

Support to Succeed

Interim Process Evaluation

The National Centre for
Social Research (NatCen)
and WPI Economics

August 2024



in partnership with:

About us

Centre for Ageing Better

The UK's population is undergoing a massive age shift. In less than 20 years, one in four people will be over 65.

The fact that many of us are living longer is a great achievement. But unless radical action is taken by government, business and others in society, millions of us risk missing out on enjoying those extra years.

At the Centre for Ageing Better we want everyone to enjoy later life. We create change in policy and practice informed by evidence and work with partners across England to improve employment, housing, health and communities.

We are a charitable foundation, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, and part of the government's What Works Network.

National Centre for Social Research

We believe that social research has the power to make life better.

By really understanding the complexity of people's lives and what they think about the issues that affect them, we give the public a powerful and influential role in shaping decisions and services that can make a difference to everyone. And as an independent, not for profit organisation we're able to put all our time and energy into delivering social research that works for society.

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Executive summary

The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) in partnership with WPI Economics have been commissioned by the Centre for Ageing Better to carry out a process, impact and value for money evaluation of part of the Support to Succeed (StS) programme focused on the experience and outcomes achieved by participants aged 50+.

Support to Succeed is an employment support programme that was launched in January 2024 and has been commissioned by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA). The Growth Company (GC) are the lead provider for provision, both directly delivering support and managing a wider supply chain. StS is designed to identify, engage and support economically inactive Greater Manchester residents who are furthest away from the labour market, to address barriers and achieve positive outcomes.

This interim evaluation report provides emerging evidence and learning about the setup and early delivery of the programme focusing on the 50+ element of the StS offer. It draws on in-depth interviews with stakeholders (n=25) delivering and overseeing StS as well as a small number of interviews with programme participants (n=7) and on analysis of key programme data. It explores the take up of support, the emerging outcomes being achieved to date and the enablers, challenges and learning about early implementation of the programme. This is not intended as a full evaluation of the programme to date and it is recognised that there is limited programme data and interview sampling at this stage.

Looking ahead, the evaluation intends to carry out further interviews with participants and stakeholders delivering and overseeing StS, as well as further analysis of programme data. A final, more detailed, evaluation report considering the full length of the programme, the impact and value for money evaluations will be delivered by Autumn 2025.

Key findings

Progress in setting up StS and emerging outcomes

Drawing on programme data and interviews with stakeholders and participants, there is emerging evidence that:

StS has been successfully setup and launched at pace – this has been enabled by the size and expertise of GC. This has included rapidly recruiting staff, developing an extensive support offer for 50+ and wider participants, developing a wide network of referral partners; establishing a CRM system and processes for managing delivery by a wide range of partners. Intensive collaborative support from GMCA in the mobilisation process has been seen by stakeholders as enabling this to take place.

Good progress has been made so far in recruiting participants, including those aged 50+, where, as of the end of May 2024, the programme was 40% over target in terms of this age group. This is testament to the significant efforts to establish a wide network of referral partners and the investment in carrying out community-based outreach across GM's boroughs.

The governance and management of StS is operating effectively as evidenced by the Operations Board meetings where constructive dialogue was observed by the evaluation team between GMCA and GC. In addition, programme delivery reports outline ongoing efforts to continually refine the delivery model.

Distinctiveness of StS as an employment support offer: whilst a Key Worker (KW)-led support model and the use of action-planning is not novel, StS was seen as distinct in terms of the combination of characteristics it used. These include the voluntary nature of the programme, the substantial scope to provide tailored, locally accessible and holistic support and the closeness and responsiveness of the Key Worker-participant relationship. Stakeholders suggested there was no comparable dedicated 50+ offer as extensive and holistic as StS, with some suggesting that the programme was innovative and breaking new ground.

Positive emerging evidence that impacts are being achieved: early evidence suggests that the combination of support offered by StS is helping participants aged 50+ to achieve employment progression. Outcomes include improved motivation and confidence, a clearer sense of their goals relating to employment, improved mental wellbeing, and the development of practical skills, including English language, digital capabilities and skills associated with finding and securing employment. While good progress has been made in terms of progression outcomes, just 3% of participants aged 50+ (24 out of 698) have achieved an employment outcome. This represents a 66% achievement of the job entry target set for over 50s during this time period. This is not unexpected

due to the focus on progression towards work and the distance of many participants from the labour market upon sign up. Programme data covering Jan-Jul '24 indicates that two fifths (44%) of participants who have secured employment (including self-employment) following support from STS, are aged 50+, suggesting a positive impact of support on job entry for people in this age cohort.

Recruitment progress and profile of 50+ participants

In the initial months, StS has made good progress in recruiting participants, especially those aged 50+. As of end of May '24, the programme was 40% over target, having recruited 496 50+ participants compared to an initial target of 354. Stakeholders attribute this success to the establishment of a wide network of referral partners and investment of significant resource in carrying out community-based outreach. However, as the programme embeds, recruitment targets are set to increase in the coming months. Delivery staff felt that significant ongoing efforts would be required to meet the increased targets.

Drawing on data for January-April '24, the demographic profile of 50+ participants is evenly split between males and females. In terms of ethnicity: 55% are categorised as White, 25% as Asian; 13% as Black; 6% as 'Other' and 1% as Mixed. Across both the under and over 50s groups, a third or more participants have 'low or no basic skills' or are experiencing 'health and or disability barriers.' Sign-up data also indicates that on entering the programme the most common needs for both age groups are: support to build confidence and motivation; life skills (including digital capability) and formal training and qualifications.

Next steps in the process evaluation

The priorities in terms of the process evaluation are as follows:

1. Developing the revised approach to participant recruitment in order to reach a sufficient number of suitable interviewees, as per an agreed sampling approach.
2. Updating the stakeholder interview sampling approach – with a focus on hearing from StS intervention tutors delivering the 50+ offer – to identify further granular 'what works' learning when it comes to working with the 50+ group.
3. Building and testing the 50+ participant segments described in this report (see Section 4.3) through further analysis of programme data and the planned qualitative fieldwork which attempts to accommodate representatives from these groups
4. The need to build a stronger understanding of the performance of the StS model across different GM boroughs and amongst different communities, including understanding the local factors that have helped or hindered impact, including by drawing on learning in the borough engagement plans.

1. Introduction

The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) in partnership with WPI Economics have been commissioned by the Centre for Ageing Better to carry out a process, impact and value for money evaluation of the 50+ delivery model included in the wider Support to Succeed (StS) programme.

StS is an employment support programme that was launched in January 2024. It is aimed at people aged 19+ (with no upper age limit) and has been commissioned by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA). StS is designed to identify, engage and support economically inactive Greater Manchester residents who are furthest away from the labour market, to address barriers and achieve positive outcomes. The programme is driven by the need to reduce inequality and social isolation, ensuring all residents can fulfil their potential regardless of their background, upbringing, location, or personal challenges.

This interim evaluation report provides emerging evidence and learning about the setup and early delivery of the programme and is solely focused on the 50+ element of the programme. It does not seek to evaluate StS as a whole. It draws primarily on in-depth interviews with stakeholders delivering and overseeing StS as well as a small number of interviews with programme participants. Key programme data related to recruitment, the take up of support and the emerging outcomes being achieved is also analysed and reported on. Additionally, this report outlines the next stages of the evaluation covering the impact, process and value for money strands (see Appendix 1).

1.1 Background and context to the programme

Evidence shows that rates of economic inactivity increase with individual age. For example, in 2023, at age 50 the inactivity rate was 12.0%. This increased to 57.3% at age 65.¹ Data from the Annual Population Survey (ONS), shows that rates of economic inactivity among this age group have been higher than most other groups, and the gap is even wider in Greater Manchester than the national average.²

Since 2016, [Centre for Ageing Better](#) (Ageing Better) and [Greater Manchester Combined Authority](#) (GMCA) have been working in partnership to build the evidence base on effective employment support for people aged 50-64, with the aim of developing and testing a new approach. The most recent stage of this collaboration involves GMCA commissioning an

¹ Economic labour market status of individuals aged 50 and over, trends over time: September 2023 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

² Local indicators for Greater Manchester (E47000001) - ONS

employment support programme for economically inactive residents. The programme called Support to Succeed (StS), identifies, engages and supports economically inactive Greater Manchester residents who are furthest away from the labour market, with complex needs and barriers to entering it.

The StS model builds on co-design work carried out by service design specialists Humanly in partnership with GMCA, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and Ageing Better. It is also informed by a rapid evidence assessment carried out by Ageing Better which reviewed existing support for this age group. Within Greater Manchester, StS is part of the suite of Working Well programmes which all follow the key principles of offering one-to-one support from a keyworker (KW) and sequenced support and integration with the wider GM ecosystem. The lead provider delivering StS is GM based social enterprise, the Growth Company (GC).

