

Evaluation of CYA's Forging Futures programme



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About this Report

Youth Futures Foundation is the national What Works Centre for youth employment, with a specific focus on marginalised young people.

We want to see a society where every young person can achieve good work.

Our work has two overarching objectives to bring about system change for marginalised young people:

1. To find and generate high-quality evidence to better understand England's youth unemployment and inactivity challenge, and most importantly to learn what solutions work to address this. We do this through bringing together the best evidence already in existence and build on this by conducting original research and testing and evaluating promising interventions to produce much needed new evidence where there are gaps.
2. To put evidence into action with policy makers and employers who have the means to make direct impactful change within the system for young people. We do this through translating the evidence practically for stakeholders to use and understand, and through partnerships and engagement to influence, inform and support them as decision makers to back evidence-based interventions that work.

Aims of this project

The overall aims for this project were to:

- Understand and evidence the programme theory of the support model and the critical drivers / mechanisms of change of Cumbria Youth Alliance's Forging Futures programme.
- Fully specify the intervention and how it is intended to work.
- Understand which elements of the model are most effective; how and why participants achieve outcomes from the support model, the impact of contextual factors and the important triggers of outcomes.
- Understand how CYA operates alongside the statutory support system; capture learning about JCP referral and partnership working through co-located hubs and the potential for data sharing.
- Use ongoing evaluation findings to support CYA to know which elements work most effectively and to refine practice to support further achievement of education, employment, and training (EET) outcomes.
- Provide recommendations for and develop a feasible impact evaluation design.

Acknowledgements

The Institute for Employment Studies is an independent, apolitical, international centre of research and consultancy in public employment policy and organisational human resource management. It works closely with employers in the manufacturing, service and public sectors, government departments, agencies, and professional and employee bodies. For 50 years the Institute has been a focus of knowledge and practical experience in employment and training policy, the operation of labour markets, and human resource planning and development. IES is a not-for-profit organisation which has around 50 multidisciplinary staff and international associates. IES expertise is available to all organisations through research, consultancy, publications and the internet. Our values infuse our work. We strive for excellence, to be collaborative and to bring curiosity to what we do. We work with integrity and treat people respectfully and with compassion.

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Executive summary

Cumbria Youth Alliance (CYA) is a Cumbrian charity delivering three strands of work: Youth Promise supporting young people in education; Youth Ambition supporting young people who are claiming benefits; and Youth Services which supports youth service organisations with governance, monitoring, impact assessment, fundraising, training, quality assurance, and knowledge exchange.

In 2021, CYA was awarded a development grant from Youth Futures, to deliver the First Steps for a sustainable future programme. This programme provided support to 16–18-year-olds in education and young people aged 18-24 who were not in education, employment or training. Following this, in 2023, CYA was allocated £410,000 as part of an impact pilot evaluation grant of the Forging Futures programme. This was largely an extension of the previously funded programme, but with a slightly different target group and support model.

The Forging Futures programme

Forging Futures is a Cumbria-wide employment programme, which aims to help young people move into employment. The programme is delivered by six CYA link workers who are supported by the Youth Ambition Lead, a data coordinator, an employment engagement officer, and a training coordinator.

The programme offers up to 12-months of support. The core activities of the programme are: weekly one-to-one link worker appointments; initial assessments; and completion of CYA's My Evaluation Tool (ME Tool), which assesses personal support needs and levels of engagement when a young person joins the programme. Optional activities include group sessions, referrals to partner organisations for additional support or training, work experience, volunteering, or virtual internships, and up to six months of in-work link worker support.

Forging Futures is aimed at young people aged 16 - 24-years-old, living in Cumbria, looking for work and claiming Universal Credit. Young people are referred to the programme by Jobcentre Work Coaches.

The evaluation

The evaluation was carried out by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES). The main aims of the evaluation were to understand and evidence the theory underlying Forging Future's programme's support model and the mechanisms of change (i.e. the main drivers of outcomes). In addition, IES was required to provide recommendations for a

feasible impact evaluation design, such as a randomised control trial or a quasi-experimental design study.

The two-year evaluation¹ of the 2023 to 2024 Forging Futures programme, included:

- a review of CYA delivery documents and data, scoping interviews, and a theory of change workshop,
- observations of co-located link workers in Jobcentre Plus offices and Youth Hubs in Cumbria,
- initial and follow-up interviews with young people participating in Forging Futures and staff,
- partner interviews,
- analysis and reporting of qualitative interview data and quantitative programme data.

Forging Futures participants

The cohort of young people in this evaluation were typically white (99% of participants), male (66% of participants), and around one-quarter (24%) said they had a health condition, learning difference or disability. Around half (52%) had been unemployed for less than six months before joining the programme, and half (48%) had been unemployed for longer than six months. Overall, 124 people were supported on Forging Futures between September 2023 and August 2024.

Findings

Figure 1: Summary of study findings

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	FINDINGS
What is the theory of change for the support model?	At the start of the evaluation the theory of change for the previous CYA programme, First steps to a sustainable future, was adapted to reflect the new target group and anticipated differences in the delivery model. However, due to programme

¹ Evaluation activities were conducted from April 2023 to March 2025.

How feasible is the theory of change?

changes, a revised (final) theory of change was made to reflect the programme as it was delivered during the evaluation period, drawing on discussions with CYA staff, and qualitative interview data from young people, link workers and partners.

The final theory of change set out how the core programme activities (one-to-one link worker support, initial assessment and the CYA's ME Tool) and optional activities, were intended to lead to short-term outcomes. These short-term outcomes were personal development, improved lifestyle choices and behaviours, improved job-readiness, and increased skills, knowledge, and experience. In summary, it was anticipated that:

- Personal development short-term outcomes would lead to intermediate outcomes of employment, education, or training, as well as long-term impacts of improved quality of life.
- Improved lifestyle choices and behaviours would lead to improved quality of life.
- Improved job-readiness would lead to employment outcomes.
- Increased skills, knowledge and experience would lead to employment, education and training intermediate outcomes.

The final theory of change included revisions to the mechanisms for change, and found 'willingness to engage', and 'trusted and continuous link worker relationship' were key drivers of outcomes. The third mechanism for change, 'tailored support' remained broadly the same. The activities in the theory of change were also updated to reflect adaptations made to the model by CYA during implementation.

Overall, the final theory of change appears feasible. See below for the extent to which it was evidenced.

What qualitative and quantitative evidence supports the underlying theory?

How can the theory of change be substantiated in evidence?

Referrals onto the programme and activities engaged with are evidenced through comprehensive Forging Futures data.

Short-term outcomes were evidenced through qualitative data from interviews with people on the programme, link workers and partners. Some of these were also evidenced through longitudinal data on personal support needs, assessed through ME Tool completion. ME Tool data was available for 34 people on the programme.

Intermediate outcomes of 'employment', and 'education, and training' were evidenced through analysis of Forging Futures

	data. However, our understanding about variation in participant journeys to achieve employment outcomes is less robust, because it relies primarily on qualitative evidence. Long-term impacts of the programme were beyond the scope of this evaluation.
How effective is the programme's engagement and needs assessment process?	Young people spoke positively about the initial engagement appointment. It was described as thorough, providing clear information about the programme in a short amount of time, and offering a good introduction to their link worker. Engagement with the programme overall was described by link workers to be good. Some link workers noted that engagement was higher in Barrow-in-Furness. In this area, the voluntary nature of the programme was highlighted during the referral process whereas in other areas some young people reported feeling pressured by their Work Coach to sign up, perhaps due to the job seeking requirements of Universal Credit. Analysis by CYA suggests that 15% of people who start the Forging Futures programme disengage not into education or employment with fewer than 10 hours of support. Needs assessments were carried out during 'initial assessment' appointments and again when completing the ME Tool in one-to-one link worker appointments. The most common support needs self-reported during initial assessment appointments were employability skills (75%), transport (47%), mental health (47%) and confidence (46%).
What are the main journeys young people take through the support?	Typically, young people were referred to Forging Futures by Jobcentre Plus. Work Coaches explained the type of support available through the programme and arranged for an initial appointment with a link worker, often in the same Jobcentre or Youth Hub where the Work Coach was based. Once enrolled onto Forging Futures young people had weekly appointments with their link worker to help them with the area(s) of support identified during initial assessment and completion of CYA's ME Tool. Small numbers of people took part in the variety of optional activities (see Optional activities for details). Nearly half (47%) of people on the programme moved into employment. This was typically part-time work (fewer than 24 contracted hours per week). Ongoing link worker support in the form of calls, messages or meetings was available for up to six months after people moved into work.

What are young people's experiences of support? What (if anything) could be improved?	Feedback from young people on the programme was overall positive, particularly in relation to one-to-one support available from link workers. This tended to be employability support tailored to individual needs. It could include, for example: help with CVs; support with job applications; interview practice; or coaching and guidance to decide what type of job they wanted to move into. No areas of improvement were identified in relation to programme delivery, as CYA adapted the planned support model to better suit the cohort of young people. In this instance, this involved introducing smaller 'taster' group sessions instead of the planned group sessions, as link workers became aware of a reluctance to engage with group activities among young people on the programme. In relation to Forging Futures data collection, it would be beneficial to future evaluation if more data was available on personal development outcomes (i.e. confidence, communication, mental health and wellbeing, ambition, motivation, and independent living skills), which in practice would involve increasing the number of programme participants who complete the ME Tool, and more specifically complete it more than once.
What are the critical drivers of sustained employment outcomes? What are the mechanisms for change?	The final theory of change identified a willingness to engage by young people, tailored support available through the programme, and a trusted and continuous relationship with a link worker to be the key mechanisms for change. Due to the small number of people sustaining employment outcomes, and the small numbers participating in optional activities such as group sessions, external support, work experience and volunteering, it was not possible to identify if specific activities or combinations of activities were critical drivers of sustained employment outcomes.

1. Introduction

The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) was commissioned by the Youth Futures Foundation to evaluate the Forging Futures programme delivered by Cumbria Youth Alliance (CYA). CYA has a strategic purpose to support young people to achieve a sustainable and positive future. The organisation works directly with young people and provides capacity building support to third sector organisations across the county. This report presents the findings of IES's two-year evaluation.

Background

Cumbria's youth employment and labour demand landscape

Analysis by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) of Labour Force Survey data (2014 to 2022 combined) shows Cumbria youth unemployment at 13.1%, with Cumbria ranked 21st out of 41 regions in the UK in relation to the percentage of 16- to 24-year-olds who are unemployed².

ONS's analysis of Labour Force Survey data of the proportion of young people in different types of occupation gives an indication of job opportunities in the region. This analysis indicated that Cumbria has one of the highest proportions of 'lower working' job opportunities for young people compared with other regions, with 'lower working' occupations typically referring to lower paid occupations³. The analysis also indicates it is one of the lowest regions in relation to the proportion of 'higher professional' occupations, which typically refers to higher paid occupations⁴. Industries in Cumbria include renewable energy, nuclear energy, defence, manufacturing, farming, tourism,

² Analysis by the Office for National Statistics of Labour Force Survey data (2014 to 2022 combined) https://social-mobility.data.gov.uk/drivers_of_social_mobility/work_opportunities_for_young_people/youth_unemployment/latest#by-area

³ Source: https://social-mobility.data.gov.uk/drivers_of_social_mobility/work_opportunities_for_young_people/type_of_employment_opportunities_for_young_people/latest#by-area

⁴ Cumbria is ranked 3rd out of 41 regions in the UK for proportion of young people working in 'lower working' occupations, and 35th out of 41 regions for the proportion of young people working in 'higher professional' occupations.

and hospitality⁵. However, the Cumbrian Local Skills Improvement Plan notes an expected continued overall trend of decline in labour supply in coming years⁶.

In relation to levels of deprivation in the county, this varies by area. For example Barrow-in-Furness is the most deprived Cumbrian district according to analysis of the 2019 English Indices of Deprivation (IoD)'s Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) scores, and Copeland, is the second most deprived Cumbrian district but has become much less deprived compared with 2015⁷. Barrow-in-Furness and Copeland are two of the areas where Cumbria Youth Alliance's Forging Futures programme is delivered, as detailed further below.

Cumbria Youth Alliance

To improve employment outcomes for young people in Cumbria, CYA have developed and delivered three strands of support:

- Youth Promise is a strand of work supporting young people in education to progress into further education, training or employment when they leave school.
- Youth Ambition is a strand of work that supports young people who are claiming benefits to overcome challenges related to moving into education, training and employment.
- Youth Services is dedicated to building sustainability of the youth services sector and supports organisations with governance, monitoring, impact assessment, fundraising, training, quality assurance, and knowledge exchange. Additionally, CYA oversee partnership agreements, integrating sustainability into these collaborations.

As part of their Youth Ambition strand of work, supporting young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) and claiming benefits, CYA developed the Forging Futures programme.

Programme

The design for Forging Futures was developed through a previous CYA employment programme 'first steps to a sustainable future' that ran between 2021 and 2023,

⁵ Source: <https://www.thecumbrialep.co.uk/news-detail/2024/thought-piece-why-cumbrias-economy-matters/>

⁶ Source: <https://www.cumbriachamber.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/LSIP-Progress-Report-Cumbria-June-2024-FINAL.pdf>

⁷ Source: Cumbria Intelligence Observatory 2019.
<https://elibrary.cumbria.gov.uk/Content/Internet/536/671/4674/17217/17223/422771749.PDF#:~:text=The%202019%20IoD%20report%20that,are%20more%20deprived%20than%20Cumbria>

supporting 109 people aged 18 to 24, who were not in education, employment, or training. 'First steps to a sustainable future' was only delivered in some areas of Cumbria (Workington, Whitehaven and Carlisle). YFF provided £253,000 of grant funding to 'First steps to a sustainable future'⁸.

Forging Futures is a youth employment support service, for people aged 16 to 24, claiming benefits and who are NEET and may have experience of the care system. Forging Futures was delivered between September 2023 and August 2024 across the whole of Cumbria.

Forging Futures works with young people to deliver tailored interventions, targeting a range of support needs, with a view to working towards:

- improved personal development, including increased confidence, communication skills, aspirations, wellbeing, and independent living;
- improved job readiness;
- increased skills, knowledge, and experience;
- improved lifestyle choices and behaviours; and
- employment, education, and training outcomes.

The model for the programme comprises one-to-one tailored support from a CYA link worker, alongside optional activities. One-to-one support includes personal development action plans, wellbeing and low-level mental health support, and employability skills. Support to access (optional) work experience, volunteering and Virtual Internships is available for those who would benefit from these and were interested in taking part. People can also receive up to six months in-work support if they wish. A full description of the Forging Futures programme, outlining the support model, participant journey and theory of change, is outlined in the Programme theory section of this report.

Research aims

The overall aims for this project were to:

- Understand and evidence the programme theory of the support model and the critical drivers / mechanisms of change.
- Fully specify the intervention and how it is intended to work.

⁸ Source: <https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/news/410k-to-tackle-youth-unemployment-in-cumbria/> accessed 29.01.25

- Understand which elements of the model are most effective; how and why participants achieve outcomes from the support model, the impact of contextual factors and the important triggers of outcomes.
- Understand how CYA operates alongside the statutory support system; capture learning about Jobcentre Plus referrals and partnership working through co-located hubs and the potential for data sharing.
- Use ongoing evaluation findings to support CYA to know which elements work most effectively and to refine practice to support further achievement of education, employment, and training (EET) outcomes.
- Provide recommendations for and develop a feasible impact evaluation design.⁹

Specific research questions are listed in Figure 3 in the Methods section below.

About this report

This report sets out the research methods used in the evaluation, including ethical considerations, analysis approach and evaluation limitations; the programme theory; evaluation findings, including characteristics and needs of people on the Forging Futures programme, programme delivery and outcomes achieved; and evidence of promise/recommendations for further evaluation.

Additional information in the Appendices includes:

- Ethics and data protection documentation from the evaluation, including research information sheets and the privacy information notice.
- Pre-evaluation theory of change that was used as the basis for developing the current theory of change.
- An example activity timeline, created during interviews with people on the Forging Futures programme.
- The evaluation timeline.

⁹ These are not included in this report. They were provided to Youth Futures in a separate report.

2. Methods

The pilot study was completed in several phases as detailed below:

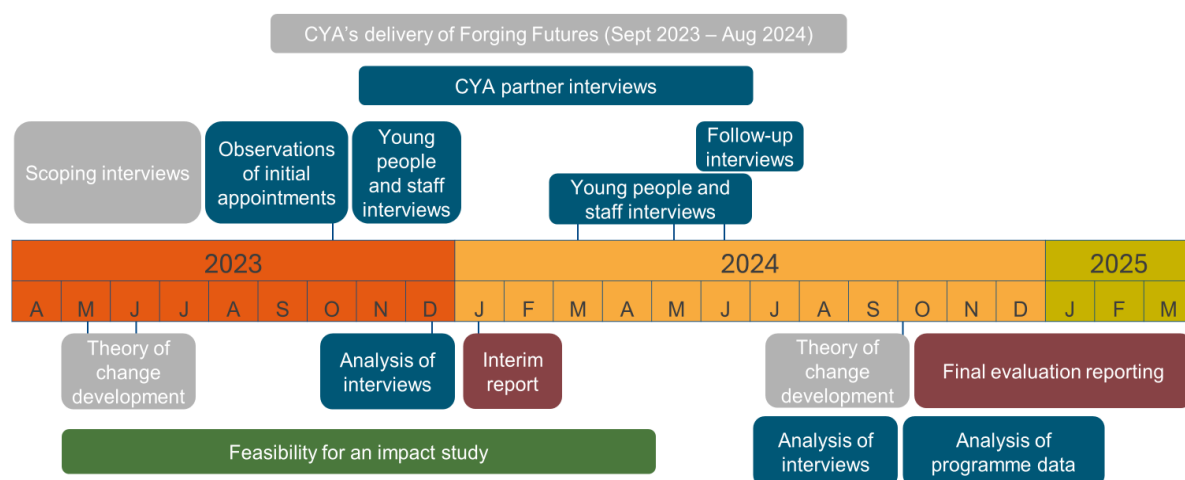
- **Evaluation mobilisation and scoping phase:** including a review of CYA delivery documents and data and scoping interviews. A theory of change workshop with CYA and Youth Futures staff was held to update the existing theory of change from the previous programme, First Steps to a Sustainable Future.
- **Observations** of co-located link workers.
- **Initial and follow-up interviews** with people on Forging Futures and staff.
- **Partner interviews.**
- **Analysis** of qualitative interview data and quantitative programme data.
- **Reporting.**

The feasibility study consisted of:

- **Initial scoping work:** in which a review of literature of impact studies was carried out, and an initial workshop with CYA and DWP staff was held.
- **Analysis of options** for a future impact study, with further meetings with DWP staff.
- **Reporting:** IES produced a report for Youth Futures on the feasibility of a future impact study for the Forging Futures programme. As intended, this report was not published, but was used to inform the next stage of a pilot impact study.

The evaluation timeline is shown in Figure 2 below and in Appendix 3.

Figure 2: Evaluation timeline



The width of each task label represents where tasks were carried out over a number of months. However, where tasks were in one month only or specific months, lines have been added to show which month the activities correspond to.

Research questions

Figure 3 displays the research questions for this evaluation, alongside the data sources used to answer each question.

Figure 3: Source of information used to answer each of the research questions

Research questions	Scoping phase	Observations of initial appointments	Programme participant interviews	Paired interviews with CYA link workers	Participant data	Partner interviews
What is the theory of change for the support model?						
How feasible is it?						
What qualitative and quantitative evidence supports the underlying theory?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
How can the theory of change be substantiated in evidence?						
How effective is the programme's engagement and needs assessment process?		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
What are the main journeys young people take through the support?			Yes	Yes	Yes	
What are young people's experiences of support?		Yes	Yes		Yes	
What (if anything) could be improved?						

What are the critical drivers of sustained education, employment and training (EET) outcomes?	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
What are the mechanisms of change?						

Theory of Change development

At the outset of the evaluation, CYA's Forging Futures programme was underpinned by an existing theory of change from the previous programme, First Steps to a Sustainable Future. This theory of change was updated during the evaluation mobilisation and scoping phase amending any parts that were anticipated by CYA staff to be different compared with the previous programme (see Pre-evaluation theory of change in Appendix 2 for the initial Forging Futures theory of change diagram). The theory of change was then updated at the end of the evaluation. The final theory of change appears in the Programme theory section.

Data collection

Observations of initial registration appointments

To capture insight into how Forging Futures is introduced to people referred into the programme, research staff spent two days observing people's initial registration appointment, led by CYA link workers. Observations took place over two days in open-plan areas of Jobcentre Plus offices in Carlisle and Workington, where link workers were co-located¹⁰. A total of four initial appointments were observed across the two days. In some instances, researchers also observed the handover of people from Jobcentre staff to link workers.

Observations were guided by the AEIOU framework¹¹, a tool that encourages researchers to capture and classify data about the activities, environments, interactions, objects and users they observe. The tool included several prompts for researchers to consider. These included:

- How do CYA link workers interact with Jobcentre staff? Are there frequent interactions between them?
- How do link workers initially try to engage and motivate young people regarding participating in CYA activities and/or entering employment, education or training?

¹⁰ Initial registration appointments were conducted in Jobcentres in Carlisle, Workington, Whitehaven, Kendal and Penrith. The only exception was Barrow, where young people attended group information sessions led by link workers at the office of a local homelessness charity for young people, Project John.

¹¹ AEIOU is an acronym for Activities, Environments, Interactions, Objects and Users, the five key points of focus of the framework.

- Is the meeting/support session tailored to a young person's needs?

Qualitative interviews with young people

Number of young people interviewed

The research team aimed to achieve 20 initial interviews and 15 follow-up interviews, to make 35 interviews in total. This number was considered to be reasonable for a programme of around 100 young people, and allowed for a range of personal circumstances and support needs to be captured. Interviewees were aged 18 to 24 years old, with a variety of living arrangements including living with family or living independently. Many had prior work experience, including volunteering and paid employment, some described themselves being quite introverted, socially isolated and/or unsure what type of work they wanted to move into.

Although 21 initial interviews were achieved, there were some challenges achieving the intended number of follow-up interviews, with only 11 being completed in the end. This was because the young people initially interviewed had since left or disengaged from the programme, were experiencing personal difficulties and/or had busy schedules due to employment or training which made it difficult to contact them and arrange a time for an interview. To overcome these challenges, researchers explained to people in their first interview that we would be seeking a second interview, in which we would offer another £25 voucher as an incentive. IES staff also worked closely with link workers to see what adaptations could be made, including offering evening interviews but there was low take-up of this.

Interviews took place at one of four different time points, depending on the Jobcentre area and whether it was a follow-up interview. Figure 4 shows the number of interviews achieved by Jobcentre area, and the time point at which these took place.

Figure 4: Number of achieved interviews with young people on Forging Futures by Jobcentre area

	Anticipated number on pro-gramme	Actual number on pro-gramme	November 2023 (initial interviews)	March 2024 (initial interviews)	May 2024 (initial interviews)	June/July 2024 (follow-up interviews)	Interviewees as proportion of people on programme
Carlisle	30	35	10			7	29%
Barrow-in-Furness	30	22		4		2	18%

Kendal	5	11		3		2	27%
Penrith	5	9			1	n/a	11%
Whitehaven	15*	26			1	n/a	4%
Workington	15*	21			2	n/a	10%
TOTAL	100	124	10	7	4	11	

*Indicates estimates: a total of 30 young people were anticipated to engage with the Forging Futures programme across Workington and Whitehaven combined.
Source: IES, 2024.

Topics covered in interviews

Interviews with programme participants covered:

- personal circumstances, such as living situation, disabilities/health conditions and experience of the care or criminal justice systems, and education and work histories before moving on to discussing programme experiences;
- how young people were referred into the programme, including their motivations and expectations of the programme; and
- reflections on the support they had received and their views on their relationship with their link worker.

As part of the interview, an 'activity timeline' of the Forging Futures activities and support participated in was created (see Appendix 2: Example activity timeline).

Follow-up interviews followed a similar structure, building on the existing activity timeline and, where a young person had moved into education, employment or training, what support CYA has provided in their transition.

Interview location and mode

Due to the prevalence of anxiety and low confidence amongst the young people on the programme, CYA felt that taking part in this type of research interaction would be a positive achievement and experience for many people on Forging Futures. Therefore, the initial plan was for all initial interviews to be conducted in person. In practice, most initial interviews took place in person on the premises of CYA partner organisations, with a few having to be re-arranged and conducted by phone or MS Teams. The mode and location of initial interviews was as follows:

- **Carlisle:** in person at Carlisle Key (a partner organisation of CYA) as planned.

- **Barrow-in-Furness:** in person interviews at Drop Zone (a youth hub).
- **Kendal:** in person interviews at the Kendal Jobcentre. Re-scheduled interviews were completed over the phone.
- **Whitehaven, Workington and Penrith:** online interviews as the small numbers in different locations made in person interviews impractical.

Follow-up interviews in June and July 2024 were in person at Carlisle Key, and over the phone and online with a small number of people in Carlisle, Barrow-in-Furness and Kendal.

Participant selection

People on Forging Futures were invited to take part in qualitative interviews based on their location in Cumbria (see Interview location and type – initial interviews section above for details), support needs and personal characteristics.

Within each Jobcentre area, interviewees were selected by their link worker in consultation with the programme manager, ensuring a mix of support needs and personal characteristics. IES emphasised to CYA staff the importance of having a diverse group of interviewees, to ensure not just those who were particularly engaged or doing well on the programme were approached for interview. Although the qualitative data reflects a range of experiences, it is possible this selection process may have introduced bias into the qualitative research findings.

Link workers explained the research process to young people during their one-to-one support sessions and gave them the option to take part or not. Printed research information sheets were given to the young people by the link worker (see Information Sheet (young people interviewees) for more details).

