



Lifting Life Chances and Local Prosperity in King’s Lynn and West Norfolk: Five UKSPF People and Skills projects 2024-2025

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March 2025

Introduction

This report looks at the aims, achievements, collective challenges and opportunities of five UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), People and Skills projects in King's Lynn and West Norfolk from April 2024- March 2025.

The five projects in this report are VIY (Volunteer It Yourself); BOOST; On Track; Tech Skills for Life (TSfL); and VENI (The Visitor Economy Network Initiative). These projects were chosen by the Borough of Kings Lynn and West Norfolk as part of its UK Shared Prosperity Funded (UKSPF) People and Skills investment plan for the region.

All of the projects share a similar participant base and have been working with people who are either NEET (not in employment, education or training), or at risk of becoming NEET; as well as working with some of the most marginalised people across West Norfolk, including some people who have experienced or are experiencing multiple disadvantage, adversity, and trauma.

These projects share many common aims and approaches in their work to increase confidence, connection, resilience, well-being, pride in place; and to ultimately raise aspirations, life chances and local prosperity by bringing their participants closer to education, training, and employment.

They share several common barriers too, such as the rurality of the west Norfolk region, its lack of good public transport, negative perceptions of local environment, hard to reach participants, digital isolation, social isolation, mental ill-health and neurodiversity, local employer attitudes, young attitudes to work, low aspirations, project dropout rates, and funding uncertainties.

This report concludes that enhancing opportunities for these projects to build closer working relationships would bring a collective benefit to their work, with the potential to positively affect dropout rates, referral and follow-on processes, the needs of local employers and shared cultural knowledge through the sharing of project learnings, best practice, and shared experiences of working in King's Lynn and West Norfolk.

VIY (Volunteer It Yourself)

VIY bring a 'two for one' benefit to the local areas in which they work, delivering work experience, trade skills, and construction industry qualifications to the young people who take part in their projects, fixing local community spaces and places in need of repairs, improvements and renovation.

VIY began in 2012, following the recession, which saw lots of community buildings such as youth clubs close due to a lack of local funding, alongside significant skills gaps in the construction industry that continue to this day, where the average age of the workforce is now 45.

VIY work with disengaged and disadvantaged young people (91% of their learners are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET) who have been referred to them. VIY use a combination of volunteering and DIY to equip those young people with work experience that leads to real qualifications.

Young people are mentored by professional tradespeople and learn real on-site trade skills in a real environment, helping to transform their own community's buildings and places. This could be a sports club, a community centre, a community hall or garden. Everything they learn is on a real building, place or space that matters to people in their community. VIY's progressions teamwork then work with participants on next steps such as an CSCS card, further training, job search, or part time or full-time work within the construction sector.

Another vital part of VIY's work, is improving the profile and popularity of construction work by focussing on getting young people on site, challenging perceptions of construction work, and getting them an entry level qualification. Often these young people are quite surprised to find that the work is enjoyable and pays well. VIY have built strong partnerships construction and construction retail sector.

VIY work with a large number of agencies and organisations in the local area including YMCA Norfolk, Norfolk Youth Justice Service and Headway. They also work closely with BOOST, not only on referring young people to projects and others locally, but also to support young people post-project with further employability and job-searching.

A closer look at VIY over the past year

VIY receive fantastic feedback from the venues they work with. This year, with UKSPF funding, they have worked on the following projects in Kings Lynn and West Norfolk:

North Wootton Village Hall

VIY worked on helping North Wootton Village Hall to double the size of their storage space for their vital maintenance equipment by building a new external storage unit, and decorating parts of the venue externally.

Docking Village Hall

VIY undertook a range of much needed internal decoration to make the venue more welcoming and appealing, as well as constructing outside furniture to enable the space to be maximised. They also rebuilt a section of flint walling that had been damaged by a delivery vehicle adjacent to the entrance.

Wootton Park Recreation Association

VIY created a large decking area and viewing platform adjacent to the club house, overlooking the park and playing fields. They also constructed some outside furniture.

