Team and the majority of Delivery Partners moved to remote working in the w/c 16th March.

Beneficiary eligibility is standardised, as are reporting and monitoring processes, but Delivery Partners and their Talent Coaches were chosen because they know what kind of support benefits young people in their communities. Therefore, they are free to decide on what type and what intensity of employability support a young person requires.

Accordingly, individual Delivery Partners and Talent Coaches were responsible for implementing their own changes to support delivery throughout the lockdown period. The Project Team, based at GMCVO, moved quickly to both facilitate and document these adjustments to the programme's delivery. It fast became clear that the flexibility of the programme's engagement with young people was proving resilient to the challenges of Covid-19. In the face of huge upheaval to the way they work, Talent Coaches were still having a hugely positive impact on young people's lives – despite inevitable limitations on what they would ordinarily be able to achieve, and, unavoidable interruptions to goal setting and action plans.

Now at a juncture whereby there is a gradual return to increased face-to-face contact between Talent Coaches and young people, the Project Team can reflect upon learning from the lockdown period. This report will highlight how employability support that is founded upon empathetic; high quality relationships, has been able to withstand the unforeseen pressures of Covid-19.

The strategies and approaches covered herein, press the case for national and regional recovery schemes (including job guarantee initiatives) to take into account the multi-faceted needs of young people. For those young people who are not in education, employment or training, facing multiple barriers to work and not claiming unemployment benefits, the current crisis has threatened to push them further from the workplace.

These young people frequently need support that extends beyond job searching and careers advice. They benefit from coaching and mentoring that moves back upstream; addressing general well-being and resolving difficulties around individual's living situations. This report will

showcase examples of this kind of work and how it has been so relevant during the Covid-19 crisis.

## Methodology

The information within this report has been drawn from minutes from remote meetings with Talent Coaches and Delivery Partners; notes from individual phone calls with Talent Coaches; a survey of young people and analysis of the programme's data capturing systems.

GMCVO, as the lead organisation in the GM's Hidden Talent Delivery Partnership, communicates actively with all Delivery Partners over the delivery and management of the programme.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Project Team met separately with Delivery Partner managers and Talent Coaches every quarter. Representatives from 42<sup>nd</sup> Street would attend both sets of meetings. All meetings were face-to-face. The Project Team would also meet managers and Talent Coaches outside of these sessions for a range of purposes, including but not limited to; training; meetings about targets, support needs and case studies; meetings to interview young people; and conducting of [peer evaluations](#). Phone call dialogue with Delivery Partners took place weekly, mainly through the Partnerships Officer.

In light of the fast-changing circumstances around Covid-19 in March, the Project Team arranged to move group meetings online and increased their frequency. Initially Talent Coach meetings moved to every third week and Delivery Partner meetings became monthly.

In-between these meetings the Communications and Employer Engagement Officer engaged all Talent Coaches in one-to-one telephone calls that expanded upon issues raised in group meetings. All Project Team members continued to speak individually with Talent Coaches around individual needs.

The terms of Partnership Agreements ask that all Delivery Partners record a range of pertinent information about young people's backgrounds, current life situations, aspirations and achievements. This information is captured through questionnaires and securely stored on Views, a customer relationship management database, and is updated throughout young people's time on the programme. The Project Team monitor this data to track a wide range of metrics relating to the programme's strategic objectives. Analysis of data on Views informed and is included in this report.

In addition to updating the Views database, Delivery Partners also submit Quarterly Reports to the Project Team. These provide narrative details of each Talent Coach's caseload, outlining any barriers to young people's progress and fleshing out the context behind successful outcomes e.g. starting a job or a course, engaging with a support service. Additional questions were asked in the Quarterly Report for April – June, to reflect the pressures of Covid-19. All of these Quarterly Reports were read and cross-referenced (with one another and earlier evidence from Talent Coaches) and instruct the conclusions of this report.

Also instructive, were the results of an anonymous survey completed by young people on the programme. The survey questions were co-designed by the Project Team and the Youth Panel, a volunteer group of young people aged 18-25 who at some point have experienced barriers to employment. The questions focused on the impact Covid19 was having on their

involvement with GM's Hidden Talent and on their life in general. The Youth Panel ensured the questions were accessible to young people before they were placed into a Survey Monkey survey. The survey link was sent to Talent Coaches who forwarded it to young people.<sup>2</sup>

## Section One: How Talent Coaches stayed in contact with young people

Working face-to-face establishes the trust in the relationship between the Talent Coach and the young people and is therefore integral to their role. As touched upon in the introduction section, Talent Coaches would meet with young people in all manner of settings:

- Sign-up and initial meetings have taken place in young people's homes
- Visiting young people living in shelters
- Walking around doing CV drops with young people
- Accompanying to interviews and open days
- Taking young people to first day in a new job
- Accompanying young people on travel training
- At the building where the Delivery Partner is based

After the imposed move to homeworking (one Talent Coach estimated that prior to homeworking under lockdown, for 10 years he had worked in roles that have been 90% face-to-face based), Talent Coaches offered their young people a variety of means of staying in touch. These included WhatsApp, text messages, emails and phone calls. Most Talent Coaches offered the opportunity for video calls but take-up for this was low.