Paired interviews with CYA link workers

Programme participant interviewees' consent was sought to share their activity timeline with a member of CYA staff as part of staff interviews.¹² This was for the member of staff to provide further detail about the activities and support a young person had received, and why particular decisions had been made during their support journey. Paired interviews were achieved for all 21 young people interviewed.

¹² For young people interviewed in Barrow-in-Furness in June/July 2024, their link worker left CYA before a paired interview could be conducted. A paired interview was conducted with another member of staff instead.

Participant selection

Since at least one young person in each of the six programme locations was interviewed, all the link workers were interviewed as part of paired interviews.

Qualitative interviews with CYA partners

The research team initially proposed conducting 20 interviews with CYA partners and employers. As the evaluation progressed it became apparent that 10 interviews would be sufficient to provide coverage of all partner types, as CYA have many partners, but fewer that they work closely with. In total, 10 interviews were conducted with partner organisations offering one or more of the following:

- referrals to Forging Futures;
- direct support to the Forging Futures programme, such as through attending employer Q&A sessions and mock interviews with young people;
- training, internships and apprenticeships opportunities; and/or
- additional support for young people, separate from Forging Futures.

Topics covered in interviews included how partners support the Forging Futures programme, what works well or less well Forging Futures, their views on partnership working with CYA and views on the opportunities and challenges in the local labour market.

Participant selection

Interviews with CYA's partner organisations were selected through discussions between CYA and IES staff. CYA extended an invitation to take part in the evaluation to their partners, and where consent was provided, their contact information was passed on to the evaluation team. IES then contacted each partner separately to arrange interviews. See the Appendices for a copy of the 'Partner organisation information sheet' given to partner interviewees.

Ethics and data protection

IES ethical review process

This research was carried out in line with IES's ethical review process. IES staff are required to conduct themselves in line with internal guidelines on ethical and professional standards as well as based on the Social Research Association recommendations and the Government Social Research Unit guidelines. This include a commitment to evidence-based approaches, conducted in an independent and professional manner, ensuring that all potential participants were aware that taking part in the research was

voluntary, that they were able to give informed consent and that data collection burdens were minimised. IES researchers have a duty to avoid harm for participants, with assurances given that not all the questions had to be answered in interviews and researchers had safeguarding awareness training ahead of fieldwork, with tailored safeguarding protocols put in place. All interviewees were aged 18 or above by the time the interviews took place.

Interview recruitment process

For people on the Forging Futures programme, initial agreement to participate in the research was gained through CYA staff who gave people the information sheets, talked them through the information and gained verbal consent. If people were happy to take part, CYA staff noted their names and completed a booking form for the dates IES researchers were in Cumbria for the observations and interviews. IES were mindful that some people taking part in research interviews might be vulnerable due to personal circumstances including experience of the care system, experience of mental ill-health or be neurodivergent. Therefore, for research interviews, CYA staff explained to the young people that they could have someone with them in the interview if they wanted, interviews were arranged for a day and time when they typically met with link workers, and link workers were on hand before and after interviews to provide additional support if needed. None of the young people interviewed requested to have someone with them during the interview.

For observations, verbal consent was gained at the start of the initial appointment and a paper copy of the information sheet with a unique ID on was given to the participant. For staff interviews, IES researchers re-explained the purpose of the research, the topics to be discussed, what would happen to interview data in relation to reporting and deletion and gained verbal consent to participate before starting the interview. See Ethics and Data Protection documentation in Appendix 1 for further details and copies of research information sheets and the privacy notice for this evaluation.

Data collection, storage and transfer

CYA record participants' data at registration, initial assessment and when completing the ME Tool. Link workers input this data into CYA's database, Upshot. Anonymised data was transferred to IES via SharePoint for analysis and reporting in this report.

IES only received personal data such as names and email addresses when conducting qualitative interviews, which IES allocated unique identification numbers to, to ensure there was only one file containing names and unique identification numbers. All other interview information such as recordings and written summaries were stored using the IES identification numbers. The names used in boxed examples throughout the report have been changed.

All personal data will be deleted within six months of this report being published.

Analysis approach

Analysis of qualitative data

Observations

For each observed interaction (appointment) researchers noted the topics discussed, whether interactions were link worker/young person led, how engaged and comfortable people were, and the link worker's overall approach to conversations and support. Once completed, researchers collated critical reflections on how observation data related to the programme's theory of change. This data was used to supplement and/or contrast findings from interviews with staff and young people.

Interviews

Thematic analysis of qualitative interview data was conducted by IES staff in parallel to quantitative analysis of programme data. Longitudinal interview data was analysed with initial interview data to understand individuals' progress, and staff interview data was analysed alongside young people's interview data to gain an in depth understanding of individual support journeys. Emerging findings from the qualitative and quantitative data sources were then paired up to identify common findings and/or differences. Where findings were aligned, the quantitative data is reported first supported by detail from the qualitative data. Any discrepancies between the two have been noted in this report and where possible explained with additional information from CYA.

Activity timelines were produced in interviews with young people to act as a discussion point in link worker interviews, and as a prompt in repeat interviews with young people. Analysis of activities listed in timelines identified commonalities between peoples' support journeys, as well as any areas of difference. Timelines were also used to understand key milestones in support, sequence of activities and length of time between certain appointments and activities.

Analysis of Forging Futures data

Anonymised Forging Futures data from CYA's Upshot database was analysed between October 2024 and January 2025 using Excel, STATA and SPSS. Overall, this data was fairly complete, with data available for approximately 82% to 100% of participating young people for key variables such as personal characteristics and support needs identified during initial appointments. Information from the registration process, initial assessment, programme activity and destinations were received by IES in October 2024. This included 3-month destination data for people who left the programme before summer of 2024, with the remaining 3-month destination data received in January 2025. IES also

received ME Tool data in January 2025, that included measures of personal support needs (see Figure 5 below).

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the characteristics of programme participants and any differences in employment outcomes between different groups were explored using significance tests (T-tests, 95% confidence interval).

For the analysis of the ME Tool personal support needs data, we analysed differences between first and last ME Tools, for the 35 people who completed more than one ME Tool. Differences in scores from people's first and last ME Tool assessments were assessed using significance tests (T-tests, 95% confidence interval).

All data was recorded in Upshot, CYA's chosen management information database. An outline of the components that build Forging Futures data is displayed in Figure 5. For consistency, each component of the data is referred to as 'Forging Futures data' in the report.

Figure 5: Overview of Forging Future data components

Data type	Description of data
ME Tool	The ME Tool is CYA's My Evaluation Tool (ME Tool for short) used by link workers to identify personal support needs and level of engagement upon entering the programme, and repeated during the programme to track progress of personal support needs. It was developed by CYA during the previous programme 'First steps to a sustainable future'. The ME Tool includes a list of 10 pre-defined support needs: relationships, employability skills, key skills (numeracy, literacy and IT skills), aspiration and motivation, social involvement, healthy lifestyles, emotional wellbeing, independent living skills, secure environment, and self-esteem and identity. At a ME Tool assessment young people, with support from their link worker, give each support need a score from one to six (where one indicates high support needs, and six indicates low support needs). At initial registration link workers note a person's stage on the pipeline of • Stage 1: not engaging • Stage 2: considering • Stage 3: taking part • Stage 4: actively participating • Stage 5: independently confident

	• Stage 6: sustaining. A pipeline stage of one indicates an individual has high support needs and/or are not engaging in the programme, whereas a pipeline stage of six indicates no support is required and they are sustaining progress. Further information on the ME Tool can be found in the 'ME Tool assessment' and 'ME Tool Pipeline' sections of this report.
Support needs	During initial appointments, link workers and young people talk through a list of support needs and record any on Upshot that the young person feels is preventing them from moving into employment. Link workers also make their own judgement on young people's support needs and record these in Upshot too. There is no pre-defined list of support needs. Figure 13 shows the range and frequency of support needs identified.
Activities	Following all interactions with CYA-led support, link workers manually recorded activities in Upshot. This included all core and optional activities outlined in Chapter 4 of this report. As activities were recorded ad hoc either during or after appointments, and there was no pre-populated list of activities, this data may not fully capture the extent of engagement in all Forging Futures activities.
Achievements	All outcomes, including movement into education and training, work experience, and employment and apprenticeships were recorded in Upshot as 'achievements'. Movement into employment was recorded when a person started a job, regardless of how many hours they completed or how long they stayed in the position.

Evaluation limitations

Qualitative data limitations

Geographical representation

Young people in Carlisle are over-represented in the qualitative interview data and Workington and Whitehaven are under-represented. This was due to 10 interviews being conducted in Carlisle in November 2023, where programme delivery was up-and-running. These first interviews were important to generate early insights into delivery to inform the feasibility study. Workington and Whitehaven received more referrals than anticipated (47 referrals, as shown in Figure 8) with only three interviews completed in these areas.

Sampling for qualitative interviews

All young people were selected by CYA to take part in the qualitative interviews, and while they did this following guidance from IES and providing a good range of personal circumstances and support needs, we cannot rule out the potential for an element of bias in this approach. We nonetheless consider this approach the most suitable sampling method for these young people to maximise safeguarding and to avoid undue stress and anxiety at being randomly selected for a research interview.

CYA partners were selected through discussions between IES and CYA with a range of partners sought for interview. Further research may wish to consider interviewing more employer partners.

Follow-up interviews

Due to the staggered roll-out of delivery of Forging Futures, not all areas were up and running in 2023. Therefore, the initial evaluation design of first interviews in 2023 and follow-up interviews in 2024 had to be adapted. Areas with fieldwork conducted in May 2024 (Workington, Whitehaven, and Penrith) were therefore excluded from follow-up interviews (see Figure 4). This means that in these areas we have limited insights into young people's support later in their journey.

Furthermore, engagement in follow-up interviews was lower than anticipated, due to a combination of 'no shows' to interview appointments and difficulty securing online interviews with young people in employment or education. As standard, people were offered a £25 shopping voucher as a 'thank you' for their time. Additionally, IES did offer evening online and telephone appointments on the basis that some people were working, but there was low take-up of this offer. Therefore, there is limited insights from qualitative data into how Forging Futures supported people to move into employment.

Lack of employed people in qualitative interviews

There was limited evidence of employment outcomes in qualitative interviews with young people and link workers, which partly reflects the way the evaluation was designed. For example, the initial design was for interviews at two time points to capture people at the start and further on in their support journey. While some people continue to receive support once they move into work, these were generally not captured in the interviews. It proved challenging for link workers to book follow-up interviews with those who had busy schedules due to employment or training. Future research may wish to purposely sample young people who have left the programme and moved into employment.

Programme data limitations

Limited sub-group analysis carried out

Quantitative data analysis of Forging Futures data was mostly descriptive statistics of the whole group of 124 people on Forging Futures. Subgroup analysis of employment outcomes was limited to a handful of variables which formed meaningful groups of around 50 people. The number of people with experience of the care system, or experience of the criminal justice system were also too small for further analysis. Therefore, our understanding about variation in participant journeys and outcomes is less robust because it relies primarily on qualitative evidence.

Limited data available to evidence a reduction in personal support needs

A reduction in personal support needs was measured by increases in scores given to 10 personal support needs in the ME Tool. The ME Tool was completed in one-to-one sessions in which link workers talked through the 10 personal support needs and what these meant, and young people gave a score of one to six to reflect how great a need they felt that areas was for them. Therefore, it is possible that some people on the programme did not answer as honestly as they might if the responses were confidential.

Furthermore, only 60% of people on the programme completed a ME Tool, and changes in personal support need 'scores' over time were only available for 34 people. Therefore, these findings should be treated with caution as we cannot assess how representative they are of all people on the programme. In the future, CYA may wish to seek to complete ME Tools with more young people as they exit from the programme, to capture more data on the reduction of support needs.

Limited data available to evidence the theory of change

Due to the small numbers of people participating in each of the optional activities, such as group sessions, work experience and volunteering, it was not possible to evidence with data the relationship between specific activities and outcomes. In the future, CYA may be able to combine multiple years of data to explore the link between activities and outcomes in more detail.

3. Initial theory of change

The original theory of change based on the previous programme First Steps to a Sustainable Future and initial discussions between IES and CYA is outlined below and illustrated in 'Pre-evaluation theory of change' in the Appendices. The final theory of change is at the end of the Findings chapter in the section 'End of evaluation theory of change'.

Context

Young people in Cumbria face challenges to entering employment for reasons such as rurality, limited transportation and opportunities, as well as geographical tourism hotspots, high disparity in sector-based employment, disparity in wages from the nuclear sector and long-lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals' confidence to participate in group activities. The decline of the high street has also affected availability of entry level jobs that were previously easily accessible and stable. This leaves young people feeling isolated, lacking confidence, skills and qualifications to progress and unaware of education, employment and training (EET) opportunities available to them.

Inputs

Inputs into the Forging Futures programme between 2023 and 2024 included:

- £410,000 of funding from Youth Futures Foundation
- CYA staffing (one delivery manager / Youth Ambition Lead, one Data coordinator, one employment engagement officer, one training coordinator and six link workers)
- Other resources to deliver, including office space in Workington, overheads and licences
- Learnings about what works to support this group of young people in Cumbria from the previous CYA programme 'First Steps to a Sustainable Future'.
- Inputs included referrals into Forging Futures which are typically through Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches, initial appointments which took place in Jobcentre Plus offices, and referrals to wider support from other organisations to address development needs.

To be eligible for Forging Futures, young people had to be aged 16 to 24 and in receipt of Universal Credit, or one of the legacy benefits such as Jobseeker's Allowance or Employment Support Allowance.

Activities

The intended design for Forging Futures featured the following elements, detailed below and illustrated in Figure 6:

- **Initial engagement and assessment.**
- **Completion of the ME Tool:** the ME Tool is a CYA tool used by link workers to identify personal support needs and level of engagement upon entering the programme. It was intended that the ME Tool would be repeated every six weeks throughout the programme to track personal development and identify emerging areas of need.
- **Small group activities** reflecting the needs of the cohort of young people.
- **Employability skills** group sessions covering CVs, job search and interview techniques.
- **Development sessions:** it was envisaged that Forging Futures would contain six-week blocks of group sessions covering one of four topics. Young people and link workers would choose which and how many of these 'Development sessions' should be attended before progressing onto the next stage of the programme (see Figure 6 for an overview of the anticipated stages of the programme). The four options were:
 - healthy lifestyle and a secure environment,
 - key skills and independent living,
 - emotional wellbeing, self-esteem and identity
 - relationships and social involvement.
- **Mock/practice interview** to determine if a person was ready to progress onto the 'Highway to Employability'¹³ programme (detailed below), or whether they had additional needs to be addressed first. If additional needs were identified, individuals could attend extra development sessions (listed above), or external support as needed until they were ready to progress onto the 'Highway to Employability' programme.
- **'Highway to employability' programme:** this seven-week programme was intended to be four weeks of employability support, followed by a mock/practice interview, followed by three-weeks work experience.
- **One-to-one link worker support:** It was intended that at least one hour of one-to-one link worker support per week would be available for each young person on Forging Futures. This could be an in-person appointment, text messaging, email, or phone call. The link worker would also spend time working independently researching

¹³ The 'Highway to Employability' programme was formerly known as the 'employer ready' programme. For consistency, the programme is referred to as 'Highway to Employability' throughout this report.

training, volunteering, work experience, jobs, or specialist provision as well as quality checking applications and CVs.

- **Optional activities:** these were envisaged to supplement the core programme activities detailed above such as attending a CYA run 'confidence group', and activities with partner organisations such as Kaefer Construction's 'Scaffold the World'. This is a half day activity designed to help young people identify personal strengths and transferable skills including communication and negotiation, teamwork, planning, problem solving, working to a budget, and presentation skills.
- **Support for care experienced young people:** the Care Transitions project provided care experienced young people additional support to develop their independent living skills, offered low level mental health support, and facilitated access to Multiply provision to boost functional numeracy skills.
- **In-work support:** link workers planned to offer an additional six months of support to people once they moved into employment if they wished to receive it. This would involve one-to-one link worker support, either in person or over the phone, at unspecified intervals for as long as the person wished to receive it.

Figure 6: Forging Futures support model (2023)

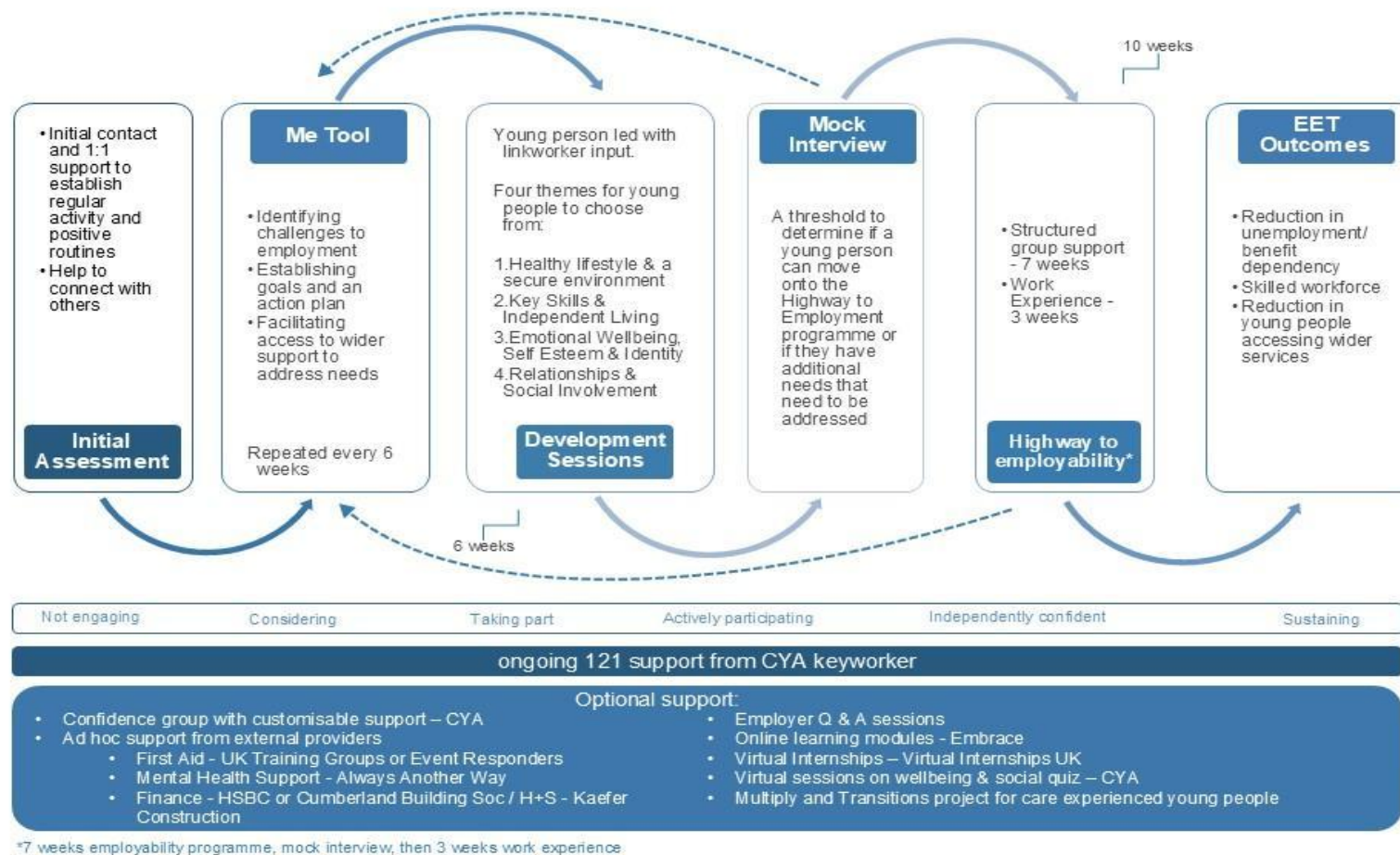
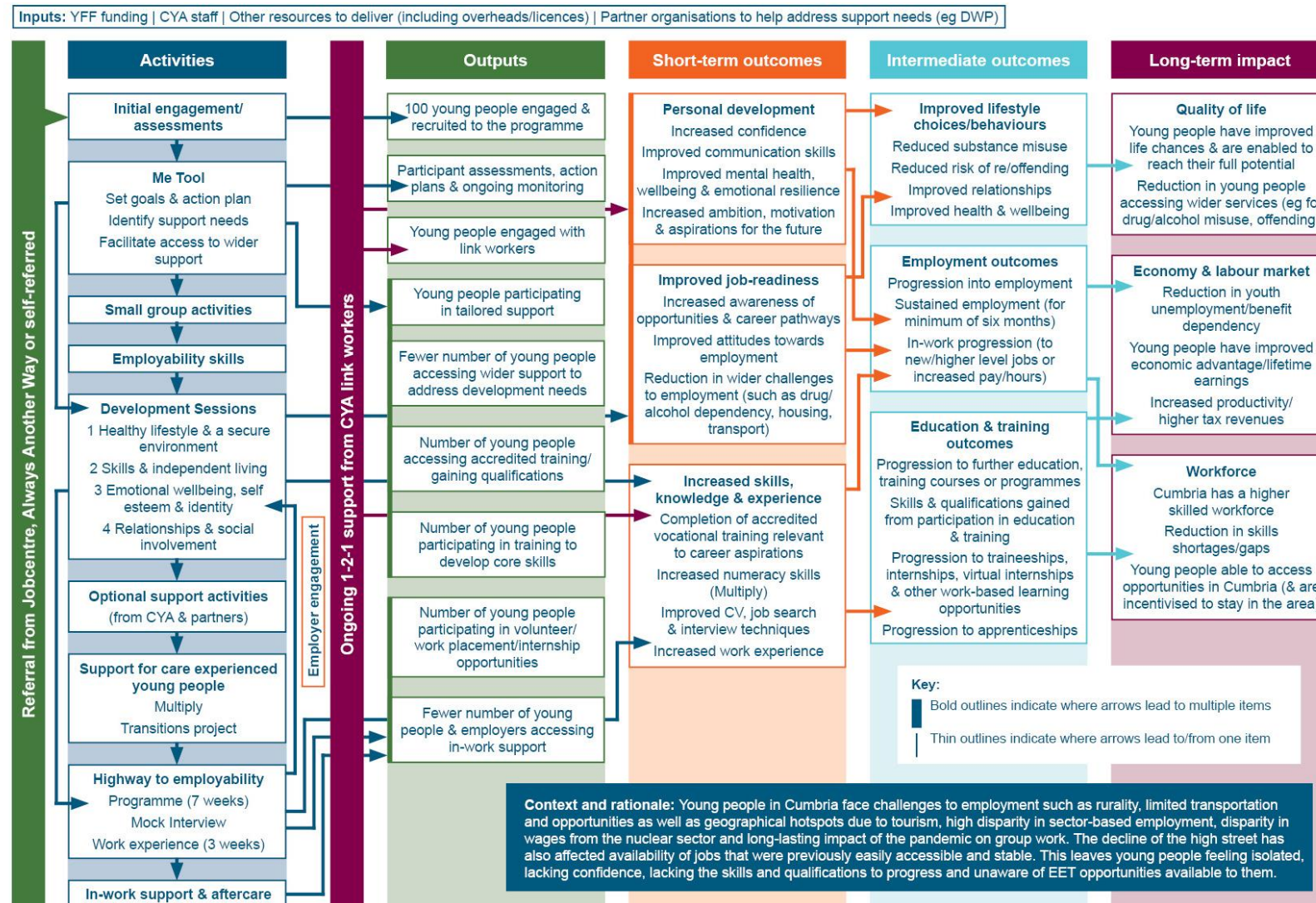


Figure 7: Initial Forging Futures theory of change (2023)



Mechanisms for change

At the start of the delivery of Forging Futures, the following enablers to achieving outcomes, also known as mechanisms for change, were identified.

Tailored and individualised support

It was felt that a key enabler to achieving employment outcomes for this group of young people was the one-to-one support from the link worker (as opposed to an employability programme that offers predominantly group support), as this one-to-one relationship enables the individual and link worker to build rapport and develop a trusted relationship. The support can be tailored to the individual by starting slowly and building a level of challenge/difficulty over time, reflecting the pace the young person wants to go at. Support can be tailored to individuals' needs and aspirations, which was felt to be key to maintaining people's engagement with the programme. The support length could also be tailored to the individual, with support available for as long as the person needs to reach and sustain their destination, most likely employment.

Model of support

The proposed model of support was felt to enable outcomes to be achieved because it was primarily face-to-face delivery which CYA felt was more effective than online, particularly at the start of the programme. In addition, the model of support created opportunities for peer learning and peer support, such as through group sessions. The programme focused on developing employability skills which were perceived as a key support need for these young people, and work experience opportunities were available which were seen as important to help people overcome fears and anxieties about moving into work. Training and qualifications could be sourced through partner organisations, as could support to address wider barriers to work such as housing and mental health support.

Drawing on networks of partners/wider specialist services

It was envisaged the third mechanism for change in the Forging Futures programme was the ability of CYA link workers to draw on wider networks of partners and specialist support organisations within Cumbria. These could include mental health services, housing, drugs and alcohol support, LGBTQ+ support services, NHS sexual health and wellbeing, colleges, vocational training providers and coaches, employers, Jobcentre Plus and Youth Hubs and other employability providers.

Short-term outcomes

Intended short-term outcomes gained during the programme and perceived to be important steppingstones towards intermediate outcomes were:

- **Personal development** includes increased confidence, ambition, motivation and aspirations, and improved communication skills, mental health, wellbeing and emotional resilience. These were perceived to be gained from link worker one-to-one support and group sessions.
- **Improved job-readiness** includes increased awareness of opportunities and pathways, improved attitudes towards employment and a reduction in wider challenges to employment, such as drug and alcohol dependency, housing and transport.
- **Increased skills, knowledge and experience** includes the completion of accredited vocational training relevant to career aspirations, increased numeracy skills (Multiply¹⁴), improved CV, job search and interview techniques and increased work experience.

