



Swale Voluntary Alliance

People and Skills strand – 2024-25

1. Executive Summary

This project was designed with a key objective:

Providing routes into learning for individuals facing challenges and barriers to education and employment, ensuring they could access opportunities that may otherwise remain out of reach.

The project generated substantial additional value through the collaborative approach adopted in this initiative creating a strong foundation for continued work and future opportunities between the Voluntary sector delivery partners.

Programme Implementation and Partnership Working

A rigorous selection process ensured that funding was allocated to organisations that aligned with the programme's objectives. Successful applicant organisations underwent thorough evaluation and committed to a structured engagement process under the guidance of Medway Voluntary Action (acting for Swale Voluntary Alliance). Monthly meetings became a cornerstone of the initiative, allowing organisations to:

- Review performance, including recruitment, retention, and outcomes.
- Exchange best practices, ensuring continuous improvement.
- Share venues and offer complementary activities, enhancing participant experience.
- Create progression pathways between organisations, facilitating smoother transitions for service users.

This collaborative structure sharply contrasted with more fragmented funding models, where organisations operate independently without leveraging collective strengths. By working together, partners maximised the impact of their services, ensuring better results for participants and greater efficiency in service delivery.

Key Achievements and Impact

The project exceeded its initial targets, with clear evidence that the support provided has created long-term benefits for participants. Some individuals secured immediate employment, while others gained crucial skills and confidence that will enable them to progress in the near future. Several key outcomes demonstrate the success of this initiative:

1. 81.81% of participants actively engaged in training and skills development, significantly increasing their employability.
2. 48.89% of service users reported an increased awareness of available training opportunities, ensuring more informed decisions about career progression.
3. 34.58% of participants reported improved confidence in using digital tools, a critical skill in today's job market.
4. 72.28% of participants felt more capable of pursuing further education opportunities, indicating that the programme successfully removed perceived barriers to learning.

The initiative's success has tangible economic benefits. According to the Future Jobs Fund study, each young person entering employment saves the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the government approximately £7,750 in welfare and associated costs. By multiplying this figure by the estimated number of individuals assisted into employment through this programme, the long-term financial benefits become evident.

Moreover, the collaborative model has generated broader social value. Participants not only developed practical skills but also gained confidence and resilience, enabling them to become proactive members of their communities. The impact extends beyond individuals to families and society, creating a ripple effect **that fosters economic stability and personal empowerment.**

Successes of Partnership Working

The collaborative aspect of this initiative was one of its strongest elements, producing multiple benefits:

1. Collaboration with key organisations—including People Plus, DWP, Pyramid, East Kent College and local support networks—enhanced service provision and expanded opportunities for participants.
2. Six organisations expressed a strong interest in continuing partnerships for future projects, recognising the value of working together. Diversity House emerged as a leader in partnership-building, working with 41 different organisations during this project.
3. Some of the participants evolved from service users to peer mentors, ensuring continued support within their communities.

These outcomes demonstrate the power of coordinated efforts in addressing complex social challenges. By breaking down silos and fostering communication between organisations, the programme maximised resources and enhanced participant outcomes.

This report highlights the effectiveness of partnership-driven models in supporting individuals who are furthest from traditional education and employment pathways. By placing trust in voluntary, community, social enterprise and faith (VCSEF) organisations, this initiative demonstrated how grassroots efforts can lead to meaningful, lasting change.

The collaboration between organisations, the increased confidence among participants, and the strong employment and skills development outcomes all confirm that investing in such models yields not only social good but also substantial economic benefits. The momentum generated through this project should serve as a foundation for future initiatives, ensuring ongoing support for those in need and reinforcing the power of community-driven solutions.

1. Background

Following the creation of the Swale Voluntary Alliance, additional funding became available to support the development of core community skills—namely literacy, numeracy, and digital capabilities. In March 2024, Swale Borough Council approached the Alliance to explore whether it could deliver this project on behalf of the local authority. The aim was to place the funding close to the community, strengthen the voluntary sector, and create accessible learning routes through trusted local organisations.

The Alliance Steering Group discussed and shaped the proposal through its March and April meetings, finalising a delivery plan with Swale Borough Council by the end of May. Approximately £125,000 was made available, with local organisations eligible to apply for up to £20,000 each, based on criteria drawn from the People and Skills strand of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Bids were assessed by a scoring panel on 11 July 2024, with projects expected to launch by the end of that month.

The initiative was led under the Swale Voluntary Alliance banner and project managed by Medway Voluntary Action. Bids were promoted via Swale BC and SVA communication channels, resulting in 14 applications. Following scoring and further discussions, final awards were confirmed, and delivery agreements issued.

The following organisations were selected to deliver the funded projects:

- Mid Kent Mind
- Citizens Advice Swale
- SATEDA
- Diversity House
- Swale CVS
- Faversham Umbrella
- Medway Diversity Forum
- Pyramid Project

Funding allocations for each organisation are detailed in Annexe 3.

1. Programme phases and approach

Once funding was allocated, organisations had the freedom to set their own timelines, promote their programmes, and recruit participants. The project was deliberately designed to encourage diversity in approach, reward collaboration, and maintain flexibility in delivery, in line with the UKSPF People and Skills criteria. The only fixed requirement was that all funded organisations would meet regularly to share learning and experiences. These monthly meetings—facilitated by MVA—were mostly held online, with two in-person sessions at the midpoint and conclusion of the project.

Each organisation was responsible for monitoring its own delivery and flagging any emerging issues. Case studies and shared learning were encouraged throughout, revealing significant variation across the projects. Differences included start dates, delivery models, scale, target outcomes, frequency, and participant engagement strategies. To maintain coherence, a strong collaborative framework developed through regular discussions and shared insights, becoming the “glue” that aligned the diverse approaches.

This collaboration led to several standout outcomes. Organisations signposted learners to each other’s programmes, sometimes even hosting activities in shared spaces. Practical advice was openly exchanged—ranging from addressing participant drop-out to marketing learning opportunities to hard-to-reach individuals. These peer-to-peer discussions began in July 2024 and continued through to the final in-person session in March 2025.

One example of shared learning involved an organisation that initially experienced a high drop-out rate after successful recruitment. Through group discussions, they revised their approach and improved retention in a subsequent run. Another focused on creating effective business links for placements, where tailored approaches for hard-to-reach learners emerged as a key, unplanned benefit of the wider collaboration.

Feedback from organisations was overwhelmingly positive. At the March 2025 wrap-up event, many cited increased cross-sector knowledge, more seamless learner pathways, and stronger partnerships likely to outlast the funding period. Collaboration was seen not just as a project requirement, but as a catalyst for long-term impact.

Throughout, organisations were guided by the targets they outlined in their applications. There was no single start date, so progress varied widely—some projects hit their goals by late 2024, while others were still recruiting in March 2025. Because not all the funding had been allocated upfront, consideration was given to either supporting over-performing organisations or offering extra help to those struggling. Ultimately, no further funds were redistributed.

MVA monitored progress closely and shared updates during the monthly meetings. Where delays occurred, solutions were discussed collectively, and peer support often helped keep delivery on track.

One notable gap in the project was the absence of wider SVA-led promotion. Responsibility for publicity was left entirely to the funded organisations. In retrospect, coordinated messaging from SVA could have boosted awareness and referrals across the sector—especially among organisations supporting potential learners. While it might have increased demand beyond capacity, it also could have strengthened recruitment for some schemes and created a stronger sense of shared purpose across Swale’s voluntary sector.

2. Performance against funded targets

Between September 2024 and March 2025, nine projects from eight organisations were delivered to support employability, digital inclusion, and skill development in Swale. These initiatives aimed to empower disadvantaged individuals, in some cases people with history of domestic abuse, or economically inactive individuals, and digitally excluded people, by providing essential skills, employment pathways, and community support.

Key Outcomes

- **Employment support and career development**
- **Educational empowerment and skills training**
- **Volunteer engagement and leadership development**
- **Strengthened community support networks**

Further to this:

- **Explored Training/Skills Development: 81.81% of people engaged**
- **Awareness of Skills Training: 48.89%**
- **Digital Skills Confidence: 34.58%**
- **Confidence in Accessing Education: 72.28%**

The Swale People & Skills programme has demonstrated success in supporting individuals through employment and digital skills initiatives.

The programme aimed to support 170 people in accessing basic skills training. This target was overachieved by 265%, with 451 individuals benefiting from increased confidence and awareness of skills

			P1	P2	P3&P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	Total
Swale People & Skills		Outcome indicator metrics for participants:									
E33: Employment support											
170 people	E33a	Increased confidence to apply/consider accessing skills training	83	85	191		20	44		28	451
	E33b	Exploring training/skills development options	38	62	191		12	44		22	369
	E33c	Increased awareness/knowledge of possible skills training and how to access it	83	50	191			44		28	396
50 people	E33d	Signposted to DWP/Pyramid etc. to access employment support		23	191					22	236
	E33e	Accessing employment support		62	191	17				28	298
30 people	E33f	In employment/awaiting start date/self-employed		38		17				8	63
150 people	E33g	Completed/Started basic skills training		58						28	86
E36: Increase levels of digital inclusion, essential digital skills											
30 people	E36a	Increased confidence to apply/consider accessing digital skills training		56			20	11	46	22	155
	E36b	Exploring digital training/skills development options		48			10	11	46	22	137
	E36c	Increased awareness/knowledge of possible digital skills training and how to access it		51			20	11	46	28	156
30 people	E36d	Completed/Started digital skills training		39				10	46	22	117
	E36e	Awarded digital skills qualification		33				10	46	9	98
88 people	E37a	Increased confidence to apply/consider accessing education		56	191		7	44		28	326
	E37b	Exploring education/training options		46			6	44		22	118
	E37c	Increased awareness/knowledge of possible education courses and how to access them		52				44		28	124
88 people	E37d	Completed training/study towards qualification, licences, skills		38	179					9	226
	E37e	Awarded qualification/licence		33	105					9	147

training opportunities. Similarly, efforts to assist 50 people in gaining employment were highly successful, exceeding the target by 472%, with 236 individuals receiving job-related support.

In addition, the goal of having 30 individuals move into employment or self-employment was surpassed, reaching 63 people, a 210% achievement rate. These figures demonstrate the programme's effectiveness in enabling participants to explore training opportunities and transition into employment.