In the early days of lockdown, Talent Coaches moved to let all young people know of the change to remote working. The overriding message was, "We are here for you, with whatever you need help with."

One Talent Coach said that he was contacting everyone on his caseload every day at the start of lockdown. From here, Talent Coaches said that contact with young people tended to average out at a frequency of once a week. This is echoed by young people who responded to a survey in late May, where 70 per cent of respondents said they had been speaking to their Talent Coach either once a week or every couple of days. The same number of respondents said they had spoken to their Talent Coach over the phone during lockdown.

In meetings and interviews, two Talent Coaches stressed that the voluntary nature of the programme influenced the frequency of their contact with young people:

*"These are adults who, in many instances have been reluctant to engage with support services – they are hidden young people. You can risk pushing young people away by over-contacting and making them think you are mithering them."*

One Talent Coach made the point that sustaining contact with a typically hard-to-reach group of young people was a success in and of itself.

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<sup>2</sup> 19 young people completed the survey.

*“Keeping in touch with my caseload and helping them out as much as I can, has been a success because the young people we work with could easily “drop off” without that face-to-face-work, mine haven’t so I see that as a success.”*

The key phrase here is ‘helping them out as much as I can.’ It is safe to deduct that young people have stayed in touch because of the nature of this help. In the aforementioned survey to young people, on a scale of 0 – 100, with ‘0’ being ‘No help at all’ and ‘100’ being ‘Incredibly helpful, young people’s average rating of Talent Coaches’ support through lockdown was 82.

Talent Coaches have reported that the longer they go without seeing some young people face-to-face, the more reluctant they are to have conversations over the phone. One Talent Coach in particular has had difficulty maintaining contact:

*“Some young people are no longer comfortable with weekly phone calls. The relationships I had formed have been strained due to the current climate, with young people more standoffish with me and the programme. I believe this is due to the limited help I can offer them.”*

However, incidents of losing contact with people altogether have been minimal. Of 198 young people active on the programme at the time of writing, only 15 had not been contactable through lockdown.

Additionally, one Talent Coach reflected that where contact had been lost, reaching these young people had proved difficult before lockdown. They observed that ‘one or two’ were ‘cosmetically involved to begin with’, believing that it was the young people’s parents who had pushed for them to join GM’s Hidden Talent, with no real interest on their part.

## Section Two: The types of support that have been possible

The young people participating in GM’s Hidden Talent are not a homogenous group<sup>3</sup>. Young people join the programme with the ultimate aim of finding a job, but present with wide-ranging barriers to employment and varying degrees of work readiness. Their support needs are multi-faceted. The Covid-19 crisis has reinforced how varied the Talent Coach role is, and how the help they provide reaches into all areas of a young person’s life.

### Financial support

Talent Coaches have continued to assist young people with opening / re-opening claims for employment benefits (a process many young people find hard to navigate independently) albeit this has become a much more time demanding and difficult process.

In normal circumstances some Talent Coaches would sit with a young person to open / amend a claim. Doing so meant they could help young people interpret the finer points of the process and speak to advisors over the phone (the young people would say, “I’m sat with my youth worker, and I give them permission to speak to you.”) Instead some Talent Coaches have had

<sup>3</sup> See [Appendix](#) for breakdown of the life situations of young people.

to talk young people through the entire process over the phone and exchange picture messages to guide through steps that young people find difficult (ID verification). There was an instance of a Talent Coach helping a young person's mother interpret benefits paperwork over the phone, and another where a Talent Coach needed to work with a young person's girlfriend over the phone because he could not read or write.

One Talent Coach was talking two young people through the claiming process over the phone, but because the Gov.uk website was so slow and would not let the young people verify their ID, the young people gave up and refused to go any further.

One young person was struggling to navigate through from a national helpline number to their local Jobcentre in order to discuss repayment of an advancement on a Universal Credit payment. His Talent Coach used their good relationships with local Jobcentre staff to provide a direct local contact.

In the early days of lockdown one Talent Coach moved quickly to help young people on his caseload who were self-employed. These young people didn't quite grasp the technicalities of their employment status (they were paid by the construction company on whose site they worked, but still classed as self-employed) and needed the Talent Coach to research and explain their entitlements. This required the Talent Coach to be up to date with the latest government guidance and this enabled him and the young person to navigate the system together.

