



# Kingston Workstart project

Delivered by Balance CIC

## Final evaluation

Organisation name: Balance CIC

Project ID: 7212

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Kingston Workstart project was set up by Balance CIC to provide specialist individualised support for people who struggle to find or maintain their jobs due to mental health issues. The project was funded under ESF Priority 1.1, Project Specification 1: Supporting people with health conditions to return to work or get into work. It offered personalised, client-led support through a variety of activities delivered in one to one and group sessions and was open to clients living in Kingston, or registered with a Kingston GP.

The project was primarily delivered through hour-long one-to-one sessions with an Employment Consultant, focussing on issues such as CV writing, active job searching, interview preparation, mediation with existing employers and general emotional support. Additionally, participants were offered workshops to support the development of employability skills such as CV writing and interview techniques. The project also ran job clubs at local libraries where groups of participants could enjoy the benefit of peer to peer support facilitated by Employment Consultants. For those participants who struggled to maintain employment and were temporarily signed-off work, the project offered additional support through liaison with their employers. The lead partner, Balance CIC, delivered the project in partnership with Mind in Kingston and the NHS Kingston Wellbeing Service.

**Balance** is a Community Interest Company (CIC) based in South West London. The company was a spin-off from the Adult Social Care team within Royal Borough of Kingston and over the last ten years Balance has provided employment and support services to a range of client groups. Balance's mission is to become a sustainable deliverer of high quality support to enable people to become less reliant on services and reach their potential.

**Mind in Kingston** is a charity organisation whose aim is to promote the understanding of mental health issues and to provide a range of services in Kingston to people with support needs due to mental health issues. Mind in Kingston is a local Mind Association affiliated to National Mind., and has been operating since 1972 to provide a range of services to local Mental Health Service Users.

**The Kingston Wellbeing Service**, launched in April 2013, provides coordinated mental health and substance misuse support for Kingston residents. The service supports adults over 18 years in Kingston with common mental health conditions related to anxiety and depression, and for individuals with drug and alcohol misuse issues.

The project has been highly successful in achieving all of its targets and over performing in certain areas, including the target for clients receiving 6+ hours of support. Almost half of the clients (41%) had progressed into jobs by the end of the project delivery, and 28% have now been in work for over six months. The project has been well received by both staff and participants and has had a major impact on development of clients' soft skills, resilience and building their confidence.

The project promoted innovative approaches to both performance management and working with clients. The project staff were not given individual targets, but were presented with targets for the team as a whole. This approach helped avoid competition between staff members, has helped to prevent 'cherry picking' of those participants closest to the labour market and has resulted in referrals between adviser to ensure that clients were referred to employers in sectors most suited to their skills and interested. Overall, this translated into high performance and helped to achieve all of the contracted targets. This practice is innovative in relation to other mainstream employability provision where advisers are generally given individual targets. Both project manager and the team members

found the Balance approach very helpful in maintaining good team relations and keeping the staff motivated, as well as achieving targets.

The project succeeded in engaging participants of all abilities including those with very complex needs. To achieve this success, Balance implemented a participant-led approach to the project. Provision was client-centred, with individuals fully in charge of their own journey through the project, as opposed to taking a “one-fits-all” approach. The pace at which the individual could progress, the type of activities in which he or she would take part was always tailored to their specific needs. In many cases the support provided extended beyond the contracted six hours per participant to meet the very complex needs of some of the participants.

By responding to the clear need for employment support for those with mental health needs, the project supports the implementation of the Department of Health policy document “Closing the gap: priorities for essential change in mental health”; which calls for improving support for people with common mental health problems and better integration between employment and health services.<sup>1</sup> It also fits within the national Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) strategy which promotes using psychological therapies to benefit the economy at local and national level.<sup>2</sup>

This final evaluation was carried out by Access Europe Network, using information gathered from a number of sources:

- The original application as submitted to London Councils
- The project’s monitoring database, which was used to analyse quantitative data and performance against outcomes
- Face to face interviews with staff members to examine the effectiveness of the delivery mechanisms and the management system
- Face to face interviews with learners to determine the extent to which the programme achieved sustainable outcomes for participants

## ESF priorities and cross-cutting themes

Kingston Workstart project was delivered under ESF Priority 1.1: Supporting people with health conditions to return to work or get into work, with the aim of providing employment opportunities to residents of the Royal Borough of Kingston with mental health problems and/or disabled people.

The project supported the implementation of the Royal Borough of Kingston Sustainable Communities Strategy which aims to achieve an *increase in overall employment rate - including adults with mental health, physical disability or learning disability conditions*<sup>3</sup>

### Equal opportunities

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<sup>1</sup> Closing the gap: priorities for essential change in mental health; Social Care, Local Government and Care Partnership Directorate; January 2014

<sup>2</sup> Talking therapies: A four-year plan of action A supporting document to No health without mental health: A cross-government mental health outcomes strategy for people of all ages, <http://www.iapt.nhs.uk/silo/files/talking-therapies-a-four-year-plan-of-action.pdf> last access: 24 September 2015

<sup>3</sup> Royal Borough of Kingston Sustainable Communities Strategy, <http://moderngov.kingston.gov.uk/documents/s14232/draft%20Sustainable%20Community%20Strategy.pdf> last access: 24 September 2015

The project has supported the equal opportunities principle by providing access to support specifically for individuals whose mental health problems affect their ability to find and maintain a job. People with health issues and disabilities are one of the most under-represented groups on the labour market, facing considerable barriers to entering employment, and as such are a priority target group for the ESF programme.

Balance ensured that all individuals with mental health needs, regardless of their age, gender, age, religion, belief or non-belief, sexual orientation or disability, could access the provision. The staff made considerable efforts to engage the BAME community in the project, through outreach activities in ethnic minority organisations. As a result, nearly 20% of participants were recruited from BAME communities: very close to reflecting the proportion of ethnic minority residents in Kingston's general population (21%<sup>4</sup>).

