

UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND IMPACT REPORT: WOMEN'S WELLBEING IN SOUTH TYNESIDE

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AUTHOR:

Charlotte O'Keefe – Key Worker, Rise.

WITH THANKS TO:

**Paul Biddle, Declan Mulholland, Samantha Hunter, Jade Scott,
Michael Walsh, Asia Uddin.**

RISE.

INTRODUCTION

This report details the activities delivered and outcomes achieved by Rise through securing UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and includes:

- Background to the project
- Project deliverables
- Impact including quantitative data and case studies
- Learning points and reflections.

BACKGROUND

In Autumn 2023 South Tyneside Council invited organisations to submit bids to the UKSPF. The fund aimed to improve pride in place and increase life chances across the UK by investing in communities, supporting local business, people and skills.

Under the Community & Place and People & Skills themes, this particular call was looking for projects that had a clear focus on engaging with local communities; particularly those in the most disadvantaged areas of the borough with the highest rates of economic inactivity. Projects needed to show how they would support people to move closer to the labour market and reduce economic inactivity.

PROJECT DELIVERABLES

In March 2025 Rise was successful in securing an additional £111,000 to deliver a holistic employability support service in collaboration with Women's Health in South Tyneside (WHiST) and South Tyneside Council between April 2025 and March 2026. The service primarily aimed to support women, particularly targeting those living with poor physical and mental health living in Beacon & Bents and parts of Simonside & Rekendyke in South Tyneside.

The project employed a female Key Worker to provide a personalised and person-centred approach to supporting individuals. Service users received 1:1 support, were enabled to identify barriers that prevented them from contemplating employment and then worked with the Key Worker to develop individualised plans to reduce those barriers. To progress towards employment the Key Worker supported individuals to tackle barriers such as low self-esteem and confidence alongside supporting them to access primary health care, referrals for counselling and support to access community groups and volunteering. The service also supported women to overcome practical barriers to applying for work, for example by helping them secure free SIM cards, onward referrals to organisations who were able to provide laptops or tablets, support accessing training around IT skills and help with interview preparation and work clothes.

To ensure the service reached those who would benefit most from the support, the Key Worker was based in WHiST's building and established a range of referral pathways into the programme. Referrals were received from partners such as

Probation, Impact Family Services, South Tyneside Adult Recovery Service and the local VCSE sector.

In addition to the Key Worker service, the project also included engagement activities at WHiST. The sessions delivered included social activities which focused on improving physical and mental well-being, raising confidence and self-esteem, communication and life skills. The funding also supported WHiST to provide creche sessions which helped to remove childcare barriers.

IMPACT

Throughout the twelve month project:

- 23 economically inactive women have engaged with Key Worker support services
- 433 women engaged in courses to improve interpersonal skills (i.e. confidence building, sessions to reduce social isolation, mental and physical wellbeing sessions)
- 32 individuals engaged in education/lifelong learning opportunities – Conversational English
- 12 women supported into volunteering opportunities

Of those women engaging in wellbeing activities:

- 75% improved anxiety and depression
- 61% improved concentration and focus
- 86% improved confidence
- 91% feeling positive about learning
- 88% improved fitness and health
- 76% improved mood and positivity
- 88% increased motivation

Feedback from the courses included:

'I have a wide range of disabilities. I've learned more about my body and how to move without hurting myself. Hildy has helped me gain more confidence in my body and helped me stay mobile. With this course I have gone from basically bedbound to living a more healthy, active lifestyle. I have gone from a size 30 to a size 20 during my time on the course'.

'The course has made a big difference to my anxiety and mood. I feel more relaxed and able to cope with my caring role'.

'This has been a positive life changing experience I have long since needed. It has educated me to how I became in this situation but more importantly how to get out of it and move on feeling well adjusted'.

CASE STUDIES

Below are three case studies which illustrate the circumstances and issues of participants engaged in the project, interventions undertaken and outcomes achieved. They also evidence some of the wider challenges facing the women supported and the project in trying to respond to these.

Client A

Client A is a woman in her 60s who had had to give up work due to complex physical health issues. She had always worked and was very reluctant to seek help and hoped to return to work. She was receiving Universal Credit, struggling to heat her home and relying on foodbanks. This was impacting her mental health; she had lost confidence in accessing the community and seldom left her home. She was referred to the project by her counsellor.

At first client A found it difficult to engage and felt that there was nothing that could be done to improve her wellbeing. The key worker slowly built a relationship with her, identifying practical ways to support her. The key worker completed a benefits check and supported Client A to apply for additional benefits, this allowed Client A to feel able to pay her bills and had a massive impact on her wellbeing and also build her trust in the key worker, so they were able to work on other issues.

Client A was able to see the benefit of accepting support. This allowed her to accept adult social care providing her aids to help her independence at home, help to apply for a Blue Badge and help to reduce her fuel bills.

Having resolved many of Client A's practical issues her confidence improved, and she had more capacity to address her social isolation. The key worker encouraged her to attend a cookery group and local wellbeing drop in and this has led to her being less socially isolated.

Client A said:

“ It was very difficult, I had always worked and did not understand ... (the key worker) was able to sort it out when no one else had... this was a welcoming space for me to build confidence, find encouragement, and develop resilience. ”

Unfortunately, Client A's health means she will not be able to return to work, however the support from the keyworker has supported her to be more able to live well with her condition.

Client B

Client B is woman in her 40s who has been economically inactive for many years due to domestic violence, mental health issues and alcohol misuse. She was referred to the key worker for support to help manage her mental health and find meaningful activities so support her to reduce her alcohol use.