These figures demonstrate the program's ability to meet or exceed **some set targets, highlighting the effectiveness of engagement and support strategies.*

**Green is individual targets met, grey is not met.*

Digital Skills

The initiative also aimed to enhance digital skills and qualifications, and the results exceeded expectations. **The target to support 30 people in accessing digital skills training was surpassed by an impressive 516%, with 155 individuals engaging in confidence-building and training activities. Additionally, the objective of 30 participants completing a digital qualification was overachieved by 326%, with 98 individuals gaining certifications.**

Efforts to encourage participation in education also yielded outstanding results. **The target of 88 people accessing education and training opportunities was exceeded significantly, with 326 individuals benefiting from the initiative—an achievement rate of 370%. Furthermore, the programme successfully supported 147 people in gaining qualifications, licences, and skills, surpassing the initial goal by 167%.**

Despite the overall success, one key area requires further attention. **The target of 150 individuals gaining basic skills (English, maths, digital, and ESOL) fell short, achieving only 57.3% of the target, with 86 individuals completing or starting their training. This suggests the need for enhanced outreach and engagement strategies to ensure more participants access and complete fundamental basic skills training.**

Category	Target	Actual	Difference (+/-)	Achievement (%)
170 people supported to access basic skills	170	451	+281	265.3% (Overachieved)
50 people receiving support to gain employment	50	236	+186	472.0% (Overachieved)
30 people in employment, including self-employment, following support	30	63	+33	210.0% (Overachieved)
150 people with basic skills (English, maths, digital, ESOL)	150	86	-64	57.3% (Underachieved)
30 people supported to access basic digital skills	30	155	+125	516.7% (Overachieved)
30 people gaining a digital qualification	30	98	+68	326.7% (Overachieved)
88 people supported to participate in education	88	326	+238	370.5% (Overachieved)
88 people gaining qualifications, licences, and skills	88	147	+59	167.0% (Overachieved)

3. Reflections on successes and learning

Comprehensive details for each individual project or organisation involved can be found in Annexe 4, alongside their respective reflections on delivery, key successes, and any issues encountered during the course of their work. This section serves to present the overarching themes and headline findings rather than offer an exhaustive analysis of every aspect. While each of the eight funded programmes was distinct in scope, audience, and methodology, regular opportunities for collective dialogue enabled adaptation and peer support throughout. These gatherings played a pivotal role in fostering openness, shared learning, and course correction, contributing significantly to the overall success of the initiative. Future projects involving diverse delivery partners should consider embedding a similarly structured forum for collaboration and mutual accountability.

The consensus among participating organisations was overwhelmingly positive: the programme, as a whole, met or exceeded expectations. This conclusion is substantiated by the performance against targets detailed in Section 4. Of the eight outcome domains, seven were overachieved, while one domain showed underperformance. It is worth noting that this shortfall may be attributable more to reporting limitations than to actual gaps in delivery. Many of the targeted outcomes—particularly those concerning basic skills in English, maths, digital literacy, and ESOL—were deeply embedded in project activities and, though not always explicitly documented, were likely experienced by participants through embedded learning. Learners had regular opportunities to practise these foundational skills in informal and supportive environments.

A key challenge in evaluating such a programme lies in capturing the full extent of individual transformation. Many impacts, especially those around confidence-building, social engagement, and readiness for further learning or work, are subtle and may not fully emerge within the timeframe of the programme. Nevertheless, the feedback gathered—particularly the case studies in Section 6 and the provider summaries—suggests widespread positive change. Across the board, learners reported improved self-esteem, a greater sense of purpose, and a stronger belief in their own potential to succeed—whether that be through accessing formal qualifications, entering employment, or simply feeling more capable in everyday tasks like shopping, managing documents, or navigating personal challenges.

Importantly, while numeric targets played a crucial role in accountability and national reporting, they were not the sole measure of the programme's impact. Locally, the project delivered significant and enduring value by fostering strong collaborative relationships among the eight participating organisations. These connections—developed through shared delivery, co-location of services, and regular strategic dialogue—are expected to persist beyond the lifespan of the funding. The spirit of partnership was tangible throughout, manifesting in a variety of ways, such as:

- Shared service delivery, with funded partners operating from one another's premises—for example, *Citizens Advice Swale* delivering sessions at *Diversity House*.
- Engagement beyond the funded cohort, such as *Faversham Umbrella's* work with *Meadowfield School*.
- Consistent input from strategic partners, notably *East Kent College* and *JobCentre Plus*, who provided insight into progression pathways and attended coordination meetings.

- Robust referral and outreach networks, facilitated by groups like *Shaw Trust*, *PeoplePlus*, *Sheppey Business Network*, and *Swale Senior Forum*, which ensured projects reached those most in need.
- Strong employer engagement, with partners such as *Nando's*, *Starbucks*, *The Bobbing Apple*, and *Hempstead House* contributing through work placements, motivational talks, and venue support.
- Enhanced links with voluntary sector organisations, including *Oasis Hub*, *Sheppey Matters*, and *Diversity House*, improving wrap-around care and outreach efforts.

These collaborations would almost certainly not have occurred organically, and it is evident that housing the initiative under the banner of the Swale Voluntary Alliance added significant value. Many participating organisations have expressed their intention to maintain and deepen these links—whether through joint bids for funding, coordinated service delivery, clearer referral and signposting pathways, or integrated learner support strategies. The strengthening of ties with institutions such as East Kent College and JobCentre Plus will also help embed basic skills and employability support within the wider VCSEF (Voluntary, Community, Social Enterprise and Faith) landscape—filling previous service gaps and ensuring learners can access a more seamless continuum of support.

That said, time-limited funding carries an inherent risk: once the immediate financial support ends, momentum can wane and priorities can shift. It is crucial, therefore, that the Swale Voluntary Alliance continues to provide a platform for ongoing engagement, even after the formal project closes. Should future funding become available, there is no need to replicate this programme precisely—instead, new and emerging organisations should be encouraged to join experienced partners, expanding the offer and tailoring support to reach new audiences. Current participants should also actively connect with other networks, particularly those focused on learning and employment, to share the success of this model and promote its continued evolution.

In the final in-person meeting of participating organisations, two important reflections were shared. First, there was a strong suggestion that a cost-benefit analysis could demonstrate the economic value of the initiative. Although follow-up analysis focused on young people, the findings were striking: according to research from the Future Jobs Fund, each young person moving into employment generates an estimated saving of £7,750 to government and public services. With 63 individuals reported to have gained employment through this programme, this equates to a community value of £488,250—a clear testament to the project's financial as well as social impact.

The second reflection was a sobering reminder of the stakes involved. One organisation shared the tragic news that a young participant, who had been experiencing severe personal distress, ultimately took their own life. This deeply painful incident underlines the profound vulnerability of some of the individuals this work reaches, and the responsibility borne by those delivering frontline support. It also highlights the dual nature of these interventions: not only can they empower people and unlock new futures, but in some cases, they may literally save lives.

3. Annexes

Annexe 1:

Project specification and scoring criteria

Swale Voluntary Alliance (SVA) Delivery Proposal - UK Shared Prosperity Fund (People and Skills)

Introduction

SVA have been working with East Kent College Group and in consultation with Swale Borough Council to develop a cost-effective programme for mobilising and co-ordinating Swale's Voluntary, Community, Social Enterprise and Faith (VCSEF) sector to deliver activities that would empower local people to engage with skills and employment opportunities that are available to them.

SVA are proposing to fund Swale's VCSEF to deliver 'gateway activities' in their communities – these activities will be designed to engage and support target communities to: increase confidence, learn new skills and engage with the 'central people & skills offer' (see delivery plan below for more details).

People and Skills Programme Objectives

Based on the Local Investment Plan submitted to access the UKSPF funding allocation for 2024/25, the aim is to support Local residents to achieve any of the following outcomes:

- [E33] Employment support for economically inactive people
 - 170 people supported to access basic skills
 - 50 people receiving support to gain employment
 - 30 people in employment, including self-employment, following support
 - 150 people with basic skills (English, maths, digital and ESOL)
- [E36] Increase levels of digital inclusion, essential digital skills
 - 30 people supported to access basic skills (numerical value)
 - 30 people gaining a qualification or completing a course following support
- [E37] Tailored support for the employed to access courses
 - 88 people supported to participate in education
 - 88 people gaining qualifications, licences and skills

See Appendix 1 for Outcomes and Outcome Indicator Metrics

Lead partners (SVA, Swale Borough Council, East Kent College Group and DWP) will oversee the delivery through local VCSEF organisations. Through assessing proposals received for grant funding they will seek to ensure the delivery is cohesive, avoids duplication and provides seamless support and progression for individual beneficiaries to enable local people to achieve their best outcomes. Links with wider local priorities will be sought where possible.

Programme Delivery Plan

Swale's VCSEF organisations will be grant funded to deliver 'gateway activities', based on proposals submitted and assessed by delivery partners. Proposals should be designed to engage and support target communities to: increase confidence, learn new skills and engage with the 'central people & skills offer'.

These activities must deliver against specified outcome indicators (see Appendix 1) and funding will be wholly dependent on capability of achieving these target outcomes.

SVA will deliver the programme as follows:

- Support SBC to manage the grant award process, including: Launch and promotion to VCSEF, co-design the grant criteria and assessment, Signposting support for unsuccessful grant applicants.
- VCSEF groups successfully awarded grants will be expected to:
 - Deliver 'gateway activities' that will engage and support target communities to achieve outcomes specified above
 - Report regularly on progress against target outcome/numbers – data collated and monitored by SVA, reported to SBC.
 - Participate in regular Delivery Partner meetings – these meetings will enable all partners to co-ordinate effectively (avoiding silo working) and to optimise available resources. Meetings will be managed by SVA and cover:
 - Keep an up to date 'central people & skills offer' that would provide the most likely progression routes for beneficiaries to meet the outputs and outcomes. The 'central offer' that will comprise existing funded provision, presented as a 'one stop shop' for communities to access (e.g. existing DWP support or Eat Kent College Group programmes)
 - Develop a process for them to 'onboard' community members at any point/location to engage with 'central offer' – VCSEF will do this via their 'gateway activities' and any additional support required by community members (e.g. travel costs, childcare, accompanying to first session)
 - Cross-refer community members to their various offers (ensuring maximum reach/engagement across target communities)
 - Share marketing materials, best practice/learning and avoid duplication of effort
 - Identify and address any barriers to engaging with the 'central' offer
 - Co-develop reporting templates/processes to evidence outcomes, target groups worked with etc.

See Appendix 2 for a map of this process.

Programme delivery milestones

Month	What
1	• Identify 'central offer' partners – map their referral methods and requirements (for VCSEF to refer into) • Finalise reporting metrics and final reporting needs • Schedule partner meetings for whole delivery period – include this in the funding criteria (expectation they'll attend/share etc.) along with required reporting methods/metrics • Finalise funding criteria/process • Launch and award grants
2/3	• Comms platforms / reporting mechanisms in place ready for all partners to use from outset • Grants awarded – VCSEF delivery partners mobilise • Signposting support given to unsuccessful applicants • First partner meeting held: review shared goal and detailed outcomes, overview of 'central offer' and processes for referring people into offer(s), VCSEF partners present on what they are planning to deliver, scoping of shared needs (e.g. promotional materials), overview of reporting requirements/processes

	Follow up meetings with delivery partners – if they need additional support to put in required reporting processes.
4-9	- Partners deliver & report on required metrics - Partnership meetings: all provide brief update on progress, share best practice/lessons learned, cross-fertilise ideas/referrals, speakers/updates on 'central offers' - Development of any shared resources that partners identify as being helpful (e.g. flyer, social post templates) - Monitor reporting 'uploads' from partners to ensure data is being uploaded on time and correctly - Update on progress to SBC
10	- Final partners meeting – www.ebi - Final reporting to SBC

Budget:

