

Final Report

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Moving Forward with Cashback for Communities

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Acknowledgements

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the participants and stakeholders who gave their views via the focus groups and surveys. This data was invaluable to meeting reporting requirements and will help refine the Moving Forward programme in future.

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Executive Summary

Background to the programme

In April 2017, the National Autistic Society (NAS) was awarded three years' funding from the Cashback for Communities Programme – run by Inspiring Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Government, to invest the proceeds of crime in raising young people's attainment, ambition and aspirations. NAS' Moving Forward programme targets young people aged 16 – 24 with an autism diagnosis who live in the 40% most deprived areas in West and Central Scotland, supporting them into employment, education or training. It aims to target 100 young people annually, with 90 progressing to group work, mentoring and/or work placement alongside 10 weeks of support to identify and apply for their preferred opportunities.

The unique NAS input relates to support around issues which people on the autistic spectrum find particularly challenging, such as conversation skills, reading body language and independent travel, as well as core employability support such as building a job search toolkit, identifying suitable opportunities, completing applications and preparing for interviews. NAS supports young people to build social confidence and manage anxiety before moving onto generic employability support, as this can be a real barrier to them taking up other support options.

This report by FMR Research feeds back on Year 2 of the project.

Method

FMR input has focussed on two key stages in Year 2:

- conducting qualitative primary research with participants and stakeholders; and
- analysing monitoring and evaluation data, and presenting the findings in this report.

Key findings

The total spend in Year 2 was £161,859 from an allocation of £192,266. The underspend of £30,406 was largely due to staffing and recruitment challenges.

A total of 66 young people participated in Moving Forward in Year 2. There was a 2:1 male:female gender split overall, a shift from 5:1 in Year 1.

All participants were drawn from 40% most deprived SIMD areas, with 32% from the most deprived 10% and 71% from the most deprived 20%.

Young people joined Moving Forward from 11 of the 14 eligible local authority areas in Year 2, although there was some activity in all 14.

27 volunteer mentors were recruited and trained by NAS, for Moving Forward and the Person to Person project. For Moving Forward, there were approximately 284 mentoring sessions (up from 162 in Year 1), equivalent to a total of 568 hours (324 hours in Year 1) or 35.5 of support scheduled per mentee on average (up from 19.5 hours).

NAS engaged with 73 employers to create opportunities for work placements and paid employment for participants.

Actual performance against targets set are shown in the table below. Numbers are lower than hoped in Year 2, but ratings and outcomes were very positive for those involved.

Outcome 1	Target	Actual	% of Target Achieved	%/Number commenting
Number of young people reporting their confidence increasing	70	40	57%	83% of 48
Number of young people feeling able to do new things	40	33	83%	69% of 48
Number of other stakeholders reporting perceived increases in young people's confidence and ability to do new things	70%	96%	138%	23 of 24
Number of young people who go on to do new things after involvement with the programme	70	15	21%	31% of 48 ¹
Outcome 2				
Number of young people gaining accreditation for learning and skills development	20	5	25%	10% of 48
Number of young people reporting their skills are increasing	60	30	50%	63% of 48
Number of other stakeholders reporting that young people's skills are increasing	60%	83%	138%	20 of 24
Outcome 3				
Number of young people reporting increased aspirations	60	36	60%	75% of 48
Number of other stakeholders reporting perceived increased aspirations in young people	60%	88%	147%	21 of 24
Number of young people reporting positive changes in their behaviour	60	28	47%	58% of 48
Number of other stakeholders reporting perceived changes in the positive behaviour of young people	60%	88%	147%	21 of 24
Outcome 4				
Number of young people reporting increases in feelings against SHANARRI indicators	60	36	60%	75% of 48
Number of other stakeholders reporting perceived increases in SHANARRI indicators among young people	60%	96%	160%	23 of 24
Outcome 6				
Number of young people who, as part of the programme, undertake training, learning (incl staying at school), employmnt & volunteering	60	48	80%	100% of 48
Number of young people progressing to a positive destination after completion of the programme	60	29 (12 education 6 employment 6 volunteering 5 training)	48%	60% of 48
Outcome 7				
Number of young people participating in positive activity	20	24	120%	50% of 48
Number of young people who are new to that activity	20	19	95%	79% of 24

¹ To date – it is recognised that the Moving Forward programme runs for several months so outcomes for Year 1 participants will continue to be achieved in Year 2.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Year 2 evaluation again affirms the approach taken by NAS in its Moving Forward with Cashback for Communities programme. Participants and stakeholders who gave their views were very positive about the person-led support provided by a committed team and the impact it has had/is having on them. Participants and other stakeholders feel welcome, comfortable and supported at NAS. Participants have been supported to overcome whatever barriers they were facing and those exiting the project felt they have been able to move their lives forward significantly. They have reported a wide range of impacts including:

- learning new or improved skills, such as independent travel, learning to drive or budget plus employability skills;
- having improved understanding and acceptance of their autism diagnosis;
- increased confidence and self-esteem;
- improved social skills;
- reduced anxiety and greater resilience to cope;
- they have a clearer idea of their next steps in life (and some have already moved into these); and
- they feel more hopeful about the future.

NAS has honed the service it offers to meet the needs of its target group very effectively. The key action going forward is still to increase the number of people tapping into the support offered, however. It is understood that NAS has had staffing challenges in both Year 1 and 2, which will have had an impact on referrals. However, posts were filled during Year 2 and a key staff member in terms of referrals has now returned from maternity leave (despite several attempts at recruiting someone to provide maternity cover, this proved impossible to fill). It is hoped that this provides a period of staffing stability for the organisation, which will have positive impacts on participant numbers.

Stakeholders were consistently positive about the Moving Forward programme, which suggests it should continue in a similar way for Year 3. There were few suggestions for improvement from participants and other stakeholders, but the ones which were made are detailed in section 3 for consideration by NAS. Three key recommendations are offered for consideration:

1. Continue efforts around recruitment and referral to achieve targets in Year 3.
2. Consider how support might be provided in schools. Those with later diagnoses felt this would have been extremely beneficial for them. This could perform several useful purposes:
 - a) to raise awareness of autism with pupils and staff, to encourage earlier diagnosis and support;
 - b) to dis-spell myths and reduce stigma around what autism is and is not, highlighting the diversity of people's experiences on the spectrum and the strengths being on the spectrum can bring, as well as the challenges;
 - c) to raise awareness of NAS' services and signpost pupils and staff to other relevant support services; and
 - d) to offer self-management tips, such as coping mechanisms for anxiety, which may be beneficial for young people on the spectrum and neurotypical young people experiencing anxiety or similar challenges.
3. Work on higher response rates for surveys at each of the key points in the process, for participants in particular. A more complete response profile will allow a clearer quantitative picture of the distance travelled by each individual, to supplement the qualitative information gathered by the team and FMR.

Contents

Executive Summary	i
List of figures and tables	2
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Objectives	2
2 Method	3
2.1 Overview	3
2.2 Primary research	3
2.3 Analysis and reporting	3
3 Key findings	5
3.1 Introduction	5
3.2 Profile of participants	5
3.3 Other key activities	6
3.4 Outcomes achieved	7
3.5 Attainments achieved	16
3.6 Positive destinations	17
3.7 Other survey and qualitative feedback	18
4 Case studies	35
4.1 Introduction	35
4.2 Year 2 case studies	35
4.3 Year 1 case studies	46
5 Conclusions & recommendations	50
5.1 Conclusions	50
5.2 Recommendations	50

List of figures and tables

Table 1:	Numbers achieved at each stage of the process, against targets	5
Table 2:	Gender and SIMD area of participants	6
Table 3:	Outcome 1 Young people build their capacity and confidence	8
Figure 1:	How would you rate your/the young person's self-confidence on a scale of 0 to 10 (0 is not at all confident and 10 is very confident)?	9
Figure 2:	Rate your/their self-confidence now compared to when you/they started Moving Forward	9
Table 4:	Outcome 2 Young people develop their personal and/or physical skills	10
Table 5:	Outcome 3 Young people's behaviours and aspirations change positively	12
Table 6:	Outcome 4 Young people's wellbeing improves	14
Table 7:	Survey SHANARRI responses	15
Table 8:	Outcome 6 Young people participate in activity which improves their learning, employability and employment options (positive destinations)	16
Table 9:	Outcome 7 Young people participate in positive activity	16
Table 10:	Exit survey agreement/disagreement to statements	25
Figure 3:	How likely would you be to recommend Moving Forward...?	29

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

This report is the second of three reports which evaluate the National Autistic Society (NAS) of Scotland's Moving Forward with Cashback for Communities Programme. This section provides some contextual information, which is followed by the method, key findings, case studies, conclusions and recommendations.

1.1.1 Cashback for Communities

The Scottish Government set up Cashback for Communities to invest the proceeds of crime (recovered via the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002) in raising the attainment, ambition and aspirations of young people across Scotland. The programme started in 2008 and a total of £93million has been invested since then over three phases of funding. The programme, which is run by Inspiring Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Government, is now in its fourth phase, running from April 2017 to March 2020. A total of £17million has been made available for the current wave of projects.

This phase has funded 17 projects with a stronger focus on helping to tackle inequalities, by targeting young people who:

- live in areas of deprivation; and/or
- are not in employment, education or training; and/or
- have been or are at risk of being excluded from school; and/or
- are at risk of being involved in anti-social behaviour, offending or re-offending.

Four themes have been prioritised for this fourth phase of the programme:

- Journey to Employment;
- Creativity;
- Diversionary Youthwork; and
- Sports for Change.

1.1.2 Moving Forward

The National Autistic Society (NAS) Scotland's Moving Forward with Cashback for Communities Programme targets young people aged 16 – 24 with autism who live in the 40% most deprived areas in West and Central Scotland, supporting them into employment, education or training. NAS was awarded £583,000 over three years (April 2017 – March 2020), to target 300 young people with autism (100 per year).

In each year, the Moving Forward programme aims to have an initial 'informal chat' with 100 young people to discuss their goals and how the programme may assist them in meeting these. It is anticipated that 90% of these meetings (and any supplementary discussions with the young people and their parents/referring partners, as required) will result in progression and 10% will be referred to other NAS services to meet their immediate needs if they are not quite able to move forward with the programme. It is projected that 20 young people each year will receive 'mentoring' support (face to face and/or e-mentoring) for up to 6 months from a NAS trained volunteer mentor for those who have a specific and/or longer-term challenge to their job readiness. This may run alongside or replace some of the standard elements of support following the initial meeting.

Approximately 70 participants each year will attend 8 group-based sessions (with the option of 1:1 coaching) following the initial meeting at the 'preparation' stage. These provide support around issues which autistic people find particularly challenging, such as starting

conversations and reading body language, and will respond to the specific needs of the group. This is a critical and unique aspect of this programme, which helps to build social confidence and manage anxiety prior to moving onto more generic employability support. Approximately half of these participants will then take a ‘placement’ - up to 8 weeks of practical work experience. NAS will assess workplaces for suitability prior to placement and support workplaces via autism awareness sessions, etc.

All 70 participants each year will then be supported at the ‘progression’ stage, with up to 10 weeks of support to identify and apply for their preferred opportunities. This includes core employability support such as building a job search toolkit, identifying suitable vacancies, completing applications, preparing for interviews or pursuing training or further/higher education opportunities.

