

**Evaluation of Change Grow Live Achieving Change through Employment project in East Wales**

**Final Report**

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# Introduction

**The project**

* 1. The Grow, Change, Live (GCL) Achieving Change through Employment (ACE) project “supports disadvantaged people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities or a Migrant background aged 25+ into employment[[1]](#footnote-2)”. It aims to achieve this through ‘one to one’ support, which includes:
* “accessing short training courses leading to both accredited and non-accredited outcomes e.g. First Aid, Food Hygiene, Health and Safety, IT training i.e. ECDL, Word/Excel training;
* job searching, CV and application form support;
* job interview preparation;
* work placement and volunteering opportunities;
* developing communication skills[[2]](#footnote-3)”.
	1. The project is supported by the European Social Fund (ESF) through the Welsh Government. It began in December 2016 and is due to end in August 2021.

**Project restructuring**

* 1. Between September 2019 and January 2020, the project went through a process of restructuring. This included the establishment of new roles so that case officers could focus on their role of supporting participants and volunteers. In short, the roles included:
* outreach workers: to focus on community engagement to recruit economically inactive participants;
* volunteer coordinators: to focus on recruiting volunteers and generate match funding volunteer hours;
* marketing manager: to focus on marketing the project.
	1. Hubs have also been established, a north and south Hub in both East Wales and West Wales and the Valleys. These Hubs include key roles that support each other in that region (i.e. volunteer coordinator, outreach worker and case officers).

**The evaluation**

* 1. The evaluation **aims** to assess whether the project is achieving its objectives; this includes providing:
* indicators of quality and impact;
* explanations behind the operation’s successes and shortcomings; and
* an understanding of what would have happened without the intervention.
	1. The **objectives** of the evaluation include:
* an evaluation of whether the operation achieved its objectives in line with its agreed Business Plan;
* an evaluation of the efficiency of operation activity in meeting objectives;
* the impact of the operation on beneficiaries and community, including WEFO’s Cross Cutting Themes (CCT);
* the impact of any external factors on the operation;
* providing recommendations to address any issues found;
* understanding of what would have happened without the intervention;
* undertaking an evaluation of the chain of participant record keeping and evidence collection processes from frontline delivery to data submission to WEFO;
* evaluating the effectiveness of operation marketing and publicity initiatives;
* evaluating the effectiveness of addressing CCT;
* evaluating the effectiveness of leadership, including quality assurance and communication methods employed by the lead sponsor;
* assessing how the operation has performed against the delivery of CCT aims, objectives and commitments, as well as CCT operation-related indicators, including what worked well/what did not work, problems identified and how these were addressed;
* assessing how, and to what extent, the operation has used and promoted the Welsh language and/or provided opportunities for participants to use and develop their Welsh language skills;
* assessing how the operation supported participants with low English language ability to increase their English language ability/skills;
* assessing how the operation has contributed to the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015;
* examining of the operation delivery and outcomes in light of the present social-economic environment in Wales;
* identifying improvements and/or gaps in service delivery.

**This report**

* 1. This is the sixth report from the evaluation. It follows the evaluation plan in January 2018, an emerging findings report in March 2018, an interim report in September 2018, a second interim report in June 2020 and a third interim report in February 2021. All the previous reports also evaluated the West Wales and the Valleys region of the project. This is the final report for East Wales. Because of the time extension for the West Wales and the Valleys region of the project, the final report for this region will be produced in July 2022.
	2. The term **stakeholder** in this report refers to partner and / or potential partner organisations, such as public sector bodies and charities that are active in the field of employment and / or the representation of minority or disadvantaged groups.

# Methodology

**Introduction**

* 1. This report draws upon five key sources of data:
* data produced by the project, including progress reports (May 2018 to May 2021), spreadsheets based on analyses of participants database (May 2021) and a service report reflecting on the project and its future (Matthews, 2021);
* questionnaires for project staff (n=8) produced by People and Work, and questionnaires for project participants (n=30) and stakeholders[[3]](#footnote-4) (n=20), both produced by Change Grow Live and analysed by People and Work;
* the previous three interim evaluation reports[[4]](#footnote-5) (Bowen and Holtom, 2018; Bowen and Pells, 2020; Pells and Bowen, 2021);
* desk-based data to provide context to the project’s findings[[5]](#footnote-6); and
* feedback from the project manager.

 *Reasoning for the approach*

* 1. In all previous evaluation reports, data collection relied mainly on qualitative interviews with project staff. Generally, the number of responses to these interviews declined, for example, from around three quarters of all staff (in the second interim report) to two thirds (in the third interim report) and often the same staff members would participate. It was therefore decided to use an anonymous online questionnaire approach for this report, in order to encourage those who had not responded previously to respond and to allow for the possibility of ‘interview fatigue’ amongst those who had[[6]](#footnote-7). Eight out of eleven staff (roughly three quarters) responded to the questionnaire.
	2. This report was able to draw upon findings from the questionnaire for participants and stakeholders conducted by Change Grow Live in January 2020. The feedback from participants and partners was useful as there had been a lack of direct feedback from these in the past two evaluation reports (Bowen and Pells, 2020; Pells and Bowen, 2021).

*Quality of the data*

* 1. As the final evaluation report, this document draws upon findings gathered during the project’s lifetime, including from previous evaluation reports. The data provides a good mix of quantitative and qualitative data from different viewpoints (staff, participants and stakeholders). Whilst the feedback from the interviews provided in this and other reports is not a representative sample[[7]](#footnote-8), it provides valuable insights into the project when triangulated (compared) with other sources, such as progress reports and outcomes data. Collectively, the data is strong enough to answer the evaluations aims and objectives.

# Findings: progress on engagements and associated reflections

**Introduction**

* 1. This section reports on the engagements in East Wales (EW) in relation to long term unemployed (LTU) participants and economically inactive (EI) participants and the recruitment of volunteers, providing an indication of the impact of the project. It draws upon views of staff, stakeholders and participants to reflect on the engagement process.
	2. It also reports on improvements in the cost effectiveness of the project.

**Progress on targets**

* 1. Table 1 shows that the project meets its targets in terms of the engagement of LTU participants and is under target for EI participants. Pre- COVID-19, the engagement of EI participants fared better, at 88% of target in February 2020, indicating that the pandemic had a considerable impact on engagement of these participants. In contrast, the engagement levels of LTU participants remained relatively steady (99% in February 2020). This shows the project has remained active in recruiting participants during this challenging period.

**Table 1. Number and percentage of EI and LTU outputs (participant engagements) achieved in relation to the August 2021 target (cumulative)**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Area and type of engagement**  | **Aug target****2021 (No.)** | **Aug 2021 achieved (No.)** | **Percentage achieved** |
| **Economically Inactive**  | **220** | **151** | **69%** |
| **Long Term Unemployed** | **180** | **180** | **101%** |

*Source: GCL ACE database updated August 2021*

* 1. Table 2 shows the pattern of engagements over the course of the last five years between January and May each year. It illustrates that, despite the COVID-19 restrictions, between January and May 2021 the project engaged more participants than during this period in any other year, suggesting that the changes made by the project, such as staff restructuring (see section 1) and improved online marketing, had a positive impact (also see para 3.7).

**Table 2. Participants engaged between January-May each year**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Year | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
| No. | 21 | 35 | 21 | 18 | 45 |

*Source: GCL ACE database updated May 2021*

 **How staff rated the engagement process**

* 1. Graph 1 illustrates that, overall, staff felt the project has done relatively well in terms of recruiting participants, with two indicating ‘excellent’ and two indicating some room for improvement.