1.2 Research aims and questions

A key aim of the evaluation is to help Ageing Better to understand what makes good support for people aged 50+ to become more economically active. This evidence base will support Ageing Better and key partners, including national government and local commissioners to offer more effective and targeted support. A set of overarching research questions were developed for the evaluation. These will be touched on to some extent in this report and revisited in more detail in other final outputs. These include³:

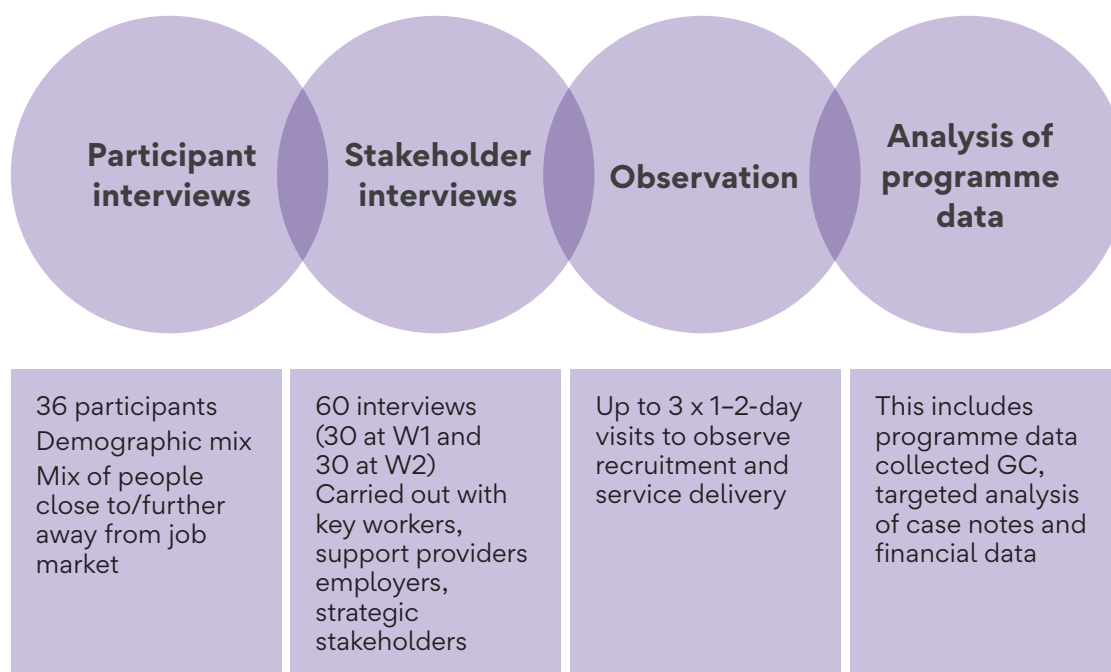
1. How does the delivery model operate at each stage along the participant journey, from outreach and pre-engagement to exiting the programme?
2. What challenges and enablers are experienced in delivering the model (including engaging individuals)?
3. How does the 50+ provision relate to the overall offer?
4. What outcomes are achieved by the 50+ offer?
5. What are the estimated costs and benefits of the 50+ element of the pilot scheme?

³ Research questions 4 and 5 are not addressed in this report.

1.3 Overview of the evaluation

To answer the research questions the evaluation is drawing on the following strands of data collection and analysis:

The evaluation is underpinned by a theory of change which was developed to clarify the relationship between the planned inputs and activities of the programme and expected outcome and impacts and key delivery risks.



1.3.1. Data sources for this report

This interim report primarily draws on in-depth interviews carried out with programme delivery stakeholders and programme participants. Interviews were conducted by telephone or online using Microsoft Teams and were supported by the use of structured topic guides. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. They were then analysed by case and theme using the Framework method, with the thematic framework organised around answering the evaluation questions.

Stakeholder interviews

A total of **25 stakeholder interviews** were completed. Interviewees were purposively selected to include a range of delivery perspectives and tended to last 45 minutes to an hour. The achieved sample of stakeholder interviews is set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Achieved stakeholder interview sample

Stakeholder type	Completed interviews
Strategic stakeholders (Ageing Better, GMCA, GC)	4
Lead providers (The Growth Company, GC supply chain)	4
Keyworker (GC)	5
Keyworker (Supply chain delivery staff)	3
Specialist providers	5
Employment engagement staff	2
Wider referral partners	2
Total	25

Participant interviews

A total of **seven interviews** were carried out with participants, significantly below the target of 18. This shortfall is partly due to participants entering the programme not consistently being invited to opt-in to participate in research, resulting in a smaller than necessary pool of potential participants available to be contacted by NatCen. To overcome this challenge going forward, a new approach to recruiting programme participants is being established. This will involve StS intervention tutors and Key Workers seeking consent from participants and supporting them to take part in interviews.

The seven participants included a mix of males and females; 6 were over 50, and 1 was under 40. Participants were at different distances from the labour market with some having never worked before, and others recently out of work for the first time in decades. While their needs varied, several had limited English and most needed support to improve their IT skills and build their confidence in finding employment.

Observations

A member of the evaluation team spent time with the StS delivery staff. They observed the following:

- A sign-up appointment – where a GM resident was taken through the steps to join StS.
- A community careers event – where representatives from StS interacted with interested GM residents.
- A meeting between a KW and a participant which focused on exploring the participant’s support needs.

Between observations, the researcher interviewed a KW and two Community Engagement Officers (CEOs).

1.4 Structure of the report

This report has eight chapters. The main findings chapters are structured around the participant journey:

1. Introduction: describes the background to the programme, and provides an overview of the evaluation, the purpose of the report and the data sources which it draws on.

2. Overview of Support to Succeed: a summary of the programme.

3. Setup of the programme: provides learning and reflection about the set up StS including areas where good progress has been made and key challenges.

4. Outreach and recruitment: captures learning and reflection about the outreach and recruitment approaches used by StS and describes progress in recruiting participants and the demographic profile of participants.

5. Support offer: describes learning and reflection about the different elements of StS offer, covering first contact and sign-up; Key Worker-led assessment; action planning and support from Employer Engagement Consultants (EECs).

6. Support accessed and emerging outcomes: describes the take up of the support offer from 50+ participants; the positive aspects of the support offer and challenges associated with delivering StS; and the emerging outcomes being achieved by 50+ participants.

7. Comparison with other provision: provides a comparison between StS and wider employment support provision, highlighting the elements of the model that make it distinct from other offers.

8. Conclusions, learning for the pilot and next steps: provides overarching conclusions and implications of the findings for the next phase of the pilot evaluation.

Appendix 1 – outlines the next steps in the impact evaluation and value for money assessment.

2. Overview of Support to Succeed

Support to Succeed (StS) is a KW-led employment support programme targeted at economically inactive residents aged 19+ across the 10 boroughs of Greater Manchester (GM). StS was commissioned in October 2023 and went live in January 2024. It is expected to run up to 31 March 2025.

Through a process of assessment and action planning, eligible participants are able to access a wide range of provision for between 2-12 months to support them to address barriers to economic activity and achieve positive onward destinations towards employment. The programme has a target to get 15% of participants into employment. While for the remainder, the emphasis is on achieving positive outcomes related to employment progression.

To be eligible to access StS, individuals must:

- Be a resident of Greater Manchester
- Be aged 19 or over
- Not currently be on a DWP / GMCA employment support programme, or due to be referred to one of these programmes
- Must not be within one of the DWP intensive work search groups

The recruitment of participants includes an outreach and engagement model which is led by CEOs who go out into communities to build interest and sign-ups. Participants are then handed over to KWs who produce an action plan that sets out their goals and a tailored programme of interventions participants will need to access. Participants' progress against their Action Plan is reviewed through regular meetings. For participants who are aged 50+, StS offers core support offer of: digital support sessions; pension support; employability support; wellbeing sessions and English skills sessions. A wide range of specialist provision is also available, which includes physiotherapy, counselling, and financial or debt advice.

Where participants feel ready and able to consider employment, they receive 1-1 support from EECs who can help them to prepare and apply for jobs or facilitate work placements and volunteering positions. Consultants also have a role in engaging local employers about StS and in building their understanding of different employment and training opportunities that participants might want to consider.

2. Overview of Support to Succeed

GC are the lead provider of StS. They have overall responsibility for setup, delivery and management of the programme. In terms of delivering StS interventions, GC directly delivers a proportion of the core offer (in Manchester, Salford and Trafford), while a further 7 organisations referred to as ‘supply chain partners’ deliver the remainder. This is described in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Overview of StS providers

Core providers	Greater Manchester boroughs	Expected volume of participants
The Growth Company	Manchester, Salford, Trafford	38%
Manchester Athena	Greater Manchester wide	23%
Back2Work	Bury, Wigan	12%
Employment Links Partnership (ELP) (Rochdale Council)	Rochdale	8%
Oldham Council	Oldham	7%
Groundwork-GM	Stockport, Tameside	6%
Manchester First	Bolton, Manchester	3%
Get Set Academy	Bolton	3%
Core Specialist Providers English Football League Trust (sports-based health improvement) The LAB Projects (arts and drama-based wellbeing) The Money Charity (financial advice and wellbeing) Sow the City (well-being through nature, gardening and woodwork)	Greater Manchester wide	N/A
Other referral partners (circa 200)	Greater Manchester wide	N/A

3. Setup of the programme

Work to setup StS began in October '23 in preparation for a January '24 launch. This was seen as a relatively tight timeframe to setup the programme and meant that in the initial months of the programme following the launch, elements of setup have continued (e.g. developing relationships with referral partners, recruiting staff, developing marketing materials). The urgency in setting up StS was explained by the need to meet the deadline to access funding from the UK Prosperity Fund.