Intermediate outcomes

Intermediate outcomes people could gain around the time of leaving Forging Futures programme were:

- **Improved lifestyle choices and behaviours** such as a reduced substance misuse or offending, improved relationships and health and wellbeing.
- **Employment outcomes** including progression into employment, sustained employment for six months, or in-work progression to new or higher-level jobs or increases in pay or hours worked.
- **Education and training outcomes** could include progression to further education or training/courses or programmes, Skills and qualifications gained from participation in education & training, Progression to traineeships, internships, virtual internships & other work-based learning opportunities and apprenticeships.

Long-term impact

The long-term impacts of taking part in Forging Futures were anticipated to be:

¹⁴ Multiply is a selection of free maths courses available to adults who do not have a grade 4 or grade C GCSE maths, or equivalent. CYA were delivering Multiply to care experienced people at the same time as Forging Futures. Other people wanting to take part in Multiple maths courses would be referred to other local providers.

- **Quality of life** in which people have improved life chances and are enabled to reach their full potential, and a reduction in people accessing wider services, such as drug or alcohol misuse, or offending.
- **Economy and labour market** demonstrated by a reduction in youth unemployment/benefit dependency, young people have improved economic advantage and lifetime earnings, and there is increased productivity and higher tax revenues.
- **Workforce:** Cumbria has a higher skilled workforce, with a reduction in skills shortages/skills gaps, and young people have the skills to access opportunities, and are incentivised to stay in Cumbria.

4. Findings

Key findings

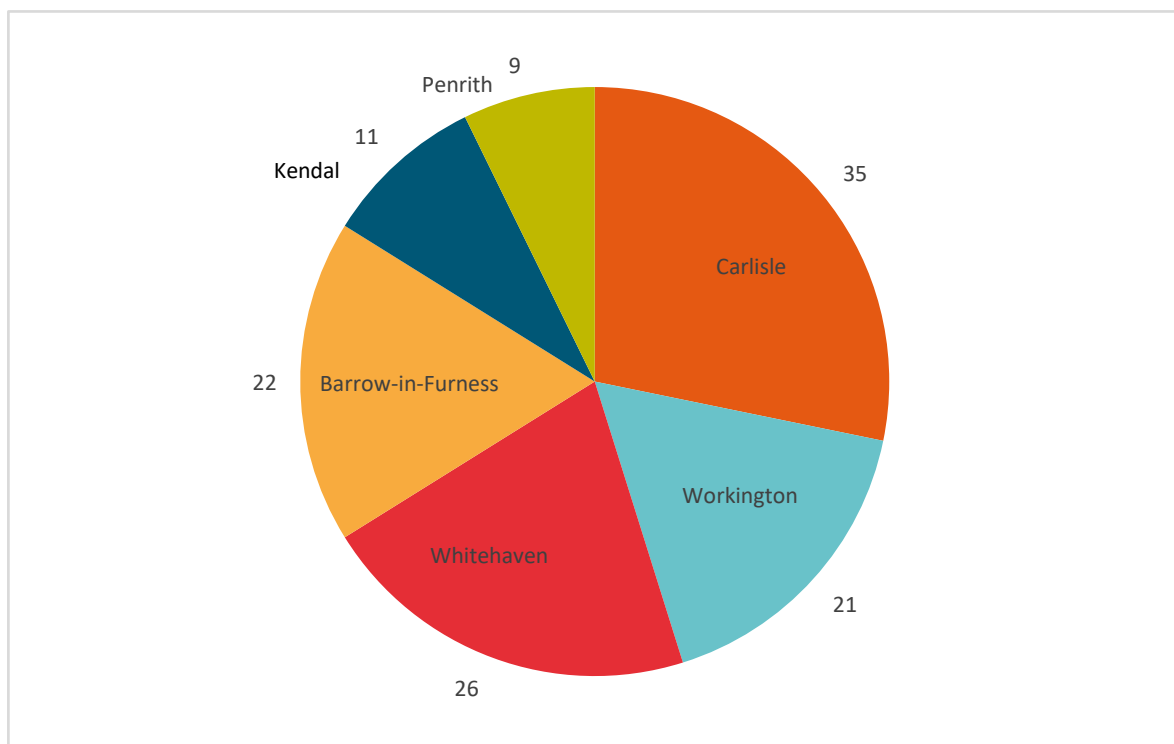
- Typically, young people were referred to Forging Futures by Jobcentre Work Coaches who explained the type of support available through the programme and arranged for an initial appointment with a link worker, often in the same Jobcentre or Youth Hub where the Work Coach was based.
- The most common support need identified by three-quarters (75%) of people joining the programme was support with employability skills, including CVs, job applications, interview skills and work experience. Transport, mental ill-health, and confidence were identified as key support needs for around half of the people on Forging Futures (47%, 47% and 46% respectively).
- Once enrolled onto Forging Futures, young people had weekly appointments with their link worker to help them with the area(s) of support identified during initial assessment and completion of CYA's ME Tool.
- One-to-one support from link workers was the main type of support received by people on Forging Futures with only 27% of people taking part in group sessions. Other optional activities included employer Q&A sessions, participation in short training programmes, work experience or volunteering, or referrals to partner organisations for specialist support.
- Most one-to-one support was employability support, such as work search support (for 61% of people on Forging Futures), CV support (48%) and interview preparation (46%). A smaller proportion of people received wellbeing check-ins (37%) and mental health support (12%).
- Length of time on the programme was broadly as anticipated, with most people (91%) on the programme for up to nine months, and some (9%) on it for longer. The average (mean) length of time on the programme was five months.
- Short-term outcomes were quite inter-related, particularly confidence with willingness to engage in optional activities, perceived job-readiness and increased skills knowledge and experience. In addition, confidence was felt to be gained from the routine and sense of purpose that participating in the programme achieved.
- Nearly half (47%) of people on Forging Futures moved into employment. Typically this was part-time employment.
- Around half (48%) of people on Forging Futures who entered employment were recorded by CYA as having sustained employment for three months. This equates to 23% of all Forging Futures participants.
- Feedback from people on the programme was overall positive, particularly in relation to the one-to-one support available from link workers.

Participants

Area

Forging Futures is a Cumbria-wide programme, with referrals from all six Jobcentres in the county. As outlined above in Figure 4, Forging Futures aimed to reach 30 people in each of Carlisle, Barrow-in-Furness, and Workington and Whitehaven combined. A further five people were anticipated to be recruited in both Kendal and Penrith. These target recruitment numbers were informed by local demographics, demand for the support and staff capacity. In practice, the number of people joining the programme was lower than anticipated in Barrow-in-Furness and higher than anticipated in all other areas (see Figure 8). The difference between planned and actual numbers of people on the programme in each area may have reflected slightly higher referral numbers in areas where CYA have long-standing relationships with Jobcentre staff, the timing of the programme starting in each area, and CYA staff turnover in Barrow-in-Furness.

Figure 8: Number of people on Forging Futures by Jobcentre area

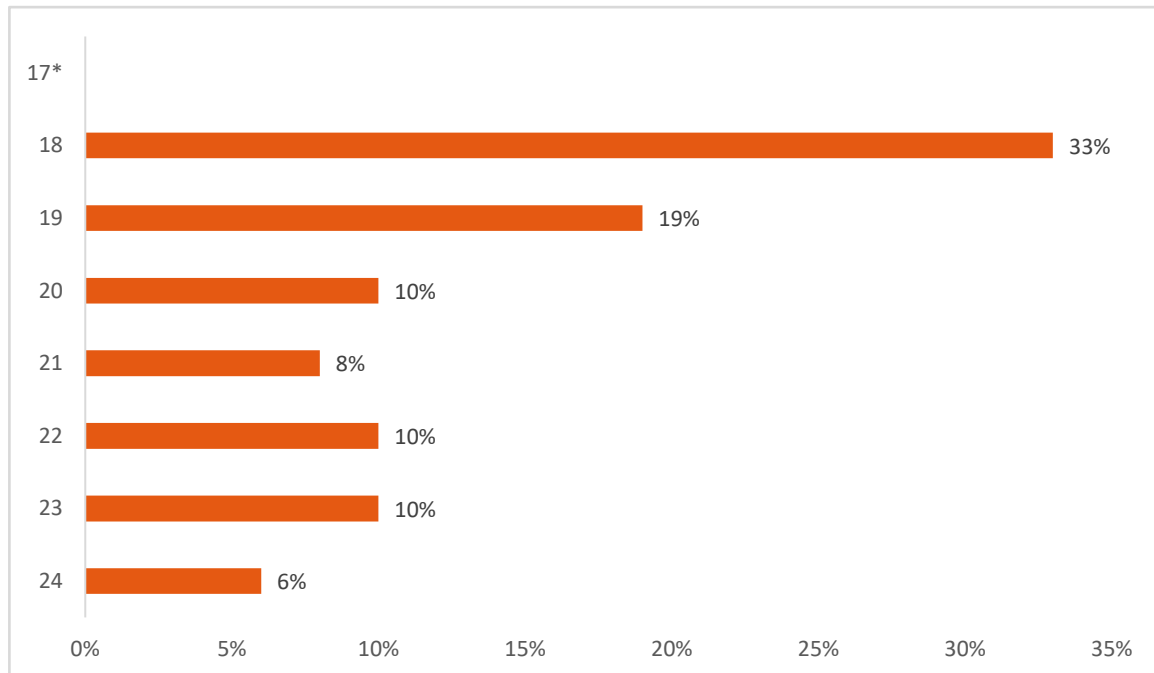


Source: Forging Futures data (September 2023 to August 2024).
 Base: 124 people.

Age

The Forging Futures programme targeted 16 to 24-year-olds living in Cumbria. All 124 people on the programme had their date of birth recorded as part of their programme registration. Ages at the time of referral ranged from 17 to 24, with a mean age of 20.

Figure 9: Age at time of registering for Forging Futures



Source: Forging Futures data (September 2023 to August 2024).

Base: 40 people.

*Suppressed due to small numbers

Gender

Two-thirds of the programme cohort (66%) were male, and just below one-third (31%) were female¹⁵. A small number of people identified as either transgender or non-binary.

Ethnicity

Almost all of those who engaged in the programme were from white ethnic backgrounds (99%)¹⁶. The remaining 1% were from mixed ethnic backgrounds.

¹⁵ Base: 124 people.

¹⁶ Base: 124 people.

Disability

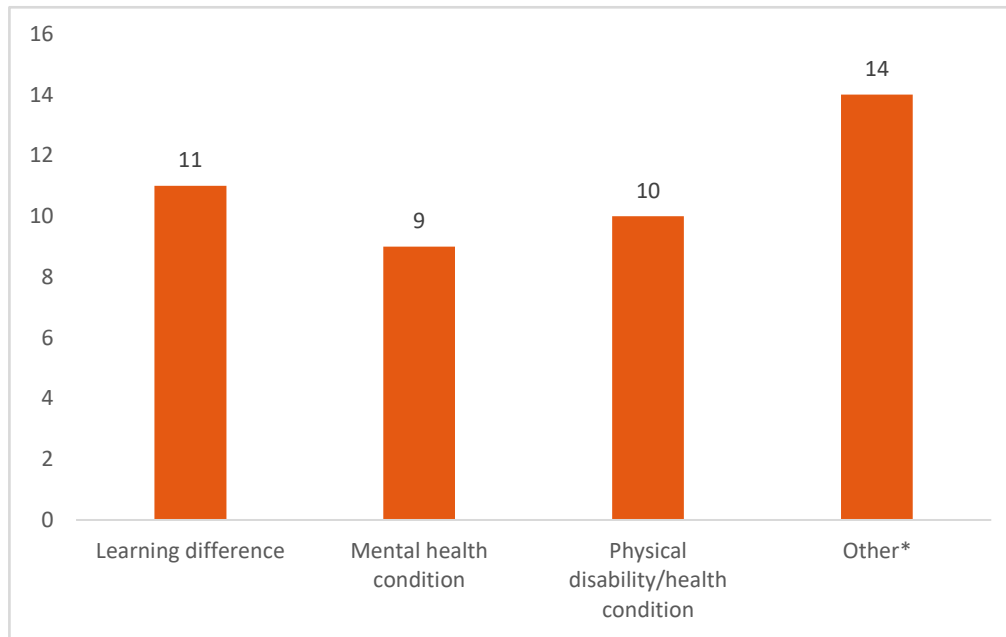
At registration, people referred to Forging Futures were asked whether they considered themselves to have a disability, impairment, health condition or learning difference that has a substantial or long-term impact on their ability to carry out day-to-day activities, and if so what type. Around one-quarter (24%) of people on the programme said they did have a health condition, learning difference or disability, while three-quarters (75%) said that they did not¹⁷. The remaining 1% were recorded as 'prefer not to say'.

Type of disability¹⁸ included learning differences (11 people), mental health conditions (9 people) and physical disabilities/health conditions (10 people) (see Figure 10). Fourteen people reported 'other' disabilities, including long-standing health conditions and vision impairments.

¹⁷ Data related to whether an individual considered themselves to have a disability, impairment, health condition or learning difference was available for 119 of the 124 people on the programme. During the evaluation period this question was reworded cover more conditions that impact on a person's ability to carry out day to day activities.

¹⁸ Thirty-five people (28% of all participants) gave information on type of disability, which is slightly more than answered yes to whether they considered themselves to have a disability, impairment, health condition or learning difference. This difference may reflect the wording at the start of the evaluation being narrower. The types of disabilities, health conditions and learning differences reported here reflect those used by CYA and recorded in CYA's Upshot database.

Figure 10: Number of people self-reporting disabilities and/or health conditions



*Collapsed field containing 'Other', 'Long standing disabilities' and 'Vision Impairments' due to small numbers.

Source: Forging Futures data (September 2023 to August 2024).

Base: 40 people.

Note: People could report multiple disabilities or health conditions, therefore numbers exceed the base total.

Employment status and work history

Almost all the people whose employment status was recorded¹⁹ when registering for the programme were unemployed (96% unemployed, 3% in employment, 1% in education), as would be expected for an employment programme taking referrals mainly from Jobcentre Plus. Those in employment included people working less than four hours per week, possibly on casual or zero-hours contracts.

Length of time unemployed

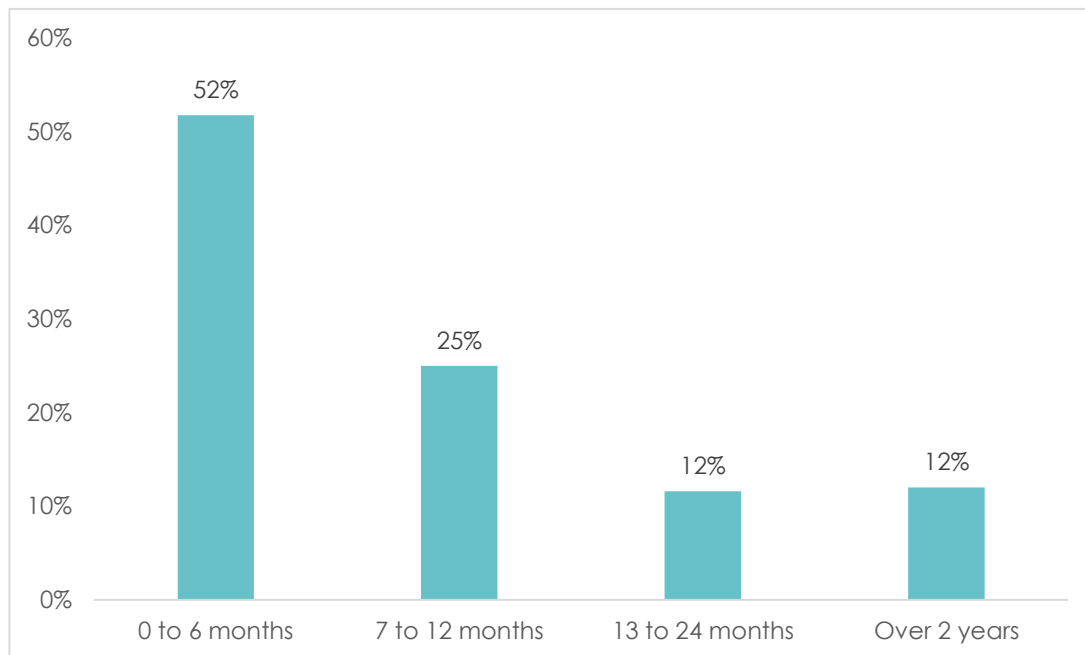
CYA recorded how long people had been unemployed for, at the time of starting on Forging Futures. Of those people for whom length of unemployment was recorded²⁰,

¹⁹ Employment status was initially recorded as unemployed, economically inactive, in education, or not in education, with 'in employment' and 'volunteering' added later. Percentages reported here are based on 124 people.

²⁰ Length of time unemployed prior to joining the Forging Futures programme was known for 112 out of 124 people.

around half (52%) were unemployed for six months or less, and half were unemployed for longer than six months (see Figure 11 below). Further, Forging Futures' data that shows the majority (87%) of young people have 'work or volunteering experience' on entry to the programme²¹.

Figure 11: Duration of unemployment prior to joining Forging Futures



Base: 112 people.

Source: Forging Futures data (September 2023 to August 2024).

Living arrangements

Data on living arrangements at the time of programme registration was available for 118 out of 124 people on Forging Futures. Figure 12 presents this data, showing that over half of the programme cohort (58%) were living with family or a partner when they registered for the programme. Others were living alone (14%), living in supported housing (12%) or were living in 'other' housing arrangements²² (16%). This suggests that while most people on the programme lived with family or partners, who could hopefully support them emotionally or practically with their job searching, a significant minority did not.

²¹ Based on 122 people for whom whether they "had work or volunteering experience at the time of registering for the programme" was recorded (yes/no).

²² 'Other' housing arrangements includes people experiencing homelessness or living in either jobless or working households. These categories were collapsed due to low counts.

Figure 12: People's living arrangements at time of registering for Forging Futures

Living arrangement	Percentage	Count
Living with family or a partner	58	69
Living alone*	14	16
Living in supported housing	12	14
Other**	16	19
Total	100	118

*Includes people living in single adult households and single adult households with dependent children.

**Includes people experiencing homelessness or living in either jobless or working households.

Base: 118 people.

Source: Forging Futures data (September 2023 to August 2024).

Support needs²³

Support needs were identified in a designated appointment during the sign-up process and recorded in CYA's Upshot database. In this appointment, link workers and people enrolling onto the programme discussed the list of barriers on the registration form, making note of any that were relevant to the individual's circumstances. Link workers also made their own judgements about any additional support needs the young person had, which they raised with them later. In a small number of cases, support needs were not captured at the start of an individual's support journey and instead discussed at a later point. This was in instances where link workers felt a young person needed longer to open up to them about their personal circumstances.

Once recorded, support needs stayed in the Upshot database, even once they were perceived to have been addressed. During an individual's time on the Forging Futures

²³ 'Support needs' is the term CYA use to refer to areas that individuals would like support with from their link worker.

programme, additional support needs could be added to case notes and the database as needed.

The average number of support needs recorded per young person was five. The most prevalent need amongst young people²⁴ was employability skills support, with three-quarters (75%) having one or more of the following recorded:

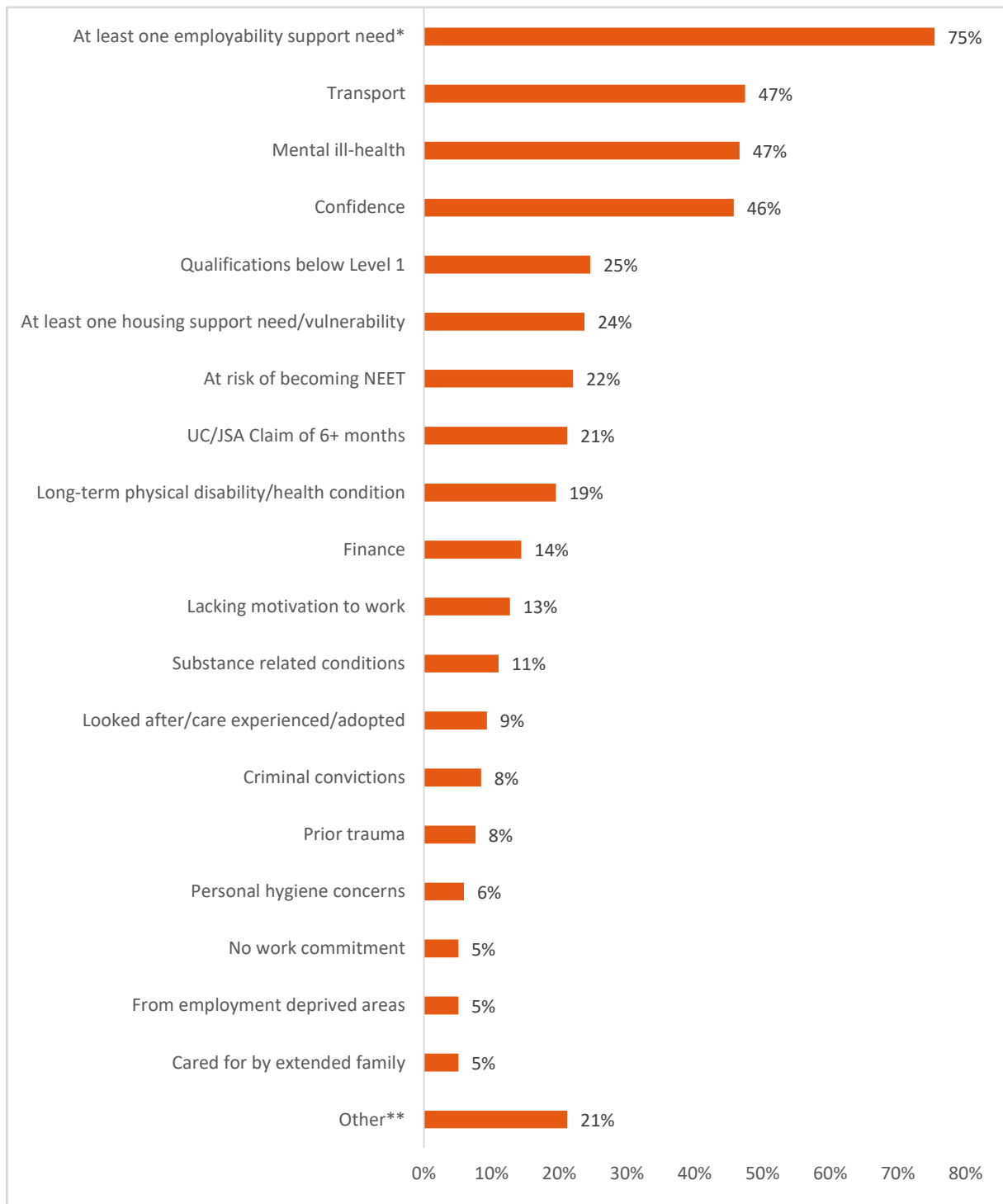
- Low interview skills.
- No or limited work experience.
- No CV or cover letter.
- Low job application skills.

Further, transport, mental ill-health and confidence were identified as key support needs for around half of people with recorded support needs (transport 47%, mental ill-health 47%, and confidence 46%).

Just over one-fifth of people (21%) reported other support needs and vulnerabilities. This included lack of childcare, displaying violent tendencies and challenges engaging in classroom/groupwork settings. A full breakdown of the support needs and vulnerabilities is displayed in Figure 13 below.

²⁴ Support needs were recorded for 118 out of 124 people on Forging Futures. There were four people whose only recorded support need was 'Barriers at a later session'. These cases were removed from the analysis and are not included in the base.

Figure 13: Forging Futures programme participant support needs and vulnerabilities



*Employability support needs include low interview skills, no or limited work experience, no CV or cover letter and/or low job application experience.

**Other includes childcare; violent or showing violent tendencies; primary care of a child/children under 18; struggles in a classroom/groupwork setting; low social skills; sexual health concerns; bereavement; challenging behaviour; negative peer group influence; primary carer of an older person/adult; and, a victim of bullying.

Support needs largely rely on self-disclosure. As such, not all support needs will have been captured.

Base: 118 people.

Source: Forging Futures data (September 2023 to August 2024).

In addition to support needs identified when people join Forging Futures and reported above, 10 personal support needs were also monitored as part of ME Tool assessments (see 'What the ME Tool is' for more information about the ME Tool). Analysis of the personal support needs identified employability, aspirations and a healthy lifestyle as the areas young people most wanted support with from the 10 options listed on the ME Tool (see 'Initial support needs' for more details).

Experience of the care or criminal justice systems

Information on individuals' experience of either the care or criminal justice systems was not recorded in the Upshot database. However, support needs and vulnerabilities identified during the registration process (displayed in Figure 13 above) show that there was a small number of people who reported having these experiences. It is important to note that support needs and vulnerabilities identified and logged on Upshot relied on self-disclosure from people enrolling onto the programme, and they therefore may not reflect the total number of care-experienced young people, or people with experience of the criminal justice system.

Of the 118 people who reported support needs, 11 (9% of all participants) said that they had experience of the care system and 10 (8% of the Forging Futures cohort) disclosed having a criminal conviction. While small, these are notable proportions of the total Forging Futures cohort.

