

# Pilot Evaluation Report

Steps Forward

January – October 2025

Wakefield and surrounding areas

28 young people received  
intensive support via the pilot

# Introduction

Triage's Steps Forward pilot was co-designed in partnership with Wakefield Council's Step-Up (Young People) employment team. This would be Triage's first provision in West Yorkshire – we wanted to self-fund a pilot to support young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) in Wakefield and continue our series of Impact Pilots with a place-based approach. Although the Council's Step-Up team has made considerable efforts to address worklessness in the area, in conjunction with local college offerings, a gap in provision persists. Some young people remain disconnected from local employment opportunities, and a major training provider had withdrawn from the area previously.



It was agreed that an experienced and highly qualified Triage Impact Key Worker would be based in Wakefield for an initial six-month period (later extended to nine months) to provide additional capacity to work with young people, particularly focusing on employer engagement and the generation of suitable employment opportunities.

Most young people referred faced complex social, emotional and economic barriers. With additional support from Triage's employer engagement team, we set out to support them to build trust and resilience and move towards and into work via clear progression pathways, with tailored support to address their mental health and wellbeing, confidence, and life skills.

ONS figures for July-September 2025 show the continuing persistence of the NEET problem in the UK, with 1 in 8 young people aged 16-24, almost one million, who are unemployed or economically inactive. In 2023, almost one out of every five (19.5%) young people who were NEET had a mental health condition, according to the Department for Education (DfE). Of the young people we supported in Wakefield, 42% identified as having mental ill health. ONS or DfE figures are not available for NEETs aged 16-24 in Wakefield. However, locally, it was indicated to us that Wakefield has thousands of young people not in employment, education or training, with a particular lack of 16+ options.

Recent data from the West Yorkshire Combined Authority states that young people aged 19-23 in West Yorkshire are less likely to have achieved a Level 2 qualification by the age of 19 than their national counterparts, with 76% of young people in Wakefield in this category compared to 80% nationally. This deficit at Level 2 feeds through into a wider gap at Level 3, with young people in Wakefield being 10 percentage points below the national average (49% compared to 59%) for Level 3 attainment.

In discussions held with Wakefield Council's Step-Up (Young People) Project Manager prior to the pilot starting, it was agreed that to deliver a successful pilot, Triage would need to effectively engage local employers and move young people into paid jobs, aiming for a total of 50% of young people completing the programme to progress to employment or training.

There was recognition that Triage were new to the area, offering time-limited provision, and that we were initially targeting young people in Hemsworth for whom travel and commuting were challenging, with a strong preference amongst residents to 'stay local' for job opportunities.

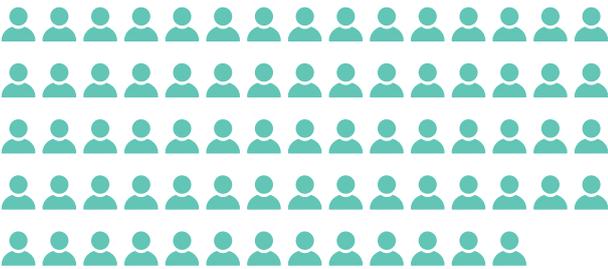
We were informed that a previous Step-Up contract supporting 850 young people had progressed 31% into employment and 52% into accredited or non-accredited training.

A year on from the start of Steps Forward, Triage have supported 36% of young people to progress to paid employment (with 80% sustainment for 3+ months), with 54% progressing into education or accredited training. Some young people accessed both options and/ or achieved more than one paid job.



**36%**

of young people progressed to paid employment



**80%**

sustained employment for more than three months

Overall, 86% of young people completing the pilot made positive progressions to employment, education or training, which is significantly ahead of the 50% target.



**54%**

of young people progressed into education or accredited training

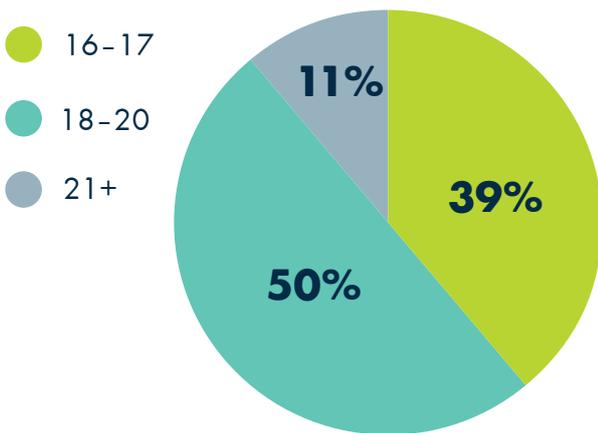
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# Profile of Young People

The pilot provided intensive support to 28 young people aged 16-24.