**Graph 1. The number of staff responded to the question ‘Overall, how would rate the project’s ability to recruit participants?’**

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*Source: People and work staff questionnaire June 2021 (n=7)[[8]](#footnote-9)*

**Strengths of engagements**

* 1. When asked what worked well about the recruitment process, staff provided a range of responses. These had also been highlighted in previous staff interviews (Bowen and Pells, 2020; Pells and Bowen, 2021); they included:
* word of mouth within communities;
* strong partnership building with partners and networks;
* building up a social media presence to target those not engaged via existing partners (see box 1), especially following COVID-19;
* raising awareness amongst potential participants about support available; and
* promotion through sharing flyers and being present (in person) at key locations (pre-COVID-19).
	1. Historically, the project had always done very well in recruiting LTU participants (Bowen and Pells, 2020; Pells and Bowen, 2021). The project had established links with Job Centre Plus (JCP) and other ESF projects that referred to the project. Staff reported that LTU participants were more likely to be referred from organisations such as JCP than EI participants, hence this facilitated the recruitment of LTU participants (see table 1). Moreover, as also highlighted in previous reports, maintaining relationships with existing participants benefitted both LTU and EI participant recruitment. Furthermore, through social media, the project was able to remain active in recruiting participants during the pandemic.

|  |
| --- |
| **Box 1. Example of engagement through social media and effective support** Alenka is a single parent. She used to work as an interpreter before developing a permanent health condition. She had got to the point that she felt able to work again. In Alenka’s own words:*“So, when I went to the old employers I used to work for and they told me they would use me, but I needed a qualification in interpreting now as the law had changed. I felt very deflated. Then I saw the Facebook post for ACE. I saw the post on Tuesday and got in touch and then on Wednesday I saw the Case Officer and then on Friday we did the paperwork and I was accepted and enrolled on the course!”*Alenka described how she could never have afforded to pay for a qualification herself, meaning she could never have returned to her profession without the support of ACE. She was also extremely pleased with the quality of the course, which was an online class. Alenka needed help with her CV and was put in touch with the Marketing Manager: she described the help she got:*“He helped me to develop a business strategy and a marketing strategy – to look at which companies to approach – to look at rates of pay and where to position myself as an interpreter. He has given me lots of homework to do. I am going to improve my LinkedIn profile and plan to create a list of clients to contact, and to offer my services to, and what websites to go to and register as a sole trader. He helped me to look at what career to go for, to look at my competencies – he felt I should focus on medical fields as I have experience of working there for a few years and I know the medical phrases so I have that vocabulary already.”* This specialist support has enabled Alenka not just to return to her old employer, but also expand her horizons, and develop her career and earning potential. Alenka was extremely happy with this support. Furthermore, ACE provided Alenka with the equipment that she needed to work and could not afford herself.  |

*Source: (Pells and Bowen, 2021)*

**Challenges to engagements**

* 1. Staff were asked what the challenges were regarding the recruitment process. As would be expected, the impact of COVID-19 was highlighted, reiterating concerns stated previously (Pells and Bowen, 2021). These included IT literacy and access issues e.g.:

*“During the Covid 19 pandemic it has been especially difficult getting all required paperwork from participants sent via email as many are not very I.T. literate or do not have laptops or computers, therefore, everything was done using their mobiles.”* Staff member.

and physical access issues e.g.:

*“The pandemic has made it difficult to maintain a physical presence where previously that was easy, such as libraries and hubs in South Wales. They operate on an appointment only basis currently which means you can't just drop in as it seemed people at* Change Grow Live *had done previously. This operational mantra applies to many organisations and community hubs now. Many simply meet on zoom etc. which is difficult to access.”* Staff member.

* 1. The recruitment of EI participants has been particularly impacted by COVID-19 as the structuring of the project (pre-COVID-19) was set up so that outreach workers were employed specifically to engage EI participants ‘face to face’ in community-based settings.
	2. There were also issues that hampered recruitment at the beginning of the project (Bowen and Holtom, 2018). This included the case officers’ role being ‘too broad’. However, after restructuring (see section 1), case officers could focus on their supportive role whilst other roles focused on recruitment. In addition, the project initially lacked diversity amongst staff, including those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, which improved as the project progressed.
	3. Other reasons reported (Bowen and Holtom, 2018; Bowen and Pells, 2020; Pells and Bowen, 2021) for the project historically struggling with recruiting EI participants, included:
* the project had lost links to charities which unexpectedly folded and had previously referred many EI participants to a similar project delivered by SOVA[[9]](#footnote-10);
* despite efforts, the project was not as successful as it had hoped in establishing new links with active charities and organisations that were likely to be able to refer (although links had been established with other ESF projects such as Communities for Work and PaCE which resulted in some referrals);
* generally, EI participants could be more challenging to engage, as they were less likely to be referred via JCP than LTU participants (see para 3.8) and many needed to be engaged through community engagement, which tended to be more time consuming, hence the establishment of outreach workers (see section 1).
* competition from other projects (see section five), that provided employment support in areas where the level of the population from d Black, Asian and other Minority Ethnic communities is relatively high for Wales[[10]](#footnote-11).
	1. In addition to struggling with recruitment, there were uneven recruitment levels across the region (Bowen and Pells, 2020; Pells and Bowen, 2021), with levels being particularly high in Newport, which subsequently resulted in a higher level of outcomes in Newport, although across the region conversion rates from engagements into results were relatively even.

**Improving the engagements**

*Context*

* 1. As part of the process of trying to improve engagements, not just in East Wales but also in West Wales and the Valleys (this report only contains feedback from EW staff), the project questionnaire to participants and stakeholders asked for advice on how to improve the process. To an extent the process of asking these questions was designed to help raise awareness amongst stakeholders about the project.

*Findings*

* 1. Table 3 summarises what stakeholders thought would enable them to refer more to the project. Overall, it shows there is room to improve the relationship and understanding between the project and its stakeholders. However, the response also shows that not all the stakeholders worked with many people from ethnic minorities[[11]](#footnote-12). This illustrates why direct community engagement by the project is an important factor for recruitment, as the number of organisations who work directly with several Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities is limited.

**Table 3. Response to ‘What would enable you to make more referrals to ACE?’**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Response\*** | **Number of times selected** |
| Better relationships with the local ACE team | 7 |
| Having more ethnic minority clients | 7 |
| More awareness of who ACE takes on as participants | 6 |
| Remembering to consider them as a referral option | 6 |
| Better understanding of what ACE do with their participants | 5 |

*Source:* Change Grow Live *questionnaire to East Wales participants in January 2021 (n=20)*

*\*These were options that could be chosen, not opened ended responses.*

* 1. In response to the feedback (table 3) the findings were shared with all relevant staff and they were instructed to act upon the suggestions.
	2. Table 4 below shows that participants highlighted online advertising and websites as factors that could improve recruitment. This option is likely to have gained more prevalence due to COVID-19, as people spent more time online ([OFCOM, 2020](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/media/media-releases/2020/uk-internet-use-surges)). In addition, getting better known in communities and JCP was highlighted and, to a lesser extent, having more ethnically diverse staff and neighbourhood-based advertising.

**Table 4. Response to ‘What do you think ACE could do to recruit more people?’**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Response\*** | **Number of times selected** |
| Advertising online | 22 |
| Be better known in local communities | 20 |
| Have a website for people to go and look at | 18 |
| Be better known at job centres etc. | 10 |
| Have more staff from different races and ethnic backgrounds |  9 |
| More neighbourhood posters and flyers |  8 |

*Source:* Change Grow Live *questionnaire to East Wales partners in January 2021 (n=30)*

*\*These were options that could be chosen, not opened ended responses.*

* 1. As reported in the progress report (May 2021) the project has increased its online presence. This was facilitated by the pandemic and built upon by the marketing team; for example, Twitter followers increased from 393 in February 2020, to 577 in May 2021. In response to the questionnaire feedback, the project has also developed a website that is funded by Change Grow Live and has a prominent position within Change Grow Live website pages.
	2. Reflecting on the recruitment process, it is likely that the project would have benefitted from having more focused job roles and spending more time and resources on recruiting a more diverse and experienced (as to more specific job roles) team from the start of the project (Matthews, 2021).