Operation of the model in practice

Length of time on Forging Futures

While the programme was expected to deliver between six and nine months of support, people on Forging Futures could spend up to one year on the programme if needed²⁵. This is exclusive of the optional 6-months of in-work support. In practice, length of time on the programme was broadly as anticipated, with people spending an average (mean)

²⁵ Forging Futures was delivered from September 2023 to the end of August 2024.

of five months on the programme and most people (91%) on the programme for up to nine months. In particular:

- A small proportion, 15%, of people who enrolled on the programme were engaged for less than one month before leaving the support.
- Around half (48%) of people were on the programme for between one and six months.
- Over one quarter (28%) were on the programme for between seven and nine months.
- A small proportion (9%) were on the programme for more than nine months.

Number of hours of support

CYA aim for at least one hour of support per week for each person on the programme, which may increase if they take part in more activities, such as group sessions in addition to one-to-one support, or the link worker spends time researching job opportunities on their behalf²⁶. During their time on Forging Futures, people had varying amounts of support. Over two-fifths of people (43%) received between one and 10 hours of support. A further two-fifths (42%) received between 11 and 40 hours of support. The remaining 15% received between 41 and 100 hours of support. The median number of hours of support received was 15.

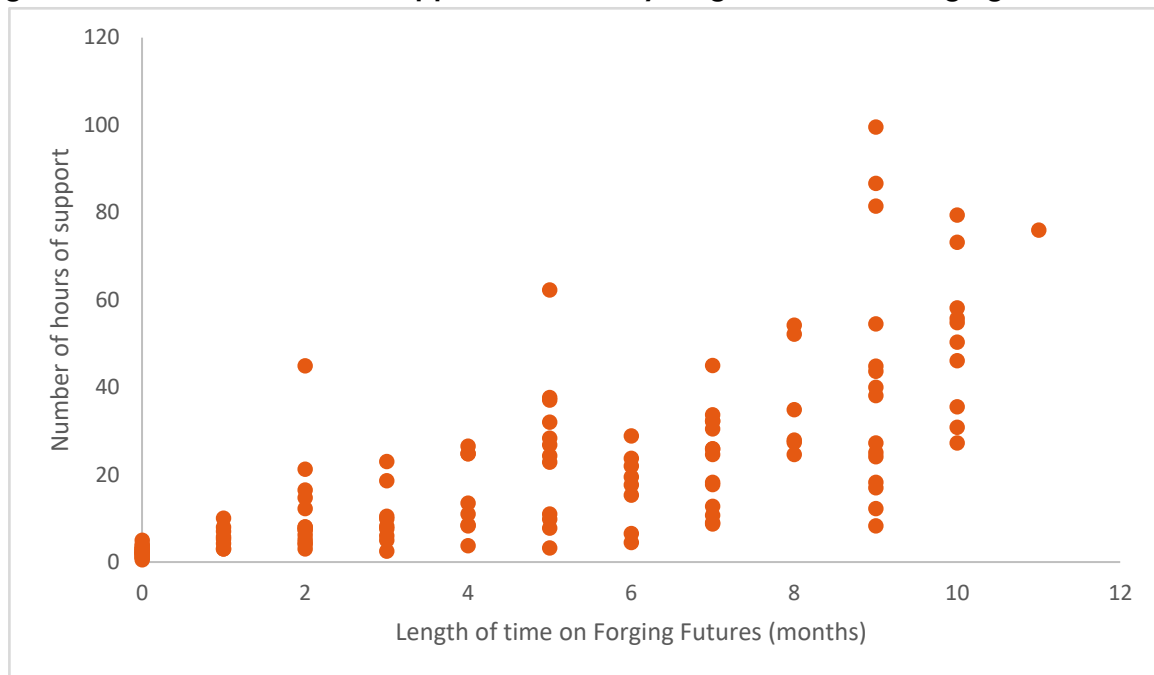
As might be expected, people who were engaged in Forging Futures for longer generally had a higher number of hours of support. However, Figure 14 shows that this was not always the case. A handful of people who received between five and nine months of support received fewer than 10 hours of support. Conversely, there are instances of people on shorter support journeys receiving more than 40 hours of support. Link workers explained during qualitative interviews that a person's needs are the main driver for how much support they receive or length of time they stay on the programme. However, if the link worker has extra time available, for example, because they have a small case load at a given time, then they will use any spare time to provide additional support where they feel this might be beneficial.

There was no significant difference (T-tests, 95% confidence interval) in the length of time on Forging Futures, by either the number of support needs reported at registration, nor

²⁶ During delivery of Forging Futures, CYA started recording the time link workers spent supporting people 'behind the scenes'. This included researching job opportunities, reviewing CV's or application forms outside of one-to-one or group sessions, and in some instances included time link workers spent when people 'failed to attend' support appointments. Therefore, hours of support reported are higher than the hours young people engaged with the programme.

whether the support needs were one of the four most common support needs (employability skills, transport, mental health, or confidence).

Figure 14: Number of hours of support received by length of time on Forging Futures



Base: 124 people.

Source: Forging Futures data (September 2023 to August 2024).

Disengagement

Disengagement was defined by CYA as receiving fewer than 10 hours of support across multiple months, and having an unknown²⁷ destination. CYA analysis states that 27 people (22% of the cohort) disengaged from Forging Futures support, with an average (mean) of 3.9 hours of support received.

Routes into Forging Futures

Jobcentre Plus referrals

As anticipated and intended, most people on Forging Futures were referred to the programme by their Jobcentre Plus Work Coach (in all but one case). CYA staff reported that Work Coaches explained to people during one-to-one meetings what Forging Futures was and suggested they engage with the programme to support their move into

²⁷ 'Unknown destination' was determined from CYA analysis of link worker typed notes in Upshot.

employment. This differed only in Barrow-in-Furness, where young people attended information sessions in groups of between six and 10 people.

Jobcentre staff confirmed the process outlined by CYA staff and commended the referral process. They explained that they used flyers provided by CYA to discuss the support and get buy-in from people they perceived to be eligible and ready for the programme. Following an expression of interest, Work Coaches would personally introduce people to CYA link workers co-located in the Jobcentre Plus office.

"(The link worker) will come and set up in the Jobcentre one day a week so we can make a referral to a person and not through an online form, and then they can tell [young people] about and sell them the programme."

Reasons for initial engagement

Young people who experienced group information sessions in Barrow-in-Furness in advance of deciding whether to engage with the support reported not feeling any pressure to sign up. Instead, they felt they were able to leave the group information session and consider the support before making a decision. Young people shared that they appreciated this approach and felt they may have felt more pressure to sign up to the programme had they have met with CYA link workers on a one-to-one basis. Reflecting this, CYA staff felt young people in Barrow-in-Furness were more engaged with the programme compared with other areas, possibly due to it being presented as voluntary. Some young people in other areas reported feeling pressured by their Work Coach to sign up. It is unclear why this was but likely due to the job seeking requirements of Universal Credit.

In qualitative interviews, young people explained that the range and appropriateness of support available through Forging Futures was the largest influence on their decision to sign up for the programme. Several explained that they needed support to increase their confidence, as well as employability skills.

"I joined the programme because I wanted to better myself, my confidence and my anxiety a lot." (Forging Futures programme participant)

Initial engagement with Forging Futures

Initial engagement with Forging Futures typically took place in a Jobcentre or Youth Hub²⁸. Appointments²⁹ were timed to follow an individual's Work Coach appointment, which in some cases enabled the Work Coach to take the young person to the link worker and introduce them.

Observations of initial engagement appointments captured insight into how these appointments worked in practice. Appointments were scheduled for an hour, however observations identified that these typically lasted around 20 to 25 minutes. They followed a structured approach, beginning with an overview of what support is available through Forging Futures and expectations of the young person's engagement. Expectations discussed included weekly attendance, and that link workers were in frequent contact with DWP Work Coaches throughout the duration of their support. Following this, and a young person's agreement to sign up to the support, young people were asked a series of questions about their personal circumstances to register them on CYA's database Upshot. This included age, gender, ethnicity, disability and health conditions, living arrangements, and work history. Registration was closed by booking the young person's next appointment.

Young people spoke positively of the initial engagement appointment. It was described to be thorough, capturing the overall offer in a short amount of time, and providing a good introduction to the link worker they would be communicating with.

**“The first appointment was great. It gave me all the information, discussed not just all the things they offer, but also all the information I needed about CYA so I know how they work”
(Forging Futures programme participant)**

²⁸ Youth Hubs are sites where DWP Work Coaches and other employability, skills and wellbeing service providers co-locate to support young people looking for work.

²⁹ Data shows that 93% of people who joined the programme had an initial sign-up appointment recorded in their activities. It is unclear why this is not 100%, as those who did not have an initial engagement appointment recorded did take part in other activities on the programme.

Core activities

One-to-one link worker support

Type of support received

Analysis of Forging Futures' data indicates that the most common type of one-to-one link worker support was phone call appointments³⁰ (see Figure 15 below). Beyond this, the three types of support most commonly received were focussed on employability skills:

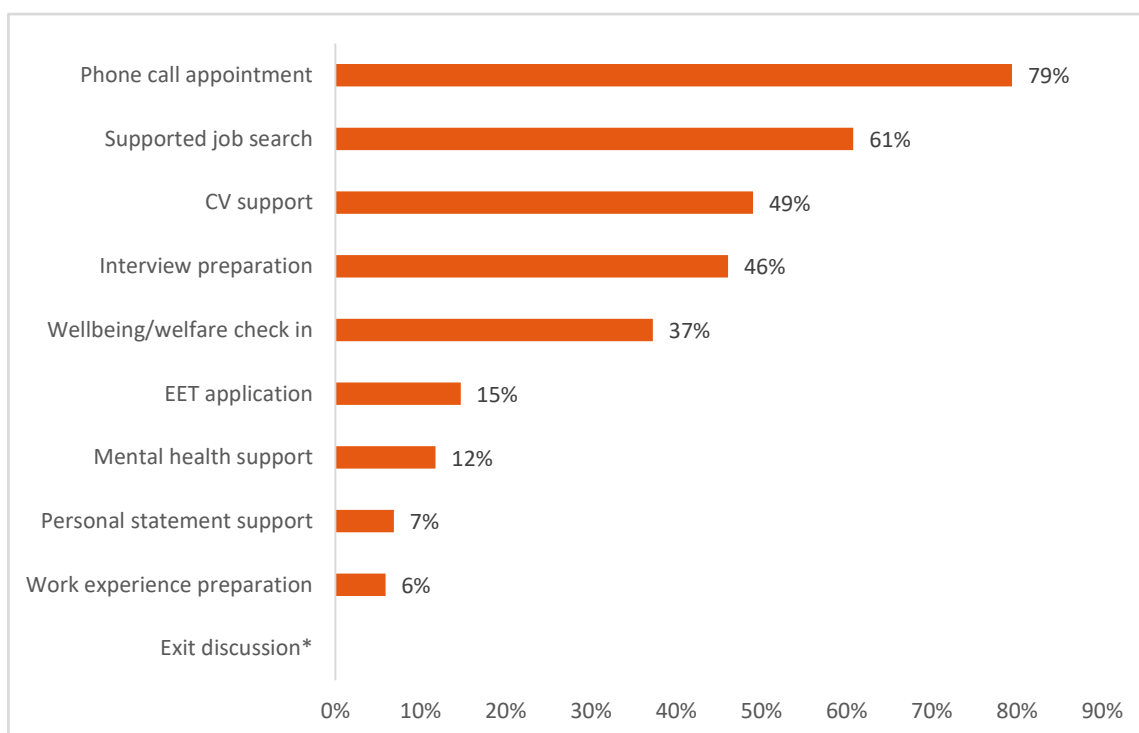
- 61% engaged in supported job search;
- around half (49%) received CV support;
- 46% received support to prepare for a job interview; and

Following these was wellbeing and welfare check ins, which 37% of those for whom one-to-one support had been recorded, received³¹.

³⁰ At the time of writing this report, CYA were looking to revise their data collection practices separating phone calls out from area of support.

³¹ 102 out of 124 people on Forging Futures had data recorded for the type of one-to-one support received.

Figure 15: Type of support received during one-to-one appointments with link workers



* Represents where figures based on five or fewer people have been suppressed due to small numbers.

1. EET application support may include education, employment or training applications.

Base: 102 people on Forging Futures that had data recorded for the type of one-to-one support received.

Source: Forging Futures data (September 2023 to August 2024).

While appointments largely focussed on reviewing movement into and towards education, employment and training (EET), link workers and young people shared in qualitative interviews that there was always time to talk about participant wellbeing and other personal circumstances. In some cases, this resulted in referrals to mental health and wellbeing support and encouraged more intensive support to find appropriate housing. Link workers also reported that appointments could be used to help young people to purchase clothing for interviews and open bank accounts. This support was practical, not financial, with young people either using their own money or money from a Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) discretionary fund to purchase interview outfits.

Feedback from young people during qualitative interviews indicated they felt they had agency over what appointments could be used for and felt comfortable discussing needs with their link worker.

Frequency and duration of one-to-one support (dosage)

Qualitative interviews with young people and link workers provided more detail about the one-to-one support young people received. Appointments were described by CYA staff to typically be weekly and could last between 20 minutes to an hour. Duration depended largely on how much an individual had to update their link worker on. For example, if they were waiting to hear back from applications or interviews, or had not identified any new opportunities, then appointments were shorter. However, if they were practicing interview questions and answers, or applying for a job, sessions were longer.

Flexibility of appointment locations

Both within and between appointments, link workers reported that they tailored communication to the preferences and needs of each young person. The location of appointments was flexible, with examples shared in qualitative interviews with staff and young people of appointments taking place in libraries, CYA offices, on co-located sites with other support organisations, supported accommodation sites and cafes. It was reported by staff and young people that tailoring communication in this way created an open, trusting relationship and encouraged continued engagement with Forging Futures.

Young people also reported feeling comfortable contacting their link worker in between appointments, which is further evidence that the link workers successfully built an effective working relationship with people on the programme.

“I could message her and she’ll get back to [me] as soon as possible. I could ring her and she’ll either answer or call me back later on” (Forging Futures programme participant)

Implications of staff changes in Barrow-in-Furness

Due to staffing changes in Barrow-in-Furness, delivery moved to predominantly telephone and online while CYA staff from other areas took temporary responsibility for people in Barrow-in-Furness. While the frequency of support was maintained, both young people and link workers explained that appointments were generally shorter when taking place by telephone, focussing on progress toward EET outcomes. Young people also noted that application support and more personal conversations felt more difficult through telephone appointments.

“I think face to face is better. It’s just better for understanding each other, and if we want to go through something or sign up to something together, that’s easier in person.” (Forging Futures programme participant)

Both link workers and young people commented that the change of staff had a negative impact on the breadth and depth of what was discussed within appointments. CYA staff expanded on this, explaining that it was often difficult to understand an individual's personal circumstances due to the sensitivities of asking such questions over a phone call, suggesting extra time was needed to re-build rapport and trust between the new member of staff and the young person. Similarly young people explained that in the short-term, the link worker changing negatively affected the support they received before improving again.

ME Tool assessment

What the ME Tool is

CYA have created a bespoke tool for capturing people's needs, action plan and progress against the action plan. This tool is called the My Evaluation Tool, ME Tool for short. Typically, at around the third appointment, young people and link workers completed the first ME Tool assessment together. At this point, link workers reported that they felt they had a strong enough rapport with the young person to begin exploring support needs in more detail.

In some instances, young people waited longer periods of time to complete their first ME Tool. This occurred where: young people were encouraged to attend development sessions happening soon after their referral; it was not appropriate at that time because other needs such as housing or wellbeing took priority; or young people had an upcoming job application or interview that they needed immediate support with.

Personal support needs identified in the ME Tool

The Me Tool includes a list of 10 pre-defined personal support needs³²: relationships, employability, key skills³³, aspirations, social involvement, a healthy lifestyle, emotional wellbeing, home and stability, communication and identify. At a ME Tool assessment, each support need, or category, is given a score of one to six, with one indicating high support needs and six indicating low support needs in that area. Analysis of these personal support needs and changes in support needs over time is reported below in 'Reduced personal support needs'.

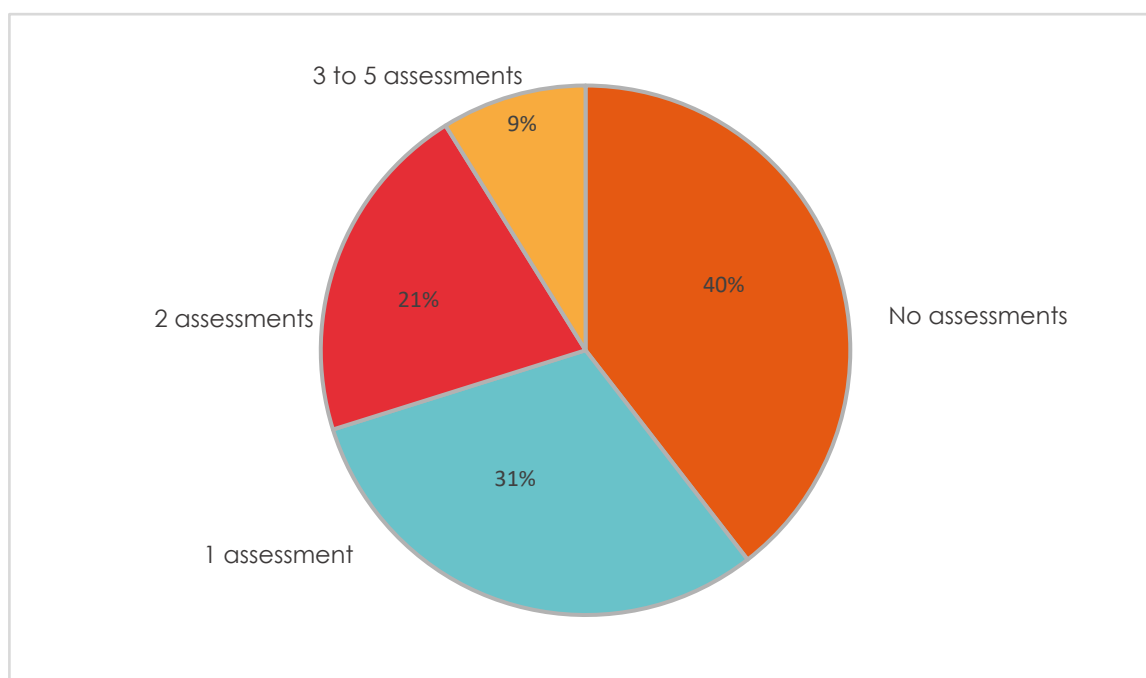
³² 'Personal support needs' is the name given to the 10 areas listed on CYA's ME Tool that link workers use in one-to-one appointments with individuals.

³³ Key Skills refers to numeracy, literacy and IT skills.

Proportion of people that completed the ME Tool

Analysis of Forging Futures data³⁴ shows that of the 124 people who enrolled on Forging Futures, most people (60%) completed one or more ME Tool assessments, and 40% did not complete a ME Tool assessment or the ME Tool assessment was not recorded. Of those who completed a ME Tool, most only completed this once, with a small proportion completing these two or more times (see Figure 16 below).

Figure 16: Number of ME Tool assessments recorded throughout people's time on Forging Futures



Base: 124 people.

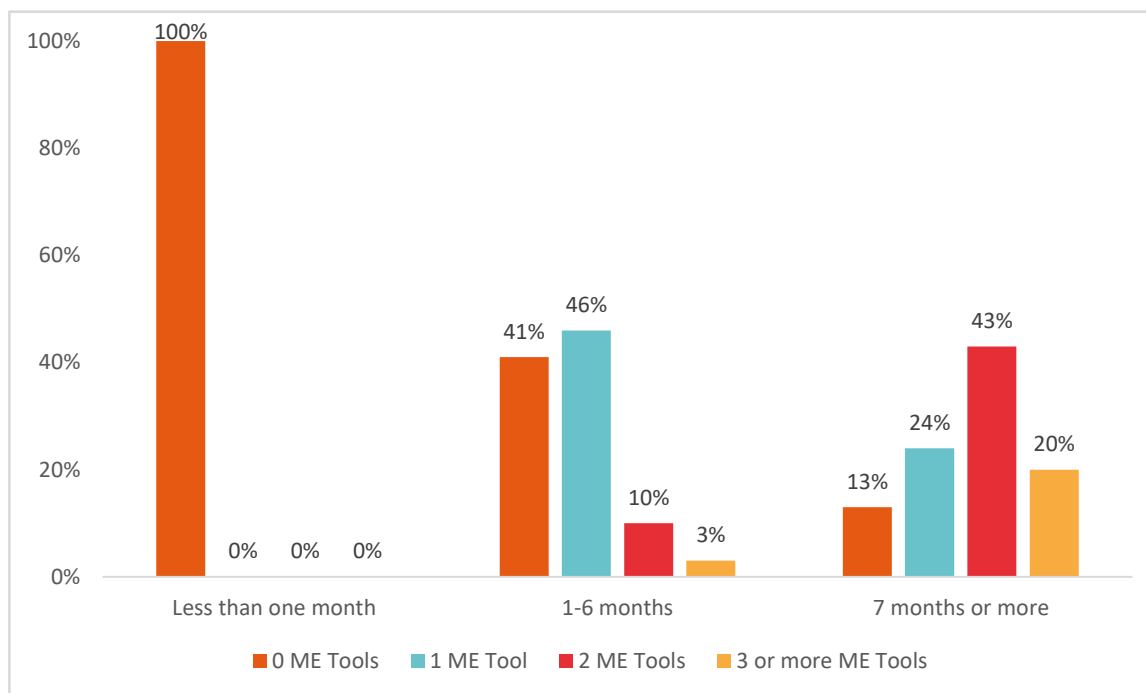
Source: Forging Futures data (September 2023 to August 2024).

While this may indicate the ME Tool did not form a core part of the support, further analysis of Forging Futures data identified a relationship between ME Tool completion and length of time on the programme. Figure 17 shows that all young people who were on the programme for less than one month did not complete a ME Tool, compared with two-fifths (41%) of people who were on the programme for between one and six months, and one-tenth of people were on the programme for seven months or more.

³⁴ Link workers recorded in CYA's Upshot database when a ME Tool assessment was completed.

Reflecting this, the proportion of young people completing multiple ME Tool assessments increases with length of time on the programme.

Figure 17: Number of ME Tools completed by length of time on Forging Futures



Base: 124 people.

Source: Forging Futures data (September 2023 to August 2024).

How often the ME Tool was completed

The initial design of Forging Futures specified that the ME Tool assessment would be completed every six to eight weeks, to track progress at regular intervals. However, in practice, it was completed less regularly than this. Adequate completion of the ME Tool usually took a full hour-long appointment due to the conversation style approach link workers used to explore personal support needs. So, if a young person came to an appointment hoping to complete a job application, link workers were happy to postpone the assessment and prioritise the application in favour of moving young people into work.

Young people and link workers' views of the ME Tool assessment process

The ME Tool was described by both link workers and young people as effective in helping to identify short-term goals and the steps needed to achieve longer-term career aspirations. Young people shared in qualitative interviews that they appreciated the collaborative nature of completing the ME Tool assessment. They said that link workers asked questions in a way that made them feel comfortable to discuss and to rank themselves against the 10 areas of need. This was particularly noted where questions

could be more sensitive, such as around relationships and identity. Through such discussions, young people said they were made aware of support needs they had not previously considered.

“I didn’t really know what support I wanted or needed at first... It (the ME Tool) helps you realise what support you should get and what you need.” (Forging Futures programme participant)

Reflections from young people on repeating the ME Tool were also positive. Several shared that they enjoyed seeing the progress they had made across their time on the programme.

George³⁵

George, aged 19, lives in a town in Cumbria with his family. Before joining the Forging Futures programme, he had completed a Level 1 vocational course and had had a couple of jobs. He explained, however, that these were not aligned with his long-term goal of becoming an HGV driver and that, aside from the high cost of driving lessons, he lacked confidence in his CV and was not sure how his experience to date could help him get to where he wants to be.

After completing his first ME Tool and first few one-to-one sessions, George and his link worker were able to identify key areas for both personal and work-related development that would help in taking steps towards his long-term goals. These included attending the four-week employability sessions to develop his CV, application and interview skills, explore work opportunities that might enable him to gain some relevant experience and start to save money for driving lessons. He also started to make small changes in his personal life, such as eating healthier, with a hope that this will increase his confidence, which in turn will improve how employers perceive him at interviews.

Overall, George feels the ME Tool has helped him develop a step-by-step route towards his longer-term work goal and appreciates the support his link worker provides through check-ins and revisiting the ME Tool.

³⁵ This and subsequent case study names are not the young people's real names.