In one instance a young person did not have internet access. With permission from their management team and the young person, the Talent Coach used the young person's login details to access their DWP account and re-apply for a claim (the young person needed money for food).

One young person started an apprenticeship days before the lockdown kicked in. He was told he would be made redundant but the Delivery Partner employing his Talent Coach managed to negotiate furlough in place of redundancy with the Delivery Partner covering his wage.

## Opportunity support

Talent Coaches have continued to act as a key bridge, linking young people to employment and training opportunities.

Employment starts on the programme unsurprisingly slowed during the lockdown as the vacancy rate fell and opportunities became more limited, but 11 young people still moved into work between the end of March and 3<sup>rd</sup> July. Behind these job starts, lies a mix of intensive Talent Coach guidance and facilitation. These four examples offer a flavour of the breadth of this work:

- A young person was due to start a job on a Monday. The Saturday before, this young person's Talent Coach spoke with the young person's new manager about an outstanding DBS check. The Talent Coach explained how the paperwork was being processed and confirmed that on their first day, the young person would bring the ID documentation used in support of the DBS application. Furthermore, the Talent Coach confirmed what the role entailed. This was vital as the young person would be assisting testing for Covid-19. The Talent Coach confirmed how the young person would be

protected and in doing so, provided reassurance that contributed to ensuring the young person started in the role.

- Continuing a model employed before lockdown, one Talent Coach negotiated a job opportunity where the first week was a paid trial, paid for by the Delivery Partner.
- One Talent Coach helped a young person secure a job as a special residential support worker for young people. Although the young person had a degree in PE and long-term wanted to work in a sports coaching capacity, the Talent Coach suggested he look into residential support work to get more experience of working with young people. Working remotely, the Talent Coach helped him amend his CV to align with these kind of roles and worked on his interview technique.
- Similar to the above, one Talent Coach worked with a young person to broaden their opportunities by applying for a job (as a carer) they had not previously considered – as a stepping stone to their dream job (nursing). The Talent Coach worked with the care provider to help the young lady through the recruitment process and secure the job.

All Talent Coaches have sent opportunity details through to young people.

The social networking platform Workplace<sup>4</sup> has been used by the Project Team and Delivery Partners to share employment and training opportunities with one another. One Talent Coach used Workplace to promote a series of online creative writing and podcasting workshops they were hosting. Seeing this, another Talent Coach encouraged one of their young people to take part. She really enjoyed the creative writing sessions, saying that they had helped her rekindle an interest in the arts. The fact these sessions were online, removed the travel barrier for this young person. Had physical attendance been required, her Talent Coach believes the young person would not have participated because of their associated anxieties around travelling from Bolton to central Manchester.

During lockdown, a young person with Asperger's and ADHD has been helped by their Talent Coach to successfully apply for a place on a creative arts course at a specialist college. The college provides creative education for young people with additional learning needs. This opportunity was also brought to the Talent Coach's attention via Workplace.

Where some young people did not have the hardware or connectivity to engage in online courses, one Delivery Partner managed to secure free tablets – loaded with sim cards – through a training agency.

Other remote learning successes include one young person who gained their Maths and English Level 1 via Google Classroom, and another young person who completed an Alison psychology course.

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<sup>4</sup> Workplace by Facebook was introduced as a knowledge and information sharing tool on GM Talent Match it was retained for GM's Hidden Talent.

Delivery Partners were chosen on the basis of their ability to help young people with personal, social and emotional difficulties. At the core of GM's Hidden Talent is the ethos that overcoming these barriers, is indivisible from the ultimate aim of securing employment.

It bears stressing that the wellbeing needs of different Talent Coaches' individual caseloads varied markedly in some instances. In part this is reflective of Delivery Partners respective specialisms. For example, one Delivery Partner's referrals come from colleagues and partners who work in the field of mental health support. All of these young people presented with mental health difficulties and arrived with accompanying information about existing and complex mental health problems.

Surveying young people revealed that the top three areas that Talent Coaches had helped with during lockdown were:

1. Just being somebody to talk to (84% of respondents)
2. Able to share my concerns with them (79%)
3. Helping with my mental wellbeing (58%)

Examples of these kinds of support have been plentiful.

One young person was having suicidal thoughts at the start of the lockdown. These thoughts were linked to feelings of panic and a fear of going out of the house with the virus at its peak. The Talent Coach checked in with him daily and felt qualified to use her knowledge of therapeutic interventions, such as grounding exercises, to successfully manage the situation.

