

Interim Monitoring and Evaluation

Summary Report

DECEMBER 2020



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Foreword

In August 2016 a unique and unprecedented partnership was formed, a partnership that over the next four years would influence a county's vision and realise the employment and learning ambitions of hundreds of vulnerable people across Gloucestershire.

The Gloucestershire GEM Project has always been a "work in progress". With the needs of vulnerable people as its beating heart, the programme has continued to flex and adapt providing those who are furthest from the labour market the opportunity to improve their skills and participate fully in their communities.

The project was originally scheduled to finish at the end of December 2019. Had we finished then we would have surpassed the expectations of all involved by exceeding our targets with the help of a partnership that had grown organically and embedded itself as a valuable county-wide resource. Instead, on the back of our evidenced based success, we received additional funding to enable the continuation of the project for a further two years. In addition we brought in some new partners to help us extend further into communities which remained marginalised and disengaged from the project, particularly BAME communities and those with high levels of unemployment.

Over the last four years the partnership has grown in strength and resilience and in early 2020 our resolve was put to the ultimate test as we faced the COVID-19 global pandemic. As individuals, communities and as a project we faced the many unique challenges that COVID-19 brought with it. However, this only served to strengthen our partnership

Vikki Walters
Strategic Lead for Inclusive Employment,
Gloucestershire County Council



I feel I can lean back and I'm not going to fall...

GEM Participant

further as our staff and partners adapted to the enforced changes of an unprecedented national lockdown. Each person played their part in making sure that GEM continued to support individuals, keep them well and help prevent social isolation. We introduced new ways of working and discovered just how adaptable and resilient our workforce and partnership were - they were all exceptional in exceptional times.

We are now moving forward into the last year of our GEM delivery and it is time to consider the legacy that GEM will leave. This report promotes the strength of the partnership, acknowledges the resilience and adaptability of staff and showcases the achievements of our participants. All of this would be meaningless without the data which provides the evidence on which we can base our commissioning decisions and that helps us to understand what it is that enables vulnerable people to live meaningful lives.

This project has allowed us to collect an abundance of information that clearly demonstrates a need for a project providing holistic and individualised support through a partnership that utilises the strength of all partners across all sectors. As we enter our last year it is one of uncertainty on many levels - COVID-19, Brexit, rising unemployment, a shrinking labour market and funding are all issues we will face. But we will face them together as a partnership determined to keep generating success and striving to create a positive legacy and a positive outlook for a future beyond GEM.

Mark Gale
Chief Executive,
Gloucestershire Gateway Trust

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Executive Summary

GEM is a social inclusion programme aimed at moving a range of disadvantaged groups closer to the labour market, training and education. Since October 2016 the programme has engaged 1668 participants, of which 429 have moved into paid employment and 148 into education and training. However, the on-going monitoring and evaluation has revealed a range of positive and often life changing outcomes for the vast majority of participants, most notably in improving their personal and motivational attributes and through removing barriers to the provision of advice and support.

In building on previous annual interim evaluation reports, this message of profound impact is strengthened and deepened as the evaluation has sought to reach out to the extremities of its harder to reach participant cohort, its partnership and to those on the front line of programme delivery, who have faced significant challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020.



Over the course of the year GEM has demonstrated a unique agility and resilience to respond rapidly and ensure that it can meet the needs of its services users - an agility which has helped to maintain the physical and mental wellbeing of its participant cohort in the face of an unprecedented public health, social and economic crisis.



The network of delivery partner organisations and especially the Navigator Developers (NDs) has developed well through new methods and systems of sharing of information, expertise and resources through the pandemic, including the celebrated #GEMonline. Many NDs reported that the network has become very close and even more collaborative, which has not gone unnoticed by participants who have referred to feeling part of the GEM 'community' in the county. This in part reflects GEMs provision of flexibility and autonomy to its partners, which has increased the capacity to establish responsive and creative approaches.

In accordance with GEM's agility in maintaining the wellbeing of its participants in 2020, the latest round of distance travelled analysis has identified a slight shift in emphasis away from employability skills towards health related outcomes, with improved physical and mental health featuring in the top two quartiles of outcome change for the first time since the programme began. The analysis also reaffirms two areas that GEM has consistently excelled at in terms of changing the lives of its participants: the competence, engagement and purpose of participants through offering them a chance to learn new things, and the removal of barriers to receiving help and advice, with participants self reporting a mean change of 32% in both outcomes.

Also highlighted is the increased take up in training, vocational and educational opportunities (+21%); improved life and work skills (+19%) and improved resilience and self-esteem (+25%), which in itself relates strongly to mental health. Results have again been

used to update the forecast Social Return on Investment (SROI) model, with the forecast Benefit-to-Investment Ratio (BIR) rising to 1: 2.50, meaning that **GEM is now forecast to generate a societal return of £14.7m** through delivery of psycho-social outcomes for its participants.

Inclusive stories of participants support deepen the evaluation metrics, highlighting GEM to be an effective experience for participants in coping with the challenges of unemployment and building the necessary skills and attributes for progression and self improvement. Participation has helped individuals to reduce uncertainty about their future career, thereby strengthening the willingness of individuals to further themselves and seek real and meaningful achievement. These experiences represent achievements which are greatly valued by GEM participants and are valuable contributors in enhancing their psychological, physical, emotional and social health and wellbeing.



Unique context



The Coronavirus pandemic caused the UK to be put on lockdown from March to July with a further period during October and November, 2020, in an attempt to limit the spread of the virus. This impacted schools, colleges, universities and many workplaces.

GEM 2020

- transfer operations to an online setting - all work continued throughout lockdown
- #GEMonline launched April 6th
- weekly programme of support published on GEM website
- laptops for GEM participants where required
- adaptive practices - weekly contact by phone or video platform
- focus on staff wellbeing; weekly 10 minute catch ups interspersed with longer meetings to discuss recovery plans

Rapid response



"agility and resilience"

Outcomes



November 2019 - new version of the GEM psycho-social outcomes survey to capture of mental health impacts using Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well Being Scale (WEMWEBS).

32%

Improvement in **competence, engagement and sense of purpose** through the chance to **learn new things**, and the **removal of barriers** to receiving help and advice,



MALE AND FEMALE PARTICIPANTS - STATEMENT CHANGES - ENTRY AND EXIT



GEM consistently improves personal and motivational attributes:

- Training, vocational and educational opportunities (+21%)
- improved life and work skills (+19%)
- improved resilience and self-esteem (+25%)



Forecast Social Return on Investment (SROI)

GEM has generated a range of psycho-social benefits for participants to the value of **£2.50** for every **£1** invested since its inception

Participants with a developmental disorder reported higher employability, confidence and motivation and positive functioning but a lower level of improvements in physical and mental health

Female participants self-report a greater distance travelled across all but one outcome domains

Optimum time in project: 3 to 6 months

"greatest impact on those that have needed it most"

Inclusive stories as told by participants



Reducing uncertainty about future career, strengthening willingness seek real and meaningful achievement

Digital Storytelling

Powerful experiential narratives

Understanding impact and gauging individuals' empowerment



being listened to, sometimes for the first time

journeying from reluctance and reservation, to leadership and achievement

reconfigured personal life goals and expectations, specifically in relation to family, drugs and crime

achieved new goals

GEM was key to being employed within a nurturing and supportive team

Worked well

career planning and pursuing goals - supporting emotional wellbeing - diversity of courses - GEM online

Worked less well

Pressures of paperwork - targets and changes over time - participant engagement - effects of COVID (shift to welfare focus)

The GEM partnership provided its organisations with flexibility and autonomy which in turn increased capacity to establish responsive and creative approaches

GEM Partnership assessment

- ✓ Resources and advice
- ✓ Mutual support
- ✓ Communication
- ✓ Learning and development

- ✗ Long term funding
- ✗ Rigid targets
- ✗ Access to CPD
- ✗ Volatility in job market

