



The **STEP** Programme

Steps Towards Eradicating Poverty

(People led, Strength based and Connected)

October 2024

Evaluation of Reaching Communities National Lottery Funded Programme



Conducted by



COMPASS

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS LTD

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Glossary

BWA	Bangladeshi Women's Association
CCP	Compass Community Partnerships Ltd
JPCC	Jubilee Park Community Centre
TMCC	Tipton Muslim Community Centre
SMBC	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Executive Summary

The STEP programme has made a significant impact in each of the 101 sample clients examined within this report.

Access to both centres was equal, with the staff in both venues highly valued for the time and effort they gave. Comments reflected the ethos of the support, with the reflection that clients were listened to and taken seriously. This was also reflected in the stakeholder workshop.

The service ran through the Covid 19 pandemic, and also reflected the principles discovered during the pandemic in relation to vaccination roll out, that is, that trusted people in accessible venues are at the heart of effective service delivery.

The age profile of clients shows accessibility was greater from the older end of the age spectrum with 51% being aged 55 or older and only 27% being aged under 45.

Clients identified a range of needs and issues, with lack of employment and the consequences of that leading to food poverty and debt. Access to both employment and benefits was hampered by a lack of digital skills which the programme sought to address. There was a significant number of clients reflecting mental health issues with clients at the older end of the age spectrum identifying loneliness and isolation. Impact was clearly being made in reducing this with 93% strongly agreeing they felt more part of the community as a result of the services received.

The opportunity to be a part of the allotment group and the community kitchen were highlighted as places where new friendships were formed.

The support package most accesses was in relation to advice, information and guidance which included income maximisation from entitled benefits and made significant progress in reducing the level of unclaimed benefits. The total amount recorded for the 71 clients where an amount was identified was just under £700,000.

56% of clients said they felt more confident in handling family finances and 48% having their confidence raised in relation to earning a living.

The value to the clients was also recorded in terms of support areas and emotional impact as well as financial. Finance, personal support, learning and friendship development were identified as the top four areas.

The top two areas of emotional impact related to a sense of gratitude and thankfulness, especially towards the staff team, again emphasising the value of trusted people in accessible venues.

The stakeholder workshop confirmed the trends emerging through the evaluation forms, recognising the access to support through local venues and trusted staff (with sufficient time) was essential for effective delivery. Clients also stated that it took courage to ask for help.

In terms of future working, the holistic approach was seen to be effective, recognising that multiple issues will impact on individuals and families. Additionally, a greater emphasis on young people and young adults was needed, reflecting client group accessing this programme.

Background

The STEP programme was funded in 2019 for five years via the National Lottery “Reaching Communities” programme.

The picture of poverty in Tipton is one where there are a significant number of families facing deep seated deprivation. Tipton is one of the lowest paid towns in Sandwell and half of Tipton’s Lower Super Output Areas fall in the worst 10% most deprived in England. Historically, an additional social aspect is a pocket of far-right political extremism that impacts on community cohesion. There is no doubt that this, coupled with the challenges of lack of opportunities, complex and multi-faceted needs contribute significantly to the fact that families in Tipton suffering from severe poverty.

For the families in Tipton, poverty means being reliant on welfare benefits, not being able to get a job, heat their home, pay rent, or buy the essentials for their children. Members of Tipton families whom we have worked with over the years have told us that they wake up every day facing insecurity, uncertainty, and impossible decisions about money. For many families especially, those who represent the BME Groups, poverty means facing marginalisation – and even discrimination – because of their financial circumstances.

The constant stress of poverty overwhelms them, affecting them emotionally and depriving them of the chance to play a full part in society. The reality is, almost everyone in Tipton experience poverty and it is wasting their potential, depriving Tipton economy of the skills and talents of those who have valuable contributions to make.

The most recent Sandwell Trends real time data demonstrates that the pattern of poverty in Tipton is complex and intricate and unlike other neighbouring towns and because of the intricate nature of deprivation in Tipton, a very tailored and community led approach such as the STEP Project is needed to target the core roots and pockets of poverty in Tipton.

The project also had the challenge of steering its way through the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Programme Aspects

Under the leadership of the Bangladeshi Women's Association (BWA), this initiative was developed as a result of findings through a previously funded Tipton Communities Connected programme, building on the established working practice through two local community centres, recognising that the principle of 'trusted people in trusted places' is core to successful delivery.

The comprehensive range of aspects of the programme sought to address presented needs and other issues arising from client interviews.

Free & open access to local community hubs (Tipton Muslim Community Centre & Jubilee Park Centre)

Improvements to community well-being; reducing poverty & retaining financial independence for families experiencing poverty in Tipton; creating employment opportunities for the long-term unemployed; improved local physical environment; increasing participation in or engagement of families with local community centres and activities; developing a positive experience in life for everyone.