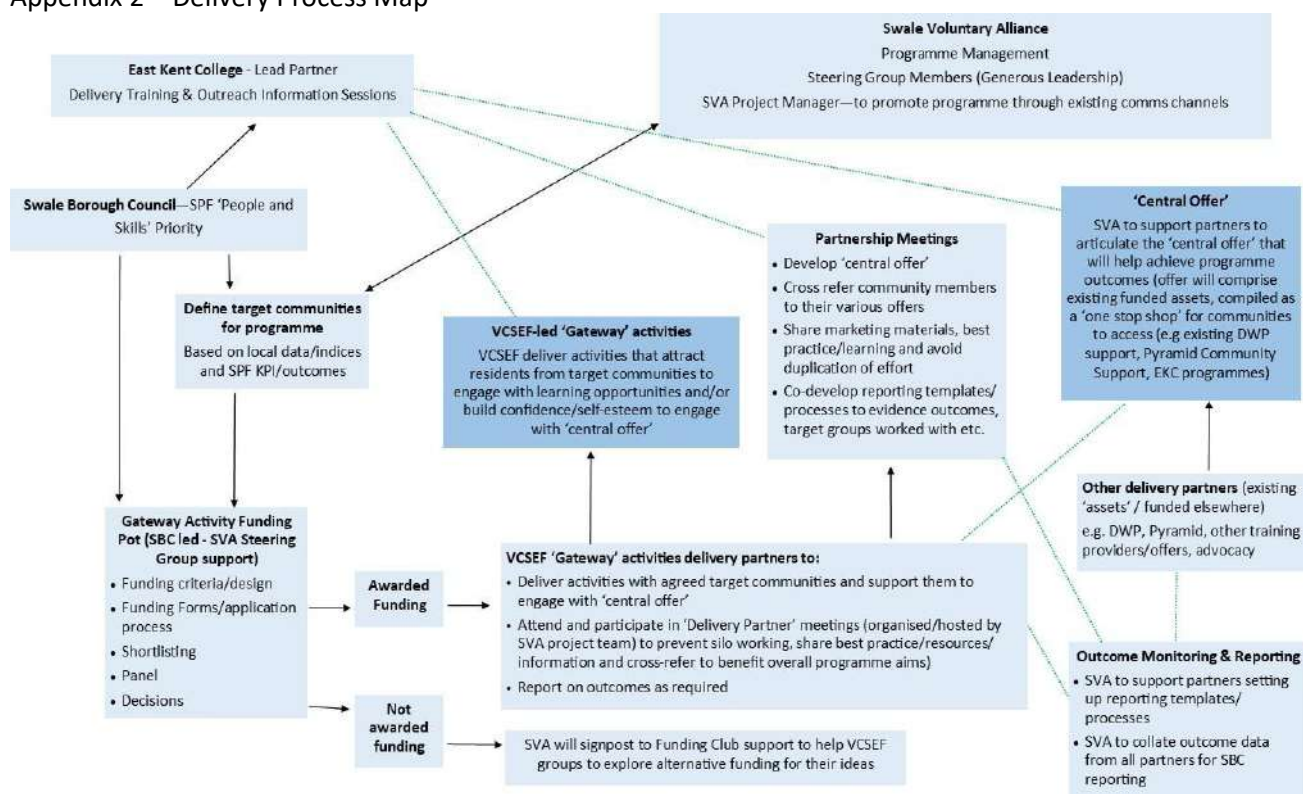
£149,940 for programme delivery of the People and Skills VCSEF Gateway Programme by 31st March 2025 – this includes: *Grant funding for 10-20 VCSEF groups/organisations to delivery 'gateway activities', Launch and promotion to VCSEF, Data sharing agreements and processes, Grant criteria setting and assessment, Signposting support for unsuccessful grant applicants, Delivery Partner meetings management and associated costs, Co-ordination of 'central offer', Follow up activities - co-creation of shared resources, comms platforms etc., Reporting metrics/data collection and reporting, Programme monitoring - partner progress/ learning/development, GDPR appropriate tracking of beneficiaries, Final reporting*

Appendix 1 – Swale's People and Skills Outcome Targets and Outcome Indicator Metrics

E33: Employment support for economically inactive people		Outcome Indicator Metrics
170 people supported to access basic skills	E33a	Increased confidence to apply/consider accessing skills training
	E33b	Exploring training/skills development options
	E33c	Increased awareness/knowledge of possible skills training and how to access it
50 people receiving support to gain employment	E33d	Signposted to DWP/Pyramid etc. to access employment support
	E33e	Accessing employment support
30 people in employment, including self-employment, following support	E33f	In employment/awaiting start date/self-employed
150 people with basic skills (English, maths, digital and ESOL)	E33g	Completed/Started basic skills training
E36: Increase levels of digital inclusion, essential digital skills		
30 people supported to access basic skills (numerical value)	E36a	Increased confidence to apply/consider accessing digital skills training
	E36b	Exploring digital training/skills development options
	E36c	Increased awareness/knowledge of possible digital skills training and how to access it

30 people gaining a qualification or completing a course following support	E36d	Completed/Started digital skills training
	E36e	Awarded digital skills qualification
E37: Tailored support for the employed to access courses		
88 people supported to participate in education	E37a	Increased confidence to apply/consider accessing education
	E37b	Exploring education/training options
	E37c	Increased awareness/knowledge of possible education courses and how to access them
88 people gaining qualifications, licences and skills	E37d	Completed training/study towards qualification, licences, skills
	E38e	Awarded qualification/licence

Appendix 2 – Delivery Process Map



Criteria/scoring matrix

	Possible score
£20k maximum	Y/N
Registered charity – serving Swale residents	Y/N
Collaborative bids – encouraged, particularly those that include small/micro VCS groups as partners	5
Evidence of ability to deliver specified outcomes and report as required (i.e. satisfied they can do what they said they will)	Weighted 10

Can not replicate/fund existing training/employment support (e.g. EKC courses, as funded by Gov)	Y/N
Existing activities cannot be funded – unless able to evidence it has been tailored to deliver against SPF outcomes specified	Y/N
Proposed activity – evidence that it will act as a 'gateway' (effective as empowering participants to engage with central offer of training/employment etc) and potentially include learning/skills development opportunities	10
Budget satisfactory/value for money based on estimated outcome/participant no.s	5
Estimated no. of participants / outcomes achieved (see sheet)	10
Evidence of need in target groups/communities the proposal intends to support	Weighted 5

Weighted questions – in place in case receive lots of applications with similar score

Annexe 2: Communications inviting bids - example



Opportunity Knocks!!

People and skills grant opens

Local charities could get up to £20,000 to fund projects that teach people new skills and help them into employment.

Swale Borough Council has opened a new grant scheme to fund Swale's voluntary, community, social enterprise and faith (VCSEF) sector to deliver initiatives that help locals with education opportunities, digital skills training and access to vital employment support.

The council's People and Skills Grant is asking interested groups to come together to develop co-ordinated activities, with funding of between £1,000 and £20,000 available.

Projects will need to focus on providing support to the unemployed, increasing levels of digital inclusion and essential digital skills or offer tailored support to help people in work access education.

Key aims are:

- increasing confidence to apply for skills and digital training and further education
- exploring training and skills and digital development options and education options
- accessing employment support, providing digital skills qualifications and awarding qualifications or licences

The scheme is only open to not-for-profit organisations and proposals will be assessed by a panel of partner organisations. It opened on 29 May and will close on 19 June - for more information on the grant scheme and to learn how to apply [visit the council's website](#)

This is a prime opportunity for large and small organisations to develop projects of direct benefit to their communities, and build routes into skills development and improved employment prospects

Question and Answer

If you want further information, a Q&A session will be held online on **Tuesday 4th June at 3.30pm**. Send a request to comms.sva@gmail.com to receive joining details

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Annexe 3: Funding allocated at commencement of project/spent by completion

Project	Amount Received	Amount Spent
Citizens Advice Bureau	17260.04	17410
Diversity House	20000	20080
Faversham Umbrella	19708.4	18708.4
MDF	19830	19830
Mid Kent Mind	14995.68	15070.75
SATEDA	17871	17871.08
Swale CVS	4496	4496
Pyramid Project	20000	20243

Annexe 4: Individual project reports

I. Citizen Advice Swale

Title of Project - Managing Your Money

Project Aim

To empower service users with the skills and confidence needed to manage their finances effectively. This was achieved by offering workshops where users could:

Build their numerical skills

Gain essential digital literacy

Develop confidence in financial decision-making

- Did the project achieve its aim?
Yes.
- Total Participants - 86
- Number of Sessions Held
- 7 workshops (plus additional one-to-one support sessions)
-

Project Delivery Period

Start Date: 05/08/2024

End Date: 31/03/2025

Project Reflection

Participant Quotes

(Permission confirmed)

"We had feedback from our service users, and it is all POSITIVE." – Diversity House

"The help I was given was the information I needed."

"I found the budgeting session really helpful and I feel more confident about managing my money."

"I wasn't sure what to expect but the session was really helpful."

"Just being able to talk to someone was a great help as well as the actual help they offered."

What Went Well

- Strengthened understanding of other organisations and services
- Focused on prevention over crisis support
- Reached marginalised communities
- Improved geographical understanding of the borough and related social isolation
- Connected with previously unaware clients (e.g. young people)
- Gained insights to tailor future support more effectively

What Didn't Go Well

- Workshops were resource-heavy and time-consuming
- Low engagement at some venues

Lessons Learned

Varying levels of understanding within groups required real-time adaptation

Importance of flexibility in workshop delivery

Partners & Collaboration

- The Umbrella Centre (Faversham)
- Diversity House (Sittingbourne)
- Sheerness and Sittingbourne Job Centres
- Medway Diversity Forum / Brighter Futures
-

Workshops were hosted at their venues and often aligned with existing community sessions.

Future Collaboration - Yes – More collaboration is desired.

The partnerships were positive and impactful.

II. Diversity House

Title of Project: Empowerment Through Digital Inclusion

What was the project aiming to achieve? The project aimed to achieve the following key objectives:

1. Enhance Employability Skills – Equip economically inactive individuals and job seekers with the digital and professional skills needed to access job opportunities and improve career prospects.
2. Promote Digital Inclusion – Reduce digital exclusion by providing training and support to individuals with limited digital literacy, ensuring they can confidently use technology for daily tasks, job applications, and communication.
3. Support Entrepreneurship – Empower small business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs with digital tools and knowledge to enhance business operations, expand market reach, and drive economic growth.
4. Strengthen Community Engagement – Foster social inclusion by encouraging community participation in digital learning programs, networking opportunities, and collaborative initiatives that improve overall well-being and resilience in Swale.

Did you achieve what you were aiming for?

Yes, the project successfully met and exceeded its key objectives by equipping participants with essential digital and employability skills. A total of 395 direct beneficiaries engaged in 246 training sessions between 17/07/2024 and 14/03/2025, demonstrating high engagement and commitment.

How We Met and Exceeded Our Targets

Diversity house had also successfully exceeded its key performance indicators across employment support, digital inclusion, and education. Through targeted training sessions, hands-on workshops, and mentorship, the project empowered beneficiaries to build confidence, develop skills, and progress in their careers. Below are the areas Diversity house activities covered.

- **Employability and Skills Development**
 - 85 individuals gained the confidence to apply for skills training (target: 50)
 - 62 explored various training and development opportunities (target: 50)
 - 18 project beneficiaries secured employment, 12 gained work experience, and 8 self-employed (entrepreneurship) (target: 10)
 - Delivered Career Coaching & Mentoring sessions to support job seekers in developing workplace readiness skills
 - Hosted 2 Entrepreneurship Workshops to help aspiring business owners start and grow their enterprises

- **Digital Inclusion and Qualifications**
 - 56 individuals improved their confidence in using digital tools and technology (target: 50)
 - 51 became more aware of available digital training programs (target: 50)
 - 33 participants successfully earned digital skills qualifications (target: 28)
 - Conducted 32 Digital Skills Training Sessions covering IT basics, cybersecurity, and online business tools and 38 one-to-one supports.