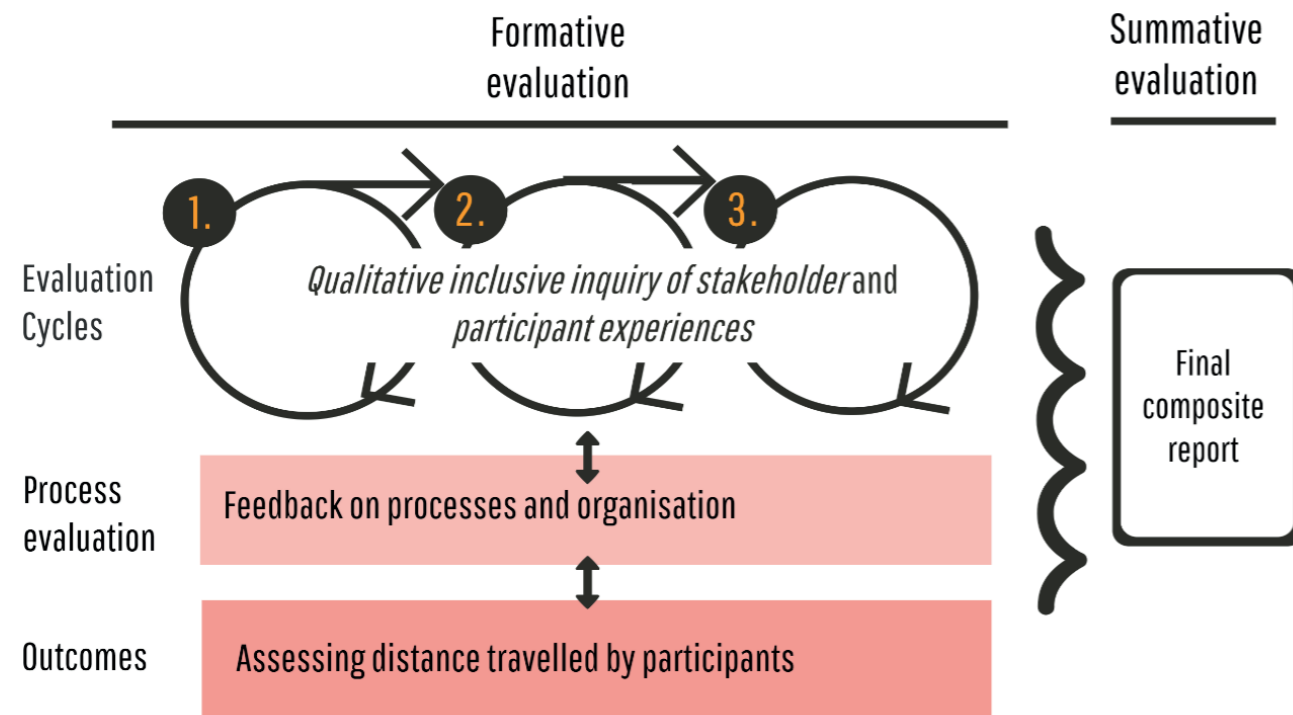
Partnership outcomes



1.0 Introduction

This report builds on the previous interim evaluation reports of June 2017, October 2018 and October 2019. The overall Monitoring and Evaluation framework for GEM encompasses both an outcomes (summative) and process (formative) evaluation. The outcomes evaluation examines the outcomes and impact of the project with the aim of determining overall effectiveness. The process evaluation focuses on processes linked to planning, management and delivery of the project, and the extent to which planned activities are carried out. These are incorporated in a cyclical approach through which data are continuously gathered, analysed and disseminated (Figure 1).

Figure 1: GEM evaluation model



The **Outcomes evaluation** is underpinned by a Theory of Change (ToC) which contains four distinct but overlapping conceptual pathways including wellbeing, health and participation, employability and material improvement. Distance travelled data is routinely collected from participants via a social outcomes survey completed on entry to the programme and again at a participant's exit interview. This data provides a way of systematically measuring change in the outcomes to populate a Social Return on Investment (SROI) model, and is triangulated with participant stories of GEM gathered through inclusive methods such as peer researcher interviews and digital storytelling.



As part of the annual evaluation cycle, the **process evaluation** draws on data gathered from project monitoring statistics, and in this case from discussions with 21 Navigator Developers and interviews with 15 participants. Assumptions identified in previous evaluation cycles that demonstrate the underlying success factors of GEM have been further confirmed and strengthened in 2020. Most notably the quality of the partnership, the intensive one-to-one support of the NDs, the proactive efforts to engage the business sector and the principles of co-production which underlie the entire programme – including its monitoring and evaluation.

¹ See the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework Report of May 2017 for full details of the approach.

2.0 GEM and the COVID-19 pandemic

- A story of agility and resilience

During early March as the number of COVID-19 cases rose it became apparent that the safety of GEM staff and participants would be of extreme importance. The GEM delivery model, which often involved face to face meetings in enclosed spaces, meant that the health of both NDs and participants was potentially at risk. Further, as over 50% of GEM participants report a health condition, a number of them could be at an increased risk of contracting COVID-19.

As the threat of a potential lockdown loomed the GEM Management team began to take swift action to protect the health of both staff and participants. An imminent staff meeting which would have meant 30+ people meeting in an enclosed space was rescheduled as a virtual event - now commonplace, but at the time this represented a sudden and significant shift in working practices. Prior to any official national announcements, all GCC staff were asked to leave their offices and to make arrangements to work from home. The GEM Management team simultaneously acted to cease all face to face activity including team meetings and one to one interventions with immediate effect. Throughout this swift process it remained imperative that the staff understood what was going on and they were part of discussions about how they could continue their interactions with participants.

The effect of the UK lockdown created the need for the GEM project to be transferred to an online setting. The GEM project responded quickly, initially to bring all the tailored one to one support online conducted via zoom and telephone calls. The GEM office set up a programme of online support through a weekly programme which was published on their website. In addition laptops were delivered to participants in need to enable them to access the online services and not be disadvantaged. Inevitably there was a distance created between GEM participants and their Navigator Developer (ND) during the isolation period, that may have adversely affected levels of engagement on the project. However, due to the necessary shift towards primarily attending to the wellbeing of

participants, this is deemed to not be the case. All work continued virtually throughout the lockdown period. NDs adapted their practice and started to contact participants either by phone or video platform - at no time was there any break in the GEM service. Across all levels of the partnership it was recognised that participants were especially vulnerable and required additional support, and as the communities rallied, GEM partners became part of the essential work that kept people from isolation and danger.

From late March/early April the focus of GEM necessarily adapted from supporting people to look for education, training or employment to focussing on their health, wellbeing and safety - making sure they had access to food, medication and helping them to access the wide range of support that became available to them. NDs moved from seeing people on a fortnightly basis to contacting them at least once a week to make sure that they were okay. Additionally, they delivered food, went on "virtual walks" with participants and for those isolated from their families they made the essential call that helped them stay in touch with the outside world.

Taking inspiration from the success of Joe Wicks, the GEM Management team very quickly introduced an online platform to help support GEM participants. #GEMonline was launched on April 6th with the aim of providing a platform that would help retain some focus on the end goal of employment, education or training, keep participants engaged with GEM, provide help to support and maintain their wellbeing and minimise the effects of isolation.

GEM soon identified that some participants were digitally excluded, they didn't have either the IT or skills to fully participate with online activities. Help was sourced through the COVID-19 response funding from Barnwood Trust and Thirty Percy and they were able to allocate IT and data to the participants who needed it most. This process has helped to raise awareness of digital exclusion in the county generally, and how it might be tackled - representing a further legacy of the lockdown and GEMs agile response to it.

and knowledge with others. All GEM staff have contributed willingly to the development of recovery plans, and to ideas about how the lessons learned and suggestions developed during lockdown are not lost. As the country emerged from lockdown in early July it was apparent that the GEM team was stronger than when it went in. And as we face up to a winter of uncertainty, the team can take the lessons learned from the last nine months and approach the final year of GEM with a robust attitude and the knowledge that even a large team dispersed across the county in 30 different organisations can react quickly, flexibly and professionally to meet the needs of vulnerable people in an environment that can change without warning, and which can impose restrictions on the way it works and the help it can offer.

As #GEMonline grew it provided a range of online sessions, from Yoga through to full career days involving local employers. Everyone contributed their ideas, provided sessions and it soon became popular not only with GEM participants but others who logged in for their weekly Yoga session or wellbeing cookery class. At the time of writing (November 2020) as GEM returns to a blended delivery model, #GEMonline continues but with the primary focus back on developing employability skills.

Staff wellbeing has also been at the fore of GEM managerial concerns since the crisis began, making sure everyone has stayed well both physically and mentally. For example, monthly half day team meetings became weekly 10 minute catch ups interspersed with longer meetings to discuss recovery plans. This had a positive effect on the staff as they had more regular contact which encouraged them to talk to one another. A number of peer support sessions sprang up, led by NDs which helped foster and develop a comradery as everyone was very much 'in it together'. Sharing an abundance of information has also been a central theme and the introduction of the SLACK platform has encouraged staff to share opportunities, information, experiences

In short, GEM has demonstrated that it has the agility and resilience to respond to a crisis to ensure that it can meet the needs of its services users, whatever those needs might be at any given point in time. Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, that agility has helped to maintain the physical and mental wellbeing of its participant cohort in the face of an unprecedented public health, social and economic crisis, as is explored further below. The purpose of this report is to explore in the current year and largely focussing on 2020 on what is working well for GEM and what has the potential to be developed with a particular focus on assessing current levels of engagement in GEM. This report forms one aspect of the annual process evaluation cycle but obviously has a particular perspective given the current context. This is the third time a report has been undertaken during the GEM project.

