



A programme led by

GMCVO

GM's Hidden Talent Year 2 Evaluation

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The Story of Our Project This Year

The second and final year of delivering Greater Manchester's Hidden Talent (GMHT) presented some considerable challenges.

As outlined in our July 2020 report, [Greater Manchester's Hidden Talent's response to the Covid-19 crisis](#), the first national lockdown challenged our Talent Coaches' freedom to deliver holistic support in the way that best suits individual young people. This report also surveyed young people, confirming the damaging impact had been on their confidence and their goalsetting.

Throughout subsequent regional and national Covid-19 control measures, our Delivery Partners have reported how difficult it has been to keep young people motivated, help them find training and job opportunities, and, support young people with their mental health and wellbeing when not able to see them face-to-face. The restrictions in Greater Manchester were tougher than most other areas in the UK, with lockdown being in place for most of the second year of the programme. The frequently changing tiered restrictions made it difficult for Talent Coaches to plan activities such as socially distanced catch-ups with beneficiaries.

Yet, because of the strength of Talent Coach-young person relationships and our Talent Coaches' determination to provide whatever support they can in spite of circumstances (see our [July 2020 report](#), our [Year 2 Peer Evaluations Report](#) and "The Differences You've Made" section), a complex variety of support has been delivered.

"I have enjoyed the dedication of [my Talent Coach] and how she dedicated her time to actually listening to what we needed help with instead of just throwing us at the wall of "you must work now." Quote from Peer Evaluation Report.

As a result, we have seen young people achieve some fantastic outcomes. Of the 295 young people the programme engaged with, we have seen:

- 29% have entered into employment
- 63% have undertaken a training course
- 59% have undertaken volunteering
- 18% have entered long-term education

We also know from the work that we do to measure "soft" outcomes that 51% of young people increased their confidence, self-esteem, self-belief, self-respect, self-awareness and ability to deal with nerves between registration and exit. 47% of young people increased their ability to manage feelings, deal with issues, cope and manage problems between registration and exit. Finally, 42% of young people increased their hope and optimism between registration and exit. These figures are particularly impressive in the context that young people made this progress during the Covid-19 pandemic; a period in which there is much evidence to indicate that young peoples' mental health was disproportionately impacted.

Our (GMCVO's) role as programme lead has necessarily adapted throughout 2020-21. Recognising that the pandemic was interrupting progression pathways some young people leaving education (potentially leading to increased numbers of hidden young people), in October we expanded our eligibility criteria, enabling our Lottery funded Delivery Partners in Bolton, Manchester and Salford to work with 16 and 17 year olds.

Throughout the past year, we have increased our remote contact with Delivery Partners (both Talent Coaches and their managers) and promoted peer support in our meetings, allowing for challenges and solutions to be freely expressed. We have also used our meetings and

Workplace by Facebook to share relevant employment, education and training opportunities with Talent Coaches. Some of these were seized upon by Talent Coaches and led to young people [making terrific progress](#).

Recognising the limited opportunities of a squeezed labour market, we shared emerging sectors information from the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce with Talent Coaches, as well as sourcing and sharing details of new Kickstart opportunities so that young people who were claiming Universal Credit could ask their Work Coach directly about a specific job. We also arranged unconscious bias training for the Talent Coaches, creating a safe space for individuals to share experiences and views when broaching the topic of how racism affects young people they support.

Our Delivery Partners have provided us with compelling evidence of young people's needs and the related gaps in provision. With this intelligence, we have influenced regional and national responses to the escalating youth unemployment crisis.

We attended working groups led by the Covid-19 Youth Employment Group (YEG), a nationwide cross-sector emergency response to concerns about the impact of coronavirus on young people, feeding back on the YEG's draft recommendations ahead of their submission to government.

The Project Team also attended all working groups of the [Greater Manchester Young Person's Guarantee Task Force](#), submitting written proposals that were reflected in the Guarantee's recommendations for the next phase of response. These include recommendations pertaining to improved apprentice wage; better advertising of apprenticeship funding options; improved employer understanding of inclusive recruitment practices; and the establishing of groups for sharing knowledge on effective traineeship delivery.

Additionally, the GM's Hidden Talent Programme Manager was a member of the cross-sector Greater Manchester Kickstart Board, ensuring that our Talent Coaches' concerns about hidden young people's non-access to the Kickstart scheme were communicated to statutory service providers. The Programme Manager also sat on a region-wide review panel that approved proposals from organisations seeking combined authority funding to remove barriers to apprenticeships for under-represented groups.

As the programme drew to a close, we asked all Talent Coaches to complete a progression plan for every young person. These included information of available support networks, other support currently received and details about on-going support they were being signposted to. It was incredibly encouraging to see that 39% of beneficiaries that completed a Progression Plan are able to continue working with their Talent Coach's organisation through their other available programmes.

How We Involved People from the Community in the Work We Did

How Talent Coaches have worked with beneficiaries' families

Whilst the aim of the Greater Manchester's Hidden Talent (GMHT) programme has been to move young people closer to employment, Coaches have recognised that it is sometimes beneficial to work with a beneficiaries' wider family in order to achieve that goal. This is particularly apt where a beneficiary is living in the family home. As one Talent Coach explained: "by helping to improve the lot of other people in the house, there are obvious benefits to helping the young person".