### Sustainable development

The sustainable development principle was achieved through:

- Promoting energy conservation and waste reduction
- Reducing usage and recycling consumables
- Minimising travel for staff and participants
- Equipping the team with Oyster Cards to enable staff to travel into Kingston instead of using their cars to meet participants
- Giving the staff access to bicycles in the office building for use during office hours

The project has also contributed to reductions in car usage through sourcing local employment opportunities. Local travel to work is more likely to be by public transport, walking or bicycle, thereby lowering carbon emissions. Balance has been awarded Green Mark Level 1 accreditation. To achieve this, the organisation has incorporated in its working practices processes that respect environmental legislation; waste management and recycling; waste minimisation; energy use; travel; communication and awareness; purchasing and procurement; greening their services; and environmental policy.

### Health

Mental health and work are inextricably linked, and skills and good jobs can reduce health inequalities and improve the general health of participants. Poverty and related issues such as lack of quality housing, fuel poverty, poor nutrition and the lack of means to participate in social life, have a highly detrimental impact on people's mental wellbeing. On the other hand, people with mental health issues often find it hard to find and maintain jobs due to their disability, low self-esteem and stigma around mental health conditions. Unemployment and mental health problems can therefore be self-reinforcing and can create a vicious circle, which is very hard to break without external support. The Workstart project has had a direct positive impact on the mental health of participants by providing employment opportunities to individuals whose employment prospects and status have a negative impact on their health; and minimising the impact of poor mental health on the careers of those who are in work.

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<sup>4</sup> London Councils ESF 2011-2015 Tendering Specifications, September 2011

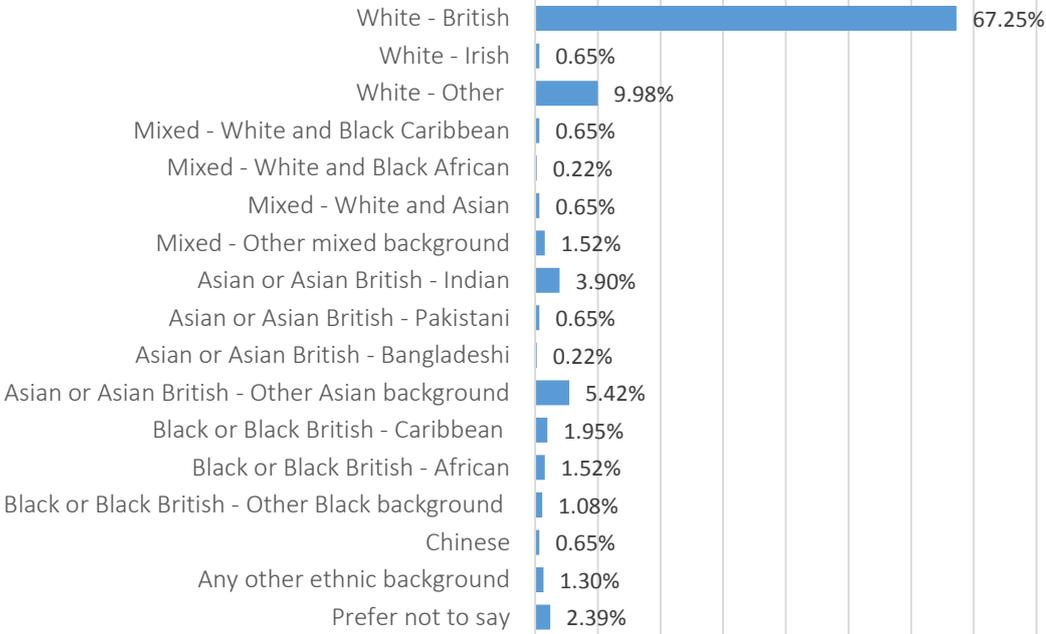
# Target groups

The employment rates for people affected with mental health conditions is far lower than for the general population. Fewer than 16% of people with a mental health condition (other than depression) have a job, yet between 86% and 90% of this group want to work.<sup>5</sup> Those who are in employment, but suffer from mental illness, are more likely to face problems at work due to health related absences. According to NHS sources, almost 50% of long-term absences from work are the result of mental health issues, including depression, anxiety and bipolar disorder.<sup>6</sup>

In response to the needs of Kingston residents affected by mental health problems, the project supported two target groups. Firstly, those people who were technically employed but temporarily signed off sick and struggling to maintain their employment, predominately due to their mental health difficulties. Secondly, the project worked with people who faced additional barriers to entering and sustaining suitable employment due to their mental health condition. The first group was offered support with tackling their health condition at work through liaison with their employer, while the second group was provided with essential soft skills and employability skills to effectively look for jobs, as well as the emotional support essential for achieving and sustaining the positive outcomes.

The Balance staff actively worked to engage BAME communities in the project. The project manager contacted relevant community organisations in the borough and organised one to one meetings with them to ensure that they were aware of the opportunities provided by the project. As a result, almost a fifth of the participants (19.7%) were members of ethnic minority communities, which reflects the borough’s demographic profile.