The programme is delivered via the Society’s Glasgow hub, so is available to young people who meet the criteria living in areas which can easily access Glasgow via public transport. This initially focussed on 14 local authority areas in West and Central Scotland, but was extended to Argyll & Bute once operational. The 15 qualifying areas are:

- Argyll & Bute
- Clackmannanshire;
- East Ayrshire;
- East Dunbartonshire;
- East Renfrewshire;
- Falkirk;
- Glasgow;
- Inverclyde;
- North Ayrshire;
- North Lanarkshire;
- Renfrewshire;
- South Ayrshire;
- South Lanarkshire;
- Stirling; and
- West Dunbartonshire.

NAS was not starting from scratch as it was funded by the Lottery to deliver a similar programme for five years. However, this did not target those living in disadvantaged areas. The new project therefore required new approaches to be developed and aims to gather additional learning from working with those experiencing challenges from living in a deprived area and being furthest from the workforce, in addition to the challenges living with autism may present.

1.2 Objectives

The Scottish Government and Inspiring Scotland require that all projects funded under the Cashback for Communities programme undertake both external and self-evaluation over the course of the three-year funding period. This evidence will be used to generate learning as the projects progress and to help quantify the impacts of each project and the Cashback for Communities programme as a whole.

FMR Research has worked with NAS since it received funding to design an evaluation framework and research tools to enable the project to collect data around each of the project outcomes. In addition, FMR conducted independent qualitative research and analysis of project data to prepare this report, as it did last year and will also be the case for the Year 3 report. Evaluation activity is designed to meet funding requirements but also to provide useful management information on the progress of the project to facilitate further development of the approach, to build on learning and better meet participants’ needs.

2 Method

2.1 Overview

The input from FMR this year has involved keeping in touch with NAS throughout the year and focussing on two key elements:

1. conducting qualitative primary research with participants and stakeholders; and
2. analysing monitoring and evaluation data, and presenting the findings in this report.

2.2 Primary research

A key finding in Year 1 was the quality of tailored support provided to young people by NAS, so the primary research in Year 2 aimed to help illustrate this more fully by compiling case studies. Case study discussions took place between 27th March and 11th April 2019. Case studies aimed to be as ‘360 degree’ as possible by interviewing the young person, a parent if possible, placement employers (where appropriate) and speaking to NAS staff.

Nine young people gave their views, six parents attended these interviews, and three employers also gave their views. Each interview was around an hour long. All but two employer discussions, which were telephone interviews, took place face to face. NAS staff gave their input via telephone and face to face discussions.

Each draft case study was circulated to the relevant participant and their key NAS contact, when appropriate, to ensure all relevant information was included to illustrate their journey, and that participants were happy with the way in which they were portrayed.

The case study participants were recruited to illustrate the variety of young people involved in the Moving Forward programme: three case studies continued the dialogue with Year 1 participants to see how they had moved on since last year, and six were with Year 2 participants. A mix of age, genders and local authority areas were represented:

- Five participants were female, four were male.
- All were aged 17 – 24.
- Different areas were represented: Glasgow (5), South Lanarkshire (2), North Ayrshire (1) and West Dunbartonshire (1).

All discussions were facilitated by Nikki Bell of FMR, using a semi-structured topic guide. The discussions explored people’s experiences and views of Moving Forward, and sought suggestions for improvement. The discussions have therefore been used to compile the case studies but have also highlighted other findings which are reported on an aggregate basis in the report.

2.3 Analysis and reporting

FMR has reviewed monitoring returns and survey responses from stakeholders, in addition to the qualitative primary research undertaken, to develop an understanding of how Year 2 of the Moving Forward Programme has performed. This report details the data available at this stage in the process, provides feedback on progress, impacts achieved and suggestions for improvement.

The survey and primary research data sits alongside the outcomes/indicators quantitative data to help illustrate progress made by participants. Specific comments on their experience of the programme, NAS as a provider and additional discussion, for example around areas for improvement, are also detailed. The number of responses from each of the surveys was as follows:

Post group survey	28
Stakeholder survey	24
Exit survey	8
Mentoring survey	5
Post placement survey	3
Employer survey	1

3 Key findings

3.1 Introduction

This section presents the project data and evaluation findings gathered by NAS and FMR Research, to illustrate the projects' achievements against the outcomes set. Section 4 draws conclusions from the findings to date and makes recommendations for action/refinement of the project, as appropriate.

3.2 Profile of participants

3.2.1 Numbers

The Moving Forward team delivered **38 presentations** to referral agencies to raise awareness of the project in the first year and achieved a total of **66 participants in Year 2**, up from 61 in year 1. This is still below the target of 100 young people per annum. The NAS team was affected by staffing issues (maternity leave and several unsuccessful recruitment attempts), which will inevitably have impacted on participant recruitment. However, the team is now up to full complement again, so hopefully numbers will rise in Year 3.

The total number of participants at each stage of the process is noted in Table 1 and explained more fully below.

Table 1: Numbers achieved at each stage of the process, against targets

Stage	Year 1		Year 2	
	Target	Actual	Target	Actual
Initial Assessment	100	61	100	66
Mentoring	30	10	30	12
Preparation	70	43	70	48
Placement	35	15	35	5

Initial Assessment

Of the 66 above, 6 did not engage further as:

- 4 felt that the programme was not for them; and
- 2 did not return contact.

Preparation

48 young people attended group work or 1:1 sessions. 1-1 sessions were offered as an alternative where a young person had a preference for this or required support with issues that were not appropriate to explore within a group setting. Of those attending groups, three young people dropped out before completion: one young person experienced an increase in seizures and withdrew on medical grounds; and two were bereaved of immediate family members. In addition, two young people completed the group phase but chose not to move onto placement or progression phases. One of these relocated with family and the other was involved in court proceedings and preferred to delay further involvement with the project until these had concluded.

Placement

5 young people undertook and completed placements.

3.2.2 Gender

There was a 2 male to 1 female gender split overall, as can be seen from the figure below, which was a significant change from the 5:1 ratio from Year 1. Please note that four transgender young people were supported by NAS in Year 2. These young people are recorded under the gender with which they identify.

The NAS website discusses both of these issues more fully². Autism can be harder to diagnose in females and was always thought to be less common. However, this may be due to diagnostic tools being skewed towards the male presentation of the condition and/or females being better at masking the condition, as more females are now being diagnosed later in life, for example. People on the autism spectrum are also more likely than neurotypical people to experience gender dysphoria, where their biological sex at birth is different to their gender identity, although it is not known why this is the case.

3.2.3 SIMD

As required, all participants were drawn from the most deprived four SIMD deciles, and the emphasis was on the most deprived areas: a third (32%) were from the 10% most deprived SIMD areas and 71% were from the 20% most deprived SIMD areas.

Table 2: Gender and SIMD area of participants

	Year 2				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Gender:					
Male	8	12	10	15	45
Female	5	9	2	5	21
SIMD area:					
0 – 10%	3	7	4	7	21
0 – 20%	11	14	7	15	47
0 – 30%	11	17	9	19	56
0 – 40%	13	21	12	20	66

3.2.4 Local authority area of residence

Young people living in 15 local authority areas were eligible for Moving Forward, and young people were drawn from 11 of those areas, as listed below. This was the same number as in Year 1, but different local authorities were represented. In Year 1, Clackmannanshire, East Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire and East Renfrewshire were not represented, although promotional activity was undertaken in three of these (not Clackmannanshire). In Year 2, Argyll & Bute, East Ayrshire, Falkirk and North Ayrshire were not represented, although some work was ongoing with Year 1 participants into Year 2.

Clackmannanshire
East Dunbartonshire
East Renfrewshire
Glasgow
Inverclyde
North Lanarkshire
Renfrewshire
South Ayrshire
South Lanarkshire
Stirling
West Dunbartonshire

3.3 Other key activities

3.3.1 Mentoring

Mentors worked with young people on a 1:1 basis, focussing on positive activities to work towards their goals. This involved spending time building trust and enjoying leisure activities

² <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/what-is/gender.aspx> last accessed 01/07/19

such as visiting the cinema. Mentors were particularly helpful working with young people who had anxiety or confidence issues. Peer mentoring facilitated informal support which did not come from either a parent/family member or an 'official' body, helping young people to open up and share concerns in a different way. Mentors were then able to help encourage, signpost and facilitate access to assistance as required. Each volunteer mentor supported one person at any one time, although some have been involved with NAS for a while and are on their third or fourth mentee now. As can be seen from the feedback below, this service was rated very highly by those who had experienced it.

Between April 2018 and March 2019, a total of 27 volunteer mentors were recruited and trained by NAS. They were trained for two projects – Moving Forward and the Person to Person project (supporting adults aged 26+). Recruitment was conducted through online advertising, via Volunteer Glasgow and NAS' own website. The profile of mentors was as follows:

- 70% of Volunteer Mentors were women (84% in Year 1), 30% male (up from 16% in Year 1).
- It was positive to see such a high percentage of peer mentors: 30% were aged 18 – 25, 44% were 26 – 35, 15% were 36 – 45 and 11% were aged 46+. 12% of mentors' ages were unknown in Year 1 which might contribute to the slightly older profile apparent this year.
- There was a good spread of SIMD areas represented: 33% of volunteers were from deciles 1-4 (40% most deprived SIMD areas, 19% were from deciles 5-7 and 48% were from deciles 8-10 (the most affluent areas); although fewer mentors were from the more deprived SIMD areas than in Year 1 (when more than half were from the 40% most deprived SIMD areas).
- Mentors are often students (particularly Psychology) or have a personal connection to autism, being related to someone with autism or being autistic themselves. This year, 10 volunteers (37%) were students, half of whom were studying Psychology, and 10 volunteers had a personal connection to autism.

For the Moving Forward project, there were a total of 284 mentoring sessions in Year 2 (up from 162 in Year 1), equivalent to a total of 568 hours (up from 324 hours in Year 1) or 35.5 hours of support scheduled per mentee on average (up from 19.5 in Year 1). This is based on 16 active matches over the course of the year, 8 of which were still active at end March 2019.

3.3.2 Working with employers

Every participant has different goals, talents and experience so NAS takes a tailored approach to finding work placements and employment opportunities. Over the course of the year, NAS engaged with **73 employers** to create opportunities for work placements and paid employment for participants.

Five autism awareness presentations were delivered to employers in advance of placements being hosted by those businesses. Over and above these placement-specific presentations, NAS again delivered two autism awareness sessions to a number of small local businesses attending Viridor Capacity Building Workshops at sites in North Lanarkshire and Ayrshire. NAS also presented at three Glasgow-based small business networking events. In addition, NAS team members met with employers from the cyber security industry at the Neurocyber in Scotland event in March.

3.4 Outcomes achieved

3.4.1 Overview

The Cashback for Communities programme has a number of outcomes to which ventures can align their work. NAS focussed on 6 outcomes, as follows:

Outcome 1: Young people build their capacity and confidence

-
- Outcome 2: Young people develop their personal and/or physical skills
 Outcome 3: Young people's behaviours and aspirations change positively
 Outcome 4: Young people's wellbeing improves
 Outcome 6: Young people participate in activity which improves their learning, employability and employment options (positive destinations)
 Outcome 7: Young people participate in positive activity

Each of these was split into several indicators, against which ventures recorded impacts. Progress against each of the outcomes and indicators is noted below. For each outcome, the numbers/percentages achieved are noted in the table and additional data or commentary from the primary research is noted beneath each table.

Additional feedback from the primary research is then provided as appropriate. The research tools were designed to collect data for the indicators set, as far as possible, and these worked well once they were in play. As in Year 1, the most challenging indicator was to evidence SHANARRI wellbeing as SHANARRI was designed as a tool to discuss wellbeing in a consistent way rather than to be used in a questionnaire format with a definitive 'answer' as such.