Financial Support

Talent Coaches are often very knowledgeable about the welfare benefits system, and can use this to signpost family members to support to ensure that they are receiving benefits to which they are entitled. This can reduce the pressure on a young person to contribute to household costs.

Some Delivery Partner organisations, including G-Force and Bolton Lads and Girls Club, are able to distribute food parcels to their local communities. This can help to develop trusting relationships with families, which in turn enables them to accept support. Tina, the Talent Coach from G-Force, explained that families would never tell her that they are in debt in such explicit terms, and she would never ask. Instead, familiarity leads to people opening up on the doorstep. When she has been delivering parcels people have said things like "I've only got £70 left to live on."

Similarly, Manchester Young Lives are involved in [Visit from the Stork CIC](#). They provide support packs for new parents that Martina, the Talent Coach, has been delivering. Recipients have included GMHT beneficiaries. Martina reflected, "**The young people's faces have lit up when they've received the packs. It's really touching. On the surface it looks a long way from employability but it lets them know I'm there for them and builds the trust that can help when job searching is appropriate.**"

Employment Support

Talent Coaches are well aware of the fact that the family environment or culture can itself be a barrier to a young person moving towards employment. This is particularly the case where young people live in a household where no-one is employed and, consequently, lack positive examples of the difference that work can have on self-esteem, independence etc. It can also create a mindset of "well if they're not working, why should I?"

Martina recently helped a beneficiary's mother secure a job at B&M. She helped the mother with her CV and to practice responses for typical interview questions. Martina also took her to the interview. In this instance, the mother asked for help but Martina has, in other circumstances with other families, been the one to make the first move. If she sees a sibling around the house, she will casually ask, "How old are you then?" or "What are you up to at the minute?" as a means of working out what help they might need signposting to.

Wellbeing Support

As well as the food parcels, G-Force delivered seeds and growing materials for young people in the community, including Hidden Talent beneficiaries. Tina explained, "It gives them something positive and constructive to commit to." We can see from the subsequent case study of [Alyish](#) that growing the sunflower seeds she received from G-Force gave her a reason

to engage with other neighbours in her community, which in turn gave her the confidence to take up volunteering.

The work of the Youth Panel

Our [Youth Panel](#) have continued to be central to our achievements this year¹. Partners and employers can trust these young people to bring an authentic and honest perspective to consultations. The Department of Work and Pensions have sought the Youth Panel's views on the accessibility of three virtual Youth Hubs, and the physical hub in Stockport. Youth Hubs are part of the DWP's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, which has had a disproportionate impact on youth unemployment. Hubs are located in a community setting, separate to the Job Centre. Young people using these facilities will be able to meet with specialist DWP Youth Work Coach, as well as information about other community provision.

Youth Panel members had a tour of the Hub and experienced an "Interview Techniques" workshop delivered by DWP Youth Work Coaches.

The Youth Panel were very impressed with the physical environment of the Youth Hub, which has some private rooms and breakout areas for any young people that would benefit from quieter areas, as well as lots of computers that are free to use and a café area. One Panel member commented: "It doesn't look too formal. It doesn't look like a Job Centre."

In Year One of the programme the Youth Panel were actively involved in the delivery of our workshops for employers at physical events. Whilst in-person event work was suspended, the Youth Panel brought their experiences to bear on a virtual event. This brought employers and our Talent Coaches together to share good practice around supportive inductions. In recognition of the more permanent shift towards hybrid working, the Youth Panel designed a [guide](#) on supporting young people to be included, rather than just present at virtual meetings. The Youth Panel's viewpoints also informed the content of our second published [employer toolkit](#), published in partnership with Youth Employment UK.

At the start of the second year of the programme, as the national lockdown was imposed, the Youth Panel co-designed a survey for programme beneficiaries to assess the impact that the restrictions had on their experience of the programme. The results were published as part of a wider [report](#) in July 2020. Later in the year, some Panel members gave a [video interview](#) about their experience of being a Panel member.

As ever, the Youth Panel designed and delivered the Peer Evaluation process. This year they needed to adapt the process to accommodate the fact that in-person evaluation conversations with programme beneficiaries were not able to happen. (See Section 4 for further details). The Panel increased their involvement with the programme's governance, attending the now monthly and bi-monthly Talent Coach and Delivery Partner meetings, as well as their attendance at the quarterly Strategic Steering Group.

The impact that the Panel's membership of these governance groups is deeper than the ability to update stakeholders on their work. A Steering Group member told us that:

"For all of us that work with young people, it reminds us of the importance of co-design. It has a broader impact of making us consider voice of young people in our own work and how we work with them to co-design services."

¹ For an in-depth evaluation of our Youth Panel's impact and the impact of involvement on individual Youth Panel members, please see our Youth Panel Evaluation Report and a summary of their activity <https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/system/files/publications/Peer%20Evaluation%20Year%202%20Collated%20Report%20Final.pdf>
<https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/system/files/news-attachments/Summary%20of%20Youth%20Panel%20Activity.pdf>

The Differences We've Made

The Difference to Beneficiaries

Peer Evaluation: Beneficiaries' experience of the programme was monitored at the end of each year through the [Peer Evaluation](#) process. This process was designed and delivered entirely by the Youth Panel, who devised the questions they thought were important to ask as well as youth friendly methods of engaging with beneficiaries.