Ethnicity



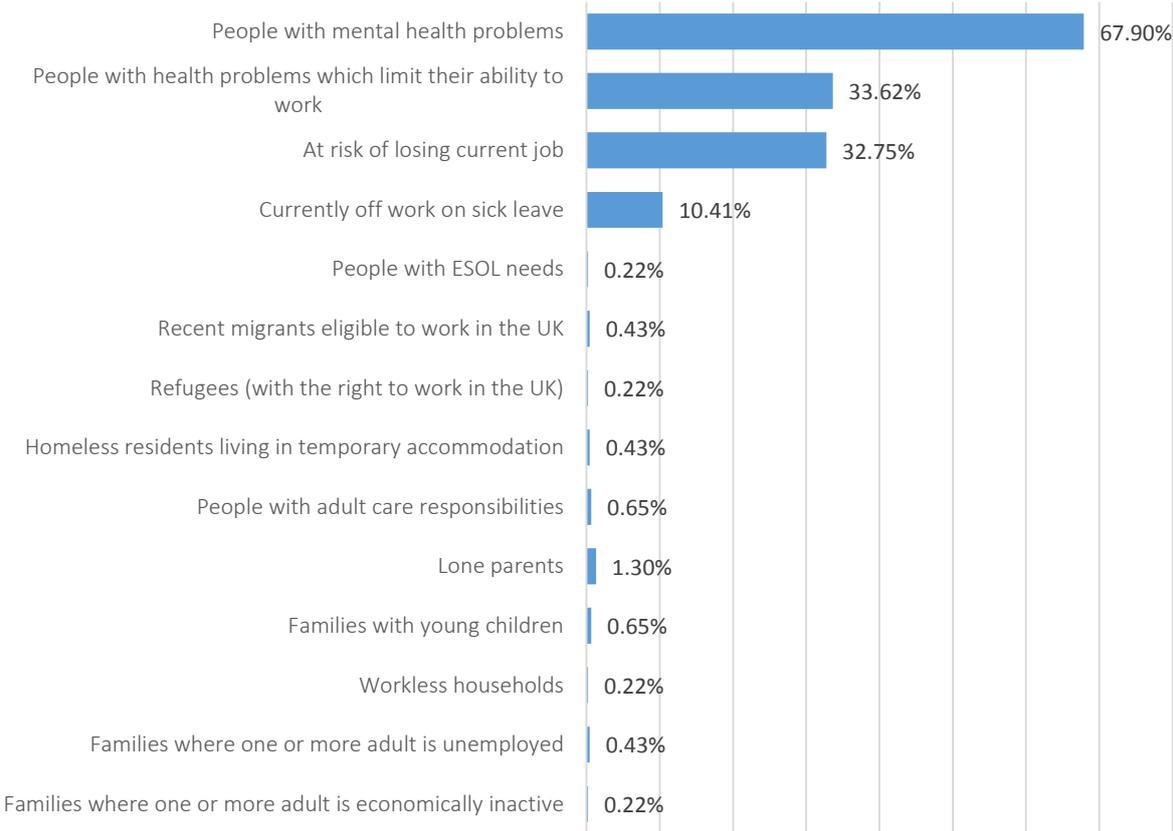
<sup>5</sup> Mental Health Network Briefing, March 2010: [http://www.nhsconfed.org/~media/Confederation/Files/Publications/Documents/Mental\\_health\\_briefing\\_200mar10.pdf](http://www.nhsconfed.org/~media/Confederation/Files/Publications/Documents/Mental_health_briefing_200mar10.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/mentalhealth/Pages/returning-to-work-mental-health.aspx>

The project has succeeded in accommodating the needs of a very diverse group of clients. People facing mental health issues come from a very wide range of backgrounds and support there has to be personalised. Unlike in other employability projects funded through ESF it is quite hard to draw an average profile of a participant of the Kingston Workstart project. Participants come from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds, some having been high achievers with developed careers before being affected by mental health problems. Many face multiple barriers to the labour market due to their family situation (lone parents and carers), legal status (migrants and refugees), housing issues, and low literacy levels (migrants with ESOL needs). The type of referrals changed as the project progressed, which was an additional challenge. In particular, there was a significant increase in referrals of people furthest from the labour market: those who have never had a job, or have been out of work for a long time. Balance has responded to these changes by developing workshops aimed specifically at these individuals.

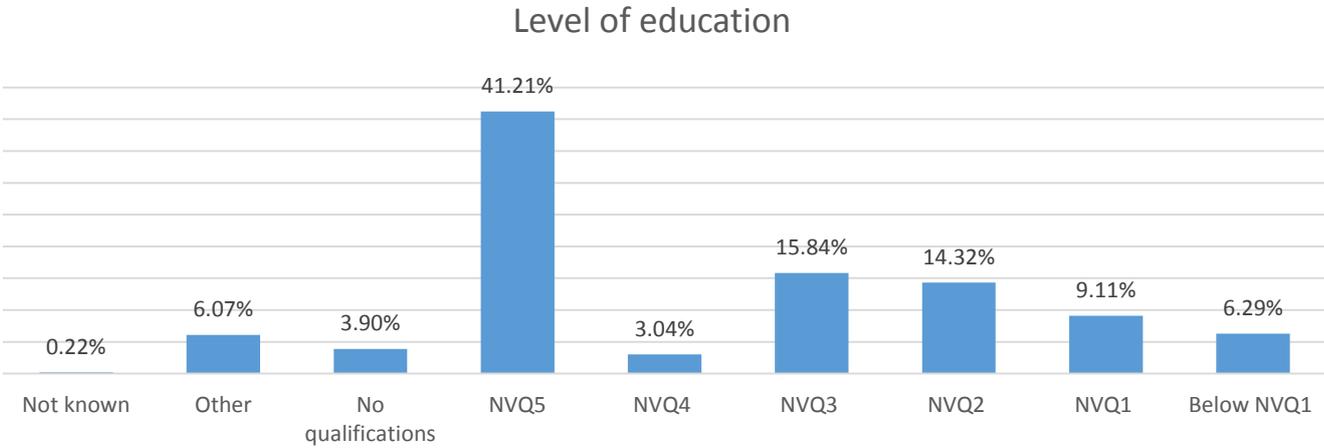
The project has been highly flexible in terms of the support available to accommodate the needs of such a diverse group. Participants kept full ownership of their journey through the project and could decide what type of support would be most appropriate for them.

### Target groups



Among the project participants the number of women was higher (at 54.8%) than the number of men (45.12%).

The project engaged people with skills varying from very basic to higher academic qualifications. There were less than 20% of participants with qualification NVQ level 1 or below while a little over 30% held NVQ level 2-4 and more than 40% of participants had been educated to NVQ Level 5.



### Recruitment and enrolment

The majority of participants were referred through Kingston’s Wellbeing Service, or directly from their GPs. Balance ensured that Wellbeing Service staff and GPs were well informed on the project offer, to avoid ineligible participants being referred to the project. Only clients with mental health issues, who were ready to commit to find employment, or were at risk of losing jobs due to their mental health condition, were referred to the programme. Balance has produced a leaflet which clearly outlined what type of support clients can receive and who is the project for.

The project has been running in the borough since 2006 and has received several awards for its success in helping people with mental health conditions. During this time it has also established a recognised brand as well as an effective referral relationship with the NHS. As such, it did not require a particularly robust marketing strategy or sophisticated publicity materials, as opposed to projects which are being piloted. Through well established relationships with GPs, Kingston Community Mental Health Team, IAPT and Mind, the project had maintained a regular flow of eligible participants, and this was very helpful to delivering the provision in a timely manner. The project manager attended regular meetings with Kingston Community Mental Health Team to discuss potential referrals and give feedback on client progress. Participants were informed about the sources of funding for the project during the initial meetings and the logos of the funders were also present on all printed materials.