Springwood Family Centre

VIY built a new outdoor shelter space to allow children to spend more time outside, they upgraded a disability access ramp, currently deemed unsafe, and refurbished the play frames.

North Lynn Family Centre

VIY created an external entrance shelter to accommodate parents dropping off/collecting children in wet weather, they built raised beds that would help children develop an understanding of growing food and plants and built new 'play walls' that will encourage outdoor group play and enhance children's development.

St Augustine's Family Centre

VIY redecorated some of the heavily-used areas and welcome area – to help improve enjoyment of the space for hirers and users.

In total 92 young people were registered onto these projects, referred from partners including the King's Trust, Boost, College of West Anglia, Norfolk Youth Justice, UET Pathfinder (AP), Seetec, West Norfolk Police, Life Beyond Care, Post 16+ EET Service (Norfolk Council), and Headway. 41 of the participants have so far achieved Entry Level 3 City & Guilds accreditations in Carpentry, Painting & Decorating and Health & Safety, and six learners have already progressed into further training, with four going into employment.

Venues say:

"The shelters are perfect...the play walls are fantastic too, very heavy and strong – thank you."

"All tasks were completed to the highest of quality, we couldn't have asked for anything more. We thank you again for support."

"I would just like to say thank you again for another fantastic project. It looks amazing, and I think it will fit in fantastically with the restoration project for the rest of the pavilion that we are just about to embark on! I cannot praise your team highly enough for the care and consideration that they take in their work."

"Maintenance on a village hall such as ours, which is now over 87 years old, is continuous. In the last seven years since the present management team took on the task, we have brought an almost derelict building back into our village community, so VIY have helped us enormously. A job very well done."

Participants say:

"Really enjoyed the experience, learnt some skills which will help with job searching."

"Enjoyed the course, great practical work, I want to go into construction."

"Great work, great variety, really want to get into construction."

"Enjoyed everything, mentors were great."

What next for VIY?

VIY have another 8-10 potential projects already in the pipeline for the Kings Lynn and West Norfolk area. They are also hoping to help Norfolk council with retrofitting a large number of buildings.

VIY would like to continue their work in the area, and to reduce their drop-out rates, which they cite as one of the more challenging areas of the work they do.

BOOST

Since beginning in 2022, The BOOST project has demonstrated an impressive impact on the local areas in which they work, surpassing targets in their aim to help 16-30 year olds gain the support, skills, education and training they need to move closer to the workplace.

BOOST is led by Norfolk County Council working with The King's Lynn & West Norfolk Skills Group and was originally funded by the Town Deal fund in King's Lynn from 2022-2024. Over the past year, and with support from UKSPF, BOOST has become borough-wide.

BOOST works with NEET 16-30 year olds, unemployed 18-30 year olds, and 18-30 year olds in employment who would benefit from training and upskilling. The work BOOST does is person led and tailored to the individual needs of the young person they are working with and their local environment.

BOOST frequently partners with and refers to other local projects such as VIY, to deliver a huge range of training opportunities, workshops, and confidence and resilience building activities.

Among the many things that have made BOOST's work successful, is how well they know the areas in which they work, how quickly and efficiently they have been able to embed themselves in the local community, forming networks with other organisations and local employers there. It is this understanding of local issues, the needs and skills gaps of local employers, and the barriers, strengths, skills gaps and potential of the young people they work with that has allowed BOOST to excel at what they do.

"It's not a one size fits all approach because everyone has different challenges, and it can be layers of challenges"

BOOST's work begins when a young person is referred to them, that person will then have a one-to-one appointment where they are registered to the project and BOOST get more of an understanding of their challenges and aspirations. Often, these aspirations are quite low and so the project activity coordinators will work with them to try to get a sense of what they're interested in and encourage them.

Those who are closer to employment will be referred on to the digital youth hub, a bespoke programme commissioned by BOOST, which works to improve employability skills. For young people with more complex needs, BOOST tailors support for that individual.

