

Economy and Fair Work Committee
Wednesday 1 May 2024
13th Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

Disability Employment Gap
Note by the Clerk

Background

1. “Disability employment gap” is the term used to refer to the difference in employment rates between disabled and non-disabled people. Statistics show that disabled people in Scotland have a lower employment rate than non-disabled people.
2. The Committee agreed on [21 February 2024](#) to undertake an inquiry to identify the barriers that limit the ability of disabled people to get and keep a job and consider how these might be addressed.

Previous Work

3. The Committee undertook some initial work on the disability employment gap in 2023. This included visits, [an evidence session with stakeholder organisations](#), and [an evidence session with the then Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work](#).
4. A [letter with the Committee’s initial findings](#), and [the then Cabinet Secretary’s response](#) can be accessed online.
5. The Committee agreed to undertake an inquiry to build on this initial work.

Remit

6. During this inquiry, the Committee will consider—
 - the help available for disabled people to get back into the labour market;
 - the support available for employers for more inclusive recruitment practices and workplaces;
 - specific barriers faced by people with learning disabilities and neurodivergent people; and
 - the employment support systems for disabled people.

Call for Views

7. The Committee previously undertook a call for views. This ran from 20 December 2022 to 16 February 2023 and received [41 responses](#).

Witnesses

8. Today's evidence session will focus on employability services for disabled people, considering such issues as funding, outcomes for disabled people, variation in outcomes within the disabled population, data collection, and evidence of best practice.
9. The Committee will hear from—
 - Elizabeth Baird, Regeneration Manager, Inverclyde Council (representing the Inverclyde Local Employability Partnership);
 - Dave McCallum, Head of Career Information Advice and Guidance (CIAGS) Operations, Skills Development Scotland;
 - Philip Ritchie, Business Growth and Inclusion Contract and Programme Manager, City of Edinburgh Council (representing the Edinburgh Local Employability Partnership); and
 - Alasdair Scott, Employability Lead Officer, Scottish Borders Council (representing the Scottish Borders Local Employability Partnership).

And then from—

- David Cameron, Chief Executive Officer, Scottish Union of Supported Employment;
 - Oxana MacGregor-Gunn, Assistant Director of Operations, Scottish Action for Mental Health; and
 - Ashley Ryan, Director of Enable Works, Enable.
10. [Enable](#), [SAMH](#), [the Scottish Union of Supported Employment](#), and [Skills Development Scotland](#) previously responded to the Committee's call for views.
 11. Ahead of the evidence session, Enable and SAMH submitted additional written evidence which can be found at **Annexe A**.

Clerks to the Committee
April 2024

Supplementary briefing from Enable Scotland

About Enable Works

As Scotland's leading specialist provider of employability support, Enable Works has developed innovative and successful services which are effective in supporting disabled people into employment. We believe that every person in Scotland has the right to work in a job that is high quality and well paid.

Enable Works supports over 7000 people every year across 29 Scottish Local Authorities to learn skills for work. We meet clients in a variety of settings including in schools and universities and out in the community. We partner with thousands of employers to create inclusive cultures and improve the diversity of Scotland's workforce, working collaboratively to challenge perceptions of disability and unleash potential.

Enable Works is committed to supporting activity at all levels of Government to close the disability employment gap through supporting disabled people and working with employers to promote understanding of successful Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategies to increase employment of disabled people. With our employability services primarily focused in Scotland but with our delivery of EDI initiatives reaching UK-wide, we work closely with the Scottish Government to support the goals of A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People in relation to increasing employment.

Enable Works is one of the largest and most successful employment support teams in Scotland and is the largest employability organisation specialising in disability and health. Enable Works:

- Supports 7,000 people with a Learning Disability, disability or long term health condition.
- Supports 1000 people into paid work each year;
- Delivers the successful Stepping Up programme in 75 schools, with 98% of students achieving positive progressions. These destinations are all vocationally linked and are related to students' career goals.
- Has supported 116 young people who have a learning disability to graduate with qualifications from the University of Strathclyde or Edinburgh Napier University through the Breaking Barriers programme.
- Delivers 3.5 jobs for the average cost of 1 job on traditional employability programmes through our "All In" partnerships, representing not only a quality, impactful service but significant value for money.