Employment Consultants were directly responsible for contact with referees. Initial contact was usually established through a phone conversation, during which a screening for eligibility was carried out. Following the phone conversation the client was invited for the initial meeting, during which a member of the project staff introduced the project, checked referral details, completed enrolment paperwork and formulated a support plan ready to be handed over to the Employment Consultant (EC) upon allocation at the weekly team meeting.

Those individuals who were ineligible for the project were referred to other provision available in the borough. Balance staff have good working relationships with Job Centre Advisers and as a result could signpost participants to appropriate mainstream projects. Participants who needed to address issues

going beyond the scope of the project were signposted to other services such as housing advice, benefits advice, legal advice etc.

## Participants' journey

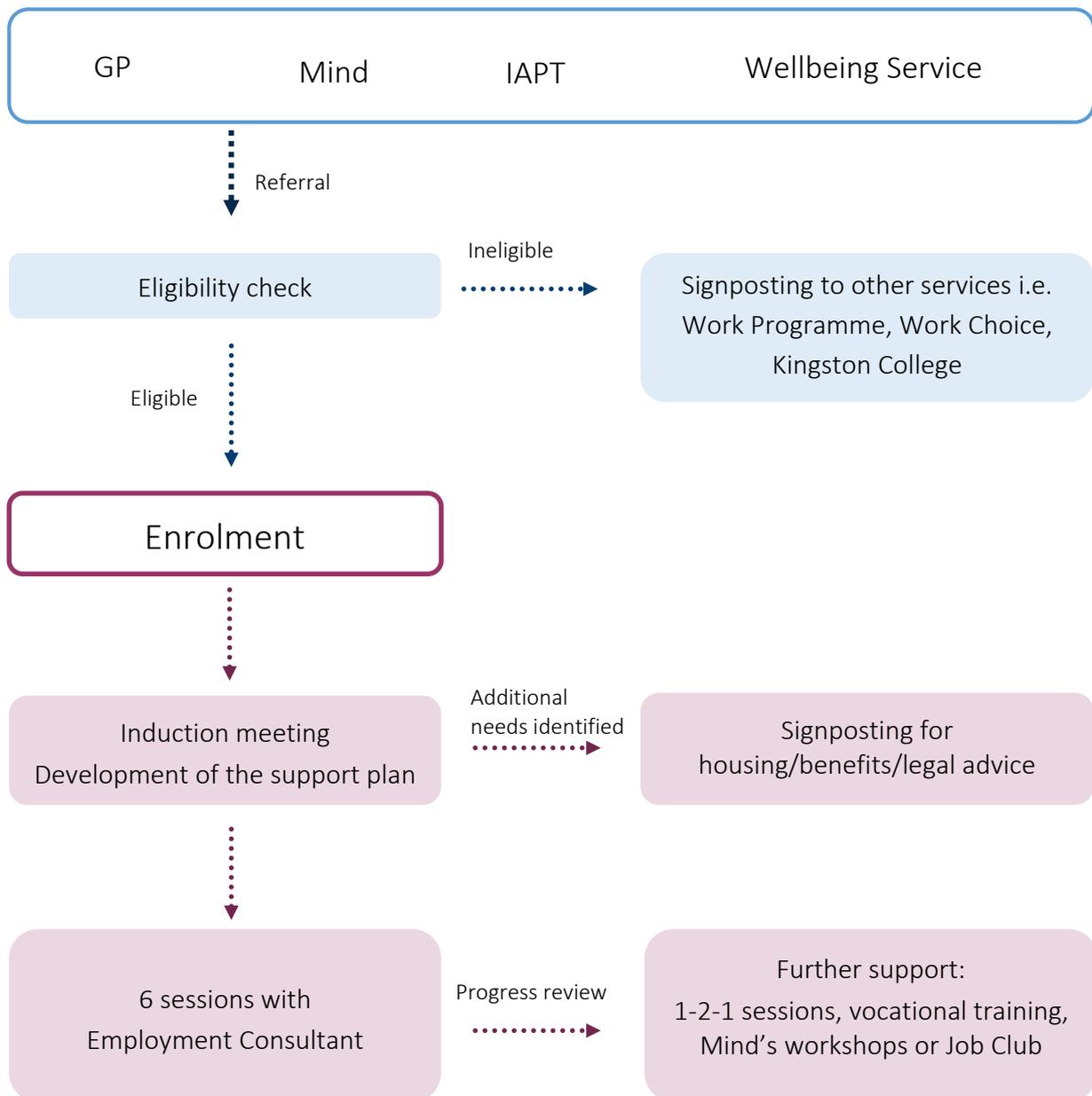
All the participants had been working on the basis of their Individual Action Plans. These were developed during discussions with participants, where their needs and goals were explored in detail. As stressed during the interviews with the staff, the focus was on matching people with the right job for them, rather than any job. This approach required spending quite a lot of time exploring clients' interests and preferences, rather than focusing solely on their past job experience. As a result, some participants changed their careers to find jobs that better suited them, important to achieving more sustainable results and reducing the incidence of participants cycling back into unemployment due to burn-out, stress or general dissatisfaction with their work.

The limit of six hours' support was flexible and people who needed more hours were invited to continue to come to more sessions. This meant that Balance delivered more sessions than it could claim for, however this was necessary to support those furthest from the labour market. During these one-to-one sessions participants were supported in their job search through vocational information and advice including CV writing and interview techniques. Support was also offered to address psychological issues which impacted on their employability for example low self-esteem and confidence.

Job search activity was delivered through the Jobs Club which ran once a week for about three hours. The clubs gave clients a safe and quiet space where they could focus solely on job seeking with the support of an employment assistant, if required. Staff would support clients in job search activities through sending them relevant links and offers, and further support was offered for participants who required it, through Mind's facilitated workshops focused on specific emotional wellbeing themes such as 'Raising Confidence' and 'Insomnia and Sleeplessness'.