- **Education and Career Progression**
 - 38 individuals gained confidence to apply for further education (target: 20)
 - 46 explored higher education and vocational training options (target: 40)
 - 33 participants obtained recognised qualifications or licences (target: 12)

- **Guest Speakers & Community Engagement**
 - 21 guest speakers participated throughout the project lifecycle, significantly exceeding the target of 6
 - Hosted 2 networking and industry events to connect beneficiaries with professionals and potential employers
 - Participated in 2 job fairs and 64 panel discussions to enhance learning and employment opportunities

The project beneficiaries gained valuable digital and professional skills, increased their confidence in job applications, online communication, and workplace technology. We have individuals who have successfully secured employment, few upcoming interviews while others progressed in their job search. The project provided several digital skills trainings, bridged the digital divide and improved participants ability to access online services, education, and employment opportunities. Small business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs benefitted from workshops on digital tools, marketing, and financial management, helping them strengthen and grow their businesses. The project fostered a sense of community, encouraged

collaboration and peer support among participants. Engagement levels were high, with individuals actively participating in training sessions and networking activities.

Testimonial 1: A Life-Changing Experience at Diversity House

Project beneficiary from Westland School Sittingbourne - At first when I came to Diversity house around July 2024 on a job placement, I was asked what my future goals and ambition are, but I had nothing in mind as at then. Though I do think about becoming a social care worker that work with children. I didn't plan to go to university after my college because I feel like it is a lot of stress, besides no one in my family ever went to the university.

I was engaged in 2 job faire activities, 2 community outreaches, stayed at the front desk welcoming people at the centre. It was really a good experience for me because It made me gain confidence from speaking in public and also build my strength to advocate for myself and others.

Diversity House made me did series of assignment finding out about universities and different courses, opportunities and different support needed. I write so many of report about myself, activities I engage with at diversity house and what I would like to become more often which had finally opened my eye beyond and I had also made my mind to future my education to the University. I will recommend DH if my friends ask of best place for job placement experience. The staffs are experiences, calm, good listeners, welcoming, caring, encourages me in whatever I do."

Testimonial 2: A Transformative Learning Experience with Diversity House

Diversity House in collaboration with Kent Community Rail Partnership, embarked on a memorable journey with our English Conversation Club beneficiaries. The trip was more than just an adventure, it was a hands-on learning experience aimed at building confidence and improving English skills in real-life situations -

Testimonial 3: Empowering Service Users through Financial Capability Workshops

Collaboration with Citizens Advice through financial capability workshop - "Thank you for the opportunity, our pre and post survey shows a significant impact from the workshop was really helpful because the service users knowledge had increased after the session.

Charlotte and I found it as a positive experience. We enjoyed listening to individual service users and how they navigate the challenges of living on a low income. The exercise on reducing expenditure was particularly useful and highlighted that many service users were unaware of social tariffs that might be available to them through their water and energy providers. It also gave us the opportunity to let people know what additional support is out there for those struggling with the cost of living"

Testimonial 4: Business Workshop Empowering Entrepreneurs

Business workshop hosted by Diversity house - *“The event was an incredible success, bringing together a diverse range of speakers and exhibitors. With six inspiring speakers and five engaging exhibitors, attendees had the opportunity to gain valuable insights and knowledge. The sessions were highly interactive, encouraging participants to share their experiences and expertise. Networking was a key highlight, as professionals from various industries including medical health, mindset and coaching, fashion, science and technology, environmental science, cooking, and sewing, connected and exchanged contacts. The event truly empowered entrepreneurs, boosting their confidence, motivation, and providing clear pathways to starting their own ventures.*

Testimonial 5: Cultural Proficiency and Workforce Development Workshop

Below are quotes from trainings delivered by CEO of Diversity House to equip the employed participants with the knowledge and tools to navigate and promote cultural diversity in their workplace. The session aimed to help attendees recognise personal biases, understand the concept of cultural proficiency, and develop strategies to foster an inclusive work environment.

‘More in-dept content of what cultural proficiency involves. Lesson learnt should be applied across the organisation with daily interactions with people and for me personally, I will use the LEARN strategy been thought today more.’ Female MacMillan

“The scenarios and role-playing really helped me practice real-life applications of cultural proficiency. I feel more confident now in dealing with culturally sensitive situations.” Male KCHF

“This workshop opened my eyes to the subtle biases we carry, and I now feel more equipped to interact with people from diverse backgrounds.” Female KCC

“Just finding out so much information as there is a lot to take in and will try hard to implement the lesson learnt. The session is enjoyable, and the presentation is made fun.” Male SVCS

Project Activities

Diversity House has achieved remarkable success and exceeded multiple targets, particularly in employment support, digital skills training, and education access, demonstrating the effectiveness of Diversity House’s interventions in empowering economically inactive individuals and promoting digital inclusion.

Outcome Matrix – Achievements by Diversity House VCSEF Activity (Based on Lamplight Data)

The project successfully engaged 395 unique beneficiaries across 246 sessions, resulting in a total of 2,250 attendances. This reflects strong community interest and consistent participation, highlighting Diversity House’s effectiveness in reaching and supporting its target audience.

Additionally, with over 11,692 people-hours dedicated to learning, skill development, and employability training, beneficiaries demonstrated a high level of commitment to enhancing their knowledge and career prospects. The significant time investment suggests that participants found the training valuable and impactful.

The table below presents a detailed breakdown of project activities, as recorded in the Lamplight database system, which was used for monitoring and tracking progress from 17/07/2024 to 14/03/2025.

Table 1: Project Activities

Measure	No of attendances	No of sessions	No of diff people	People - hours	Total length of activity records
Total	2250	246	395	11692:24	1339:55:00

High Participant Engagement and Positive Outcomes

- Increased Confidence and Employability: 18 project beneficiaries secured employment, 12 gained work experience, and 8 self-employed.
- Digital Skills Development: 56 individuals attended IT and digital inclusion classes, leading to increased confidence in using technology.
- Entrepreneurial Growth: Diversity house hosted 2 business workshops in collaboration with Abettermecoaching with 12 guest speakers and 43 beneficiaries. Among all, 8 beneficiaries successfully launched their businesses after attending the business workshops as a result of motivation and gaining a positive mindset

Effective Training and Support Systems

- Structured Learning Pathways: The IT and Digital Inclusion classes provided tailored training from beginner to advanced levels, ensuring all participants progressed at their own pace.
- One-to-One Mentoring: Personalised career coaching helped individuals set goals, improve CVs, and develop job interview skills.
- Guest Speaker Sessions and Business Workshops: Experts from various industries shared insights, motivating participants and providing networking opportunities.

Strong Community and Partner Collaboration

- Diversity House's partnerships with Citizens Advice, HSBC, Kent Community Rail Partnership, NHS, and local businesses expanded opportunities for participants.
- Job Fairs & Employer Engagements: Through collaborations with the 2 job fair organisers hosted at the swallow's leisure centre Sittingbourne, Diversity house recorded 54 attendance list who made inquiry from diversity house stand. After series if follow up, 22 individuals were recruited for CV enhancement, mock interview and training placements.
- Community Well-being Support: Coffee morning sessions and mental well-being workshops helped beneficiaries improve emotional resilience and confidence.

Major Community Engagement Events

- Cultural Celebration Day Event: This event is hosted at the Sittingbourne Library with 28 young children from primary schools around Sittingbourne who had benefitted from the event. Below is the feedback received from the event beneficiaries.

- Valentine's Event at The Appleyard, Sittingbourne: Diversity house hosted 36 attendees in a unique celebration that combined networking, community integration, and success stories sharing alongside Valentine's festivities. We also organised a raffle and auction to raise funds for sustaining Diversity House's services.

- International Women's Day Event at Hempstead House and Spa, Sittingbourne: This event attracted 98 attendees, including 9 guest speakers, 4 exhibitors, and 41 students from 3 Sittingbourne secondary schools, who debated on "*Accelerate Action for Girls Leadership*". The event provided a platform to celebrate the impact of Diversity House, advocate for gender equality, and empower women, girls and men ally. As part of the event, diversity house organised a raffle and auction to generate funding for critical interventions in education, employability, and tackling inequality.

Referrals & Partnerships

Diversity House successfully worked with 41 organisations through collaborations and made key referrals to ensure participants received tailored support and resources:

- Citizens Advice: 2 referrals for financial advice and support.
- Tesco Warehouse Logistic & Training: 4 referrals for logistics and warehouse training.
- Sittingbourne Police: 2 referrals for safety and legal support.
- Adult Education: 3 referrals for further education and skills development.
- Morrisons: 3 referrals for employability and work placements.
- EKC (East Kent College): 5 referrals for vocational courses and training.
- SATEDA: 4 referrals for domestic abuse support.

Inclusive and Accessible Learning Environment

- Flexible Learning Approaches: A mix of in-person workshops, online resources, and individual coaching made training accessible to all participants.
- Amigos Flamingos & Literacy Support: Regular English conversation club helped non-native speakers improve their communication skills, increasing their ability to engage in the workforce.
- Hands-on Experience: Practical activities like online business setup, jewellery making, and IT troubleshooting sessions ensured learning was engaging and impactful.

Real-Life Application and Lasting Impact

- Participants became self-sufficient: Many individuals moved from dependency on support services to independently managing their careers and personal development.

- **Increased Digital Inclusion:** More residents in Swale now have access to and confidence in using digital tools for everyday life, including job searching, online banking, and accessing public services through the support of Diversity house staffs, volunteers, and partners.
- **Sustained Motivation and Commitment:** Many beneficiaries continued engaging with Diversity House, demonstrating a strong commitment to lifelong learning and personal growth.

What didn't go well? Reflect on challenges faced. (e.g. recruiting participants, marketing)

While Diversity house achieved significant successes, we also encountered several challenges that impacted its implementation.

- **Participant Recruitment and Engagement:** Despite outreach efforts, recruiting participants at the beginning of the project was challenging. Many individuals were unaware of the opportunities available and hesitant to join due to low self-confidence or lack of trust in new programs. Some beneficiaries struggled with consistent attendance due to family commitments, health issues, or work schedules, making it difficult to maintain steady progress.

Solutions Implemented: To address this, Diversity House expanded its community outreach efforts and maximized opportunities through participation in two job fairs at Swallows Leisure Centre. These events were instrumental in showcasing the work of Diversity House and promoting the project objectives to a wider audience. Additionally, direct referrals through partner organisations and flexible scheduling options were introduced to accommodate participants availability.

- **Marketing and Outreach Challenges:** Although Diversity House leveraged social media and community partnerships, digital marketing efforts needed to be strengthened to attract a broader audience. Some economically inactive individuals, particularly those with low digital literacy, did not engage with online marketing efforts and were difficult to reach.

Solutions Implemented: Partnering with Job centres, libraries, and religious centres to spread awareness through word-of-mouth and physical posters. Conducting in-person community events and outreach workshops to directly engage with potential beneficiaries.

- **Digital and Language Barriers:** Many participants had little or no experience using computers, requiring additional one-on-one support before they could fully engage with IT and digital inclusion training. Some service users, particularly English learners, faced difficulties understanding instructions in workshops, slowing down their learning progress.