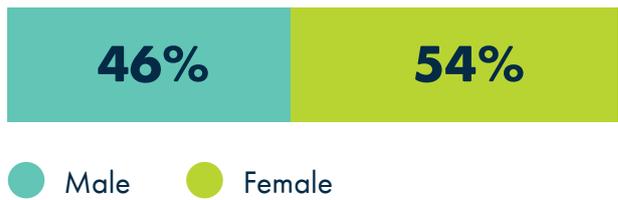
## Age range:



## Ethnic breakdown:



## Self-identified gender breakdown:



## Benefits:

**54%** were claiming Universal Credit

## NEET:

**2+** On average, each young person had been NEET for over 2 years, with the length of time out of employment, education or training ranging from 6 months to 7 years.

# Young People's Needs and Barriers

The young people we worked with in Wakefield had multiple and overlapping barriers to engaging in employment or training. These included:

- **Mental health needs** (42% of young people), including anxiety, depression and low self-esteem, impacting confidence, motivation and the ability to engage with mainstream employability programmes.
- **Trauma, chaotic home lives and adverse life experiences**, which had eroded trust and hindered engagement. 19% of young people presented with a history of complex trauma.
- **Neurodivergent conditions** (38% of young people), requiring adapted communication and learning approaches.
- **Learning needs** – some young people had learning difficulties and/or dyslexia.
- **Negative educational histories**, leading to low confidence in learning environments.
- **Caring responsibilities** (36%) – often on an informal basis, made it difficult for young people to find time and motivation to focus on their own progression into work or training.
- **Limited understanding of local employment opportunities** and minimal direct contact with employers. 84% of young people on the pilot reported **no prior work experience**. This lack of exposure created misconceptions about the world of work. We identified a mismatch between the jobs young people aspired to and the type of jobs available in the local labour market.



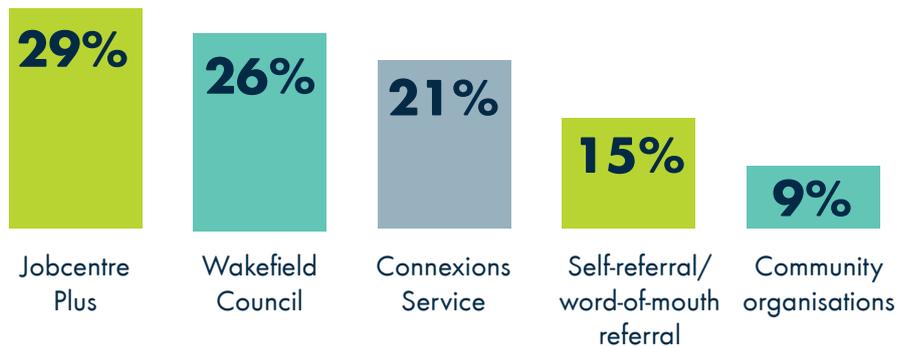
## Our support for neurodivergent young people

Our support for neurodivergent young people was designed to ensure they felt safe, understood and able to progress at their own pace. In practice this meant:

- **Slowing down** the structure of sessions, using clear language and avoiding jargon.
- Breaking down agreed tasks and actions into **smaller steps**.
- Gently and precisely **repeating key points** when needed and regularly checking for understanding without putting pressure on the young person.
- **Using visual aids**, written follow-ups and simple, clear, step-by-step instructions to support memory and processing, helping to avoid information overload.
- **Keeping support sessions predictable** – young people knew what to expect before each appointment, how long it would last and when conversations were coming to an end - important for some young people who benefited from clear time boundaries.
- **Meeting environments** avoided large or noisy settings, helping to reduce anxiety and support engagement.
- Offering **one-to-one coaching** as the primary mode of support. A number of young people did also successfully engage in group sessions when they felt ready.
- **Encouraging each individual** to express their preferences around communication methods, whether they needed extra time to respond and any support they needed to navigate online job platforms.