In one example, BOOST worked with a young person who hadn't been out of their house for four years but who was interested in the environment, BOOST worked with The Greenlight Trust at Oxborough Hall, and then commissioned The Workshop project to work with the young person on building up confidence required to attend sessions. This young person was supported by BOOST over 18 months and is now in full time employment, working as a receptionist.

A closer look at BOOST over the past year

Having established their presence in King's Lynn and engaged with over 500 young people, BOOST was next able to continue its work from April 2024 with support from UKSPF, going borough-wide and focusing more attention on the steps required to help young people move closer to education, training and employment.

Over the past year BOOST has once again surpassed targets, working with 288 participants (targeted with 200) of which, 92 are actively engaged in job searching (targeted with 75). 37 people have been supported to participate in vocational education (targeted with 20) and 28 people have gained a recognised vocational qualification due to their engagement with the project. 33 people have gained employment having acquired additional skills or support for job searching, applications and interview preparation.

“Young people need to know that there is nothing wrong with starting at the bottom and working your way up, there is worth in working really hard and the value of hard work - they struggle with that if they've not enjoyed school”

During this past year BOOST have also prioritised improving confidence and resilience in the young people they work with, enabling them to build stronger connections outside their support network. They have also gained a greater understanding of conditions such as poor mental health, learning difficulties and autism

“The team's awareness and knowledge of the wider support system, being that first door to many other doors is really important”

Building on BOOST's local presence and connections with other services has been important this year, and BOOST have worked to increase local cultural knowledge, as well as fostering closer relationships with community-based organisations such as Purfleet Trust, Norfolk and Waveney Mind, YMCA and Family Action; NHS services; and training providers.

BOOST has worked on forming closer ties with local businesses to understand their employment needs, and skills gaps; and has attended networking events with the Federation of Small Businesses creating opportunities for work experience, talks and site tours. Membership in partnerships such as the West Norfolk Skills Assembly, West and Breckland Community Forum has also been very beneficial.

“If transport is a bit of a challenge, we can immediately give them some new confidence skills working with someone they’ve never met before, learning new skills and riding away on a bike -You can’t measure that.”

BOOST has also been able to spend some time addressing broader barriers of the local area such as a lack of good transport links for young people by working with an organisation that teaches people how to ride and maintain a bike safely, and provides them with a bike, a lock and a helmet at the end of a session.

Participants say:

“Currently, finding work is extremely tough, and having Boost to support and guide me personally definitely helped me stay focused and driven to continue the search. I would recommend the Boost project to those finding work as it kept me resilient and motivated, but it also gave me the confidence to feel able to work as well.”

“I’m so happy I’ve done this course, it’s like I’m a different person because I’m now realising I need to look after my own mental health”

What next for BOOST?

“There are a whole section of young people who don’t have anyone on their side and we would really like to be that for them... Generationally, culturally, societally, the dial needs to shift for these young people earlier”

Next year, BOOST hope to continue building on their existing work, and to further increase their understanding of the opportunities in the local area, such as who the main recruiters are in those areas, what employers are looking for, specific skills gaps and training opportunities, as well as continuing to tackle local issues such as more awareness about transport routes.

Eventually, BOOST hope that their work will be county-wide and that they will be able to reach more young people even sooner.

“We want to continue supporting young people as they come out of statutory education to catch them and say – it’s not too late!”

On Track

This year, following a gap in funding in the area, after the European Social Fund ended, On Track is back in West Norfolk, and has reestablished its work over the past few months, forming referral connections and getting its name out into the local community, in its aim to bring 16-24 year olds closer to education, training, employment or volunteering.

On Track offers the young people it works with one-to-one coaching, supporting them to 'get their foundations in place', for example by opening a bank account or setting up an email account. On Track works to build motivation and resilience, helping young people to find opportunities and training that's right for them, and focussing on skills including job search, CV and covering letter development, as well as individual and small group work to increase confidence and self-esteem.