Setup has encompassed the following types of activities:

Recruiting, training and onboarding staff within GC and across the supply chain partners supporting recruitment and delivery.

- **Producing local authority engagement plans** to map the different communities and key stakeholders in each GM borough and inform recruitment and outreach plans.
- **Establishing the network of supply chain partners** responsible for delivering the programme – this included signing contracts, setting up assurance processes and delivering training to ensure each organisation had the required capacity to deliver.
- **Establishing the network of referral partners** and developing marketing and recruitment materials.
- **Establishing governance structures** – this included GC establishing an Advisory Board to steer development and delivery and a monthly Operations Board where GC updates GMCA on progress and performance. GC has also appointed Supply Chain Managers whose role is to support consistent delivery standards across the programme.
- **Establishing CRM and performance managements systems:** GC and the supply chain partners use the ESyNCS platform to manage participant data and management information (MI); GMCA also setup an additional MI system – called the Greater Manchester Information Tracker (GMIT) which periodically draws on performance data from ESyNCS.

It was widely felt by stakeholders that GC had been successful in rapidly operationalising the programme in time for a January '24 launch. A range of stakeholders suggested that this was possible because GC is a well-established employment support provider in GM. As such, they were able to draw on a wealth of existing systems and processes as well as prior relationships with local supply chain partners, referral partners, and other key stakeholders.

3. Setup of the programme

As a relatively large organisation there was also view from interviewees that GC had sufficient capacity to work at pace to develop the programme. Progress in setting up StS was also supported within GC by appointing a dedicated implementation manager to lead setup; and by holding a range of regular planning meetings, such as weekly mobilisation meetings between GC and supply chain partners to setup the programme.

In terms of other elements of programme setup that were felt to have worked well, it was noted that:

- A representative from Ageing Better was embedded within GMCA. This has helped the two organisations to work closely and collaboratively together to oversee and manage implementation of StS.
- There was evidence of a positive and constructive dynamic between the commissioner (GMCA) and the lead provider (GC) and a culture of continuous improvement. This was evident at the monthly Operations Board meetings attended by the evaluation team, where challenges were frankly explored, and the commissioner was often able to offer suggestions to support successful delivery of the programme. Monthly management reports highlight evidence that the delivery is continually being refined and interviews with delivery staff suggest that they have agency to develop and refine the model.

In relation to key challenges during setup and early delivery, stakeholders identified the following:

- Although the extensive number of partners involved in referrals and delivery was seen as a great asset, which enabled reach into GM's communities by trusted organisations; it was perceived as resource intensive for GC, particularly for supply chain managers to manage the complex web of relationships across GM and support consistency of delivery.
- The resource required to manage the delivery of StS was increased by the variability of supply chain partner skills, capacity and expertise. GC has managed this challenge by providing ongoing support to ensure consistent approaches and service offerings.
- Variable performance in terms of the extent to which supply chain partners are meeting their recruitment targets has been a key challenge discussed in the initial months. In response, GC has reallocated volume targets – reducing the targets for lower performing partners and increasing them for higher performing partners.
- In the initial months of the programme, there was evidence that the wide and extensive network of referral partners did not always feel completely clear about the eligibility criteria or about what was on offer (for example, some partners reported that mental health counselling was not available from StS, while others reported that it was). Stakeholders emphasised the

importance of embedding robust briefing processes and lines of communication with relevant partners.

- It was observed that some staff tasked with recruiting participants were performing highly effectively from the start, whereas others with less experience and expertise would take longer to become effective in the role. Similarly, it was reported that some KWs needed more time to build their confidence and capability, for example, in terms of the ability to use the Outcomes Stars⁴ to effectively track participants' distance travelled across the programme.
- It was noted that some KWs were using the ESyNCS contact log to capture outcomes and points of progress rather than logging this using the intended fields within the platform. This meant that outcomes had to date been under recorded. However, work was underway to address this.
- Specialist providers and some wider referral partners had to check the ESyNCS system regularly to see if they had new referrals. While this was not considered burdensome, it was felt that an electronic or email-based notification when new participants were added would enable them to respond to referrals more quickly. Additionally, EECs would welcome having access to ESyNCS, as currently they have to document actions on paper and then scan and upload these. EECs currently lack access due to contract obligations requiring specific clearances such as certain levels of DBS and BPSS. For those with clearances, further discussions could be had.
- Because the programme has funding for a limited period of 12 months, there was some nervousness about staff leaving before the planned end date as they secured new roles. Poor retention of delivery staff represents a key risk in terms of achieving the targets and objectives of StS.

⁴ Outcomes stars are validated tools for tracking intervention participants' progress across key domains. This involves StS participants having to evaluate themselves using a numerical score at the beginning, middle and end of the programme.

4. Outreach and recruitment

4.1 Outreach and recruitment

Unlike some employment support programmes, where the majority of referrals flow from one or two partners, StS has needed to invest significant resource in developing a multi-strand recruitment approach. This includes a wide network of referral partners and community outreach to find participants, including those who are aged 50+.

“We know that our target participants don't want to go to mainstream services on their own accord for the most part; you have to go to them, but there isn't just one place where all these people are. They're dotted around. They're in local communities. There might be one or two people. The amount of stakeholders and resource you need to engage to get the referrals is absolutely huge in comparison to just having a really good working relationship with the Jobcentre.”

(Strategic Stakeholder)

CEOs and KWs have worked together to deliver outreach. This has involved basing themselves at, and regularly visiting, a wide range of services and community settings to generate awareness and interest in StS. The range of settings and organisations mentioned by stakeholders is set out below.

Table 3: Outreach activities described in the interviews

Site visits	Advertising	Community events and activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Libraries and council buildings, especially where events were taking place - Jobcentres - Places of worship - Homeless projects - Hospitals - Health and well-being charities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Banners on websites - Flyers, posters and banners displayed in local shops and highstreets - Social media communications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coffee mornings - Careers events - Events in community centres - ESOL courses - Knitting clubs - Gym sessions - Yoga courses - High street events - Other work and training courses

To illustrate the outreach approach, the example below describes an interaction between a CEO and an interested resident who attended a community careers fair. This is drawn from an evaluation observation visit carried out in March '24.

At the careers fair, the StS stand had paper-based fliers that described the programme and the general types of support on offer (e.g. wellbeing, financial). The CEO tending the stand also had a printout of a PowerPoint presentation about the programme and a list of all the different types of support on offer.

A potential participant expressed an interest in getting support to work in Textiles. The CEO collected some basic information about the participant's situation (e.g. education, work, job-seeking) to check programme eligibility and suitability. The potential participant was eligible and provided their contact details. The CEO set-up an appointment for the participant's initial onboarding meeting and highlighted that as well as employment support, they would be eligible for help in other areas, such as health and wellbeing and digital skills.

4. Outreach and recruitment

What is functioning well?

Stakeholders felt that CEOs had been effective in delivering the outreach model. They were perceived as knowledgeable about their localities and target populations and committed to reaching their recruitment targets. Key attributes including them being warm, approachable, enterprising and enthusiastic about the programme.

Key to the success of the outreach model was having a regular presence in a range of community settings to generate awareness and interest in StS. Instances were reported where 50+ residents approached CEOs after having seen their peers being recruited onto the programme, or after hearing positive feedback about StS from their peers. There were also examples of StS participants introducing their friends to StS recruitment staff.

“We're based in a centre where there's other activities going on; things like knitting classes, and coffee mornings, and yoga, and seated exercises. We've found that a lot of people will hear what we're doing or see what we're doing and come in and just say, you know, can you help me with my CV, or I'd like to learn a bit more about doing a PowerPoint presentation, for example. So, we have a lot of individuals that are self-referred.”

(Key worker)

Stakeholders suggested that referrals driven by word of mouth were higher amongst people from 'close-knit' communities (e.g. residents who recently arrived from Hong Kong). Some observed that once one or two members of a community were recruited, further self-referrals would start to come in. A further enabler to success was the fact that some GC Key Workers speak relevant community languages. This includes the example of a key worker who speaks Cantonese being able to support participants from Hong Kong.

What is challenging?

Initial challenges were reported in establishing the recruitment approach. For example, in one locality, staff from two different delivery partners (both delivering StS) were attempting to recruit residents from the same area. This has resulted in planning meetings to agree on a more coordinated approach.

Both KWs and staff leading outreach activities reported that people aged 50+ were particularly cautious about signing up to the programme when asked for personal information, such as their National Insurance numbers, as they were wary about being 'scammed'. Some prospective participants were also wary of initiatives which were outside of government-run locations such as Job Centres. Others had a concern that the support offer could negatively impact their receipt of benefits.

Staff leading recruitment emphasised that if one or two participants became nervous or ‘spooked’ about the programme, it could put others off. It was therefore seen as important to build participants’ trust by providing clear information and reassurances and avoid rushing the recruitment process. Staff also felt it was important to have ways to confirm the legitimacy of the programme for those who had not engaged with similar services previously and so were, understandably, more cautious.

Whilst referrals from key partners were seen as an important component of the recruitment approach, operational data suggested that as many as 50% of referrals did not attend their first appointments with KWs or were not being onboarded. Key issues have included people not turning up for appointments with CEOs and people not being eligible for StS. The latter challenge highlights the importance of strong partnership working with referral partners to ensure that the eligibility criteria is well understood.