3.0 Outcomes evaluation

3.1 Distance travelled in participant outcomes

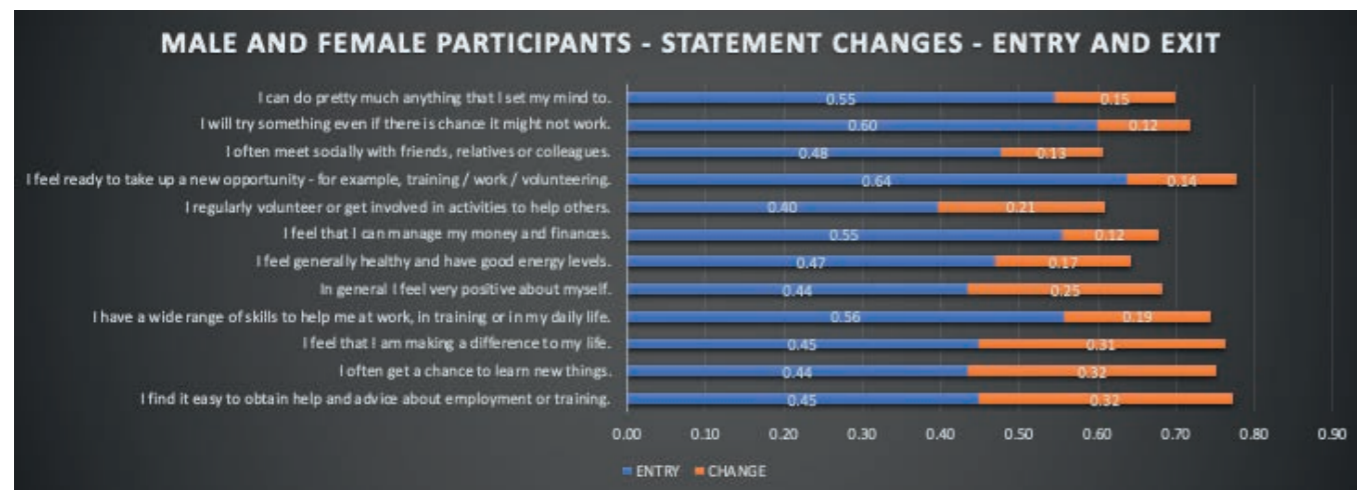
In November 2019 an all new version of the psychosocial outcomes survey was launched to include formal capture of mental health impacts using the validated Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well Being Scale (WEMWEBS). Following consultation with NDs, the existing survey was also reformatted to make it more user friendly. In July 2020 the outcomes data was merged with the GEM management and monitoring data which is held centrally and collected via the core paperwork. For the first time this has allowed differences in psychosocial outcome change to be examined across various characteristics of participants.

A data combining and cleaning exercise has yielded usable distance travelled responses from 704 participants, amounting to around 50% of all participants that have registered on

GEM since the programme began in late 2016 and representing a sample that is statistically representative of the entire participant cohort.

The distance travelled analysis reaffirms the two areas that GEM has consistently excelled at in terms of changing the lives of its participants: the competence, engagement and purpose of participants through offering them a chance to learn new things, and the removal of barriers to receiving help and advice, with participants self-reporting a mean change of 32% in both outcomes. Indeed, these outcomes have scored highly in every evaluation cycle since 2017, firmly demonstrating the consistency of GEM in improving personal and motivational attributes through the provision of advice and support. Figure 2 highlights the distance travelled across the outcomes for all participants.

Figure 2: Distance travelled for GEM participants across psycho-social outcomes



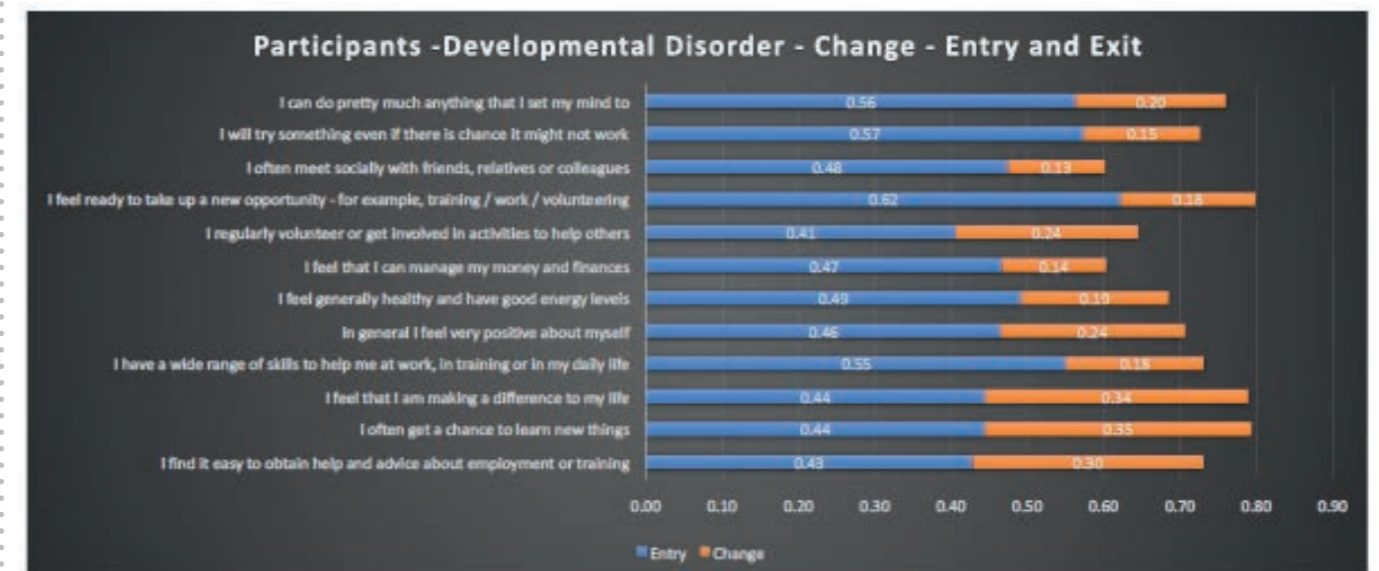
In addition to increased competence, engagement and purpose and the removal of barriers to receiving help and advice, a further three outcomes have consistently demonstrated a higher magnitude of distance travelled for GEM participants across every evaluation cycle: increased take up in training, vocational and educational opportunities (+21%); improved life and work skills (+19%) and improved resilience and self-esteem (+25%), which in itself relates strongly to mental health. This not only demonstrates the consistency of GEM in improving personal and motivational attributes, but also provides validation of the survey methodology itself, with only marginal differences in relative magnitude of outcome change order since 2017.

This latest round of analysis has also identified a slight shift in emphasis away from employability skills towards health related outcomes, with improved physical and mental health featuring in the top two quartiles of outcome change for the first time since the programme began, taking the place of improved employability through job-ready skills and attributes. This may in part reflect the broader shift towards personal wellbeing and support that GEM has necessarily made for its participants in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, as described above.

3.2 Participant characteristics and outcome change

Differentiating between various characteristics of respondent and the magnitude of outcome change experienced by them reveals that female participants self-report a greater distance travelled across all outcome domains apart from one - improved confidence and motivation to engage with new opportunities. Another source of differentiation can be found in relation to disability, where participants with a developmental disorder (which include Asperger Syndrome, Autism, Developmental Co-ordination Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), ASD and speech issues) have reported greater distance travelled in employability, confidence and motivation and positive functioning when compared to participants without a disability. This group have also reported a lower level of improvements in physical and mental health impacts as a result of their participation in GEM when compared to the wider cohort (See Figure 3).