At the start of lockdown the same Talent Coach helped another young person by mediating in a family argument. The young man had left home and travelled to other relatives in London. The Talent Coach was one of the first people the young person contacted at their time of crisis, proving the high level of trust that was in place between them and the Talent Coach.

Talent Coaches have educated young people around self-care practices like good diet and sleeping / exercise routines. One Delivery Partner organisation lent a young man a bike to encourage him to exercise and began delivering food parcels to all of their young people and their families (the Delivery Partner was working with a church who are acting as a food hub, and also acting as a community link for an independent sponsor who were sourcing food). Young people working with another Delivery Partner Organisation attended a group Zoom wellbeing session led by a local mental health awareness organisation.

One young person was very concerned about the prospect of going back to work as they hadn't left the house in a number of weeks. They met up with their Talent Coach to go for a socially-distanced walk around their local park:

*"It was a really positive time. We discussed everything from family, wellbeing, confidence and the future. We talked about what his options with returning to work are. I've worked with the employer to arrange a phased return to work. Most of the young person's social contact came through work and since being furloughed they've suffered a dip in confidence. The phased return will help reintegrating more gently."*

Before socially distanced walks became a possibility, one Talent Coach was hosting virtual walks. She would video call a young person and together they would walk around their respective local neighbourhoods and talk about what they saw and how they felt. Similarly, Talent Coaches were willing to share their own Covid-associated mental health and wellbeing concerns. Three Talent Coaches have talked about how ‘putting a personal spin’ on the challenges of social distancing, has prompted more open conversations.

## 42<sup>nd</sup> Street

The nature and flexibility of support provided by 42<sup>nd</sup> Street has continued to benefit those in receipt.

Ordinarily young people would attend 12 psychosocial support sessions with a 42<sup>nd</sup> Street mental health practitioner. Recognising the upheaval caused by Covid-19, five of the 13 young people working with 42<sup>nd</sup> Street have chosen to pause their counselling sessions. Some young people were finding it difficult to discuss everything they wanted to over the phone / online and others did not have safe and confidential space at home.

Where sessions have been paused, 42<sup>nd</sup> Street are maintaining weekly catch-up calls with young people and their parents. Where remote counselling has continued, young people have been guided on managing low mood, anxiety, panic attacks and suicidal thoughts. Before March, some young people had been implementing strategies to get them out of the house more and socialising with positive peers, they have instead been focusing on healthy lifestyle goals:

*“We talk about those small, positive changes young people can affect. This can start with getting up at a set time in the morning and deciding what needs doing straight away. You start small with things like making the bed, cleaning teeth and slowly add to this.”* **42<sup>nd</sup> Street mental health practitioner.**

To dovetail with this work, one Talent Coach has been talking to their young people about how the mind works and has been sending young people reflective self-help exercises.

42<sup>nd</sup> Street have also delivered two virtual training sessions for the Talent Coaches: *Employment rights in relation to young people and mental health* and *Supporting LGBTQ+ young people with their emotional health and wellbeing*. These sessions, along with four additional training days given earlier in the Hidden Talent programme, have given the Talent Coaches more confidence and knowledge when speaking to young people about their mental wellbeing. 42<sup>nd</sup> Street had carried out a skills audit and asked the Talent Coaches which training sessions they would most benefit from. These were then prioritised and carried out in that order.

Since March, 42<sup>nd</sup> Street have reported lower than expected levels of referrals from Talent Coaches. This is perhaps partly explained by the fact some Talent Coaches have said they will only fully understand the extent of young people’s needs and circumstances when they can meet in person. Another possible reason is that Talent Coaches have needed to prioritise sustaining their own relationships with young people at a time when contact has proved difficult. Furthermore, one Talent Coach reported that a young person he believed would benefit from 42<sup>nd</sup> Street support, is reluctant to do so at present. The Talent Coach believes this is because of reservations around speaking to and working with new people.

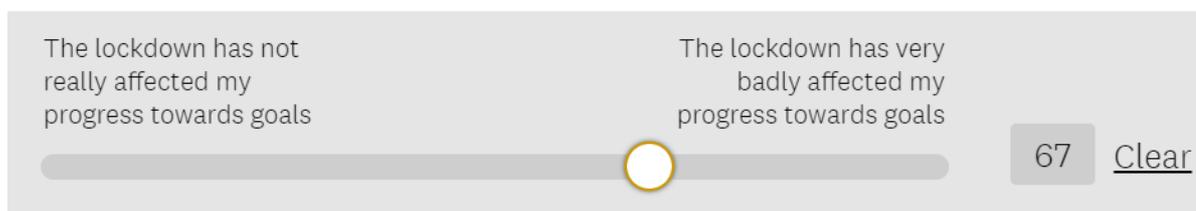
The referral pathway between Talent Coaches and 42<sup>nd</sup> Street will continue to be monitored throughout the remainder of the programme but the fact is, many Covid-specific health needs have been addressed directly by Talent Coaches themselves, many of whom have longstanding experience and training in wellbeing support.