It was felt that StS had been well promoted in communities using a range of marketing materials. For example, one KW reported that in their local area, they had seen posters and banners for StS in libraries, community centres, hairdressers, kebab shops, shopping centres, and their local chip shop. However, there was a recommendation that the programme could consider investing further in specialised marketing for people aged 50+. The forms of messaging or design that might be appealing to this age group was not specified.

Some stakeholders highlighted the importance of reaching people who were socially isolated and may especially benefit from involvement in activities or work.

“I would like to get on board a lot of housing associations to work with them, to work with their tenants... to get them on board, to tell them what we can offer. We've even been leaflet dropping to get the word of mouth out about us.”

(Community Engagement Officer)

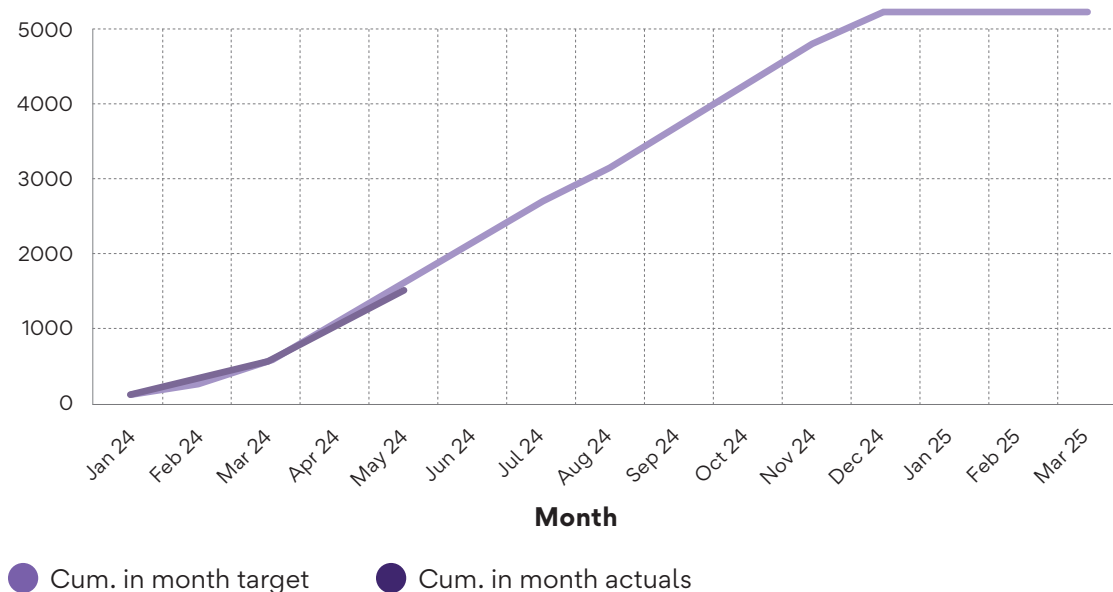
One supply chain partner, Manchester Athena, a housing provider, had attempted to engage tenants via sharing of programme information. The need to reach people not already engaged in community activities was felt to be an ongoing priority for the programme going forward. Both to continue to meet the ambitious recruitment targets and to meet the aim of reaching the most marginalised and socially isolated people.

4.2 Recruitment (“Start”) performance

StS aims to recruit 5,202 participants by end of March ‘25, of which 1,000 should be 50+. Chart 1 below, drawing on GC’s May ‘24 performance report, highlights that at the end of May, participant recruitment is broadly on target.

Figure 1. Number of participants engaging with KW support – profile vs actual

Participants



The same report also indicates that to date 50+ recruitment is over target by 40%: as of the end of May, StS has recruited **496** 50+ participants, compared to a target of 354. Looking ahead, GC report that over the next seven months, the average number of service starts required to stay on target is 515 per month.

Delivery staff felt that significant ongoing efforts will be needed to achieve the ongoing recruitment targets requiring investment and innovation in recruitment. Further planned recruitment activity planned by GC includes a Facebook marketing campaign, more focused outreach to target those most likely to sign-up to the programme, and ongoing analysis of monitoring data to identify ‘trends, bottlenecks and areas for improvement’.

The table below draws on data from ESyNCS covering January up to early May. It shows the demographic breakdown of participants who are over and under 50 who have entered the programme.

Table 4. Demographic profile of 50+ participants

Characteristic	Overall		Below 50		50 or over	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Gender						
Female	423	58	242	65	181	50
Male	311	42	132	35	179	50
Other	1	0	0	0	1	0
Ethnic group						
White	342	48	152	42	190	55
Asian	214	30	127	35	87	25
Black	89	13	45	13	44	13
Mixed	14	2	9	3	5	1
Other	49	7	27	8	22	6
Unknown	27		14		13	
Disability	315	43	141	38	174	48
Unknown	0		0		0	
Number of participants	735		374		361	

In terms of the key demographic trends set out in the table above:

- Gender: the split between males and female in the 50+ age category is 50:50, while for under 50s, females are better represented.
- Ethnic group: In terms of 50+ participants, 55% are categorised as White, 25% as Asian; 13% as Black; 6% as ‘Other’ and 1% as Mixed. In comparison, for the under 50s group, there is a greater proportion of Asian participants (35%) and a lower proportion from ‘White’ backgrounds (42%).
- Disability: There was a higher percentage of people in the 50+ group with a disability (48% compared with 38% of those below 50). More people 50 or over had ‘presenting needs’, including physical health conditions and disability, than the younger cohort.

Table 5 below shows recruitment in relation to distance from employment. Participants in the older age group were marginally less likely to have basic skills compared to the younger groups (59% of 50+ compared to 64% under 50s). Additionally, 16% of participants aged 50+ had no educational qualifications compared to 11% of those aged below 50.

The top three categories of ‘presenting needs’ identified by participants during their initial assessment were the same for the older and younger age groups. For both age groups ‘confidence and motivation’ was the top issue for more than half of participants (53%). The next two most cited issues for both groups were ‘life skills (e.g. digital skills)’, and lack of ‘formal training/qualifications’. Once again, ‘physical health conditions’ were more likely to be identified by the 50+ group (28% compared to 19% for those below 50

4. Outreach and recruitment

group). Additionally, lack of work experience was less of an issue for the older group (23%), and more prevalent for those aged below 50 (44%).

Participants tended to be in receipt of a range of benefits, including Universal Credit, Employment and Support Allowance (all categories), Job Seekers Allowance, and other state benefits (e.g. Personal Independence Payments) as outlined in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Recruitment by distance from employment

Characteristic	Overall		Below 50		50 or over	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Labour market status						
Inactive - not in work, not actively seeking work	733	100	372	100	361	100
Unknown	2		2		0	
Has 'basic skills'	453	62	239	64	214	59
No educational qualifications	90	13	37	11	53	16
Unknown	62		26		36	
Presenting needs						
Confidence and motivation	391	53	202	54	189	52
Life skills (e.g. digital)	358	49	180	48	178	49
Formal training/qualifications	340	46	180	48	160	44
Lack of work experience	247	34	165	44	82	23
Mental health conditions	203	28	109	29	94	26
Physical health conditions	170	23	70	19	100	28
Finance issues/ debt	161	22	79	21	82	23
Age	134	18	4	1	130	36
Parental / guardian responsibility	67	9	59	16	8	2
Family / relationships	48	7	32	9	16	4
Disability	47	6	16	4	31	9
Drug or alcohol dependency	39	5	23	6	16	4
Caring responsibilities for adult relative or friend	33	5	13	4	20	6
Receipt of benefits						
Universal Credit	441	81	229	84	212	79
Employment and Support Allowance (all categories)	39	7	23	8	16	6
In full-time education or training prior to enrolment	4	1	4	2	0	0
Job Seekers Allowance (JSA)	3	1	1	0	2	1
Other state benefits	55	10	17	6	38	14
Unknown	193		100		93	
Number of participants	735		374		361	

Additional analysis of programme data covering January up until early May also shows that participants aged 50+ have spent a longer time out of work⁵ (around 279 weeks (5.4 years), compared to 248 weeks (4.8 years) for those aged less than 50).

StS has identified a number of target groups with high needs who are targeted by recruitment staff. Table 6 demonstrates that people with ‘low or no basic skills’ and those with ‘health and or disability barriers’ are the most common target groups across both age categories. While the proportion of people recruited across target groups is broadly similar for both age groups, those aged below 50 have greater ‘caring responsibilities’ compared with those aged 50+ (40% compared to 12% respectively).

Table 6. Recruitment of priority target groups 50+ compared with under 50s

Characteristic	Overall		Below 50		50 or over	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Target groups						
Low or no basic skills	296	40	147	39	149	41
Experiencing health and/or disability barriers	263	36	124	33	139	39
Caring responsibilities	195	27	150	40	45	12
Experiencing (or previously experienced) domestic abuse	70	10	47	13	23	6
Experiencing substance misuse related barrier	53	7	33	9	20	6
Experiencing racial inequality	32	4	18	5	14	4
Offender or ex-offender	31	4	21	6	10	3
Currently homeless	27	4	16	4	11	3
Care leaver or experienced care	17	2	10	3	7	2
Former member of HM Armed Forces or partner of current / former Armed Forces personnel	13	2	4	1	9	3
Number of participants	735		374		361	

⁵ As measured by the difference between the date they were last in work and the date of data collection.