Solutions Implemented: Offering extra support sessions for beginners, ensuring one-to-one mentoring where needed. Integrating language support into digital inclusion sessions by providing bilingual resources and translation assistance.

- **Financial and Resource Constraints:** Some project beneficiaries only had access to computers when they visited the Diversity House IT Centre, while a few did not own mobile phones with internet access, limiting their ability to practice outside class hours. Also, offering free training and workshops posed a financial strain, as funding was limited, and some beneficiaries required long-term support.

Solutions Implemented: While it was not possible to provide laptops or mobile phones for participants to take home, beneficiaries were encouraged to visit Diversity House IT Centre at any convenient time to practice independently or receive one-on-one support.

In terms of the financial constraints,

- Diversity House partnered with HSBC Bank to deliver workshops on mobile banking and online safety, ensuring that participants could make the most of their mobile devices where available.
 - Sittingbourne Police engaged beneficiaries in workshops on safety, scam awareness, and reporting fraudulent activities.
 - Support from volunteers helped reduce the financial burden by minimising costs associated with hiring external experts for training sessions.
 - Referrals to partners that offers services we do not provide at the centre.
 - Fundraising events such as raffles and auctions were implemented to support project sustainability and ensure continued service delivery.
- **Follow-Up and Long-Term Engagement:** Some participants required continuous mentoring and support beyond the project's timeframe to fully transition into employment or further education. We also ensured continued engagement with past participants to track their progress and provide further guidance proved challenging due to resource limitations.

Solutions Implemented: Diversity house has established WhatsApp groups and online support networks to maintain communication and offer ongoing advice. We also encourage participants to become peer mentors for new service users, fostering a self-sustaining support system.

Lessons Learned: Summarise key takeaways for future improvement.

Despite these challenges, Diversity House's proactive approach in adapting solutions and strengthening partnerships helped mitigate many obstacles. The strategic use of job fairs, referrals, partnerships with organisations like HSBC and Sittingbourne Police, volunteer support, and fundraising efforts played a crucial role in overcoming financial and resource limitations. Lessons learned from this project will inform future initiatives, ensuring improved outreach, engagement, and long-term impact for beneficiaries.

Partnerships

1. Financial Literacy & Employment Support

- Citizens Advice – Delivered a Financial Capability Workshop to 18 participants, enhancing financial literacy, confidence, and overall well-being.
- HSBC – Provided fraud awareness training to 14 participants, equipping them with skills to recognise and protect against scams.
- Nando's – Supported mock interviews, work experience opportunities, and hosted a Christmas dinner for Diversity house Staffs and Volunteers.
- Westland School Sittingbourne – Sent students for job placements, work experience, and learning exchanges.
- ISP School Tenham – Advocated for young individuals needing employment and skills support.

2. Digital & IT Skills Development

- Good Things Foundation – Provided Cybersecurity Training for staffs and volunteers, enhancing their ability to support participants.

3. Well-being and Mental Health Support

- Opis Counselling – Provided a safe space for social engagement and well-being strategies to 13 beneficiaries.
- Mental Health Together People Sittingbourne – Organised well-being workshops for Coffee Mornings.
- NHS OneYou – Has a space at Diversity House centre and help delivered MOT health checks and well-being assessments with 2 NHS professionals.
- Shaw Trust – Provided referrals for well-being support and mental health services.
- MVA – Hosted focus groups on self-harming and community health initiatives.

4. Community Engagement and Social Inclusion

- Kent Community Rail Partnership – Organised real-life English learning experiences for 33 beneficiaries.
- Sittingbourne Library – Hosted Cultural History Month events, engaging 28 beneficiaries.
- Hope Church and Holy Trinity Church – Provided support for elderly and youth engagement in Diversity House services.
- Sittingbourne Mosque & Redeem Covenant Church – Offered community support and food donations.
- SATEDA – Assisted with domestic abuse survivors through referrals for specialist support.

5. Fundraising and Resource Support

- Morrison's – Provided continuous food bank support to vulnerable individuals.
- Hempstead House Hotel & Spa – Hosted events at discounted rates and contributed raffle tickets for fundraising.
- Season Time – Provided decorations for Valentine's events.
- Delux Decorating Centre – Donated paints and materials for raffle events.
- M&S, John Frewin Optical, Jewellery Shop, Barber Shop, Holland & Barratt, Cooks, and Flow Pilates – Contributed to raffles and auctions to support fundraising.

Following this project, would you like to partner and collaborate with other organisations more or less? If more, what would you like to do?

Yes, the partnerships established during this project played a vital role in delivering employment support, financial literacy, digital inclusion, well-being services, and community engagement. Expanding collaborations will enhance project delivery, increase outreach, and create more opportunities for beneficiaries. Diversity House strongly believes that collaborative working leads to better outcomes. Moving forward, we will actively seek and build new partnerships while strengthening existing ones to create sustainable opportunities for empowerment, learning, and community development.

Building on the success of this project, Diversity House remains committed to fostering partnerships that expand opportunities for beneficiaries and strengthen future initiatives.

Future Collaborations includes:

- Sittingbourne Police - Cybersecurity and Fraud Awareness: Quarterly cybersecurity and fraud prevention workshops will be delivered to help beneficiaries identify scams and stay safe online.
- OneYou NHS - Health & Wellbeing Support: Diversity House will work closely with NHS OneYou to offer MOT health checks, Coffee morning and mental well-being workshops, and mindfulness sessions. These sessions will empower individuals to prioritise their health, especially those transitioning into employment.
- Morrisons - Food Bank & Community Support: Morrison's continued food bank contributions will support vulnerable service users. Additionally, we aim to introduce community cooking sessions focused on healthy eating on a budget.
- Westland School & Local Schools - Employability & Work Placements: We plan to expand job placements and mentorship programs, allowing students to gain hands-on work experience in IT, social care, and entrepreneurship.

III. Faversham Umbrella

Title of the project: Meadowfield

Highlights and Challenges

The project started as a vision from the work placement Development lead within Meadowfield School and the Manager of Faversham Umbrella. The idea of the project was to provide an environment within Faversham Umbrella for the students to continue with their studies, learn more skills with 'hands on' opportunities and allow them some freedom to display their capabilities.

The project allows six form students to travel from Sittingbourne, where Meadowfield School is situated, to Faversham Umbrella on public transport. Some of the students have not used before public transport before. Once arriving at Faversham Umbrella they utilise the building to develop skills in the commercial kitchen through tasks such as making sandwiches and baking cakes. Growing skills in the café, increasing social and customer services skills. Whilst also carrying out other class activities within The Art Room, being creative and determining increased Mobility skills and utilising the computer rooms to produce invites, menus and recipes.

The ability of the students varies, both in physically and mentally, which dictates a level of inconsistency in how each student reacts to different tasks within the project being delivered. The project as a whole has been beneficial to the students to either enhance their knowledge of local surrounding areas, develop their kitchen and Cafe skills and enhance independent living in later life. Within the project we have invited Faversham Umbrella Staff and volunteers, other funded partners and the students carers to Faversham Umbrella so the students can role play a café situation, taking orders, communicating the orders to the kitchen, preparing drinks and food, and serving their customers food. This has developed their skills in so many areas, but ultimately gave the students the chance to show those most close to them what they are capable of. This was a real confidence boost for the students. The students definitely enjoyed inviting their own carers and family in the most and so this was repeated during the following term. The response from the carers and family was very positive and allowed them a sense of pride in what the students had achieved.

Lessons Learned: Summarise key takeaways for future improvement.

Partnerships

Adult Education - providing training for the students with a basic food safety training course. This enhances their educational skills and they will all be presented with a attendance certificate.

Following this project, would you like to partner and collaborate with other organisations more or less?
If more, what would you like to do?

More. The project has demonstrated that although several different organisations can come together with independent projects there is some cross over and support that can be offered from others that are not involved.

The ultimate aim of the original project was to bring the students into Faversham Umbrella, to develop their skills and enable them to grow. Ideally we envisaged the students opening the cafe as Faversham Umbrella one day a week. As time has developed, we have realised the challenges of this. Firstly due to the time the students spend at Faversham Umbrella being insufficient, once the students have caught the bus and travelled withing school hours this reduces the amount of time actually in Umbrella. Whilst using public transport enhances a life skill. Secondly, the variation of competencies and challenges that each student faces, which impedes the ability to achieve the ultimate aim. Therefore, we have not been to reach the ultimate aim of opening the cafe and so have settled for developing the students each term with new skills working towards inviting their carer's and family in at the end of term so they can display their capabilities independently. The students have found this whole project beneficial and one of the main proficiencies they have developed, orr consistently inform their teachers is how they love the fact they are able to show people what they can do independently.

This project was unique and so no duplication occurred. We did however invite the partners in to experience the project themselves which the students found daunting and interesting. The partners were amazing at supporting and enhancing the students confidence further. Below is case study from of the partners after attendance.

Are you considering any future collaboration with any of the partners involved? if so, please briefly describe what this would be.

The collaboration between Meadowfield School and Faversham Umbrella has been successful. We are discussing the potential to continue this into the next academic year for a new cohort of students. Faversham Umbrella has weighed up the pros and coms of opening another day or ensuring the building is secure for the students. We feel this project is so beneficial and allows another scope to what we offer that we are prepared to continue with the same arrangement.

Second project of Faversham Umbrella – Training

What was the project aiming to achieve?

Provide training for employability, accreditation and fun. 167 attendees, 21 separate training sessions over 23 days.

Response: Level 2 Food Safety in Catering	10	11/09/2024 00:00
Response: Level 1 Introduction to Customer Service	8	20/09/2024 00:00
Response: Level 3 Emergency First Aid at Work	6	02/10/2024 00:00
Response: Introduction to Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults or Safeguarding Children	14	23/10/2024 00:00
Response: Level 2 Award in Conflict Management	5	06/11/2024 00:00
Response: Mindful Living	6	29/11/2024 00:00
Response: Level 2 Award in Food Allergen Awareness and Control in Catering	4	06/12/2024 00:00
Response: Introduction to Mental Health Support	17	07/01/2025 00:00
Response: Level 2 Health and Safety in the Workplace	0	29/01/2025 00:00
Response: Level 3 Emergency First Aid at Work	7	12/02/2025 00:00
Response: Level 2 Food Safety in Catering	12	26/02/2025 00:00
Response: Introduction to Conflict Management	10	12/03/2025 00:00
Response: Level 3 Emergency First Aid at Work	12	19/03/2025 00:00
Response: Level 2 Award in Food Allergen Awareness	8	26/03/2025 00:00
Response: Introduction to Customer Service	8	25/04/2025 00:00
Response: Level 3 Emergency First Aid at Work	12	12/05/2025 00:00
Response: Introduction to Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults or Safeguarding Children	8	14/05/2025 00:00
Response: Level 1 Health and Safety in a Construction Environment	8	06/06/2025 00:00
Response: Introduction to Assertiveness	8	11/06/2025 00:00
Response: Five Ways to Wellbeing	8	18/07/2025 00:00
Response: Level 3 Emergency First Aid at Work	8	19/07/2025 00:00

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Start Date July 2024

End Date July 2025

Highlights and Challenges

- What went well? Describe successful aspects of your project.
- What didn't go well? Reflect on challenges faced. (e.g. recruiting participants, marketing)

The partnership between Faversham Umbrella and Adult Education is growing stronger year on year. Adult Education are both professional and excellent in their delivery of the courses. The tutors know their subject matter very well and are amazing when handling some of the students' learning difficulties that make studying more challenging for some. They are very encouraging and have allowed some people that have never sat an exam or acquired study accreditation a pass result.