Figure 3: Distance Travelled in psychosocial outcomes by disability



Educational level and ethnicity of participants were also found to be differentiators with higher distance travelled across some outcomes self-reported for those with lower educational attainment and Asian/British participants. For the first time the survey findings also provide an indication of the optimum length of time for a participant to be engaged with GEM in order to experience higher levels of change in psychosocial outcomes. Across all outcome domains, those participants engaged with GEM between three and six months self-report higher mean distance travelled scores than for those in all other time periods - 26% compared to 20% for those who have been engaged between six months and two years, and 17% for those participants who have been registered on GEM for less than three months or more than two years. Therefore one might conclude that, in terms of personal development and life changes, an optimum time for participation in GEM is between three months and two years, with the greatest level of change occurring between three and six months.

Survey results have been used to populate a forecast Social Return on Investment (SROI) model during every evaluation cycle since 2017, demonstrating that GEM has generated a range of psychosocial benefits for participants to the value of between £1.57 and £2.39 for every £1 invested since the programme began. Results from the 2020 distance travelled analysis have again been used to update the forecast SROI model, which demonstrates a slight improvement in the prospective societal return of GEM, with the forecast Benefit-to-Investment Ratio (BIR) rising to 1: 2.50.

Outcome	Distance Travelled (%)	Financial Proxy	Proxy Value (£) / Unit	Present Value (PV)**
Improved sense of competence, engagement and purpose	+32	Value attributed to positive functioning for volunteers based additional median wages earned	2,940 / per person p.a	£3,653,686
Reduced barriers to receiving help and advice	+32	Unit cost of approved social worker (ASW) for community social care	1,380 / per person p.a	£1,714,995
Increased levels of interest and take up in training, volunteering and vocational opportunities	+21	Value of volunteering in England	1497.60*** / per person p.a	£976,771
Improved confidence and motivation to engage with and access new opportunities	+12	Value of improved confidence in young people	215 / per person	£25,991
Improved resilience and self esteem	+25	Cost of Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) to build psychological resilience and self esteem	1,240 / per person	£312,301
Improved financial situation of target participants	+16	Valuation for improved emotional wellbeing arising through the Common Assessment Framework	649 / per person	£83,660
Improved employability through job-ready knowledge, skills and attributes	+14	Employment Incentive costs	3,800 / per person	£428,615
Improved physical and mental health	+17	Cost of reduced health care to maintain good physical health (based one A&E and 4 GP visits p.a) plus Mental health service costs per individual (anxiety and depression) @ £942 averaged over 5 years	420 / per person p.a	£305,160
Improved positive functioning and coping strategies	+15	Well-being valuation of improved autonomy and control	1400 / per person	£211,558
Reduced social isolation	+13	Annual value attributed to meeting friends and relatives more frequently	13,333 / per person p.a	£6,731,397
Improved financial literacy and ability to manage finances	+12	Average cost of 2 hours financial advice	300 / per person	£29,004
Improvement in life and work skills	+19	Cost of employability skills training in regular sessions with counsellor/coach	1,650 / per person	£252,576
Total*				£14,698,113
Investment in GEM				
(Grant 2016-2021)				£5,875,025
BIR				2.50

*Based on self-reported outcome change for 704 participants. The model then adjusts for what would have happened anyway (Deadweight) and the impact of GEM as opposed to other influences, initiatives or interventions (Attribution).

** After accounting for drop-off over time and discounted to 3.5% following UK HM Treasury standard.

*** Based on living wage rate of £7.20 per hr multiplied by average number of hours per week volunteers undertake in UK = 4.

3.3 Impacts of GEM on mental health

Results in the current round of the evaluation cycle - involving the comprehensive and complete set of social outcome data since the programme began - indicates that participants have experienced a 25% improvement in resilience and self-esteem and a 17% improvement in physical and mental health as a result of their involvement in GEM. Delving a little deeper into the data reveals the characteristics of participants whose mental health and wellbeing has benefited the most as a result of participation in GEM.

Perhaps most significantly we find that those participants documenting a mental health condition on admission to the GEM programme have experienced above average improvements to both resilience and self-esteem and physical and mental health - at 30% and 24% respectively. In terms of mental health and wellbeing it is therefore evident that since GEM began, the programme has had the greatest impact on those that have needed it most.

As previously noted, mental health impacts are greatest for the participants who were involved with GEM for between three and six months, with such participants self-reporting an above average change in both self-esteem and physical and mental health at 37% and 24% respectively. Equivalent distance travelled for participants engaged with GEM for less than three months were 13% and 15%, and for between six and 12 months were 25% and 15% respectively.



Mental health either side of lockdown

The data indicates that self-reported change in mental health according to WEMWEBS for those entering the programme following the start of lockdown (mid March) and exiting after (mid July) was 0.07, compared to ten times that (0.73) for those entering and exiting before lockdown, and 0.46 for those entering before and exiting after. Thus, despite the huge challenges that faced the participants over this period in terms of social isolation and disruption to their own GEM programmes and journeys, participants still reported a slight uplift in mental health as a result of being on the programme - albeit only 10% of that reported prior to lockdown - with the respect to those entering after the lockdown hit and exiting shortly after the main restrictions has subsided.

4.0 Inclusive stories of GEM

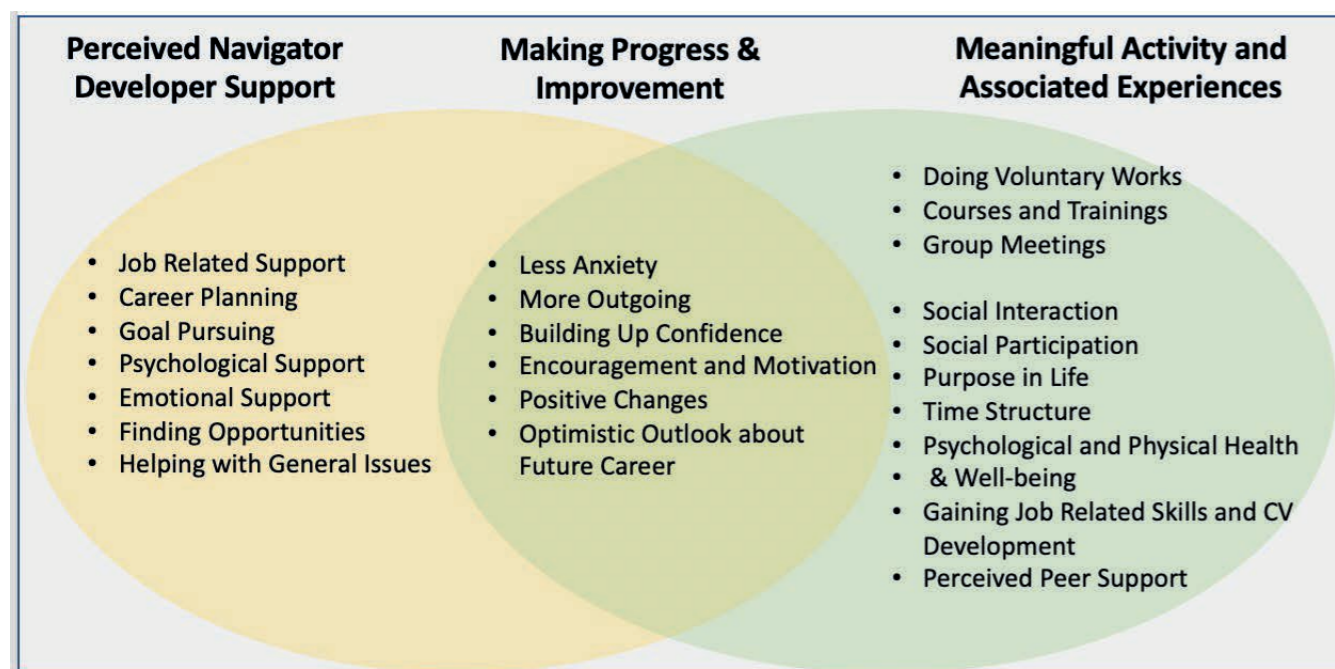
- As told by participants

4.1 Peer researcher approach

The peer researcher approach has highlighted GEM participation to be an effective experience for studying participants in coping with the challenges of unemployment and to build the necessary skills and attributes to help them progress and improve along their GEM journey. Although the peer research data produced a number of prominent contributing factors such as perceived supportiveness, the whole GEM experience can be viewed holistically to entail a set of very positive outcomes for participants.

Three themes were extracted from the peer research data: perceived Navigator Developer support; meaningful involvements and associated experiences; and making progress and improvement. Each theme is an important factor in understanding how GEM is affecting the lives of its participants. The whole GEM experience can be viewed holistically to entail a set of very positive outcomes for participants, as summarised in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Central Experiences and Theme Associations



Participation in the GEM project has helped individuals to reduce uncertainty about their future career, thereby strengthening the participants' willingness to further themselves and seek real and meaningful achievement. Working with solutions, talking about career opportunities and discussing possibilities, undertaking training and doing voluntary work are all things that have certainly enabled participants to have a positive and beneficial experience through engaging with the GEM project. As a result of their involvement in such activities, they have built up confidence and developed some tangible employability and sociability skills.