3.4.2 Outcome 1 - Young people build their capacity and confidence

Building capacity and confidence was a key element to NAS' Moving Forward programme as this is a significant barrier to progress for participants. The numbers achieved are obviously affected by the lower than projected number of total participants, but it was reassuring to see a high proportion of participants/stakeholders reported positive impacts as this suggests the approach is effective.

Table 3: Outcome 1 Young people build their capacity and confidence

	Target	Actual	% of Target Achieved	%/Number commenting
Number of young people reporting their confidence increasing	70	40	57%	83% of 48
Number of young people feeling able to do new things	40	33	83%	69% of 48
Number of other stakeholders reporting perceived increases in young people's confidence and ability to do new things	70%	96%	138%	23 of 24
Number of young people who go on to do new things after involvement with the programme	70	15	21%	31% of 48 ³

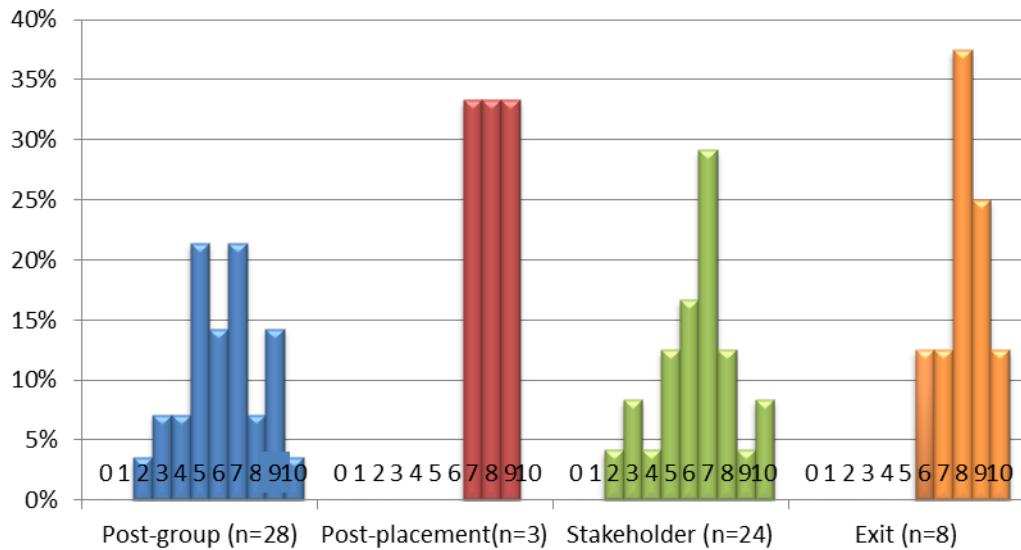
Confidence

Surveys at various stages sought feedback on the young person's confidence – at the time of taking the survey and also whether that had increased, stayed the same or decreased since starting Moving Forward. The surveys had different numbers of people responding, and the numbers of individuals commenting (n= in the figure below)/being commented on at each stage is still quite small at this stage. In Year 3 we will look at how full the data is for each participant, to see if it is possible to identify the progression made by participants in a quantitative way via the surveys to supplement the qualitative feedback.

The figure below illustrates the responses made. Post-placement and exit surveys show good confidence levels, although the number of respondents is low. The post-group and stakeholder responses show a greater spread of scores, although this perhaps reflects the fact that groupwork is generally undertaken early on in the process and some of the stakeholders will also have given their views before completion of the programme.

³ To date – it is recognised that the Moving Forward programme runs for several months so outcomes for participants starting in one year may continue to be achieved in later years.

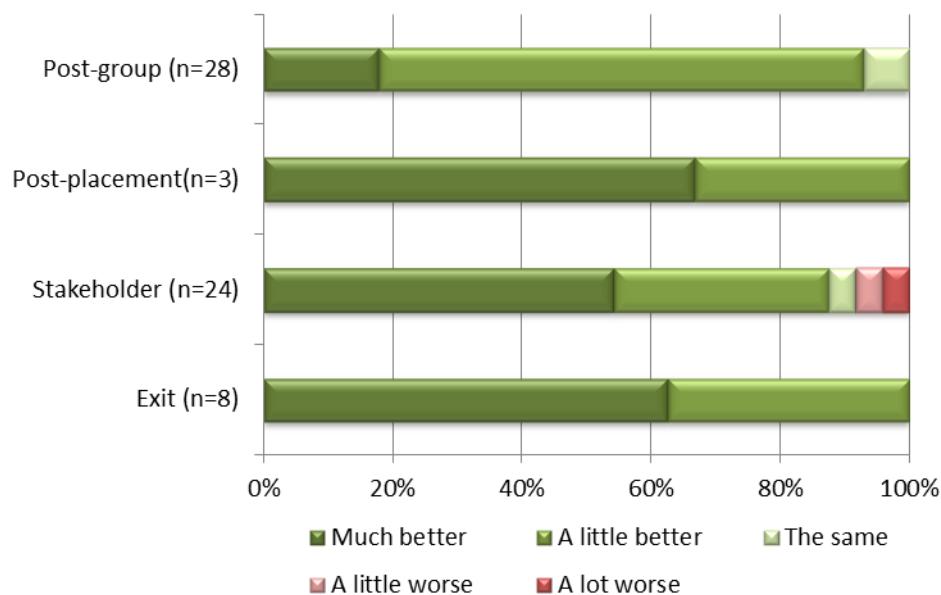
Figure 1: How would you rate your/the young person's self-confidence on a scale of 0 to 10 (0 is not at all confident and 10 is very confident)?



There will inevitably be a potentially wide variation in young people's confidence at the start of their engagement with NAS, and different people will build confidence at different rates, but it was promising to note the perceived positive shift in confidence levels, with the vast majority of survey respondents saying confidence was a little or much better. Over half of respondents to the post placement, stakeholder and exit surveys felt confidence was much better.

The figure below shows that two stakeholders responded that their young person's confidence had deteriorated since starting Moving Forward. Their ratings for confidence are 7 and 9 out of 10 and their other comments suggest that confidence has improved, not deteriorated. We would therefore suggest that this question may have been answered incorrectly by them, but have presented the answers as they were given in the figure below.

Figure 2: Rate your/their self-confidence now compared to when you/they started Moving Forward



Feeling able to do new things

All 8 (100%) participants who completed an exit survey said they did feel able to do new things, because of Moving Forward. Learning to drive (4), greater independence to travel or do things (3) and improved confidence (2) were all mentioned. Examples of these and other comments are as follows:

- *Started College*
- *I have become more independent, I can travel around Glasgow myself and have a little more confidence in meeting new people - I got to know my mentor really well over the last year. In the last year I have taken up ice skating and won 3 gold medals.*
- *Went to West End Games with brother and participated in games. Able to navigate my way around Glasgow now and find new places. Able to check things online like shop opening times etc.*
- *I'm getting back out to social groups and small art classes. Something that I never bothered to do before because of low confidence and anxiety.*
- *Look for work again*
- *Understand autism as it relates to me better than I was before*

3.4.3 Outcome 2 - Young people develop their personal and/or physical skills

The number of young people gaining accreditation for learning and skills development is an interesting indicator for the NAS programme. Firstly, the programme is young-person led so whether they wish to gain accreditation or not is a factor, as is whether there is an appropriate accreditation for whatever they might be interested in. Secondly, many young people with an autism diagnosis are already highly qualified, with qualifications from school, college or university (depending on the stage at which they attend Moving Forward). Thirdly, the critical and unique aspect of the Moving Forward is its tailored approach to supporting young people on the spectrum so this is often their primary reason for participation and, indeed, the only employability service able to support them appropriately.

However, as can be seen in the table below, 5 young people (25% of target) did gain accreditation in Year 2, including the Saltire Awards Scheme and a CSCS card, for example. All young people progressing into voluntary work are made aware of the Saltire Awards scheme.

Half of participants also reported increasing skills and the vast majority of stakeholders reported their young person's skills increasing, exceeding the target set. Results were a little lower than in Year 1, but this can be seen to be due to lower numbers overall and the person-centred approach (accreditation may not have been a focus for them).

Table 4: Outcome 2 Young people develop their personal and/or physical skills

	Target	Actual	% of Target Achieved	%/Number commenting
Number of young people gaining accreditation for learning and skills development	20	5	25%	10% of 48
Number of young people reporting their skills are increasing	60	30	50%	63% of 48
Number of other stakeholders reporting that young people's skills are increasing	60%	83%	138%	20 of 24

New or improved skills

All 8 exit survey respondents said they had new (5) or improved (3) skills because of Moving Forward.

New skills were:

- *communication*
- *time keeping*
- *budgeting*

-
- *how to zifit and magpie various items [online ways to sell games, DVDs, etc.]*
 - *more willing to try new things and accepting of autism*
 - *travelling independently*

Improved skills were:

- *problem solving*
- *my confidence has improved and so has my communications and eye contact*
- *I can talk to people much better and I'm less shy than before. I can approach others now instead of it being the other way around all the time.*

The stakeholder survey also asked whether stakeholders⁴ felt their young person had new or improved skills as a result of participating in Moving Forward. Over a third (35%, 9) said they had new skills and 70% (18) that they had improved skills. Just three stakeholders said there had neither new nor improved skills as a result of the programme (so far). Responses for new or improved skills were grouped as follows:

- confidence and self-esteem (8)
- communication skills (7)
- social skills (7)
- independence around travel, decision-making, etc. (4)
- time management (3)
- organisation (2)
- budgeting (2)
- motivation (2)
- maths (2)
- planning (2)
- team working (2)
- flexibility (1)
- patience (1)
- accepting support from others (1)

"General social skills have improved. Particularly noticeable in her interactions with retail workers."

"More confidence and awareness around internet safety. More social confidence - more chatty. More realistic in terms of job searches - was at first a wee bit all over the place looking at things like healthcare professionals and train driver jobs without considering qualifications and skills sets required. Now more structured in the way she searches for jobs and asks herself more questions about whether she is, or could become, qualified for particular jobs."

The survey followed this up by asking if stakeholders felt the young person was now able to do new things, which they couldn't do before, as a result of Moving Forward and to give examples of what they were. 22 out of 26 (85%) said they were.

The new things which programme participants were now able to do were as follows:

- travel independently (6)
- confidence to do things by themselves, not related to travel (6)
- putting social skills into practice (4)
- go to college (2)
- attend interviews (1)
- willing to try something new (1)

⁴ It should be noted that 12 stakeholders were parents/grandparents, 11 were volunteer mentors and 1 was a work coach, so there were different starting points in terms of knowing the capabilities of the young person, but it was useful to gain different perspectives nonetheless.

-
- independent living (1)
 - able to articulate what they want (1)

"X has joined the NAS Girls Group and meets with them regularly. She wouldn't have had the social confidence to do this a year ago."

"X went on the train herself to do some Christmas shopping. We looked at a map to show her where the shops were she wanted to go to before she went. She wasn't confident enough to get the bus to the station but this was very encouraging."

"He is more able to hold a conversation – he is more focussed on giving attention, looks around the room much less when someone is talking to him."

3.4.4 Outcome 3 - Young people's behaviours and aspirations change positively

The Moving Forward programme aims to help young people on the spectrum understand their condition more fully – the pros and cons – and supports them to identify, plan and move towards employment, training or education. Part of that process focusses on behaviours and how young people feel about themselves, their lives and their future.