**Recruitment of volunteers**

* 1. The project has struggled with recruiting volunteers (Bowen and Holtom, 2018; Bowen and Pells 2020). This improved when the role of the Volunteer Coordinator[[12]](#footnote-13) was established in late 2019 and the project was aligned with Change Grow Live recruitment systems. In addition, there were more people wanting to volunteer after March 2020, due to furlough and job losses caused by COVID-19 (Pells and Bowen, 2021). This improvement has continued, with 68 since the start of the project. Nevertheless, recruitment has been more successful in some areas than others, and improvements to recruitment has come late in the project’s lifetime.

**Cost effectiveness**

* 1. Overall, the cost effectiveness of the project had improved a little in recent years[[13]](#footnote-14). This was attributed to greater efficiency as processes become more established. For example, after [SOVA had merged with Change Grow Live in 2019](https://www.changegrowlive.org/about-us/news-views/change-grow-live-and-sova-complete-merger), time was needed to embed new systems of working and it took time for staff to improve their targeting of participants who could benefit most from the project’s interventions (see para 4.21 for further details).

# Findings: progress on outcomes and associated reflections

**Introduction**

* 1. This section reports on the performance (outputs and results) of long term unemployed (LTU) participants and economically inactive (EI) participants and draws upon the views of staff, participants and stakeholders to reflect on the performance and how things could be improved for a project in the future. It also reports on the strengths and challenges in terms of the project’s delivery model that includes management, record keeping and quality assurance.

**Progress on Outputs and Results**

* 1. Table 5 shows that in August 2021 the project has achieved its employment targets, has over-achieved in terms of qualifications for LTU participants and was very close to achieving its qualification and job search targets for EI participants. Given the lower engagement rate of EI participants (see section 3), output figures highlight that the conversion rate into results, specifically into employment and qualification outcomes is better than anticipated amongst these participants.
	2. The project had previously been on track to meet its employment and qualification targets (Bowen and Pells, 2020; Pells and Bowen, 2021).
	3. Table 5 also shows that, by August 2021 the project was under target for work placements and volunteering. Prior to COVID-19 (Feb 2020) the project was on target for work placements and volunteering amongst LTU participants (97%) and fared marginally better amongst EI participants (79%), indicating that the pandemic had an impact.

**Table 5. Number and percentage of EI and LTU results achieved in relation to the August 2021 target (cumulative)**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Type of engagement**  | **Aug target****2021 (No.)** | **Aug 2021 achieved (No.)** | **Percentage achieved** |
| *Result: EI Participants entering employment including self-employment upon leaving*  | 44 | 48 | 109% |
| *Result: LTU Participants entering employment including self-employment upon leaving*  | 45 | 47 | 104% |
| *Result: EI Participants gaining a qualification or work relevant certification upon leaving*  | 110 | 109 | 99% |
| *Result: LTU Participants gaining a qualification or work relevant certification upon leaving*  | 90 | 110 | 122% |
| *Result: EI Participants completing work experience placement or volunteering opportunity*  | 44 | 34 | 77% |
| *Result: LTU Participants completing work experience placement or volunteering opportunity*  | 45 | 34 | 76% |
| *Result: EI Participants engaged in job search upon leaving*  | 55 | 51 | 93% |

*Source: GCL ACE database updated August 2021*

**Strength of the project support**

*Context*

* 1. Despite COVID-19 having a negative influence on the economy and the project (see para 4.15) there were still jobs available in certain sectors, such as cleaning and transport (Pells and Bowen, 2021) and an economic upturn in February 2021 ([Welsh Government, 2021](https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2021-04/labour-market-overview-april-2021-627.pdf)) is likely to have helped with the on-going delivery of employment outcomes.

*Overview*

* 1. Graph 2 shows how project staff rated the support the project provided. The response is very positive with over half stating ‘excellent’ and a further two responding with ‘very good’. This is also supported by feedback from participants to the project questionnaire that rated their time with the project on average 4.9 out of 5 (5 being the best) and stakeholders who rated their satisfaction with the project as 4.2 out of 5 (5 being the happiest). The positive feedback, especially amongst participants, indicates the project was providing support effectively.

**Graph 2. The number of staff responded to the question ‘Overall, how would you rate the support the project provided to participants?’**



*Source: People and work staff questionnaire June 2021 (n=7)[[14]](#footnote-15)*

*Staff comments*

* 1. When asked what worked well about project support to participants, staff provided a range of responses, many of which have been highlighted previously (Bowen and Pells, 2020; Pells and Bowen, 2021), these included:
* a focus on improving the employability skills of participants, including the soft skills (which contributed towards good employment outcomes);
* the process of building trust between staff and participants, especially when face to face contact is feasible;
* being flexible and persistent in the delivery model in terms of communication methods (face to face, phone and online) and in the kind of support offered (support with CV and job applications, developing soft skills and access to qualifications);
* skilled case officers with good experience and knowledge to share with participants.
	1. Other reasons reported (Bowen and Pells, 2020; Pells and Bowen, 2021) included:
* generally the project had adapted well to online working, with most staff adapting well to remote working, the establishment of ‘digital champions’ and encouraging participants to access the [Better Futures fund](https://wcva.cymru/better-futures-wales-lottery-funded-project-launched/);
* management and communications structures were generally praised, especially the establishment of the Hub system[[15]](#footnote-16) and the sharing of good practice through case officer meetings.

|  |
| --- |
| * 1. **Box 2. Example of persistent support yielding a successful outcome**
	2. Vivak wanted to become a security guard. He was on carer’s allowance due to him taking care of his disabled child and this would limit the number of hours he could work. Vivak met with the Case Officer who helped him source a security training course. However, he failed the course badly. The Case Officer then met with the security training provider to get workbooks that would help with completing the course and worked through these books with Vivak. The next time Vivak did the course his score improved but he still did not pass. He eventually did the course 4 times before successfully passing (with continued support from the Case Officer). He then got the security job he wanted at 16 hours a week which suited his caring duties. The whole process took over a year. The participant was very happy with the outcome as he could took great pride in working and was able to improve the quality of life of his family. As he stated: *“I want to show my children I can work”.* He was thankful to the project for its persistence in supporting him.
 |

*Source: (Bowen and Pells, 2020)*

*Participants’ comments*

* 1. The project questionnaire asked participants what the project did well. Responses included the helpful bespoke approach the staff undertook, which included:
* being patient and listening carefully to their needs;
* being friendly and personable; and
* contacting them on a regular basis,

and associated outcomes from this approach, that included (in line with the project delivery model):

* building and/or improving their CV, job application skills, interview skills and job search skills;
* careers advice;
* supporting soft skills, mainly confidence;
* supporting a sense of well-being and social interaction with other participants;
* developing English language skills;
* access to qualifications and work-related certificates; and
* help to gain employment.
	1. Some of the comments highlighted the considerable impact the project had upon their lives:

*“The ACE project has changed my life, it has given me confidence to attend ESOL classes. I have met other participants on the project, whilst being at the XXX Centre in XXX [attending a course]. I have received ongoing support from my Case Worker. I have spoken to other people about how good the ACE project has helped me.”* Participant.