Triage Assessment of Poverty & Deprivation

Increased involvement of families experiencing poverty in identifying issues from the start & making informed decisions about taking an early action ensuring that families are ready for everything and work to create a socially/economically better future for everyone in the family.

Advice and Information & referrals on welfare rights, debts & housing

Increased access to high quality information and advice for families experiencing poverty; helping to make well informed choices; improved access to welfare entitlements; preventing families from falling into arrears or debts and securing affordable and suitable housing for all.

Financial Literacy and Management Workshops

Increased confidence of families experiencing poverty about financial knowledge; better understanding of lifetime income streams; better management of debts and arrears; and getting families out of deep financial trouble over their lifetimes.

Employability and Entrepreneurship

Increased confidence, self-esteem, positive attitude & employability for the long-term unemployed experiencing poverty being ready for work; entering and retaining paid employment; creating passion and talent based enterprises; & developing a long-term financial independence.

Community Centre Based - Community Kitchen

Improvements in well-being for families experiencing poverty; enabling families from different cultures spending time together in doing things they enjoy and benefit from; learning from each other on producing affordable and healthy food; building social networks and friendship and making life better for everyone.

Compass Community Partnerships Ltd (CCP) was commissioned to conduct an independent evaluation of this programme.

Evaluation methodology

This evaluation is based on

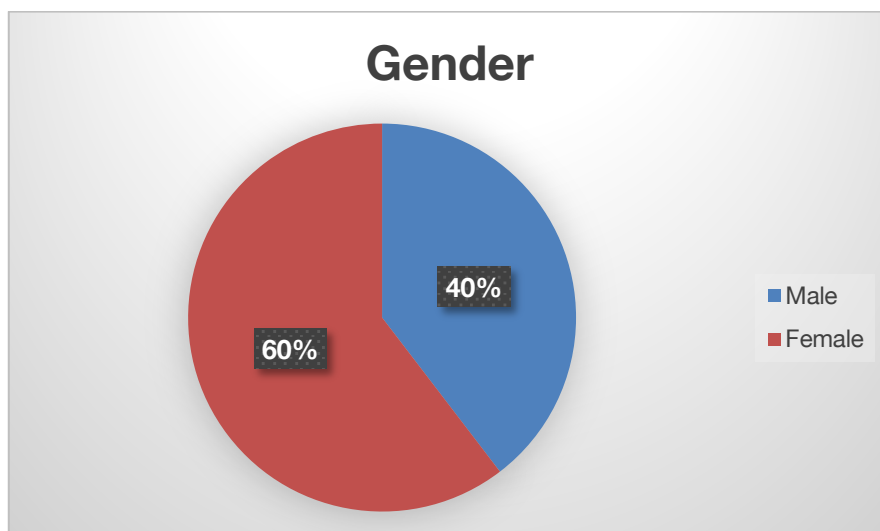
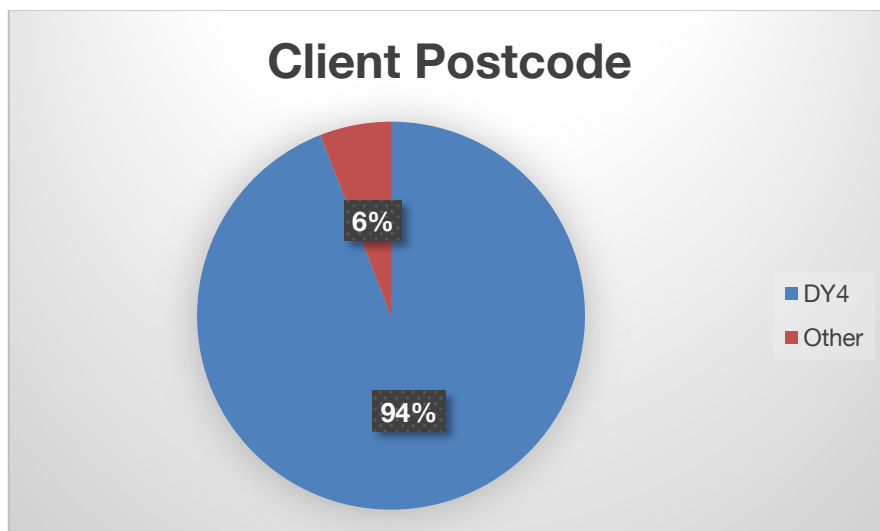
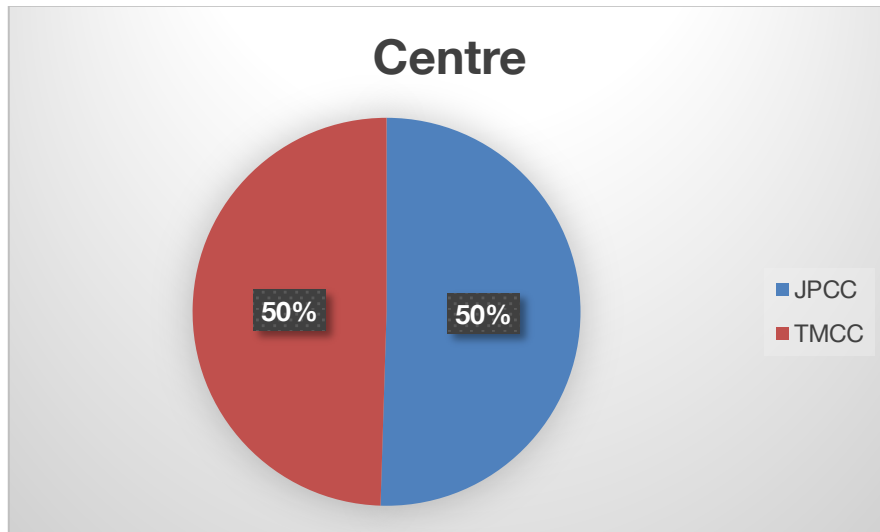
- Information gleaned from 101 extensive registration, monitoring and evaluation forms (appended as a separate document)
- A stakeholder workshop (12th September 2024)
- A podcast (recorded 30th September 2024) with
 - Syeda Khatun (Chief Executive, Bangladeshi Women's Association)
 - Harj Ganger (Centre Manager, Jubilee Park Community Centre)
 - Raj Chande (Welfare Rights specialist)