# Referral Sources

Young people were engaged via a diverse range of referral sources including:



Our Key Worker invested significant time in visiting local organisations and community centres to raise awareness of the support on offer. This multi-channel referral strategy allowed the programme to capture a broad spectrum of need, including individuals who had previously disengaged from mainstream provision.

In total, 28 young people received intensive support on the Steps Forward pilot on a 'roll-on/roll-off' basis. This number was slightly below expectations, with more resource required than originally envisaged to generate referrals onto the pilot.

# Engagement

Positive initial engagement of young people was key. Our delivery of the pilot via a full-time Key Worker, based in Wakefield Monday-Thursday, was concentrated in Hemsworth, Pontefract and Castleford, with additional access points in central Wakefield, ensuring coverage across areas of greatest need and high levels of deprivation. We co-located provision within known community-based settings e.g. Platform One in Hemsworth and The Hut in Castleford. This multi-site, flexible delivery model ensured accessibility for young people across the district, supported the generation of referrals, reduced travel barriers and embedded support within familiar, trusted spaces.

Our initial focus was on building trust with each young person, recognising that this was key to unlocking individual needs, barriers and progression pathways. We proactively sought to create a positive, relaxed and friendly atmosphere when meeting with young people. Support was adapted to individual circumstances at every stage, ensuring inclusivity and responsiveness. Delivery was entirely flexible, with appointment times and duration adapting to individual circumstances, rather than imposing rigid structures. Young people progressed at a pace to suit them.

Where appropriate and with the young person's consent, we involved and maintained contact with family members during pilot delivery, particularly for young people with autism and/or social anxiety. This took the form of accompaniment to initial appointments or 'keeping in touch' with progress updates provided to family members via phone calls and text messages.

## Our initial focus was on building trust with each young person

Six young people disengaged from the pilot (18% of referrals, all from different referral sources) – one moved away, and the remaining five did not want to progress after attending initial appointments. All young people who disengaged were White British, with five being male. Only one young person who disengaged was under 18, with 50% aged 21+. Of this group, we referred two young people to alternative mental health provision.



# Steps Forward Delivery

**Our menu of support, delivered to young people over 12 weeks on average, included:**

## 1 Intensive 1:1 coaching

Intensive 1:1 coaching to provide tailored guidance and build trusted relationships. This was led by our Key Worker, who has a Level 6 Information, Advice and Guidance qualification and extensive prior experience as a Careers Adviser with the National Careers Service. Conversations and support for young people were adapted to take account of diverse communication styles, learning preferences and confidence levels. Support included:

- **Confidence Building** – Helping participants overcome anxiety and self-doubt.
- **Goal Setting** – Developing realistic, personalised action plans aligned with aspirations and local labour market opportunities.
- **CV and Application Support** – Crafting tailored CVs and supporting letters, supporting with application forms for jobs and/or training and guiding participants through application processes to improve job search success.
- **Interview Preparation** – Using trauma-informed techniques to reduce stress and build readiness for employer interactions. Mock interviews were provided, using face-to-face, online and telephone methods. They involved different Triage colleagues to get young people used to dealing with different situations. The interview method was adapted to the job role that the young person was pursuing e.g. telephone mock interviews were used for those interested in call centre roles.

**Health and wellbeing support** was woven into delivery throughout each young person's time on the pilot. The main focus of our support was to build trust with each young person and to reduce anxiety and increase their self belief, using a mix of structured activities and responsive, relationship-based support. We found that targeted interventions focused on wellbeing and self-belief were required prior to young people engaging in job search in order to create a sense of readiness and resilience for the pursuit of progression routes.

Some examples of health and wellbeing activities undertaken:

- **Wellbeing coaching** within one-to-one appointments, including support to develop positive routines, self-care habits, stress-management techniques and coping strategies. All sessions were followed up with step-by-step instructions sent by email, for young people to refer back to.
- **Weekly check ins** exploring mood, stress levels, sleep, and motivation. If a young person didn't attend their face-to-face appointment, a check-in was conducted by phone to ensure they were ok, as well as rearrange appointments.
- **Goal setting conversations** using small, achievable steps that each young person was in control of, avoiding the feeling of being forced or pushed into something.
- **Space to talk through personal barriers** such as anxiety, low confidence, past negative experiences or situations they were currently going through.