Beneficiaries were asked what they had personally learned, gained or developed from the GMHT programme. Many young people reflected on a general improvement in their confidence, either in their ability to approach job seeking or to undertake specific employment-related training:

“I wasn't very confident at going out and getting jobs and that because of previous events and she's boosted me up without giving up on me.”

“That I can do it, I mean; I'm doing a university course on policing now. I'm doing it at Hopwood Hall [a college and training provider]. I'm doing it now, I've been getting Distinctions.”

Beneficiaries also spoke about improvements in their communication, and ability to interact with people they do not know:

“I feel like I find it easier to approach people and ask questions and stuff because before I usually would just sit and deal with it.... If I have an issue or if I need to know something and I will go and ask rather than just like guessing figuring it out myself.”

“I'd say interactive skills like face-to-face talking, putting my ideas on the table...Phone calls as well because we've had phone meetings so I'm more confident on the phone and stuff like that.”

Some beneficiaries described an improvement in their understanding of their own mental health and improved acceptance of this, as well as gaining the skills needed to manage this such as journaling, which has helped them to feel less confused and better able to express themselves:

“It's okay not to be okay and yeah, just get support whenever you want.”

“Honesty I suppose, but not in a bad way, more being honest with myself.”

“Working with XXXX I started learning that it's okay to be myself and that I'm able to go outside more without having panic attacks, as such I find myself looking for exits far less often.”

One young person connected improvement with their mental health with improved independence, describing how they now feel able to get on a bus by themselves, which is something they did not previously feel able to do.

Progression Plans: At the end of the programme, beneficiaries receive support to complete a Progression Plan with their Talent Coach. Beneficiaries have the opportunity to reflect on what they have achieved whilst on the programme; skills they have gained and/or developed; and the opportunities that they have participated in.

Achievements: analysis of the Progression Plans received to date reveals two key themes relating to achievements. The first is an improvement in confidence, which reflects the findings from the Peer Evaluation reports. This can be linked to improved awareness of employability

skills but also more widely to beneficiaries' confidence to speak to people they do not know; to ask for help when needed; or travel to places on public transport.

“My confidence has improved- I am OK at travelling to different places now on my own. I am more confident in speaking to different people.”

“...during my time on the programme I feel I have opened up a little more than I usually would”

“I have gained a lot more confidence in myself and around other people”

The second, often related theme is improved mental health and/or wellbeing. Some beneficiaries related their increased confidence to the fact that they felt better able to manage their mental health. **“I have worked very hard on my confidence and coping strategies for anxiety”**. Similarly, one beneficiary reflected being better able to **“understand feelings and how to deal with them”**. Another plan highlights the relationship between confidence and self-esteem: **“I am more confident, [I] feel better about myself”**.

Many beneficiaries referred to support they have received to develop habits that are more positive, and related this to improved wellbeing. Some young people report having a routine, including getting out of bed every day, as a positive achievement.

Skills: the most commonly referred to skill listed by beneficiaries in their Progression Plans relates to interview skills, followed by job searching skills. Some Plans reflect the fact that young people have been offered virtual interviews, and refer to the skills needed to succeed in online and telephone interviews. It is interesting that skills not necessarily associated with employability are referred to almost as frequently. Several beneficiaries list an ability to budget and manage their finances as a skill they have developed during their time on the programme. Budgeting is sometimes mentioned as a skill in its own right, and sometimes in relation to becoming more independent. One beneficiary explains how learning how to budget has helped them to pay for travel. Another explains how it was part of their preparation for moving to University:

“I have learned to budget my finances. I have also learned to cook budget meals. My Talent Coach gave me some recipes and ideas [on] how to shop on a budget. Also, the meals are nutritious”

Opportunities: in the sample of Progression Plans analysed, most beneficiaries listed opportunities relating to education and training courses. This is perhaps because employment opportunities were limited during the second year of the programme when many employers were furloughing staff as a means of avoiding redundancies rather than recruiting. Some young people, who had perhaps not considered returning to education, did so in order to avoid becoming long-term NEET. Others chose this route after their initial experience of work was not what they had expected.

“I have also been given chances to work...and found that the job I wanted at the beginning wasn't for me and now have gone back to college to become a police officer”

Many beneficiaries did cite gaining employment in their Progression Plans, as well as pre-employment opportunities including volunteering, work placements and work experience.

Employment Case Studies: Throughout the course of the programme, we have supported Delivery Partners to write detailed case studies in order to give some context about their work with young people. It is clear from the case studies relating to young people who have successfully been supported into paid employment, that their journeys towards this goal have not been straightforward.

[Aylish](#) had previous work experience but was unemployed due to long-term health conditions at the point of referral. She is described as “struggling with severe anxiety, feeling very down and lonely”. She was encouraged to join an art therapy class at G-Force, the organisation where her Talent Coach worked. This led to her volunteering at a local sheltered housing scheme with G-Force, offering arts and crafts activities as well as manicures to residents. At this point, she was confident enough to apply successfully for paid employment, which she maintained with support from her Talent Coach to re-negotiate her role. Aylish summarises her journey:

“Tina, my Talent Coach, gave me my confidence and my drive back. I took a step forward and I also chose to take a step to the side onto a different path and I have not looked back.”