Consideration has been given to:

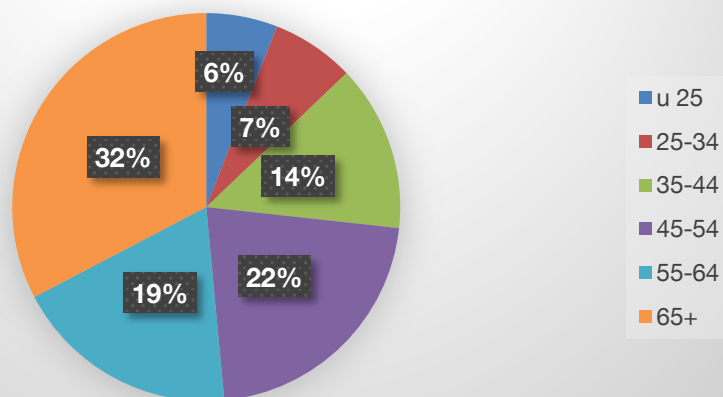
- Demographic spectrum achieved (gender, age, ethnicity, religion, disability and location)
- Access to the two community hubs
- The presented needs and issues by clients
- Access to the various aspects of the support plan
- Assessment of the services by clients
- The financial value to clients
- The personal value to clients
- The emotional response by clients to the services received
- The impact on clients' confidence regarding financial management and employability
- The sense of belonging to the community by clients

The registration, monitoring and evaluation form is appended below.