After progressing to a positive destination the project participants are still in touch with their advisors. Some of them decided to enrol on the additional Mind courses and through these continue to improve their general wellbeing. Employment Consultants have kept in touch with participants to help sustain their job outcomes, were available via phone or email, and could identify any possible problems at work and help participants to effectively cope with them.

A typical participant's journey through the project is illustrated below.



## Participants' engagement and tracking

The project was successful in engaging and retaining participants. 62% of all engaged participants progressed to positive destinations:

- 48% of all enrolled participants progressed into jobs
- 13% progressed into further job search and training
- 57% of those who progressed into jobs have managed to stay in employment for more than six months.

Balance staff used the tracking templates provided by London Councils to successfully manage the flow of participants. Building rapport and positive relationships with clients was essential to the project's overall success and the Balance staff worked hard to ensure that they were both easily available and approachable. Personal advisers stayed in touch with project participants by telephone, mail and text messages to maintain their engagement. Participants' feedback gathered during the interviews was very positive, with the majority of participants feeling that they could call their advisers at any time and that they could rely on them in case of any problems. One of the participants stated that *"Employment consultants are doing the best they can to support us, sometimes putting in extra hours. My consultant certainly went out of her way to help me."*

Despite the efforts to keep people engaged, some participants did disengage from the project. About 16% of those enrolled on the project did not take up the full 6 hours of support available to them.

As pointed out by the project staff during the interviews, this would often apply to clients who were not yet ready to progress into jobs and needed to address other issues first. Those clients were referred to other agencies and encouraged to come back to the project as soon as they felt that they had addressed their other issues and were able to focus on improving their employment situation. Some participants disengaged because from the start their motivation was low: they had been referred to the project by a friend or family member rather than being driven by their own readiness to move into job. Another group who dropped out were those who self-sabotaged due to low self-esteem. Project staff tried to address this issue during the one to one sessions by providing psychological support, encouragement and space to discuss any emotional barriers to work.

Balance staff made significant efforts to keep participants motivated. Participants who decided to leave the project were assured that they could always call or email and that they could re-engage with the project if they changed their minds. Personal advisors kept in touch with people who had left the project, using phone and email for up to six months after they have left the project. This was to ensure that the results achieved through the project were sustainable and that the participants were confident that they had not been left alone as soon as the project ended.

## The Delivery Partnership

Balance delivered this project in partnership with Mind, which provides Wellbeing Wednesdays targeted at people who in work or close to the job market, but experiencing emotional wellbeing difficulties. Wellbeing workshops are structured psycho-educational courses aimed at improving the general wellbeing of participants, and are provided for clients who are out of work, as well as for those in work. The employment consultants referred clients to Mind, whenever they thought that workshops would be beneficial for them.

The Mind workshops tackled a range of wellbeing topics including: Mindfulness, Anxiety Management, Feel the fear & do it anyway, Anger Management, Art therapy and Positive Thinking and Sound Meditation. These have been regarded as very useful by participants during the interviews. The workshops provided them with tools to improve their general wellbeing, which produced positive results reaching beyond employability. As highlighted by one of the interviewees, the Mind workshops *"helped to cope with stressful situations and thought me how to handle my triggers"*. The partnership with Mind is already well established and there were no significant challenges with regards to partnership working throughout the project.

The relationship with London Councils was overall positive and the project went on without major flaws. The monitoring tools provided by London Councils were very useful in terms of tracking the project progress and monitoring the outcomes and the templates for client satisfaction surveys were useful in measuring the soft outcomes which are crucial in this type of provision.

There were some challenges with regards to programme management. The major challenge in establishing a good working relationship with London Councils was the fact that the contract manager changed four times during the project. This has resulted in a lack of clarity from London Councils with regards to reporting requirements, because the interpretation of the programme guide differed slightly from one contract manager to another. For example, to claim the employment outcome, the project manager was required to collect and submit participants' payslips. Due to the confidentiality and sensitivity of this type of evidence, the amount earned was blanked out. Payslips in this form were accepted in the first couple of months of the project duration, however later on this was changed and the amount earned had to be visible on the document. This resulted in difficulties for participants who did not wish to disclose such information.

Balance has hosted monitoring visits from London Council throughout the project duration. The contract manager was also available on email and phone whenever necessary.

## Project's financial summary and value for money

### Project budget

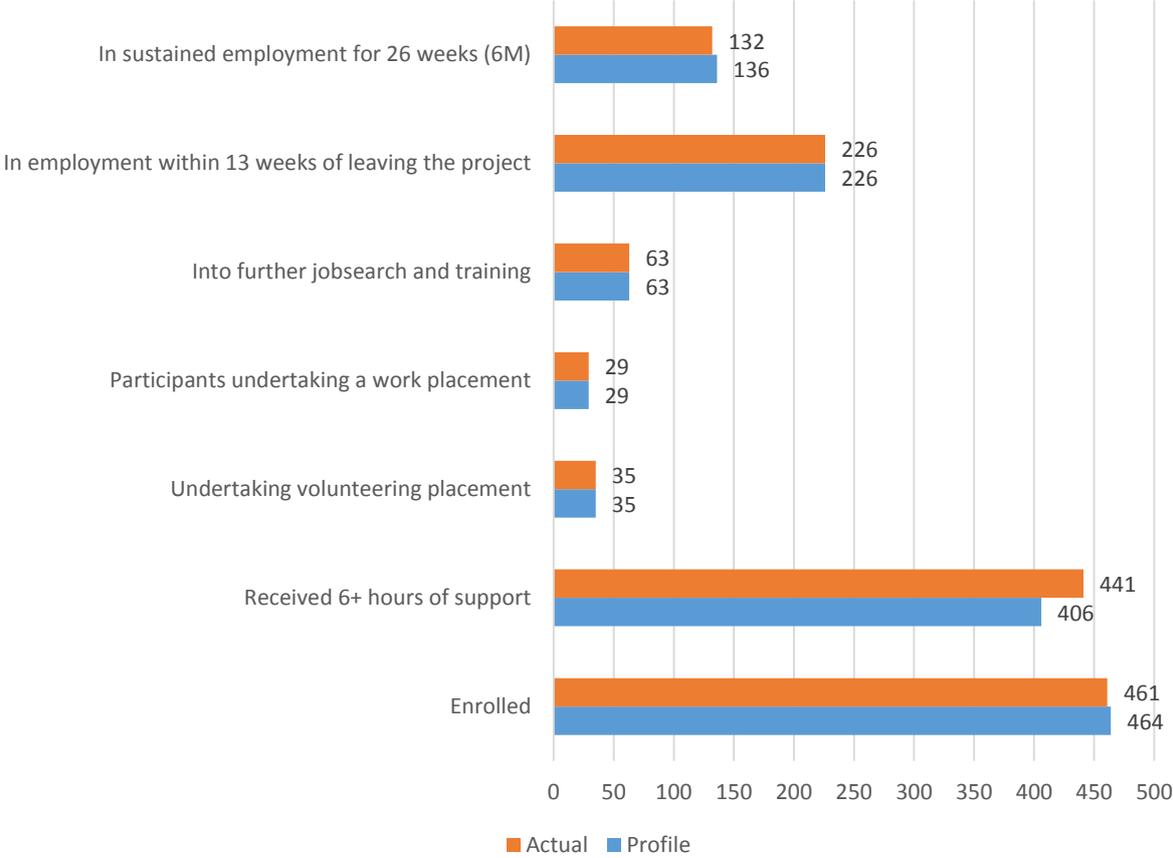
There were some variations in expenditure in relation to the project profile, with an overspend on 6 hours of support (£19,250) and an underspend on job outcomes within 13 weeks of leaving the project (£4,800). The overspend is related to a significant overachievement on the target, while the underspend relates to a slight underachievement on this target (2.9%).