“*They help people achieve their aims through employment and educating people, giving people like myself a voice. I got my first job through ACE and still working to date with the help of my case officer”.* Participant.

 *Staff satisfaction with the project*

* 1. As highlighted in earlier reports (Bowen and Holtom, 2018; Bowen and Pells, 2020; Pells and Bowen, 2021), staff were mainly positive about the management of the project and their ‘approachability’ and what the project offered. This is reflected in the People and Work questionnaire responses, with staff making comments about how they enjoyed the project and were proud of it; for example:

*“I have enjoyed being a part of the team and am full of admiration for my colleagues.”* Staff member.

*“The whole thing has been well led.”* Staff member*.*

*“I'm very proud of the work we do on the project and the support we provide to help participants improve their life.”* Staff member.

*Record keeping and quality assurance*

* 1. As reported in the interim reports (Bowen and Holtom, 2018; Bowen and Pells, 2020) analyses showed record keeping and quality assurance mechanisms (see appendix 1) were appropriate. Having a consistent data input system such as CRiiS has helped with consistency and staff reported that it was effective. Nevertheless, throughout the project’s lifetime some frontline staff have struggled with the administrative tasks[[16]](#footnote-17) needed for the project by WEFO and Change Grow Live, which was particularly challenging during COVID-19, due to the lack of face to face contact with participants. However, staff reported that it was difficult to see how these systems could be streamlined without jeopardising WEFO expectations and Change Grow Live quality assurance requirements which reflected the good governance of the project. Moreover, steps were taken to facilitate administrative processes, for example, when changes were required by WEFO to processes such as gathering of evidence and participant signatures, where possible, these changes were made and a COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions document link was circulated to all operations for reference.
	2. Data submissions to WEFO were generally provided on time, although there were examples of delays, such as, [Disclosure and Barring Service](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service) checks for volunteers were described as taking too long, although they had improved since the establishment of volunteer coordinators (Pells and Bowen, 2021).
	3. Data on indicators and financials were consistently produced for the evaluators in a timely fashion and the Monitoring and Compliance Manager responded promptly to specific data requests, such as result data of women and participants who were disabled.

|  |
| --- |
| **Box 3. Participant fulfilling ambition and long term employment goals**A participant who had recently moved to the Wales had been engaged and assessed onto the project just before the first COVID-19 lockdown. He wanted to do training to become a security guard because he had spoken to people who work in this field and thought it was his best chance of gaining immediate employment. However, in the country he previously resided in he had completed around four years of a medical degree. Then when he came to Wales he was told that he would need to start medical school training again. He wanted to start to earn money now whilst he worked towards that longer term goal. The case officer did many online sessions with him looking at job opportunities, nevertheless, it became clear that his main motivation was to finish his studies and become a medic. Between them they found a medical science course would help him to become a medic. However, he had to have sufficient English and needed to do a [IELTS](https://www.ielts.org/) course which he had to go to London to do as the course in Wales was fully booked. He did the IELTS course and passed and was accepted on a medical science course in Wales in September. The case officer also supported him in finding accommodation near the University as travel would have been problematic. |

*Source: (Pells and Bowen, 2021)*

**Challenges of producing outcomes**

* 1. As highlighted in section three recruitment of EI participants was under target and this made it more challenging to produce the results as there were fewer participants than anticipated to work with, reasons for this are also highlighted in section three.
	2. In a response to the survey staff were asked what was challenging about providing support. The impact of COVID-19 was highlighted and mirrored reasons stated previously (Pells and Bowen, 2021). These included not being able to offer in person support, for example:

*“Not being able to meet during a pandemic - especially when they have language difficulties in speaking on the phone or by email.”* Staff member.

*“No face-to-face contact because of the Covid.”* Staff member.

And the impact on employment opportunities in certain sectors e.g.:

*“Lack of opportunities due to Covid making it challenging to access certain industries such as hospitality.”* Staff member.

* 1. Other barriers associated with COVID-19 reported (Pells and Bowen, 2021) were that places which offered volunteering opportunities and training were either closed or had restricted access, especially during the lockdown periods.
	2. Staff reported that the English language skills of some participants could be difficult to navigate (even when working in person). As previously highlighted (Bowen and Holtom, 2018), initially the project was working with some participants with very little or no English skills and the project changed this to work with those with at least intermediate English language skills, and signpost those who did not have this level of English to language support providers. This remains the case, but the project has continued to support language skills (in line with the project’s objectives), for example, through conversation practice between participants and volunteers. English language skills can remain a barrier to support, especially when providing that support online.
	3. Staff also reported that it could be challenging working with participants who changed their minds about their career goals, meaning the support package needed to change, and their engagement levels on the project could become unpredictable, for example, becoming disinterested then interested again.

**Improving support**

*Participants’ views*

* 1. Table 7 shows the response of the participants to the question of what would have made their time on the project easier. As with the response on improving engagements (see section 3), IT solutions were selected the most, with an ACE app and website to show to family and friends. In addition, people agreed that examples of what people like them had achieved on the project would help, and availability of other languages (other than English and Welsh) scored highly.

**Table 7. Response to ‘Which of the following do you think would have made your time with ACE easier?’**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Response** | **Number of times selected** |
| An ACE app I could put on my phone  | 12 |
| A website so I could show friends and family what ACE does and how they help | 12 |
| More examples of what other people like me have done with ACE to give me ideas | 8 |
| More information available in other languages besides English and Welsh | 7 |
| More choices of training on offer | 5 |
| More contact with my volunteer | 4 |
| Having a volunteer to help me | 4 |
| Simpler choices of training on offer | 3 |
| More contact with my Case Officer | 1 |

*Source:* Change Grow Live *questionnaire to East Wales participants in January 2021 (n=30)*

* 1. As reported in section 3, a website has been developed by the project and this feedback (table 7) was shared with staff.

*Stakeholders’ views*

* 1. The Change Grow Live questionnaire for stakeholders asked stakeholders how the project could support them more. As shown in table 8, referring participants to their projects was a popular choice, as was communicating more about the outcomes for the participants they referred.

**Table 8. Response to ‘What can ACE do to support your work more?’**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Response** | **Number of times selected** |
| Refer participants to our project/s | 9 |
| Communicate more when our referrals complete outcomes and develop | 8 |
| Attend meetings and events | 5 |
| Follow us on social media | 3 |
| Awareness of how your financial support can help clients | 1 |

 *Source:* Change Grow Live *questionnaire to partners in January 2021 (n=20)*

* 1. In addition, within the questionnaire, stakeholders wrote comments on how they wanted to work in partnership with the project, with around half saying they were willing for the project to attend their project meetings; examples of other partnership activities included:
* providing access to each others’ events and doing joint events;
* setting up a joint peer support group;
* sharing training and advice around participants needs, most notably around careers advice; and
* taking on volunteers.
	1. Nevertheless, a few felt partnership work would need to be discussed after the effects of COVID-19 declines, as this was currently their main focus.

* 1. The responses highlight that the questionnaire had worked as a valuable tool, not only to understand the need of stakeholders, but also as an engagement tool with these organisations. However, the data from the questionnaire is likely to benefit the West Wales and Valleys region of the project more (they were also involved in the questionnaire, although their responses are not shown in this report) and future projects, given that the project in East Wales is drawing to a close.

*Volunteer support*

* 1. Graph 3 shows project staff’s response to how well the project made use of its volunteers. The response is mixed, with two of the eight who responded choosing ‘excellent’ and another two choosing ‘average’ and, although four chose ‘good’, none chose the ‘very good’ option.