Whilst the lower numbers of young people progressing through the programme affect the number of young people reporting positive shifts against targets, three-quarters of young people reported increased aspirations and 58% positive behaviour changes (and it must be recognised that not all young people would have required these to change). These proportions were a similar level to last year. The consistently high proportion of stakeholders reporting positive shifts in behaviour and aspirations illustrate the success of that focus in the Moving Forward programme.

Table 5: Outcome 3 Young people's behaviours and aspirations change positively

	Target	Actual	% of Target Achieved	%/Number commenting
Number of young people reporting increased aspirations	60	36	60%	75% of 48
Number of other stakeholders reporting perceived increased aspirations in young people	60%	88%	147%	21 of 24
Number of young people reporting positive changes in their behaviour	60	28	47%	58% of 48
Number of other stakeholders reporting perceived changes in the positive behaviour of young people	60%	88%	147%	21 of 24

Raised aspirations

Participants who completed the exit survey were asked if they felt participating in Moving Forward had raised their aspirations or not: 7 out of 8 (88%) said that it had, as their comments illustrate.

- *Future plans - in college to develop independent living skills. Future plans to study mechanics at college*
- *It has shown me different websites to look for jobs, and useful CV tips. I aim to apply for jobs in nurseries or as a train conductor.*
- *Want to get a job that is related to computers in some way*
- *Yes like my learning to drive was something I did not think about ever doing*
- *Before moving forward, I didn't see myself going back to college, but because of moving forward, I feel like I am ready to go back for more qualifications.*
- *I know there is support and advice for me if I go back into work so I can get help to overcome any problems*

-
- *I understand myself better and that will help me decide on the opportunities that are right for me*

The stakeholders survey asked (grand)parents/mentors whether they felt participating in Moving Forward had raised their young person's aspirations and 83% (20 out of 24) did. Around a third of comments (7) spoke of the young person hoping to or starting college/university, a quarter (6) cited greater motivation to succeed and a similar proportion highlighted the young person's improved confidence about achieving things in future. Working towards independent living was mentioned by 3 stakeholders.

"He is more determined to find himself a college course and involve himself in different activities with different people."

"X is keen to do things like go to college, join social groups and work on confidence."

"Yes, meeting others with autism has made X aware of what others have achieved and that his own goals are attainable."

"More motivated to want an IT placement, and learn about hardware and software – he wasn't too bothered about this before but now is actively asking about this. He wants to be able to save up money to move out with his girlfriend."

"It has helped X to get a qualification and driving lessons. He feels he has a better chance of getting back into work because of this."

"Applied and accepted for college. The future is a far brighter place with the help and support from the (NAS) team."

Positive changes in behaviour

Participants completing an exit survey were asked if their behaviour had improved since participating in Moving Forward. Obviously, this doesn't establish whether their behaviour needed to improve prior to completing Moving Forward, but all except one (7 out of 8) said that it had done so, in terms of both how they feel about themselves and how that impacts their behaviour:

- *I think I am more lively and outgoing than I used to be.*
- *More organised/motivated*
- *Yes my confidence has improved*
- *I'm less likely to stay quiet and withdrawn from people, because I know that I'll regret being quiet later when I haven't given myself a confidence boost or made any friends or connections.*
- *I know how to avoid some of the difficulties that I had in the past*
- *I feel more confident and able to try things that I might not have done before*

The stakeholder survey also highlighted positive changes in behaviour: 88% (21 out of 24) of stakeholders felt their young person's behaviour had improved, whilst 12% (3) did not. Eight stakeholders specifically mentioned their young person's increased confidence and four felt they were less stressed or anxious. Social skills, improved motivation and improved timekeeping were also mentioned along with a number of one-off comments.

"She has generally had a more positive demeanour. I also noticed that with the group not being on last week it deteriorated slightly."

"More punctual for meetings and more flexible when things don't go to plan."

"X now has the confidence to speak about how he is feeling. He is very open about this and will chat away. At the first few meetings he did

things because he felt obliged, now he takes charge and raises what he wants to do. He is very disciplined and organised.”

“X seems to be opening up more as the weeks go on.”

“X seems better at initiating conversation and sharing his opinions now (asking questions, giving longer answers).”

3.4.5 Outcome 4 - Young people's wellbeing improves

The SHANARRI indicators are a nationally-recognised framework developed to support good practice in Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC), to facilitate discussion of different aspects of wellbeing with children and young people, using consistent language. Whilst the seven headings (safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included) are designed to cover all aspects of wellbeing, they would not necessarily all be included in one discussion, just the ones the child/young person felt appropriate to discuss.

Three-quarters of young people reported increases in positive feelings against SHANARRI wellbeing indicators (up from two-thirds last year), along with all but one of the stakeholders. This reinforces the consistent qualitative feedback highlighting the progress participants had made because, for example, they felt comfortable as soon as they stepped into the NAS office, they felt supported, they understood their condition better and how it fits with the wider world, they had clearer goals and felt more equipped to reach them.

Table 6: Outcome 4 Young people's wellbeing improves

	Target	Actual	% of Target Achieved	%/Number commenting
Number of young people reporting increases in feelings against SHANARRI indicators	60	36	60%	77% of 48
Number of other stakeholders reporting perceived increases in SHANARRI indicators among young people	60%	96%	160%	23 of 24

The surveys sought feedback on the SHANARRI wellbeing indicators as far as possible. Some of the surveys will have been completed face to face with a member of staff, which would allow explanation and discussion of the indicators, as intended, but others were completed online. The difficulties in ‘translating’ what is meant by the indicators (challenging for neurotypical respondents and those on the spectrum alike), the mix of face to face and online responses and the fact that there are seven different categories are all likely to have impacted on responses.

Whilst some questions still had a high proportion of ‘unsure’ responses as in Year 1, the table below illustrates positive responses from different surveys which highlight people feeling safe (able to travel independently), achieving (learning a new skill), achieving (more confident), nurtured (feel able to fulfil your potential), nurtured (feel well supported), active (take part in activities with others), respected (being offered opportunities based on your positive attributes) and included (feel equal in society).

Table 7: Survey SHANARRI responses

	Post-group (n=28)	Postplacement (n=3)	Stakeholder (n=24)	Exit (n=8)
Safe - Able to travel independently				
Yes	50%	33%	83%	63%
No	11%	0%	13%	25%
Unsure	39%	67%	4%	13%
Safe – Making considered decisions				
Yes	36%	33%	46%	63%
No	0%	0%	0%	13%
Unsure	64%	67%	54%	25%
Healthy – Exercising regularly				
Yes	43%	33%	38%	75%
No	0%	0%	17%	25%
Unsure	57%	67%	46%	0%
Healthy – Maintaining a healthy weight				
Yes	43%	33%	50%	75%
No	0%	0%	8%	13%
Unsure	57%	67%	42%	13%
Healthy – Sleeping well				
Yes	43%	33%	38%	63%
No	0%	0%	4%	13%
Unsure	57%	67%	58%	25%
Healthy – Isolated from your peers				
Yes	29%	0%	25%	38%
No	14%	0%	25%	38%
Unsure	57%	100%	50%	25%
Achieving – Learning a new skill				
Yes	64%	33%	67%	88%
No	0%	0%	8%	13%
Unsure	36%	67%	25%	0%
Achieving – More confident				
Yes	71%	33%	83%	100%
No	0%	0%	0%	0%
Unsure	29%	67%	17%	0%
Nurtured – Feel able to fulfil your potential				
Yes	64%	33%	42%	75%
No	0%	0%	4%	0%
Unsure	36%	67%	54%	25%
Nurtured – Feel well supported				
Yes	68%	33%	54%	100%
No	0%	0%	0%	0%
Unsure	32%	67%	46%	0%
Active – Take part in activities with others				
Yes	79%	33%	54%	88%
No	0%	0%	25%	0%
Unsure	21%	67%	21%	13%
Respected – Being offered opportunities based on your positive attributes				
Yes	61%	33%	46%	75%
No	0%	0%	13%	0%
Unsure	39%	67%	42%	25%
Responsible – Engage with your local community				
Yes	39%	0%	25%	13%
No	4%	0%	25%	25%
Unsure	57%	100%	50%	63%
Responsible – Manage your personal finances				
Yes	32%	0%	17%	50%
No	4%	0%	21%	38%
Unsure	64%	100%	63%	13%
Included – Feel equal in society				
Yes	54%	33%	25%	63%
No	4%	0%	4%	0%
Unsure	43%	67%	71%	38%

3.4.6 Outcome 6 - Young people participate in activity which improves their learning, employability and employment options (positive destinations)

As highlighted earlier, the Moving Forward programme can engage young people for a number of months, so it is likely that the number of Year 2 participants undertaking training, learning, employment and volunteering will increase before they exit the programme. Similarly, the number of young people progressing to a positive destination on completion is likely to increase.

Table 8: Outcome 6 Young people participate in activity which improves their learning, employability and employment options (positive destinations)

	Target	Actual	% of Target Achieved	%/Number commenting
Number of young people who, as part of the programme, undertake training, learning (including staying on at school), employment and volunteering	60	48	80%	100% of 48
Number of young people progressing to a positive destination after completion of the programme	60	29 (12 further/higher education 6 employment 6 volunteering 5 training)	48%	60% of 48

3.4.7 Outcome 7 - Young people participate in positive activity

As in Year 1, Moving Forward exceeded the targets set for the number of young people participating in positive activity and was just one person off the target for trying new activities. Despite the lower overall numbers, the proportion of young people participating in positive activity/new activities was higher than in Year 1 (and the projected targets set, which were based on higher participation levels). This affirms the approach taken – with mentors, social opportunities, work placements and focus on independent travel skills, for example – which encourages participants to try new things to help them to progress positively on their life journey.

A number of young people began engaging in physical activity that they had been interested in for some time but had previously lacked the confidence to try. This included attending the gym, boxing club, Jiu Jitsu classes and weight lifting. Others worked on independent travel skills and one young person began developing their own website.

Table 9: Outcome 7 Young people participate in positive activity

	Target	Actual	% of Target Achieved	%/Number commenting
Number of young people participating in positive activity	20	24	120%	50% of 48
Number of young people who are new to that activity	20	19	95%	79% of 24

3.5 Attainments achieved

The attainments achieved by Moving Forward participants in Year 2 were as follows:

Internal Training (48):

Group x 44

1:1 sessions x 4

External Training (1):
Tattoo Infection Control

Placements (5):
Creative placement, Glasgow Caledonian University Charles Oakley Studios x 2
Admin, The Hansen Company
Starter Packs, Magpie's Nest
Retail, Oxfam Music

3.6 Positive destinations

Positive destinations in Year 2 which participants reached following Moving Forward are noted below. Where one individual achieved more than one positive destination (for example working whilst in education or training, or training and volunteering) these are indicated.