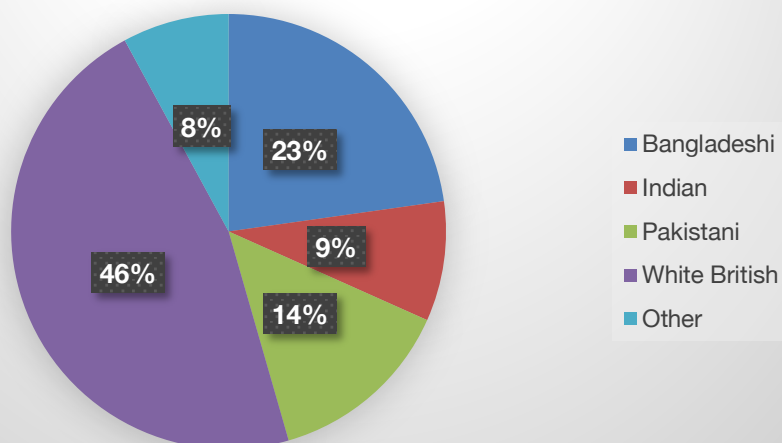
Demographic Information



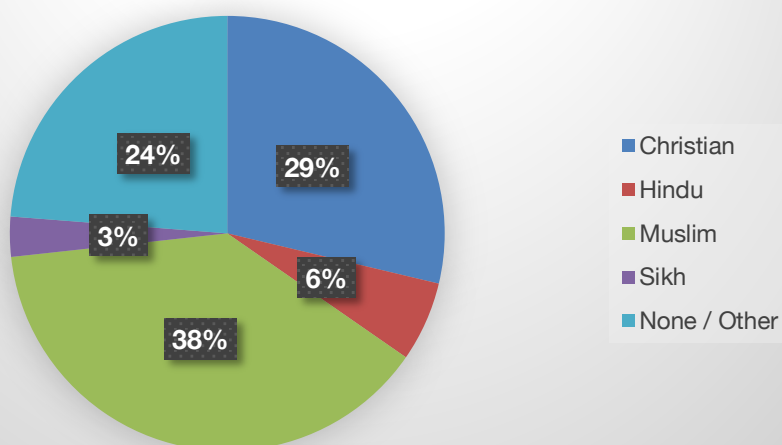
Age



Ethnicity



Religion

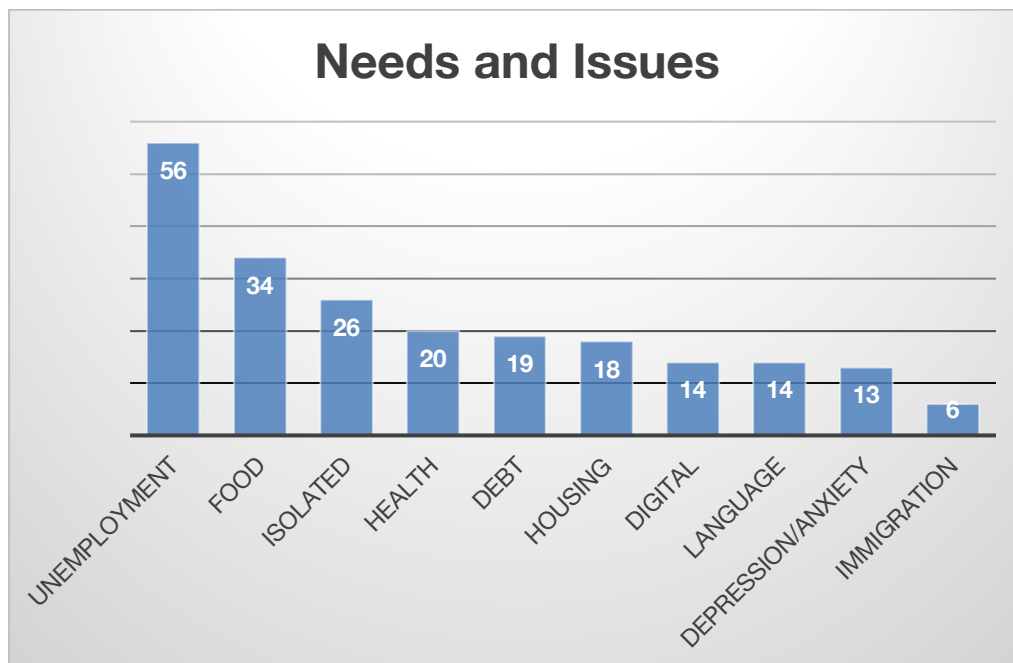


Triage of Needs and Issues

Each client was asked for a response to each of the following areas:

- *Are you currently employed? What is the level of unemployment in your family? If employment level is low, please explain why.*
- *Do you and the members of your family have the necessary qualifications, training and skills to secure employment? If not, what has been the barriers?*
- *Are you and the members of your family happy with your current housing needs? If not, please explain why?*
- *Do you and the members of your family have adequate income? Do you receive all your welfare entitlements? If not, please explain why?*
- *Do you or members of your family suffer from debts? If so, how are you managing your debts?*
- *Do you or members of your family struggle to get enough to eat? Do you access food bank? Do you spend more than 10% of your income on fuel payment?*

The responses are summarised in the following table outline the presented and underlying needs and issues. Most clients presented several needs and underlying issues.



The needs and issues are also reflected in the following word cloud



Support Packages

Each client was offered to opportunity to benefit from each of the following support packages:

1) Advice Information and guidance.

- Income Maximisation.
- Debts Consolidation.
- Housing Issues.

2) Employability and Entrepreneurship.