Similarly, [Owen](#) took a different route to reach his desired goal of working for the Police. He had originally received support to apply to a University course in policing. However, after his first term Owen realised that the experience was not right for him and he returned home. Like Aylish, Owen began to struggle with mental health issues and was referred to 42nd Street and his GP for specialist support.

Throughout this period, Owen maintained contact with his Talent Coach through both virtual and socially distanced face-to-face meetings. When Owen found an Admin apprenticeship with the GM Police, his Talent Coach was able to support him to apply. Andy (Talent Coach) explains:

“Owen has shown a lot of resilience in dealing with setbacks and learning to manage his anxiety. He didn’t let this stop him and showed a lot of self-determination. Working for the police was a long-held ambition and he got there.”

Finally, when [Dylan](#) was first referred to the Hidden Talent programme at Groundwork he had only just turned 18 years old and had no means of living independently. He was quickly supported to apply for a form of photo identification and a bank account, both of which are essential in order to be able to claim Universal Credit. He was also supported to apply for the Our Pass free public transport pass in order to boost his ability to travel for study or work. Dylan was supported to start a traineeship, although he was unable to complete the work placement aspect of this during the Covid-19 lockdown. However, having completed the English and Maths qualifications he was able to successfully apply for paid employment. Within his first month of employment, Dylan was awarded Employee of the Month! Nicky, his Talent Coach explained how she supported Dylan to appreciate how small changes can contribute towards bigger goals.

“Once he had a little bit of independence e.g. ID, a bank account, means of travel and some money, it seemed to change his whole outlook and vastly improved his mind-set. He is now employed and has an increased sense of self-worth. The belief that he can steer his own course in life is evident. His next step is to live independently - something that seemed impossible when I first supported him.”

Work with Greater Manchester’s Good Employment Charter

The rollout of the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter (GM GEC) coincided conveniently with GMHT’s delivery timeline, offering the potential for collaborative work around employer engagement. The GM GEC is a voluntary membership and assessment scheme, creating improved employment standards across Greater Manchester.

It was apparent that there was direct crossover between the programme’s strategic aim of encouraging employers to make their recruitment processes accessible, and the Charter’s

characteristics of good employment (good recruitment is one of these characteristics) that prospective Charter members would need to evidence themselves against.

Building on the relationship established in the first year of GMHT, in which both the Employer Engagement Officer and the Youth Panel spoke at GM GEC workshops, our toolkit about supporting recruitment practices to get the best out of young people was added to the Recruitment resources section of the GEC website.

Work with the national Youth Employment Group

GMCVO joined forces with youth experts and others across the country to tackle the problem of unemployment among young people in the wake of COVID-19. Over 140 of the country's leading youth charities, employer groups and experts united to form the 'COVID-19 Youth Employment Group', a cross-sector emergency response to rising concerns about the economic and educational impact of coronavirus on young people.

The Youth Employment Group is led by Impetus, the Youth Futures Foundation, The Prince's Trust, Youth Employment UK and the Institute for Employment Studies. It designs, delivers, and campaigns for solutions to the immediate and long-term impact on young people's employment prospects, particularly those who already face considerable challenges entering the labour market. One example of the successes of the YEG's campaign is the DWP Kickstart placement initiative.

GMCVO staff and Youth Panel members participated in relevant working groups including "Providing employability support during lockdown"; "Ensuring a quality welfare-to-work system post-lockdown" and "Ensuring effective and accurate use of data". We were able to highlight the views and experiences of the Youth Panel, the holistic support offered by the Talent Match and Hidden Talent programmes, and how Hidden young people were continuously not included in employment support provision. When the draft report was circulated, the Youth Panel spent an afternoon going through the draft recommendations and their detailed comments were given to the leaders of each subgroup. Therefore, Hidden Talent ensured that young people's voice was able to feed into a national campaign and influence policy decisions around employment support for young people.²

² <https://www.impetus.org.uk/assets/publications/Youth-Employment-Group-Final-Working-Group-Recommendations-August-2020.pdf>

What We Have Learnt

Peer Evaluation and Youth Panel Evaluation summary

The Youth Panel began planning the Peer Evaluation process in August 2020, as it was clear that restrictions caused by the national and local lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic would mean that the Year 1 process could not be simply duplicated in Year 2. The first peer-led conversations occurred at the end of November 2020, and the final conversations at the beginning of February '21. Delivery Partners received their individual reports in January and February '21, and the [collated report](#) was published in March'21.

What did we learn about the programme?

Some clear themes emerged from the findings of the individual reports. One was the quality of the one-to-one relationship between beneficiaries and their Talent Coach or Mental Health Practitioner. Beneficiaries repeatedly described the understanding, supportive and non-judgmental nature of these relationships. It is perhaps not surprising that Coaches and Practitioners were most frequently described as outgoing; friendly; helpful and amazing.