Type of activity	Grant profiled	Grant spent	Difference
Received 6+ hours of support	£223,300	£242,550	-£19,250
Undertaking volunteering placement	£17,500	£17,500	£0
Participants undertaking a work placement	£21,750	£21,750	£0
Into further jobsearch and training	£47,250	£47,250	£0
In employment within 13 weeks of leaving the project	£206,112	£206,112	£0
In sustained employment for 26 weeks (6M)	£163,200	£158,400	£4,800
Evaluation	£4,010	£4,010	£0
Sum	<b>£683,122</b>	<b>£697,572</b>	<b>-£14,450</b>

The Kingston Workstart project has provided excellent value for money by achieving almost all of its targets and over-performing on several targets in relation to its profile. The project engaged 461 learners throughout its duration, very close to its contracted target of 464. Out of those, 441 learners received 6+ hours of support, which represents an over-achievement of 8.6%. The project achieved its target of 35 people engaged in volunteering placements and the target of engaging 29 people in work placements.

In terms of job outcomes, 226 people had found employment within 13 weeks of leaving the project (7.6% more than the original target) and 132 had been in sustained employment for 26 weeks, which falls slightly below the contracted figure of 136.

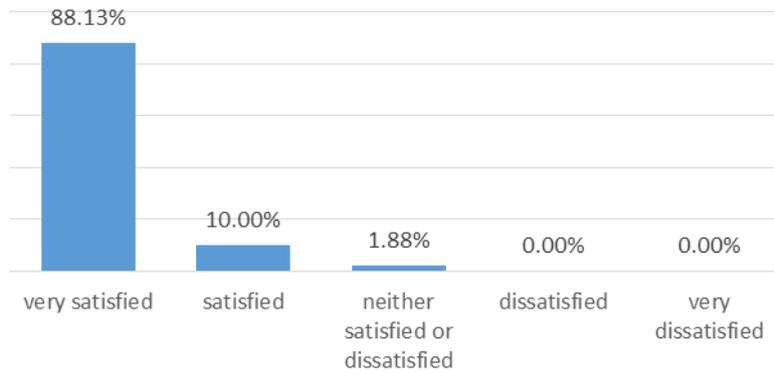
### Outcomes against profile



### Impact of the project

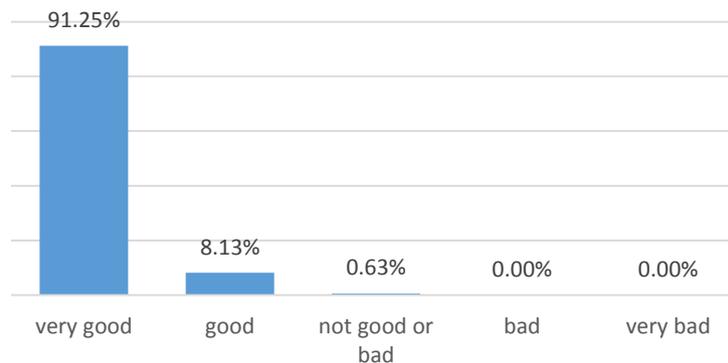
To capture the extent to which the project had a positive impact on participants’ skills development, and ultimately on their chances of entering and/or maintaining employment, was a key part of this evaluation. We reviewed the participants’ satisfaction survey data and carried out qualitative interviews to gain insights into the participants’ perception of the project. We aimed to identify the specific strengths and weaknesses of the project and measure participants’ satisfaction in relation to several aspects of project delivery. Overall, the project was highly valued by participants with 98.1% being very satisfied or satisfied with the quality of the support provided.

### Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the support?



The high satisfaction rate is directly related to the quality of the relationships that employment consultants built with project participants. All but one of the participants stated that their employment consultant had a good or very good understanding of their needs.