GEM participation has not only enhanced participants' ability to move forward in getting into employment, but has also increased their motivation to be more proactive in finding a job and has engendered a positive approach to job hunting. These experiences represent achievements which are greatly valued by study participants and are valuable contributors in enhancing participants' psychological, physical, emotional and social health and wellbeing.

4.2 Digital storytelling

Four half day digital storytelling workshops formed the foundation of the pilot phase. The first introduced the concept of digital storytelling, the following two focused on story circles and scripting and the fourth was a technical workshop. The script was developed by the facilitator and clients outside of the formal workshop and the second session comprised the recording. When GEM participants made digital stories, they were being listened to - sometimes for the first time. The impact of this on mental health, self-esteem and development cannot be overstated. The digital storytelling process facilitates the emergence of powerful experiential narratives of being involved in GEM. Co-production is key to both GEM and digital storytelling - it opens up a productive space where experience and knowledge can be exchanged. Key to the process is how the balance of power shifts from the facilitator (at the start) to the participant (towards the end).

All three participants in this pilot phase produced stories that reflected on the problems that had led them to be involved in GEM and the success that they had enjoyed from having achieved new goals because of it. One participant received top marks on a

drystone walling course on which they had been encouraged to enrol through GEM. Their story of journeying from reluctance and reservation, to leadership and achievement illustrates the power of digital storytelling in spotlighting individual impact. Another revealed how GEM had reconfigured personal life goals and expectations, specifically in relation to family, drugs and crime. A third told of how GEM was key to their being employed within a nurturing and supportive team.



Digital storytelling therefore enables those with challenging histories around employment, addiction and mental health to be listened to. The stories foreground how central GEM has been to their lives and the digital storytelling method is a tool for both gauging impact and for individuals' empowerment.



5.0 Process evaluation

The previous three interim reports (June 2017, October 2018, October 2019) have identified a number of assumptions regarding what makes the project unique and more likely to succeed where others have failed. At this stage of the project these are being further confirmed and strengthened.

They are:



the intensive one to one support of the Navigator Developers that puts participants at the heart of the project, responding to each individual on their terms and at their pace. This has been particularly valued in 2020 as the all-round wellbeing of participants has taken centre stage;



the quality of the partnership with Voluntary and Community Sector delivery partners, rooted in the communities they support and who have experience of working with the target groups for the project;



proactive efforts to engage the business sector and develop opportunities for participant engagement;



the value of the principles of co-production, which lie at the heart of the GEM programme.



In 2020, the GEM project has provided a significant lifeline to many people during an incredibly difficult year, providing a vital role in supporting the welfare of extremely vulnerable people through regular phone calls and online meetings.

As the majority of process data was collected during the March to July lockdown, feedback often related to the agility and resilience of GEM in responding to the needs of its participants, and indeed of its staff and partner organisations.

5.1 What's working well

In terms of process, the standard GEM programme continues to work well and the revised lockdown service has been hugely welcomed and celebrated. The overwhelming word used by participants to describe the GEM project and the Navigator Developers in 2020 is 'helpful'. There has been enthusiasm and praise for the GEM project. 2020 has been a very difficult year and these challenges have not only affected participants, but also the NDs themselves.

It has been starkly evident that GEM has attained an expert level of agility in the speed and responsiveness of the project to react to the needs of the participants and staff. This echoes previous feedback where the flexibility to respond to the needs of GEM participants was highlighted, as was the need and willingness to work collaboratively to support participants in their journeys. But in 2020 this has been tested to the extreme.

Related headlines include:

Striving for ambition and encouragement has been prized by participants as it helps with **career planning and pursuing goals**. For many it has been the encouragement to reach for dreams and ideas they had perhaps forgotten about.

'GEM is helpful in giving something to aim for and have some ambition.'

The focus that the NDs have given towards supporting the emotional wellbeing of their participants has been vital, where all the NDs spoken to have reported increasing issues of mental health disorders. At least two have dealt with participants at risk of suicide and self-harm and many others dealing with challenges such as anxiety, OCD, agoraphobia and depression which has been compounded by the climate of the lockdown.

The breadth of the support both from the NDs and GEMonline from employability, business courses, volunteering to wellbeing and creative courses has been recognised as best practice and many particularly found the offer of the online careers event particularly useful. Participants spoke about the huge help they had received in discussing ideas for and accessing training, volunteering, CV development and applications.



'During COVID-19 I have found the lockdown quite tough. GEM has been **very helpful, I wasn't anticipating that. GEM works to provide opportunities - they are so holistic and provide varied stuff. It's been very helpful and the year has been very crazy so GEM has been very helpful and the treatment I've been having is now paying off.'** - Participant





GEMonline has been a very positive development, providing a lifeline to many participants and helping to give them daily tasks and a weekly routine. The addition of the provision of laptops to overcome the lack of technology has been very well received and made a big difference in the lives of some socially isolated individuals who have found this an easier way to engage with the project.

In addition, this has been easier in many instances for participants to access, rather than having to travel to meetings / training, particularly overcoming issues of rural isolation.

In fact partnership communication generally appears to have improved during and since the COVID-19 crisis. NDs really value the weekly 10@10 meetings which have enabled them to get to know the wider GEM team bringing them closer and feeling the support from the GEM office which has been invaluable. Social media has helped to provide regular contact and opportunities for sharing, and geographical clusters has prompted online events and informal buddying and in turn prevented social isolation amongst Navigator Developers and participants alike.

5.2 Challenges

The NDs themselves identified a number of challenges they experienced and largely overcame during significant reorganisation of the GEM offer and delivery during the COVID-19 crisis. There was only one frustration with internal processes, i.e. paperwork, but there were several NDs who raised concerns about targets and the changing remit of the project and the impact of this on targets. Whilst these have not adversely affected the work that NDs have undertaken with participants, they are worth monitoring with respect to the overall outcomes of the programme. The Participants' Council provides participants with a voice and the ability to influence the programme and should be recognised as an important part of the programme. However it has necessarily taken a back seat this year due to the pandemic.

The network of delivery partner organisations and especially the NDs has developed well through new methods and systems of sharing of information, expertise and resources through the pandemic. Many NDs reported that the network has become very close and even more collaborative. This has not gone unnoticed by participants who have referred to feeling part of GEM as a 'community' in the county. Very few external issues were highlighted by participants as being problematic during the interviews conducted in 2020. Two participants suggested improvements including one appraising the journey for a disabled jobseeker and another to flag up issues of challenges in job seeking due to rural isolation and poor transport services in the county.

Other headline points included:

Unlike previous years the overwhelming feedback from NDs has been the challenge of participant engagement. There was a significant list of reasons given as to why this was the case, ranging from participants having children at home, being busy, having to home school, lack of access to technology (which was addressed with laptop donation), lack of technical skills, additional problems of mental health brought about by concerns with the pandemic and broadband speeds preventing access.

Despite the reported success of GEMonline some NDs have struggled to get some of the **participants to engage** or to do this with any sort of regularity if they do engage, creating frustration for some NDs who have felt that while the online offer has given the best chance for many during lockdown to access support and new skills, it also increases the opportunity for non-participation.



The rapidity of the switch from being a predominantly employability focused project to one focussed on participant welfare has given NDs some cause for concern as this has not been accompanied with any revision to the targets from the central team. NDs also articulated some concerns around feelings of panic and guilt about their roles and how to address targets during COVID-19 with the wider climate of declining employment opportunities.



Some NDs felt that the new regulations and emerging in to the new normal could be difficult. Clear guidance on face to face work is likely to be needed as the project navigates this. While some NDs have been seeing participants face to face whilst also adhering to social distancing guidelines, more official help about this is requested. This also links to general anxieties about what the economic climate will look like going forward and how easy it will be to help new referrals in to work; again some GEM specific guidance on this would be helpful.



6.0 Partnership assessment

The GEM partnership consists of a number of cross-sector organisations who work together under the umbrella of the GEM project in order to mobilise resources to achieve better outcomes as measured by the needs of the beneficiaries. Partnership is perhaps the most overused but least understood term in contemporary policy and politics. The failure to adequately grasp its meaning and to identify which aspects might usefully support its effectiveness is a long-standing problem. The GEM evaluation team devised an assessment exercise to explore the processes and outcomes of the GEM partnership in order to establish evidence that will support practice and performance.