A second theme was an appreciation of the holistic support provided by Talent Coaches, which had an increased focus on wellbeing, including physical and mental health of young people in the second year of the programme. Beneficiaries also referenced financial support, including referrals to food banks, and work that Talent Coaches had done with their wider families.

All the beneficiaries who took part in the evaluation process felt an increase in confidence. This included not only an increase in confidence to move towards employment, but also in their communication skills and in their ability to develop independence, such as their confidence to travel on public transport. The answers also indicated that many young people had an improved understanding of their own mental health and wellbeing, and often an increased acceptance of this.

Whilst the responses regarding the impact of the pandemic on beneficiaries' experience of the programme were mixed, more than half acknowledged that it had had a negative impact. Most young people attributed this to the fact that communication with their Coach had changed from in person meetings, to mobile messaging or WhatsApp.

What did we learn about the Peer Evaluation process?

The process of planning and delivering the peer-led evaluation conversations, and then writing up the individual and collated reports was long: starting in August 2020 and finishing with the publication of the collated report in March 2021. It can be difficult for the Youth Panel and the staff involved to maintain momentum and motivation for the duration of such a long piece of work. However, we know from the subsequent evaluation of the Youth Panel's work, that the Peer Evaluation model is regarded by many stakeholders as one of the most important functions of the Youth Panel.

The fact that the Panel were only able to carry out conversations over the phone had a negative impact on the process. The Panel's offer to deliver the conversation over Zoom was not an option chosen by any participants, and in-person conversations were not permitted under the restrictions at the time. However, Talent Coaches told us that phone conversations with a stranger were a barrier to participation for some beneficiaries. A text survey may have enabled more beneficiaries to participate, as some may have felt more comfortable with this than a phone call.

This method also reduced the participation of some Panel members who were similarly uncomfortable to have phone calls with beneficiaries that they did not know. However, these Panel members had been involved in the planning process and had the opportunity to listen back to the recorded calls and contribute to subsequent discussions.

In the evaluation of the Youth Panel, the Panel Coordinator also reflected that the use of phone calls required more staff support than the previous in-person conversations. This was partly because the only phone available was her work phone, which was only available for the Panel to use during the sessions. As such, text reminders sent in advance of the booked conversations to beneficiaries had to be sent by the Panel Coordinator. Additionally, it was necessary to have a staff member present during the phone calls in order to help prompt the questions and keep the conversation flowing, which was not necessary during previous the in-person conversations.

Summary of learning from the Youth Panel Evaluation

The full Youth Panel Evaluation report is included as an Appendix to this report. It focuses on the support allocated to the Youth Panel; the recruitment and support of its members; the impact that the Panel made on the design, delivery and evaluation of GM's Hidden Talent; and the personal impact that volunteering on the Panel has made to its members. In order to gain feedback on all aspects of the Panel's work, we interviewed project team members; Delivery Partners; employers; members of the Strategic Steering Group and current members of the Youth Panel. The report sets out recommendations for how GMCVO could work with the Panel on future youth employment programmes.

It is clear that everyone interviewed for the evaluation valued the unique input of the Youth Panel in the design, delivery and evaluation of GM's Hidden Talent. There is a joint vision of the Panel at the heart of the programme, which is seen as integral to the programme's success. Over the course of the programme, the Youth Panel have been involved in all its aspects: commissioning and recruitment of key staff; delivery of the strategic aims; governance; employer engagement; monitoring and evaluation. Their decisions have been listened to and acted upon.

Whilst the report contains many recommendations from different partners including Panel members, these are seen as things that could build upon the foundations that the GM Talent Match and GM's Hidden Talent Panels have created. The key recommendations relate to capacity: both of the Youth Panel Coordinator and the Panel. It is widely felt that having a full time Coordinator could improve the experience of Panel members, as a wider range of activities could be offered and support for the Panel to do a wider range of work with partners. Equally, having more members on the Panel would increase their capacity to deliver work with partners and to represent the range of young people engaged in the wider programme.

Whilst the report has only been shared with a small number of stakeholders that were directly involved with the programme, it has the potential to be used to advocate for the importance of youth voice in strategic decision making beyond the GMHT programme. Certainly, GMYN have pledged to embed some of the Recommendations into their planning for a young peoples' Leadership Group.

Delivery Partner Quarterly progress reports

Throughout the programme, Delivery Partners submitted a quarterly progress report. Partners were able to submit up to three issues that had arisen each quarter. Emerging themes were discussed at either Talent Coach or Delivery Partner meetings in order to address them collaboratively. Analysis of all reports submitted over the course of the programme has highlighted some key themes.

The Referral Process

The Delivery Partners' ability to source new referrals to meet their targets was raised as an issue throughout the programme. However, the reasons for this difficulty were different in the first and second years. In the first year of the programme, Talent Coaches were receiving ineligible referrals i.e. for young people who were already claiming benefits, or had not been out of work or education for six months. Some Delivery Partners found that previous referral pathways, particularly JCP, were no longer appropriate. Some Delivery Partners created drop-in sessions for young people to find out about the programme and refer themselves, but these were not a consistent source of referrals. This was no longer a viable option in the second year of the programme when Covid-19 restrictions were in place.