### Understanding of your needs

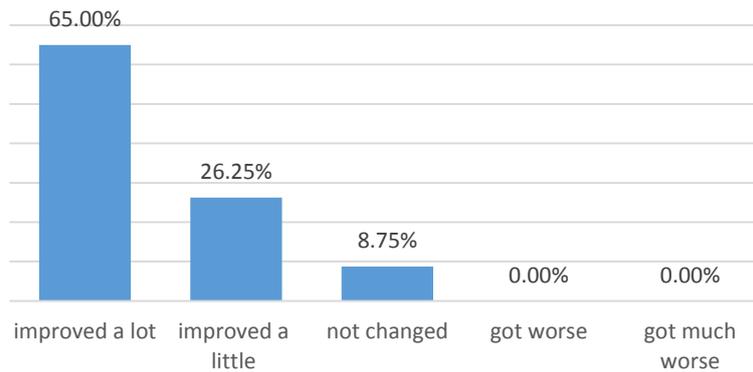


This was also supported by participants' statements during the qualitative interviews. One of the participants said: *"I do not feel like I am here to check boxes but that I am treated like an individual"*

The employment consultants took time to explore what type of career would be most appropriate for their clients, which sometimes resulted in big career changes. One of the women we interviewed had always worked in retail, but now had a job in the NHS. She was very happy with the change and felt that the current job suited her much more than any of her previous roles. *"I am happy to work with in the NHS, I feel respected and more satisfied than in my previous retail jobs."* Another male participant said: *"I want to do a job that I am interested in, otherwise it will not last. I feel that this project can help me to find out what it could be".*

This openness to exploring options before putting people into jobs has resulted in a much greater awareness of the options available to participants. 91% stated that their knowledge of available options had improved, and for 65% it had improved a lot.

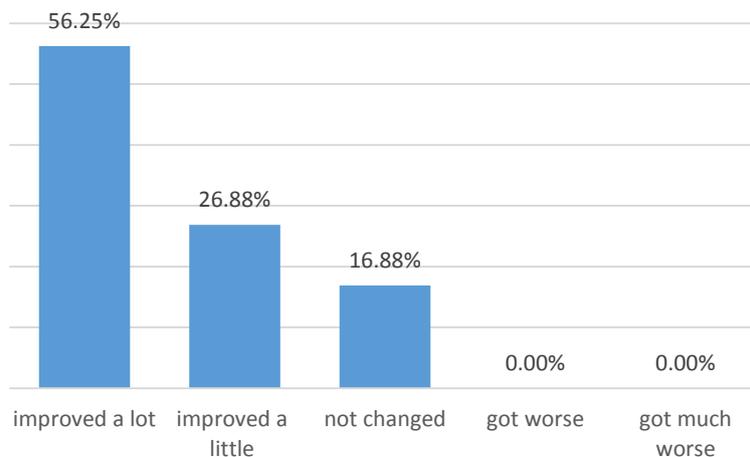
### My knowledge of options available to me has



The project therefore demonstrated significant impact on participants' ability to look at their skills creatively and allowed them to explore, on their own pace, the type of job most likely to be sustainable for them.

According to the participants' satisfaction survey, the majority (83%) were positive about the project's impact on their career progression. More than half (56.2%) stated that their prospects of getting a job had improved a lot, 26.8% said that they had improved a little and for 16.8% they had not changed.

### My prospects of getting a job have:

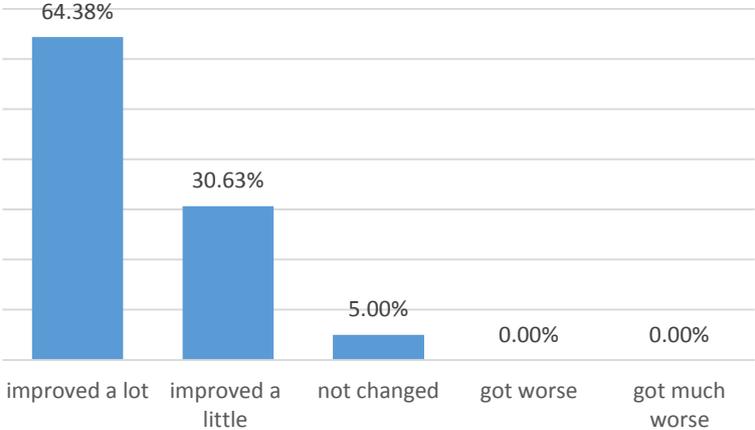


As reported by the project staff, people with mental health issues very often have very low confidence which prevents them from realising their potential. It was crucial for the success of the Kingston Workstart project to address this issue and create a safe environment which allowed people to explore their options on their own terms. Most of participants felt that the environment allowed them to be themselves, to build good relationships with others and to support each other. As stated by one of the interviewees: *"It is a fantastic experience. The environment here is very informal and relaxed. Being in a group means that I do not feel like I am the only one"*

For those who have been unemployed for longer periods of time, the social aspect of participating in the project was as important as the one to one sessions. Once the initial barriers of lack of confidence and low self-esteem had been addressed, they began to see options which they had not previously considered. One young woman told us she had decided to start her own creative arts business after a

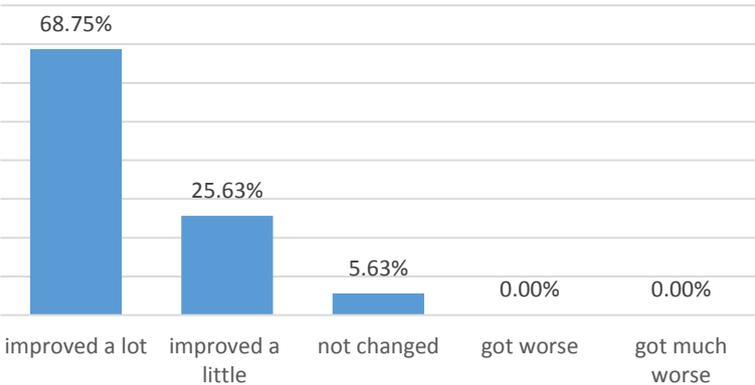
long period of being out of work. She said: *“I am self-employed now. I was out of employment for a long time and now I have developed my own project for which I have won funding”*