**Graph 3. How the number of staff responded to the question ‘Overall, how well do you think the project made use of its volunteers?’**



*Source: People and work staff questionnaire June 2021 (n=8)*

*Strengths of volunteer support*

* 1. Staff reported different ways in which they thought good use was made of volunteers (depending on the volunteer’s area of expertise), this included:
* help with social media and digital activities;
* someone with whom participants can practice their English language skills;
* help to develop the social skills of participants;
* assistance with job searches for participants;
* researching places to advertise the project; and
* general support for case officers.

*Challenges of working with volunteers*

* 1. Staff reported on challenges they faced working with volunteers; these included:
* availability issues, such as difficulty in sourcing volunteers able to provide a suitable amount of time with participants; for example, many volunteers work and were only available for short periods at specific times; and
* the process of getting references and [Disclosure and Barring Service](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service) checks could be very slow (although this had improved since the Volunteer Coordinator role was introduced).

**Lessons learned for future projects**

*Context*

* 1. Change Grow Live recently put a bid in for the [Community Renewal Fund](https://www.cardiff.gov.uk/ENG/Business/Support-and-Finance-for-Business/community-renewal-fund/Pages/default.aspx) project in Cardiff (passing the first stage), for a similar type of employment support-based project for migrants, and is planning a funding bid for the Wales Council for Voluntary Action’s ESF [Active Inclusion](https://www.sewales-ret.co.uk/active-inclusion-fund/) fund. There is likely to be demand for such a project, given that the unemployment rate in Wales has risen ([Senedd Research, 2021](https://research.senedd.wales/research-articles/coronavirus-labour-market-january-update/)) and the forecasted improvement in the Welsh economy ([Welsh Parliament, 2021](https://senedd.wales/media/lpzl3j1d/cr-ld14182-e.pdf)), although the future of the Welsh economy will be reliant on many factors, such as the on-going success of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout and the impact of Brexit.

*Staff feedback*

* 1. Staff were asked whether, if a similar project were delivered in the future, what advice they would give. The range of responses included:
* greater use of social media and other IT platforms to publicise and inform potential and existing participants from the start;
* more funding for training;
* establish an employment liaison role or similar to help secure even more employment opportunities and also consider other more specific roles for staff (building on what was done during restructuring (see section 1);
* improve ‘performance reward incentives’ for staff; and
* base the project around participant outcomes and [Return on Investment](https://www.investopedia.com/terms/r/returnoninvestment.asp) linked to more flexible budgeting.
	1. Other reflections, in line with previous points in this report (see section 3), and based upon recommendations in the service report (Matthews, 2021) highlight learning from the initial emerging issues of this project by:
* carefully considering and exploring the situation ‘on the ground’ as the work starts and not basing the project on past successful projects, as project circumstances and context can change quickly (such as over-reliance on certain organisations to refer participants to the project);
* having systems in place to be able to adapt quickly to meet the challenges of any issues which may occur during the project’s lifetime (e.g. key assessment and response points);
* avoid generic staff roles and have people in specific roles which are easier to define in terms of job specifications and for the staff to deliver; and
* focusing more resources on the recruitment process of staff to get the adequate levels of skills, experience and diversity needed from the outset.

# 5. What would have happened without the intervention?

**Introduction**

1. 1. This section considers the counterfactual, that is what is likely to have happened to participants in the absence of the project. This can be done by assessing the link between project intervention and its outcomes and the likelihood of participants being able to gain similar support and outcomes elsewhere ([English Partnerships, 2008](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/191511/Additionality_Guide_0.pdf)). However, in this section only estimations of the counterfactual are provided, as it is beyond the scope of this study to provide a causal link[[17]](#footnote-18) between the project interventions and its outcomes.

*The relationship between support and outcomes*

* 1. As highlighted in an earlier report (Bowen and Holtom, 2018) staff and participants drew a direct link between the support provided and outcomes. This early finding was supported by comments from the recent Change Grow Live participants’ questionnaire (2021); for example (also see section 4):

*“The Ace project was very helpful for me. I did volunteering and completed a CV, to find employment. I found employment with a cleaning company, because I was with the ACE project.”* Participant.

*“The project helped me find volunteering, which gave me confidence to go into paid employment. The case officer explained things which made things easier for me to understand.”* Participant.

*“Very helpful with training, CV and job searches. I found employment.”* Participant.

* 1. The evidence therefore indicates that it is likely that, without support of the kind provided by the project, those who had achieved outcomes would not have achieved the outcomes during this period.

*Access to support*

* 1. As highlighted in earlier reports (Bowen and Holtom, 2018; Bowen and Holtom, 2020) comments from participants indicated that mainstream services, such as JCP, had not met their needs. Moreover, the fact that services were referring participants to the project showed that the project was offering an intervention which they could not offer, such as higher levels of bespoke support.
	2. The picture is less clear in terms of possible duplication from other projects. Throughout the project, the evaluations (Bowen and Holtom, 2018; Bowen and Pells, 2020; Pells and Bowen, 2021) have reported on the support offered by other projects, such as [Communities for Work](https://workingwales.gov.wales/how-we-can-help/learning-new-skills/communities-for-work) (CFW), [CFW+](https://workingwales.gov.wales/how-we-can-help/learning-new-skills/communities-for-work-plus), [Parents and Childcare and Employment](https://gov.wales/parents-childcare-and-employment-pace-project) and [OPUS](https://gov.wales/docs/wefo/publications/170928-approved-projects.pdf), to achieve employment. However, although these projects work with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, they do not specifically target these communities. Moreover, amongst those programmes that do work with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, the [ReStart](https://gov.wales/one-stop-support-hubs-refugees-launched-across-wales) projectonly works with refugees and is solely active in dispersal areas, and charities such as the Henna Foundation and Hayatt Women’s Trust do not have specific employment support projects.
	3. To summarise, given the project’s specialist approach to targeting and working with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, it is likely that the majority of participants would not have accessed similar support elsewhere, especially amongst those who are EI, given that they are more likely to be recruited through community engagement (Pells and Bowen, 2021). However, it is also likely that some participants would have been able to access similar support elsewhere, for example, if referred by JCP.

# Findings: assessment of the Cross Cutting Themes

 **Introduction**

* 1. This section assesses the project’s activities concerning Cross Cutting Themes[[18]](#footnote-19) (CCT) Case Level Indicators[[19]](#footnote-20) and associated engagement levels amongst relevant groups of participants. In addition, an estimation of the project’s impact on the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is set out.

**Overview**

* 1. The project has successfully achieved its Case Level Indicators and has, overall, been very active in delivering the themes. Although the recruitment levels of women and disabled people, are not as high as hoped the evidence from the project results such as employment amongst women participants, is strong and the project has done very good work in areas such as raising awareness of LGBTQ+[[20]](#footnote-21) issues and voting rights amongst European migrants and activities related to sustainable development.

**How well were Cross Cutting Themes delivered?**

* 1. Graph4shows that there were high levels of satisfaction amongst staff with the project delivery of CCT, with most choosing the ‘very good’ option.

**Graph 4. The number of staff responded to the question ‘Overall, how would you rate the project’s delivery of Cross Cutting Themes?’**



*Source: People and work staff questionnaire June 2021 (n=7)[[21]](#footnote-22)*

* 1. When staff were asked what they thought worked well regarding CCT, there was a consistent theme amongst the replies that the project was generally able to meet the CCT criteria; for example:

*“We have had plenty of workshops and opportunities to attend events relating to several of these topics. If you want to know about it the opportunity is generally there.”* Staff member.

* 1. An example of the project’s approach to tackling social exclusion through peer support was that of encouraging participants to join social and community groups.