4.3 Emerging segments of 50+ participants

Stakeholders including KWs and wider stakeholders delivering and overseeing the programme identified a number of emerging segments of 50+ participants. These will be further tested and developed as the evaluation progresses.

- **People made redundant from jobs in later life with basic skills:** this particularly included men who had worked in jobs such as warehousing all their lives, and lacked basic maths and English, or the digital skills they needed to explore new work opportunities. Individuals were referred through Job Centres or other basic skills programmes, but sometimes found the basic maths and English skills tests during StS onboarding off-putting.
- **People with previous caring responsibilities:** this was mainly women (including those from South Asian backgrounds) whose children had grown up and left home leaving them wanting to find something to do. They were mainly recruited through community centre activities. Some had never done paid work, and needed to improve their confidence and employability, as well as digital skills. 50+ women seeking digital skills would sometimes drop off courses where they felt tutors assumed a basic level of digital knowledge or because courses were too fast paced for them. Stakeholders identified South Asian women as a group requiring trust-building activities as they could initially be uncomfortable outside of their immediate cultural group.
- **Refugees, asylum seekers and migrants experiencing language and qualification barriers:** this included recent refugees from Hong Kong and Ukraine who were recruited through English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses, while Kurdish people were recruited via community centres. It was noted that some of the participants had significant qualifications and work experience in their countries of origin. Reasons for getting involved in StS included wanting to improve their language and communication skills and better understanding the British work environment (e.g. the importance of ‘small talk’ and eye contact). Some also sought references which could be gained through taking part in volunteering and work placements.
- **Recovering addicts and people suffering from mental health problems:** this group were often looking to improve their confidence, employability and to give more structure to their lives. They tended to hear about the programme through charities that were supporting them with their health and wellbeing and there was a keenness to go straight into volunteering or work. Of the participants interviewed to date, some were accessing the specialist core provision (e.g. Sow the City, the LAB project) and there were instances of positive employment outcomes being achieved. KWs noted that this 50+ group were in a few cases more likely to attend more

sporadically or to drop out due to fluctuations in their health or circumstances.

- **People close to retirement or with health issues:** this group were identified as wanting to find activities to increase their social interactions and to get them out into the community. It was less common that they were looking for work. CEOs and KWs saw links with faith groups and voluntary and community sector organisations as being especially important for this group. StS provision also helped some of these participants to improve their financial situations, including by reviewing their benefit eligibility to help them increase their incomes.

5. Support offer

5.1 First contact and sign-up

Participants typically have first contact with a CEO. Having expressed an interest in StS, the CEO will work towards carrying out a 1-1 assessment to check the participants' eligibility and to understand more about their needs and circumstances. During this initial interaction it was stressed that CEOs may also need to build participants' motivation to join the programme by highlighting how the support can help them.

Meetings to formally assess participants' eligibility and sign them up to StS may take place at the location where initial contact was made, (if a private space can be found) or at the CEO's office. Stakeholders pointed out that multiple conversations with a potential participant may be required before sign-up. Stakeholders stressed that it was important to only recruit people who genuinely wanted to engage with the support and make progress, and to emphasise to participants that StS was a programme where you 'get out of it what you put in'.

Trust building (by offering reassurances, building rapport and not rushing participants or overwhelming them) was seen as crucial from the first point of contact and throughout the process of sign up. This was especially emphasised for 50+ participants where, as mentioned previously, concerns were often raised, including about the sharing of personal information and the risk of being "scammed". A further challenge identified by CEOs and KWs was for the need to build participants' motivation where they had had negative experiences with previous programmes.

5.2 Key worker-led assessment

When participants initially meet with their KW an initial needs assessment is carried out. This involves completing a basic skills test in maths and English, questionnaires about participants' health status and financial situation and agreeing on a set of Outcome Star scores which capture participants' starting position across a number of areas, such as work readiness.

KWs and stakeholders felt that at the first meeting with a participant it was critical to put them at ease and to establish a good rapport. This helped to ensure that participants returned to the programme. The default location to meet was at KW's office space, however there was a willingness to go to where participants felt most comfortable, such as a local community centre. KWs thought this was particularly important for some 50+ participants who may not be able to travel due to health and mobility challenges. Interviewed

participants said that they appreciated that travel to attend StS appointments could be covered by the programme.

Stakeholders felt that meeting in person worked best because it helped to build a good rapport and because it allowed them to read and respond to participants' body language. However, meetings could also take place remotely if there was a good reason. An example emerged of a recovering addict who wanted to avoid a particular area where they ran the risk of meeting other addicts.

KWs noted that it was especially important to get participants booked in for more appointments and/ or activities during the first meeting, as this helped to prevent early exits.

A range of stakeholders reflected that the assessment process tended to be long and intensive for both KWs and participants. With a large amount of information to collect and run through, KWs said that this could be potentially off-putting or overwhelming for participants if not managed carefully. One participant recalled it taking 2-3 hours, and spending some of the time waiting as the KW needed to attend to other tasks. Another participant characterised the onboarding and assessment experience as "kind of exhausting".

There were also challenges associated with the basic skills test. For example, a KW reported that there had been an occasion when a participant initially refused to do the tests because of the time it took, and they had to return a second time to finish it. Another said that the skills test needed to be handled carefully, as there was potential for participants – especially those aged 50+ – to feel embarrassed if they felt their skills were not at a basic level.

While stakeholders felt that all the information collected was important and justified, they noted that they had to take steps to avoid overwhelming a participant early on and putting them off the programme.

“I think there's always a danger of people feeling a bit overwhelmed, particularly if you're having quite personal conversations and quite difficult conversations with people. I think balancing the need to capture all of that information versus somebody's experience on the programme can be a bit of a challenge.”

(Strategic stakeholder)

5. Support offer

Key Workers reported several ways to reduce the burden on participants. This included:

- Making the whole process conversational and informal.
- Splitting it up into multiple sessions.
- Emphasising the importance of the assessment process to achieving positive outcomes.
- Assuring the participant that follow-up sessions would be more focused on support.

Further suggestions for improvement included moving the process online and collecting some of the information further into the programme. For example, it was suggested that the skills test could take place at a later date. It was also suggested that tests could be skipped entirely if deemed too sensitive. Additionally, some suggested streamlining the ‘paperwork’ and key information which had to be documented and explained to participants. This included making the language more concise in StS documents and eliminating unnecessary repetition.

5.3 Action planning

KWs explained that action plans were expected to be developed in their initial meeting with participants and were used as a guide for what the participant wants to achieve, and how they can get there. Operational data from May 2024 shows that action plans have been completed for 100% of participants within 10 working days of their service start appointment.

KWs indicated that that action plans tended to be led by participants’ suggestions and preferences. However, in some cases, participants found it difficult to speak about their needs in any detail. One approach to encouraging reflection was by KWs giving examples of the different types of support and provision and then exploring their reactions. They also used the assessments and Outcome Stars to help identify issues, themes and areas of need. Another element of their role involved identifying participants’ most fundamental needs and issues and sequencing the StS support provision in a way that would achieve the best outcomes.

“Most of the time the answer is 'I would like a job'. Talking to them and seeing if they bring up other issues like mental or physical problems. For those with multiple problems, they figure out which is the most pressing issue and prioritise that first.”

(Key worker)

Participants receive a copy of their action plan, and their KW keeps a copy. It was emphasised by KWs that the needs that are initially identified could change over time, as participants became more open and trusting of their KW. Therefore, it was important to review the action plan and make updates where necessary. For example, there was an observation by some KWs that older 50+ participants were not always initially comfortable discussing their mental health needs. However, they tended to become more open about this over time. Another example was that participants sometimes shifted their views about their career aspirations over the course of the programme, sometimes becoming more open to types of work that they had not done before.

Participants did not always recall completing an action plan with their KW, with some just recalling a series of discussions with their KW about their goals. This could be due to individual KWs not explicitly calling the plans by name or opting for a more informal approach to goal-setting.

5.4 Allocating key workers

KWs tended to be assigned to participants based on their availability and capacity. It was emphasised that KWs were adaptable and were generally able to work with people from a range of backgrounds and with different needs. However, there were reported occasions where they had been matched with participants. Matching was seen as relatively rare across the programme. Example forms of matching included:

- ESOL participants being matched with KWs who could speak their first language, or who were qualified ESOL tutors.
- A nonverbal autistic participant matched with neurodiverse KW.
- KWs with relevant specific skills or experience (e.g. experience of starting a business).
- Matching participants with someone of the same gender or of a similar age.

It was reported that there had been instances where a participant, having made a certain amount of progress with one KW, was then handed over to a different KW who had more relevant skills and expertise.

Over and above matching, KWs talked about the benefits of being based in the same area as their participants, although this was not seen as a pre-requisite for providing good support.

“With me living in the same neighbourhood, I know the community, I know the areas. Some of them even I know walking through the street and stuff, and I recognise their faces. They've come in going, 'Oh, I know you. I've seen you around Asda,' and things like that.”

(Key worker)

In terms of general characteristics of a successful KW, interviewees pointed to the importance of showing empathy, of being non-judgemental and down to earth. Where appropriate, and in a limited way, KWs also said that it could be helpful to signal to participants where they had similar or relevant life experiences to the participant. This helped to build trust and encouraged participants to feel comfortable about discussing and addressing their needs.