- **Facilitating mindfulness and breathwork sessions** delivered outdoors in natural environments, using grounding and breathing techniques.
- **Discussions around healthy lifestyle choices** e.g. diet, exercise, sleep, stress reduction, and mood.
- **Signposting**, with warm handovers and initial accompaniment (if needed), to local mental health support e.g. Talking Therapies, Future SELPH and Turning Point provision and to local youth support organisations, GPs and community groups to reduce

isolation. We collated information on 40+ local organisations for signposting or referral purposes.

We provided gradual exposure to the pilot for young people with social anxiety e.g. initially meeting in a café close to their home, shorter initial meetings. Our Key Worker would attend workplace visits with young people if needed and be on-hand to reassure and encourage during job taster sessions.

Our approach ensured that every young person received bespoke guidance, addressing individual barriers before moving into group or employer-facing activities.

## 2 Group-based employability and health and wellbeing sessions

Group-based employability and health and wellbeing sessions were optional, with 46% of young people attending multiple sessions, 71% participating in at least one group wellbeing or confidence-building session and 29% of young people preferring only one-to-one support. Our group sessions were designed to provide a supportive environment to develop employability skills, peer support and motivation, with topics covering:

- **Job Search Skills** – Raising awareness of where to search for job vacancies, including accessing the hidden jobs market via networking/ utilising existing contacts and CV drops to employers.
- **Employer Expectations** – Insights into workplace behaviours, professionalism and performance standards.
- **Communication Skills** – Building confidence in verbal and non-verbal communication for interviews and workplace settings.

- **Career Exploration** – Introducing opportunities across key sectors such as **care, retail, agriculture, hospitality and self-employment**, broadening horizons and challenging misconceptions.
- **Practical numeracy skills development and awareness of money management** via separately funded Multiply provision, made available to young people accessing the pilot.
- **Confidence-building workshops**
  - **Team building activities** to encourage peer connections.
  - **Sessions on communication skills**, assertiveness, and managing nerves.
  - **Activities focused on strengths identification** and positive self talk.
  - **Creative sessions**, including using flip-charts, storytelling, and problem-solving games to build confidence in a low-pressure environment.
  - **'Check in circles'** at the start of group sessions to normalise talking about wellbeing.

### 3 Employer engagement activities

Recognising the importance of real-world exposure for young people, the programme embedded direct employer interaction through:

- **12-week Work Experience Placements and Volunteering Opportunities** to improve knowledge of working environments, increase skills, positive routines, experience and work readiness.
- **Workplace Visits** enabling young people to experience work environments first-hand and build confidence. Twenty young people benefitted from this activity, with one workplace visit resulting in a 12-week work placement. Other employers visited included:
  - Film studio
  - Hotel
  - Gym
  - Cafe
  - Bar
  - Wedding venue
  - School

**By combining wellbeing interventions with practical employability tools, Steps Forward provided a trauma-informed, safe and supportive environment where young people were able to rebuild confidence, develop resilience and take positive steps toward their future. The majority of young people received weekly support for 6-15 weeks, depending on their needs, whilst on the pilot.**



# Pilot Impact

The Steps Forward pilot delivered tangible, measurable outcomes for a cohort facing multiple and complex disadvantages and who, on average, had been NEET for over two years prior to receiving support from Triage. Beyond employment results, the programme achieved significant gains in confidence, wellbeing and progression readiness. The outcomes achieved by the 28 young people completing the pilot programme include:

**10 young people (36%) moved into paid employment**, securing 16 roles across sectors such as retail, hospitality, warehousing, care and agriculture, including one young person moving into self-employment as a Travel Consultant. One young person transitioned to a Warehouse Operative role and gained promotion to Section Leader within months.

**80% of young people have sustained their job for up to 9 months** (and counting!) – this is based on tracking completed by our Key Worker to January 2026.

**21 young people (75%) attended a job interview** (47 interviews attended in total), reflecting improved job readiness and employer engagement.

**3 young people benefitted from (unpaid) work experience placements** on their journey into work, including one young person accessing a Sector-based Work Academy Programme (SWAP) within a retail and warehousing environment.

**36%** of young people moved into paid employment

**80%** of young people have sustained their job for up to 9 months

**75%** of young people attended a job interview

**6 young people gained valuable volunteering experience** within charity shops, with 4 young people (66%) sustaining volunteering on a long-term basis whilst they apply for paid jobs. They report benefitting from increased structure to their day, reduced anxiety, greater confidence and communication skills, with the ability to settle more quickly in new environments.