Education (12):
Work Readiness SCQF Level 4
Moving onto Work SCQF Level 3
Transitions SCQF Level 3
Access to Fabrication & Welding SCQF Level 5
HNC Working with Communities SCQF Level 7
NC Beauty Care & Make Up SCQF Level 5
NQ Modelmaking for TV & Film SCQF Level 6
NC Social Sciences SCQF Level 5
NC Music & Sound Production SCQF Level 5/6
NQ Introduction to Sport & Fitness SCQF Level 4 (Participant 1)
SWAP Access to Chemical & Life Sciences SCQF 6
National 5s SCQF 5 (Participant 2)

Training (6):
Gateway to Employment – Celtic FC Foundation x2
YouthBuild - Action for Children x 2 (Participant 1 and 1 other)
Fair Start – Remploy
Choice Works – GCC (Participant 3)

Employment (6):
Hamleys
Tim Hortons
NAS
Hansen
Assured Group
Arnold Clark (Participant 4)

Volunteering (9):
Starter Packs (Participant 3)
LGBT Health & Wellbeing
Oxfam Music
Loch Lomond Bird of Prey Centre
Shaw Trust
CamGlen Community Radio
Spruce Carpets (Participant 4)
GCU Charles Oakley Studios (Participant 2)
Shelter Scotland

3.7 Other survey and qualitative feedback

3.7.1 Overview

This section outlines additional feedback provided via surveys or focus groups. The surveys were designed to provide data primarily for the outcomes/indicators above but additional questions were asked to provide feedback on the programme, to help refine it in future and gain additional insights.

3.7.2 Group work

Key take-aways

The post-group survey asked about the key things participants took from the group work, and 25 out of 28 young people responding gave their views on this. The key things were similar to those highlighted in Year 1, with a mix of autism and employability related issues, as follows:

- being more autism aware (12), including being more accepting/comfortable with self, how autism affects them and others, and the diversity of people on the spectrum;
- preparing for work (7), preparing CVs and personal statements, how to act/speak in a job interview, interview questions, how to apply for jobs, etc.; and
- communication skills (4), including conversational skills, not worrying about speaking up, etc.;
- meeting new people with shared experiences (4);
- working as a team (4), and problem solving;
- tips to deal with anxiety (3); and
- improved confidence and self-esteem (3).

“That everyone’s opinion is valid. Sometimes compromise is necessary.”

“That my ASD isn’t a bad thing but in fact a massive advantage to myself. This as a result boosted my confidence no end; allowing me to be even more successful in my life.”

“I learned how differently autism affects other people. I realised that certain stereotypes about autistic people are untrue. I also learned that anxiety was common in autistic people.”

“Better teamwork skills. I think I’d feel more comfortable now if a situation were to happen in the future.”

Likes

The post-group survey asked programme participants what they liked best about the group work and a variety of responses were given. The most commonly-cited ones focussed around socialising with peers who understood their experiences:

- Opportunity to get to know/work with other people with autism and those who understand the condition (14);
- Learning new things (6), including about employment and skills; and
- Group exercises (5), including scenarios to respond to and puzzles

“Just the experience of meeting others in a similar situation to myself and hearing all their stories/ways of coping.”

“I particularly enjoyed the practice interviews. This was due to finding out more about everyone else and getting good feedback from my own

interview. I also enjoyed the laser tag as it was really fun and the food afterwards really good!"

"How welcoming the meetings were."

"Learning more about myself and how I learn. It makes me more aware of how I see things."

Dislikes

The post-group survey also asked what participants like least about the group work. Reassuringly, the most common response was nothing/I liked it all/that it finished/no response (16 responses).

"I liked all of it and it went by quickly."

Three people disliked travelling (although the reimbursement of expenses was appreciated) or the fact that town is busy.

"The journeys there as I don't like to travel on transport."

"Just coming into town, getting there because it was busy."

Seven other responses were given, as follows:

"I liked least the time in which comments I felt were transphobic were made by some group members and there was little intervention at the time by the head of the group. However, when I brought these complaints up I felt it was taken very seriously and that I was given a full apology and the promise of further training was given. Therefore I don't feel too bad about it post the incident."

"Sometimes just the overall fear of when I first start going to the group sessions with everyone."

"Working with people because I don't like people."

"Working in pairs wasn't very enjoyable because I didn't feel comfortable talking over another group."

"I didn't feel comfortable when we were asked to talk to each other (conversation) + find out information about the other. I know this was important for me to do for my development though."

"I didn't like the smoke alarm checks. That moments when Jean was out of the room and we were all stuck in awkward silence (but that's our fault)."

"Thinking what to write."

When asked if there was anything they would have liked to have had more information or support on, the majority said there was not, or gave no answer. The suggestions which were made highlighted confidence issues and the need for ongoing support (which was then provided, as group work was early on in the process for most participants), as follows:

"Yes, getting more confident in social situations."

"Finding out about people who were convinced they didn't fit into a workplace or that they couldn't last a week without a crisis being able to find something for themselves that made them happy to turn up for work."

"I think more advice on CV's would have been good. I had advice from a friend on this area so was okay on that front. Maybe also how to plan out applying for jobs and how to manage it."

"More reading and writing."

"Employment and confidence in general and in the workplace."

"Maybe a few more sessions just to familiarise myself more with everyone else (although that's mostly due to the amount of fun I've had during this course)."

"Just some stuff in the future."

"Possibly handling and dealing with finances, budgeting, legal forms and maybe dealing with stress."

"Having more confidence/assertiveness + more info on how to make/keep friends."

"How to show to employer that being on autism spectrum isn't a bad thing. I'm still worried that employers might find it too much of a hassle."

"Further support going onwards."

"CV & applications, reasonable adjustments."

"More info on handling stress would be appreciated."

The majority of post-group survey respondents had no further comments to make when asked. However, some took this opportunity to give positive feedback and thanks, or to highlight progress made:

"The amount of help I've had is just great, I feel I'm a little more mature in my confidence and teamwork skills and I can't appreciate it enough from the society."

"Thank you for the support and for reacting so well to criticism I have had in the past. I am glad that this space is welcoming to trans people. I'm open to giving more feedback! probably best over the phone."

"Thanks!"

"I'd just like to thank everyone who helped throughout this experience in moving forward. You've been a great help."

"I've had good fun meeting new people and learning how they are working with a team."

"The staff are quite frankly heroes. Without the Moving Forward programme I would not be where I am today - plain and simple!!"

"moving forward has helped reduce isolation + given more normal sleeping pattern."

"I like learning more about people + employment"

"Jean is lovely and very supportive"

"I managed to participate in group work"

3.7.3 Placement

The post-placement survey was only completed by three people in Year 2 but their views are shared below. Post-placement respondents rated their confidence levels highly (scoring 7, 8 and 9 out of 10), and all perceived their self-confidence to have improved since starting Moving Forward (2 much better, 1 a little better).

All three felt they had got on with their colleagues on placement well (2 quite well, 1 very well).

When asked what they liked best about their placements, survey respondents said:

“Getting the feeling of confidence from helping others and being part of a team.”

“Learning about equipment and how to develop an idea for a film.”

The elements they liked least were:

“Sometimes we had to discuss ideas for long periods before agreeing on a way forward but I know that's what happens in teams and it results in a better idea.”

The only suggestion for more information or support was “*finding a full time job*”.

All three respondents felt more prepared for employment post-placement.

3.7.4 Mentoring

In Year 2, NAS circulated a survey specifically around the mentoring support provided and five participants gave their views. Three felt their mentoring support had been going ‘okay’ and two that it was ‘great’.

“It could be improved with more fun activities - would like to have a gaming session of my mentor.”

“[mentor] has helped me to financially plan so that I could know if I could afford to move out or not. Have met him in the studio sometimes which has given me an extra reason to get out the house.”

“So far it’s been going pretty well.”

“Mentoring has been going very well, I feel like I have made a lot of progress so far. I have updated my CV with improvements and created a LinkedIn profile to increase my chances of employment. I am feeling more hopeful about getting a job now, although I appreciate this will take time. I am making steps towards employment that I hadn’t made when I started mentoring.”

Four respondents said they were ‘very satisfied’ with the support of their mentor and one that they are ‘quite satisfied’.

“I am happy with the support.”

“He’s very understanding and it’s been helping me be more confident.”

“My mentor has been very helpful and I am enjoying the sessions.”

All five respondents rated their self-confidence as ‘a little better’ compared to when they started receiving mentoring support, with the following supporting comments:

"Would like to work on self-confidence a little more with mentor."

"I feel like this is still something that I need to work on."

"I feel a bit better being more open to others."

"My mentor made suggestions for social groups and I have now been to one for people on the spectrum several times. The people are friendly and I feel like it is helping to build my confidence. There are over 100 people in this group, and normally about 6 of us when we meet, sometimes we see a movie or go to a café. I would like to maybe try a different group - maybe the Dungeons and Dragons one if I can find one at the right time."

"I have not long started my mentoring with X, so can't really answer just now."

Participants were focussing on different issues with their mentors, as follows:

- Self-confidence (5)
- Developing social skills (4)
- Application forms (3)
- Trying new activities (3)
- Finding work (2)
- Benefits advice (1)
- Financial planning (1)
- Housing (1)
- Independent travel (1)

Participants made the following comments when asked what they liked about mentoring:

"[mentor] is quite cool, I like having one to one chats with him, he gives me advice."

"It's like an added routine, an extra day that I will be out of the house."

"Mentoring gives me motivation - we set goals each time we meet, which has been very helpful in making me sit down and do things, I haven't had this structure or motivation since leaving university."

"[mentor] is very friendly and is helping me with my confidence."

Participants were asked to agree/disagree with statements to gain a sense of their views:

- Four participants strongly agreed with the statement "I would recommend Mentoring to someone else", and one agreed.
- Four participants strongly disagreed with the statement "I did not enjoy my Mentoring sessions" and one disagreed.

"It has been very helpful so I would recommend."

- Two participants strongly agreed that "I've had made progress towards achieving my goal" and three agreed.

"My mentor has helped me with college application, I have submitted this and hoping to get a place for a sports course starting in August in Anniesland. We have covered attention, what makes me anxious and communication. I feel I have improved the most in social situations, this has been very helpful."

"I feel like a cloud has been lifted now that I am out of Castlemilk. I now live 15 minutes away from the city centre so it's much quicker to get into town. I feel more independent as there's always things to buy for the flat and keep me busy."

"I've slowly been making my way to a goal."

"My goal of updating my CV is complete, and I have my new LinkedIn profile now to link in with more employers and be aware of more opportunities. My mentor checks over my job applications for me. I am still working on social skills, I do this at my social group once a week. My next goal will be possibly volunteer work in a charity shop to build up my experience - going to look at different opportunities soon with my mentor. We are looking both where I live in Hamilton and also in Glasgow."

- Three participants strongly agreed that "I feel positive about my future", one agreed and one selected a neutral response.

"As a back up plan if I don't get my sports course I would like to look at art and design courses."

"I am going to start off with volunteering then hopefully get into work. I am looking to get fitter physically and mentally - my bike is in the repair shop now. I have been going out and about doing more walking and exploring. I have a good momentum right now and I want to keep it going. I am going to go for more walks now the weather is a bit better with my mentor and we also might play tennis too."

"Not too sure how to feel yet."

"I definitely feel positive about the future - I am hopeful of hearing back from several job applications that I have made recently, including an I.T. company called GP Morgan, and Autocon. With Autocon, I recently had a skills assessment which went really well so I am hoping to reach the next stage which would be a technical talk."

3.7.5 Exit views

The exit survey asked those completing the Moving Forward programme to agree or disagree to a number of statements, in order to gain a sense of their views and experiences in a slightly different way. Whilst numbers were low at this stage, the views expressed were very positive, as can be seen from the table below. There was particularly strong agreement that they enjoyed the group sessions, 1:1 support was helpful and they understand autism better now. Five out of eight did not feel the programme was too short, although three would have liked it to have been longer.

Response categories with no responses have been left blank rather than have 0%, to help the reader see where the emphasis of responses lay.