**Promoting equality and reducing occupational segregation**

*Representation and key outcomes of women*

* 1. 47% of participants on the project were women. Most EI participants were women (62%), and far fewer (34%) were LTU participants. Generally, this pattern has been consistent throughout the project.
	2. Encouragingly, a higher proportion of women achieved employment and qualification outcomes than the project average, indicating that the project had effectively supported women; for example:
* 27% of women gained employment compared with the project average of 25%; and
* 69% of women gained qualifications compared with the project average of 55%.
	1. Throughout the project’s lifetime there were examples of women who applied for and / or gained non-traditional roles in IT, security and engineering. The project also made links with a construction company to help promote non- traditional roles to women, through work experience. However, staff reported that generally participants stuck to traditional gender-based roles.

*Reasons for the representation and outcomes*

* 1. The data shows that women were more likely to self-refer (around 60% of these referrals were women[[22]](#footnote-23)) than be referred (around 35% of referrals from JCP were women[[23]](#footnote-24)) and this is partly explained by the fact that more women participants were EI.
	2. As highlighted in an earlier report (Pells and Bowen, 2021) childcare needs during school COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions meant women found it more difficult to access the project. However, the online support provision developed during this period did suit some women with younger children as it took less time than having to meet in community settings.
	3. In terms of achieving outcomes, as highlighted in section 4, the quality of support was high and catered for individual needs. Interviews with staff (Bowen and Pells, 2020) also suggested that overall (but not in all cases), women tended to be more motivated than men once they were engaged in the process. Moreover, the majority of project frontline staff were women (5 out of 7) which is likely to have helped create a welcoming environment for women.
	4. In terms of challenging occupational segregation and engaging women, activities during the project’s lifetime included:
* publicity used to promote the project using images of women more often than men;
* the impact star and action plans used are gender-neutral, e.g. focusing on the same type of opportunities for women and men; and
* staff workshops shared information around occupational segregation.

*Representation of disabled people and key outcomes*

* 1. As reported in the previous report (Pells and Bowen, 2021) the percentage of participants with a disability or work limiting health condition almost doubled from 8% in February 2020 to 15% in October 2020. Encouragingly, the percentage remained at the higher end (16% in May 2021) although this is still a little less than the average in Wales which is 22% ([StatsWales](https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Equality-and-Diversity/Disability/disabilitystatus-by-region)).
	2. Reflecting a national trend that disabled people are around twice as likely to be unemployed ([Scope](https://www.scope.org.uk/media/disability-facts-figures/#:~:text=More%20than%204.4%20million%20disabled,unemployed%20as%20non%2Ddisabled%20people.)) the proportion of those who gained employment was lower than the average, at 13% (average is 25%). However, the figure for those who gained a qualification was higher than the average, at 63% (average is 55%) and staff reported that getting qualifications was a key focus for those who struggled to gain employment.

*Reasons for the representation and outcomes with disabled people*

* 1. As reported previously (Pells and Bowen, 2021), the increase in representation had improved when:
* establishment of a Disability Champion and associated workshops to raise awareness around disability had improved engagement of disabled people;
* contact had been made with charities that work with disabled people to encourage engagement; and
* moving interactions online had made it easier to interact with some disabled people.
	1. A staff member reported that disabled people tended to focus more on gaining qualifications as they faced greater barriers to achieving employment. Moreover, the general approach of catering for individual needs was effective, in that outcomes were achieved by many disabled people and/or people with work limiting health conditions.

*Representation of older people*

* 1. The percentage of older people was relatively small (4% in EW), as it had been for much of the project’s lifetime. The small number of older participants means that although their separate outcomes can be reported, there are insufficient numbers from which to draw definitive conclusions.

*Reasons for the representation and associated activities with older people*

* 1. As stated previously (Bowen and Pells, 2020; Pells and Bowen, 2021) the percentage of older people in the project generally reflects the proportion of people in the local BAME population aged between 55-65, which is roughly 5% ([Gov.UK, 2020](https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/demographics/age-groups/latest)).
	2. As also reported earlier (Pells and Bowen, 2021) staff highlighted that they had found some older people difficult to engage in an employment support project. These included, for example, people who had retired early or who had long term complex issues beyond the project’s capacity to help. Moreover, despite efforts to establish links with Age Cymru and relevant local authority departments, recruiting older people had remained a challenge.
	3. Notwithstanding this, throughout the project’s lifetime (as shown in progress reports) there were examples of positive measures being adopted towards older people; the production of marketing material aimed at older people and an example of an older person who had previously lived in another country being supported to gain work experience as a lecturer at a college (see box 4 below).

|  |
| --- |
| **Box 4. Example of an older person being supported.**Ahmed came to Wales via the Family Reunion scheme. He was previously an assistant Professor in mathematics in a university and wished to continue with in this line of work. His Change Grow Live Case Officer worked with him to investigate the requirements of being a university lecturer and discovered he does not require any further qualifications to those he already had and therefore his PhD and 32-year experience means he was qualified to apply for a job in his chosen field. However, he lacked the work experience to realistically gain employment in his field in the UK. Therefore, his Case Officer has worked with him to find a placement and was successful in gaining a shadowing placement in Cardiff and the Vale College shadowing a maths revision class. During this placement Ahmed stated he learnt a great deal such as learning being more student led in the UK than his home country.This placement was ongoing and during this placement his Case Officer had also assisted him in improving his CV and helping him develop his job search skills. |

*Source: based upon case study in the Change Grow Live progress report (2018)*

*LGBTQ+[[24]](#footnote-25)*

* 1. As highlighted previously (Pells and Bowen, 2021), an LGBTQ+ Champion was established in 2020, who raised awareness of LGBTQ+ issues via leaflets and the training of volunteers.

*Gypsy and traveller communities*

* 1. Similarly, a staff member with experience of working with the Gypsy and Traveller community shared her experiences with other staff members on the project and provided advice on working with this community.

*English language*

* 1. As highlighted in section 4, promoting English language skills played a core role in the project’s offer. This worked by signposting people to English language courses if the standard of their English was not high enough for them to join the project, and through project volunteers providing participants with opportunities to practice their English.

*Welsh language*

* 1. The project has produced Welsh language publicity material and the level of fluency in Welsh is recorded for all volunteers and participants. There was a lack of demand to acquire Welsh language skills or access services in Welsh[[25]](#footnote-26). As reported previously (Bowen and Holtom, 2018), there were examples of raising awareness of Welsh language and culture, such as explaining the meaning of Welsh street names and traditional Welsh myths.

**Sustainable development**

* 1. Through the establishment of a Sustainability Champion, sustainable development has been an area of strength for the project. Information sharing activities included:
	+ production of an Eco-Code to advise on eco-friendly practices;
	+ sustainable travel and resource efficiency themes that are covered in volunteers’ supervisions and training;
	+ a newsletter regarding sustainable practices for staff and volunteers; and
	+ pre-COVID-19, sustainable public travel and walking was encouraged; for example, a list of public transport options was provided to staff.

Reported actions included:

* + use of local supply chains; for example, most work-related training was sourced locally and participants were signposted to local ESOL providers. The project also used [SelltoWales](https://www.sell2wales.gov.wales/);
	+ during COVID-19, increased working online reduced travel and the use of paper and printing resources;
	+ DVD and book swap practices amongst staff and a donation scheme in which staff can pass on items to participants who need them; and
	+ standard household recycling practices, such as hard plastics, food and tea bags recycling were adopted in offices;
	1. In order to manage COVID-19 risks, the project needed to consume additional resources, such as anti-bacterial wipes and hand sanitisers. As reported in the progress reports, efforts were made to alleviate the impact by, for example, using long lasting sanitiser to avoid reapplying and the use of biodegradable kitchen roll.