On Track pride themselves on being able to work with any young person. Their work begins by focussing on wellbeing and self-confidence, before moving onto resilience and toolkits that young people can continue to use in the future as they move closer to employment, education, training, or job search.

Something that On Track specialises in, is delivering intensive support to work with acutely vulnerable young people in the area, many of whom have fallen through existing gaps in service provision and have very little trust in professionals and service providers. Some of these young people are experiencing high levels of trauma and are sometimes housebound.

On Track is part of The Matthew Project and originally began with the Building Better Opportunities fund alongside other charities to support bringing over 1000 young people closer to job search, education, employment or training.

"It's about what you can do, working around barriers, focussing on the positives, what can change, rather than the bits that are stuck"

On Track also offers brief interventions and a continual presence for the young people they work with, remaining as a point of contact for when a young person does eventually feel ready to trust and work with them.

To illustrate how they work, On Track gave the following examples of young person they have worked with recently:

“When I met him he was really shut down, he is neurodiverse and had dropped out of college, unable to cope. I worked with him to build his confidence, steady steps - meeting in public places, looking at other places he could get support. We went to the Steam House Café in King’s Lynn, we went to VIY to visit a project there... At that point the funding came to an end. Skip forward a year, and he was back in contact with us and ready to move forward. We started with sleeping patterns and eating – daily routines, getting up before midday. We looked at things he could eat for breakfast, limiting social media, going to bed earlier. We did some confidence work.. things like getting him to order his own meal. He went off to get his own CSCS card with BOOST. We did another confidence building session together at a workshop in King’s Lynn. We attended a local job fair and he applied for a position. He didn’t get that one but he has since gone for three further jobs and he starts his new job this week.”

“We’re still doing home visits with one of our young people, we started by just talking through the bedroom door...a few sessions later she was up and out of her bedroom and we played board games and she really enjoyed it...we are working on getting her dressed and out of the house next week. She’s starting to see a future...Her mum said it is just lovely to hear her laugh again”

A closer look at On Track over the past year

Having lost their foothold in the region during an 18 month funding hiatus, On Track returned in June 2024 with the help of UKSPF. Their first member of staff got to work in July last year, networking and getting On Track’s name back out into the local community to connect with other service providers and organisations.

Over the past year, On Track have networked with around 40 organisations to create strong referral links. They have access to a minibus to help address some of the public transport issues in the region, and as an example of the type of sessions they run - teaching important life skills, building resilience and raising confidence – they recently put on a slow-cooking workshop to show young people how to put affordable ingredients together and cook a meal, at the end of the course participants got to take a slow cooker home.

Building up the trust needed for referrals took time but the results of that profile-raising and networking work are now evident, with referrals rising. So far this year, two participants have gone into college, and one has started employment.

“It’s been challenging for referrers and organisations to really feel safe with us, it was initially really difficult to make them feel confident that we were here and able to do work with young people.”

“Sustainable results don’t come quickly, it is about all of that groundwork and foundation work, and making sure young people have the resilience, a toolkit in hand to move forwards and deal with future hurdles”

Participants say:

“My daughter is now engaging with your charity and being supported by mentors. They have been both patient and understanding to her needs. I know it will be a long process, but they have already started building on her trust, building up her confidence and self-esteem”

“It helped me with setting goals to move forward”

“The activity helped me to feel confident about meeting new people and going to new places”

“Gave me an opportunity to try new experiences I had never done before”

What next for On Track?

“I would love to be able to continue this work and link up with schools in the area so that they knew we were a trusted service.”

On Track hope to continue their work now that referrals are regularly coming in and they have a strong cohort of young people who are engaging, many of whom need intensive support but are making progress. They would also like to be able to extend what they do into Breckland again, and to build stronger connections with local schools. Since losing Providence Street in Kings Lynn, On Track say it would be good to have a multi-agency base again with lots of different agencies in the local area. Young people have huge potential, strengths and skills to bring to the workplace and On Track is a space for each participant, and employers too, to explore and recognise this

“I’d like all of us to be broader in our thoughts about those young people who are keen but have disabilities. There are young people with neurodiversity have got some superpowers that we could use in the workforce if we’re broader in our thoughts about what they can bring.”