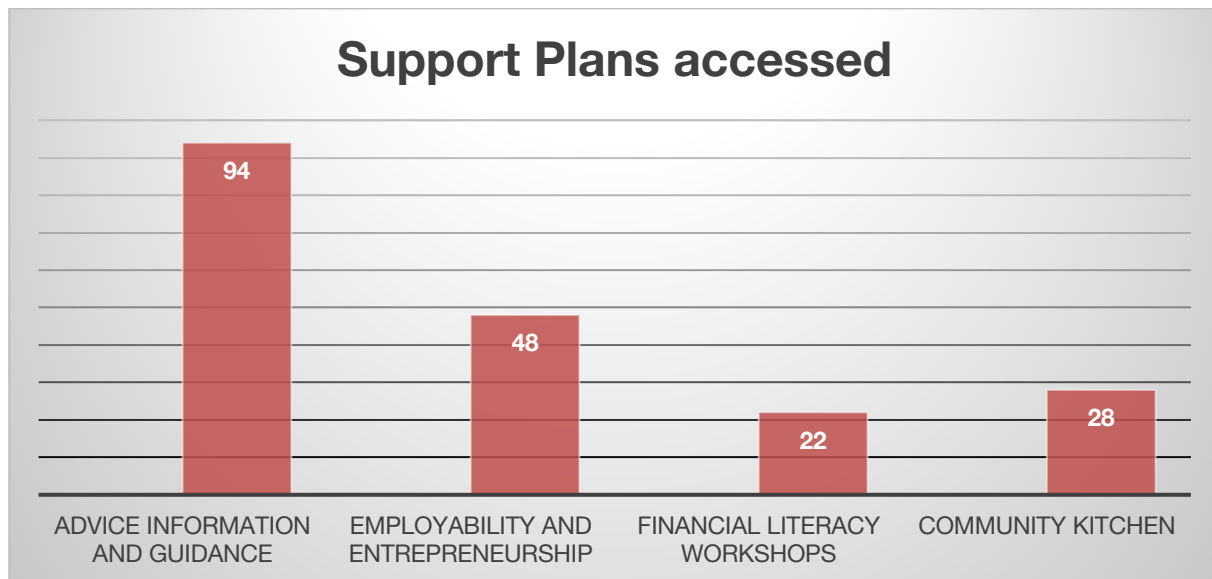
- CV Writing.
- Job Search.
- Job Application.
- Work Trials /Volunteering.
- Business Start-Up Training.

3) Financial Literacy Workshops.

- Financial Planning.
- Debt Management.

4) Community Kitchen.

- Healthy Cooking.



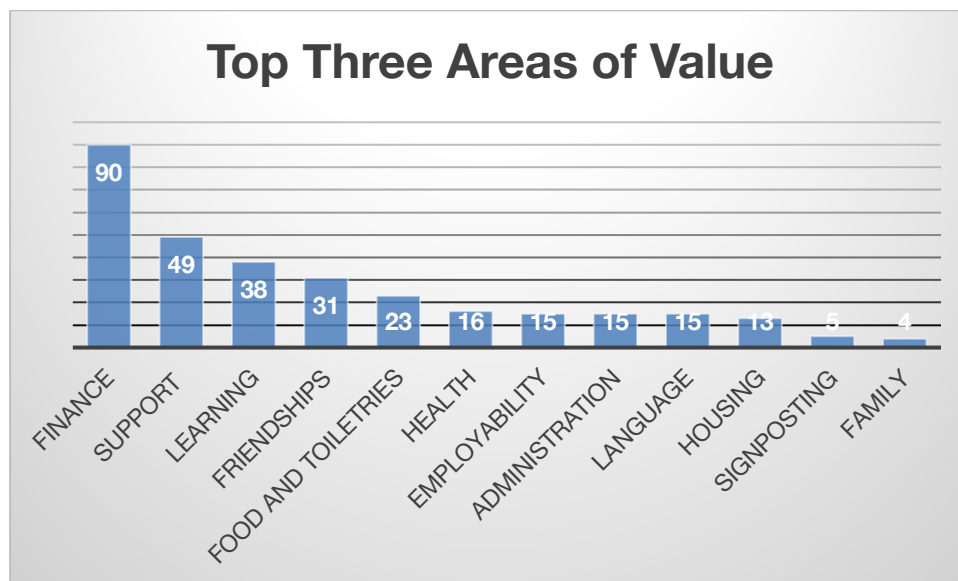
Value to Clients

The **Financial Value** was estimated as part of the evaluation process, based on access to benefits and other resources. This was reflected in 71 of the evaluation forms out of 101.

The total value to clients was just under **£700k** (£699,727), with an average of just under **£10k** (£9,855) across the 71 beneficiaries where an amount was recorded.

This ranged from £55 to £39,438.

The **Support Value** is reflected in the chart below. This was compiled based on the feedback from the clients as to the three top areas of value for them.