The networking achieved by Faversham Umbrella through the Faversham Community Networking Group and Swale Voluntary Alliance has allowed further distribution of the courses through the voluntary sector. Enabling staff and volunteers of not-for-profit groups to attend the training free of charge allowing these groups to utilise their funds elsewhere. Supporting these groups in doing this allows a broader range of supportive services within the area.

Partnerships

Did you work with any partner organisations during your project? Yes

If so, who did you work with and how did you collaborate with them?

Adult Education - providing training for attendees.

Other not-for-profit groups – allowing their staff and volunteers access to free training.

Following this project, would you like to partner and collaborate with other organisations more or less?

If more, what would you like to do?

More. The project has demonstrated that although several different organisations can come together with independent projects there is some cross over and support that can be offered from others that are not involved.

- Did you experience any challenges? If so what were they and how did your peers help you address these (e.g. best practice, connections, referrals)?

Our main challenges we attendance to some of the courses. Upskilling and employability accreditations are sought after, but in some instances our courses are not attended. For instance, we had to cancel our Health and Safety course because we did not have the minimum numbers required. We also find that people book onto our courses and then do not turn up. We wonder if the fact this free training is makes people think there are no overheads or costs sitting behind the delivery of the training. We have discussed potentially taking a booking deposit or making a small charge to display the implications but have not yet come to a final conclusion on how to best handle this. On the flip side of this our most popular courses we have had to add more dates to the diary to accommodate more attendees.

The idea was to provide 25 courses with 12 attendees on each we actually have delivered 21 courses with varying numbers of attendees hence the reason the figures less than anticipated. This is as a result of the challenges we have listed above.

- Did you find ways to avoid duplication across the partners? If so how? Did this help reduce your overall workload as a result?

Other people are providing the same training across Swale but in different towns. Providing training in Faversham supports the local community with making them more accessible.

- How did having guest speakers help you with the delivery of your project?

We have not had any guest speakers.

- Are you considering any future collaboration with any of the partners involved? if so, please briefly describe what this would be.

We will continue to provide training for our local community and not-for-profit organisations as these are vital skills being provided.

IV. Medway Diversity Forum

Title of Project: Creating Life Chances – Catering & Hospitality

What was the project aiming to achieve?

Help young people from disadvantaged and diverse backgrounds secure employment in catering and hospitality.

In response to the question in 2.2 did you achieve what you were aiming for?

- We have provided soft skills training to 17 young people.
- We have so far secured job offers for 1 young person.
- We secured work placements for 3 more young people.
- We are waiting to hear back on work placements for 8 more young people.

How many people participated in this project?

57 young people were engaged and interviewed.

How many sessions were held?

3 training programmes of 3 days each.

Total of 342 guided learning hours.

Project Delivery Period

Start Date 01/9/2024

End Date 31/03/2025

Highlights and Challenges

By running 3 programmes instead of 2 we were able to get 19 young people to start the programme and 17 of them to complete it.

We developed a selection profiling tool which appears to have worked quite well in finding young people who were sufficiently motivated to complete the programme and use it to get a job.

We have 12 employers who have so far engaged and worked with us on this programme.

8 of them have provided venues either free or at a nominal cost: Hempstead House Hotel, Abbey Hotel, IslandWorks, Holiday Inn, Bobbing Apple, Nando's, Wetherspools (Sheerness), Starbucks (Queenborough). 4 of them provided the young people with lunches free of charge.

We had 6 employers give inspirational talks to the young people: Hempstead House, Starbucks (Sittingbourne), Bobbing Apple, McDonalds, Nando's, Wetherspools. The best of these was Nando's!

The following SPF partners were involved: CAB delivered their Money Management programme twice, Diversity House provided a training venue for one afternoon, and the Faversham Umbrella had offered to speak but were unable to on the day.

We currently have one young person employed (Bobbing Apple) and three others have already started their work experience (WEX) placements. We are waiting to hear about 8 more young people's WEX placements. A summary table on the progress with these, is also attached. Experience of Work - Swale Mar 25.pdf

The first programme in November 2024, only 3 young people turned up out of 10, in each training venue.

We realised from this (a) we needed to run the programmes locally to them either in Sittingbourne or on the Island (b) we needed to improve our selection process to find more motivated young people.

We should have devoted more time to build stronger bridges with our consortium partners, particularly those working with young people in our target audience (16-25 year olds from disadvantaged and diverse backgrounds). We should have found better ways of referring their services and ensuring more sign-ups to consortium partners. It would be helpful to get some feedback from other consortium partners on how we could have improved on this.

Were there any significant changes to the delivery of your project, if so what were they?

The main change, was that after running the first programme, it appeared that young people from Sittingbourne were reluctant to travel to the Island, and vice versa.

We therefore decided to run TWO further programmes (i.e. an extra one), one located in Sittingbourne employer premises, and the other with employers on the Island. Consequently, the turnout to both events was significantly better.

Secondly, some employers were reluctant to engage with us to provide work experience, perhaps due to lack of internal resources. However we explained that this work experience could be extremely flexible, at hours to best suit their staff, and on days that they could manage rather than on 5 consecutive days. We explained that the experience of work would be on a voluntary basis, so some employers would find it easier not having to include the young people on their payroll. Also some employers corporate policy did not allow them to provide paid WEX. The volunteering approach could work better for some of them too.

Lessons Learned: Summarise key takeaways for future improvement.

- Since we are relatively new in Swale, it took us longer to establish trust and relationship with other consortium partners. Not all partners were focused on reaching young people, so they were not so relevant for us. We met with most of the partners who were also reaching out to

young people. We included them in our broader wrap-around service offering to the young people we trained. But apart from a referral from CAB, we did not get any other referrals. We are also still working with our young people and looking for referrals to the other consortium partners eg. for apprenticeships and digital skills.

- We spent a lot of time engaging with and nurturing young people to join the programme. Sometimes there was a gap before the actual programme was to be run. We found some young people had found other things to do, because they had not heard from us for a few days, and we realised that we needed to communicate more regularly with them to keep them informed of our progress.
- Employers often struggle with “work experience”. But by making it more “flexible” to fit in with their timings, and explaining that the young people would be volunteers, encouraged some employers to be more receptive eg. Queen Phillippa Hotel. But, nevertheless, it takes a long time to get responses from employers and requires persistence.
- Employers have “suffered” from past programmes by being offered candidates for work experience of poor quality and attitude. We therefore have taken the trouble to try and match the young people’s interest to the employers we offer them to.
- Some employers are more keen than others to help the local community and help young people get jobs where they can. However, they have recruitment time-frames which may not be immediate. They also have recruitment procedures that they expected our young people to follow. We therefore have to keep in regular contact with employers to remind them of our candidates. We have set up a Newsletter to help us with this.
- Finding venues can take longer than anticipated. We needed to have started finding venues much earlier.

Partnerships

Did you work with any partner organisations during your project? Yes

If so, who did you work with and how did you collaborate with them?

Citizens Advice Bureau – Money Management. Diversity House – training venue with Nando’s.

Following this project, would you like to partner and collaborate with other organisations more or less?

More

If more, what would you like to do?

We would like to work more with The Pyramid Project to generate cross referrals for each other.

They may also have worked with young people far from employment, and they could now ready for a soft skills training and employment programme such as ours.

Refer to East Kent College (s?) for food related apprenticeships, and also to Faversham Umbrella (or other provider) for Food Hygiene short courses.

Diversity House offer digital skills courses and it would be good to seamlessly refer some of our young people onto their courses.

Did you experience any challenges? If so what were they and how did your peers help you address these (e.g. best practice, connections, referrals)?

DWP helped us hugely to access young people. We got one young people referral from Citizen's Advice Bureau.

Through our own efforts we managed to get 12 Swale employers to participate with hosting each of the training days, and/or provide work experience.

- Did you find ways to avoid duplication across the partners? If so how? Did this help reduce your over all workload as a result?

Not really explored.

- How did having guest speakers help you with the delivery of your project?

They inspired young people with their journeys in the industry. Some speakers had behaviour issues when they were younger but managed to turn their lives around. Others arrived in England with very little money but managed to get a job in catering & hospitality and took that opportunity to rise to become a Manager.

They also gave some advice on applying for jobs, and how to prepare for them. It largely backed up what we had taught them on the CV writing and Interview techniques modules in our training programme.

- Are you considering any future collaboration with any of the partners involved? if so, please briefly describe what this would be.

Nothing specific has been discussed, but we would like to explore all opportunities to help young people as much as possible.

However, some of the employers were keen to see further continuity of the CLC programme, since they felt that they had access to good quality young people and better motivated candidates. Further feedback from employers is being collated.

V. MidKent Mind

Title of Project: Numeracy and Nutrition

What was the project aiming to achieve?

The aim of this project was to help individuals develop their basic number and literacy skills, improve personal confidence and self-esteem and teach individuals how to prepare nutritious cost-effective meals.

In response to the question did you achieve what you were aiming for?

Yes we achieved what we were aiming to achieve. This project has helped to tackle health inequalities and improved participants health and wellbeing by providing them with knowledge, equipment and healthy recipes to use going forwards. By incorporating healthy recipes into their day to day life they have started to see the physical and mental benefits that eating a well-balanced diet has, with the added benefit of knowing this can be done on a budget.

Wellbeing skills covered – We explored the impact that food can have on mood and general wellbeing; using the Eatwell guide to understand how to eat healthy and understanding how this can improve mental and physical health.

Mental health and/ or wellbeing knowledge, skills and techniques linking to food -

- Diet and mental health
- Stress container and coping strategies
- Grounding techniques
- Wheel of wellbeing

Encouraging peer to peer support -

- Sharing experiences (not feeling alone)
- Sharing ideas (adapting recipes and feeding back)
- Increasing confidence from peer to peer interactions as well as staff encouragement to try more recipes and join more groups going forward to continue on the path of improving their physical and mental wellbeing.

Basic numeracy skills covered – All participants benefited from numeracy skills at all sessions including adding, subtraction, multiplication and division. Specifically, this was based around personal finance,

budgeting and measurement calculations, for example, through the weighing of ingredients, using ratios to increase/decrease quantities according to their individual needs, making and meeting a budget and converting measurements between metric and imperial. Each participant was gifted a calculator, kitchen scales and a slow cooker and shown how to use these.

Basic literacy skills covered – We recognised that for many of the participants understanding a recipe was hard and through reading recipes together, getting clarification on key terminology and growing their comprehension skills their basic literacy improved and by the end of the course the participants were far more confident.

Digital skills covered – We showed people how to effectively search for recipes online that meet their needs. In addition to this we involved the participants in using the internet to substitute ingredients based on dietary needs, what they already had in their cupboards or their budget.

How many people participated in this project? 28 attended (42 booked)

How many sessions were held? 2x6 weeks – 12 sessions in total

Project Delivery Period

Start Date Course 1 – 17/09/2024

Course 2 – 10/01/2025

End Date Course 1 – 22/10/2024

Course 2 – 14/02/2025

Participant Testimonials

“I enjoyed this course, I have just signed up for an online level 2 course for nutrition and food.”