Table 10: Exit survey agreement/disagreement to statements

n = 8	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know	N/A
I had to wait too long before I started			50%	12%	38%	
I enjoyed the group sessions	63%	37%				
I found the 1:1 support helpful	50%	38%				12%
I understand autism better now	50%	38%			12%	
I feel more able to manage my challenges now	38%	12%			50%	
Employability skills training was helpful	37%	63%				
The work placement gave me good experience of working life		38%			12%	50%
We had a good mix of participants	25%	63%	12%			
I made friends	12%	75%			12%	
Staff understand what being on the spectrum is like	25%	75%				
I liked the approach taken by staff	12%	88%				
It helped that some staff members are on the spectrum too	12%	50%				38%
The programme was too short	12%	12%	63%		12%	
I learned a lot	25%	63%			12%	
I feel more able to get and keep a job now	12%	38%			50%	
I feel more positive about my future now	12%	50%			38%	

Comments were as follows:

- *Would have liked the programme to run for 3 years - felt it was too short*
- *Because of my epilepsy, I am not sure about applying for jobs but I still want to be a train driver/conductor/driving instructor*
- *Although I learnt things from my placement in a computer repair shop, I felt the man teaching me wasn't the best at this, he wasn't really going at my pace*

Likes

Those who had exited the programme were asked what they liked best and least about Moving Forward, to help illuminate responses and learning further. A variety of issues featured as the 'best' thing including the different types of support from staff and peers and the activities, as the comments show:

- *Trip to the Transport Museum. Meeting with Mentor*
- *I liked the interactive side of things, the activities - for example in Girls Group we went a trip to the Cat Café which was really good and in mentoring we went bowling which I also really enjoyed.*
- *It's been really supportive - both group work and mentoring were very helpful. I feel like the NAS has taken me as far as I can go now - I just need to find the will power to go out and do stuff. I felt my mentor went above and beyond, she gave me a book on coding which is really useful.*
- *I like the 1-1 support. I like learning about autism. I like working in a group.*
- *I liked the group work we done, the people in the group were good as it was that understand what I have.*
- *That it helped me improve my social skills and has also given me a confidence boost. So staying motivated for my career goal is a little easier. I say all that because being in a small group really helped me see how other people with autism see and do things through their perspective. It inspired me to be more empathetic of how others around me (autistic or otherwise) interact with other people, so this is helpful to my social skills of wanting to be a tattoo artist, as it requires a lot of communication between the artist and the customer.*

-
- *I really enjoyed the laser tag with the rest of the group*

Dislikes

There was very little people did not like about Moving Forward - one cited the distance to travel to NAS and the only other comment was:

"The learning side of things - I find doing active activities more interesting. My least favourite activity with my mentor was applying for jobs (although the jobs were interesting, I didn't like the process of applying, I have issues around data confidentiality and don't like giving out my mobile number)."

Other feedback

This positive feedback was further reinforced by the following responses:

- When asked to rate Moving Forward in terms of 'marks out of 10', 5 gave full marks (10/10) and the mean score was 8.6. One participant gave a score of 4/10 but all their responses were very positive, apart from wanting the programme to last longer so this may have influenced their score.
- Three-quarter (6) said Moving Forward was better than expected and the remaining 2 did not know what to expect.
- All 8 (100%) felt better equipped to move forward with their lives now.
- All 8 felt the Moving Forward programme is tailored to young people on the autistic spectrum (63% very well, 37% quite well tailored). This was because it was tailored to their needs, they now understand autism better and staff show how well they understand the needs of people with autism by the support and opportunities they provide in an accessible way.
- The only suggestion for improving Moving Forward was to extend the length of the programme.

The one thing participants felt made the most difference to them in the exit survey was 1:1 support (38%, 3), mentoring (25%, 2), followed by group work (33%, 2), peer group support (12%, 1), work placement (12%, 1) and learning about autism (12%, 1).

Three-quarters of exit survey respondents (6) said they require further support, around:

- *Social Groups – don't currently do anything social with others*
- *Anger Management - often get angry, particularly at college*
- *Right now I am getting support from the NAS girls group which I started a new months ago, I am still getting to know the other girls in the group.*
- *I would like an I.T. placement*
- *I would like to further my education*
- *Going places I don't know like going the day before to see what it's like and help to go to college*
- *If I have ideas about what I might like to do next it could be helpful to get support for this*

One who said they no longer required support also said:

"I know that I can go to NAS if I need more support."

3.7.6 NAS staff

As in Year One, one point which emerged consistently from the survey responses and case study discussions was the consistently positive feedback on NAS staff. Participants felt welcome, comfortable and well supported throughout their contact with the team. It was also clear that participants, parents and other stakeholders felt they could ask for help in the future and the team would do their best to assist.

"NAS is a very supportive environment, it's great." Participant

3.7.7 Anything which didn't work so well?

Participant and stakeholder views were very positive, as outlined above. The only comments made when asked what had not worked so well were as follows:

- “X was disappointed that Mentoring was ending but he understood as he was moving.”
- “Ending Transition - not properly prepared. Extra reviews needed to reinforce boundaries.”
- “Something that didn't work so well was when I gave her a notebook and set small tasks such as list your 3 best qualities or 3 jobs you could apply for - she didn't really take the initiative and complete these tasks.”
- “I think X was a bit overwhelmed with the initial meeting that happened in the NAS office.”

3.7.8 Changes, improvement or suggestions

In the survey, stakeholders were very positive about the Moving Forward programme, even making positive comments when asked for areas they would like to see changed, improved or added to the Moving Forward programme. The only suggestions for improvement – all from mentors except the final one, which was from a parent - were as follows:

- While the programme offers mentees with work placement opportunities, the programme may also benefit from setting up education based work shops, offering information on how to apply to colleges / universities. Mentors may also benefit from attending these workshops with their mentees. It may also be a nice idea to arrange group trips to university / college open days.
- Applying for university workshops and group visits to open days.
- Would be nice to have a resource bank of information for volunteers to access.
- Reading & Maths skills
- More volunteer support meetings - only had the opportunity to meet other volunteers once.
- Maybe more check ups.
- More funding from government to (NAS) to create more pathways to jobs + training for people with (ASD).

Case study participants were also asked if they had any final comments or suggestions for improvement. They were all very positive about NAS and the Moving Forward programme, but the following suggestions were made:

- More autism awareness and profile raising of NAS and what it has to offer in schools and colleges (5)

“NAS should go to schools and colleges to tell people about the great things they do here, not waiting for people to come to them as it's not going to happen for autistic people.”

“Are there ways to advertise NAS? We've spoken to people who didn't know about it and they should. Unless they come here, there's not a lot of information for parents of people with autism.”

“NAS should go out to schools. People don't know the different effects autism can have on you and it would be helpful if they knew. For example it can give me a complete mental block and I don't want to have to deal with people. I know there's a light at the end of the tunnel now because of NAS but schools need to have an assembly on autism so everyone knows about it and has a space to feel safe at school. I felt alone, even with friends.”

"No gaps for us – they just need to keep it going and for more people to know about it and able to access it. Other people must be demented without it, like we were. It needs more advertising as this place is lifechanging and could help a lot more people. Why does it not come up on Google? It's like a secret society where you need to know someone to access it."

"Publicise it. More people could benefit and no-one knows it's there."

- More social events/links to other organisations to help develop social skills/interests (3)
- Financial management, how autism affects the financial world and the options available to autistic people.
- Practice shifts in businesses
- Volunteering roles at NAS.
- Bigger groups (if people find groups challenging and the group is too small that won't help them get used to it).
- More help with CVs.
- Longer mentoring support.
- Other comments were:

"Just a minor thing, but they could lay off a bit if you are independent – if you don't need services NAS provide stop asking if you need them. Don't pester people."

"The team chat before each session is good as it forced me to interact and not cut off; it helped us get comfortable with each other quickly. I understand it might be better if unexpected but the opportunity to have to interact is useful."

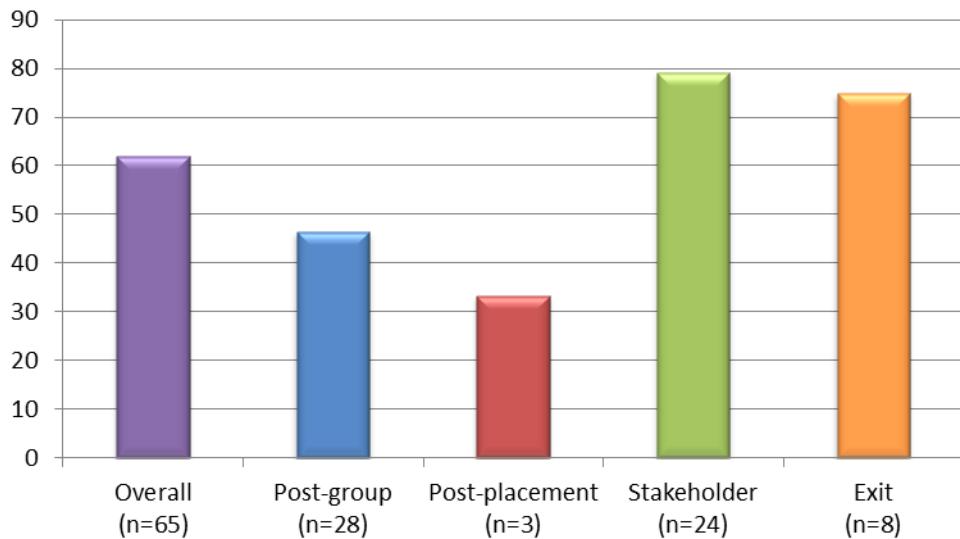
"I'm still keen on something for parents, particularly when diagnosis has been late, but appreciate people are busy with things and have work and caring commitments etc."

"I would have liked to know I have a placement at the end of it, but I know it's person-centred so that would be difficult to do. Try to ask early on what we want to do so can get something in place when we've finished the group."

3.7.9 Recommending Moving Forward (Net Promoter Score)

The different surveys asked the Net Promoter Score (NPS) question as a gauge of satisfaction/loyalty, i.e. how likely would you be to recommend Moving Forward to someone else? The NPS is calculated by deducting the 'detractors' (those who score 0 – 6) from the 'promoters' (scoring 9 or 10), ignoring those who score 7 or 8 as 'passives'. There are pros and cons to NPS, but it can be a useful tool to use alongside other feedback to gain a sense of the depth of feeling about a service/programme/product/organisation. The overall NPS score was +62, ranging from +33 for the three post-placement respondents to +79 for stakeholders. NPS can range from -100 to +100, so these are all good scores.

Figure 3: How likely would you be to recommend Moving Forward...?



"Nothing is a 10. They do lots of things I'm not interested in. They're doing good. There are a lot of people on the spectrum who aren't as independent as me or able to get into the workforce without experience as it's such a catch 22. NAS would help them all." Participant rating 9/10

"Yes, it helps keep you busy, you get up and out the house and most importantly you learn things." Participant

3.7.10 Feedback from employers

Only one employer completed an online survey so those findings (which were positive) will be reported in aggregate in the final evaluation, but three employers were also interviewed to help shape the case studies, so additional feedback from them is noted here.

Many Moving Forward participants wish to undertake a voluntary work placement. During, or soon after, group work NAS staff develop a sense of where an individual's strengths and interests lie and what their next steps might be. The NAS team take a very person-centred approach and tailor support to each individual, although this can be challenging if the participant does not know what they want to do!

NAS staff usually seek a voluntary work placement which is 5 hours a day, 1 day a week for 6 weeks. Whilst feedback is ongoing throughout the initial placement, this will then be reviewed more fully with the participant and employer at the end of 6 weeks. If both are happy, the placement may be extended for a further 6 weeks or tailored, as appropriate.