5.5 Support from Employer Engagement Consultants

EECs work directly with participants to help them secure employment. Participants tended to be referred to EECs once they had made progress in achieving the goals set out in their action plans and when they felt ready to make active steps towards employment. It was noted by EECs that they only work with a proportion of StS participants, because not all will feel ready to take these steps.

The key elements of the EEC role include:

- **CV tailoring** – So that participants are better placed to apply for certain jobs or sectors.
- **Considering different employment options** – It was observed that participants may need encouragement to broaden the types of jobs that they would consider.
- **Job searching** – With the EECs doing some searching but also giving participants the skills to do some of this themselves.
- **Developing new volunteering positions** – Through engaging with local businesses (often in hospitality and retail sector) and community and voluntary sector organisations.
- **Engaging local employers about StS** – Anticipating that StS participants may make applications and to encourage age inclusive attitudes amongst employers.
- **Interview practice** – It was suggested that some participants had significant skills and could excel in roles but were not confident when it came to interviews and in the art of ‘selling themselves’.

- **Group sessions** – After spotting a gap in the StS offer, EECs have developed a specific session for participants. This combines a presentation covering key principles and tips related to securing employment; showcasing volunteering opportunities and follow-up conversations with attendees to gauge their interest in having further 1-1 sessions.
- **In-work support** – For up to a month after they have started a new role, to provide any support or advice to support them to settle in.

There was evidence that some of the tasks carried out by EECs were also to some extent carried out by KWs. For example, KWs reported that they may also help participants to secure volunteering placements or help to update their CVs.

EECs noted that the levels of need could be variable. For example, some participants might approach them having recently lost their job. These participants may just need a small amount of practical assistance to revise their CVs, to sharpen their digital skills or some help with preparing job applications. Other participants who were further from the job market tended to need more extensive support. This might include more in-depth coaching to identify their career goals, or support to help them secure a series of volunteering placements related to confidence and capability building.

In terms of key challenges in the role, EECs felt there was a need for more truly age inclusive employers. This was on the basis that some very strong 50+ candidates were not being shortlisted and/or were repeatedly performing well in interviews but not getting any job offers. There was speculation that employers viewed older applicants as less likely to be long-term employees and as being slower to pick up skills. There was a suggestion from one EEC that StS could consider trialling the provision of a financial incentive or grant, which encouraged employers to employ participants for a trial period to identify whether this improved employment outcomes. However, this could present challenges linked to perceptions of people accessing work not based on merit and would not address the negative stereotypes held by some employers. There is also no evidence to suggest that employment would be sustained following the removal of any incentive programme.

6. Support accessed and emerging outcomes

6.1 Support accessed

Feedback from a range of stakeholders suggested that on the whole 50+ participants have tended to be more motivated and committed to taking up StS interventions and support compared with those under 50. This was felt to be evident in terms of 50+ participants' behaviours and attitudes – with some stakeholders suggesting that this age group were on the whole more “enthusiastic” or in some cases “grateful” for the targeted support and that they were more consistently attending scheduled activities. One possible factor explaining this difference suggested by a stakeholder was that in some cases younger participants might be getting more external pressure to engage with StS (e.g. from a parent) compared with those aged 50+ who were choosing to engage voluntarily. It was also speculated that people aged 50+ might tend to be more conscientious or have more of a sense of urgency about resolving challenging and achieving progress in their lives.

“A couple of the older learners are like, “I really need something to set me back on track”, which might be an issue beyond middle age, where you feel like, I don't know, time's a bit more valuable, a bit more... That they need to get things... sorted in their life sooner rather than later, whereas if it's a 23, 24-year-old, they're probably thinking, “This is just where I am now, but things will change in a couple of years”

(Specialist Provider)

Programme data indicates that participants – both those aged over and under 50 have tended to engage with the programme for longer than was anticipated. Stakeholders attributed this to the fact that participants have engaged with a greater range of the provision on offer than was initially anticipated. It was suggested that this was linked to the fact that StS was working with people who often had high levels of need, and because of KWs efforts to encourage participants to address a number of different areas (e.g. financial wellbeing, IT skills, confidence and motivation building).

The most popular provision for over 50s was largely similar to that of under 50s participants. Interventions focused on confidence and motivation, digital skills, wellbeing, and employment related skills and support were among the most popular types of interventions for both age groups, as shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Top 10 Ranking Interventions – 50+ participants

Ranking Over 50 Intervention		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Grand Total
1	Job search for the Over 50s	8	16	17	24	4	5	5	79
2	Confidence and Motivation +50	4	18	6	16	10	6	9	69
3	Money Matters +50	1	2	9	10	15	11	7	55
4	Employability	0	0	3	15	8	14	13	53
5	Digital skills for the over 50's	2	11	12	9	8	5	4	51
6	Preparation for Work Workshops +50	1	5	7	6	11	3	2	35
7	Healthy lifestyles workshops +50	0	4	3	9	12	1	3	32
8	Wellbeing Activities	1	0	4	6	8	4	8	31
9	Language for Living and Working +50	3	8	9	6	1	3	0	30
10	Individual Therapy Sessions	0	5	4	16	1	3	1	30

Factors enabling positive outcomes

Drawing on the interviews, participants and stakeholders identified a number of positive features of StS provision which was felt to be enabling positive outcomes to be achieved:

- Tailored support: Stakeholders emphasised that there was a strong ethos of tailoring the support to participants. For example, in some cases, participants had the option of receiving support via one-to-one sessions or in group settings, depending on what best suited their needs and preferences. Forms of bespoke support not already available could also be organised, for example, a session for people from Hong Kong about the British workplace was specially designed when the need became apparent.

“I've got a lady who's partially sighted, and she's got learning difficulties, so the group sessions are not the best for her because her confidence isn't the best. She tends to book in for one-to-ones, which are a lot better for her because she can concentrate more. The support needs are directly on her, rather than having to support the whole class generally. The one-to-one sessions are working really well for some people.”

(Key worker)

6. Support accessed and emerging outcomes

- **Locally available provision:** It was noted that most of the sessions and activities took place within participants local areas, so extensive travel was not required. This was seen as important, especially for participants with health and mobility challenges. Participants could also get their public transport costs covered by StS. Locally available provision was made possible because of the way in which delivery was shared between a large number of organisations based in and operating across Greater Manchester.
- **Learning cohorts:** Delivery staff noted that where possible participants were grouped together based on common needs and circumstances (e.g. 50+ participants, age, those with limited English). This meant that staff leading sessions could better tailor their delivery approach and participants reported that they had valued learning and bonding with people who had similar needs and circumstances.
- **Key worker support:** Participants' journey through the programme was guided by ongoing support from KWs who aimed to check-in with participants at least once a week and to review action plans every two weeks. Over and above the core StS offer, there was also evidence that KWs were playing an advocacy role in some cases – for example, helping participants to secure more stable accommodation, claiming money back after a banking error, or carrying out research about free courses in their area that were in line with their Action Plan objectives.
- **Responsiveness of the service:** Programme data indicates that StS is consistently meeting its targets related to timely delivery across each stage of the participant journey. For example, receiving an initial appointment within 7 days to check eligibility and a service start appointment with a KW taking place within 5 days of this. Participants also praised the responsiveness of KWs when they had ongoing questions and needs, and the fact that support could be accessed relatively quickly.

Challenges associated with achieving positive outcomes

Again, drawing on the interviews, participants and stakeholders identified a number of challenges related to delivering StS provision and the achievement of positive outcomes:

- **Language barriers:** A number of participants did not have English as their first language, which in some cases had made communication challenging and had potentially hindered engagement and progression outcomes. It was suggested that some participants might need to make more extensive progress in terms of English skills (for example, via the ESOL offered as part of StS) before they could make progress in other areas, including towards employment.
- **Keyworker capacity:** It was noted that KWs' caseloads are becoming larger (often between 30-40 participants per KW) and that levels of contact between KWs and participants can be several times per week. Although feedback about KWs was positive, there was some feedback

from participants and stakeholders that those with larger caseloads may sometimes struggle to provide the ideal level of support to all participants. KWs also emphasised the need to manage participants' expectations and set firm boundaries which helped to keep their workloads at a manageable level and avoided participants becoming too dependent on them.

- **Access to tailored provision:** There was some evidence people aged 50+ did not always have positive outcomes when engaging with StS support that was not targeted at this age group. For example, one participant reported that they were the only person 50+ at a job fair which made them feel out of place. When they signed up for digital skills training, they also felt the tutor assumed knowledge they did not have and went too fast for them. They also reported feeling that the tutor did not allow for the fact that participants learn at difference paces, with the result that they felt discouraged and dropped off the course.

“There was no encouragement that I needed. So, that's why I stopped, and they called me, and I decided not to answer them.”

(Participant)

Another participant made a wider point that Job Centres and training providers often just assumed people could use computers independently (e.g. training on Zoom) and did not provide enough support.