**23 young people (82%) accessed whilst on the pilot and/or progressed to education or training**, including vocational courses, college study and various other accredited and non-accredited qualifications, with some young people achieving both employment and training outcomes. Progression routes included Wakefield College and Castleford College for various courses, including functional skills, with one young person progressing to a Level 2 Childcare course. One young person progressed to a Level 3 Diploma in Sports Coaching, one went on to train for their forklift licence and another enrolled at Leeds City College to study for five GCSEs including English, Maths and Science. 100% of young people sustained their progression to training or education with none dropping out of their course.

**Other progression routes**, particularly for young people engaging with the pilot at a later stage who were only able to access support over four weeks, included to longer-term employability programmes e.g. Restart or to specialist mental health support e.g. via Turning Point.

**3** young people benefitted from (unpaid) work experience placements

**6** young people gained valuable volunteering experience

**23** accessed whilst on the pilot and/or progressed to education or training

# Participant feedback

In addition, young people demonstrated significant improvements in personal development and employability skills, self-measured on a scale of 1-5 at the start and end of the pilot (1 = low, 5 = high).

**On average, each young person reported an improvement in their score by 1-2 points on the scale as follows:**

Category	Initial average score	End average score
How would you rate your overall confidence?	2	4
How motivated do you feel to better yourself?	2	3
How confident do you feel in a group setting?	2	4
How do you rate your ability to deal with change?	2	4
How open are you to training or upskilling?	3	4
How do you rate your employability skills?	3	4
How much do you know about effective job search techniques?	2	4
Do you feel confident approaching employers?	2	4
How would you rate your CV?	2	3
How prepared do you feel to start work?	2	3

# Stakeholder feedback

“

Triage have been great to work with, particularly Tom (Innovation Manager) and Kerry (Wakefield-based Key Worker). Whilst being both incredibly flexible and amenable, they have also demonstrated clear experience of working with young people as well as fellow stakeholders. This has been evidenced in the number of young people they have engaged with as well as the variety of suitable outcomes they have supported them into, be that employment, training, volunteering or education. The positivity with which Triage embraced the opportunity to come into Wakefield and support Step-Up and wider residents should be commended. Despite the occasional logistical challenge, the team have persevered and shown admirable commitment in supporting those referred to them to achieve. They have been a most useful partner and it would be great to keep working alongside them to enable the young people of Wakefield to fulfil their potential. ”

**Paul Gribbon, Project Manager,  
Step-Up (Young People), Wakefield  
Council, September 2025**

“

I would like to thank the (Triage) team for the support you've provided to the young people I referred to you. In an area where resources for the NEET group are limited, your responsiveness and commitment have been invaluable. Not only have you helped them explore opportunities, but the practical advice you've delivered has empowered them to take meaningful steps forward. Your guidance has given them a clearer understanding of what options are available and supported them to navigate those options. Thank you for being such a reliable and supportive presence in the Southeast of Wakefield. From my visit, last week, it was clear that you genuinely care about the young people you work with. Thank you for being such a reliable and impactful presence. ”

**Lesley Needham, Digital Careers  
Adviser, Connexions Wakefield,  
May 2025**

# Challenges and Lessons Learned

While the Steps Forward pilot achieved strong outcomes, delivery highlighted several challenges that shaped our learning and inform our recommendations for future provision. These challenges underscore the complexity of supporting young people with multiple barriers and the need for integrated, flexible models of support.

## 1 Mental Health and Anxiety

- **Impact:** Anxiety affected interview attendance, commitment to sessions and social confidence, even among young people who were otherwise job-ready.
- **Learning:** Building readiness often required extended timeframes, with some individuals needing many weeks of confidence-building before engaging with employers.
- **Recommendation:** Embed mental health support and therapeutic interventions alongside employability coaching, ensuring participants receive holistic support from a trusted source.

## 2 Limited Entry-Level Roles in Key Sectors

Gaps in entry-level roles were particularly evident in mechanics, construction and skilled trades, where local vacancies were scarce and often required prior experience.

- **Impact:** Participants aspiring to these sectors faced frustration and disengagement, as realistic pathways were limited.

- **Learning:** There is a need for stronger employer partnerships and pre-apprenticeship routes in these sectors to bridge the gap between aspiration and opportunity.
- **Recommendation:** Future programmes could explore sector-specific academies, work tasters and employer-led training pipelines to create viable entry points.