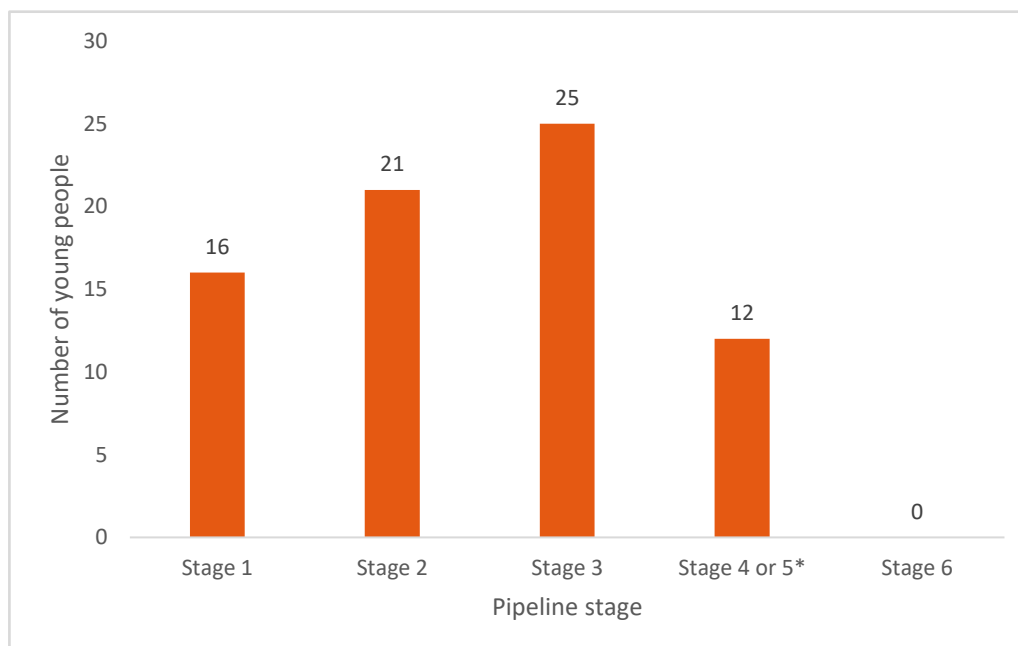
ME Tool Pipeline

Following completion of the ME tool, each young person was allocated a 'pipeline stage'. The pipeline stage descriptions give an indication of a young person's engagement and progress in making changes. Where a young person is at stage one, this indicates they have high support needs and/or are not engaging in the programme, and where they are at stage six, this would indicate that no support is required, and they are sustaining progress. The stages are labelled as follows:

- **Stage 1 – not engaging:** The young person does not acknowledge there is any need for change. They present minimal to no engagement. Attendance can be poor and appointments/ meetings/ sessions are rarely attended.
- **Stage 2 – considering:** The young person is thinking about making changes. They are thinking about accepting help or feel that moving forward is a possibility. Intermittent 1-1 engagement
- **Stage 3 – taking part:** The young person is aware of information or resources needed to move forward. They are creating a plan and are ready to make these changes. Consistently engaging with 1-1 sessions and intermittently with groups.
- **Stage 4 – actively participating:** The young person is engaged in activities, or accessing support, that aligns with their goals. Consistently engaging with 1-1 sessions and groups and other agencies where appropriate.
- **Stage 5 – independently confident:** The young person is starting to sustain changes and has successfully incorporated new habits or behaviours. Fewer sessions required and support minimal.
- **Stage 6 – sustaining:** The young person is self-reliant. Changes can be maintained without active interventions or assistance. No support required.

Around a third of young people (34%) started at pipeline stage 3 'taking part', 28% at stage 2 'considering' and 22% at stage 1 'not engaging'. Only 16% of young people entered at a pipeline stage of 4 or above (see Figure 18 below).

Figure 18: Pipeline stage at initial ME Tool assessment



Base: 74 people.

Source: Forging Futures data (September 2023 to August 2024).

*Indicates a collapsed field where stages 4 and 5 have been combined due to small numbers.

Young people shared positive feedback on the process of identifying and reviewing their pipeline stage following ME Tool assessments. They shared that this was a useful way to see the progress they had made, and provided structure to the support they were receiving.

“It’s good that I actually see the progress that I’ve made because I don’t really see progress of my achievements and stuff... having that marker of progress that I can look back on and say I’ve definitely improved from that has been good” (Forging Futures programme participant)

CYA reported that they intend to revise the pipeline because it had a negative bias and it was not working as intended to demonstrate progress. For example, a young person who has unstable housing would have a low score on the pipeline, and while they may make progress in other areas, including moving into employment, if their housing remains unstable then they would not progress along the pipeline. The low pipeline stage would not be an adequate reflection of that person’s progress, especially since housing is out of scope for Forging Futures.

Optional activities

Group activities

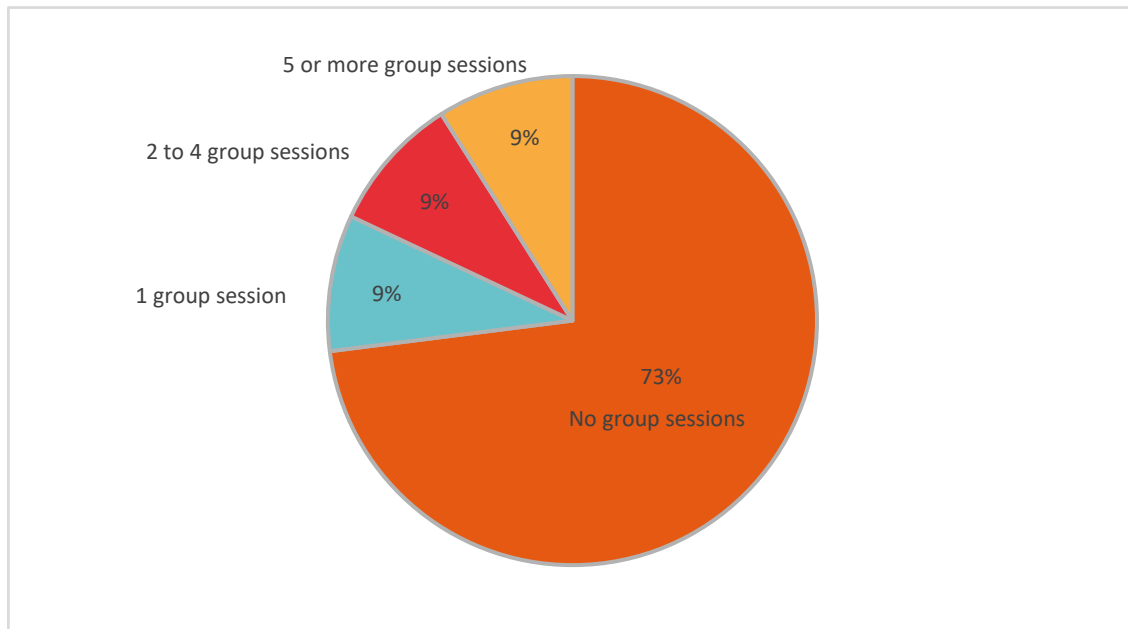
Proportion of people taking part in group sessions

Analysis of Forging Futures data shows that most people on the programme (73%) did not take part in group support activities³⁶, and just over one-quarter did (27%, 33 people). This is fewer than intended in the initial programme design, which had all programme participants engaging in group activities as part of the development sessions and highway to employability sessions. CYA staff reported in qualitative interviews that this reflects the needs of the people on Forging Futures, with more self-reporting anxiety and low confidence compared with previous years. Reasons cited by young people themselves for not engaging in group sessions included being too busy, transport challenges, low confidence, and believing their support needs were already being addressed with their link worker.

Figure 19 below shows the number of group sessions people took part in, with equal proportions participating in one group session (9%), two to four sessions (9%), and five or more group sessions. The highest number of group sessions someone took part in was 24.

³⁶ Group support activities include group employability sessions, development sessions, confidence sessions, emotional wellbeing sessions, the healthy lifestyles group, independent living and key skills, the relationships and social involvement group and employer Q&As.

Figure 19: Number of group sessions Forging Futures participants took part in



Base: 124 people.

Source: Forging Futures data (September 2023 to August 2024).

Topics covered in group sessions

The group session with the highest attendance was the career talks with external organisations, which 19 of the 33 young people who engaged in group sessions attended. Following this was 'group development sessions'³⁷ attended by 16 people, and employability skills sessions³⁸ attended by 15 people.

Group sessions were not available in all Forging Future delivery areas. Data from qualitative interviews with link workers and young people suggests Carlisle and

³⁷ Group development sessions did not run as intended in the original programme design. Therefore, analysis of Forging Futures data suggests 'group development sessions' refer to development 'taster' sessions run in Carlisle, confident communication sessions run in Workington and interview skills / employability sessions run in both these areas. However, in many cases there is no additional detail in the data beyond the label 'group development session'.

³⁸ Link workers could add additional detail for each activity in an open text space. It was noted that 'employability skills' group sessions included employability skills sessions delivered by CYA staff and sessions delivered by external organisations such as 'Scaffold the World', delivered by KAEFER Construction.

Workington were the only areas within the Forging Futures programme to deliver any form of group sessions³⁹. However, Forging Futures data shows a small number of people from Whitehaven and Penrith also attended group sessions, possibly due to CYA providing minibuses to transport people to the sessions. In Carlisle, the group sessions were development 'taster' sessions, offered to those who joined the programme earlier in the recruitment period. At the time of delivering the 'taster' sessions it was envisaged that the pre-planned development sessions would also be delivered later, but this was not the case.

Group sessions were ad-hoc reflecting support needs identified in one-to-one discussions with young people and their action plans. Groups were small, with both link workers and young people reporting in qualitative interviews session numbers ranged from two to five attendees. Young people reported in qualitative interviews that they felt the small group size was beneficial in helping them to be ready for attending larger group sessions in the future.

Employability sessions in Carlisle and Workington

A series of six fortnightly employability⁴⁰ small-group sessions were delivered to a maximum total of 15 people⁴¹ in Carlisle and Workington, covering a range of topics detailed below in Figure 20.

Figure 20: Overview of small-group employability sessions in Carlisle and Workington

	Focus of session	In this session...
Week 1	CVs	Link workers outlined what a CV is, what to include, and what makes a good CV. Young people then had the opportunity to make changes and adaptations to their CV with link worker support.

³⁹ An employability workshop was planned for Barrow-in-Furness, however low attendance to the session caused this to be cancelled.

⁴⁰ Some CYA staff described these sessions as 'interview skills', but for ease of understanding and linking to Forging Futures data we are describing them as employability skills sessions.

⁴¹ In Forging Futures data, employability skills sessions included sessions delivered by external providers, as well as these CYA delivered employability skills sessions.

Week 2	Covering letters	Young people learnt the importance of including a covering letter with their application and were guided through how to write one.
Week 3	Job applications	Link workers provided a walkthrough on how to identify key information from a job application. Following this, young people were asked to submit a job application, including a CV and covering letter, for an example/pretend job.
Week 4	Interview preparation	Young people were provided guidance on the importance of researching a company ahead of an interview, and ways to do this. Practical guidance also included ensuring journeys to interviews are well planned.
Week 5	Interview preparation	Link workers provided a guidance on personal preparation for interviews. This included information on what to wear, the importance of personal hygiene and effective communication.
Week 6	Interviews	Link workers ran a practice interview with each young person, one-to-one. This interview was for the job application they posted in week three. Young people were then provided feedback on their application and interview.

Source: Forging Futures programme link worker and young people interviews

Confident communications groups in Workington

In Workington, 'confident communications' group sessions were held weekly for young people who wanted to practice and develop their communication skills. This was facilitated through a range of activities. Link workers reported in qualitative interviews, that the sessions began in a workshop format, discussing the differences between formal and informal communication and when to use these, such as when communicating with colleagues or friends. Later sessions incorporated independent living skills and these sessions were more activity-based, including cooking, and offered young people the

opportunity to work towards accredited short courses such as an ASDAN⁴² 'food wise' award.⁴³ Link workers explained in qualitative interviews that these sessions were structured and had ground rules, particularly those delivered in a kitchen, which they felt encouraged professionalism from young people taking part.

Both young people and link workers felt that the 'confident communications' sessions had a noticeable, positive impact on the confidence of those taking part. Young people said they noticed improvements in the way they conduct themselves outside of CYA, for example when volunteering, and link workers shared that young people have presented more confidently in their regular one-to-one appointments.

“You can see the confidence in them, not just in the (confidence) group, but in their one-to-ones, they are more confident about the future which is nice to see” (Forging Futures link worker)

Employer Q&As

CYA hosted employer Q&A sessions, for which they invite employers and training providers working across a range of industries to discuss the opportunities they have available for young people and discuss their personal career journeys. The aim of these sessions was to highlight the breadth of opportunities available, and the varied paths into employment individuals can take. Link workers also considered that the events provided opportunities for young people to develop their communication skills and develop confidence in talking to employers.

A small number of sessions were held in Workington during the early stages of the Forging Futures programme. To increase the event's reach, transport was arranged for young people living in Carlisle and Whitehaven.

Due to the low number of interviews across the Workington and Whitehaven area, interviews with young people did not explore these employer Q+A's in detail. Some young people interviewed in Carlisle did mention that they had been invited to the event but were not able to make the date and/or time of the session. Each said they would have liked another opportunity to attend.

Employers and training providers who attended the event outlined how positively the events were received, explaining that young people were engaged, asked relevant questions and stayed behind to talk with speakers.

⁴² ASDAN is an education charity.

⁴³ [ASDAN Food Wise short course](#)

“The first time I did (the employer Q+A) we had a really shy group. The second time we got a few questions which got a really nice buzz going in the room” (CYA Partner)

On one occasion, a small number of employers were not able to make the Q+A sessions as planned. A partner shared in qualitative interviews that link workers stepped in and outlined their own career paths as part of the session instead. The partner felt that this was an important resource for young people's aspirations and had the potential to strengthen the relationship between young people and their link worker.

Referrals to external support

Link workers can refer young people to external organisations for additional support, which they reported in qualitative interviews expands the breadth of support available to people on Forging Futures. Analysis of Forging Futures data suggests that only 18%⁴⁴ of people on the programme were also receiving support from other organisations aside from CYA and the DWP. Evidence from the link worker and young people interviews highlighted referrals to housing support, mental health support, confidence and social groups, adult and community learning providers and further education providers.

Link workers reported in qualitative interviews that prior to making a referral they would discuss the anticipated usefulness and potential benefit to the individual of the support, and how comfortable or ready they felt to engage in external support. The close relationship between link workers, young people and the external support organisations enabled link workers to know of and share success stories with people considering the support, to encourage them to take up a referral offer.

In some cases, where appointments were taking place in co-located sites such as libraries, Youth Hubs, Jobcentres and homeless organisations' offices, link workers were able to offer informal handovers to support organisations to reduce young people's anxiety about engaging with a new service.

Highway to employability programme

Whilst planned, the Highway to Employability programme (outlined in Chapter 3) was not offered to the cohort of young people taking part Forging Futures during the

⁴⁴ This proportion has been calculated by combining the proportion of non-DWP services engaged with (50% of all non-CYA services) and the fact that 42 people out of 115 people on the programme for whom this data was available engaged with non-CYA services.

evaluation period. This is reflected in the final theory of change, outlined later in this chapter.

In-work support

Analysis of Forging Futures data indicates that, of those that moved into employment, most (81%) had received in-work support. However, evidence of in-work support was limited in interviews with both young people and link workers. This may be a result of a low number of employment outcomes within the interview sample.

Where in-work support was identified in interviews, young people explained that this was a brief telephone or text message check in on their first day of work to ensure their first day went well. Young people expressed an appreciation for this check in but largely felt that they would not need continued support from their link worker. Link workers expanded on this and shared examples of supporting young people to correct tax codes, understand annual leave entitlements, and identify any additional training requirements to support sustained employment.

Mechanisms for change

At the start of the evaluation it was envisaged that the key factors that enable programme participants to achieve their outcomes, also known as the mechanism for change, were tailored and individualised support, the model of support itself and the ability of link workers to draw on a network of partners and wider specialist services (see 'Mechanisms for change' in the 'Programme theory' chapter). However, discussions with CYA staff during the evaluation and analysis of qualitative interview data resulted in these enablers being changed to individuals' willingness to engage, tailored support, and trusted and continuous link worker relationships (discussed below). For example, the fact that link workers were able to flex and adapt the support model prompted discussions to explore which elements of the support model enable change, as opposed to the whole support model. This also highlighted the fact that for the Forging Futures programme, one-to-one link worker support was the main activity in the programme, which itself enables support to be tailored to individual needs. Furthermore, there was evidence to suggest that only a minority of people on the programme engaged with support from external partners, fewer than was perhaps envisaged at the start of the programme (see section 'Referrals to external support' above).

The findings of this evaluation indicate that all three mechanisms are required for the Forging Futures programme to effect change for the young people they support, and we were unable to isolate these from each other, or link them individually to specific outcomes.

Willingness to engage

Many young people reported in interviews that they wanted to engage with the programme because the content sounded appropriate, such as offering support to build confidence, employability skills, or deciding what area of work to move into. Over time, as trust in the link worker and individuals' confidence grew, willingness to engage was perceived to increase with people willing to engage in activities beyond the one-to-one link worker support.

Additionally, Link workers perceived people's engagement with the programme to be higher in areas where it had been offered as a voluntary programme, such as Barrow-in-Furness (see section 'Reasons for initial engagement').

Tailored support

As a programme of support that is predominantly one-to-one support, the link worker can tailor the support to the needs of the individual young person. In addition, CYA tailor the delivery model to meet the needs of the cohort, which during this evaluation period meant not proceeding with some of the planned group sessions and instead introducing smaller taster sessions when they felt people were ready for them (see Operation of the model in context of people's needs).

Furthermore, while Forging Futures had a pre-planned structure, link workers reported the benefits of being able to flex that structure as needed. For example, during the early stages of the programme an initial assessment and completion of the ME Tool were planned, but link workers explained that if someone arrived at one of these appointments needing support with a job application or upcoming interview, they could flex the support model and use the appointment for these activities instead.

Trusted and continuous link worker relationship

Link workers explained in qualitative interviews the importance of building trust with the young people they support. This was achieved through initial face-to-face appointments, regular appointments (typically weekly) and being able to tailor support to the individual's needs. Once trust was established, link workers felt there was more chance that people would agree to engage with other support such as group sessions or referrals to partner organisations. Link workers also explained the importance of building a person's confidence⁴⁵, as well as trust, before some people were willing to engage in other activities. Furthermore, trust, link workers explained that regular

⁴⁵ Increased confidence is a short-term outcome within personal development in the theory of change.

communication with people on the programme gave them a good understanding of when it was appropriate to introduce additional support activities.

The fact that people were typically supported by only one link worker, enabled this continuous relationship, which in turn meant link workers developed a deep understanding of the person they were supporting. A CYA partner that was interviewed also felt that the continual personalised support available to people on Forging Futures was a key factor in the programme achieving outcomes and cited another programme which they felt to be less effective than Forging Futures that does not have this feature.

Participant outcomes

Participant outcomes were identified through analysis of Forging Futures data which includes education and employment outcomes, and a reduction of personal support needs captured in ME Tool data. These were then cross-referenced and supplemented with other outcomes reported in link worker, young people and partner interviews.

The structure below reflects the grouping of short-term and intermediate outcomes used in the final theory of change (see Figure 25). The only exception being 'Reduced personal support needs' which spans multiple short-term outcomes, but being from the ME Tool data, we felt it benefitted from being reported together for ease of comparison across support needs. Furthermore, two short case studies have been presented to help illustrate the way Forging Futures helps people increase their confidence, and job application and interview skills.

Short-term outcomes

Strength of evidence

An overview of the strength of evidence used to support claims made is included in Figure 22 and Figure 23. When assessing the strength of information, the number and quality of data sources available to support claims, and the following descriptors have been considered⁴⁶:

- **Good evidence:** for these elements of the theory of change we have multiple sources to support the claim, both quantitative and qualitative, and the quantitative evidence is from a third party, such as examining board qualifications or HMRC.

⁴⁶ These descriptors have been adapted from Mackay et al. (2023) Evaluation of the St Giles Choices Programme – Final pilot evaluation report, Youth Futures Foundation.

- **Emerging evidence:** We have multiple sources, both quantitative and qualitative, to support the claim, but there are limitations in that the data is self-reported⁴⁷, issues with the completeness of some datasets, or no comparison group.
- **Limited evidence:** We have data from one source to support the claim, either quantitative or qualitative. There are limitations with the data such as it being self-reported²⁶, has a small sample size, potentially unrepresentative or incomplete.
- **Little or no evidence:** to provide a suitable robust assessment that the element of the theory of change works as described/intended, or that the support model contributed to the outcome/impact.

The overall assessment, as set out in Figure 21 below, is that some emerging evidence exists for the effectiveness of the Forging Futures support model.

⁴⁷ As the ME Tool relies on self-report, evidence from this data source will always be subject to the limitations associated with self-reported data

Figure 21: Strength of evidence for short-term outcomes

Short-term outcome	Strength of evidence	Data source(s)
Personal development	Emerging evidence from quantitative and qualitative sources that Forging Futures has supported improved personal development related to: improved communication skills; improved mental health and wellbeing; and increased ambition, motivation and aspirations for the future. Limited evidence from qualitative sources that Forging Futures has led to increased confidence and independent living skills.	Quantitative: ME Tool data (Increases between mean baseline and endline scores for those participants with more than one ME Tool assessment (34 out of 124 people) in all 10 categories, with nine of these with statistical significance). Qualitative: Interviews with link workers and young people. Qualitative: Interviews with link workers and young people.
Improved lifestyle choices / behaviours	Limited evidence from quantitative sources that Forging Futures has led to improved relationships.	Quantitative: ME Tool data (increases between mean baseline and endline scores for those participants with more than one ME Tool assessment (34 out of 123 people) on relationships and a healthy lifestyle).
Improved job readiness	Limited evidence, primarily from qualitative sources, that the programme has led to increased awareness of opportunities and career pathways, with improved attitudes towards employment and reduction in barriers such as housing and transport.	Quantitative: ME Tool data (increases between mean baseline and endline scores on extent to which home and stability is a support need). Qualitative: Interviews with link workers and young people.
Increased skills, knowledge and experience	Emerging evidence within Forging Futures data, ME Tool data, and qualitative interviews that the programme has supported: the development of employability skills; completion of accredited vocational training; improved CV, job search and interview techniques; and increased work experiences.	Quantitative: ME Tool data (increases between mean baseline and endline scores on extent to which key skills and employability are a support need) and Forging Futures programme data on no. young people starting an accredited course or taking part in work experience.

Qualitative: Interviews with link workers and young people.

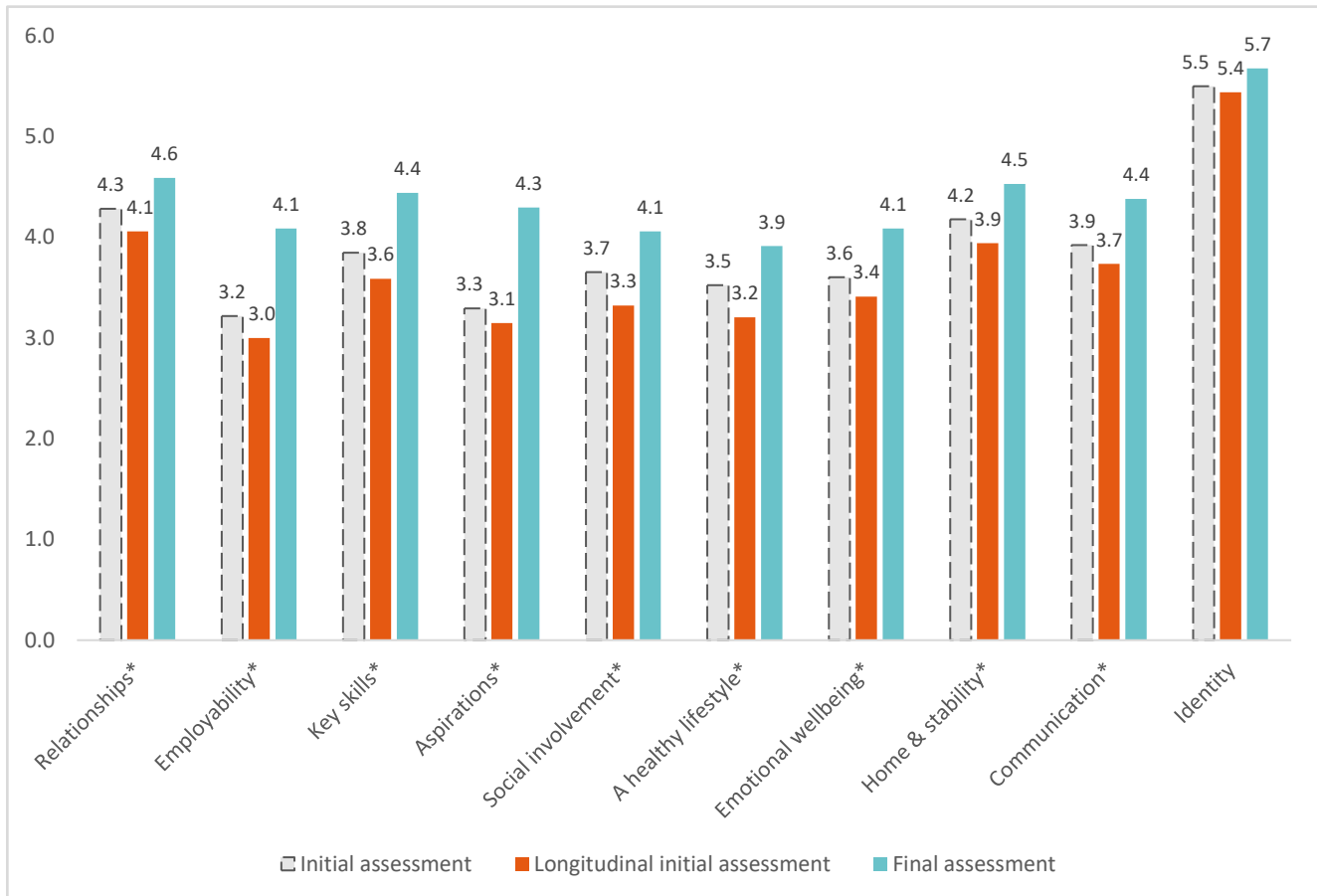
Reduced personal support needs

As reported in the section 'ME Tool Pipeline', the support needs in the ME Tool are a predefined list of 10 personal support needs that CYA monitor for all people on Forging Futures. Each personal support need, or category, is given a score of one to six, with one indicating high support needs and six indicating low support needs in that area.