- **Challenges accessing the support and remote attendance:** It was noted that some participants who are financially struggling would benefit from having their travel to interventions covered upfront, rather than this being reimbursed. It was also reported that participants with mobility challenges were not able to participate in face-to-face activities as they were not able to use public transport, and taxis were seen as unaffordable. GC also reported in their June delivery report that there was a trend for participants to opt for attending appointments and interventions remotely, which had the potential to undermine the achievement of successful outcomes by possibly impacting on engagement and rapport.
- **Securing employment:** Participants could feel frustrated and unhappy about not getting interviews or a job after accessing the programme support. As noted in Section 5.5, there was a view amongst some StS staff, that even though employers tend to say that they are age inclusive, older job applicants are reporting that they struggle to secure interviews or job offers, even where they feel they are consistently performing well. There may be value in exploring whether work placements or working interviews could help to address this or to consider whether more promotional and engagement activity aimed at employers is required around being age inclusive.

6. Support accessed and emerging outcomes

- **Individual budgets:** While stakeholders welcomed the fact that StS made a small amount of budget available to assist with meeting individuals' support needs, there was a request to increase the flexibility of how the budget could be used. Not having access to a laptop was identified as a challenge for some. One KW reported that they overcame this by lending the participant a laptop.
- **Distinctiveness of the 50+ StS offer:** Some stakeholders found it difficult to think about StS in terms of providing a distinct 50+ offer. This was on the basis that 'everyone is unique' and that support skills for employment should always be tailored to each person. However, the same stakeholders also questioned whether they might benefit from training on the issues that may affect 50+ people differently to the under 50s.

6.2 Emerging outcomes

Analysis of the participant outcomes recorded by delivery staff covering January to July is set out in Table 8 below. Outcomes are recorded by KWs into ESyNCS. Compliance Officers at GC then check the outcome to ensure that there is sufficient evidence uploaded or recorded within the system to justify that the outcome has been met. The last two columns on the right of Table 8 highlight the proportion of participants aged under and over 50 who have achieved the anticipated outcomes.

Table 8. Overview of StS outcomes achieved – comparison of those aged below and over 50

Outcomes	Numbers			% distribution between those aged over and under 50		% of total participants	
	50<	50+	Total	50<	50+	50<	50+
Outcome 1 - Fewer people facing structural barriers into employment and into skills provision	222	166	388	57%	43%	14%	24%
Outcome 2 - Increased active or sustained participants of UKSPF beneficiaries in community groups (and/or) increased employability through development of interpersonal skills	210	139	349	60%	40%	13%	20%
Outcome 3 - Increased proportion of participants with basic skills (English, maths, digital and ESOL)	109	102	211	52%	48%	7%	15%
Outcome 4 - People engaged in job searching following support	124	106	230	54%	46%	8%	15%
Outcome 5 - People engaged with life skills following interventions	252	198	450	56%	44%	16%	28%
Outcome 6 - People in employment, including self-employment, following support	31	24	55	56%	44%	2%	3%
Outcome 7 - People sustaining engagement with key worker support and additional services (min. of 2 months)	999	477	1476	68%	32%	62%	68%
Totals	1947	1212	3159			1602	698

The following findings about emerging impact will be further explored through the analysis of StS programme data and by carrying out further targeted interviewing of participants and delivery staff over the remainder of the programme.

- **Financial wellbeing:** On entering the programme, KWs noted that participants are offered an appointment with a finance, debt and benefits advisor who can check whether they are eligible for any unclaimed benefits. This advice was reported to be benefiting participants by increasing their incomes. Stakeholders also reported that the Money Matters course had been well received, including by 50+ participants. This intervention includes helping participants with household budgeting skills and money saving ideas, improving their understanding about how to manage their pensions and supporting them to carry out retirement planning.

6. Support accessed and emerging outcomes

- **Digital literacy:** Stakeholders felt that the digital skills offer had been an important component of the offer, especially for participants aged 50+. Whilst not all participants in this age group lacked skills and confidence in this area, there was felt to be a substantial proportion who had benefited from the digital skills course and the 1-1 support provided by KWs and EECs. This included building foundational skills, such as knowing how to navigate websites, using smartphones and composing emails. A range of stakeholders also reported that they had supported older participants to develop digital skills related to finding employment (e.g. learning how to upload their CV, learning how to navigate job searching platforms and understanding and constructing employment related emails).
- **English skills and integration:** StS has succeeded in recruiting a diverse range of participants, including people who had recently arrived from Ukraine and Hong Kong. KWs reflected that participants from these backgrounds had often been highly engaged with the StS support offer. This included examples of participants asking for extra sessions and homework between the planned ESOL provision. KWs also observed that dedicated sessions about British workplaces and volunteering placements had helped participants to build their English language skills and to support their integration and work readiness in Britain.

“The feedback that I've got from her being in that volunteering placement is amazing. She's able to practise her English more, she's making friends with people from different communities... A lot of the time when we have participants where English is their second language, they're not really confident that they will find employment in the future. So, it's like, ... if it's [volunteering] something that they want to do, they can start working with that.”

(Key worker)

- **Sense of purpose and improved self-esteem:** Stakeholders often reported that through having regular contact with KWs and by regularly taking part in StS group sessions and volunteering activities, participants had come to feel a greater sense of purpose and self-esteem. This was particularly important for participants – including those aged 50+ – who entered StS feeling social isolated, for example, due to being long term unemployed or having long term health conditions.

"The lady described that to me last week. It's kind of like a new life for her because she's waking up and she knows what she's going to do, which before, she was like, 'Oh, what am I going to do today? I'm just going to go and see my grandkids again and I'm not doing anything for myself', and now she's waking up, 'Oh, I'm going to do some gardening. Then I'm going to go to community centre. Then I'm going to do, for example, go to Manchester office', and it's like the day is booked. So, she said, 'I'm waking up and I can look forward to it and know that I'm not staying at home all day or not doing nothing.'"

(Key worker)

- **Improved confidence and work readiness:** Stakeholders reported that the combination of group sessions and 1-1 support from KWs and EECs had helped participants to become more work ready and more able to start applying for jobs. The combination of tackling confidence and motivation issues, alongside the emphasis on acquiring practical skills, was seen as key to driving positive change in this area.
-

"I felt 'invisible' when I came into the project. Taking up the support has made me feel a bit more human again. It's made me feel more confident... this is why I couldn't write a CV because I can't big myself up or anything."

(Participant)

Alongside the structured provision, volunteering placements were often seen as a vital 'stepping stone' towards employment. This was both as a means of gaining positive references (which was important for participants who had recently come to Britain) and as a way of building the confidence and capabilities that would allow them to secure and keep a job.

"I'm supporting two recovering addicts at the moment, one of them has just been taken on for a voluntary placement with a local charity. She's going to be doing support work. She's already doing a volunteer placement with another project. She's still going to all her meetings, and she said she's been clean for nine months. She wants to do well, she wants to help herself, so that makes a massive difference."

(Key worker)

6. Support accessed and emerging outcomes

Additionally, staff who had a role in helping participants to secure jobs stressed that they were helping people to build their ability to do things for themselves (e.g. applying for jobs online) rather than doing everything for them. This was in an effort to create more lasting positive outcomes in participants' lives.

- **Health and wellbeing:** Stakeholders pointed to the therapeutic and mental health benefits associated with the various activities and volunteering positions, with gardening-based activities and activities focused on helping others and building confidence emerging as particularly impactful. Stakeholders also talked about the mental health benefits associated with learning within group settings which had helped participants to form friendships and feel a sense of community. There were instances of KWs 'matchmaking' likeminded participants and encouraging them to work on activities together. The StS offer also included sessions focused on helping participants to manage their wellbeing more effectively, this included learning about coping strategies for managing anxiety which was identified as helpful by several stakeholders and a participant.

“[The StS wellbeing activities] help me get out of the house. It helps me with my mental things. It teaches you how to deal with different things.”

(Participant)

- **Engagement in job searching:** There was evidence from stakeholders and participants that StS had supported improvement in participants' confidence and ability to search and apply for jobs – with both KWs and EECs providing direct support and assistance in this area. An EEC interviewed gave an example of teaching a participant made redundant in later life new digital skills (e.g. use of the Internet and AI tools to refine CVs) and how this had helped to improve their confidence in looking for work.

‘[I had] a participant in the over-50s category. He got made redundant. Now, I've been guiding him and helping him with applying online to get into places, while updating his CV, editing it, making the words right, using AI tools. Teaching him how to apply online. It's been working and he's had a few interviews too.

(Employment Engagement Consultant)

7. Comparison with other provision

7.1 Stakeholder comparison with other provision

Stakeholders were asked to compare how StS provision compared with other employment support offers. It should be noted that where participants identified positive elements of StS they were often unable to say clearly what programmes or projects they were comparing StS to. Where comparisons are made, it is also not clear how extensive stakeholders' understanding of other employment support provision is. This section sets out insights from stakeholder interviews; comparisons of full delivery models will need to be explored further by the evaluation team in order to draw clearer comparisons in future reports.

Stakeholders were positive overall about how StS compared with other employment support programmes (e.g. the DWP Restart programme and other Working Well programmes). The programme specification sets out that the model should help individuals on their pathway to employment (where this is right for the individual), education/training or further ongoing support. Stakeholders saw the main positive aspect of StS being that it recognised the need to do important 'groundwork' for people who were further from employment before progressing to job searching. As one KW put it:

“I've worked on welfare to work programmes where you go in and straightaway it's like, “right, you've got to apply for ten jobs this week”. That's not what we're doing, but if people want - or when they're ready - to get into that state where they're looking for work, we'll help them, not force them. I think that's the key.”