### My confidence has:



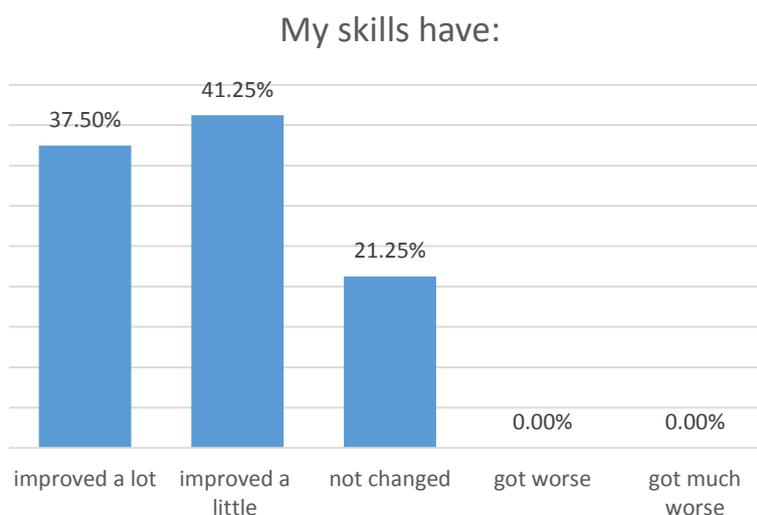
An impressive 95% of all participants reported that their confidence had increased as a result of participation in the project. This has had a positive impact on their progressing into employment or maintaining their jobs and also improved the prospects of those participants who had not achieved an employment outcome within the timeframe of the project. Greater confidence and higher self-esteem is likely to result in positive change long after the project has ended, enabling individuals to take the initiative whenever they feel ready. The majority of participants (94.3%) also reported a boost in motivation alongside growth in confidence.

### My motivation to make the next steps has:



The project had a lesser impact on participants’ skills in comparison with confidence and job-readiness. However, 78.8% of participants had noticed an improvement in their skills levels and for 37.5% the improvement was significant. 21.2% stated that their skills have not changed. It is important here to remember that many participants were highly skilled at the start of the project, with 40% of the

participants having been educated to NVQ Level 5 or above. It would therefore be unrealistic to expect the project to have had a major impact on skills levels.



Overall, the participants' satisfaction survey data suggests that the project had a positive impact on participants' professional development through improving their soft skills, addressing psychological barriers and raising awareness with regards to options available to them.

## Lessons learnt and recommendations

### 1. Amount of hours available per participant

One of the main observations from the focus groups and the staff interviews was that project participants had received more support than the project was able to claim for. The staff stressed that if the participant required more than the six hours of support initially envisaged for them, they would not turn them down, but provided additional sessions. Participants with mental health issues are a very diverse group with different support needs. While for some participants six hours of support might have been sufficient to achieve the desired outcomes, others needed much more than that. The advisers' view was that ceasing support after the initial six sessions, during which the trust between them and adviser had been established, would have been harmful for participants.

It would be beneficial for those participants furthest from the labour market if payment models could be designed to reflect these differences, allowing advisers to provide more support to participants who would not otherwise achieve progression into employment.

### 2. Evidence requirements for the outcomes

The reporting requirements for the job outcomes proved difficult to comply with, as they required submitting learners' payslips. Some learners were uncomfortable about disclosing information about their income and sometimes refused to provide payslips, the result being that Balance was unable to claim achieved results. The guidance from London Councils on this issue was not consistent and varied depending on a contract manager.

It would be beneficial for project delivery if the evidence requirements for job outcomes were simplified and consistent guidance provided on the evidence that was required.

### **3. More flexibility on the time of the sessions**

Both project staff and participants expressed strongly the need to run more sessions in the evenings to accommodate people who are already in work and cannot attend appointments during the daytime. The project did not have the financial and staff resources to cover more flexible session patterns and the participants had to adjust to the daytime sessions.

We recommend that in the future applications funders and delivery organisations take into account the fact that for some learners flexible scheduling of sessions is a key factor for sustaining engagement in the project, and that some evening/weekend provision would be helpful in reducing dropout.

### **4. Setting targets for the project rather than for individual staff members**

The Kingston Workstart project has been the best performing project in London, according to the GLA ESF performance rating. In our view, one of the main reasons for this success was the management approach, which encouraged cooperation between staff members rather than competition. None of the staff members were given individual targets, but all knew the targets that the project as a whole needed to achieve. This meant that each adviser focused on delivering the best possible service to each participant, rather than picking those who are easiest to engage or referring participants to jobs in sectors that did not interest or engage them. By discouraging cherry-picking and encouraging referrals between advisers, targets were very largely met and positive outcomes achieved even for those participants furthest from the labour market.

We recommend that this approach is continued and promoted in the future ESF projects, in particular those with a focus on hard to reach groups and participants with multiple barriers.

## Case study

Jane was referred to Balance by her CMHT Psychologist and had been meeting with her Employment Consultant since 5th February 2013.

Having previously worked at a very senior level in the highly competitive business world, as a freelance financial consultant, Jane was at a low ebb when she was referred to Balance to look for voluntary work. Over a year of being virtually housebound with anxiety issues had taken its toll on her confidence and her ability to plan her future. Jane's anxiety issues were at such a pitch when that by her second session with an Employment Consultant, her low self-esteem led her to conclude that she must be wasting the project's time as she wasn't ready to do anything. This would have been ultimately her choice but she and her Employment Consultant explored her feelings and by the end of the session she felt reassured about the validity of meeting to plan what she would like to do when she is ready. To date she has attended on six occasions and feels she is making great progress.

As well as providing advice on important issues such as disclosure of a Mental Health condition, Jane has had support to talk about and reflect upon some of the poor work experiences she has had in the past and she has started to re-connect to the skills that she would like to use in the future and is much more aware of the situations that she wants to avoid and what is important to her about the work that she does. Importantly, she has realised how important it is for her to work with others who share her values and approach.

Jane had begun to address some of her avoidant behaviour patterns through psychological work and so the Employment Consultant has worked in partnership with her psychologist to support and not hinder this approach.

Some of the sessions have revolved around helping Jane to plan making some of the small changes that would ultimately lead to her independence. For example, planning bus journeys and making contingency plans for the interactions that she might have and was so anxious about. She now journeys to sessions independently and has taken two refresher lessons to get back behind the wheel of her car. Jane has also found the confidence to start answering her own phone again.

By week four, Jane felt ready to be able to sign up to a group anxiety management course run by Balance's project partners, MIND, and by session six, she had visited the volunteer centre and applied to take on a voluntary teaching position so that she could start putting her excellent skills to good use again.

Jane is now much more confident about taking the decisions that are right and healthy for her and is ready to start her volunteering post with the ultimate goal of becoming a qualified teacher.