Key elements in developing effective strategies to support disabled people into work include:

- Support for transitions from school into work or continuing education
- Increasing aspirations for disabled children, young people and their families
- Increased education for teachers supporting young disabled people
- Supported employment services which provide tailored support meeting the needs of the individual to ensure the business, the individual and the role are all the right fit for each other

- Specialist support for businesses in developing EDI policies and practices which promote the employment of disabled people
- Enable Works has developed the successful “All In” partnership model, bringing together specialist third sector partners, not competing to provide services but instead working in collaboration to provide a “no wrong door” approach to employability support for disabled people.

Provision of employability services to those furthest from the labour market;

The disability employment gap in Scotland is currently 31.2%, the biggest in the UK. For someone who has a learning disability the gap is even bigger at 75.1%. But even when in work, disabled people still experience disadvantage and for every pound a non-disabled person earns in work, a disabled person earns just 83p. The mission of Enable Works is to change this and ensure fair chances in employment for all.

Enable Works has contributed significantly towards securing progress in achieving the ambition of closing the disability employment gap through the provision of a range of specialist employability services to those furthest from the labour market,. These include Supported Employment and “All In” consortia.

- Supported Employment

Supported Employment is the best and most effective way of supporting disabled people into work but true fidelity to the model must be practiced to see results. Programmes which offer versions of Supported Employment which do not have full fidelity do not see the progressions and sustainment’s that true Supported Employment delivers.

Through the five stage supported employment model, we provide a 1:1 service that helps people to identify, obtain and thrive in jobs within their open labour market. We do this through vocational profiling, job analysis and matching, as well as job coaching in the workplace.

We also provide support to people already in the labour market who need support to retain jobs or to progress their careers.

The five stages of supported employment are:

Stage 1: Client Engagement

Stage 2: Vocational Profiling

Stage 3: Job Finding

Stage 4: Employer Engagement

Stage 5: On and Off The Job Support

This 1:1 support for clients throughout the full journey of seeking work, to securing and maintaining employment, to onward career planning, is a key aspect of Enable Works delivery. This approach provides person-centred support to overcome barriers to employment and has a track record of success for the disabled people we support. This is delivered through end to end personalised support through our Supported Employment services, and a crucial element is aftercare where someone moves on from employment so that they can be successfully supported into a new role. It is vital there is funding and support for activities which deliver each of the five stages of supported employment, including for aftercare where this is required. One to one support is vital for those who face the biggest barriers to work to develop a tailored plan which will create the best opportunity for the client to find and sustain employment through considering:

- What kind of work would suit them and which they would find rewarding
- How many hours they want to work and what working pattern would be most manageable for them
- What support they would need once they are in employment

Enable Works Employability Co-ordinators support disabled people seeking employment to develop employability skills, receive training which will help them in securing employment, writing CVs and preparing for interviews. Once a client secures employment, Employability Co-ordinators work with employers to provide disability advice, information and mentoring to help create a supportive environment in the workplace.

Employability Co-ordinators provide essential support for employees who face challenges in remaining in employment due to their disability or health issues, or other external factors. They also provide crucial ongoing support to clients whether they are in employment or seeking employment at any given time.

Programmes which work on this sustained basis with employees and employers, providing one to one, tailored support for clients, are more likely to have greater success. It is not enough to identify twenty jobs in a business and choose at random twenty disabled people to fulfil those roles. There needs to be more individual support to ensure the business, the individual and the role are all the right fit for each other.

- “All In Consortia”

The “All In” model for delivering employability support through local authorities working with third sector partnerships has been strategically designed by Enable Works to combine the power of local third sector organisations, enhance co-production, and remove competition. The Consortium model provides an ‘end to end’ service that hides the wiring of commissioning, to put the people we support at the heart of the service.

“All in” partnerships bring together the best and brightest third sector organisations with expertise and track records of success in supporting those who are furthest from

the labour market into work. The “All In” partnerships in Scotland’s cities are led by Enable Works.

Enable Works builds on local knowledge of employability delivery in Scotland’s cities to work with third sector partners with a range of expertise in supporting people into employment, whether that be support for long term health conditions, disability or for parents seeking to return to or enter employment. Enable Works takes on the lead liaison role with the local authority to agree priorities for the partnership; administer funding arrangements; report on outputs and outcomes; and promote awareness of the service.