Tech Skills For Life (TSfL)

The Tech Skills for Life scheme was set up by Norfolk County Council and began in West Norfolk back in 2023 with the aim of tackling digital isolation. West Norfolk is an area with high levels of digital exclusion (this means people either do not have the technology to go online, cannot afford to access the internet or do not know how to use it).

Having helped more than 6,500 people, Tech Skills for Life has now been rolled out to North Norfolk, East Norfolk, Waveney and Breckland.

Tech Skills for Life pride themselves on their organic-outreach, community-centred approach to digital skills, which they credit with the huge, rapid and successful growth of the project.

Uptake has been swift with high engagement from the start. Tech Skills for Life had an initial target to reach 1,000 people which they surpassed after just 6 months. Their community engagement numbers, including more casual outreach work, for example community coffee mornings, has led to even higher numbers.

Keeping their engagement definitions intentionally broad, Tech Skills for Life value all forms of engagement from formal to less formal; working on a 'trusted person, trusted spaces' basis, which means meeting participants in environments where they already feel comfortable. Being out in the community, meeting people where they are rather than asking people to come to them has been a key part of the success of the project.

Tech Skills for Life offer a huge range of learning and skills options, as well as tech equipment such SIM cards, refurbished laptops, smart phones to those who need them. Their work often focuses on safety and awareness, basic digital skills, employability skills, and is tailored to the individual. They use an online referral form and digital coaches to assess what an individual needs and to make a plan tailored to those needs.

TSfL work with people of all ages. Their largest demographic is elderly people, followed by the under 35s, a large number of whom are school age. Many of the people they work with, who are in their 50s and 60s, need employment skills as a result of changes to employment and digitisation of the workplace.

A closer look at Tech Skills for Life over the past year

This year Tech Skills for Life have expanded the project, while continuing their presence and delivery across King's Lynn and West Norfolk.

This year they have supported more than 550 people in Kings Lynn and West Norfolk to access basic digital skills. Employment continues to be a major motivator for people working with TSfL, with more than 230 people listing 'getting or keeping a job' as a motivating factor for making their referral, and at least 29 of those people successfully finding employment. More than 200 people have been supported by TSfL to participate in education. And TSfL has gifted more than 532 devices (such as SIM cards, refurbished laptops, smart phones) to residents of West Norfolk to help them engage more fully with the digital world.

TSfL have continued to build on growing relationships with local colleges, social workers, and schools, alongside ensuring their digital coaches are based out in local communities, in places such as libraries, the Salvation Army, Mind and Rest hubs.

They have provided a wide range of tailored tech support, from helping people learn how to use a computer to helping a young person set up a hairdressing website because they were about to finish their qualification and begin work.

The impact of their work has been impressive and wide reaching. In one example they were able to work with a young carer to enable him to fill out online forms to receive his care-work allowance. Another example saw their coaches talk to a local sewing group, which led to one member of the group seeking support to access online banking. This participant was also in a controlling relationship and was next supported with a step in a safer direction. Being able to engage in a less formal way allows Tech Skills for Life to work with participants they might not be able to reach were additional referral or time and place hurdles in place.

Participants say:

“Anna [TSfL Community Tech Coach] has helped me today so much, shown me things that I knew nothing about, opened up a whole new world for me. She is such a good teacher. I’ll be back!”

“I can't thank you enough for all you've done for me . I started with you with this lump of plastic that I was so afraid of and within a few short weeks I'm finding the confidence to "play" with my lump of plastic that no longer is !!! My computer skills have moved from "scared " to " hey, plastic you're no longer as scary as you once thought you were. Now this in itself is one major hurdle for me .”

“TSFL has helped me so much. Taking the fear out of computers, but being aware of scams, to keep safe. It's an ‘age thing’! I must go forward with tech in 2024 and Janie [TSfL Community Tech Coach] is making this possible for me.”

