

Emerging findings

Future Grow Pilot | July 2025

In partnership with Darlington Primary Care Network (PCN), we are supporting individuals with long-term health conditions move closer to employment. We are testing a trauma-informed, person-led approach combined with community partnerships and integrated wellbeing advice, on employment success.



Key findings (Three month review):

- 70% of referrals are actively progressing through the pilot
- 8 participants are pending onboarding
- 10 individuals declined or disengaged, mainly due to acute health conditions

Referrals and onboarding overview

➤ Referrals received	60
➤ Participants onboarded	42
➤ Participants pending/ follow-up	8
➤ Referrals declined/ disengaged	10



Participant profile

➤ Age:

Broadly spread across working-age adults, including those further from the labour market and needing the most support.

➤ Gender:

Slight female majority; many are single parents or have significant unpaid caring responsibilities.

➤ Health & wellbeing:

100% of participants live with one or more long-term health conditions, including:

- Depression, anxiety, trauma-related issues
- Chronic pain, fatigue and mobility limitations
- Grief, bereavement and active caregiving roles for terminally ill relatives



Barriers to employment

➤ Mental health challenges	29
➤ Low confidence and motivation	24
➤ Long-term unemployment	24
➤ Digital exclusion	18
➤ Housing instability	14
➤ Bereavement/ caring responsibilities	12

These complex and often hidden challenges demonstrate the importance of a trauma-informed, person-led approach.

Support delivered

Each participant co-developed an individual action plan tailored to their goals and personal circumstances.

- Emotional wellbeing and motivational support
- Confidence-building and mindset coaching
- CV writing, transferable skills mapping and employment goal setting
- Access to adult learning courses and online training
- Volunteering taster sessions and warm introductions
- Travel planning and logistical support to attend activities
- Signposting to GPs, mental health services and bereavement counselling
- Ongoing collaboration with the voluntary sector, adult learning providers and local employers
- Mock interviews and panel interviews





Outcomes and case studies

While still early in its lifecycle, the pilot is already demonstrating tangible impact.

Employment gained (5 participants)

- Part-time customer service role
- Driver
- Warehouse operative
- Part-time role in logistics
- Part-time pastry chef

Volunteering pathways (10 participants)

- Allotment project | 3 participants engaged in weekly gardening sessions
- Farplace charity shop | 3 participants volunteering weekly
- Darlington Carnival 2025 | 4 participants helping design costumes and props

Creative self-employment

- One participant is publishing poetry and pursuing creative self-employment via a writing course through Etch.

Learning achievements

- Entry Level 3 in maths
- Level 1 in cyber security
- Level 1 in essential digital skills

Key observations



Low confidence areas:

Approaching employers | Discussing health conditions in work-related settings.



High confidence areas:

Group participation | Peer support | Adaptability when trust is established.

Challenges and learnings

Engagement challenges:

- Digital exclusion remains a key barrier for many participants.
- Health fluctuations (physical and mental) continue to disrupt sustained engagement.
- Complex life situations such as bereavement, housing insecurity and caring responsibilities require patient, flexible and trust-building approaches.



System learnings

- Digital access is foundational – providing devices and connectivity has transformed engagement.
- Flexible support delivery, including remote check-ins and participant-paced scheduling, remains critical.
- Integrated care through social prescribers and employment coaches is showing strong results.
- Community partnerships offer valuable low-barrier opportunities for re-engagement.

Recommendations and next steps

- Strengthen digital inclusion by securing sustainable pathways for devices and internet access.
- Deepen health integration, especially between mental health services, social prescribers and employment support.
- Widen community partnerships to include more employers, VCSE organisations and creative learning hubs.
- Regularly review and adapt delivery models to meet emerging participant needs and feedback.
- Exploring possibilities of working with the PCN around musculoskeletal (MSK) due to the high demand in the area.

Conclusion

The Future Grow Pilot continues to demonstrate a compassionate, holistic approach that addresses the multifaceted barriers faced by individuals far from the labour market.

Embedding the programme within primary care settings and focusing on whole-person support has led to early successes in employment, volunteering, learning and wellbeing. The added recent achievements, including new job starts, volunteering engagements and support for career shifts, underscore the pilot's adaptability and impact.

There is strong justification for ongoing investment and scaling, with a particular interest in exploring support around MSK conditions to further meet participant needs.