Partnerships deliver services which make the process easier for both stakeholders and clients alike and put people truly at the heart of the service. By providing a menu of options and providers all under one banner, people can access the right support based on their ambitions, interests, and support needs. This stops clients having to engage with multiple providers and retell their story over and over to find the right fit. It also allows greater co-ordination of services, rather than competition between them, and freer movement between services for the clients accessing support. It means there is no such thing as a “wrong door” – regardless of how someone makes contact with an “All In” partnership, we can ensure they are guided to the right place to get the support they need.

“All in” partnerships are currently in operation in 3 of Scotland’s cities: Edinburgh, Dundee and Glasgow, involving 24 partner organisations. All in Edinburgh was the first partnership to be established in 2015 with four partner organisations. All in Dundee was established in 2019 with 8 partner organisations and All in Glasgow, established in May 2023, is now Scotland’s largest third sector employability consortium with 17 partners. “All In” also operate in Moray as well as partnership between the Moray Council, Enable Works and the University of Highlands and Islands (UHI).

In addition to the successful partnerships, All In models have been developed in other areas of Scotland within city regions, and also delivering employability support in rural areas. These include All in Highlands, All in Aberdeenshire, All in Inverclyde and All in East Ayrshire.

The All In model, which has been developed, refined and now successfully replicated since it was first established in 2015, has demonstrated it is scaleable and replicable to address local priorities in Scotland’s cities and secure positive results for those people facing the biggest barriers to employment.

All in partnerships have a proven track record of success across Scotland. All in partnerships achievements to date include:

- Supporting over 10,000 people across Scotland’s cities
- Securing over 50% positive destinations
- Improved outcome rates in each city

- Clients moving into employment are achieving excellent results in sustained employment after 12 months (70% in Dundee)

Support for employers

Programmes funded by the Scottish Government such as No One Left Behind and the Parental Employability Support fund provide important supports to employers as well as clients of the services. UK schemes also help provide support to employers, although there remain challenges over lack of awareness of Access To Work.

Direct support for employers through training and advice is also vital. Enable Works' specialist Equity, Diversity and Inclusion team partners with over 2,000 employers every year. We work with employers to equip them with the knowledge, skills and tools necessary to build an inclusive culture that attracts and retains talented people who face barriers to employment and create an environment where people can thrive. We highlight the benefits to employers in supporting EDI initiatives, with Harvard Business School finding a 50% reduction in employee turnover amongst organisations embracing EDI.

Enable Works supports employers to review recruitment processes, policies and practices and to develop in-depth action plans which set out areas in which they can deploy best practice in EDI. Inclusive management training also ensures that when people move into employment, they join a team who are supportive and understanding of their needs.

Training on a range of disabilities for employers and staff is also vital to change cultures in workplaces. Enable Works provides training including on learning disability, neurodiversity, autism, sensory impairment and creating a mentally health workplace.

Training on neurodivergent conditions covers raising awareness of the most common neurodiverse conditions. The training also covers understanding the social model of disability; learning about sensory processing and masking; and identifying specific adjustments for people with neurodivergent conditions. Participants in the training are given the opportunity to consider how to apply learning to their own workplace environment and practices to create a more inclusive workplace.

Greater support for employers to participate in the development of EDI strategies for their own businesses would support activity to close the disability employment gap.

Funding

Enable Works would welcome a more consistent approach to funding employability programmes. While we are pleased some local authorities have embraced an approach of longer-term funding arrangements for projects, this is not the case for every local authority. We are also aware that in some instances local authority decisions on funding for employability programmes have been delayed as they wait for confirmation of funds dispersed by central government. It is particularly important for smaller organisations to reduce uncertainty and significant delays over the award

of funds for employability programmes, as this affects both their sustainability and the clients who are supported by their services.

Funding where we have multi year commitment means less turnover in staff, higher calibre of staff and appropriately qualified and experienced staff which mean clients receive a better service. If we want disabled people to be included under principles of fair work in jobs that are high quality and well paid, it's vital as a sector we can provide that same commitment to our staff delivering these services.

It is also essential to maximise the impact of government funding in times of constraint in public sector funding, and in achieving 3.5 jobs for every 1 supported through traditional employability programmes, "All In" consortia provide an example of best practice in efficiency. It is important that research is undertaken to ensure that funding is prioritised for activity which demonstrates the highest levels of efficiency and impact.