Only 34 out of the 124 people on Forging Futures completed the ME Tool more than once, so analysis of improvements in personal support needs is limited to this group of participants who may not be representative of all people on Forging Futures. Therefore, analysis of personal support needs data is indicative and should be treated with caution. Figure 22 below shows:

- An initial assessment column (grey) of the average (mean) score for all 78 young people who completed the ME Tool at least once.
- A longitudinal initial assessment column (blue) of the average (mean) score at initial assessment, for the 34 people who completed two or more ME Tool assessments.
- A final assessment column (orange) of the average (mean) score of personal support needs at the last ME Tool assessment completed before leaving the programme. This average is for the 34 people who completed two or more ME Tool assessments. Given the number of ME Tools completed varied, this longitudinal analysis is based on the first and last ME Tool completed for those who completed two or more.

Figure 22: Average (mean) score of personal support needs, at initial and final assessments



Base: 78 people at initial assessment. 34 people at longitudinal initial assessment and final assessment.

Source: Forging Futures data (September 2023 to August 2024).

*Represents where the difference in mean scores at the longitudinal initial assessment and final assessment are statistically significant at the 99% confidence interval, based on a paired samples T-test.

Initial support needs

The three most identified areas of personal support need at initial ME Tool assessment, based on the mean scores of all 78 people, were employability (3.2), aspirations (3.3) and a healthy lifestyle (3.5). The longitudinal group had lower average initial assessment scores overall for each support need, suggesting those with greater self-reported support needs may have spent more time on the programme, so were more likely to have completed a follow-up ME Tool assessment.

Reducing personal support needs

The average score improved from initial assessment to final assessment for nine of the 10 personal support needs, indicating Forging Futures reduced young people's support needs in all areas, apart from identity which is arguably beyond the scope of an employability programme. Differences in scores from initial to final ME Tool assessments for the longitudinal sample of 34 people were assessed using significance tests (T-tests, 99% confidence interval). The paired samples test revealed a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.01$) between the means of the initial and final assessments for all categories, except for identity.

For the longitudinal group, the support needs with the largest mean increase from initial to final assessment were aspirations (28%), employability (27%), and key skills (18%). Aspirations and employability were also the two categories with the lowest mean score at initial assessment (i.e. the categories with the greatest support need initially). The smallest increase was for identity, which also had the lowest support need initially.

Personal development

Personal development was identified as a short-term outcome in the theory of change. Where young people and link workers reported positive outcomes in qualitative interviews, personal development was a key focus throughout the programme.

Increased confidence

Findings from qualitative interviews suggest that a key outcome from the programme was improved confidence, which young people were exhibiting socially, in their independence and with job searching and employability skills. Young people and link workers attributed improved confidence outcomes to all aspects of the programme, including ongoing one-to-one support from link workers, internal and external group activities and gaining work experience.

A key contributor to young people's personal development, especially confidence, was reported by link workers and young people to be the routine, sense of purpose and reduced isolation that young people achieved from engaging with the programme. Where young people and link workers reported increased job-readiness, skills, knowledge and experience, this was also reported to boost confidence.

“I've noticed since being with Michelle that my confidence has been a lot better. I'm actually happy to get out of the house and do things now, so I feel a lot better in myself as well.” (Young person)

Often, where people were lacking in confidence, they were initially reluctant to take part in activities other than receiving one-to-one link worker support. Link workers explained in qualitative interviews the importance of increasing confidence which in turn increases the likelihood of someone agreeing to take part in other activities, aside from one-to-one support.

“Once their confidence has risen you can start introducing them to other things and plant other seeds.” (Link worker)

Improved communication skills

As reported in the section ‘Reduced personal support needs’, analysis of young people’s initial and final ME Tool assessments showed a significant improvement in young people’s communication, and social involvement. Similarly to reported improvements in confidence (above), young people and their link workers in qualitative interviews reported improved communication and social skills from having increased social interactions and talking to more people, through engaging in one-to-one support and other activities such as attending confident communications sessions.

Link workers at follow-up interview reported young people demonstrating more communication skills in their one-to-one sessions. Often improvements in communication skills were linked to improved interview techniques (see section below on Interview techniques).

Improved mental health, wellbeing and emotional resilience

As reported in the section ‘Reduced personal support needs’, analysis of young people’s initial and final ME Tool assessments showed a significant improvement in their emotional wellbeing. Interview findings suggest that young people reported improvements in their mental health and wellbeing due to engaging in one-to-one support and having a purpose and routine.

A key enabler to this outcome was young people having a positive relationship with their link worker, who they felt comfortable to talk to, knowing they would listen and be understanding (see also Mechanisms for change above). A couple of young people who had a difficult home life reflected on how talking to their link worker was helping them manage it. A small number of young people who reported taking part in courses on mental health and wellbeing reflected that these were helpful. For example, one young person commented that an Embrace module on mental health they had taken was helping them to support their family’s mental health.

Sophie

Sophie hoped to work with CYA to build her confidence and get a part-time job. She started volunteering with Pitstop (an organisation she heard about through the Jobcentre) and at a charity shop. As well as her one-to-one link worker support, she attended an employer Q&A and other CYA employment sessions. Along with her link worker she reported several personal development outcomes, including improved confidence, social skills, self-esteem and more independence. Engaging with Forging Futures had also helped her overcome her social anxiety. Sophie attributed this to the encouragement of her link worker, who she feels is invested in her progress, and the new friends she had made whilst volunteering. Sophie's link worker added that having a routine and getting used to engaging in activities was supporting her personal development.

"I had really bad social anxiety so I don't think I would have been able to talk to anyone... being with Michelle, talking to her, it's made me feel better about interacting with other people." (Sophie)

"Being complimented and being told I'm great the way I am is building my self-esteem." (Sophie)

Emotional resilience

When asked about developing emotional resilience, many young people were unsure or reported that they were yet to test it. One young person reported that they were more resilient to unsuccessful applications since joining the programme, partly as they were more confident in their CV.

Increased ambition, motivation and aspirations for the future

As reported in the section 'Reduced personal support needs', analysis of young people's initial and final ME Tool assessments showed a significant improvement in their aspirations. Analysis of qualitative interviews with link workers and young people suggest that people developed their ambition, motivation and aspirations for the future from a combination of elements. These included encouragement from their link worker, taking small steps and seeing their progress throughout the duration of the programme.

Both link workers and young people reported young people having more motivation to look for jobs and engage in other activities (e.g. volunteering, driving lessons) since being on the programme, mainly due to support and encouragement from link workers.

Link workers and young people also reflected on how taking small steps and celebrating success helped to improve confidence and motivation, for example seeing their progress when reviewing the ME Tool and developing action plans. One young person

described that the ME Tool had been the most helpful aspect of the support as it allowed them to take stock of various aspects of their life and start putting together manageable steps to work towards their goals.

"I think the appointment where we discussed my strengths and weaknesses was by far one of the most important. It's something I've not thought of before ... it's definitely something I've wanted to do but never really known how to go about it. So it was great to be shown how." (Young person)

Some young people reported changing or clarifying their aspirations for the future after engaging in one-to-one support, increasing their awareness of opportunities and/or gaining work experience (see 'Furthering experience of the workplace' below).

Independent living skills

Interview findings suggest that in some cases young people gained independent living skills, such as improved financial wellbeing, and cooking skills from the ASDAN⁴⁸ course, which link workers explained would particularly benefit young people looking to live on their own. Link workers reported supporting young people with budgeting and time management, having identified these when discussing the personal support needs on the ME Tool. One young person reported learning time management and forward planning from attending Forging Futures sessions.

Link workers also reported helping young people to set up bank accounts or get an ID needed before entering employment. A young person whose close family member had recently passed away received support from their link worker to help take on new responsibilities for their family, and share their new knowledge with them, such as how to set up their own bank accounts. They also gained a knowledge of financial systems from an externally led course.

Improved lifestyle choices and behaviours

Improved lifestyle choices and behaviours were in the pre-evaluation theory of change as 'intermediate outcomes' but were moved to 'short-term' outcomes to reflect the perceived importance of improving lifestyle choices and behaviours before moving into work. This includes improving relationships and reducing substance misuse. However, these were not topics that were discussed during qualitative interviews beyond a handful of people mentioning tension with family members they lived with. Furthermore, 'relationships' was the second lowest support need identified in initial ME Tool

⁴⁸ ASDAN is an education charity.

assessments (see 'Reduced personal support needs' section above) suggesting this was not a common problem for the Forging Futures cohort. A 'healthy lifestyle' was a greater support need identified in initial ME Tool assessments; however this is likely to include people wanting to have a healthier diet and more exercise, and is not necessarily reflective of people needing support with substance misuse. That said, there was a significant reduction in young people's self-reported need for support with relationships and healthy lifestyle between initial and final ME Tool assessments for the 34 people who completed more than one.

Improved job-readiness

Improved job-readiness is a short-term outcome in the theory of change.

Increased awareness of opportunities and career pathways

Analysis of qualitative interviews with young people and link workers found that young people gained an increased awareness of volunteering, training and work opportunities, as well as of different career pathways. This was due to suggestions from their link worker and employer talks, as well as from gaining work experience on the programme. Where young people reported increased awareness of job opportunities and career pathways, this helped to clarify their aspirations and increased their ability and motivation to job search.

“I'm more aware of different jobs and different places where I could, kind of, like, go in, that I wasn't aware of before, like different job titles, and kind of have a little bit of an idea of what I like and what I don't like.” (Young person)

One young person explained how they had gained a clear goal for their future while on Forging Futures, and that their link worker had found the necessary college course to do that job in the future.

Improved attitudes towards employment

Positive attitudes to employment were identified as a short-term outcome from Forging Futures that are important for wider job-readiness and moving into employment. Throughout their time on the programme, young people often developed increased confidence, engaged more regularly with the support, and developed a positive relationship with their link worker. Combined, these improved young people's outlooks on their day-to-day lives and future prospects, leading to more positive attitudes to employment. For example, a link worker reported that young people gained a positive attitude toward work through encouragement from link workers to build routine and be out of the house more to improve health, wellbeing and quality of life in the longer-term.

In turn, a more positive attitude towards work was reported by link workers to lead to increased motivation to look for work, increased engagement with Forging Futures and more job-search activities.

Reduction in wider challenges to employment

Housing

As reported in the section 'Reduced personal support needs', analysis of young people's initial and final ME Tool assessments showed a significant reduction in people identifying 'home and stability' as an area they needed support with.

No outcomes around securing housing were reported in qualitative interviews, but both link workers and young people highlighted examples of people getting support to improve their housing situation. This included a link worker exploring accommodation options with a care leaver and their personal adviser⁴⁹. Another young person received support from their link worker to look into how to move out of their family home. This included helping the young person get on the local authority housing register and referring them to housing support from Citizens Advice.

“When we meet in person, we sometimes look for housing. No one at home helps me with that ... I've got no one else to support me so I'm glad she's there. And she said that when I do move out, she can help me move my stuff.” (Young person)

Transport

CYA identified transport as a key barrier to employment for many young people in Cumbria, especially those living in more rural areas. Link workers helped young people to gain the confidence to navigate public transport, with one young person explaining in interview how their link worker helped them learn to read bus timetables. Another young person reported that going to interviews helped them learn to navigate public transport. In some cases, link workers helped young people to get a driving license by encouraging and motivating them to get driving lessons and theory tests arranged if they wanted to learn to drive.

"I haven't got a theory test booked yet but I will be booking one very shortly. That's good. I wouldn't be saying that without Rosie. It

⁴⁹ Local authorities are required to provide personal advisers to support care leavers from the age of 18 to 21, which in some cases is extended to 25 years old.

would end up being the end of the year before I ended up doing it." (Young person)

However, for some young people transport remained a challenge. For example, some young people explained having limited job options or being unsuccessful gaining work because they were unable to get there in a timely way on public transport, particularly buses. Interviews with link workers and partners concurred with the issues of public transport and highlighted that some young drivers are limited in how far they can travel for work, due to being required by insurance companies to have a 'black box' fitted in their car to monitor their travel.

Increased skills, knowledge and experience

Increased skills, knowledge and experience were identified as short-term outcomes in the theory of change.

Key skills and employability

As reported in the section 'Reduced personal support needs', analysis of young people's initial and final ME Tool assessments showed a reduction over time in the extent to which people were identifying key skills and employability as support needs.

Completion of accredited vocational training⁵⁰ relevant to career aspirations

Forging Futures data shows that around a fifth (23 people) of the 124 young people on the programme started a separate course, including adult learning, vocational training and sector-based work academy programmes⁵¹. Seven of the 23 people had started two to three programmes/courses, with 31 programme/course starts recorded for Forging Futures participants overall.

Data collected by CYA also shows that 19 accreditations were achieved by 13 of the 124 young people on Forging Futures. Around half of the accreditations were Level 3 First Aid. CYA organised a First Aid training day at a youth centre with an external trainer/accreditor, and link workers reported referring young people to First Aid training,

⁵⁰ CYA record achievements as and when they are achieved by young people, including short courses and qualifications while on Forging Futures.

⁵¹ Sector-based work academy programmes, known as SWAPs for short, are intended to help job seekers aged 16 or over apply for jobs, through a programme of up to six weeks that comprises pre-employment training, a short work placement and a guaranteed job interview.

which may explain the frequency of this accreditation. Other accreditations included Embrace learning certificates, functional skills qualifications and forklift licences.

In initial interviews, young people often referred to wanting qualifications and training to improve their CV, and where they achieved this, they reported having more confidence in their skills and employability. For example, a young person who had been taking part in Embrace courses relevant to their preferred career in retail, reported that this would make their CV look professional, and their link worker reported this was a way to build up their skills before they had gained the confidence to start voluntary work. Another link worker reported that even where training is not directly relevant a young person's career aspirations, it helps show employers that individuals are engaged in meaningful activity and capable.

A young person who reported getting a forklift license was confident it would help them get a job and had been applying for relevant warehouse jobs since. The link worker confirmed that since this young person's long-term goal was to get a job role which involves driving, the forklift experience would help them understand what this role looks like and start working towards it. They explained the young person would not have understood the value of the course when they first started on Forging Futures and link worker encouragement led to them signing up for the course.

Maths and English qualifications

Link workers reported referring young people to maths and English courses to gain qualifications where they did not have them, to improve the likelihood of those people moving into work. Young people who reported taking part in maths and English training also recognised that it would help them to get a job. Analysis of Forging Futures data showed that a small number of young people who took part in functional skills training whilst on the programme, also achieved another education, employment, and training outcome.

In cases where young people did not have maths and English qualifications before joining Forging Futures, they often attributed it to COVID-19 interrupting their education, which was corroborated in a CYA partner interview. A link worker reported that in some cases young people were hesitant to go back to education if they did not have a good experience with school, and in such cases only came around to the idea after the link worker consistently explained the benefits and gave them time to think about it. One young person reported that gains in confidence since being on Forging Futures had motivated them to pursue an English qualification.

"Getting help doing stuff has made me more motivated to actually do the English." (Young person)

Improved CV, job search and interview techniques

CV

Interview findings suggest that young people often created or improved their CVs while on Forging Futures, which gave them more confidence and increased their perceived employability. Interviews suggest young people often had CV guidance early on in their one-to-one appointments, with link workers amending CVs and giving guidance on how to improve them. Young people and link workers also gave positive feedback on employability sessions run by CYA which helped young people to make changes to their CV.

Some young people reported securing more job interviews because of the improvements to their CV:

“I think the best part has been doing my CV. I thought it were alright before but it was really useful. I've noticed I get more responses now. I've had three interviews since then.” (Young person)

Job search techniques

Young people reported improving their skills and knowledge on how to search and apply for jobs, due to one-to-one link worker support as well as assisted job-search group sessions. One young person gave the example that their link worker had taught them to ask for feedback when they were rejected for a job application, and since doing so they had learned how to improve their applications for next time.

Others reported that their link workers had helped them to understand how to search for jobs, what jobs they should apply to and what to include in their applications.

“Just talking about job searching and what to do on applications and stuff has really helped” (Young person)

A young person who took part in an assisted job-search/application session at the library reported that this was helpful as they usually applied for jobs on their phone rather than a computer.

Young people also reported applying for jobs more frequently since taking part in Forging Futures, as they were more confident with their CVs and job applications, were more motivated and had a positive attitude to employment (as reported in earlier sections).

“I was looking for jobs everyday with the help, which I wasn't doing before” (Young person)

Interview techniques

Young people reported learning interview techniques through practice and preparation, as well as feeling more confident in interviews due to having gained better communication skills and social confidence. Young people gave positive feedback about getting interview support, including practice interviews from their link worker, as well as from taking part in CYA and partner led employability sessions. For example, a young person reported receiving tips from their link worker which helped them to feel more prepared for interviews.

“I constantly get tips of like what kind of questions I should ask in an interview and when I do get an interview, they tell me to research the company as much as I can and they even give me bullet points of stuff they might ask me in the interview and that's really useful to go over and just makes me a lot more ready for the interview.” (Young person)

A benefit of tailored one-to-one support is that if a young person had an interview coming up, they could use their weekly link worker appointment to prepare their answers. One young person suggested that although taking part in interview skills sessions had been a useful opportunity for social interaction, they found one-to-one sessions were more helpful for job application and interview support, as it is more targeted to their individual needs. An employer offering internships reported that CYA's one-to-one personal link worker support complements their internship well, because it is helpful to know that when giving constructive feedback to people, such as after a mock interview, the link worker will discuss feedback with individuals to ensure they take it on board fully.

Furthering experience of the workplace

Forging Futures data shows that nine people gained work experience in retail, hospitality, trades, customer services, factories and warehouses. No young people took part in a period of work experience more than once. Additionally, 13 young people (of which some had also gained work experience) took part in volunteering, with over a third taking part in more than one different volunteering experience. Volunteering was recorded in a range of industries, including retail, charity and care. Analysis of qualitative interviews with young people suggests that where young people gained work experience and/or engaged in volunteering opportunities, this helped them to

better understand the world of work, clarify their aspirations, understand their strengths and weaknesses and increase their confidence.

**“Doing work experience at B&M, before I did it, I didn't really want to do retail but actually doing it... now I want to [work in retail].”
(Young person)**

Link workers explained that those who started volunteering often had low levels of confidence and/or previous work experience and had built up the confidence to start volunteering since joining the programme.

An employer interviewee explained that working with CYA enabled them to fully understand the needs of the young people, and helped make them feel prepared to support the young people before they came for work experience:

“We've got a good relationship with CYA and because we have that we're able to find out more about the young people they do work with... it makes us think about ‘how can we work with these people?’” (Employer)

Intermediate outcomes

Strength of evidence

The overall assessment, as set out in Figure 23 below, is that some emerging evidence exists for the effectiveness of the Forging Futures support model.

Figure 23: Strength of evidence for intermediate outcomes

Intermediate outcome	Change	Strength of evidence	Data source(s)
Progression into education, employment or training	48% of people on the programme moved into employment and/or education.	Emerging evidence within quantitative and qualitative sources that Forging Futures supports young people into education, training, and employment.	Quantitative: Forging Futures data Qualitative: interviews with link workers, partners and employers.

Sustained employment outcomes	Of those who entered employment, around half (48%) sustained employment for three months.	Emerging evidence within quantitative and qualitative sources that the programme supported young people to sustain employment outcomes.	Quantitative: Forging Futures data. Qualitative: interviews with link workers.
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Employment outcomes

Progression into education, employment, or training (EET outcomes)

Forging Futures data shows that 48%⁵² of people on the programme moved into employment and/or education⁵³. Most of these moves were into full-time or part-time employment, with a small number of young people moving into an apprenticeship, 'other' employment, or education⁵⁴. This figure is not mutually exclusive, as some young people moved into more than one EET outcome throughout their time on the programme.⁵⁵

Entering employment

Nearly half of people on Forging Futures entered employment or an apprenticeship (47%) (see Figure 24).

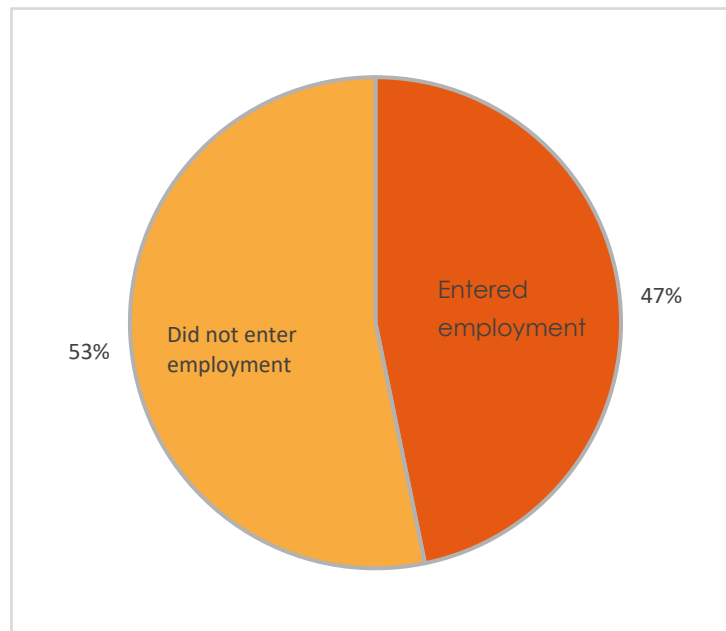
⁵² In addition, two young people achieved their first employment outcome in September 2024, which they sustained for 3 months. However, this data was received too late to be included in the analysis.

⁵³ Employment outcomes are an intermediate outcome in the theory of change that people could gain around the time of leaving Forging Futures programme.

⁵⁴ This figure does not include taking part in work experience or sector-based work academy programmes (SWAPs), which were covered under short-term outcomes.

⁵⁵ A small number of people in this figure had started a functional skills maths or English programme or gained a functional skills qualification, in addition to gaining another EET outcome.

Figure 24: Proportion of people on Forging Futures moving into employment



Base: 124 people.

Source: Forging Futures data (September 2023 to August 2024).

Sustained employment outcomes

Nearly half (48%) of people on Forging Futures who entered employment were recorded by CYA as having sustained employment for three months. This equates to 23% of all Forging Futures participants. CYA track and record three-month sustained employment outcomes by conducting 'sustainment checks' (phone calls) with people they know have moved into employment. Therefore, there may be instances where people could not be re-contacted so it is unknown if they stayed in employment or not. There were also some inconsistencies in how this outcome was recorded in Upshot that resulted in under-reporting initially. Therefore, we recommend CYA improve the recording of this outcome in the future.

CYA also recorded when young people sustain employment outcomes for six months. This was beyond the scope of analysis for this evaluation, as the timing of the evaluation did not allow for data to be collected systematically after six months for everyone who entered employment. Further evaluations of Forging Futures may wish to consider analysing six-month sustained employment outcomes.

Types of employment

Around three-fifths of moves into employment⁵⁶ were into part-time jobs, around two-fifths into full-time jobs, and a small number moved into apprenticeships or jobs with few contracted hours⁵⁷. Not all people who moved into employment remained in employment; seven people moved into employment two or three times.

Comparing employment outcomes on Forging Futures to employment outcomes among 16–24-year-olds not in work in the UK

The proportion of young people moving into employment is in line with CYA's earlier programme 'First Steps to a Sustainable Future', in which 51% of 109 young people on the programme moved into employment⁵⁸. Both proportions are higher than Labour Force Survey data which shows that 30.8% of young people aged 16-24, who were not in paid work, found paid work six months later⁵⁹. However, this comparison should be treated with caution as the two groups are not directly comparable.

Factors contributing to people on Forging Futures entering employment

Link workers, CYA partners and employers reported in qualitative interviews that two key steppingstones that young people needed to progress into employment were improving their employability skills and increasing their confidence⁶⁰. This reflects two of the four most common support needs identified at initial assessments (see 'Support needs' section above) and both of which were identified as short-term outcomes of the programme (see 'End of evaluation theory of change' above). For example, a young person who had moved into employment commented during a qualitative interview that they felt the support they received to develop their CV had been the most effective element of the programme, and that since joining Forging Futures they had

⁵⁶ Seven people moved into employment two or three times, some of whom moved into both part-time and full-time employment on different occasions. Therefore, the proportions reported here are indicative of 'all moves into employment', and percentages are not reported.

⁵⁷ Forging Futures data includes people moving into 'other employment' which IES understand to be jobs with only a small number of hours or with zero-hours contracts.

⁵⁸ The first steps to a sustainable future programme ran between 2021 and 2023, supporting 109 people aged 18 to 24, who were not in education, employment, or training. This data has been provided to IES by CYA as context for the Forging Futures programme.

⁵⁹ Source: IES analysis of Labour Force Survey data for April 2022 – July 2023, Office for National Statistics, 2023.

⁶⁰ There was limited evidence of employment outcomes in qualitative interviews with young people, possibly due to interviews being with people who were still on the programme, whereas those with jobs may have disengaged from the programme.

increased their employability skills and the frequency of their job/apprenticeship applications (see the case study below).

Jared

Before joining CYA, Jared had left his previous job due to an extended period of hospitalisation for his health condition. His main driver for wishing to engage in the Forging Futures programme was to boost his employability by developing his CV, interview skills, and understand how best to present himself and communicate his break from work to potential employers. Through one-to-one link worker support he achieved these goals and gained more motivation to apply for jobs. He secured a full-time job in the food industry and said this was largely due to amendments made to his CV which his link worker had suggested.

Analysis of Forging Futures data highlights the absence of a relationship between people's length of time on the programme and whether they achieved an employment outcome. Of those who were on the programme between zero and six months 42% moved into employment, while 54% of those who were on the programme for seven months or longer moved into employment. Despite the difference between these figures, this was not statistically significant. Notably however, the majority of those who were on the programme for less than one month did not move into employment, suggesting they instead disengaged from the programme. Furthermore, analysis indicates that there was no significant difference in achieving employment outcomes by:

- Whether or not people took part in group sessions.
- Whether or not people reported employability skills, transport, mental-ill health or confidence as a support need during their initial assessment appointments with link workers.

In addition to the support received through Forging Futures, an individual's length of time unemployed prior to joining the programme may have also played a role in their movement into work. Over half (53%) of young people who were unemployed for six months or less prior to joining the programme secured an employment outcome compared with only 33% of people who were unemployed for seven months or more⁶¹.