What next for Tech Skills for Life?

“The ultimate goal is to be able to serve the entirety of Norfolk and to be a self sustaining service”

As well as expanding the project throughout Norfolk, and continuing to seek new funding opportunities, TSfL aim to continue their work in King’s Lynn and West Norfolk, finding opportunities to connect with new people and meeting demand for digital learning they continue to see in the area. They are also looking forward to working with people who are returning to their service for next steps of support, having successfully engaged with the project in the past.

“There are communities that need time and attention for us to understand how we can reach and support them.”

VENI (The Visitor Economy Network Initiative)

The VENI project is a collaboration between educators and industry to deliver skills, support, and career opportunities, while also raising awareness and perceptions of the visitor economy as a fantastic place to work locally.

VENI creates opportunities for adults of any age to learn more about the visitor economy (a group of sectors that covers everything from hospitality, retail and tourism to conservation, heritage and entertainment) and to acquire the skills needed to find work in the sector that interests them.

Formed in 2021, and overseen by the Eastern Education Group, VENI is a partnership of five colleges: The College of West Anglia, City College Norwich, East Coast College, Suffolk New College and West Suffolk College. VENI also works closely with Visit East of England.

VENI works with young people as well as older people, in and out of the workforce to build confidence and teach skills for working in the visitor economy. Its courses go one step further, coaching participants through cv, interview and job search training, and then carefully matching them with local employers.

VENI also hold networking events, sector profile-raising campaigns, training courses, workshops, and advice sessions with local industry leaders. They have produced careers brochures and leaflets, shining a light on the many different roles and career paths available within the region's visitor economy, as well as designing a 'skills package', combining general business apprenticeships with employer led masterclasses, a skills network, and an aspirant digital skills passport.

A closer look at VENI over the past year

“During the course, we include CV and interview training techniques, and we work with each participant to work out their strengths and weaknesses, and where they would fit within the hospitality and tourism industry, we then place them with work experience in industry over the following weeks, in the hope that will help them progress their career in the visitor economy.”

Over the past year, VENI has worked with people outside the labour market in King’s Lynn and West Norfolk to raise awareness of career options in the local visitor economy, deliver the skills required to find work that interests them, make connections with local employers, and achieve an internationally and industry recognised qualification.

In order to reach those outside the labour market, VENI has partnered with The Department for Work and Pensions, holding information sessions at job centres about VENI courses on offer, with approximately 70% of people going on to attend a VENI course, and around 30% of those finding a job within the next few weeks.

This year VENI has engaged with hundreds of people interested in working in the visitor economy, and has been delivering its courses in conjunction with The College of West Anglia.

With the aim of increasing ‘pride of place’, VENI has also supported Visit West Norfolk to create a ‘Local Ambassadors’ course. This course shows unemployed participants the many tourism assets of their local area, and goes on to give them an ‘ambassadors’ role’ in promoting their town. VENI participants are also given opportunities to meet local employers and to understand more about local visitor economy businesses.

“The Local Ambassador’s course hopes to capture all that is good about the local area and to encourage a bit of civic pride!”

VENI courses are centred around the WorldHost Principles of Customer Service, and over four days, participants are introduced to the local visitor economy, learning about the difference good customer service can make. To further raise confidence and teach new skills, participants spend a day in a working kitchen with a chef, learning about the kitchen environment and cooking and eating lunch together as a group.

Finally, VENI participants leave their course with a WorldHost Principles of Customer Service certificate, an internationally recognised qualification backed by Visit East of England. There are then follow up sessions to support individual job search and to arrange work experience opportunities with local employers.

Participants say:

“It’s been a great opportunity not only to learn new skills but to have a greater understanding of what I would enjoy and the type of work I want to get into. I’d say it’s definitely a great course which I would recommend to anyone who is looking for a way forward in their career.”