First impressions

NAS contacts employers operating in the field the young person is interested in moving into. Interestingly, all three case study employers had some connection to autism – a family member of their own or a friend – who were on the spectrum. They were keen to be as supportive as possible and *"wanted to give something back"*. None of the case study employers had offered work placements or internships before, although one had participated in an apprenticeship programme in the past. However, since their experience with a NAS placement, two were in the process of organising a school work experience placement at the time of interview.

"My only concern was about not being able to offer something permanent at the end of the placement, but I appreciate work experience is still useful and things need to come to a natural end."

"The opportunity came at the right time as the business was growing and I needed the resource, without an ongoing commitment of employment in the first instance. It was ideal, a win:win. The fact that it was an unpaid placement meant there was no risk in trying it out, so it was an easier decision, also without any hassle of recruitment. These are also preferred candidates as they have very strong skills for the role and are able/willing to cope with detailed database work which other people may find dull."

Employers felt the young people were ready for their work placements, with just one comment on appropriate dress code.

"I just had to ask X not to wear a tracksuit as jeans and a tee shirt are more presentable in the office, and he was fine with that."

How did it go?

All employers spoke very positively about the work placement. Placements went very smoothly, with employers appreciating the inputs the young people made to the organisation and seeing how much of a difference the placement made to the young person too.

"X is great, he's fitted in nicely. It's not difficult to work with him. He often says what is on his mind, which is helpful actually. The editor has a similar direct style, so they work well together. We're very busy and he gets on with work."

The support from NAS was seen to be at an appropriate level, and all employers felt they could contact the NAS team if they had any issues to discuss. Contact with NAS compared favourably to experiences with school placements.

"The support from NAS was spot on. We had chosen to do a weekly report because we could see the progress in X and wanted to tell him we were happy with things, so we probably gave more feedback than NAS were looking for. We had one meeting after that. Jean came back very quickly if there ever was anything to discuss."

"The level of support is fine, about the right amount and it's a collaborative approach, which is the key thing."

"Nothing unexpected or challenging came up. Jean's very nice to get on with and it was the right amount of support. We're really busy so anything more would have been hard to accommodate. We will have a school placement for 2 half days in May but there has been a lot more health and safety paperwork and a visit for that, which has made us wonder if it's worth it! We did it because we didn't know how much would be involved and the pupil had already been told, but it was overload. It's not like that with Jean. We had a meeting at the start and to consider future options, plus Mum came in too, but otherwise we know she's on the phone if we need anything."

Making a difference

All employers were very positive about the Moving Forward programme as they felt it had a positive impact on the young people, on their organisation and the process worked well. When asked to give the programme marks out of 10 the mean score was 9.5 out of 10, with two awarding top marks and one an 8 or 9, which we scored as 8.5 for the purposes of the calculation.

"10/10. They did everything they said they would do. It wasn't onerous for us and we gained from it too. It was great to see him complete tasks and improve over time. I would recommend it to anyone. There were gains on both sides."

"10, no bad or negative experiences at all."

"8 or 9, I never give 10!"

Positive impacts were noted for all young people.

"Both are more outgoing, eye contact is good, it's all fine. With X at the start, a process wasn't working so we changed it and she wasn't happy about it. It was a learning point for us and we know how to approach change better now."

"We've been surprised with what he's achieved already. If we were to do it again, we would probably try to give more time as it's all so fast here. We will make time to think more about tasks and what he might be involved in."

"His mum talks so passionately about the difference it makes to X, getting up and out to work and he's proud that he is at work. We take that for granted but with a bit of encouragement and acceptance it has given him a huge confidence boost."

The benefits to the employer were also highlighted:

"It's not charity, they're doing a good job and I need them to run the business. Without them, the business would be in a different position as they have very strong skills...I've not found any weaknesses yet."

"It's had a positive impact on us. It's good to give everyone a chance."

"It's a good way for people to try something and see if that is what they want to do. Also a good way for employers to see how people perform and then save recruitment if there is a potential role for them to fill. It's a good balance, where both can check each other out."

"I think we all prefer having him here because he's helping, and we're enjoying supporting him into the future. The finance manager doesn't say much but is greeting X, which he doesn't say to others."

"X is a great help and only needs the correct guidance to what his role would be within the workplace to be a perfect candidate for an appropriate role."

In terms of challenges, one employer ran out of work for the young person to do as he was very efficient in completing the tasks set of him. This was partly because he did not like using the phone, so that limited the tasks which could be allocated to him. One young person also suffered a family bereavement so was absent for a couple of weeks.

"All good, no significant problems. Absence issues on one placement but now I know why, I think it's impressive that he's managed to attend at all, and I commend him for that."

All employers felt the work placement was a good route into employment for the young people as it got them used to the work environment, they could test whether the role was for them or not and experience on their CV would put them in a stronger position when seeking a paid role (although 2 out of the 4 young people were actually offered paid part-time positions in their placement organisations).

"It's a good route into employment, absolutely. We saw such a difference in him, going from quiet and withdrawn to engaging with people, and he

was very quick to pick up tasks which gave him confidence. He knows where his strengths lie now. He was given responsibilities and got on with them. He scanned something upside down but we just pointed it out and to be careful next time and he coped well with mistakes like that. It was just because he hadn't done it before."

"It's definitely a helpful route into employment... we made a post for him. Money is tight but he has been a massive help and we want to continue that."

Employers would also recommend a placement to others, as a result of their positive experiences. Indeed, one had already done so.

"100% would recommend it to others, and I have done so already to the software company we share an office with. I would be open to having a shared placement too, if that helped. Both placements have great skills and work hard too."

"We would definitely recommend it to others and would take another placement. There needs to be understanding in the workplace. Hand picking the company is important, as it might not work so well everywhere, and X [participant] makes it easy too."

Looking to the future

All three case study employers were open to further placements if they have the capacity and need for one in future. They felt their experiences were very positive – for them, the organisation and the individual on placement.

"I'd take another placement and have said so to Jean. We don't always have enough to keep someone busy and I wouldn't want them scanning all day as that wouldn't help them, but ideally 3 or 4 hours a week we could manage."

"I'm happy to take people on with good skills, for placements and paid work. Ideally a full-time role could be filled on a job share basis. It's all on the cloud, so people don't even have to come into the office if they don't want to."

They also all felt they were more likely to employ an autistic person in future, now that they had experience of the Moving Forward programme placement. This has perhaps dispelled some myths around autism and highlighted the strengths of people with autism, whilst also providing them with greater understanding of people on the spectrum so they felt better equipped to welcome an employee with autism in the future. One employer has already given a one day a week paid position to one young person and may consider another paid appointment in future. Another young person has secured one half day a week with their placement employer.

"Yes, absolutely more likely to employ a person with autism, if they have appropriate skills, in future. If X could do calls he would have been a better fit here. If someone has similar skills and could answer the phone that would be a game changer for us. We need flexibility as we're a small team."

"I am aware of, appreciate and happy to support people's needs. It's not unreasonable to have a bit of give and take, as everyone is different. I don't mind taking 10 minutes to show someone the bus stop when they work as hard as they do."

"We all decided we would like to offer X a paid role, so we opened up a position for him offering what we could afford, taking on archiving which is a big task, but which he enjoyed. It's 3.5 hours a week."

"I think we would be more likely to employ a person with autism in future, we certainly wouldn't be put off. Our company is all about equal opportunities and trying to not just give opportunities to people that are easy to place. We're certainly open to people on the spectrum as we have a lot of work which would suit that profile and play to their strengths."

The NAS work placement was perceived to have the right approach, but employers were asked if there was anything which could be improved upon to support participants, parents, or workplaces in future. There was only one suggestion around absence reporting, because of a particular situation experienced, but others were happy with things as they stand.

"Perhaps a process of absence reporting might be helpful as NAS could then contact the young person and see if they need more support. Perhaps by email? Check they're on time, etc."

"There's nothing to work on. Jean accessed funding for X to get his own laptop etc., which was a really big help, and she's 'on it' whenever she needs to be."

One employer was also keen to see if there is anything they can do to help promote work placements with NAS, for example a case study or video on LinkedIn, and would be keen to have guidance from NAS on this.

3.7.11 Additional comments from stakeholders

Several stakeholders made additional comments at the end of their survey. These largely said thank you to NAS, mentors said how much they enjoyed working with their young person and some of these and parents commented on what the young person had achieved and/or next steps. For example:

"Just thank you very much to everyone involved with his support."

"I have already recommended National Autistic Society Moving Forward to another family as it has been great for X."

"Would have stayed longer if I wasn't moving away to study – it's been a fantastic experience. Felt well supported by Callum [mentor co-ordinator] - he was always very responsive to my queries."

"I think X is an amazing young man, he is keen to develop himself and do well, he is only 18 but mature enough to recognise the areas he needs to work on and seeks to make improvements, he is very motivated."

"I am really enjoying mentoring X. He is an incredibly capable person with a passion for music. He doesn't take any convincing to try new things. He has been instrumental in going home and researching things after meetings. I've enjoyed filming him in his music studio and hearing about his interests in History. Next goal with him is to look for voluntary work."

"I think Moving Forward is a very good programme for building the confidence of people on the autistic spectrum. A lot of young autistic people have severe confidence issues due to feeling like they don't fit in and not knowing where to begin in fulfilling their aspirations (applying for

jobs, interviews, college etc). The most important thing in these situations is to engage them to rethink what's possible and help them share and achieve their goals."

"Billy Docherty has engaged with my son whenever required and X has raised the bar due to the support and confidence provided by Billy + team. I cannot praise Billy Docherty and the rest of the NAS team enough for their support and professional approach on supporting myself, X and our family in dealing with ASD. It has enabled myself + X to see light at the end of a very dark tunnel. More funding would be so beneficial in helping others, families etc. Fantastic service and totally appreciated."

Discussions with participants and other stakeholders to formulate the case studies were wide ranging. Quotes which highlight the significance of the Moving Forward programme for participants and those who care for them, which have not been captured elsewhere in this report, include the following:

"NAS are great. There are no daft questions here, they answer everything no matter how stupid. I don't see Billy, Jean and Jim as workers, I see them as family." Participant

"I'm infinitely grateful and infinitely in debt [to NAS]." Participant

"I feel they're always here for me, it's great." Participant

"I can't praise them enough in here [NAS]. They do what they say." Participant

"It's elegant. They don't make you feel uncomfortable." Participant

"People ask how I feel and I know it's genuine, I respect that." Participant

"If they don't know the answer, they'll find out." Participant

"It's lovely to see people take their time and grow, like Giovanna and her butterflies." Parent

"NAS is like an oasis, it's great X got a place on it." Parent

"I don't know what we'd do without this place. Right from speaking to someone in reception to all the other support we get." Parent

"You leave your troubles at the door. It always cheers me up coming in here." Parent

"I can't fault NAS, I don't know what else they could do [for X]." Parent

"In one way I wish he hadn't come so far as I miss the contact (with NAS). I always leave full of euphoria. It's great to see my son doing so well. He's thriving. It's a wonderful feeling and puts me on a high for a week or two." Parent

4 Case studies

4.1 Introduction

A key aspect of the primary research this year was interviews with young people and other stakeholders in order to prepare case studies, in response to Year 1 findings. The evaluation research in Year 1 highlighted both:

- the quality of input by NAS to help young people, provided in different ways (group work, mentoring, 1:1 support, work placements, social events and so on) and about different things (particularly decoding themselves and the world around them as autistic people, plus the more 'standard' employability elements); and
- the diversity of the client group (by time since diagnosis, gender, age, educational attainment, ability to travel independently, etc.).