There are variations in outcomes within the population of disabled people.

The [Labour Market Statistics for Scotland by Disability Report](#) published in March last year stated that the main self-reported impairments with the highest proportion of disabled people in work are:

- stomach, liver, kidney, or digestive problems (71.6 per cent in work; 28.4 per cent out of work)
- problems or disabilities (including arthritis or rheumatism) connected with legs or feet (60.0 per cent in work; 40.0 per cent out of work)
- problems or disabilities (including arthritis or rheumatism) connected with arms or hands (56.7 per cent in work; 43.3 per cent out of work)

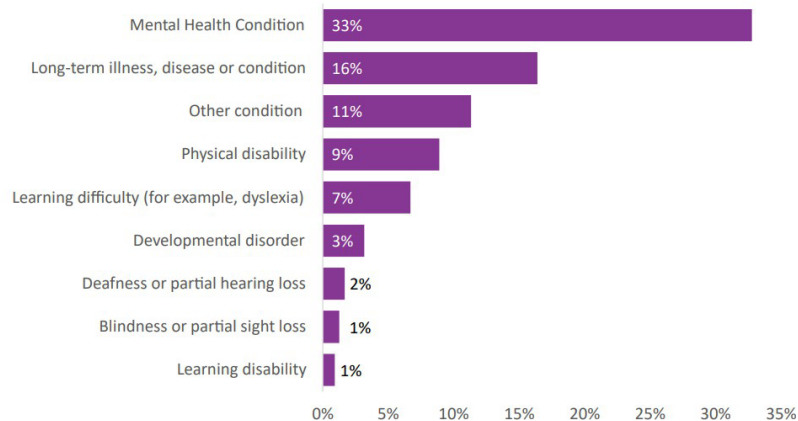
The main self-reported disabilities and conditions with the lowest proportion of disabled people in work are:

- severe or specific learning difficulties (25.0 per cent in work; 75.0 per cent out of work)
- autism (31.6 per cent in work; 68.4 per cent out of work)
- mental illness, or suffering from phobia, panics or other nervous disorders (32.2 per cent in work; 67.8 per cent out of work)

The most recent (2019) Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities population survey found even an indication that the number of people with learning disabilities in employment is even lower with between just 4 and 8 per cent of local authorities' learning disability service users in employment. Additionally, the following table published at Figure 10 in the Scottish Government's Devolved Employment Services Statistical Summary in February highlights the challenge which exists with specific disabilities:

Figure 10: Mental health condition is the most reported long-term health condition for people starting on Fair Start Scotland

LTHC Reported by People Starting on Fair Start Scotland, April 2018 to September 2023



These statistics show the need for a specific focus to secure better outcomes in employment for people with learning disabilities and people with neurodivergent conditions.

Barriers faced by people with learning disabilities and neurodivergent people to work.

Disabled people face a range of barriers to employment, and there are specific barriers faced by people with learning disabilities and people with neurodivergent conditions. These can include communication challenges and sensory environments in workplaces. It is vital information and instructions at work are provided in formats and methods which are accessible for all. There can be challenges with workplaces which do not accommodate the needs some people with learning disabilities, autistic people and people with neurodivergent conditions will have, for example quiet spaces and opportunities to deal with sensory hyperstimulation.

These barriers can be overcome with the right information and advice for employers through EDI support and training, one to one support for people with learning disabilities and neurodivergent conditions where this is required, and informed approaches by line managers.

A key barrier to work for people with learning disabilities and people with neurodivergent conditions is the challenge they often face in securing work because interview processes are not accessible. This includes job adverts not being published in a range of formats, and interview processes and formats not being accessible for disabled people. Too often job interview formats are not adapted to make them accessible, and at the very start of the process if jobs are posted online but without using the assistive technology this can also make them inaccessible for disabled people.

Many disabled people will face physical barriers at workplaces such as premises which are physically inaccessible, but also people with learning disabilities may find it challenging in getting transport to a job interview or to their place of work, and will need support to do so or support to plan how they will get to work.

Once disabled people are in work it is vital workplaces and systems are made accessible in line with requirements for reasonable adjustments. Advice and information on reasonable adjustments is available to employers, but too often employers still don't seek this advice and reasonable adjustments are not put in place.