Delivery Partners also reported that referral pathways with external organisations “dried up” in the second year as staff from these organisations were furloughed, or their direct contact with young people was paused when face-to-face work paused. Partners also reported receiving ineligible referrals from young graduates straight out of university that could not secure employment, or from young people made redundant because of the pandemic.

Maintaining contact with beneficiaries

This issue was also consistently raised throughout both years of the programme. To some extent, this is a known risk when working with this cohort of young people: many programme beneficiaries had chaotic or unstable home environments and a significant proportion were homeless. In other cases, beneficiaries frequently changed mobile contact details and did not necessarily update their Coach. However, these issues were exacerbated in the second year of the programme during periods when face-to-face working was prohibited. Whilst Coaches were able to maintain contact with many beneficiaries through text, WhatsApp and calls, some beneficiaries and Youth Panel members disengaged at the start of the pandemic. The reasons for this are varied and complex, but some beneficiaries simply did not feel as engaged with the programme without in-person support. Some may have disengaged as job hunting may no longer have been a priority, or may have felt unrealistic. However, we have little evidence to support the theory that beneficiaries disengaged due to digital exclusion.

Lack of suitable opportunities

This was mentioned in every report from Quarter 2 of Year 1. Talent Coaches often raised the issue of entry-level roles, with many roles requiring entry-level qualifications that beneficiaries did not have and that Talent coaches thought were disproportionate to the role. Many Delivery Partners were able to find opportunities for beneficiaries to study for qualifications, but classroom based learning did not appeal to some beneficiaries. Furthermore, some beneficiaries required support to get the photo ID required to enroll at college.

Issues relating to traineeships were discussed at a Talent Coach meeting, and subsequently shared with the GM Learning Provider Network. Coaches were concerned that training providers were inflating the qualifications required to enroll on a traineeship, in order to attract students that did not require intensive support to gain English and Maths qualifications. It was also noted that some young people could not afford to work without being paid and, as such, traineeships were of limited appeal. In the second year of the programme, some Delivery Partners noted that whilst the academic elements of a traineeship could be delivered online, the actual work placements often could not be offered. This resulted in young people disengaging from traineeships. (<https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/case-studies/talent-coach-nicky-lays-groundwork-employee-month-dylan>)

We know from the first year of the programme and from GM Talent Match, that retail and hospitality are both sectors that employ a large number of young people. However, these opportunities are often insecure and were not available during the second year of the programme when high streets closed during lockdown. Also concerning was the drop in

employment rates in the construction sector, from 58% of beneficiaries entering employment in Year 1, to only 9% in Year 2. However, we know that construction remains a buoyant sector and can perhaps attribute the decline in young people moving into the sector to the fact that many could not gain their CSCS card qualification remotely. The Green economy is forecast to be a buoyant sector during the recovery, and this also involves construction roles. Finally, we know that the logistics industry has thrived during the last year due to the increase in online shopping when the high street closed. However, Talent Coaches are concerned that entry-level roles, such as warehouse work, is often insecure and largely done through agencies. Some Talent Coaches advise caution when seeking work in this sector, due to previous negative experiences in relation to employee wellbeing reported by beneficiaries.

For future programmes, we will change the way we work with employers in order to both create more opportunities, and promote them to Talent Coaches. Firstly, we will aim to collaborate with the GM Chamber of Commerce (GMCC) again, as we did on the GM Talent Match programme. This enables Talent Coaches to make direct connections with local employers at events hosted by GMCC. Secondly, we will make a stronger connection to potential opportunities through the “Be Clear, Remove the Fear” service delivered by the Youth Panel. We will aim to leverage opportunities such as a workplace tour, or work experience with businesses that request the BCRF service, as we will be confident that they are interested in employing young people. Finally, our analysis of the use of Facebook Workplace as an internal communications tool for Talent Coaches and Delivery Partners has highlighted that this was an underused platform. In the future, we would provide a regular email bulletin that would contain pre-employment and employment opportunities, as well as case studies and updates from Delivery Partners.

Why Hidden Young People don't Claim

In August 2020, we analysed information available to us from beneficiaries' registration questionnaires, to improve our understanding of why young people on the programme hadn't claimed benefits before they joined GM's Hidden Talent.³ We also spoke to Talent Coaches to gain their perspective. In September 2020, the Youth Panel added their feedback about their experience of Jobcentre Plus (JCP).

As of August 10th 2020, 85% of young people who had registered to the programme had never previously claimed benefits (198/232 young people). Of 172 active young people who had not claimed at any point in their lives, 158 gave reasons:

- 36 mentioned not knowing they were eligible or the perceived difficulty of claiming

Several Delivery Partners told us that some young people do not have ID – a requirement to open a claim. This was frequently raised as a challenge in Delivery Partners' quarterly reports. The fact that 11% of beneficiaries felt that their level of literacy, numeracy and IT literacy was not good enough to get by on a day to day basis, will account for some young people not having been able to navigate the claiming process without Talent Coach support.

One Delivery Partner explained that some young people, who do have the understanding of how to claim, might lack the confidence to then attend their appointments. Across these 36 young people, there were repeated negative perceptions of Job Centre staff and seven separate mentions of friends having had bad experiences of claiming. This was echoed by the Youth Panel's reflections of their experiences with JCP.