## Section Three: Halted / interrupted progress

### Low confidence

There is no masking the fact that Covid-19 has badly impacted the positive steps being made by some young people.

In our survey, we asked young people to use a sliding scale to rate how much the lockdown was affecting their progress:



From here, we asked young people to compare what goals they were working towards pre-lockdown, with those they were still able to work on under lockdown. Below is a sample of some standout results:

Goal	Working towards pre-lockdown	Not able to work towards during lockdown
Doing things to build my confidence	75%	40%
Socialising	55%	65%
Getting out of the house more	65%	60%
Creating routines	50%	50%

These four goals can all be categorised as employability ‘building blocks’. Achievement in these areas provides a social and emotional bedrock: a position of stability from which to start looking for work.

Pre-Covid-19, one Talent Coach’s caseload was characterised by low confidence issues. These manifested in a reluctance to go out of the house; meet other young people or use public transport. The bulk of this Talent Coach’s work had involved developing independent travel behaviours and placing young people in different social situations: all work that had to stop due to lockdown.

Several Talent Coaches said that confidence levels cannot be truly assessed until they are able to meet in person with young people. In addition to the previously referenced welfare walks with young people, as of the second week of July 2020, most Talent Coaches had been cleared (by their managers) to begin having face-to-face welfare checks with young people at their front doors or in their gardens. In some cases, it is possible young people’s progress may be further impeded by a reticence to meeting in-person with their Talent Coach.

The Project Team will monitor this. It may be that as social distancing relaxes and the economy opens up, young people are less apprehensive, however, at the peak of the pandemic, the Talent Coach with the largest caseload said that a 'large number' of their caseload were too scared to both leave the house, and look for work. One young person working with this Delivery Partners' other Talent Coach left a new job after a week, due to fears of working in close proximity with their colleagues.

Delivery Partners' individual arrangements around re-opening their premises will need to be tracked. Whilst some offices / centres are now open for some face-to-face appointments with young people, others do not anticipate starting this work until the autumn. One Talent Coach, whose office is now open for drop-in sessions, said they faced the quandary of not wanting to ask people to travel to their offices on public transport, but at the same time feeling like some young people would benefit hugely from attending.

It bears consideration that some types of work will still be constrained by setting. Talent Coaches have reported the difficulty of helping with writing / job application when not being able to sit face-to-face with young people. Some Talent Coaches may return to their tried and tested approach of meeting young people in 'neutral' venues (e.g. coffee shops) to do this work, but again, this is contingent upon young people being comfortable with such arrangements.

The programme will need to take into account that one Talent Coach is considered in the 'clinically extremely vulnerable' category and will continue to offer virtual support to her clients pending further guidance.

## Keeping focus

Many Talent Coaches have spoken honestly and openly about their difficulties in keeping young people motivated since March.

Talent Coaches report that young people's life circumstances and experiences conspire to bring about a state of inactivity. Some young people lack working role models and have been surrounded by a culture of worklessness in which there is no pressure from family / friends to find work. At registration, half of the young people on GM's Hidden Talent do not know what job they want, or what skills and qualifications they need to progress. Over one quarter have never worked or volunteered before. Some with very low confidence can feel destined to fail; avoid pursuing opportunities but then end up feeling worse as a result of inactivity.

Talent Coaches were concerned that young people were starting to fall back into old habits such as smoking increased amounts of cannabis and using social distancing measures as a chance to stay in to play computer games. These assessments, although frank, are non-judgemental. The levels of empathy, attention and care offered by Talent Coaches are evident throughout this report.

For these reasons the setting of tangible, achievable goals is crucial for young people. '*Not being able to work towards something*' was the second most common challenge under lockdown (for young people who completed our survey). In addition to interrupted travel training, Talent Coaches have struggled to keep young people working on goals related to time-keeping and routine. Prior to lockdown, Talent Coaches with one Delivery Partner would arrange meetings at times which compelled young people to be up and out of the house at a

reasonable hour. Another Delivery Partner's Talent Coaches would ordinarily pick up young people, bringing them to their office to revise and prepare for CSCS (Construction Skills Certification Scheme) tests. Although these tests have now restarted, Talent Coaches felt that earlier in lockdown they couldn't be certain (without seeing them) that young people were preparing for them.