“Overall, my experience with VENI has given me a chance to work in the visitor economy, an industry I have become really passionate about and I’m very grateful that I’ve been given this amazing opportunity.”

“Before I came here to do this course, I didn’t really know what I wanted to do, I was a bit lost really, and now I’ve found what I want to do, the steps I need to take, it’s really helped me.”

“Something that really helped was training in how to be around customers, how to be approachable and how to present yourself, I hadn’t really had training in that before”

“It was so helpful to hear about the different jobs out there, it feels like there are more opportunities than I thought.”

What next for VENI?

VENI would next like to continue to build on their work with people out of the labour market in the local area, expanding the number of their courses, collaborating with even more local organisations and agencies such as those mentioned in this report, and creating a skills academy for the region’s visitor economy.

VENI aims to continue raising awareness about the visitor economy, responding to business skills needs and upskilling the visitor economy workforce. They aim to ensure that WorldHost Principles of Customer Service becomes a qualification ‘standard’ for all visitor economy businesses. VENI will also be working to improve uptake of apprenticeships.

VENI also expect to work more closely with local businesses in the coming year, supporting them to improve productivity and workforce training, following the rise in National Insurance, which has left some businesses thinking less about recruitment and more about improving skills and productivity for the workforce they have.

Common challenges and opportunities for increased collaboration between the projects

The five projects in this report have much in common and offer a continuum of support and opportunities to the people they work within the region. That work could be enhanced by closer working relationships between the projects, particularly regarding dropout rates, referral and follow-on work; further helping to decrease the number of participants at risk of 'falling through the gaps' after a project ends or they cease engagement.

During interviews for this report, the projects often spoke of similar barriers and challenges in the work they do. They reported a lack of good public transport in the region that can impede participants' sense of what was possible in the area and their ability to access support, training sessions, the workplace and education. Negative perceptions of the local environment fed into low aspirations, and both digital and social isolation made it even harder to reach and engage with potential participants. Mental ill-health and neurodiversity often required more intensive work and support, and some projects felt that improving attitudes of local employers regarding the capabilities of people with neurodiversity would be helpful. Project dropout rates tended to be higher than the projects would like but are a very common feature of this type of work. Most of the projects cited funding uncertainties as a further challenge that made recruitment, retaining a local presence, and becoming a known and trusted local service more challenging.

All of the projects spoke of the value of good relationships with referral partners but many of the projects felt that the referral process, particularly referral between the projects had not yet been fully explored or clearly defined. What did seem clear was that more opportunities to 'get together' with other projects and to pool ideas, solutions, learnings regarding the challenges they face would be beneficial to this work.

Shared networking opportunities with other local community-based organisations, stakeholders, education providers and local employers would also be useful for bolstering connections, sharing understanding of local employer needs, follow-on opportunities, as well as providing more opportunities to celebrate local projects, business and community successes.

At a meeting in March 2025 the five projects in this report met to discuss collaboration ideas and a great many opportunities emerged. Three of the projects discussed a path for participants to move from On Track, working on confidence and ability to engage - to BOOST, where they can further build on these skills and move closer to training or employment, and then for those who are interested in construction - on to VIY. Another idea was to share offers of support between the projects for example the VENI project could put on bespoke customer service courses for On Track and Boost, or develop a VENI youth Local Ambassador programme, which could work extremely well for participants with low self-esteem, difficult circumstances, and a poor view of their local environment. The idea of career markets was discussed, these could be held once a quarter and focus on a particular sector, with hands-on activities such as CV workshops, or Tech Skills for Life's digital skills advice. The projects talked about transport and rural challenges of the region, agreeing to share and work on solutions together, with a range of suggestions including kick start scooters, cycling courses, dial a minibus, taxi services, and car sharing. Skills Bootcamps were also talked about, and it was noted that funding is only available for over 19s, leading some of the projects to question whether they might explore funding opportunities for younger audiences. These ideas and many other issues will no doubt form part of an ongoing agenda throughout 2025, as these projects continue to build on their work, local connections, and form closer working relationships.