### 3 Trauma-Related Disengagement

- **Impact:** Despite initial engagement, some young people affected by trauma were unable to sustain participation, highlighting the fragility of progress when underlying issues aren't addressed.
- **Learning:** Employability alone cannot resolve deep-rooted trauma; without embedded therapeutic pathways, disengagement risk remains high. During pilot delivery, we adjusted our approach to allow for a more gradual onboarding process for young people with high anxiety or low confidence, creating a two-week "pre-pilot" phase of informal sessions, activities focused on self-belief, resilience and trust-building. This phased approach helped to ensure that young people were emotionally ready to engage, reducing dropout risk and improving long-term outcomes.
- **Recommendation:** Subject to funding, future delivery should build in extended engagement timeframes and build referral routes to specialist trauma support, ensuring participants have access to clinical or therapeutic interventions alongside employability coaching.

The pilot reaffirmed that employment support for vulnerable young people must be holistic and flexible. Success depends on addressing mental

health needs, building confidence gradually and creating realistic progression routes that align with aspirations and local labour market realities.

Subject to funding, we would look to enhance future programmes of this nature via:

- **Digital Engagement:** Developing an online platform for resources, job alerts and virtual workshops to reach young people unable to attend in person (or lacking confidence to attend).
- **Employer-Led Academies:** Co-design short, sector-specific training programmes with local businesses to create direct routeways into work.
- **Peer Mentoring:** Train successful alumni to act as mentors, providing relatable role models to support programme engagement.
- **Mid-long-term Tracking** of young people to support sustained employment and training outcomes (and support to move from training completion into employment). Whilst outcomes have been tracked to January 2026, sustainable funding for the pilot has not been secured, and staffing resource has been diverted to other Triage contracts.



# Case Study

## From high-risk behaviours to self-employment...

One young person, 'B', aged 17 at referral, presented with significant and complex barriers. She had been involved in county lines activity, substance misuse and criminal behaviour since the age of 13. At 14, she had run away to London, before later returning to Wakefield. When referred to the pilot, she was planning to relocate to Turkey upon turning 18 to meet someone she had connected with online. This young person was initially highly guarded and distrustful of services, requiring a patient, step-by-step approach to identify her needs and to share information on the support available.

To enhance B's wellbeing, we signposted her to several local specialist services, including Turning Point, Wakefield Inspiring Recovery, Future SELPH and local leisure services.

Our employability support included CV adaptation, confidence-building, interview preparation and job search guidance. To raise awareness of working environments, we helped her to secure a stock assistant role within a hospice charity shop in Hemsworth.

**After 12 weeks of intensive 1:1 support and progression in line with her action plan, B demonstrated significant improvement in skills, confidence and motivation.**

During our meetings with B, we identified her love of travel and supported her transition into self-employment as a Travel Consultant – a major milestone given her initial distrust and high-risk behaviours. B sourced online training to increase her sector knowledge, including completing the required ABTA Knowledge as well as attending in-person learning seminars. Alongside this, she works as a Warehouse Operative, which boosts her income and her work experience.

B opted to remain on our caseload and would dip-in and out for support when needed, receiving 21 one-to-one sessions in total. The Steps Forward pilot helped B to rediscover her potential and build a new future that she's proud of.

B has said she would not be where she is today without the help and support she received and is very grateful for all the hard work and support around her to help her carve out her career plans. She is in a much better place in herself and has never felt more confident!

# Case Study

## Building confidence within working environments...

One young man 'U', aged 20, is autistic and often finds social interactions difficult – especially with unfamiliar people. Upon referral, his confidence was low, and despite having completed an admin-based work placement at college, he couldn't picture himself stepping into employment. Interviews felt overwhelming and the idea of working regularly seemed out of reach. U's uncertainty about his future, combined with limited work experience and no formal qualifications in English or IT, made the path ahead feel daunting.

Our consistent weekly support for U focused on a number of areas:

- Interview Preparation: Role-play sessions to reduce anxiety and build confidence.
- Job Search: Tailored searches for roles aligned with his interests.
- Functional Skills development: Supported English literacy and completed the Multiply Money Management course to improve financial awareness.
- Attending workplace visits, including to a local hotel complex.
- Participation in group-based wellbeing and mindfulness sessions.

U's confidence flourished gradually through positive experiences like the money management training, CV development, and supported introductions to employers. We were able to create a flexible, low pressure environment where U could build confidence, develop skills, and move forward in a way that felt manageable for him.