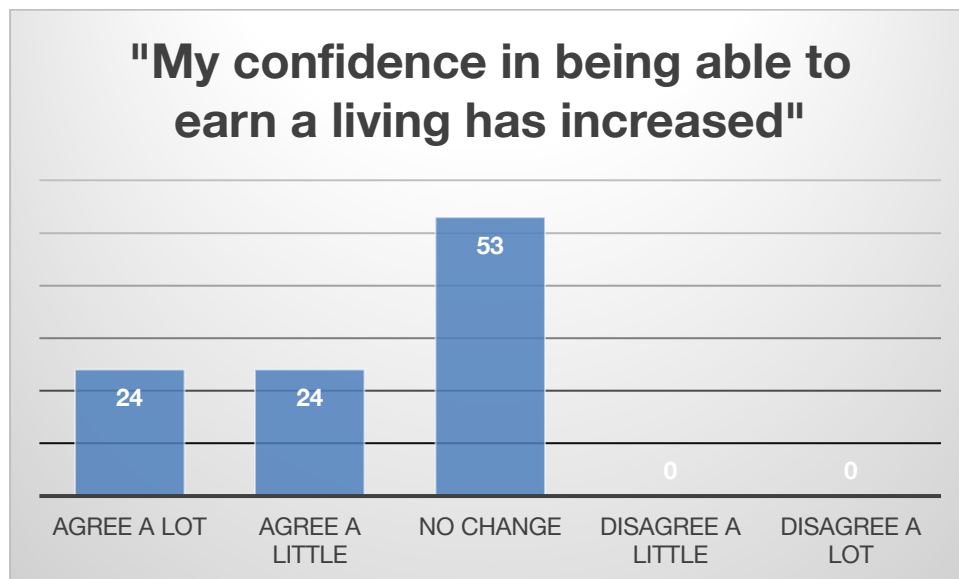
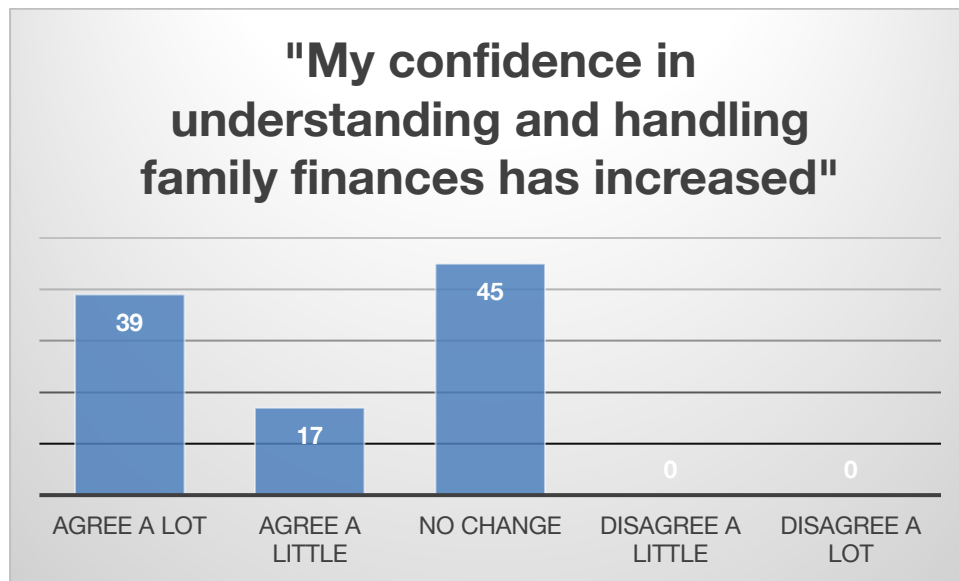


There is also an **Emotional Value** for the clients reflecting how they felt with regard to the support they had received. The chart below is based on their comments in the evaluation forms.