There remain cultural and societal barriers facing disabled people in the workplace, including negative assumptions and attitudes about their capabilities and skills.

Enable Works refers to a wide range of barriers to employment for disabled people:

1. **Attitudinal Barriers:** Negative attitudes and stereotypes about disabled individuals can lead to discrimination in the hiring process. Employers may underestimate the abilities of disabled people or harbour misconceptions about their productivity or reliability.
2. **Physical Barriers:** Physical barriers in the workplace, such as inaccessible buildings, lack of accommodations, or inadequate transportation options, can prevent disabled individuals from accessing or performing their jobs effectively.
3. **Lack of Accessibility:** Many workplaces lack accessibility features such as ramps, lifts, adaptive technology, or ergonomic furniture, making it challenging for disabled individuals to navigate and perform their duties comfortably.
4. **Limited Opportunities for Advancement:** Disabled individuals may face limited opportunities for career advancement due to unconscious biases, lack of mentorship, or assumptions about their capabilities.
5. **Concerns about Costs and Productivity:** Some employers may worry about the costs associated providing accommodations or adjustments for disabled employees. There may also be concerns about productivity levels or the potential impact on team dynamics.
6. **Legal and Regulatory Compliance:** Employers may struggle to navigate legal requirements and regulations related to disability rights and accommodations- or may be reticent to even attempt this, worried that failure will impact them negatively. Failure to comply with these laws can result in legal challenges and reputational damage.
7. **Lack of Awareness and Training:** Employers and coworkers may lack awareness and understanding of disabilities, leading to misunderstandings, communication barriers, or inadequate support for disabled employees.
8. **Social Stigma and Isolation:** Disabled individuals may experience social stigma or isolation in the workplace, leading to feelings of alienation, low morale, and decreased job satisfaction.

9. Healthcare and Support Services: Limited access to healthcare, rehabilitation services, or support networks can impact the ability of disabled individuals to manage their health conditions and remain employed.

Addressing these barriers requires proactive efforts from employers, including: promoting diversity and inclusion; providing comprehensive training and education; implementing accessible policies and practices; and fostering a supportive and inclusive work culture. Additionally, partnering with disability advocacy organisations and consulting with disabled employees can help employers better understand and address the specific needs and challenges of this population.

Data

The Fraser of Allander Institute has highlighted the lack data around disability employment in Scotland. The available data suggests that employment rates for people with learning disabilities are extremely low, around 7%, however this figure is sourced from the 2010 census. It is vital to have more data available on disability employment to understand which interventions are most effective and identify those areas where support is most required. For this reason, Enable has welcomed the proposal in the Learning Disability, Autism and Neurodivergence Bill that there should be requirements on statutory bodies to publish relevant data for this purpose.

Enable Works also supports the recommendations Institute of Directors Commission chaired by Lord Shinkwin “The Future of Business: harnessing diverse talent for success’ to introduce mandatory ethnicity pay gap reporting and disability workforce reporting for employers with 250 or more staff, although we recognise this is a reserved issue. We also welcome the recommendation that businesses should publish details of their inclusion strategy with specific requirements and objectives, along with an annual report on progress. We also believe it would be beneficial to support small and medium-sized enterprises on the best use of data to inform ED&I strategies, for example through the provision of guidance and training on the most useful types of data to collect and data collection, best practice in engaging with employees to encourage self-identification, and translating data into action plans.

Wider support systems relevant to employment for disabled people

Employability initiatives must be supported by effective wider support systems in areas such a social care, transport and the provision of accessible information as all these factors are important in ensuring better opportunities in employment for disabled people.

Enable Works would highlight effective transitions from school as being particularly important in promoting employability for young disabled people. Young people who leave school without a qualification are 4 times more likely to be unemployed at 25.

Enable Works’ long established, successful Stepping Up Program follows the seven principles of good transitions which are:

- Planning and decision making should be carried out in a person-centred way

- Support should be co-ordinated across all services
- Planning should start early and continue up to age 25
- All young people should get the support they need
- Young people, parents and carers must have the access to the information they need

Stepping Up provides specialist support to young people, helping them focus on their own skills and employability and explore their options for life after school. The programme provides the students an opportunity to discuss their post-school transition and to help make informed choices about their next steps.