Figure 5: Themes and levels



A partnership logic model was developed using data collected at two qualitative workshops with NDs (n=3) and managers (n=3) between August and September 2020. A semi-structured format was used to explore what had gone well, and why, what had gone less well, and why, and things participants would change about the GEM partnership. Data were analysed to identify themes that helped explain the experiences and perceptions of the partnerships.

To assist in arranging the data, four principal domains were established across in which the themes were mapped, which depicted the respective levels at which the identified themes were present (Figure 5).

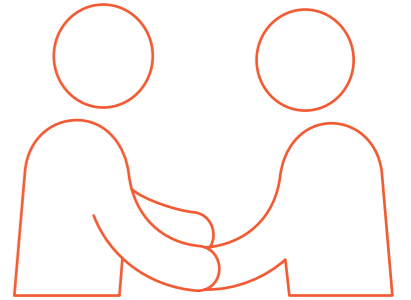
COVID-19 featured largely in participants' experiences, having had an impact on their professional and personal lives. This had created a number of challenges for organisations including home working and an inability to meet directly with beneficiaries and other stakeholders. The situation had, and continued, to provide a source of fear and uncertainty with respect to people's health and wellbeing, and social and financial situations.

Funding was a source of concern, and whilst it was understood that GEM was funded irrespective of the pandemic, there were concerns when considering the wider and local economy and long term funding for organisations. This was also true with respect to the long term health of the employment market which was perceived to be in a highly volatile state which had the potential to negatively impact the successful delivery of the GEM project.

6.1 GEM partnership level

Partnership was recognised as complex and required organisations to work through a range of issues relating to aims, practices and culture. There was widespread support for the principle of partnership working and its potential to address complex social challenges through the intentional bringing together of multiple stakeholders. Resources and advice were a key benefit of the GEM partnership including staff expertise, knowledge and mutual support. There was the sense that the GEM partnership was genuinely unique and capable of delivering significant change.

Communication was perceived as largely effective, specifically the flow of information via newsletters and meetings and had improved during the life course of the partnership. This provided the bedrock of trusting and communicative partnership relations which in turn facilitated continued evolution and innovation, particularly during the pandemic. Tightly defined targets and outcomes created a sense of rigidity despite greater flexibility that had been introduced during the lockdown period. Some participants felt that this served to create a sense of disempowerment in decision making processes.



6.2 Organisational level

The GEM partnership provided its organisations with flexibility and autonomy which in turn increased capacity to establish responsive and creative approaches. A process of continual learning and development had been established which helped understand what worked, for whom and why. Sharing information freely between organisations supported this and provided a basis for organisational development for example, revised practices.

A significant benefit was that partners were working on a level playing field in which there was no competition for resources or prestige. This distinguished GEM from other partnerships and supported the trusting and communicative nature of the wider partnership. Being able to evidence and understand the impact provided a source of motivation which cemented organisational commitment and investment.

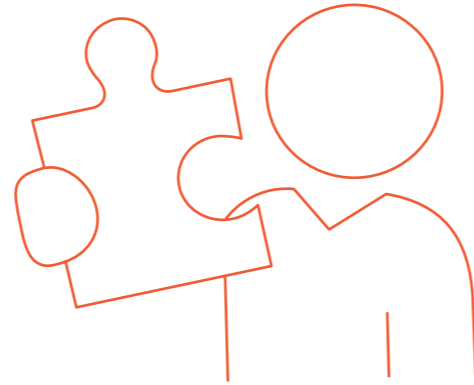


There were less favourable opinions of the paperwork required to manage the project which was seen as burdensome, although it was recognised as an inherent feature of this type of project. The emphasis on targets and evidence helped provide a strong outcome focus for participating organisations regarding inclusivity, employability and sustainability. It was difficult for organisations to access continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities that were essential for supporting delivery and long term staff development.



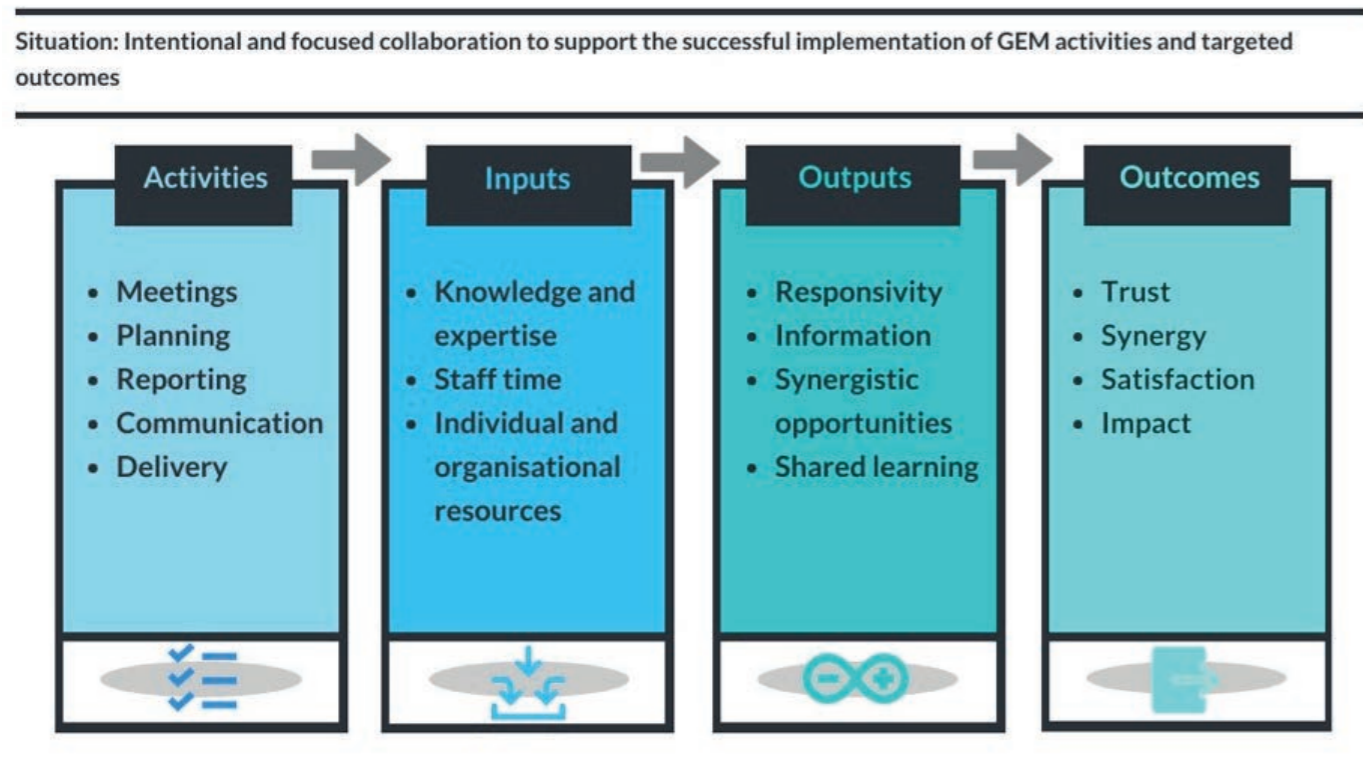
6.3 Individual level

There was the sense that GEM provided staff with the sense of being part of something bigger that was contributing significantly to people and communities. Participants were passionate about the project and there was a strong sense of satisfaction and pride in what was being accomplished. Participants and their peers were highly invested in the project and acknowledged that GEM represented far more than coaching for beneficiaries. Being able to work in a flexible and autonomous way ensured activities responded to the needs and preferences of the beneficiaries.



Data derived from the two partnership workshops was used to devise a logic model which articulated a chain of causes and effects that lead to the partnership outcomes (see Figure 6). The model presents a hypothesised relationship between activities, inputs, outputs and outcomes as a means of understanding what it is that the partnership as a distinct entity is achieving. This provides the basis for developing subsequent data collection tools that will acquire further data concerning the processes and outcomes of the partnership.