³ <https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/case-studies/why-young-people-gm%E2%80%99s-hidden-talent-do-not-claim-benefits-%E2%80%93-august-2020-snapshot>

- 23 instances of people having been either previously too young to claim, or being in college or working (so not needing to claim). Three young people cited living off savings from previous jobs
- 18 young people have never claimed for reasons that could be grouped under feelings of pride

The common theme here is a young person's self-image and perceptions of how others see them. Example quotes from young people include: "It's not the done thing", "I don't want to rely on the system", "It's scruffy", "I'm not that desperate", and "I don't want to be a scrounger."

- 13 young people specifically mention getting financial support from family or partner. Given that 86% of the GM's Hidden Talent cohort live with family it is quite possible that more are receiving financial support from family. Delivery Partners report that some young people are not encouraged by the family to take on responsibility for their lives, which can lead to young people becoming too comfortable and reliant on parental financial support.
- 11 young people's reason for not claiming were variations on this comment: "I don't want to claim benefits, I prefer to just find work."
- 43 / 55 young people who report having a disability that limits their ability to work, and 18 / 26 who report a mental health difficulty that limits their ability to work, have never claimed benefits.
- There are four instances of young people not claiming because they worry that doing so will affect the claims of other family members in the house.
- Out of the 34 young people who had previously claimed, 10 cited previously negative experiences or sanctions as reasons for not claiming.

Youth Panel's reflections of their experience of JCP

These comments were gathered during a Youth Panel session in September 2020. Quotes have been summarised and paraphrased.

YP 1: Hasn't had much experience but has a lot of friends who have used it:

"I don't have any glowing reviews of the job centre."

"I've heard that a lot of young people are put off asking for the help they are entitled to. I had a friend who went in and she didn't have a good experience. She was on crutches and her mobility was affected but she was still threatened with sanctions if she was late or missed her appointment."

"The doctors are actually friendlier and more lenient than the job centre when it comes to missing or being late for appointments."

"Sometimes they can be outright rude to people. Sometimes adults think that because you're a teenager or you look young that you are up to no good and they talk down to you and patronise you. It's hard to pinpoint it as it's so subtle but it's there."

"They are not even empathetic to you in a bad situation."

"I've heard the Job Centre called so many names – the most PG would be the joke shop or the money grabbers – the others are not really PG, I won't repeat them here!"

“The advisors are rude. They just ask if you have been looking for a job. No hello, how are you, how was your day.”

“If they overpay you or lend you any extra money the way they ask for it back is intimidating and threatening.”

“That’s what I’ve seen so far and I’m not looking forward to dealing with the Job Centre.”

YP 2: Is now claiming Universal Credit but all experience has been by phone due to the pandemic:

“I am currently on Universal Credit but other than checking in they haven’t really been in touch.

“My job centre is pretty nice and friendly, asking hello and how are you doing and stuff. That is on the phone though and I suppose no two places are the same.”

YP 3: Said they haven’t really used it enough to make a judgement but then said the following:

“I’ve only been twice. Once for the initial appointment and the second time to meet my Work Coach. The options were quite limited – retail, office jobs, catering – so it wasn’t as relevant to me because I want a job in the creative industry, but I understand why that was because they just need to get people into a job.”

“I didn’t get the experience I would have liked. They were not able to support me finding work I actually want. Those options don’t seem to be available at the job centre and I have found most opportunities myself.”

“I feel like I haven’t had a bad experience, but I haven’t had a good experience either.”

YP 1 then chipped into this with: “There is a common similarity between retail, office jobs and catering – the jobs on offer at the job centre – they are not paid well, especially when you first start out. They need to offer better job options for people.”

We are currently applying for funding from the DWP’s Flexible Support Fund scheme which will allow us to continue this research.

Talent Coach and Delivery Partner meetings

During the first year of the programme, the project team facilitated quarterly meetings for both Talent Coaches and Delivery Partners. However, as soon as the first national lockdown was imposed in March 2020, we realised that we needed to increase our contact and communication to both sets of stakeholders.

It was important to increase the frequency of Talent Coach meetings to monthly in order to avoid Talent Coaches feeling as though they were working in isolation from the programme when they began working from home. We appreciated that this was a difficult shift for some Coaches to make, as they were used to and enjoyed face-to-face delivery with young people. The Talent Coach meetings gave the group an opportunity to share their frustrations with their peers in a safe space, and to offer and receive peer support.

It was also important that the Programme Manager attended these meetings in order to provide reassurance regarding continuity of funding for the programme, and to emphasise that we were realistic about previously agreed targets relating to young people moving towards employment.

The meetings provided an opportunity for us to hear directly from the Coaches how beneficiaries were dealing with the pandemic. Many Coaches spoke about the increased need to provide mental health and wellbeing support, and pause work that they were previously doing to support job searching. The project team were able to reflect this information when attending strategic meetings with local authorities, and in the GM Youth Guarantee task force meetings.