One Talent Coach noted that a couple of their young people's focus was likely being hampered by negative peer influences. Had the Talent Coach been able to meet with young people they felt they could have acted as a more effective counterbalance:

*"He's spending more time with people who, in the past have held him back by saying things like, "What do you need a job for?" He can be impressionable and he's taken a few step back as a result."*

## Interruptions to employment

Of the 45 young people who had entered *sustainable work*<sup>5</sup> before the lockdown, 10 were furloughed, six were temporarily laid off before returning to work, and three lost their jobs. At the start of July, one Talent Coach was uncertain whether or not some young people on their caseload would still have jobs at the end of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. The same Talent Coach has been chasing training providers, asking if they will extend traineeships to account for the months two young people have missed.

One Talent Coach felt he could have prevented one young man leaving his job at the beginning of lockdown. The Talent Coach would ordinarily have dropped in on this young man at home, or seen him at a weekly jobs club hosted in a community centre, and perhaps been able to talk him out of leaving.

Delayed start dates and interviews have been a theme across several caseloads, whilst keeping young people focused on job searching in the context of a constricted labour market is proving tough for some Talent Coaches. In early July, one Talent Coach felt they had 11 young people emotionally ready for work but was struggling to find appropriate job openings. One Delivery Partner organisation had sent an email shot to 200 employers, asking about entry level roles and offering them support with any recruitment needs. As of early July they had received no contact from employers and were going to chase up.

Pre-Covid, one Delivery Partner organisation had been trying to encourage local employers to capitalise on a local authority-wide offer of subsidised employment for young people who are not in education, employment or training. These discussions came to a halt as they encountered businesses working with skeleton staff who were pausing recruitment.

As employers prioritise keeping existing staff and stability, rather than recruiting new staff, workplace visits, placements and work experience have been paused.

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<sup>5</sup> Under the GM's Hidden Talent Partnership Agreements, the programme records employment outcomes where the role is a minimum of 16 hours per week, paid at the National Minimum Wage (or Apprentice Wage) and expected to last six months.

## Section Four: Interrupted referral pathways and new sign-ups

GM's Hidden Talent has four potential referral pathways: Young people are referred by:

- other organisations
- other programmes / teams / branches operating within a Delivery Partner organisation
- word of mouth (young people's friends and family tell them about the Delivery Partner)
- self-referral (often as a result of a Delivery Partner's high standing and reputation within the community).

Given that Delivery Partners are charged with identifying a demographic of young people who are – as the 'hidden' classification suggests – hard to find, a recent fall in the number of referrals was not wholly unexpected. Pre-Covid-19, Delivery Partner had been establishing links with other organisations working with young people within the respective boroughs in which they operate. Covid-19 has badly interrupted Delivery Partner's headway on this front:

*"The last conversation I had with my previous referrers was very unsure. They were not confident of the number of young people that they will come across, as their visits with young people have been massively reduced. Many services have furloughed staff and many others are on such small staff teams that they are struggling."* **Talent Coach.**

Other Delivery Partners echoed this problem, with one adding:

*"It has been very noticeable just how so many agencies have become very inward looking and dropped contacts with partners because of the pandemic."* **Talent Coach.**

Referrals from Early Help services, a homeless charity and a single point of access (SPA) have slowed or stopped altogether (as of early July). Time will tell how long these pathways are disrupted. These referrals are contingent upon on engagement within a triage ecosystem. SPAs are reliant on referrals coming through from GPs and statutory services and Early Help assessments depend on communities and families feeling safe to engage in meetings.

One Talent Coach believed she had not been able to sign more young people onto the programme because of not seeing young people face to face. They said that in initial meetings young people would bring along their friends, some of whom she'd been able to work with.

The impact in interrupted referral pathways is seen in the numbers of new sign-ups. In the April – June quarter, only six young people joined the programme. This has left the programme at 70% of its target registrations for the end of June. In contrast, at the end of March, the programme had achieved 91% of its target registrations. The drop-off, as well as being explained by the above interruptions, is also mitigated by a number of expected sign-ups that are awaiting paperwork completions and first face-to-face meetings that will confirm eligibility criteria. A couple of Talent Coaches will also have new sign-ups once young people they know turn 18 (and therefore become eligible).

All Talent Coaches acknowledge that establishing personal connections with young people at the earliest opportunity is vital to laying the foundations of trusting relationships. Engaging with a newly registered young person who they have yet to meet face-to-face, is proving a challenge for one Talent Coach. The Project Team need to keep an open dialogue with Talent Coaches about any difficulties in establishing new relationships particularly as some of the new young people, who have been referred will need understanding and sensitive support because of their personal circumstances, such as overcoming addiction or being a victim of domestic abuse.

