



## Introduction

**Greater Manchester's Hidden Talent (January-June 2022) was funded by the UK Government through the UK Community Renewal Fund of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), and led by GMCVO.**

**It was a youth employment programme which provided support to young people aged 16 - 25 who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) to progress into an education, employment or training outcome.**

## How was the programme delivered?

- Talent Coaches, based in community-based employment support organisations across Greater Manchester, provided strength-based and holistic support to young people. They were afforded considerable professional autonomy in how they flexibly provided services (albeit with requirement to complete standard reporting), and collaboration and dialogue were fostered across all partners and stakeholders with regular meetings.
- Additional budget provision was allocated to mental health support as a key barrier to address for young people to pay for additional services in this area. The seriousness of concerns about young people's mental health requires urgent action above and beyond what can be achieved in an employment-focused project.
- In-work support was provided to young people that moved into employment, which was of great value to both young people and employers.
- A youth-led approach was modelled through the engagement of the Greater Manchester Youth Network's (GMYN) Youth Panel creating an important legacy which aligns with a co-production model as a measure of good practice in public services.
- The average cost to support each young person on the programme was £2,200.



## What did the programme achieve?

- **Virtually all young people (95%) were supported with life skills. 85% were assisted with job search skills.**
- **37 young people (26%) achieved an employment outcome.**
- **38 young people (27%) secured an education and training outcome.**

Hidden young people achieved better employment outcomes than unemployed peers (34% against 17%). In contrast, unemployed young people achieved better education and training outcomes (33% against 23%).

Using a proximity to the labour market (PLM) measure (adapted from Greater Manchester Talent Match), generally young people made positive progress against twelve indicators. On average, the distance a young person travelled was 1.09 points on a scale of one to five (relating to the twelve indicators), band one indicating greater distance and band five greater proximity to the labour market. This measure provides an alternative and more nuanced quantitative presentation of outcomes illustrating how the intervention nudges beneficiaries forward.

The development of strong and trusting relationships between talent coaches and young people was crucial as a basis to move forward. Engagement with talent coaches contributed to cognitive, emotional, and behavioural development.

There was mutual benefit for all parties through partnership working in enhancing both planning and delivery of the project. The engagement of a diverse group of delivery partners as well as Advisory Group members meant the project drew upon diverse skills, knowledge, and experience. These partnerships can continue beyond project-end.

Partnerships with employers and DWP representatives on the Advisory Group allowed the project to be informed by, as well as influence, these important institutions for young people's employment. Ongoing work is required with these groups to support the pipeline of young people who are NEET into the labour market.

## What young people benefited from the programme?

Hidden Talent has been highly effective in reaching hidden young people. 142 young people participated in the programme. Of this;

- **51% were economically inactive (including hidden)**
- **49% were registered as unemployed and receiving benefits**
- **61% of beneficiaries were men compared to 35% women. National figures consistently report that more young men than women are NEET and Hidden Talent reflects this pattern.**
- **75% were White British and the remainder identified as from a variety of other ethnic groups. Young people from ethnically diverse backgrounds have a higher risk of becoming NEET so it is positive that 25% of the beneficiary cohort were from ethnically diverse backgrounds.**
- **The highest number of declared disabilities were mental health (16%), social/communication disorder (10%) and learning difficulties (9%).**
- **Many young people had characteristics and circumstances associated with major barriers to education, employment, and training. Notably, on self-disclosure, 30% declared they were neurodiverse, 27% had a mental health condition and 17% had experienced homelessness.**
- **94% of young people were from seven Greater Manchester boroughs; Manchester (n - 30), Oldham (n - 22), Bolton (n - 16) Rochdale (n - 18), Salford (n - 17) Stockport (n - 19) and Bury (n - 11).**



## Other Insights

Despite efforts by the DWP to improve take-up of Benefits and active engagement as a project partner, both young people and stakeholders had negative perceptions of the experience of making a claim for Universal Credit (or other Benefits) and attending the Job Centre. Barriers to claim included the social stigma associated with being a claimant, an inaccessibility in making and sustaining a Benefits claim, and fears about the repercussions of sanctions. With fears of poverty increasing, this low take-up of entitled Benefits is an urgent problem.