At first, she was not ready to access support, but the key worker engaged with her proactively and offered outreach sessions to make it easier for her. The key worker spoke with Client B to identify what was preventing her engaging, and she highlighted anxiety, being unable to afford bus fares to appointments and not having credit on her phone. The key worker supported her with a bus pass and a free SIM to reduce her digital exclusion. The key worker helped Client B explore what helped her to manage her anxiety and Client B identified that attending the gym helped with this, but she could not afford this at present. The key worker supported her to access a free gym pass to help her manage her anxiety until she was able to access mental health support. Client B reports that this has supported her with her alcohol recovery and helped her to build her self-confidence.

Her increased confidence has allowed Client B to feel able to think about what she wants in the future and be open to opportunities. Client B wanted to gain her level 2 maths qualification and her key worker supported her to enrol in a course, which she is now attending and hopes to complete the course in June. Her next goal is to start an engineering course at college in September.

Client B said:

“ This has brought me a new belief in myself. Thank you so much. ”

Client C

Client C is a woman in her 20s with autism, mental health difficulties and a history of being in the care system. She had not worked since being unable to complete an apprenticeship due to an episode of homelessness and since then has been very socially isolated and not in education, training or employment. She was referred to the key worker to help her build her confidence and explore returning to training.

Client C does not enjoy group activities and did not want to try new things. However, she does have a strong interest in cookery. The key worker supported her to enrol in a beginners' cookery course and a healthy eating course. These courses have helped build her confidence, she has made new friends and they have now enrolled themselves on another cooking course. Client C now wants to work in hospitality and plans to return to college in September, in the meantime she is hoping to gain additional qualifications and is exploring setting up her own catering business.

Client C said:

“ Thank you for your help, I needed help to get started and now I feel like I know what I need to do and can do it myself. ”



LEARNING AND REFLECTIONS

Over the 12 month programme Rise and WHiST have worked in collaboration with each other, South Tyneside Council and other partners to ensure the project was a great success. In relation to the targets set we have:

- Exceeded the amount of economically inactive people engaging with the Key Worker support service (23 women were supported, exceeding the target of 20).
- Exceeded the number of people who had improved their employability by improving interpersonal skills (324 women who attended courses reported that the intervention had helped improve issues affecting their interpersonal skills compared to a target of 160).

WHAT WENT WELL AND WHY

Collaboration – Rise and WHiST

Partnership working between Rise and WHiST, with the Key Worker being based within WHiST, was critical to the success achieved during the programme. WHiST is a locally well known, well regarded and trusted organisation, regarded as a safe space, by the project's target group of women. As such, women were comfortable to engage with WHiST and therefore the Key Worker in a way they may not have been with Rise.

WHiST staff have a wealth of experience of directly delivering provision to women experiencing deprivation, marginalisation and poor mental and physical wellbeing, whereas Rise is not a direct delivery organisation and lacks this experience and capacity. Collaborating with WHiST and other partners also enabled women to access wider services beyond those directly funded via UKSPF. This created a more holistic approach to meeting the needs of the women accessing the project.

Realistic targets

Due to both Rise and WHiST having previous experience of delivering holistic employability courses and having worked with individuals in similar circumstances realistic, achievable targets were set based on the knowledge of how many individuals it was feasible to work with and outcomes that could be achieved. Because realistic targets were identified, it enabled the Key Worker to provide light touch support to some individuals who did not meet the criteria. This strengthened relationships with referral partners and enabled the Key Worker to build trust and a reliable reputation for the service.

Creche provision

Funding for free creche provision has supported women to access courses, this has been particularly important for women attending Conversational English classes. The creche not only enabled participants to leave their children in a safe, friendly space, located in the same building whilst they received support, it also strengthened WHiST's partnership with another South Tyneside organisation, Crest.

CHALLENGES

Planning and delivery timescale

The delivery timescale was particularly challenging and for some people 12 months is too short a time-period to provide the full support they needed to move towards employment given their circumstances and needs. Women from the previous year have continued to access support to help them to build on their success, supporting them to move to volunteering, continuing to provide emotional support when transitioning to work and continue to access courses to improve their skills and wellbeing.

Eligibility criteria

The project eligibility criteria required participants to be economically inactive. However, the Key Worker has continued to support women who are not economically inactive, including by helping women who are actively seeking work where needed to help them find work and access other services.

Reporting

Reporting and outcomes focus on quantitative numbers/throughput, rather than quality of experience or impact on participants related to their unique starting point.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A development period to plan and promote activities is critical. This supports promotion, engagement and underpins successful delivery.
- Clear eligibility criteria is required at the start of projects to enable planning. There is a need to accept service users outside of criteria while building the service.
- Whilst positive impacts can be achieved in 12 months, ideally projects need to be longer term to reflect how long progress from economic inactivity into employment can take and to allow interventions to have maximum impact.
- Longer term funding to fund projects delivered by experienced, locally embedded organisations and staff, is critical to successful project delivery.
- Free childcare must be part of projects supporting this client group. Without it, their engagement would be much more difficult – if not impossible.
- Experienced delivery staff and organisations with a history of working with target groups, who are embedded in their local communities, are crucial to achievement of positive outcomes.
- Strengthen communication/embedding the Key Worker in WHiST, again longer term projects would enable this to happen.
- Performance monitoring needs to capture quality of participant experience alongside throughput to truly illustrate the impact achieved and value of investments made.
- Realistic, rather than overly ambitious, targets are required to ensure delivery is manageable and focuses on delivery appropriate, high-quality interventions, rather than box-ticking interventions to ensure high numerical targets are met.

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 Royal Quays Business Centre | Coble Dene | Royal Quays | North Shields | Tyne & Wear | NE29 6DE

 RiseNorthEast.co.uk

 info@RiseNorthEast.co.uk

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