U successfully secured a part-time voluntary role at the British Heart Foundation charity shop. Now volunteering five days a week, he has flourished, chatting confidently with customers, handling transactions, and contributing meaningfully to the in-store team. His ability to converse freely and serve the public with ease is a testament to his personal growth.

**Through this experience, U has gained valuable life and work skills, built a stronger sense of independence, and laid the foundation for future employment.**

# Case Study

## From feeling sheltered to beginning college

When X first joined Steps Forward, he was a quiet, anxious 16 year old who had been home schooled for years and had never experienced a workplace, a classroom environment, or even independent travel. Autism and social anxiety made new situations feel overwhelming, and he relied heavily on his parents, who accompanied him to his early appointments. With no work experience, no qualifications, no CV, and no clear idea of what he wanted to do, X was unsure where to start and unsure of his own abilities.

Through encouraging, consistent one-to-one support with the Triage Key Worker, X began to grow in ways that surprised even him. He worked on his anxiety and found calming mechanisms in one-to-one sessions - learning breathwork, grounding techniques and mindfulness exercises he had never heard of before but could now use on his own to calm himself in stressful situations.

X built his first CV and tailored cover letter with the help of his Key Worker, completed several online courses to boost his confidence and skills in subjects such as Maths, English and Adolescent Mental Health, and even attended group workshop sessions - something he never imagined he could do. With support from a Travel Trainer he was referred to, he learned to navigate bus journeys independently.

By the end of the pilot, X had secured a place at Wakefield College on the FLEX VOTE (Vocational Options, Tasters and Employability) 1-year programme; giving him structure, routine and a clear path forward to build upon.

**By the end of the pilot, X had secured a place at Wakefield College.**

# Case Study

## From isolation to aspiration...

When H joined the Steps Forward programme she was facing more barriers than most young people her age. At just 16 she had no qualifications, no work experience, and no social connections outside her home. Newly arrived in the UK only a few months earlier, she didn't know the area, didn't have friends, and spent most days babysitting her younger siblings while her parents worked long hours. With no routine, no opportunities to get out of the house, and no clear path forward, H felt stuck and cut off from the world around her.

**With guidance and consistent support, H slowly began to build plans for her future, alongside gentle encouragement to get herself more involved in her local community on days she was free of babysitting.**

Along with her Key Worker, H attended meetings to get involved in local youth groups, female-only classes, and things she could do at home to help herself move forward, such as online free learning platforms to explore short courses.

She began to explore career ideas and this ignited a spark - looking at the possibility of nursing discovered through a passion for medicine inspired by her Mum's own career. H also began attending group-based workshops along with her one-to-one sessions, learning through face-to-face money-management training, then moving onto complete a level 1 Introduction to Nursing course online.

Together she and her Key Worker mapped out a realistic route into healthcare, starting with the basics: gaining the required GCSEs. H enrolled at Leeds City College to study five GCSEs - a huge milestone for someone who once felt she had no way forward. She now has structure, purpose, a new social circle of people her own age, and a starting point on a pathway into the medical field she dreams of.

# Case Study

## From setbacks to promotion at work...

D was referred to Triage's pilot programme feeling stuck and frustrated. He'd narrowly failed his CSCS test after paying for it himself, struggled with maths, was vaping constantly to the point of making himself ill, and often felt overwhelmed by anxiety and disrupted sleep. Apprenticeships felt out of reach, job applications were confusing, and the constant knockbacks were chipping away at his confidence. Even when opportunities came up, his motivation wavered and his sleep pattern made early starts difficult.

Over time, with steady one to one support, things began to shift. Through the help of his dedicated Key Worker, D had new CVs and tailored cover letters focusing on different sectors of interest, explored differing ideas for work he'd not considered before, and enrolled on a Level 2 Business Admin course to broaden his options. His health issues were addressed gently and slowly, by encouraging D to reduce his reliance on vaping. This succeeded in D only vaping a few times a day, getting a better sleep pattern, learning and practising new ways to calm himself (through breathing exercises and short mindfulness sessions) and being in better physical and mental health overall.

D kept showing up to weekly sessions, kept trying, and eventually applied for a warehouse role with the help of his Key Worker at Bookers, just five minutes from home. After careful interview preparation he secured the job, and discovered that he could fit into night shifts. Working alongside his parents at the same facility gave him a soft landing (along with handy lifts to and from work), but he quickly carved out his own space, made new friends, and proved himself on the job.