In 2019 Enable Works was commissioned by Scottish Government to carry out a research project looking at best practise for education providers to support the positive transitions of young disabled people. This research project consulted education providers, young people and parents and resulted in the production of practical guidance for education providers.

Since it was established in 2009, Stepping Up has successfully supported thousands of young people in transitions from school:

- 3755 young people have benefited and been supported
- 98% of those engaged gain a positive progression – this attainment rate is higher than that of mainstream pupils, whose positive destination rate is 96.4% (2022/23)
- 660 have achieved paid employment
- 2286 supported work placements delivered
- 399 have gone on to vocational training programmes including Modern Apprenticeships
- 1240 FE, HE Places - 60% of which are mainstream vocational courses
- 8524 “soft outcomes” now achieved by YP including: independent travel training / increased aspiration and resilience / increased awareness of using money / better participation within their local communities

Increasing access for all young disabled people to effective support in transitions has the potential to make a substantive contribution to increasing employment for disabled people in Scotland.

Supplementary briefing from SAMH

We thank the Committee for giving us an extra opportunity to brief them ahead of giving oral evidence. We have a case study from someone who has successfully gone through out Individual Placement Support service, as well as a bit more information on our 'In Reach' services.

Case Study: Client A

Client A was referred to SAMH IPS in November 2023. They had been out of work for almost 3.5 years and had a previous diagnosis of autism, and a weakened immune system. The client had applied to minimum 12 jobs per week in either admin or call centre roles, but their last interview was at the start of 2023.

The client was hugely motivated to find a job, so we initially worked on updating and perfecting their CV. They were offered an interview, and we put them through a practice interview, however they were unsuccessful in securing this role. Feedback was that they could have sold themselves a little more – so we focused heavily on interview technique. We prepared answers for both general and competency interview questions, enabling client to practice selling themselves more effectively. Another potential role was identified and with our support through the process Client A was offered the role. Due to the location of the job, we signposted them back to Job Centre Plus to access funding for their travel for the first month.

The client is enjoying their role, and knows they have much to learn but is feeling fully supported by the team around them on site. We have agreed to weekly in-work support for the first month, and then this will move to twice monthly. The timing of Client A securing this job could not have been better – they got their first pay on the week of their 30th birthday, and see this as a sign of a positive future.

Client A Feedback

“If someone was to ask me today what my dream job would be, I honestly don't think I could answer. But what I do know is that wherever I am, so long as I feel supported within that environment and I am managing my health then I would be okay. At present, I feel that with the right support from my employer and additional support of Emma at SAMH Retention service, I am looking forward to the future, whatever that may hold.”

Case Study: Client B

Prior to starting on the IPS programme Client B had not been working since 2019, when they last worked as an audio typist. Shortly after leaving that role, Client B was diagnosed with depression, and this had such an impact on their life they rarely left the house. Client B joined SAMH IPS at the start of Aug 2023.

In Client B's mind, their biggest barrier was that they were 62 and they thought nobody would want to employ them. We discussed this issue at length and also worked with Client B on a CV refresh as well as practicing interview techniques.

Client B was offered a hybrid role and SAMH supported them through their induction period by helping with setting up at home.

In-work support has been important to Client B over the first 13 weeks of their new role, as clients are sometimes overwhelmed by the sheer volume of new learning in a role, and we kept in regular contact with Client B during this time.

Client B Feedback

“Because of my depression and age I never saw myself working again, but for the first time in a very long time, I love my job and look forward to going in every day – and this is all because of the support I have received from SAMH.”

In-reach service

As well as our Individual Placement Support services, detailed in our previous submission, we also run In-Reach Services. These are designed to reach those with severe and enduring mental health problems that are furthest from the job market. The support starts while individuals are still in hospital.

Our In-Reach Support service is designed to reduce the number of (re)-admissions to hospital for people with mental health problems.

Its primary aims are to:

- Ensure people have the right support in place prior to discharge from wards
- Prevent (re-)admission by providing flexible, community-based support, such as building life/coping skills, or early intervention to prevent crisis
- Integrate SAMH support with clinical teams to ensure seamless and sustainable discharge process.

Participants report:

- Reduction in number of re-admissions
- Higher change of sustaining community ‘placement’
- Higher self-esteem, resilience and ability to cope
- Improved mental health/wellbeing.