Initially, the frequency of Delivery Partner meetings was also increased to monthly. However, from April 2020 we reduced the frequency to 6-8 weekly in order to avoid duplication of information between the Talent coach and Delivery Partner meetings and to manage capacity. Meetings had an increased focus on wellbeing for both Talent Coaches and Delivery partners, as we recognised that beneficiaries receive a better quality of service when the people delivering the service have positive wellbeing themselves. All meetings began with an icebreaker designed to create an informal and welcoming atmosphere. We shared resources such as the [Skills for Care toolkit](#) and shared good practice from the different organisations regarding support for staff wellbeing.

From the summer of 2020 onwards, national and local initiatives to respond to the economic consequences of the pandemic were rapidly developing. The GMHT programme was better able to respond to, and influence, these developments due to more frequent contact with Talent Coaches and Delivery Partners. We were able to ensure that the DWP kept partners updated with developments of virtual and physical Youth Hubs, and the Kickstart scheme. We were able to listen to Talent Coaches and Delivery Partners concerns about these developments and ensure that we reflected these in the strategic meetings we attended. At the same time, development work on the GM Youth Guarantee began and we were able to discuss this and feedback via the task force work groups.

Partnership working

We knew from our experience of GM Talent Match, that mental health posed a barrier to employment for a significant proportion of beneficiaries. In response, we commissioned specialist mental health provision from 42nd Street for Hidden Talent beneficiaries that could be accessed without a waiting list. Young people could self-refer, or refer with support from their Talent Coach, to receive specialist therapeutic support.

Written at the start of the second year of the programme, this [case study](#) illustrates some of the key factors that needed to be in place for this offer to work well. In total, 41% of referrals to 42nd Street were Early Break beneficiaries. This case study highlights the importance of collaboration between the Talent Coach and the Mental Health Practitioner (MHP), to present a cohesive offer to the beneficiary.

It is important that beneficiaries understand the connection between their mental health and their ability to progress towards their employment goals. Hanan, the Mental Health Practitioner from 42nd Street, explained that the therapeutic sessions helped young people to be able to break down long-term goals into manageable objectives. It is also important that beneficiaries see that their Talent Coach, with whom they already have a trusting relationship, has a good working relationship with the MHP that they have professional confidence in each other's' work.

The collaborative nature of the relationship between the MHP and the Talent Coach at Early Break ensured that their individual sessions with beneficiaries complemented each other, and supported the same goals for beneficiaries. This was achieved through regular communication between both parties about their work and the progress of beneficiaries.

Key to the success of this relationship was the fact that the MHP was able to base herself at the Early Break premises for one day per week. This enabled her to build an informal relationship with many of the Hidden Talent beneficiaries, and removed the barrier of travel into central Manchester to access the service. This is learning that we aim to take forward on future programmes: allocating specific beneficiary expenses for young people to use to access mental health support in their local area should they choose.

The Talent Coach model

We have written previously about the benefits of the autonomy that Talent Coaches have to work in a way that is tailored to the unique needs of each beneficiary.⁴ The flexibility that Coaches had in the second year of the programme enabled them to switch their focus to support beneficiary wellbeing when this was needed, rather than employability. It also enabled them to continue to work remotely, using video calls and WhatsApp to retain communication during periods of lockdown, and socially distanced in-person work in the community when permitted.

⁴ <https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/case-studies/talent-coach-approach>

What We Have Spent

Hidden Talent Finances

Timeline	Amount
Year 1 (Mar 19 – Apr 20)	279,567
Year 2 (Apr 20 – Mar 21)	302,035
Year 3 (Apr 21 – Jun 21)	70,685
Total	652,287

Timeline	Amount
Funding b/f from Talent Match	85,156
Lottery funding (years 1 & 2)	500,000
Lottery funding (year 3)	67,131
Total	652,287

Conclusion

A key piece of learning from the delivery of the second year of the programme has been that it is the flexibility of the Talent Coach model, and the resilience of the partners that deliver it, that has enabled us to adapt the programme and continue to deliver it throughout the national lockdowns and regional tiered restrictions. This ensured that young people received tailored support at the time when they most needed it. This is particularly pertinent when we consider that other youth employment providers stopped delivering in-person sessions.

This report has highlighted the breadth of work that the programme has achieved, not only with young people but also with employers, through the development of resources and the facilitation of an online event. This is a legacy that will continue beyond the programme as the next iteration of the Youth Panel at GMYN are developing an interactive workshop to build on their learning from “Be Clear, Remove the Fear”. Furthermore, the programme has had a wider strategic reach than initially envisioned through our involvement with both the national Youth Employment Group; the regional Youth Guarantee and Kickstart Board, all of which were established in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

GMCVO has been well placed to bring organisations together in order to deliver the programme’s strategic aims. The Strategic Steering Group brought together employers and the GM Chamber of Commerce with the DWP and local authority strategic leads. This resulted in direct work between these organisations and the Youth Panel and Delivery Partners. We have ensured that Delivery Partners were well connected to both KickStart and Youth Hubs opportunities in their boroughs, as well as to wider funding opportunities. The Hidden Talent model has also enabled micro organisations, such as G-Force, to be part of a larger funding programme.

Finally, in line with the “test, learn and share” ethos at GMCVO, learning from the programme has been captured throughout the course of the programme and used not only for the purpose of this evaluation, but for funding bids that have been submitted in order to continue this much needed support beyond this programme. It has also been shared with stakeholders in order support their work with hidden young people.

Demographic Information