**Tackling poverty and social exclusion**

* 1. Recent data indicates that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities experience economic injustices, such as lack of access to work ([WISERD, 2020](https://wiserd.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/WISERD%20Research%20on%20Race%20and%20Ethnicity%20finalwc_0.pdf)). Therefore, the project’s core achievements in terms of employment and qualifications[[26]](#footnote-27) outcomes are likely to have contributed to tackling poverty and social exclusion. It also took steps to establish an operational steering group that provided advice to the project on how to work with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

*Peer support*

* 1. Prior to COVID-19 (Bowen and Pells, 2020) there were some examples of informal social groups being established between participants, although this was rare at this stage in the project. Following COVID-19, as commented in the staff questionnaire responses (section 4), participants were encouraged to join social and community groups and, as highlighted in the previous report (Pells and Bowen, 2021,) online peer support activity were established, including a women’s conversation group and an online group for three participant families.

*Community skills building*

* 1. The project is likely to have contributed to community skills building by contributing to the demand for local services and increasing community capacity to deliver such services through:
* supporting access to local community services such as health services and food banks;
* use of local libraries, community centres and cafés when meeting project staff; and
* most volunteering and work experiences being located locally.
	1. In addition, staff provided participants with information around accessing funds to become digitally included and around their right to vote (for European Union participants) in, for example, Senedd elections, both of which would help with the process of accessing and influencing local services.

**The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**

* 1. Table 9 below provides an indication of the project’s contribution to the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

**Table 9. Showing the relative contribution of the project to the well-being goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (Green – strong, Amber – medium, Red – weak)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Well-being goals | Key contributions  |
| A prosperous Wales | * + Increasing employment and qualifications levels amongst participants is likely to increase productivity.
 |
|  A resilient Wales and globally responsible Wales | - Sustainable development activities of the project are likely to have helped although this was not the main focus of the project. |
| A healthier Wales  | * + Participants entering employment can make important contributions to health and well-being ([What Works Wellbeing, 2017](https://whatworkswellbeing.org/resources/unemployment-reemployment-and-wellbeing/)a).
	+ Increasing participants’ skills can also make important contributions to health and well-being ([What Works Wellbeing, 2017](https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/adult-learning-Nov17.pdf)b).
	+ Project focused on participants’ well-being during COVID-19 lockdowns
 |
| A more equal Wales | * + The project directly supports Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities who are at a higher risk of poverty and/or social exclusion ([JRF, 2020](https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/poverty-wales-2020)).
 |
| A Wales of cohesive communities  | * + By reducing poverty and social exclusion, the project is likely to have made a worthwhile contribution to promoting community cohesion.
 |
| A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language | * + Despite bilingual promotion and offer of support, very few Welsh speakers engaged. However, Welsh cultural awareness has been raised amongst some participants.
 |

1. **Conclusions**

**Has the operation achieved its objectives?**

* 1. Overall, the project has performed very well in terms of its key objectives as an employment-based support project. It has achieved its employment target for the Long Term Unemployed (LTU) and the Economically Inactive (EI). It has over-achieved its qualification targets for LTU participants and was close to achieving its qualification and job search targets for EI participants. Nevertheless, it has struggled with its volunteering targets for both LTU and EI participants.
	2. It is reasonable to assume that, without the negative impact of COVID-19 the project would have performed better in terms of its EI engagement targets and volunteering targets for both LTU and EI participants. During lockdowns, especially the first period, work placements and volunteering opportunities were often closed or restricted; for example, before COVID-19 (February 2020) volunteering outcomes were on target for LTU and were not far behind EI participants. Moreover, analyses of engagements showed that in 2021 between January and May (when the impact of COVID-19 had lessened) the project engaged more participants during this period than over those same five months over the last five years. This is likely to have been due to the impact of restructuring prior to the pandemic and an improved social media presence during the pandemic period (discussed further below).
	3. Despite improvements over the last 18 months and a total of 68 volunteers during the project’s lifetime, the project has struggled with recruiting volunteers (Bowen and Holtom, 2018; Bowen and Pells, 2020) and there has been a greater use of volunteers in certain geographical areas of the project than others.

**Explanations of successes in terms of engagements**

* 1. Overall, staff felt the project had done relatively well in terms of recruiting participants. Echoing findings from previous evaluation reports (Bowen and Pells, 2020; Pells and Bowen, 2021), strengths included:
* word of mouth within communities;
* strong partnership and networks;
* social media presence and reach, especially following COVID-19;
* pre-COVID-19, promotion through sharing flyers and being present face to face at key locations.
	1. Although, as expected, recruitment activity decreased a little during the pandemic, the project to its credit remained very active and carried on recruiting through social media and participants recommending other people they knew in need of help.
	2. Recruiting LTU participants had always been easier, as LTU participants

were more likely to be referred from other organisations, such as JCP (Bowen and Holtom, 2018; Bowen and Pells, 2020) and this pattern remained throughout the project’s lifetime (apart from the period when the project stopped recruiting LTU participants to focus on EI participant recruitment).

* 1. The establishment of the Volunteer Coordinator[[27]](#footnote-28) role, alignment with Change Grow Live recruitment systems and the external factor of more people wanting to volunteer due to furlough caused by COVID-19 (Pells and Bowen, 2021), helped with the recruitment of volunteers.

**Explanations of barriers and shortcomings in terms of engagements**

* 1. Staff were asked what was challenging about recruitment. As expected, the influence of COVID-19 was highlighted. Again, as stated in the previous report (Pells and Bowen, 2021), this included issues with IT literacy and access amongst participants. Also, difficulties in meeting people at community locations had a significant impact, as outreach workers for the project were established (around restructuring in 2020) to work face to face in communities.
	2. In addition to the above, the project faced other challenges to engagement during its lifetime, this included:
* charities which were expected to refer to the project folded and establishing new links proved problematic;
* a lack of diversity amongst staff, such as ethnicity;
* case officers having too many responsibilities to focus effectively on recruitment;
* issues with recruiting staff with the right levels of skills and experience;
* competition from other projects that provided employment support in areas where the level of the population from Black, Asian and other Minority Ethnic communities is relatively high for Wales[[28]](#footnote-29); and
* uneven levels of engagement across project areas; for example, recruitment was considerably higher (hence outcomes higher) in Newport compared to other areas, due to the established networks of a staff members there.

**Explanations of successes in terms of outcomes**

* 1. An economic upturn in February 2021 ([Welsh Government, 2021](https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2021-04/labour-market-overview-april-2021-627.pdf)) is likely to have helped with the on-going delivery of employment outcomes and, as stated in the previous report, there were still jobs available in certain sectors despite the negative impact of COVID-19 on the economy (Pells and Bowen, 2021).
	2. Staff felt that overall, the project support was the strongest part of the project (in comparison with engagements, volunteering and CCT). The strengths of the support identified mostly reflected feedback given in previous reports (Bowen and Pells, 2020; Pells and Bowen, 2021). These included:
* focus on employability skills, such as soft skills;
* strong relationships fostered between staff and participants;
* skilled and experienced staff; and
* a flexible delivery and communication model between staff and participants.
	1. Staff also expressed how much they had enjoyed working on the project and were ‘proud’ of what it had achieved.
	2. Key mechanisms that facilitated the support process included:
* the project, overall, adapted well to online working;
* improvements to the management and communications structure (e.g. Hub system[[29]](#footnote-30) and the sharing of good practice through case officer meetings).
	1. The support worked because participants felt valued. Participants reported that they valued the way staff communicated and supported them and rated their time with the project on average 4.9 out of 5 (5 being the best). There were also comments that highlighted the considerable positive impact the project had upon their lives.
	2. There was evidence of the value of volunteers on the project in supporting participants’ English language skills, social skills, job search skills and the project generally with social media. This added to the holistic approach to support.