Figure 6: GEM partnership logic model



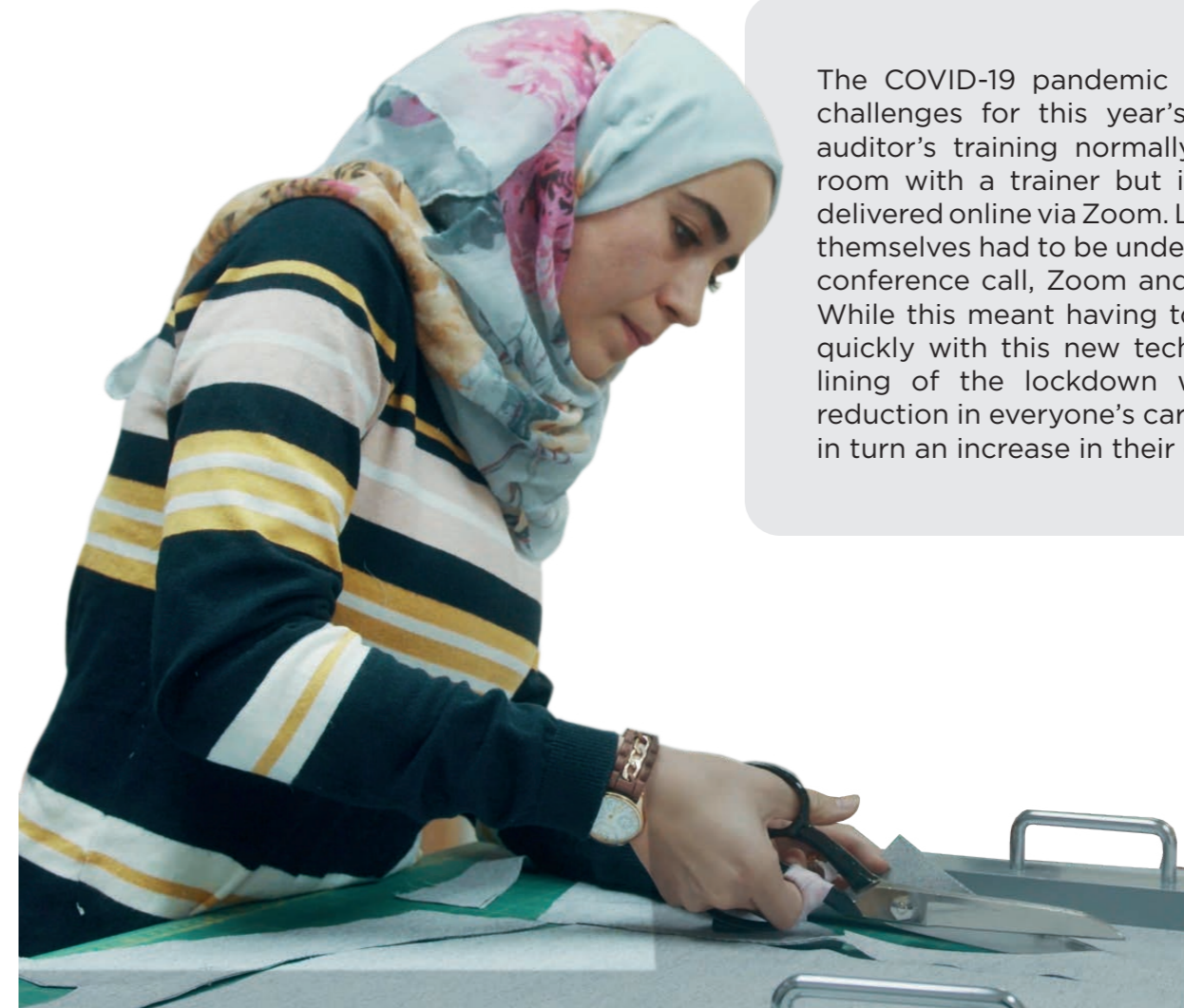
7.0 Evaluating the impact of GEM on sustainability - Green Impact

Green Impact is an internationally recognised benchmark environmental assessment tool run by SOS-UK (Students Organising for Sustainability UK), a new educational charity created by students and staff at the NUS in response to the climate emergency and ecological crisis. As part of the GEM Service Agreement, the 25 GEM partner organisations committed to achieving Silver level accreditation in the Green Impact scheme. This provides a way for GEM to report back to its stakeholders how it has met its sustainability

and environmental targets and is about helping organisations to embed sustainability into their everyday workplace practices. Covering areas such as procurement, travel, energy, biodiversity and community, the scheme runs in alignment with the United Nations 17 Global Goals for Sustainable Development. Green Impact is based upon models of behaviour change and it engages, encourages and enables staff to take action and create positive change.

There are three levels of assessment - **Bronze**, **Silver** and **Gold**, with **10 modules** within each level. Scheme auditors were recruited and received Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) accredited training on

28th May 2020. They came from a range of backgrounds and included an Open University student, two GEM participants, two staff from the CCRI at the University of Gloucestershire, a placement student and a postgraduate student.

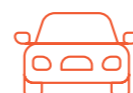


The COVID-19 pandemic caused additional challenges for this year's entrants, as the auditor's training normally took place in a room with a trainer but instead had to be delivered online via Zoom. Likewise, the audits themselves had to be undertaken virtually via conference call, Zoom and Microsoft Teams. While this meant having to get up to speed quickly with this new technology, the silver lining of the lockdown was a substantial reduction in everyone's carbon footprint, and in turn an increase in their green impact!

This year's entries demonstrated a high level of environmental awareness and commitment to the programme. The results were commendable and exceeded the original target - with nine partners achieving Gold, 13 Silver, one Bronze and one working towards Bronze. The Awards Ceremony took place online via Zoom in July 2020. Green impact results by organisation are shown below.

Organisation	2019/20
GL Communities	Gold
Stroud Valleys Project	Gold
GL11 Community Hub	Gold
Caring for Communities and People	Gold
GRCC - Gloucestershire Rural Community Council	Gold
Art Shape	Gold
Together in Matson	Gold
Prospect Training Services	Gold
Creative Sustainability CIC	Gold
<hr/>	
Gloucester County Council Forwards Employment Service GEM	Silver
Nelson Trust GEM	Silver
Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (GARAS)	Silver
Gloucester Rugby	Silver
Gloucestershire Youth Support Team - Prospect Services	Silver
National Star College	Silver
Forest Upcycling Project	Silver
PATA	Silver
Young Gloucestershire	Silver
Inclusion Gloucestershire	Silver
Brandon Trust	Silver
The Cheltenham Trust	Silver
The Churn Project	Silver
<hr/>	
Cotswold Communities First	Bronze
<hr/>	
Gloucestershire Deaf Association	WTB

Some positive environmental changes organisations reported during their audits included:



During the COVID-19 lockdown, the postponement of face to face meetings resulted in savings from travel costs, and a reduction in carbon footprint, which they aimed to carry forward.



A cultural shift in the way they approached recycling, food and paper waste.



Use of FairShare food recycling.



Lowered electricity bills from reduced consumption by turning off computers and lights.



Reduction in printing (by printing less and printing double sided).



More healthy low carbon lunches.



Purchasing cleaning solutions with reduced packaging.



Reusable crockery.



Considering their carbon footprint, some staff changed from driving to cycling and walking to work. They commented that this was good for their fitness and mental health.



Using Terracycle to recycle some items also resulted in some income for one charity.

8.0 Key action points

Based on the synthesis of the findings presented in this report, the following action points are intended to provide stimulus for purposeful discussion – with the GEM OMC in the first instance – and action that supports the continued development of the programme. As in previous evaluation cycles, they are based on doing more of what works and addressing those challenges that can support the success of the project and shape what follows in a positive way. To this end, we suggest the following areas for consideration initially.

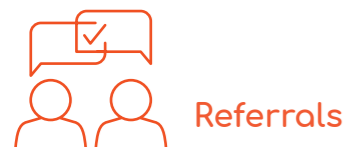
8.1 Implications for the GEM project

There are increasing numbers of people in England claiming benefits which is set to keep rising as government COVID-19 support packages are gradually withdrawn after March 2021. Businesses are currently working in some of the toughest climates for generations which is not only caused by COVID-19 but will potentially be exacerbated by Brexit in December 2020. In Gloucestershire some of the sectors that have been hardest hit include the tourism, hospitality and retail sectors.

Statistics from the GFirst LEP COVID-19 Impact report in June 2020 state that in Gloucestershire around 76,300 residents were furloughed, including 19.9% of the 16-64 year old population. This is higher than the national

average, largely explained by the relatively high proportion of people employed in the tourism and retail sectors in the county.

The GEM project will continue to operate in this turbulent economic environment with increased levels of unemployment, more workless households and more competition for those job vacancies that do emerge. In addition there are more people suffering with extreme mental health issues on the back of the experience of COVID-19, with related implications for the social and economic wellbeing of people. More positively, the hope of a new vaccine role out in the Spring of 2021 provides some optimism for a return to some normality later in the year.