“I enjoyed learning what you can do with a slow cooker and how to adapt recipes by using the internet which I would have never done before.”

“Food is mood and mood is food, I now feel more energetic as I am getting more nutritious food. I am now looking to join other courses.”

“I have saved money through batch cooking and me and my family are eating better.

I have learnt to understand recipes rather than throwing things in. Reading through the recipes together really helped.”

“I enjoyed interacting with people and learnt how to adapt recipes and quantities. I was never good at maths at school but this course has given me the confidence to try and do this.”

“I’ve learnt how to cook using a slow cooker, using new food and understanding timing.” 8. “It’s made me want to cook different foods, I have been researching what I can cook next.

“I’ve learnt different ways to use food and measurements.”

“This course has helped me prepare to move out of my parents house.”

“It’s been so good to meet other people. I’m really going to miss coming here. The course has made me think about doing more things. I’d like to do a business course and find out how to run my own business.”

“I am definitely more likely to do another course in the future. I wouldn’t feel ashamed that I couldn’t do it now I know other people are in the same boat.”

Highlights and Challenges

1. What went well? Describe successful aspects of your project.

We are delighted with the outcomes achieved. All participants benefited greatly from this programme not only in supporting them with improved numeracy, literacy and digital skills but also in supporting their mental health and wellbeing. Many have been long term unemployed and their self worth and confidence was very low. This was a barrier to them applying for courses and jobs. As project offered a slow cooker, scales, a calculator and 6 recipe bags this enticed people to sign up. An added benefit was that we were able to provide much needed food to those in need and over the duration of the course teach them how to use cheaper ingredients to cook wholesome meals.

Feedback has evidenced the courses helped individuals develop their basic numeracy, literacy skills and digital skills, improved their confidence and self esteem, taught individuals how to prepare nutritious budget friendly meals and helped participants understand the link between what we eat and how we feel. The majority of participants have increased their confidence and now feel able to seek future opportunities in education and training.

Through peer to peer support the course was successful in creating a supportive community. Many of the participants live alone or are isolated within their own families and felt anxious about starting a new course. Participants enjoyed sharing ideas and providing peer support, they would share photos of the food they made each week so they could talk about what went well, what changes they could make and any new recipes they have found. Some participants went on to create a support group they could attend each week now the course has finished.

Through this project we have created positive connections with a community café who reached out to us with the following -

“Our Community cafe has recently hosted your food and mood course. We have had nothing but amazing feedback, both on content and tutors/staff. We have also been asked if this is something that can continue, and I wanted to make contact to see what would need to be done for this.” Course photos – All photo permission gathered.

What didn't go well? Reflect on challenges faced. (e.g. recruiting participants, marketing)

We delivered our first course on the Isle of Sheppey and despite having 21 participants booked only 12 regularly attended. We found that people had to drop out due to health issues, appointments, mental health difficulties or gaining employment. Our team worked hard to keep in touch with people but life challenges they faced on a day to day basis made weekly attendance difficult.

However, we did not experience the same attendance difficulties on the Sittingbourne course.

We had difficulties with gathering evaluations as some participants did not attend the final session and despite us contacting them by phone and email they have not responded to reminders regarding feedback.

3. Were there any significant changes to the delivery of your project, if so what were they? None.

Partnerships

Did you work with any partner organisations during your project? No

If so, who did you work with and how did you collaborate with them?

Following this project, would you like to partner and collaborate with other organisations more or less? Yes, more.

If more, what would you like to do? Greater understanding of each others wider work.

• Did you experience any challenges? If so what were they and how did your peers help you address these (e.g. best practice, connections, referrals)?

The challenges we experienced regarding regular attendance at our Isle of Sheppey course was shared with the group at a monthly meeting. Helpful support and ideas were given by Mark however, one of the

representatives from another provider was very vocal and forceful in her input which created a barrier in sharing best practice and building relationships.

- Did you find ways to avoid duplication across the partners? If so how? Did this help reduce your over all workload as a result? No

- How did having guest speakers help you with the delivery of your project? N/A

- Are you considering any future collaboration with any of the partners involved? if so, please briefly describe what this would be.

No, not at this stage but we would be very happy to explore this in the future.

VI. Pyramid

Title of Project: New Horizons

What was the project aiming to achieve?

The New Horizons project aimed to reach adults who had not engaged with training or employment for a significant period. The participants we were aiming to engage with typically present negative experience of prior learning or employment and consequently have low aspirations, motivation and self-esteem. The aim of this project was to work with these individuals in either small groups or 1-2-1 settings and instil a newfound belief that positive changes were achievable and empower them to take ownership of their futures.

In response to the question did you achieve what you were aiming for?

Yes. Participation, retention and progression has been positive with 32 individuals engaging with the programme, of which 22 of those took part in IT courses and 8 finding employment. 28 of the participants who attended expressed an increase in self confidence and felt more optimistic about the future.

How many people participated in this project? 34

How many sessions were held? 41

Project Delivery Period

Start Date 07/10/2024

End Date 31/03/2025

Did you work with any partner organisations during your project?

Yes

If so, who did you work with and how did you collaborate with them?

We worked with JCP, Shaw Trust, Peopleplus to help identify individuals who would benefit from the tailored support offered on this programme. We also worked closely with the Sheppey Business Network, Sheppoeys Employment Forum and Hope Street Centre

Following this project, would you like to partner and collaborate with other organisations more or less?

If more, what would you like to do?

The Sheppey Business Network is an excellent forum for engaging with small businesses but we would like to find routes into some of larger employers such as the local food distribution centres who we have worked closely with in the past. Our community group engagements are also a fantastic way to engage young people with work and the community at large. More recently we have had young people join us on the Sheppey Light Railway Greenway project that I am a volunteer and committee member of. We have also had learners engage with our 20/20 event at the Dockyard church and have a small group attend HMP Elmley for an open door event with Kier construction on Wed 19th March.

- Did you experience any challenges? If so what were they and how did your peers help you address these (e.g. best practice, connections, referrals)?

Persuading individuals from this client group to engage in skills training or employment is always a challenge. Initial taster sessions were used help remove any perceived barriers and promote the benefit to the individual and following up with voluntary events has helped tremendously.

- Did you find ways to avoid duplication across the partners? If so how? Did this help reduce your over all workload as a result? Our provision was based on a niche client group so did not experience any duplication

- How did having guest speakers help you with the delivery of your project?

Yes. Having employers in training rooms provides a more personal touch and helps the participants connect with the employer and removes some the previously held perceptions. Having access to local businesses to help the young people overcome their fears and trepidations supported by mentors was very successful and we are already preparing for or next event.

- Are you considering any future collaboration with any of the partners involved? if so, please briefly describe what this would be. We have spoken to others such as the Faversham Umbrella Centre and NHS group as an example to work in collaboration to support one another. This includes collaborations with local charities such as Sheppey Matters, Oasis Hub and EKC.

VII. SATEDA

Title of Project: Employability Skills for survivors of domestic abuse

What was the project aiming to achieve? The project enabled us to provide one six-month programme of employability activity to survivors of domestic abuse and volunteers.

In response to the question did you achieve what you were aiming for? Yes

How many people participated in this project? 44

How many sessions were held? 28

Project Delivery Period

Start Date 01.09.2024

End Date 31.03.2025

Participant Testimonials

"I will be using the information now as I am currently job searching".

"I will take the information I have learnt on the course and look into training courses and volunteering to build up my CV".

"I realised I have more skills and life skills than I thought I had".

"This training was so good. Anyone would benefit from it – all the women I know would have benefited from identifying/acknowledging their strengths, boosting their confidence and reducing anxiety around entering the job market".

"Thank you so much, other courses offer help with CV's and getting into work, but they just scratch the surface. This course is more in depth and helps us recognise skills we otherwise wouldn't realise that we had" (from in session) and after. There is a lot of support out there for CVs and job skills but when you actually look at them there is either a cost involved or they just scratch the surface and will say things like have a strong CV, sell your skills. This course went into real depth and really helped to build my confidence and helped me realise and understand the skills I have. The imposter syndrome was particularly helpful to me as I really thought I was the only person who thought that way! A real light bulb moment".

Mental Health First Aid training

"I was very impressed with the trainer, the way the course was delivered and the mixture of case studies, videos and conversation that really brought the course alive. I will definitely feel more empowered and confident when speaking to people in the future".

“I loved, loved the training and Mark, the trainer. So captivating content and Mark was able to manage us all, making it easy to navigate through all that content and emotions”.

Highlights and Challenges

- What went well? Describe successful aspects of your project.

Many of our clients and volunteers were very grateful to be able to access these training sessions, especially Mental Health First Aid. Awareness of what the local offer is in terms of courses was very well received.

- What didn't go well? Reflect on challenges faced. (e.g. recruiting participants, marketing)

The Digital IT course started later, and then they had issues with staff sickness, so some classes were missed due to trainer/equipment/access to IT problems, but our volunteers are still determined to complete it in their own time. We are supporting them to ensure this happens.

Many volunteers work part or full-time or have other commitments when the courses are run. Some do not feel confident about attending. To mitigate this, SATEDA is fortunate to have two Volunteer Coordinators who can support those individuals to access training at a pace which suits them.

Thanks to the digital skills training, our trained volunteers are now able to help as peer mentors on a weekly basis, supporting other women in need in SATEDA's Sittingbourne 'Hub' at Heather House, which is a collaboration between us and three other charities – including Age UK - to offer a community cafe, food bank, clothes bank and domestic abuse drop-in space for the whole community.

- Were there any significant changes to the delivery of your project, if so what were they?

No.

Partnerships

EKC Sheppey College – 4 volunteers enrolled to complete Level 2 Digital Skills and IT. We also worked closely with Good Things Foundation who delivered the digital training to our peer mentors. Digital Kent have been very helpful in establishing our digital champions.

Following this project, would you like to partner and collaborate with other organisations more or less?

Yes, definitely, more partnership is always wanted.

VIII. Swale CVS

Title of the project: "Get Online and Up with the Times"

The "Get Online and Up with the Times" project, delivered by Swale CVS in partnership with Swale Senior Forum, aimed to tackle digital exclusion among older adults in Swale. This initiative sought to provide training, access to digital devices, and ongoing support to individuals aged 55+ who faced challenges in using online services.

Objectives

The project set out to:

- Improve digital literacy among older adults.
- Reduce social isolation by enabling online communication.
- Provide hands-on training and access to digital resources.
- Support individuals in accessing online healthcare, banking, shopping and social media.
- 14 successful "Get Online and Up with the Times" coffee mornings, attended by over 40 clients.
- 46 individuals provided with digital skills training, exceeding our initial targets.
- 46 iPads with 40GB of monthly data distributed to clients, thanks to the Good Things Foundation (Match funding worth over £15,000).
- Home visits conducted for those unable to attend sessions to ensure wider accessibility.
- Introduction of 'Learn My Way' to provide structured digital training.
- High demand resulted in a growing waiting list, demonstrating the need for continued support.

Challenges & Solutions

- High demand & waiting list – Additional funding is being sought to expand capacity.
- Varying skill levels – One-to-one support was provided alongside group sessions.
- Limited confidence among clients – Regular follow-ups and ongoing support encouraged engagement.