⁶¹ The differences were statistically significant at the 95% level ($p < 0.05$).

Factors contributing to some people not entering employment

Analysis of Forging Futures data suggests that self-reporting four or more support needs during initial assessment appointments, reduces the likelihood of moving into employment. Of those who reported four or more support needs (36%) moved into employment compared with 59% of people who reported three or fewer support needs⁶².

Further reasons as to why employment outcomes were not achieved for some people were reported in qualitative data from interviews with young people and link workers, including:

- external factors in the young person's life, such as needing to care for family, which may have changed during the programme;
- having complex needs, such as housing or mental ill-health, which need to be addressed before the person is ready to move into employment; and
- young people's aspirations changing while on the programme and consequently needing longer to gain the relevant skills or work experience.

Why some people do not remain in employment

Forging Futures data shows people leaving employment, and some with multiple moves into employment. Analysis of qualitative data suggests this might be due to the job not being aligned to longer-term career goals, such as being in a different sector, and/or the young person finding work challenging to manage alongside mental ill-health or special educational needs.

⁶² This analysis is based on 66 people who reported four or more support needs and 58 people who reported three or fewer support needs when registering for the Forging Futures programme. The difference in the proportions moving into employment for these two groups was statistically significant at the 95% level ($p < 0.05$).

Education and training outcomes

Education and training destination outcomes⁶³ were achieved by five or fewer people⁶⁴. This is to be expected, as Forging Futures focuses on gaining employment outcomes for young people.

Where education and training outcomes were initially sought for by young people but not achieved, qualitative data shows this was often attributable to the same reasons listed above for employment outcomes not being achieved: external factors in the young person's life, complex needs and changing aspirations. Additionally, in a couple of cases, young people who wanted to achieve education outcomes reported they were unable to pay for their desired college course and were seeking support for this.

Virtual internships

Two young people who were interviewed had taken part in Virtual internships⁶⁵. Virtual internships were remote work experience opportunities for a specified period. Link workers and young people did not expect Virtual internships to lead to a job offer, as companies young people interned with were international. One person who completed a Virtual internship had a university degree and the other had qualifications from college which were relevant to the internship. The latter did an internship that was closely aligned to their interests, which they found helpful and enjoyable. The other person reported that the internship was less closely related to their area of interest, but they still found it helpful and felt it met their goal of being more productive with their time. They also reported that they appreciated having a taster of the world of work and it helped them understand what type of work they prefer; desk-based office work rather than shift work.

⁶³ Education and training outcomes are an intermediate-term outcome in the theory of change, that people could gain around the time of leaving Forging Futures programme. It does not include here completion of vocational training and/or qualifications, which were covered under short-term outcomes.

⁶⁴ Due to the small number of people moving into education, the exact number is not reported.

⁶⁵ There was no Forging Futures data available to confirm the total number of people on the programme who completed a Virtual internship.

Final theory of change

Based on all the learnings from the evaluation of Forging Futures, IES believe the revised theory of change in Figure 25⁶⁶ below reflects how the Forging Futures programme worked to achieve intermediate (employment) outcomes.

Programme activities comprise of:

- **core activities** of one-to-one link worker support, initial assessment and the CYA's ME Tool;
- **optional activities** of group sessions, partner-led activities, work experience, volunteering, virtual internships and in-work support; and
- **support for care experienced people** including Multiply⁶⁷ and CYA's transitions project⁶⁸.

The revised mechanisms for change included replacing two previous mechanisms with 'willingness to engage', and 'trusted and continuous link worker relationship'. The third mechanism for change, 'tailored support' remained broadly the same.

Short-term outcomes of personal development, improved job-readiness and increased skills, knowledge and experience remain in line with the pre-evaluation theory of change. However, improved lifestyle choices and behaviours were moved from intermediate outcomes to short-term outcomes to reflect that for some young people this is a necessary step before moving into education, employment, or training.

Participant journeys

Due to the small number of people taking part in the optional activities it was not possible to separate the effects of these on outcomes, therefore the programme theory treats all core and optional programme activities as one which led to all four short-term

⁶⁶ Please note the next version of the theory of change diagram will include additional arrows from increased skills, knowledge and experience to employment outcomes, and from education and training outcomes to employment outcomes.

⁶⁷ Multiply is a selection of free maths courses available to adults who do not have a grade 4 or grade C GCSE maths, or equivalent. CYA were delivering Multiply to care experienced people at the same time as Forging Futures. Other people wanting to take part in Multiple maths courses would be referred to other local providers.

⁶⁸ CYA's transitions project is additional support for 15- to 24-year-old care experienced young people to help them transition care to living alone. Source: <https://www.cya.org.uk/projects-1/in-care-care-experienced-transition-project>

outcomes of personal development, improved lifestyle choices and behaviours, improved job-readiness, and increased skills, knowledge, and experience.

Care experienced young people and people with experience of the criminal justice system were both small groups within the Forging Futures cohort (11 and 10 people respectively). Therefore, analysis of these peoples' journeys through the programme was not possible.

Furthermore, in relation to how short-term outcomes lead to intermediate outcomes, analysis of qualitative interview data and quantitative Forging Futures data indicates:

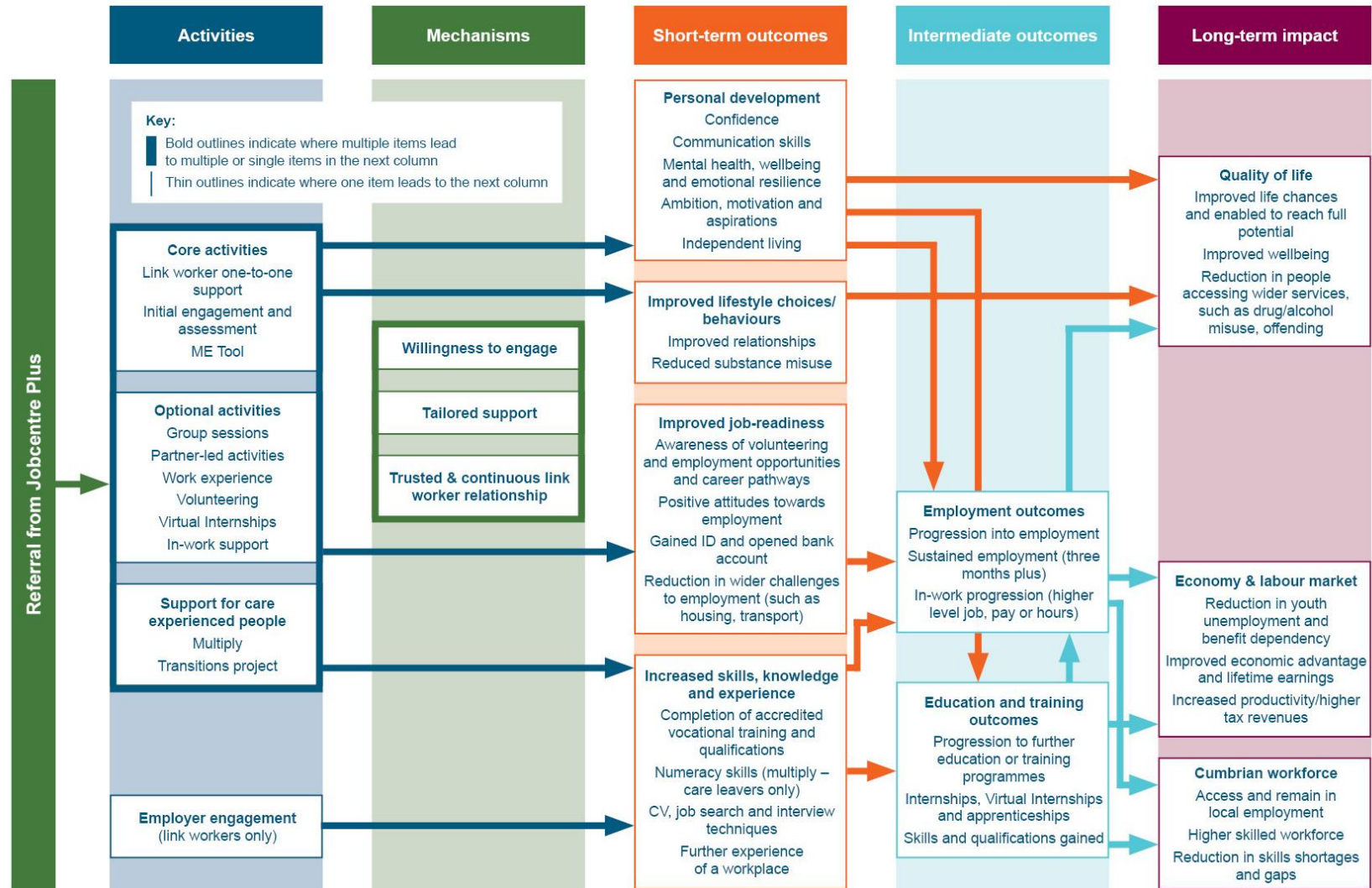
- Personal development short-term outcomes can lead to intermediate outcomes of employment, education, or training, as well as long-term impacts of improved quality of life.
- Improved lifestyle choices and behaviours lead to improved quality of life.
- Improved job-readiness leads to employment outcomes.
- Increased skills, knowledge and experience leads to employment, education and training intermediate outcomes.

Evidencing the theory of change

The final theory of change appears feasible and can be evidenced to some extent through a combination of Forging Futures data, ME Tool data, and qualitative data from interviews with link workers, young people and partner organisations. In particular:

- Referrals onto the programme and activities engaged with are evidenced through comprehensive Forging Futures data.
- Short-term outcomes were evidenced through qualitative interview data from interviews with people on the programme, link workers and partners. Some of these were also evidenced through longitudinal data on personal support needs, assessed through repeat ME Tool completion for 34 people on the programme.
- Intermediate outcomes of 'employment', and 'education, and training' were evidenced through analysis of Forging Futures data. However, our understanding about variation in participant journeys to achieve employment outcomes is less robust because it relies primarily on qualitative evidence.
- Long-term impacts of the programme were beyond the scope of this evaluation.

Figure 25: End of evaluation theory of change



Readiness for further evaluation

A study of the feasibility of estimating the causal impact of Forging Futures was carried out alongside the programme evaluation. The purpose of this was to establish whether the intervention was ready to be scaled up for an efficacy study. The feasibility study drew on findings from the early stages of the programme evaluation, a literature review, a review of secondary datasets and consultation with key stakeholders within the Department for Work and Pensions, CYA and Youth Futures Foundation.

The study explored key considerations for an impact evaluation design. Specifically, it explored:

- Randomised-controlled trial (RCT) feasibility.
- Quasi-experimental design (QED) feasibility.
- Non-causal analysis, including considerations of data sources and the quality of these measures.
- Further considerations about the acceptability of the proposed design, including any required adaptations.

A paper setting out full discussion of these options was shared with Youth Futures Foundation. It was agreed that a RCT design, the 'gold-standard' in evaluation, was potentially viable but that more detailed exploration and design work was required around the recruitment strategy (inclusion/exclusion criteria), randomisation strategy, defining Business as Usual (i.e. what standard provision participants would access in the absence of Forging Futures) and sample size requirements. The evaluation team developed a more detailed paper on these issues. This included a risk register that identified the key risks and obstacles for any potential future RCT, their likelihood and impact, and potential mitigation strategies. This paper informed Youth Futures Foundation's decisions about funding.

5. Conclusion

This report has presented the findings from the evaluation of CYA's Forging Futures programme. This chapter summarises the main findings from the evaluation. It discusses and interprets these in relation to the theory of change for the programme, including limitations of the evaluation. Finally, it draws out recommendations for future delivery and data collection emerging from the evaluation.

Figure 26: Table summarising key evaluation findings

	FINDING
A strong referral process was established. There were varied perceptions of the extent to which the programme was mandatory or voluntary, which may have affected engagement	Typically, young people were referred to Forging Futures by Jobcentre Work Coaches who explained the type of support available through the programme and arranged for an initial appointment with a CYA link worker, often in the same Jobcentre or Youth Hub where the Work Coach was based. Feedback on the referral process was overall positive, albeit with mixed experiences of whether individuals felt the programme was voluntary or mandatory. Link workers felt people in Barrow-in-Furness who perceived the programme as voluntary were more engaged with the support compared with people in other areas.
The most common support needs people reported when joining the programme were employability skills	The most common support need identified by three-quarters (75%) of people joining the programme was support with employability skills, including CVs, job applications, interview skills and work experience. Transport, mental ill-health, and confidence were identified as key support needs for around half of the people on Forging Futures.
One-to-one support was the main type of support received	One-to-one support from link workers was the main type of support received by people on Forging Futures with only 27% of people taking part in group sessions. This tended to take place through weekly appointments designed to provide support identified during initial assessment and completion of CYA's ME Tool. Most one-to-one support was employability support, such as work search support (for 61% of people on Forging Futures), CV support (48%) and interview preparation

	(46%). A smaller proportion of people received wellbeing check-ins (37%) and mental health support (12%). Feedback from people on the programme was overall positive, particularly in relation to one-to-one support from link workers.
Most people spent up to nine months on Forging Futures	Length of time on the programme was broadly as anticipated, with most people (91%) on the programme for up to nine months, and a small proportion (9%) staying on the programme for longer. Both the mean and median length of time on the programme was five months.
47% of people on Forging Futures moved into employment	Nearly half (47%) of people on Forging Futures moved into employment. Typically, this was part-time employment. Analysis of Forging Futures data suggests that having worked in the six-months prior to joining the programme and self-reporting three or fewer support needs during initial assessment appointments increased the chances of someone moving into employment. Analysis of qualitative interviews suggests increasing employability skills and confidence were two short-term outcomes from the programme that led to employment outcomes.
23% of people on Forging Futures sustained employment for three months	Nearly half (48%) of people on Forging Futures who entered employment were recorded by CYA as having sustained employment for three months. This equates to 23% of all Forging Futures participants.
Delivery of the programme was adapted to meet the needs of the 2023 to 2024 cohort	At the start of the evaluation, it was envisaged that Forging Futures would follow a structured support model, with one-to-one support, optional six-week group development sessions for six weeks available for four topics, followed by a mock interview and progression into the 'Highway to employability module'. However, CYA had to adapt this model in response to more prevalent support needs around confidence building and a reluctance to engage in group activities. This resulted in the group development sessions and 'Highway to Employability' being replaced by additional one-to-one link worker support and/or smaller group sessions in Carlisle and Workington. Forging Futures intend to continue to deliver a flexible support model centred around one-to-one link worker support, with additional activities available.

Interpretation

Programme delivery

Overall, the Forging Futures programme was successful in reaching its intended target group, primarily due to strong partnership working and a smooth referral process between Jobcentre Plus and CYA. The co-location of the two services and 'warm handovers' between staff were key in informing young people about the programme, obtaining their agreement and stimulating interest to take part. Future delivery could seek to make descriptions of the programme a little more consistent so that participants in different geographic areas have the same understanding of the extent to which the programme was mandatory or voluntary. Experience to date suggests young people are most motivated by personal choice and agency and so consistently emphasising voluntary aspects of the programme would be beneficial.

The delivery model appeared to work well, with positive feedback from participants, staff and partners.

CYA worked in a highly flexible way to adapt the original delivery model to better meet the needs of the young people on Forging Futures. This resulted in the theory of change being updated at the end of the evaluation so that activities were grouped as core activities, optional activities, support for care experienced people, and employer engagement.

Similarly, the flexibility in the length of support available to participants appeared to work well. Interestingly, there was no significant difference between the proportion of people moving into employment who had been on the programme for up to six months, compared with those who had been on the programme for seven months or longer, suggesting the flexible model is required to meet the needs of individuals in varying circumstances and with varying needs.

While the flexibility and ability to adapt are success factors for implementation, they create challenges for future impact evaluation, which will need to be considered in ongoing scoping and design work.

Outcomes

The Forging Futures programme demonstrated some emerging evidence of employment outcomes for young people. Nearly half (47%) of those who participated in the programme moved into employment, with around half of those (48%) able to sustain employment for three months. Most of the jobs moved into were part-time jobs. However, due to the lack of people in employment participating in follow-up interviews, it is not possible to comment on the extent to which the part-time jobs meet people's

expectations and aspirations. This is an area that a future evaluation of the programme may wish to explore further.

The evaluation also found emerging evidence of improvements to personal development and increased skills, knowledge and experience. It found some limited evidence of improved job readiness resulting from Forging futures support.

Findings suggest that the short-term outcomes were quite inter-related, particularly confidence with willingness to engage in optional activities, perceived job-readiness and increased skills knowledge and experience. For example, people needed a certain level of confidence before taking part in optional activities, but conversely taking part in optional activities, such as short courses, work experience or volunteering, could lead to an increase in confidence. In addition, confidence was felt to be gained from the routine and sense of purpose that participating in the programme achieved.

The short-term and intermediate outcomes identified at the outset of the evaluation in the theory of change remained relevant and reflected the needs of the target group and the nature of the support they received. A minor change was made to move 'Improved lifestyle choices and behaviours' from intermediate outcomes to short-term outcomes, reflecting the perceived need to address these prior to moving into employment or education.

Mechanisms of change

The key factors that enabled programme participants to achieve their outcomes, also known as the mechanism for change, were identified from discussions with CYA staff and analysis of qualitative interview data. These were individuals' willingness to engage, tailored support, and trusted and continuous link worker relationships.

The fact that the support model is mostly one-to-one link worker support, enabled staff to tailor the support to individual needs, such as flexing appointments to cover job applications and interview preparation if needed, or delaying group sessions until people were ready and willing to engage with them. It was also felt that the continuous relationship of one link worker was key to building rapport and trust. This trusted relationship helped keep people engaged with the programme and encouraged participation in other activities or take advice on employment opportunities.

Limitations of the evaluation

There are some limitations of the research that need to be considered when interpreting the findings.

Due to the need for early insights into the delivery of the programme, the staged roll-out of delivery across Cumbria and some differences between anticipated and actual

referral numbers, young people in Carlisle are over-represented in the qualitative interview data and Workington and Whitehaven are under-represented. Furthermore, areas with initial fieldwork conducted in May 2024 (Workington, Whitehaven, and Penrith) were excluded from follow-up interviews in June and July 2024 due to the short intervening period. Therefore, we have limited insights into support later in their journey for young people in Workington, Whitehaven, and Penrith.

The evaluation design had the potential for sampling bias with the selection of young people for qualitative interviews as this was completed by CYA staff. However, on balance this was felt to be a controlled risk and the most suitable sampling approach to safeguard participants and avoid undue stress and anxiety that random selection may cause for some young people.

Subgroup analysis was limited due to the total number of people on the programme being 124. Therefore, analysis of employment outcomes was limited to a handful of variables which had meaningful subgroups of around 50 people. Consequently, our understanding about variation in participant journeys and outcomes is less robust because it relies primarily on qualitative evidence.

Furthermore, data on personal outcomes such as increases in employability skills was only available for 34 people who completed the ME Tool two or more times. Therefore, these findings should be treated with caution as we cannot assess how representative they are of all people on the programme and there may be an element of bias from completing them with the link worker.

Due to the small numbers of people participating in each of the optional activities, such as group sessions, work experience and volunteering, it was not possible to evidence with data the relationship between specific activities and outcomes. In the future, CYA may be able to combine multiple years of data to explore the link between activities and outcomes in more detail.

Recommendations

Recommendations emerging from this evaluation are detailed below:

Maintain the tailored support in relation to being able to flex the overall support model to meet the needs of the cohort of people, and in relation to link workers being able to adapt what is covered in individual appointments at short notice and introduce additional activities at a time that is right for the individual. Similarly, the availability of optional support, such as group activities, referrals to external partners, and work experience appears to be comprehensive and useful to people on the programme, even if only taken up by small numbers of people.

Maintain the continuous link worker relationship. Overall young people were positive about the programme and in particular the link worker. Having one dedicated link worker for each person on the programme was felt to be a strength of this programme as it enabled depth understanding of the people being supported and set Forging Futures apart from other employment support offers.

Align data collection about support needs. IES noted that while the two sources of support needs data, from initial appointments and the ME Tool, were largely aligned, there is room for improvement. In particular, the 10 personal support needs in the ME Tool do not include confidence or transport, which were two of the key support needs identified by people during initial appointments. Therefore, we recommend CYA consider adding these. Furthermore, having data to evidence people's increased confidence would enable evaluators to better evidence the theory of change, in which confidence is a key short-term outcome within personal development. There would be value in exploring whether any existing validated scales of confidence and personal development could be embedded in programme delivery and data collection.

Increase the number of people for whom personal support needs are recorded more than once. A key limitation of this evaluation was that data on 'reduced support needs' were only available from qualitative interviews with young people and link workers, and for 34 people for whom the ME Tool was completed more than once. Therefore, evidencing the short-term outcomes in the theory of change relied heavily on qualitative interview data. In the future, CYA may wish to seek to complete ME Tools with more young people as they exit from the programme, to capture more data on reduced support needs.

Ensure consistent and accurate reporting of sustained employment outcomes:

Inconsistencies in how this sustained employment was recorded in Upshot resulted in under-reporting that required additional analysis to rectify. Therefore, we recommend CYA improve the recording of this outcome by ensuring all staff know where in Upshot this information should be recorded and run checks on this periodically.

Future research and publications

At the time of publication further work was underway by another research organisation called Ipsos, to explore the possibility of a future randomised control trial to test the efficacy of CYA's Forging Future programme. This pilot study is using findings from this evaluation and the work undertaken by IES to assess the feasibility of estimating the causal impact of Forging Futures.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethics and Data Protection documentation

Participant consent – information and capturing consent

Young people that were invited to participate in an observation were given a research information sheet, graphically designed by IES into a leaflet in CYA colours (below). This was given to the young person at the time of the observation. They were given a verbal summary of the information sheet and asked to sign a consent form to take part in the observation.

Young people that were invited to take part in a qualitative research interview were given a research information sheet (below), designed in the same format as the observation information sheet. These were distributed by CYA link workers to young people before the interview, as well as given to each young person by IES researchers at the time of their interview. At both time points, young people were given a verbal summary of the information sheet and asked for their consent to take part in the interview, which was recorded verbally. When young people were given an information sheet at interview or observation, it also included an ID number unique to each young person, and it was explained that this should be quoted to IES in the case of wishing to withdraw consent at a later date.

Research Information Sheet – Observations



Evaluation of Forging Futures

Observation information sheet

We would like to observe your meeting with your CYA link worker today to support our evaluation of Cumbria Youth Alliance's Forging Futures programme which provides support for young people.

This information sheet explains why the research is being done and what it involves.

If you have time after the session, we may also ask to speak to you for about ten minutes to find out more about your views of the support.



What is this research about?

- Our team at the Institute for Employment Studies is completing this research for the Youth Futures Foundation (YFF) to help understand which elements of the Forging Futures programme are most effective in supporting young people.
- This information will be used to improve the support CYA and other organisations provide to young people in the future.

What will happen if I take part?

- If you agree to take part, the researcher will observe your session today and take notes.
- We will be focused on how and what support CYA provides. We are not assessing anyone.
- We will not record any personal details. You may choose to share additional personal data during the short interview.
- Participation is optional and you can ask the researcher to leave the session at any time.

What are my rights if I take part?

- It is up to you whether you take part. Whether you take part or not will not affect the support you receive from CYA in any way.
- You have rights under data protection law to make the following requests of the personal data held about you that is being processed for this research, including to:
 - request access to this data
 - amend any incorrect or inaccurate information
 - restrict or object to your data being processed
 - destroy this data
 - move, copy or transfer your data



What happens to the information I share, or 'my data'?

- If you take part in an interview and/or observation, the information you give will only be used for purposes of this study.
- When we write our report, we might use quotes from you, but never with your name. We will not include any information that could reveal your identity.
- The notes and information recorded from this observation will be deleted six months after the project is completed (currently estimated to be May 2025).
- We will write a summary of the findings from our observations and share this with CYA and YFF. They will not know who we have observed and spoken with, and we will not include anything that identifies you (like your name).
- A final report with findings from observations and interviews with young people and CYA staff will be produced in 2024 for YFF. No information that can identify you will be included in this report. The report will be made publicly available on the YFF, IES and CYA websites.

- You have a right to change your mind if you no longer wish to take part.
- If after the observation you decide you do not want us to use what you shared, email lorraine.lanceley@employment-studies.co.uk or call 01273 763 400 and ask us to delete your data, quoting the ID number at the end of this sheet.
- This can be done up to two weeks after the observation.
- For more information on how the research team will protect your data please see the privacy notice for the project, using the QR code or go to: <http://bit.ly/3t80Ode>






Who can I talk to about the research?

If you have questions about the study or would like to remove any information you have provided, please contact:

Institute for Employment Studies
Lorraine.Lanceley@employment-studies.co.uk

Cumbria Youth Alliance
Gary@cya.org.uk

ID number:

Your ID number is unique to you. Please include your ID number in any correspondence with IES about this research.

ies Institute for
employment
studies

**CUMBRIA
YOUTH
ALLIANCE**

**youth
futures
FOUNDATION**

Research Information Sheet – Interviews



Evaluation of Forging Futures

Interview information sheet

We would like to invite you to take part in a research interview with a researcher from the Institute for Employment Studies (IES). This is part of IES's evaluation of Cumbria Youth Alliance's (CYA) Forging Futures programme which provides support for young people.

This information sheet explains why the research is being done and what it involves.



What is this research about?

- Our team at the Institute for Employment Studies is completing this research for the Youth Futures Foundation (YFF) to help understand which elements of the Forging Futures programme are most effective in supporting young people.
- This information will be used to improve the support CYA and other organisations provide to young people in the future.