## Conclusions and concomitant priorities for the remainder of the programme

- 1. One-to-one key workers who are trusted and liked by young people, can provide far-reaching employability support at a time of crisis. Covid-19 has reinforced how well placed the VCSE sector is to deliver this kind of wide-ranging mentoring and coaching.**

This report has shown how GM's Hidden Talent's support extends far beyond what might typically be considered traditional careers advice and guidance.

Underpinning the breadth of this support are high quality relationships. Talent Coaches care about their young people and young people respect and listen to their Talent Coaches. This has enabled contact to be maintained with caseloads throughout a barely conceivable set of circumstances. The depth and variety of support highlighted in this report has only been possible because of the strength of Talent Coach-young person relationships, and Talent Coaches willingness and ability to assist in all areas of a young person's life.

Eight out of nine of the Delivery Partners employing Talent Coaches are VCSE sector organisations. All Delivery Partners were chosen because of their expertise in engaging and building relationships with young people. Some organisations are at the heart of their communities and possess insight into local opportunities / a strong understanding of the local support ecosystem. Some organisations are synonymous with 'getting on' in life and approached by young people for this reason. Others have specialisms working with target groups and unpicking complex needs. Whatever their particular focus, all Delivery Partners share a flexible approach that has served young people incredibly well throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

Unrestrained by a contrived or unnecessarily prescriptive delivery model with fixed parameters, Delivery Partners have seized the initiative and done what they can.

### **2. Young people are more engaged face to face**

Young people have been badly impacted by not being able to see their Talent Coaches in person.

Whilst Talent Coaches have innovatively adapted their ways of working, maintaining young people's progress to re-entering education or towards work has been more difficult when working remotely.

Young people have preferred to keep in touch via messages and phone calls rather than video calls. Phone calls, by nature, have been shorter than face to-face meetings and have not been able to explore issues and options in as much depth.

When they do meet with Talent Coaches in person, some young people's focus for the remainder of the programme will be on repeating and revisiting the confidence building work they had done pre-lockdown.

The freedom with which Talent Coaches and young people are able to meet in person will need to be monitored closely for the remainder of the programme. This, combined with repeating work to get young people work-ready, will likely have a bearing on programme outcomes such as employment outcomes and young people's scores under our proximity to the labour market measure.<sup>6</sup>

### **3. At a time of crisis, contact with Delivery Partners has been key**

Strong relationships with Delivery Partners going into lockdown meant that a culture of transparency, whereby Delivery Partners have not been afraid to share difficulties, had already been created.

The Project Team's existing understanding of how Delivery Partners and Talent Coaches work, ensured that the right questions could be put to individuals.

[Increasing the frequency of communication](#) with Delivery Partners has proved effective in that there has been more sharing of successes, challenges, tips, and opportunities for young people. The increased use of [Workplace](#) as an information sharing platform has led to take-up of new college courses, training and employment for a number of young people.

### **4. The full impact of Covid-19 on young people's mental health and wellbeing is still unclear. The Project Team will continue to explore what provision best addresses young people's mental health and wellbeing needs, and the professional relationships that underpin this.**

Talent Coaches have said they will only fully understand the extent of young people's wellbeing when they can meet in person and at length. Maintaining open dialogue with

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<sup>6</sup> To assist in the evaluation of all of 21 Talent Match programmes, Sheffield Hallam University developed a tool to measure a young person's proximity to the labour market. The measure used details about a young person's current situation to generate a score. This 'distance travelled' measure is being used again on GM's Hidden Talent. It serves as an additional gauge to assess the impact of Talent Coaches' employment support – instead of simply looking at whether or not a young person secures employment.

Delivery Partners about young people's frame of mind will tell us how difficult young people are finding the changed world that Covid has left in its wake.

The specialist mental health support from 42<sup>nd</sup> Street is having an unquestionably positive impact for those in receipt of it. Having direct access to mental health practitioners is a boon for the programme and young people. Equally however, Covid-19 has shone a light on how adept some Talent Coaches are at maintaining young people's mental wellbeing. The Project Team has worked hard to explore the lower than expected number of referrals to 42<sup>nd</sup> Street support. We will continue to work with all the Delivery Partners so that the young people on Hidden Talent have appropriate access to mental health support.

42<sup>nd</sup> Street have delivered two online mental health training sessions for Talent Coaches during the lockdown. These sessions will continue during the remainder of the GM's Hidden Talent programme. This will continue to inform Talent Coaches about mental health and wellbeing as well as increasing their knowledge of appropriate support.

## **5. The Project Team will closely monitor programme referrals**

Referrals of young people to GM's Hidden Talent have slowed significantly since the Covid-19 lockdown. This is mainly a result of existing referring agencies and organisations not being in a position to refer on.

At the same time, Covid-19 has created potential for an increase in the numbers of young people who become hidden (due to large numbers of disrupted onward journeys into further education or work and the potential of further cuts to youth services).