Partnerships: Swale CVS and Swale Senior Forum collaborated with several key organisations to deliver the project successfully:

- Good Things Foundation – Provided funding and resources, including the 46 iPads with 40GB of monthly data.
- Local community centres – Offered venues for training sessions and coffee mornings.
- Health and social care providers – Referred clients who could benefit from digital inclusion.
- Local businesses – Supported the project with refreshment donations and volunteer assistance.

Challenges in Partnerships

- Did you experience any challenges? Yes, it was difficult to juggle the befriending referrals and the (SSF) Swale Seniors Forum membership. As befriending was receiving more referrals to SSF membership, befriending was offered more places. We also found the SSF members were generally at a higher level. Best practice was to separate the two groups into separate coffee mornings.
- Did you find ways to avoid duplication across the partners? If so, how? Did this help reduce your overall workload as a result? Swale CVS lead on the Partner meetings, feeding back to SSF and having discussions at their committee meetings
- How did having guest speakers help with the delivery of your project? Yes we had Barclays in to talk about online banking and online fraud. The local community Warden came in to talk about local online fraud attempts.
- Are you considering any future collaboration with any of the partners involved? If so, please briefly describe what this would be. We are looking to continue to work with Swale Seniors Forum and the KCC Digital champions, as well as, interacting with other digital exclusions organisations across Swale. We have really enjoyed hearing the experiences from the Partners on this project and we plan to continue to develop our services particularly with Faversham Umbrella and Citizens Advice Bureau.

Future Plans

- Apply for additional funding (e.g., Kent Community Foundation grant, Hedley Foundation and Good things foundation) to extend, expand the project so we can reach even more residents across Swale.
- Increase the number of sessions to meet the growing demand.
- Develop partnerships with other local organisations to enhance digital inclusion.
- Provide more advanced digital skills training for those who have mastered the basics.
- Good Things Foundation – Seek more funding and resources, including more iPads, laptops, mobile phones and monthly data.
- Local community centres – Take up offers of venues for training sessions and coffee mornings eg: Leysdown Hub, Heather House and Sheppey Matters.
- Health and social care providers – Work with social prescribers, NHS and local government departments for referred clients who could benefit from digital inclusion.
- Local businesses – Increase support for the project with donations and volunteer assistance.

4. Case Studies

Below are case studies that demonstrate the success of our project model, showcasing its real-world impact on people's lives. These stories highlight how our approach has transformed communities, improved livelihoods, and delivered sustainable solutions, reinforcing the effectiveness of our methodology.

Case Study 1:

E found out about the course while attending the local food bank where she met one of our Wellbeing Coaches who was there to promote the course.

E joined the course as an unemployed person having left her last employment in early 2024. E was very open and explained she had many years within an abusive relationship and had a past addiction to drugs and alcohol. E has been sober for the last 9 months and whilst she hoped to be able to return to work in the future, her confidence to do so was low and preventing her from applying. She recognised that she needed to join activities which would let her focus on her personal development, improve her skills and also provide respite from the stresses of caring for her 13 year old son who struggles with his own mental health and rarely attends school.

E has attended all sessions and her personal growth during this time has been seen not only by us, others within the group but also herself. In her feedback E explained how this course has helped her bond with her son and given them an activity they can complete together. Having a family meal is very important to E and both her and her son enjoyed this.

“Doing this course actually made me want to get up and do something. It helped my motivation and I wanted to turn up every week and try the recipes.”

E's confidence in understanding the recipe, being able to adapt it in quantities through the simple maths taught meant she was able to prepare the meal with her son when she got home. This has strengthened their relationship and the angry outburst he was having have reduced.

“Communicating with my son is such a struggle, but I knew that doing an activity together like cooking would help me talk to him. His mind relaxed when we were in the kitchen and while he was more settled and less angry we could actually communicate.”

H doesn't like being told what to do, but it was great that I could give him the recipe print out and it was really simple for him to follow, plus all the ingredients were ready to go. So I could be there with him, but he could feel like he was in charge. We would chat as well because his mind was more relaxed and he wasn't getting cross with me. He actually wants to be a chef.”

E has increased her knowledge of food and healthy eating. She has learnt about positive coping strategies and how to support her own mental health and says the course has supported her in staying sober. She is far

more aware of her own thought processes, challenging negative thinking and the importance of managing her stress levels. She is consciously trying to choose healthy coping mechanisms.

"I really found it helpful to talk openly about how to manage stress everyday. I am much more aware of how my brain works now and that helps me make better choices."

E has improved her digital skills and is now using technology for self development.

"I've looked up lots more recipes online and tried cooking chicken and lamb in it. I wouldn't have done that before this course."

E has now applied for a number of job applications and was delighted to tell us she has a forthcoming interview for a care/support worker role. She reported that she was going to use her attendance on this numeracy and nutrition course as evidence of her recent personal development and to show the practical skills she has learnt in relation to food. She also felt that the actual cooking knowledge would be a highly useful transferable skill for the role that she could share with clients.

"I feel more confident about going for the interview. I can definitely talk about what I have learnt on numeracy and nutrition . I really want to access anything that would make me a better person. I want to get out there and meet new people and have more interaction. This course has given me the confidence to do this and also improved my skills in reading and maths."

Case Study 2:

S is currently unemployed and has struggled with her mental health for a long period of time. This has prevented her from working. S joined the course as she recognised she needed to manage her mental health better as it was not only impacting on her but also her family.

5 years ago, S completed several courses but since then has not had the confidence or motivation to apply for work or other courses.

Having attended all the sessions and improved her digital skills from this she has used the recipes provided and learnt how to adapt these to make them suit her families tastes. She reports that both her partner and son have been greatly impacted as she can now make one meal for the entire family to enjoy together. Her son is a particularly fussy eater and through this course she has learnt how to adapt food to help support him with this rather than cooking separate meals. She explained this has helped her confidence and she now feels like she is beginning to take control of things. The support around digital skills was beneficial in helping her do this.

Her improved numeracy skills have helped her to batch cook and this has allowed her more time for things she enjoys. She plans on using this time to access other courses. The nutrition aspects of the course has been very valuable to S. She is now understanding the impact of what she eats on how she feels and from being aware of this is making better choices for her and her family. She also commented on how her improved

knowledge of foods she would have not previously used e.g. lentils has cut her grocery bill, something that is a real help.

S has signed up with Livewell Kent to find about more opportunities in the area for courses which will help her manage her mental health better and community groups. She is now looking to return to work part time something which she says she would never had considered before this course.

Case study 3:

We met Client 2 at our Jobcentre session. He had worked for over 20 years and had never previously been unemployed. He lost his job through redundancy around the same time he separated from his wife and debts started to build which had affected his mental health and ability to manage his money. His landlord was on the point of evicting him. Our budgeting session showed that he had a good sense of what payments to make but no idea of any services in the area that could support him. His income was so small he was unable to meet his basic needs of heating and eating. He also struggled with the internet and how to access local resources. After speaking to him we were able to refer him from debt and housing advice and give him access to the HSF fund to relieve immediate hardship. Through ongoing support we were able to register him for the digital skills course through Kent College to improve confidence. He was signposted to warm spaces in his area and alternative forms of support. Other members of the workshop session began talking to him and made him aware of potential job opportunities they'd seen on the board downstairs. The client's desire was to get back into work as soon as possible and avoid potential homelessness. Through our intervention we were able to do this.

Case study 4:

J joined Diversity House in July 2024. Her first visit was a significant challenge, as she struggled with severe anxiety, rapid breathing, sweating, lack of eye contact, and minimal verbal communication. Living with autism, ADHD, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and low self-esteem, Jennifer relied on the support of her NHS support worker to accompany her.

Despite her initial anxiety, J found Diversity House to be a welcoming and supportive environment. The staff's professional and understanding approach reassured her, creating a safe space where she felt valued. Encouraged by this positive experience, Jennifer returned the next day this time on her own, without her support worker.

J began attending the Coffee Morning sessions regularly, a wellbeing-focused space that includes meditation, mindfulness, gratitude exercises, thought downloads, and breathing techniques. Jennifer was advised to integrate meditation and breathing exercises into her daily routine.

Over the following weeks, Jennifer noticed remarkable changes in herself:

- She smiled more and became more mindful of her breathing.
- She started making new friends, engaging in conversations, and socialising more comfortably.
- She actively participated in sewing classes, workshops, and one-to-one mentoring sessions, which helped improve her self-esteem and confidence.

As J's confidence grew, she independently enrolled in various activities at Diversity House, including business workshops and jewellery-making classes. She also stepped out of her comfort zone, trying new experiences like cycling and cooking classes.

Recognising her passion for crochet, Diversity House provided training and business support to help Jennifer turn her hobby into a viable business. She enrolled in the "Unlock Your Business Potential: Antiques and More" e-business program, which enabled her to set up an eBay account and start selling her products. With this milestone, J officially became self-employed and a business owner. This is a significant achievement for both her economic independence and overall well-being.

J's journey with Diversity House has been transformative. From an anxious individual hesitant to engage with others, she has evolved into a confident entrepreneur with a growing business. Through mentorship, training, and a nurturing community, J has built resilience, self-reliance, and a newfound sense of purpose. She credits her progress to the unwavering support of Diversity House, stating that their programs and services have been instrumental in her success.

Case study 5:

H, a young man with a bright and enthusiastic personality, made a big impact during the session. From the moment he began, his energy and eagerness to get involved were clear to everyone around him. H was excited to try every task, whether it was cleaning the table, serving drinks, or assisting customers in the role-play café.

His enthusiasm was creating a positive atmosphere that inspired both his peers and the staff supporting him.

As the day progressed, it became evident how much he was benefiting from the structured support provided during the session. H's excitement for learning and his natural ability to lift the spirits of those around him highlighted how opportunities like this can help channel energy and passion into developing practical skills. With ongoing guidance, H has the potential to thrive and make meaningful contributions in any role he chooses to pursue.

A Journey of Discovery

One participant, called 'E,' began the session feeling visibly anxious and even a little frustrated. She seemed unsure of how to approach the activities and hesitant to engage. At first, she was avoiding interaction and appearing overwhelmed by the café role-play experience.

However, as the session went on, E began to relax and watch her peers as they took on their tasks. Seeing their confidence grow inspired her to give it a try. With gentle encouragement from the staff, she gradually started participating, taking small steps like helping to serve food and preparing drinks.

The turning point came when she began chatting with a member of the VCSEF organisation, who kindly engaged her in conversation. This interaction helped her feel more at ease, and she started to enjoy the experience. By the end of the session, E was not only taking part but also smiling and contributing to the café tasks with a sense of accomplishment.

Her transformation highlighted the importance of patience, support, and creating a safe space for growth. It showed how even those who may struggle initially can achieve so much when given the right opportunities and encouragement.

Impact

The session was a clear demonstration of how innovative, hands-on initiatives can change lives.

Beyond the café skills they practiced, participants learned to communicate effectively, handle responsibilities, and work collaboratively. Their accomplishments not only boosted their self-esteem but also revealed their capacity to contribute meaningfully to society with the right support.

This role-play session, made possible by the Swale Shared Prosperity Fund and Faversham Umbrella, underscored the profound potential of young people with disabilities when given tailored opportunities. By combining life skills training with a supportive environment, the initiative equipped participants with tools for greater independence and self-reliance. It serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of investing in programs that empower individuals to build fulfilling lives and achieve their aspirations.