Mental health issues for young people are increasing. These have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Mental health and wellbeing are an important factor in the development of young people's sustainable employability and need to be recognised in any youth employment programme. Mental health conditions often intersect with other barriers such as being a care leaver, ex-offender, having a disability or being homeless.

Youth employment programmes should be allocated a minimum of twelve months funding and ideally have permanent, secure funding. Despite the good outcomes achieved by the project, there were serious misgivings about such important work being allocated short-term funding.

## Project Legacy

Successive iterations of Hidden Talent support the importance of seeking out and working with hidden young people. Not only has the high number of hidden young people been recognised but the productive scope of working with them. In this project many of their outcomes exceeded unemployed young people.

Hidden Talent has provided a foundation for many delivery partners to continue their work through other funding (via GMCA).

The modelling of a youth-led approach is an important feature that will continue into other projects and influences how Job Centres and others approach youth employment provision.

GMYN's Youth Panel and GMCVO continue to work together having won a tender to carry out a Peer Evaluation of the Prince's Trust's Future Workforce Fund programme from July 2022 - Dec 2022.

## Lessons for future policy & practice

In Greater Manchester, the Young Person's Guarantee policy framework complements lessons learnt from Hidden Talent and recommendations that have emerged from the evaluation. Our lessons specifically relate to supporting young people to move towards active participation in the labour market and to be able to sustain decent work for the future.

Young people as early entrants to the labour market need tailored provision of relevant advice about education, employment, and training. This will have an important benefit for the economy and society as they move towards being active citizens and workers.



**Recommendation 1:** Building on the good practice model of delivery from Hidden Talent, establish a permanently funded careers advisory/employment support service for all young people (including those that are NEET). With varied provision depending on young people's circumstances, this could be co-ordinated via appropriate youth hubs in collaboration with Third Sector organisations and focus on advice for education, employment, and training.

The inter-relationship between education, employment, training, and other aspects of young people's lives needs to be recognised in youth employment programmes.

**Recommendation 2:** Ensure youth employment programmes have provision to support young people with varied barriers, e.g., available mental health support.

Very practical barriers reduce young people's ability to progress towards the labour market. This affects less well-off young people more.

**Recommendation 3:** Address the practical barriers that impede young people going into employment, e.g., introduce a young person discounted rate for both travel and ID costs.

**Recommendation 4:** Engage relevant transport authority (TfGM) as a partner in future youth employment projects to assist in improving access to travel.

Policymakers and employers can both create more strategies to help generate opportunities to support young people into education, employment, and training.

**Recommendation 5:** Build upon schemes such as KickStart to make work experience more widely available to young people (e.g., not just limited to those on Universal Credit). As part of this, appropriate opportunities need to be created for young people with disabilities who want to work.

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**Recommendation 6:** Employers to strengthen good HR practices and engage with initiatives such as the Good Employment Charter in Manchester. The Youth Employment Charter and Youth Employment UK's Youth Friendly Badge also provide a way to evidence employer commitment.

Data used to understand the progress of young people is not adequate. Systematic ways to track young people as they transition into the labour market are absent. Traditional measures of desired outcomes in youth employment programmes do not recognise the complexity of young people's lives and what constitutes progress.

**Recommendation 7:** Establishment of a robust system to monitor young people leaving education, training, and employment to ensure they do not get lost in transition. This could be administered by GMACS, with provision to direct to relevant careers advice.

**Recommendation 8:** Consideration of how diverse groups of young people are served effectively in appropriate projects. Scope to more explicitly appreciate how outcomes vary between different streams of young people facing different barriers.

Although officially adults (at least those over 18) young people have unique needs associated with their physical, emotional, and cognitive development. Dramatic and positive changes to young people's lives can be created by timely and appropriate interventions.

**Recommendation 9:** Recognition and appropriate funding in public policy of the unique needs of young people in the design and provision of support services in all aspects of their lives (e.g., careers and work, health, wellbeing, housing).