Local community organisations and those within the VCSE sector, who do refer young people to Hidden Talent, are starting to increase the work they are doing. As the contact they have with young people starts again we are hoping the number of new referrals from them will grow over the next few months.

The Project Team will continue to enable partnerships between Delivery Partners, local organisations, and individual Local Authorities so that referrals will come from stakeholders across GM.

## **6. The Project Team will closely monitor employment and training starts in a post-Covid-19 labour market. We will continue to share our intelligence with key regional and national influencers within the youth employment sphere.**

The Project Team already capture the essential details about employment starts (wage, name of employer, sector, hours worked etc.) Taking note of where young people secure jobs post-Covid-19 will help to inform regional recovery work. Amidst fears that job losses will disproportionately impact the least secure, gig economy and entry level jobs that are often

young people's gateway into work<sup>7</sup>, it will be imperative to keep asking Delivery Partners what opportunities are / are not available for young people.

The Project Team can feed this information up to GM-based strategic groups with which they are involved. Intelligence around the points at which young people experience barriers to job starts (e.g. lack of opportunity in the first place, skills disconnect, overly demanding recruitment) can help to influence regional recovery programmes. Intelligence from Delivery Partners can also guide future employer engagement work. By finding out which employers are recruiting young people, the Project Team can potentially harvest examples of good recruitment practices.

The Project Team will work with the [Youth Guarantee's Task Force](#) to develop post-Covid-19 provision and policy for young people in Greater Manchester.

In response to the Covid-19 crisis, Impetus, Youth Futures Foundation, Youth Employment UK, the Institute for Employment Studies and The Prince's Trust formed the Youth Employment Group (YEG), to bring together key leaders and experts around the youth employment sector to help drive the UK's response.

As a member of the YEG the Project Team, along with Youth Panel members, attended working groups and contributed ideas towards the government response.

We gave feedback on the YEG's draft recommendations that have been submitted to central government and the relevant departments. The Youth Panel contributed to this feedback using their own experiences, to comment fully on the draft recommendations.

Our feedback included:

- Advising that funding cuts to youth services have meant that young people have fallen through the cracks with some becoming 'hidden'. By having more youth services, people will know what support and guidance is available.
- Agreeing that virtual work placements and tours would save on travel and time costs. These would be positive for people with mobility or anxiety-related difficulties.
- Sharing reservations about how those young people who are not able to work full time because of health conditions and disabilities, will fit into the Kickstart scheme. We also shared concerns as to how local the scheme's roles would be.
- Stressing how valued relationships with local organisations improves young people's wellbeing, increases their confidence and allows them to progress with education, training or finding employment. That trust with a Talent Coach-type figure can be key in opening up and asking for help as not all places are accessible with a welcoming atmosphere.
- Pushing for reliable statistics from jobcentres to show how successful schemes like the Youth Obligation are, as they don't know how many people move into employment after these sessions.
- Acknowledging that incentives are needed for employers to increase wages for apprenticeships so that people are encouraged to start them.

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<sup>7</sup> According to the [Class of 2020](#) report by the Nuffield Foundation, one-in-three non-graduates, and one-in-five graduates, have got their first employment experience after education in sectors such as retail, hospitality, travel and leisure.

- Arguing the need for more schemes that address the barriers to apprenticeships especially for those in care, vulnerable or those with Education, Health and Care Plan.

## Appendix

The below table is a snapshot of the life situations of young people when they registered on to GM's Hidden Talent. It is worth noting that some figures will likely be under representative of true picture as they are captured at a point when some young people may not feel entirely comfortable disclosing some information. This figures were correct as of 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2020.

Those with caring responsibilities	14	<b>6.2%</b>
Those with physical disabilities	27	<b>11.9%</b>
Those with mental health issues	39	<b>17.3%</b>
Those without GCSEs in English and Maths A*-C	135	<b>59.7%</b>
Those who struggle with English and Maths on a daily basis	27	<b>11.9%</b>
Those without work experience or volunteering	62	<b>27.4%</b>
Those who do not know what kind of employment they want	96	<b>42.5%</b>
Those who do not know what skills/experience/qualifications they need	110	<b>48.7%</b>
Those not confident with job searches and CVs	150	<b>66.4%</b>
Those who rate their ability to manage feelings 1-3 / 6 (1 - you really struggle to manage your feelings, 6 - you have no difficulty managing your feelings)	111	<b>49.33%</b>
Those who rate their confidence 1-3 / 6 (1 - you really struggle with you confidence, 6 - you have no issues with confidence)	119	<b>52.89%</b>
Those with a drug or alcohol problem	9	<b>4.0%</b>