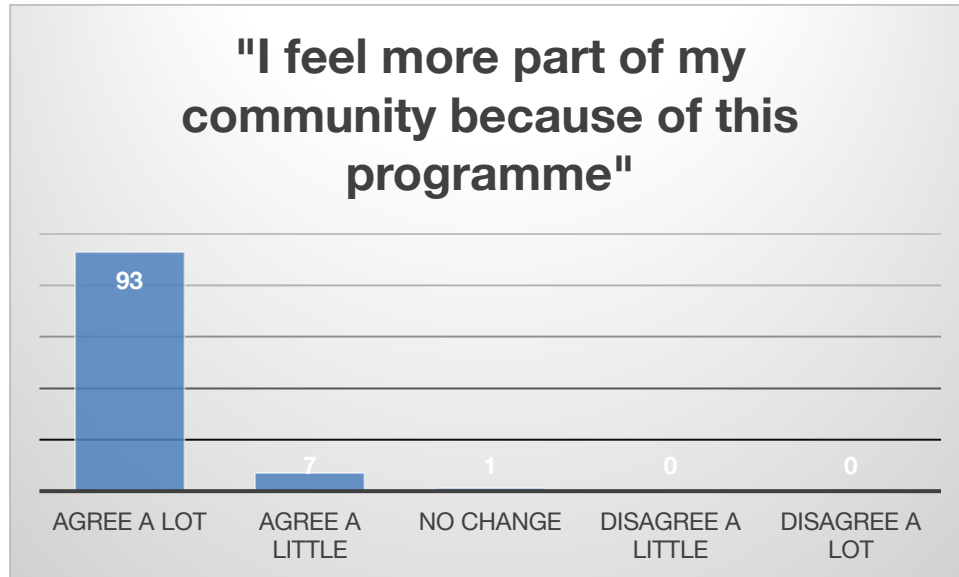
Increased Confidence

Each client was asked to respond to the questions in the boxes below. There was no disagreement with the statement from any of the 101 clients whose forms were assessed.



Sense of Community

Each client was also asked to respond with regard to their sense of being part of the community. This is reflected through a reduction in loneliness and isolation and an increase in volunteering. 100 people out of the 101 assessed said they felt more part of their community as a result of being part of the programme.



Stakeholder Workshop

This workshop was held on the 12th September 2024 and attended by approximately 30 people, with a mixture of beneficiaries, support workers, external stakeholders and funders.

The purpose of the workshop was not only to capture insight as to the value of the STEP programme, but also record aspects of learning that will help shape future delivery.



Those attending were presented with an overview of the programme. In the picture below the phrase on an Orange background reflects the presented needs and issues. The words on the Green and Yellow backgrounds reflect the support responses. The words on the pink background reflect the responses from beneficiaries.



Attendees were then asked to think of stories to capture best practice, core values and the need for change.

“Brilliant work goes on every day to support people in the STEP programme, in our communities, in groups or one-to-one, by those paid, volunteers or neighbours, etc. You may have a great story to tell of good work in supporting those who are most vulnerable and in need. These are examples that can inspire us and help us work out the kind of places we would like our communities to be, the kind of values we want our communities to have, and the way we would like to feel as we live in them”.

Attendees identified the following (arranged alphabetically)

Keys to success:

- Approachability – removing the stigma of asking for help
- Being listened to, developing confidence and signposting to key organisations
- BWA and Local Authority working together for positive outcomes
- Community based activity
- Connected services
- Enabling people to become involved and volunteer at their own pace – building confidence that opens doors to other support
- Having more confidence within the community – different motivators around me
- Holistic approach
- Kindness, care and sincerity of the staff
- Made to feel important - personal touch - being listened to
- Mental health support
- Opportunities for new families – providing childcare
- Residents upskilling and, in some cases, receiving digital equipment
- Signposting to specialist services
- Support for digital inclusion and skills development
- Support from key people on a regular basis
- Support to families experiencing domestic and mental abuse.
- Team going above and beyond to help people access the services they need
- The Jubilee Community Centre
- The opportunity for someone to socialise and make friends – reducing isolation
- The opportunity to learn English – leading to the confidence to come out more
- Warm welcome – open door policy – personal touch

Core Values:

- Being able to support urgently / immediately
- Being trustworthy and listening – and allowing people to express feelings
- Honesty and character of a person with a positive outlook on life
- I was feeling helpless after a health scare – pleased I asked for support
- Increase in confidence through developed language skills
- [Named person] a ‘total miracle in an amazing centre’ helping people be better
- Not being afraid to ask for help
- Not holding yourself back through fear
- The ability to take time to listen to people and find a solution together
- The commitment of learners
- The courage it took to ask for help – and being open to be helped
- The courage of vulnerable people to ask for help
- The kindness and professionalism of the staff
- The stories and feedback given by individual demonstrating impact – improving the lives of individuals and families

Areas for development and change:

- Create the opportunity for all the residents to be able to access the support, skills and equipment to improve confidence for positive change.
- End of cost of living crisis and poverty and poor housing
- Everyone showing care to those around them – even if just a smile
- For people to be kind and empathetic
- Helping people get passed and language barrier (4)
- Making it easier for vulnerable people / communities to access help
- More and more people believing in themselves
- More funding for community based support services
- People have access to data and equipment
- Tackling digital poverty – more to have access to devices and training and support to stay connected
- The centres to be able to extend the service to those around them

Attendees were then invited to identify emerging opportunities and aspirations that a future programme might encapsulate

Opportunities

- Better communications between organisations to extend holistic response (networking)
- Greater focus on young people
- Influence Sandwell MBC through the learning from this programme
- Map assets – what do we have? What volunteers do we have?
- Mental health support – reducing isolation / developing confidence
- The net zero challenge - work with the Local Authority
 - Efficient homes
 - Health outcomes
 - Tackling fuel poverty

Aspirations

- Better communications
- Developing community kitchen opportunities
- Eradicating food poverty
- Extending the allotments
- Mental Health – providing more opportunities to people
- Net zero – the challenge
- Volunteering – extending opportunities
- Youth – greater focus

Mr, Mrs, Ms and Little Miss!