**His hard work paid off, and he went on to be promoted into a new department with better-suited shift patterns; a huge step for someone who once doubted he could get a foot in the door. D's journey shows what persistence, support, and self belief can unlock, even when the starting point feels tough.**

# Conclusion

The Steps Forward pilot has demonstrated that personalised, trauma-informed employability support is not just effective - it is essential for young people facing complex and overlapping barriers and long-term exclusion from the labour market. By integrating wellbeing, confidence-building and employer engagement, the programme has delivered measurable, impactful outcomes, with 86% of young people achieving progression to paid employment and/or education and training.

This pilot proves that traditional, one-size-fits-all approaches are insufficient. Steps Forward offers a scalable, evidence-based model that addresses the root causes of disengagement - mental health challenges, trauma and lack of confidence - while creating real, sustainable pathways into work and education.

We hope the effective delivery model evidenced above, the positive outcomes achieved and the learning from the pilot can feed into wider local, regional and national initiatives such as the

Government's Youth Guarantee and forthcoming Jobs Guarantee pilots. **The Jobs Guarantee is aimed at young people on Universal Credit for 18 months – some 68% of referrals to our Steps Forward pilot had been NEET for 18 months or more, with some young people being long-term NEET for 3-7 years.**

Of the young people progressing from the pilot to work, training or education outcomes, 75% had been NEET for over 18 months (with 56% claiming Universal Credit). Of this sub-cohort, 28% secured paid employment and 56% progressed to education or training, which we hope will lead to future employment outcomes. This shows that with the right holistic support long-term NEETS, regardless of whether they are claiming Universal Credit or not, can achieve positive outcomes and increase their long-term prospects. Additionally, more funding is needed outside of the Jobs Guarantee for intensive and holistic support for more young people to reach their potential.



# Return on Investment

The Steps Forward pilot, providing intensive support to 28 young people, cost Triage £52,479 to deliver, which includes higher than average staff expenditure (due to the costs of hotels, meals and travel expenses for non-Wakefield based staff delivering the pilot).

**The cost equates to:**

- £1,874 per young person receiving support from Triage, including health and wellbeing support, confidence building and employability skills.
- 24 young people who completed the pilot (86%) achieved paid employment and/or education or training progression at a cost of £2,187 each.

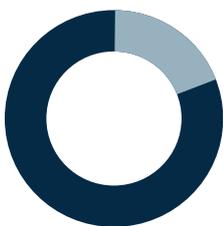
Intensive support to 28 young people cost

**£52,479**

The cost equates to

**£1,874**

per young person



**86%**

of young people who completed the pilot achieved paid employment and/or education or training progression

The Learning & Work Institute (L&W) has reported that being NEET for a sustained period has long-term “scarring” effects on young people’s future employment prospects and earnings – and by extension on the economy. Modelling by L&W estimates substantial long-term economic costs associated with rising youth unemployment and inactivity, such as reduced lifetime earnings and lower tax contributions. Persistent NEET status is linked to worse outcomes later in life, associated with poor health outcomes and social exclusion.

**Independent research cited by Policy Connect and the Skills Commission in May 2025 suggests that:**

**Each young person who becomes NEET may cost the UK economy over £100,000 in lost productivity, earnings and increased costs of support.**

Therefore, Triage’s time-limited pilot, costing £52,479, has potentially saved the UK economy

**£2.4m**

over time – by providing support, opportunity and positive progression outcomes to 24 young people.

# Why are Triage delivering Impact Pilots?

Triage has chosen to invest in a dedicated team to deliver Impact Pilots, enabling us to test 'what works' for key priority groups who need additional support to access employment or progress to other positive destinations. Pilots enable us to be flexible and creative, outside of some of the parameters of our other contracted provision.

Each pilot is carefully designed, monitored and evaluated, with participant feedback built in, enabling us to tweak the delivery model to best meet individual needs. Each pilot aligns with the ambitions of the Government and devolved authorities to provide tailored interventions to support the achievement of an 80% employment target.

## Our other pilots have supported:

- Inmates within a prison setting and ex-offenders
- Older jobseekers aged 50+
- People with disabilities via a supported employment model
- People with mental health needs and long-term health conditions referred by GP practices and Social Prescribers
- Young people seeking to enter the tech sector

## Further information

For more information, including outcomes from our other pilots, please contact:

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