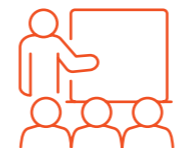


Given the above context the GEM project is likely to experience a change in the client group of participants needing support from GEM. While these may be subtle changes, the GEM project will continue to focus on the most socially excluded and those furthest from the job market. GEM project staff may need to devise strategies to ensure the project focusses on the original target groups whilst also maintaining up to date knowledge of other services that can support people who have recently lost jobs and are seeking support.



Importance of Employer relations

The confidence of participants in the labour market may change as people lose confidence that employers want them and that competition for jobs is too fierce. The GEM project will need to ensure good levels of employer engagement to support GEM participants throughout 2021. Initiatives and activities to build the confidence of participants and foster connections with employers will be central to this. As the M&E findings demonstrate, activities such as doing voluntary work, attending courses, workshops and training courses are considered to be meaningful as they are associated with valuable experiences and positive consequences.



Training and Education

Given the struggles that businesses will face in re-structuring their work and reframing given the 'new normal', upskilling people to fit the opportunities will be important. The GEM project will need to build core programmes of learning and training that can help to prepare people for another turbulent year ahead, and beyond.



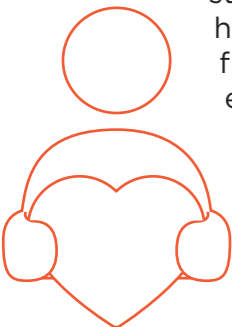


Project Management

The GEM project has been exemplary in terms of management over the past year, proving that even a large team dispersed across the county in 30 different organisations can react quickly, flexibly and professionally to meet the needs of vulnerable people in an environment that can change without warning, and which can impose restrictions on the way it works and the help it can offer. As the project moves forward the need to continue to manage the project securely will be paramount, providing clear guidelines as the COVID-19 situation evolves, and providing NDs with advice in working with participants and how to do this safely.

Longer term consideration may need to be given to the delivery implications for the project as GEM approaches the end of the contract in December 2021, as staff may seek other work towards the end of the project. There are likely to be new programmes that emerge and GEM will need to navigate through the competition with other programmes such as the DWP 12 Months Plus programme = Restart starting in April 2021, and also seek to find opportunities, including supporting the new DWP programme to incorporate elements of the GEM model.

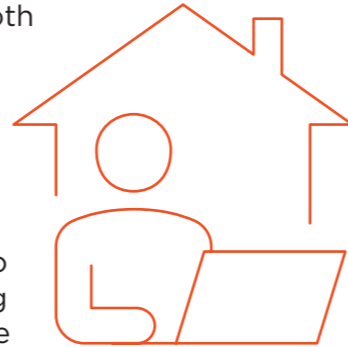
As previously mentioned, GEM staff will likely be dealing with more mental health issues this year. That said, Gloucestershire has a variety of support initiatives that participants can be directed towards and NDs need to be made aware of these and to refer participants on to relevant services. It is just as important that staff manage their own mental health and can access support from their peers, potentially exploring a stress management group, peer-to-peer support and wellbeing buddying (if it doesn't already exist) and be sure to take their own annual leave allocations.



The new weekly Navigator Developer 10@10 catch-ups have been really positive and unlike the monthly meetings – which are both useful and necessary, have given the NDs a chance to keep in touch

meaningfully. For the future it would be worthwhile doing the physical monthly meeting and while retaining the weekly 10@10, using a combination of face to face meetings (when allowed) and online video calling.

In terms of work, NDs have found a number of positives of online meetings including less travelling and making their time more productive. Going forwards it would be helpful to work in a blended way involving both online and face to face modes of communication. As NDs report that it takes longer to induct new participants onto GEM when working remotely, it would be useful to consider this when reviewing targets against the period of the second (Nov 2020) lockdown and any subsequent disruption caused by COVID-19.



Since March 2020 the NDs have been working together to create more alliances and have relied on each other for support and to find out key information. In addition, working together as a cluster on, for example, a virtual event has meant they've got to know each other better. While an element of this has been about geographical cluster working, in general cross partnership working in the virtual world has taken off and given the benefits this is likely to continue. There will however, be challenges ahead for NDs in terms of finding the opportunities for their participants in a more competitive job market, therefore the ability to share intelligence and work closely across the partnership will be vital. For the GEM management team fostering and monitoring this will be important in the months ahead.

GEMonline is, and continues to be, a well-received new addition to the programme that should continue. Feedback about it has been incredibly positive and new developments to enhance it could include more chat space on themes to increase participant engagement.

8.2 Suggested actions to support future work

- 1 Devising strategies to ensure that the project focusses on the original target groups whilst also maintaining up to date knowledge of other services that can support people who have recently lost jobs and are seeking support.
- 2 Extend and deepen the success of GEM in generating psychosocial outcomes for participants through increased opportunities for meeting, socialising and networking; gaining new skills; volunteering and improving self-esteem by continuing to maintain and extend levels of employer engagement to support the GEM participants going forwards.
- 3 Ensure funding and access is available to programmes of learning and training that can help to prepare people for the year ahead and beyond, looking strategically at those programmes that could fit with opportunities in Gloucestershire.
- 4 Monitor and develop on an on-going basis, clear guidelines as the COVID-19 situation evolves, providing NDs with advice in working with participants and how to do this safely.
- 5 Routinely signpost participants to new and emerging mental health services, in the county and online.
- 6 Closely monitor the delivery implications for the project as GEM approaches the end of the contract in December 2021 as staff may seek other work towards the end of the project.



7 Continue to support initiatives across the teams in terms of communication and ways of working that have been helpful to the project and are worth building upon.

8 Work more closely with existing employer engagement groups in the county such as Circle to Success and the Growth Hub, to raise the profile of the GEM offer and to help ensure sustainability of GEM principals following closure of the programme in December 2021.

9 Consider in more depth, for example through discussions with NDs and a review of participants' stories, the role of GEM in supporting and alleviating the mental health of participants, and how this might shape the trajectory of future social inclusion and employment inclusivity programmes in the county.

10 Differences between participant groups with respect to their GEM journey, trajectory of social change and the time it takes for participants to fully engage with and benefit from the programme should be considered and any resulting change in terms of management or delivery implemented at the earliest opportunity. For example, there may be certain reasons why gender and disability are differentiating factors with regards to psychosocial benefits that could be explored - with NDs in the first instance. Again, differences with respect to mental health alleviation would arguably be a useful starting point in the current environment.

11 The partnership logic model provides an initial framework to undertake a 'quick-win / quick-fix' assessment of the GEM partnership, perhaps starting with an element from each stage of the model i.e. undertaking a review of Reporting, Staff time, Shared Learning and trust with ND managers to gauge their appetite for further engagement and development within and across the partnership.

12 Planning for sustainability is a concern of partner organisations and there is the opportunity to explore ways in which partners are able to inform decisions concerning the future sustainability of the project.

8.3 Next steps for the GEM Monitoring and Evaluation

The experience and findings presented in this report also have implications for the design and refinement of the evaluation cycle in 2021. We aim to continue the mixed-methods approach of gathering different forms of data from a variety of stakeholders, along with pushing the boundaries of evaluation methods, which befits GEM's socially inclusive approach.

With one year to go, the following points are of particular note:

Alongside the GEM programme itself the evaluation will seek to remain flexible and agile in responding to any specific events in what will hopefully prove to be the autumn of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The evaluation cycle will be undertaken as in previous years, providing an internal lens on management and practices as the programme is implemented and delivered. However it will also look to focus on the lessons learned for the implementation of GEM principles and practices in a post GEM environment.

The forecast Social Return on Investment (SROI), which has been updated annually throughout the GEM programme, will comprise an evaluative model towards the end of the programme in 2021. The research team will also seek to extend and deepen the metrics of social value with an indication of cost-savings to the state resulting from programme engagement.

A detailed partnership assessment will be pursued building on the initial scoping and logic model reported here, and emerging themes including training and development and planning for sustainability. This work will also have relevance for partnership working beyond GEM, and for the design and implementation of future partnership based programmes - in Gloucestershire and beyond.

Subject to the collection of sufficient participant data, a formal analysis of the mental health impacts of GEM will be undertaken, which will again have potential implications for future employment inclusivity, social inclusion and community health programmes.

Following delays caused by the COVID-19 situation, inclusive elements of the evaluation will reach new heights in 2021, incorporating methodological lessons learned from previous inclusive evaluation pilots, and from the inclusive participant stories reported here.





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