In the light of the news that Adam Hargreaves, son of the creator of the original Mr Men series, Roger Hargreaves, is going to continue his father's work, attendees were invited to create their own characters.

- *What are our hopes for the future of who we might reach and support?*
- *What kind of people do we need to support the most vulnerable?*
- *What kind of values would we wish to see in our community?*

The group created the following characters, with some of them illustrated on the page! The characters are listed alphabetically and reflect the people we are; the people we need; the people we aspire to be.



Mr and Little Miss **Allotments**

Mr **Community**

Mr **Community Together**

Mr **Depressed**

Mr **Emotion Changer**

Mr and Mrs **Green** (environment)

Mr **Help** (encouraging sport)

Mr **Helpful**

Ms **Local Resident Support Worker** (volunteer turned trained employee)

Mr **Mobile** (disability)

Little **Miss Naughty**

Miss **Overthinker**

Miss **Overwhelmed**

Mr **Particular**

Mr **Perfect** (healthy eating, sending children to school)

Mrs **Possible**

Miss **Resilient**

Mr **Share** (time, knowledge, resources, help, information, helping hands)

Mrs **Smart** (managing family, awareness of safety and safeguarding, healthy lifestyle, trying to be helpful, sharing learning)

Mr **Strong**

Mr **Watcher** (TV: communication improvement, learning difficult cooking, motivational documentaries)



Podcast

Use this link to access the podcast recorded on the 30th September 2024. Guests are Harj Ganger (Centre Manager, Jubilee Park Community Centre); Syeda Khatun (Chief Executive, Bangladeshi Women's Association) and Raj Chande (Welfare Rights specialist).

The podcast is hosted by Podbean. If the link does not take you directly to the recording, search for "Chris Allen in Conversation" in the app.



<https://www.podbean.com/ew/pb-g5bhk-170d713>

Conclusions

Access to Support

Making support and advice more accessible to where people live has been essential in the success of this programme. Trusted people in trusted places enabled access in addition to having entitlements explained in an appropriate language and manner. Supporting people to overcome language barriers was also a significant part of the programme.

Local Centres

Having the two centres, Tipton Muslim Community Centre and Jubilee Park Community Centre also enabled access. The welcoming nature of the staff and the expertise of particular staff was identified as being an essential factor. The majority of people supported came from the DY4 postcode (94%) with a few people from further afield, presumably through word of mouth via faith networks, etc.

Outcomes

There was significant access to each of the four support programmes, with advice, information and guidance most accessed. This service recorded about £700k in financial support to clients with an average of £10k for the 71 cases where amounts were recorded. It's clear that clients struggled with the processes of even migrating to Universal Credit and needed help through the process to give the confidence that everything was being applied for correctly. Some clients had found themselves in debt due to previous errors in making claims with repayment plans needing to be put in place.

Keys to success:

The stakeholder workshop identified the keys to success within an advice programme, which could be summarised as being 'user friendly'. This included a warm non-judgmental welcome from a kind, caring and sincere staff team. This helps to overcome the stigma of needing to ask for help. The holistic approach of all support in one place, often through a single person, reflected the multiple needs of clients and their families. Having the time for clients was also seen as essential because support needs to go beyond the technical to the personal, recognising vulnerability.

Core Values:

The 'time' factor was also highlighted as a core value of the programme. Advisers were "trustworthy and listened – and allowing people to express feelings". Increasing clients' personal confidence was enabled through language learning, digital skills, healthy cooking and being part of the allotments team. Approximately half of the clients reflected that this confidence was impacting on their ability to manage finances and earn a living.

Future Working

The need for continuing support remains, especially given the high levels of unclaimed benefits and the complexity in accessing them. Increasing digital skills (including access to equipment) and supporting people in language learning are key aspects in sustainability. It was hoped that this mode of working (local and holistic) would influence other organisations around better communication and joint approaches, including the local authority. There was a particular opportunity through the green economy which could impact on efficient homes and tackling debt and fuel poverty.

Client Satisfaction

The level of client satisfaction is very high across every aspect of the programme with regard to services received, financial impact and emotional wellbeing.