What happens to the information I share, or 'my data'?

- If you take part in an interview, the information you give will only be used for purposes of this study.
- When we write our report, we might use quotes from you, but never with your name. We will not include

any information that could reveal your identity.

- The notes and information recorded from this interview will be deleted six months after the project is completed (currently estimated to be May 2025).
- We will write a summary of the findings from our interviews and share this with CYA and YFF. YFF will not know who we have spoken with, and we will not include anything that identifies you (like your name).
- A final report with findings from interviews with young people and CYA staff will be produced in 2024 for YFF. No information that can identify you will be included in this report. The report will be made publicly available on the YFF, IES and CYA websites.

What are my rights if I take part?

- It is up to you whether you take part. Whether you take part or not will not affect the support you receive from CYA, the Jobcentre or Youth Hub in any way.
- Participation is optional and you can stop the interview at any time and do not have to provide a reason. You can also skip any questions you do not wish to answer.
- You have rights under data protection law to make the following requests of the personal data held about you that is being processed for this research, including:
 - to request access to this data
 - to amend any incorrect or inaccurate information
 - to restrict or object to your data being processed
 - to destroy this data
 - to move, copy or transfer your data.
- You have a right to change your mind if you no longer wish to take part.
- If after the interview you decide you do not want us to use what you shared, email lorraine.lanceley@employment-studies.co.uk or call 01273 763400 and ask us to delete your data, quoting the ID number at the end of this sheet.
- This can be done up to 2 weeks after the research interview.
- For more information on how the research team will protect your data please see the privacy notice for the project, using this QR code or go to <http://bit.ly/3t800de>.



What will happen if I take part?

- If you agree to take part, CYA will arrange for you to meet with an IES researcher to take part in a research interview that will last approximately 45 minutes.
- During this interview, we will speak about:
 - What support you have been offered by CYA
 - How helpful this support has been so far
 - Your views on whether the support can be improved in any way.
- If you take part in a research interview IES will give you a £25 shopping voucher as a 'thank you' for your time.
- We will also create a timeline of CYA support and activities you have taken part in since joining the Forging Futures programme. If you agree, we would like to share this timeline with a CYA link worker after our interview. This helps us understand more about the activities CYA offer and what they are intended to achieve. Nothing else from the research interview will be shared with the link worker.
- Our focus is on how and what support CYA provides. We are not assessing anyone.
- We will not record any personal details, however you may choose to share personal information during our interview. This will be treated confidentially.



Who can I talk to about the research?

If you have questions about the study or would like to remove any information you have provided, please contact:

Institute for Employment Studies
Lorraine.Lanceley@employment-studies.co.uk

Cumbria Youth Alliance
Gary@cya.org.uk

ID number:

Your ID number is unique to you. Please include your ID number in any correspondence with IES about this research.

 **ies** institute for employment studies

 **CUMBRIA YOUTH ALLIANCE**

 youth futures FOUNDATION

Participant consent – interview data sharing

Each young person that was interviewed was asked if they would be happy for IES to share their activity timeline, which was created during their interview with their link worker (whom IES could interview to find out more about the support and activities available to them). CYA staff invited to take part in a 'matched interview' were provided with the following research information sheet.

Research Information Sheet – CYA staff

CYA Forging Futures research

What is this project about?

- The Institute for Employment Studies (IES), an independent research organisation, have been awarded a grant from the Youth Futures Foundation (YFF) to carry out an evaluation of CYA's Forging Futures programme for cohorts starting from September to November 2023.
- The Forging Futures programme is offered to young people aged 16-24 who are not in education, employment or training, and may face complex barriers to progression. It is a development of CYA's First Steps to a Sustainable Future programme.
- The purpose of this research is to understand more about the programme and the range of support it offers to young people, and to make recommendations to YFF for how it can be evaluated in the future.

What happens if I decide to take part?

We will arrange a private conversation by video call between you and one of the people in our research team. It will take around 45 minutes.

Our conversation may cover:

- Your role at CYA and what this involves.
- Review of a young person's activity timeline (if consent has been gained to share this).
- Your views on what works well to support young people looking for work.

What are my rights if I take part?

- You have the right to privacy. We don't share anything that would identify you (your name or job role) with anyone outside the research team.
- When we write our summary of findings from these interviews, and final report, we might use quotes from you, but never with your name.
- If afterwards you decide you do not want us to use what you shared or would like it to be amended, email <IES email> or the researcher who interviewed you. This can be done up to 2 weeks after the interview date.

- You have the right to ask questions, or get in touch if you have a complaint, any time. Just contact: <IES email>

What happens to the information I share, or 'my data'?

- If you take part, with your permission, we'll record our conversation (audio) and take notes.
- We only keep one file with your name and other identifying information (like your email address) so we can reach you. This is held securely on our server and not shared with anyone outside the research team. Anything else you share is labelled anonymously (for example, as 'Participant 1').
- At the end of the research, we will also write a report summarising the research findings and share this with YFF and CYA (October – November 2024).
- This final report may be made available on the YFF and IES websites. The report and any other findings shared will name CYA but will not include any information that could be used to identify individual participants or staff.
- To protect your data, we delete the audio recording of our conversation, the file with your name and other identifying details as well as the other information you provide no later than six months after the project is completed (currently estimated to be May 2025)
- Further information on how your data will be used is available in our privacy notice for the project.

Who can I talk to about the research?

If you have questions about the study, or would like to remove the information you have provided, please contact:

Institute for Employment Studies

CYA

<IES email address>

<CYA email address>

Participant consent – partner organisations

Partner organisations and employers invited to take part in a research interview were provided with the following information sheet.

Research information sheet – partner organisations

CYA Forging Futures research – Partners/Employers

What is this project about?

- The Institute for Employment Studies (IES), an independent research organisation, have been awarded a grant from the Youth Futures Foundation (YFF) to carry out an evaluation of CYA's Forging Futures programme for cohorts that started between September and November 2023.

- The Forging Futures programme is offered to young people aged 16-24 who are not in education, employment or training, and may face complex barriers to entering and progressing within the labour market. It is a development of CYA's First Steps to a Sustainable Future programme.
- The purpose of the research is to understand more about the programme and the range of support it offers to young people, and to make recommendations to YFF for how it can be evaluated in the future.

What happens if I decide to take part?

If you decide to take part, we will arrange a private conversation by video or phone call between yourself and someone on the research team at IES. This call will last around 30 minutes, depending on your experience of working with CYA and your level of involvement in the support/opportunities provided to Forging Futures participants.

Our conversation will be a part of a series of interviews conducted with young people engaged in the Forging Futures programme, CYA staff, and employers. Collectively, these will provide an insight into how the support is working for young people from a range of backgrounds, and any key improvements that could be made to support additional outcomes.

Our conversation will cover:

- Your job role and the nature of your organisation.
- How you currently work with CYA, and more specifically the Forging Futures programme, for example what opportunities or support you might provide to CYA and young people engaged in the programme.
- What outcomes are being achieved by young people you work with.
- Suggestions for if/how support for these young people might be improved.

What are my rights if I take part?

- It is up to you whether you agree to take part in this research. Whether you take part will not affect your relationship with CYA.
- If you agree to take part, your contact information will be passed to IES by CYA staff.
- You have the right to privacy. We don't share anything that would identify you (such as your name or job role) with anyone outside of the research team unless we have specifically asked your permission first.
- With your permission, we would include the name of your organisation in a list of partner organisations we have spoken to in reports and presentations we produce. In these, we won't attribute your views to the organisation you are representing.
- When we write our summary of findings from these interviews, or produce any presentations or final reports, we might use quotes from you, but never with your name.

- If afterwards you decide you do not want us to use what you have shared or would like it to be amended, email <IES email address> or the researcher who interviewed you. This can be done up to two weeks after the interview date.
- If you have any questions about this research, or would like to make a complaint, please contact <IES email address>

What happens to the information I share, or 'my data'?

- If you take part, with your permission, we'll record our conversation and take notes.
- We only keep one file with your name and other identifying information (like your email address) so we can reach you. This is held securely on IES servers and not shared with anyone outside of the research time. Anything else you share is labelled anonymously (for example as 'Partner organisation' or 'Employer').
- We will share a summary of our findings with YFF and CYA in July 2024. At the end of the research we will also write a report summarising the research findings and share this with YFF and CYA (December 2024).
- This final report will be made available on the YFF and IES websites. The report and other findings shared will name CYA but will not include any information that could be used to identify individual participants or staff.
- To protect your data, we delete the audio recording of our conversation, the file with your name and other identifying details as well as any other information you have provided six months after the project is completed (currently estimated to be May 2025).
- Further information on how your data will be used is available on our privacy notice for this project.

Who can I talk to about the research?

If you have questions about the study, or would like to remove the information you have provided, please contact:

Institute for Employment Studies

CYA

<IES email address>

<CYA email address>

Participant consent – DWP staff

DWP staff invited to take part in a research interview were provided with the following information sheet.

Research information sheet - DWP staff

CYA Forging Futures research – DWP Staff

What is this project about?

- The Institute for Employment Studies (IES), an independent research organisation, have been awarded a grant from the Youth Futures Foundation (YFF) to carry out an evaluation of CYA's Forging Futures programme for cohorts that started between September and November 2023.
- The Forging Futures programme is offered to young people aged 16-24 who are not in education, employment or training, and may face complex barriers to entering and progressing within the labour market. It is a development of CYA's First Steps to a Sustainable Future programme.
- The purpose of the research is to understand more about the programme and the range of support it offers to young people, and to make recommendations to YFF for how it can be evaluated in the future.

What happens if I decide to take part?

If you decide to take part, we will arrange a private conversation by video or phone call between yourself and someone on the research team at IES. This call will last around 30 minutes, depending on your experience of working with CYA and your level of involvement in the support / opportunities provided to Forging Futures participants.

Our conversation will be a part of a series of interviews conducted with young people engaged in the Forging Futures programme, CYA staff, and employers. Collectively, these will provide an insight into how the support is working for young people from a range of backgrounds, and any key improvements that could be made to support additional outcomes.

Our conversation will cover:

- Your job role and the nature of the customer group you support.
- How you decide to refer young people into Forging Futures and other similar programmes available locally.
- Suggestions on if/how support for young people in your area could be improved.

What are my rights if I take part?

- It is up to you whether you agree to take part in this research. Whether you take part will not affect your relationship with CYA.
- If you agree to take part, your contact information will be passed to IES by CYA staff.
- You have the right to privacy. We don't share anything that would identify you (such as your name or job role) with anyone outside of the research team unless we have specifically asked your permission first.

- With your permission, we would include the name of your organisation in a list of partner organisations we have spoken to in reports and presentations we produce. In these, we won't attribute your views to the organisation you are representing.
- When we write our summary of findings from these interviews, or produce any presentations or final reports, we might use quotes from you, but never with your name.
- If afterwards you decide you do not want us to use what you have shared or would like it to be amended, email <IES email address> or the researcher who interviewed you. This can be done up to two weeks after the interview date.
- If you have any questions about this research, or would like to make a complaint, please contact <IES email address>

What happens to the information I share, or 'my data'?

- If you take part, with your permission, we'll record our conversation and take notes.
- We only keep one file with your name and other identifying information (like your email address) so we can reach you. This is held securely on IES servers and not shared with anyone outside of the research time. Anything else you share is labelled anonymously, for example, 'Jobcentre Work Coach' or 'Partner organisation'.
- We will share a summary of our findings with YFF and CYA in July 2024. At the end of the research we will also write a report summarising the research findings and share this with YFF and CYA (December 2024).
- This final report will be made available on the YFF and IES websites. The report and other findings shared will name CYA but will not include any information that could be used to identify individual participants or staff.
- To protect your data, we delete the audio recording of our conversation, the file with your name and other identifying details as well as any other information you have provided 6 months after the project is completed (currently estimated to be May 2025).
- Further information on how your data will be used is available on our privacy notice for this project.

Who can I talk to about the research?

If you have questions about the study, or would like to remove the information you have provided, please contact:

Institute for Employment Studies

CYA

<IES email address>

<CYA email address>

Privacy notice

All information sheets directed interview participants to the privacy notice for this evaluation, which was hosted on the IES website and is included here.

IES Privacy Information Notice

Research into CYA's Forging Futures programme: Privacy Information Notice

Data protection legislation and personal data

Data protection legislation determines how, when and why any organisation can process personal data. 'Personal data' means any information which can identify someone. 'Processing' means any actions performed on personal data, including: collection, storage, alteration or deletion. These laws exist to ensure that your data are managed safely and used responsibly. They also provide you with certain rights in respect of your data and creates a responsibility on the Youth Futures Foundation (YFF) and the research organisations it works with to provide you with certain information.

This privacy notice sets out the legal basis for processing data in relation to this research project, which is being completed by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES). This includes who will have access to your personal data, how your data will be used, stored and deleted, your legal rights and who you can contact if you have a query or a complaint.

The legal basis for processing personal data

The legal basis under which IES processes personal data and 'special category data', such as information about your health and well-being, criminal allegations, proceedings or convictions, and racial or ethnic origin, is to fulfil YFF's legitimate interests as funder of the Forging Futures programme from 2023-2024.

This legal justification applies to this research project, which is a pilot evaluation and feasibility of impact evaluation study for the Forging Futures Programme at CYA, examining how it works to improve education, employment and training (EET) outcomes for young people with multiple or complex needs, as well as contribute to a range of intermediate outcomes relating to skills, confidence, resilience, and wellbeing. The study will involve IES leading analysis of participant Management Information and survey data collected by CYA, conducting in-depth interviews with Forging Futures programme participants, staff and partner organisations/employers, as well as shadowing of case workers.

IES will analyse an anonymised version of the participant and survey data held by CYA collected from enrolment to leaving the Forging Futures programme. IES will receive information covering personal characteristics (e.g. gender, age, ethnicity, SEN/disability) and individual needs (e.g. health, substance misuse, housing situation, involvement in

the criminal justice system), support received, and activities undertaken through Forging Futures, EET outcomes and destination for all participants who provide consent. Your data will be anonymised by CYA before it is shared with IES, meaning it will not contain any personal details such as your name, address or date of birth. Despite this, you may still be identifiable based on the potentially unique set of information held about you. This data will be transferred and held securely on IES servers. It will not be published in this format at any time.

IES will use the participant data to do the following:

- Understand the experience and outcomes of participants on the Forging Futures programme based on their initial support needs.
- Select young people to invite to take part in interviews about their experience and outcomes.

If you are selected to be invited to interview, interviews will be arranged by CYA and your name will be supplied to IES. Interviews with young people will mainly be face-to-face and so your contact details (i.e. email address) will only be shared with IES if you prefer a telephone/video call interview which needs to be arranged with you directly or if we need to follow up with you. This personal information will only be processed for the purposes of completing this research. Participation in the research is completely voluntary – just because you are contacted, does not mean that you have to take part and you can decline the invitation without having to give a reason.

We will be observing case workers providing support, information, advice and guidance to young people. Personal data about the young person will not be collected but we will provide an information sheet and seek consent via a consent form. When IES researchers conduct observations of CYA staff at work, some interviews with young people may be conducted ad hoc, with their consent. If you agree to this you may choose to share additional personal data during the short interview (e.g. about personal circumstances and age). We will not record your name and will instead use an ID number.

Who will have access to my personal data?

If you take part in interviews arranged by IES or needing follow-up from IES, your contact details will be stored on the IES encrypted server, with access restricted solely to members of the research team at IES. Even after these contacts details have been shared with the research team, you are free to withdraw from the research and can decline to take part in an interview without having to give a reason.

If you agree to take part in a research interview, any information you provide will be summarised in an anonymised format – this means we will remove any information that could be used to identify you.

How will my data be treated?

If you are invited and choose to take part in an interview, the information you give will only be used for purposes of this study. IES will produce progress reports summarising the main findings from the interviews. These will be shared with YFF but are not intended for wider publication, though they could be shared with other stakeholders. You will not be named in the reports, nor will any information be included that could reveal your identity.

When the interviews are completed, we will produce a final report drawing together the findings from the evaluation. No information that can identify you will be included in this report. The report will be made publicly available on the YFF, IES and CYA websites. It will be accompanied by case studies on three young people. These will summarise the experiences of three participants of Forging Futures, including information about their personal circumstances, support received and EET outcomes. The case studies will be fully anonymised so that the participants cannot be identified in any way. We will also produce a final report on feasibility to take forward a further evaluation which will be shared with YFF.

Data protection law requires that personal data are kept for no longer than is necessary. We will anonymise the information you provide as soon as we practically can (i.e. within two weeks of the interview date). The personal data we used to contact you will be securely deleted from the IES systems six months after the project is complete (currently estimated to be May 2025).

At the end of the research period, numeric participant data will be transferred to the YFF data depository; that is, information covering personal characteristics (gender, age, ethnicity etc), Forging Futures support received, outcomes and destination. It will not contain any identifiers such as names, address, contact information or the code-identifier that CYA uses. Despite this, you may still be identifiable based on the potentially unique set of information held about you. When it processes your data, IES will take action to minimise the risk that you could be identified indirectly. The data from the interviews will not be transferred to YFF. The data stored in the YFF data depository will only be used for research purposes that have been approved by YFF. More specifically:

Your data will be securely shared with the project funders, Youth Futures Foundation, to be held in a data depository for the purposes of evaluation and research to help young people. To fulfil these purposes, the data may also be shared with other organisations who manage the archive, evaluate outcomes or conduct further research that is associated with Youth Futures' vision and values. Youth Futures will process your data in accordance with data protection law which includes keeping it secure and only using it where there is a fair and lawful basis to do so. For more information, please see Youth Futures' privacy policy <<https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/privacy-policy/>>.

Who can I contact if I would like to withdraw my interview or participant data?

You have rights under data protection law to make the following requests the personal data held about you that is being processed for this research, including:

- to request access to this data
- to amend any incorrect or inaccurate information
- to restrict or object to your data being processed
- to destroy this data
- to move, copy or transfer your data.

You have the right to withdraw the information you have provided as part of the interviews up to two weeks after the interview date. After this point the information will have been anonymised and will no longer be treated as personal data.

If you have taken part in an interview but would like your data withdrawn or have consented to share data CYA hold about you and want to change your mind, please contact: <IES email address>

If you have any questions about how your data will be used, please contact the Project Manager at IES: <IES email address>

Who can I contact with a complaint?

Further information on the rights available to you is also available from the Information Commissioner's Office - the independent body responsible for regulating data protection within the UK. They can also deal with any complaints you may have regarding our use of your data:

- Tel: 0303 123 1113
- Email: casework@ico.org.uk
- Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF

The online version of this Privacy Notice is available at: <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/research-cya%E2%80%99s-forging-futures-programme-privacy-information-notice>

Youth safeguarding policy and disclosure protocol

Safeguarding and disclosure of harm

IES is committed to working in the best interests of any individual it interviews for research and evaluation purposes in order to safeguard and promote their welfare. Children, young people and vulnerable adults require special consideration. The commitments we

make to research participants including on confidentiality are paramount to our work. Our researchers are expected to work in accordance with the confidentiality requirements of the Data Protection Act and General Data Protection Regulations 2018. Our procedures follow the ethical guidelines of the Social Research Association, and those outlined in the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics (2015) and we make clear commitments to participants on data confidentiality.

Our researchers are all DBS-cleared prior to research with members of the public. Those working with children and young people, and vulnerable adults are checked to the enhanced level.

The fieldwork for each of our projects is fully risk assessed by project teams covering the safeguarding of members of the public and our staff. We consider: the participants – age/vulnerability; the location of interviews – e.g. locations where participants can access support, public places, home locations; gatekeepers and advocates for participants, the support network surrounding individuals and how participants can seek support should they need it. Where appropriate we draw up leaflets that signpost support services available to participants.

Where research is planned to take place in higher risk locations, such as individuals' homes, we use our staff safeguarding and lone working policy to ensure we can track progress and provide support where needed.

Disclosure protocol

There are rare instances where researchers encounter a situation during contact with a research participant where something they see, hear or experience gives them particular cause for concern. As a result, they may feel that information should be passed on, for example to social services or to the police to avoid risk of harm – either to the individual or the public.

We require researchers to have 'reasonable cause to suspect' which means having a sensible reason for thinking that a child or young person may be at serious risk from or to others or themselves. We also require researchers to make sensible decisions about how to support individuals who have disclosed at risk information. This will involve a risk assessment of the nature of the disclosure, and the environment/support network in the context of the interview. Our fieldwork briefings at IES equip researchers for this, and for projects on sensitive topics and/or with vulnerable groups, we provide researchers with information about national and local support organisations/services that they can give to and discuss with individuals if they believe this is appropriate.

However, where researchers believe the risks require more than signposting to support services, we expect researchers to report their concerns to the nominated senior staff for the project at IES and partner rather than act on their own initiative. They are required to report into the project manager and/or director who will then take over decision

making. The only exception is where there is a clear and immediate need to call the emergency services (police, ambulance, fire service) because of an imminent danger to life.

The decision-making process has two stages:

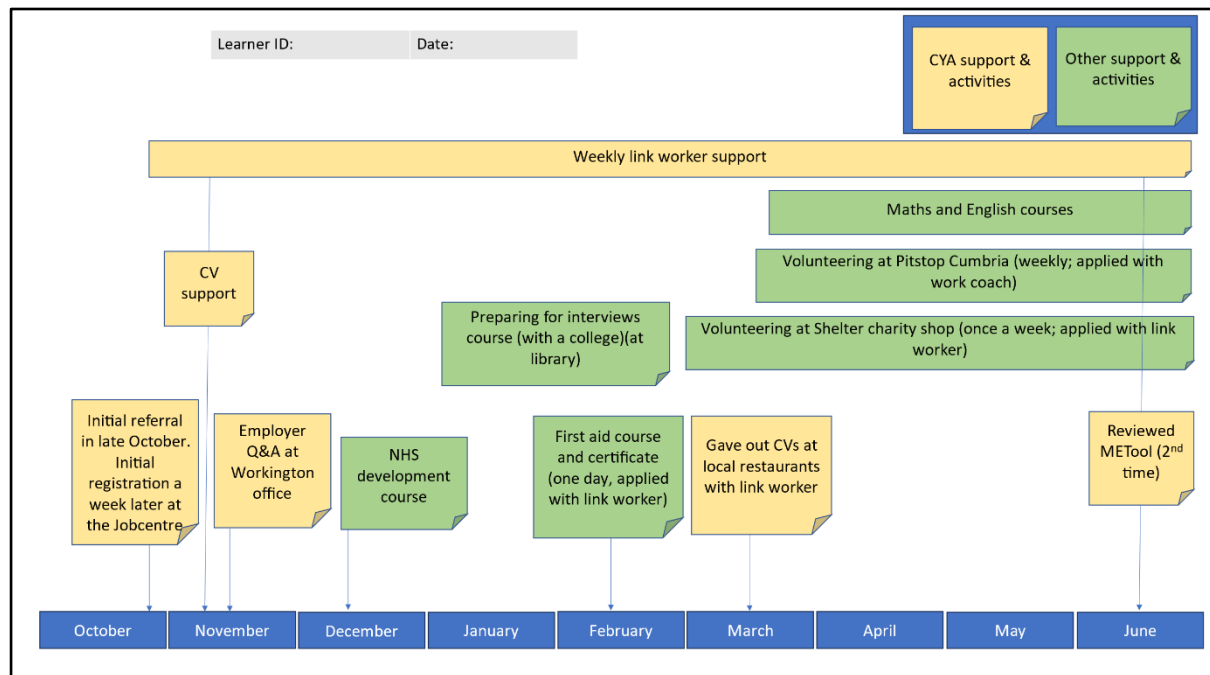
1. The disclosure risk is reported to the senior staff responsible for the project – Project Director: <IES staff name> and Manager: <IES staff name> at IES, and partner senior staff <partner staff name>. They will consider the risk and whether there is justification for disclosure. The risk and decision is recorded in the secure, personal data folder for the project. Senior staff decide if:
 - The risk does not warrant disclosure. In these situations, sources of support may be provided to research participants if this has not already been done.
 - The risk warrants disclosure which means the team refers to the IES Management Team (IMT).
2. IMT representatives (minimum two representatives) convene a meeting (virtually if necessary) with the project team. This team considers:
 - The seriousness of the alleged harm or illegal behaviour.
 - The strength of evidence for the researcher's concerns.
 - Any further evidence provided.
 - The ability of the individual involved to seek help for themselves.
 - Whether the situation is already known to support services (e.g. GP, health visitor, social worker) or others capable of intervening (e.g. family members).
 - The potential risks to individuals and to IES.

The IMT agree what information may be passed on, by whom and to whom. Wherever possible disclosure will be made directly to a representative public body or authority or known agency already working with the individual. Where a disclosure is to be made, arrangements to notify the client/project funder are also agreed and will not delay a disclosure. IMT keeps a record of all disclosure decisions on IES secure servers. For the reasons of the complexities of decisions and risks associated with delays in communication, projects are risk assessed at the outset and lines of support and disclosure are examined and agreed prior to the commencement of fieldwork.

For this project the IES team has agreed to raise all safeguarding concerns with <partner staff name>, senior staff at the partner organisation to help facilitate the safeguarding policies of the partner organisation.

Appendix 2: Example activity timeline

The diagram below is an example of an activity timeline created with a young person over two interviews, in November 2023 and June 2024.



Appendix 3: Evaluation timeline

Timeline of evaluation activities carried out by IES.

	2023												2024												2025		
	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	J	F	M
Scoping interviews																											
Theory of change development																											
Observations of initial appointments																											
CYA partner interviews																											
Initial paired young people and staff interviews																											
Follow-up paired young people and staff interviews																											
Analysis of interviews																											
Analysis of programme data																											
Evaluation reporting																											
Feasibility for Impact Evaluation																											