(Key worker)

Other positive aspects of StS identified by stakeholders included that:

- **Participation is voluntary, not mandatory:** stakeholders said the voluntary nature of the programme made them feel less under pressure to move participants towards work or volunteering before they felt ready. Furthermore, as StS was driven by participants' needs and motivation, there was a view from StS delivery staff that it had the potential to achieve a more sustainable and lasting positive impact in participants' lives.

7. Comparison with other provision

- **The support has a ‘non-corporate’ feel:** it was felt that the social enterprise-led delivery in community-based settings helped to put participants at ease and become more open about their needs and circumstances. KWs stressed that they aimed to be ‘down to earth’ and create genuine trusting connections with participants. There was also a view that StS was well placed to build partnerships with wider community and voluntary sector organisations to deliver the programme because it was led by an organisation that was well established in Greater Manchester and ‘of the sector’.
- **It provides a high level of intensive support:** the intensive level of support was particularly emphasised by KWs, who said that participants often needed a good deal of contact during the early engagement and assessment stage to build rapport, provide encouragement to take up provision, and to build their self-esteem. KWs noted that participants were benefiting from the frequent support and by them taking an advocacy role where necessary.
- **It offers holistic and wraparound support:** StS placed an emphasis on identifying and addressing a whole range of needs and barriers that might be holding someone back from employment progression. This includes addressing health and well-being challenges through non-work-related activities and rebuilding confidence through volunteering or training. Stakeholders felt that this recognised the need of participants to be treated as a person rather than just a prospective employee.
- **It is less restrictive and more flexible in its offer:** stakeholders said that the variety of community-based support available meant the programme could respond more flexibly and appropriately to the specific needs of each person, rather than referring them to provision that was not necessarily a good fit. There were also instances where if provision was missing, this could be found or designed.

7.2 Comparison with other 50+ provision

It was not possible to pull out direct comparison with other 50+ provision in this phase of the evaluation. Stakeholders said that they were either not aware of specific provision for people aged 50+, or that such provision was rare. Where it existed, stakeholders said it was highly localised and usually short-lived due to a lack of continued funding. They therefore felt that StS 50+ offer was innovative and genuinely distinctive in its offer. Some participants also said that they had not received 50+ targeted support in the past, and that they felt it was a good idea. Future participant interviews will need to explore this further in order to draw conclusions. Comparison with other holistic provision can also be explored in the next phase of evaluation should no direct 50+ offer be identified.

8. Conclusions, learning for the pilot and next steps

8.1 Key findings from the early process evaluation

Drawing on programme data and interviews with stakeholders and participants, there is emerging evidence that:

StS has been successfully setup and launched at pace – this has been enabled by the size and expertise of GC. This has included rapidly recruiting staff, developing an extensive support offer for 50+ and wider participants, developing a wide network of referral partners; establishing a CRM system and processes for managing delivery by a wide range of partners. Intensive collaborative support from GMCA in the mobilisation process has been seen by stakeholders as enabling this to take place.

Good progress has been made so far in recruiting participants, including those aged 50+, where, as of the end of May, the programme was 40% over target in terms of this age group. This is testament to the significant efforts to establish a wide network of referral partners and the investment in carrying out community-based outreach across GM's boroughs.

The governance and management of StS is operating effectively as evidenced by the Operations Board meetings where constructive dialogue was observed by the evaluation team between GMCA and GC. In addition, programme delivery reports outline ongoing efforts to continually refine the delivery model.

Distinctiveness of StS as an employment support offer: whilst a KW-led support model and the use of action-planning is not novel, StS was seen as distinct in terms of the combination of characteristics it used. These include the voluntary nature of the programme, the substantial scope to provide tailored, locally accessible and holistic support and the closeness and responsiveness of the KW-participant relationship. Stakeholders suggested they were unaware of a comparable dedicated 50+ offer as extensive and holistic as StS, with some suggesting that the programme was innovative and breaking new ground. Comparison with other provision will continue to be explored.

Positive emerging evidence that impacts are being achieved: early evidence suggest that the combination of support offered by StS is helping participants aged 50+ to achieve employment progression. Outcomes

8. Conclusions, learning for the pilot and next steps

include improved motivation and confidence, a clearer sense of their goals relating to employment, improved mental wellbeing, and the development of practical skills, including English language, digital capabilities and skills associated with finding and securing employment. Programme data covering Jan-Jul '24 indicates that two fifths (44%) of participants who have secured employment (including self-employment) following support from STS are aged 50+, suggesting a positive impact of support on job entry for people in this age cohort.

8.2 Next steps in the process evaluation

The priorities in terms of the process evaluation are as follows:

1. Developing the revised approach to participant recruitment in order to reach a sufficient number of suitable interviewees, as per an agreed sampling approach.
2. Updating the stakeholder interview sampling approach – with a focus on hearing from StS intervention tutors delivering the 50+ offer – to identify further granular ‘what works’ learning when it comes to working with the 50+ group.
3. Building and testing the 50+ participant segments described in this report (see Section 4.3) through further analysis of programme data and the planned qualitative fieldwork which attempts to accommodate representatives from these groups
4. The need to build a stronger understanding of the performance of the StS model across different GM boroughs and amongst different communities, including understanding the local factors that have helped and hindered impact, including by drawing on learning in the borough engagement plans.

Appendix 1 – Next steps in Impact and VfM evaluations

Next steps in the impact evaluation

Two different impact evaluation approaches to measure the effect of the 50+ element of Support to Succeed (StS) had been identified: regression discontinuity design (RDD), and statistical matching (SM). Initial examination of data from 735 participants, 361 of whom were 50+, suggested that RDD would be the appropriate option should some key requirements be met (e.g. large enough sample size on each side of the 50 year age threshold). However, the bespoke and holistic approach of delivery makes this a less relevant option for the next stage, particularly when considering the service received by those aged 40-50 vs for those aged 50+.

The SM approach will now be developed further for the next phase of work, adopting a matching/weighting approach that answers the following research question: “What is the effect of the 50+ pilot compared to not receiving any employment support?”. We will also adopt a pre-post evaluation (PPE) approach that makes inferences on the effect of the programme by comparing the baseline and endline values of a given outcome. Combining these two approaches allows us to utilise both GMCA captured and publicly available data sets.

A value for money assessment will be developed alongside the SM and PPE approaches, based on the current understanding of the programme, the evaluation approach, the data collected by GC / GMCA, and how the conceptual costs and benefits can be quantified and monetised now that the programme has commenced.

Potential design of valuation strategies

Assessing VfM requires both qualitative and quantitative data. Key challenges include data availability, attributing outcomes to the intervention, and converting outcomes into monetary values. Below is a summary of our revised scoping of the costs and benefits of the intervention and where the data are expected to be available.

Costs

Input costs of the intervention are likely to include:

- Staff costs involved in the intervention, including setting up and managing the programmes
- Administrative costs related to the programmes, e.g. recruiting participants, monitoring and evaluation of the programmes
- Costs incurred by partner organisations in delivering training and skills courses
- Costs from downstream provision of services, e.g. increased referrals to healthcare

The first three cost items will be collected directly from Ageing Better and GC and supplemented by qualitative fieldwork. The information on referrals is expected to be contained in the exit questionnaire.

Benefits

The potential benefits of the intervention can be categorised as follows:

- Employment impacts: measurable changes in participants' employment rates or earnings. These data points will be collected as part of the monthly performance reports and GC survey.
- Wellbeing impacts: improvements in mental or physical health, as well as subjective wellbeing, measured in monetary terms, such as increases in life satisfaction. Data will be collected through surveys.
- Social and community benefits from increased volunteering, to be collected in the exit survey.

Benefits to the participants from increased employability may also include reduced benefit claims due to increased financial security. It is important to note that a change in benefit status is a benefit to the recipient, but a cost to the DWP. If the benefit generated is netted off by the fiscal spending, it will not be considered in the VfM. However, according to the Green Book guidance, we will also consider distributional weighting, or the 'welfare weights', to model the potential distributional impact on the increase in benefit entitlements. This is to assume that taxpayers, i.e. those ultimately funding the intervention, have median equivalised income, and the 50+ participants are in the lowest equivalised income group.

It should be noted that there will be a number of benefits that are not quantifiable in the evaluations. They include positive outcomes that are not captured in the data collection exercises and are difficult to quantify and generalise. These are likely to include people supported to access basic skills or engage in life skills. Meanwhile, the improved equity and inclusion in the employment market in Greater Manchester may be estimated using

exit survey or Outcomes Star data to understand the participants' employability, but these may not be monetisable and therefore will not be captured in the cost-benefit analysis model.

Based on the emerging findings and our current understanding of the data landscape, the key risk we have identified for the VfM assessment is having low participant engagement with the survey and fieldwork. One major risk is the high possibility of low sample size, and this will limit the representativeness of the data.

Let's take action today for all our tomorrows.
Let's make ageing better.

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The Centre for Ageing Better is pioneering ways to make ageing better a reality for everyone, including challenging ageism and building an Age-friendly Movement, creating Age-friendly Employment and Age-friendly Homes. It is a charitable foundation funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and part of the government's What Works Network.