**Explanations of shortcoming and barriers in terms of outcomes**

* 1. As previously stated (Pells and Bowen, 2021), COVID-19 was reported as a barrier mostly due to not being able to offer in person support and restricted or closed access to training and volunteering opportunities.
	2. Although providing English language support was a key part of the project, there were cases where poor English language skills created difficulties and these were more problematic when providing support online. Moreover, participant engagement levels and career ambitions could also fluctuate, which could frustrate staff due to the loss of participant progress this caused.
	3. In terms of volunteers on the project, a key barrier was finding volunteers who could be available at convenient times for participants (as many volunteers worked during the day).

**What would have happened without the intervention**

Staff and participant feedback indicates a direct link between the project intervention and an outcome, in that it was the project intervention, and not other external factors, that led to that particular employment outcome.

* 1. Moreover, it was unlikely that most participants would be able to gain similar support and outcomes elsewhere, especially EI participants (who were more likely to be recruited from community sources) as no other known project solely focuses on providing employment support to the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

 **Cross Cutting Themes**

* 1. The project has successfully achieved its CCT case level indicator targets and there were key strengths in terms of raising awareness of LGBTQ+[[30]](#footnote-31) and Gypsy and Traveller issues, and sustainable development activities such as DVD and book sharing practices amongst staff. Participants had also gained from additional positive activities, such being encouraged to join community groups and raising awareness of voting rights amongst Europeans (in Senedd elections). Moreover, whilst representations of women, older people and disabled people were not as high as hoped, employment outcomes were stronger amongst women than men and disabled people were more likely than others to gain qualifications.
	2. Despite challenges staff reported that the project had been able to cater adequately for CCT..

**Recommendations**

* 1. The recommendations are focused on lessons learned from the successful project that could be taken forward to a similar project in the future, as the project has demonstrated an on-going need for such a project.

*To* Change Grow Live

* 1. Recommendation 1: share best practice and ‘lessons learned’ from the project with relevant partners and stakeholders.
	2. Recommendation 2: explore further[[31]](#footnote-32) funding options for a similar project based on assessed need in the future.
	3. Recommendation 3: future projects should consider lessons learned in[[32]](#footnote-33):
* maximising the use of social media to publicise and inform potential and existing participants;
* having clear and specific job roles for staff (i.e. avoid a broad range of work responsibilities);
* providing adequate resources and focus upon recruiting staff with the right levels of experience and skills to carry out their roles effectively;
* fostering and building upon partnerships with other organisations established in this project and with Change Grow Live.

# Appendix 1: data collection and guidance tools

**Table 10. Showing categorised data collection and guidance tools.**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Outcomes measures**  | **Outcomes requirements**  | **Policy related forms**  | **Forms that aid participant recruitment/engagement**  |
| Impact Star and Action Plan  | Evidence Requirements for Outcomes  | Referral Form  | Participant Eligibility-Consent Form  |
| Skills Audit  | Outcome Evidence Cover Sheet  | Equal Opportunities Form  | Telephone Assessment Form Script  |
| Soft Outcomes Form  | Contact Form  Active Job Search Declaration  | Consent to Share Information  | Paperwork Flowchart  |
| EI Outcome Achievement Flowcharts  | Entering Employment Declaration  | Photo Publicity Consent Form  | Participant Eligibility Checklist  |
| Participant Employment Review Tracker  | Entering Self- Employment Declaration  | Eco-code  | Employer Introduction Letter template  |
|   | Placement Details Declaration  |   | DAF v2 application form Change Grow Live Frequently Asked Questions  |

*Source:* Change Grow Live *ACE data collection and guidance forms*

# Unpublished references

Bowen, R. and Holtom, D. (2018) *Achieving Change Through Employment project. First interim evaluation report*. Unpublished.

Bowen, R. and Pells, H. (2020) *Achieving Change Through Employment project. Second interim evaluation report.* Unpublished.

Matthews, H. (2021) Service Report – *Wales Education, Training & Employment (ETE) D36. Achieving Change through Employment (ACE) P840 P842.* Unpublished

Pells, H. and Bowen, R. (2021) *Achieving Change Through Employment project. Third interim evaluation report.* Unpublished.

1. As specified in the project’s Business Plan Addendum, August 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Partners and / or potential partners. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. The second interim report went into detail about the ways of working that influenced success and the barriers the project faced, and the third interim report focused on the responses to COVID-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Quantitative data collected via StatsWales to compare numbers of project participants with certain characteristics (gender and disability) with the national average and risk of COVID-19 to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. For example, some staff had been interviewed four times regarding the evaluation. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. A representative sample is a subset of a population (e.g. staff and participants) that accurately reflects the characteristics of the wider population.  [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Eight had responded to the questionnaire, however, one of the staff members did not have relevant knowledge to answer all the questions, due to their specialist role. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. This is the charity which delivered the ACE project before Change Grow Live took on the role. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Such as the southern wards of Cardiff ([The University of Manchester, 2013](http://hummedia.manchester.ac.uk/institutes/code/briefings/localdynamicsofdiversity/geographies-of-diversity-in-cardiff.pdf)) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Outside Cardiff, the proportion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities in EW local authorities is relatively low ([StatsWales](https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Equality-and-Diversity/Ethnicity/ethnicity-by-area-ethnicgroup)). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. To focus on recruiting volunteers and generate match funding volunteer hours. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. i.e. average cost per participant was 3,971 in August 2020, 3,952 in February 2021 and £3,897 in May 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Eight had responded to the questionnaire, however, one of the staff members did not have relevant knowledge to answer all the questions due to their specialist role. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. These Hubs include key roles that support each other in that region i.e. volunteer coordinator, outreach worker and case officers. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. For example, the participants eligibility consent form, equal opportunities forms and results declarations (see appendix 1 for further examples). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. “A causal relationship is when one variable causes a change in another variable. These types of relationships are investigated by experimental research in order to determine if changes in one variable actually result in changes in another variable” (Verywellmind, 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. I.e. Equal Opportunities and Gender Mainstreaming, Sustainable Development, Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. This includes positive measures regarding women, people aged over 54, occupational segregation activity, resource efficiency measures, development of an organisational travel and sustainable transport initiatives, local supply chain development, developing an eco code, peer support activity, community skill building activity, developing / engaging CCT champions. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Stands for: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (or questioning) and others. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Eight had responded to the questionnaire, however, one of the staff members did not have relevant knowledge to answer all the questions due to their specialist role. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. This figure is from October 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. This figure is from October 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. Stands for: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (or questioning) and others. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Only one participant chose to access services in Welsh and only one other could read, write, and understand Welsh. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. 18% of participants had no qualifications, compared to the 7% average for Wales ([StatsWales](https://gov.wales/levels-highest-qualification-held-working-age-adults-2020-html)). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. To focus on recruiting volunteers and generate match funding volunteer hours. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Such as the southern wards of Cardiff ([The University of Manchester, 2013](http://hummedia.manchester.ac.uk/institutes/code/briefings/localdynamicsofdiversity/geographies-of-diversity-in-cardiff.pdf)) [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. These Hubs include key roles that support each other in that region i.e. volunteer coordinator, outreach worker and case officers. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Stands for: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (or questioning) and others. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. A bid to the [Community Renewal Fund](https://www.cardiff.gov.uk/ENG/Business/Support-and-Finance-for-Business/community-renewal-fund/Pages/default.aspx) project in Cardiff has been sent (passing the first stage) and the project is planning a funding bid for [Active Inclusion](https://www.sewales-ret.co.uk/active-inclusion-fund/) [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. Many are based upon recommendations from the service report (Matthews, 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)