The case studies aim to illuminate these further.

There are nine case studies: six with Year 2 participants; and three with Year 1 participants who took part in the focus groups last year, to show how they have progressed further with Moving Forward. Case studies for Year 2 participants appear first, in alphabetical order, followed by Year 1 participants.

4.2 Year 2 case studies

Amy

Amy is 17 and her skills with a make-up brush are immediately apparent - she looks stunning. She has found her niche: she's currently completing a 12 week Eye Enhancements course at college and has been accepted for a year-long beauty course at the City of Glasgow College in August. She is also in a relationship and is looking forward to what the future has to offer. Life hasn't always seemed so positive to Amy, unfortunately.

"It [Moving Forward] has made such a difference to me. I've realised that I'm not stupid and I can do things. If I wasn't here there would be no college and I'd be in the house doing nothing. This gave me something to get up for. And I've got a boyfriend now."

Amy was only diagnosed as being on the spectrum last year, although she has received counselling from CAMHS for depression and anxiety since she was 12. Despite struggling at school, and being given counselling, Amy and her mum Margaret-Anne felt school was not helpful or supportive as staff did not believe her diagnosis. Luckily, Margaret-Anne worked near NAS so approached them for help.

"It was such a relief [to get the diagnosis]. I expected it, I knew what was coming so I'd already set in place support from NAS for after the diagnosis. This is the best thing I've done as a parent. It's amazing to see the difference in her, she was so down and now she's so confident."

Amy had planned to study social work at college last year, before her diagnosis, but did not feel up to it. She never thought she would be able to study at the City of Glasgow College as it is so big and busy. It can be scary. Some days at school Amy didn't feel up to getting up or speaking to people, so she felt the City of Glasgow College was a step too far when she was looking at college before. NAS feels different.

"NAS is my safe place."

Group work with the Moving Forward programme helped Amy to discover what career she wanted to pursue – becoming a make-up artist. She has had 1:1 support from NAS staff and NAS has helped fund her make-up kit for her current course; and will also help with her kit next year plus the purchase of a voice recorder so she can record lectures.

Being a single parent is tough and Margaret-Anne has prioritised Amy's needs rather than her own. Now that she is confident that Amy is thriving, she is looking forward to being able to pursue her own dreams.

"It's been a huge journey for both of us. Now that Amy is doing so well I can do what I want to do. It's my time now."

Amy and Margaret-Anne are hugely appreciative of the support they have had from NAS. So much so, that Amy's boyfriend Connor, a musician, is organising a fundraising gig (or 3!) for NAS in June. They want to give something back.

"I really hope they get funded to do this for other people. I don't know what we would have done without it, where we would be. We've already recommended NAS to other people because not enough people know about what they do. We wouldn't have known if I didn't work across the road and the [NAS] group came in."

Amy and Margaret-Anne felt the impact of the NAS team could not be overstated:

"I'd love a picture of Billy, Jim and Becky as superheroes!"

Anton

A big personality. Big enough to be remembered by Humza Yousaf, the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Justice. Everyone mentions his great personality. And a cage fighter.

Even though he's only 20, Anton has been a volunteer youth worker with Regen:FX Youth Trust in South Lanarkshire for 4 years. He's passionate about showing young people from a deprived area who have been 'written off' that they can have a second chance.

Not what many people expect of someone with autism, is it? But autism is only one part of the picture.

Anton had a relatively late diagnosis at 16. School offered no support, actively advising against a diagnosis. However, Anton found the diagnosis useful as he had always felt different. For example, he didn't have a specific friend group at high school, although people liked him. After school he studied social sciences at college but failed his exams. He hit a low point then, so one of his mum's colleagues suggested NAS might be helpful.

"I thought they might just give me some advice on what to do about college, but once we explored what NAS does I immediately wanted to be here. The light bulb came on."

Anton started Moving Forward in summer 2018:

"I loved every minute of it, it was the highlight of my week to come here. [Moving Forward] gave me a reason to get up and the drive to move forwards. I'll be eternally grateful for that... For me, the workplace was a real worry, that fear of the unknown. NAS made it all sound really normal and unthreatening, explaining forms and interviews."

Anne, Anton's mum, also felt supported by NAS, both in her own right and because she could see how well Anton is being supported to realise his potential.

"You know no matter what, NAS has your back. They have been a huge support."

Both Anne and Anton highlighted how helpful the coping mechanisms have been, suggested by the NAS team, when Anton is feeling stressed. Moving Forward has also helped Anton to see the positive aspects of autism rather than focus on the negatives.

"It's given me the confidence to make me put myself out there. You need to seek discomfort until it becomes comfort and I'm more comfortable in myself."

Anne feels Moving Forward has helped to open up new horizons for Anton, encouraging him to try new things and be a young adult rather than be "*happily stuck in childhood*". For example, Anton now travels by bus so is much more independent, a benefit for him and those who had to accompany him before.

"NAS were great because they stepped into a void I couldn't as a mother. I don't know the things they do and it's so good for him to be independent and less child-like. We're so grateful. NAS have been like a lighthouse in a dark moment."

Anton is now starting to work with a volunteer mentor, looking at financial management and budgeting, as well as providing an opportunity to take some time out for himself. Anne still worries that he could become socially isolated as he does not go out much, but recognises that youth work brought him out of his shell and he has a wide variety of friends through Magic: The Gathering (the card trading game).

The future is looking bright for Anton. He starts a new course in August and NAS are also looking for a paid work placement for him.

"I've gone through a complete metamorphosis since August. I'm not finished yet as I've got so much further to go... But I can see a future for me now and I probably didn't before I came to NAS. I started at a low place."

Jack⁵

"Kids with poor social skills often don't get past the interview stage but have a lot to offer."

Jack was diagnosed as being on the autism spectrum when he was 9 or 10. He had some support after diagnosis and went on to college after school, but found it too challenging to be in such a noisy, crowded place and had to quit. Jack, 20, lives in Pollok and was referred to Moving Forward by a GP practice-based Community Links Practitioner. He had been trying to find an admin role for some time, hampered by a lack of experience and social skills. He is shy, has a stammer (which is worse when he is anxious) and finds eye contact difficult with people he hasn't met before.

Jack describes himself as not very sociable or talkative in a group, but he was interested in what Moving Forward had to offer and wanted to give it a go. Helpfully, his group was small and Jack quickly found common ground with his peers. He found the group work helpful and felt more prepared for the future.

The NAS team found two work placements for Jack, to provide office experience in different settings. First up was Money Puzzle, a small, family-run PPI and pension mis-selling claims management company based in Glasgow city centre, suggested by the volunteer mentor. Norma Mackay at Money Puzzle has a personal connection to someone on the spectrum and, having seen what they have been through to find employment, was keen to help provide a placement.

"It's really important to make the most of the skills they have and give them a first step into employment so they can build confidence. Of course, it feels good for us to help too."

This placement ran from July until December 2018 and played to Jack's strengths as he completed a variety of admin tasks such as organising the files, managing the post, data entry, photocopying and taking notes. He was so efficient they ran out of work for him!

"His attention to detail was second to none and he took ownership of the mail and other tasks. He was very quick and efficient. Every job was completed to a high level. He was very conscientious too – he stayed late one day to finish a task, which he didn't need to do. It's just a pity we didn't have a long-term job to match his skills... I would be very happy to give him a reference. He has good IT skills and is great working with detailed data. He can assimilate a lot of information on screen very quickly."

Jack really enjoyed the social side of this small organisation too, becoming more comfortable with casual conversations during the working day. This was noted by his colleagues.

"It worked very well. From the beginning we saw a marked difference in him. At the start he would only really speak to one person at a time, with no eye contact, and by the end he was chatting to everyone in the office, with eye contact. He enjoyed the banter and his social skills really progressed."

The placement was also beneficial for the Money Puzzle team.

"We have a better understanding of autism now too, thanks to the placement. I try to be more patient with people generally, as a result."

The second placement is ongoing at present with OccuTrace, which involves checking databases. This has been less social than Money Puzzle but Jack is very good at checking details and investigating anomalies.

⁵ Name has been changed on request.

"I feel more able and experienced to do this and feel a lot more comfortable in a work environment than I thought I would."

Again, Jack's skills set was seen to be a great fit with the organisation and there may be scope for paid work if the remainder of the placement goes well.

"He would be a preferred candidate based on progress to date. He's very accurate and gets through the work which other people may find dull."

NAS and workplace contacts all commented on how Jack's confidence had improved significantly over time. He seems more at ease when talking to people, and they noticed that his eye contact had improved and stammer eased, to the point that they rarely noticed it.

Jack can travel independently and may not have some of the support needs other young people on the programme may have, but it has still had a big impact on him, particularly helping him to feel more prepared to move into the world of work now.

"I'm a much more confident person. I can go into interviews knowing I have previous work experience. I know how to prepare for the interview and how to behave. I know how to tell them I'm on the spectrum too, that's a really big thing for me."

He was conscious that this impacts on his family too:

"It's also helped my Mum to see me going out and about. I think it's nice for her to see me doing something and it'll help when I get a job."

So, what's next?

"The key is to find paid work, that's my goal. NAS has supported me to get this far."

If his placement keeps going well, he may reach that goal very soon.

Katie

Finding something you love doing can improve your confidence and self-esteem, as well as being an enriching experience in its own right. Like falconry. Katie, 17, became hooked when she first held a Harris Hawk. She comes to life when talking about the birds she works with and recognises falconry has had a positive effect on her, as well as giving her useful experience towards her goal of working with animals.

Katie was only diagnosed with autism last autumn so it is still relatively new to her and her family. Unfortunately, neither she nor her Mum, Jo, found school to be very supportive

[at school] you only get attention if you behave badly, not if you need it.”

...but CAMHS did provide support, suggesting that Katie may be on the spectrum, and later recommended the NAS Moving Forward programme. Once she left school, Katie started group work in January 2019. Katie has friends with autism so had some understanding of the condition, and the group work helped to improve this significantly.

Katie has recently started mentoring sessions, focussing on independent travel and improving her self-confidence. At the moment she relies on her Mum, Jo, to accompany her wherever she needs to go, so independence will have a huge impact on both of them. Katie has epilepsy but would also like to learn to drive in future, if possible.

Katie's family have noticed she is already more confident and engaging with them. The diagnosis has also helped some of her extended family understand her behaviour better, which has been positive for both them and Katie.

“It [Moving Forward] has changed me as a person. I used to be cold, distant and closed off. I would just sit in my room with my dog and not speak to anyone. I can still be like that sometimes but I've become a better person and relaxed a bit to let people in. My family would agree.”

“There have definitely been changes since Katie has been coming to NAS. We've seen a big difference in her confidence. She used to drop her bag when she came in and go straight to her room. She'll sit and talk to us for 5 or 10 minutes before going into her room now.”

This confidence has also impacted on her behaviour at NAS, where the team have made an effort to find out what Katie really thinks and wants, and challenged her to be honest:

“Katie would say yes just to please people but she's not afraid to say no to Jean now and say what she thinks.”

Katie finds it hard to judge people, which can bring challenges for her when trusting the 'wrong' people, but feels she can trust everyone at NAS, who genuinely have her best interests at heart.

“A lot of people hear but don't listen. They hear what you are saying at NAS.”

“Everyone is so nice here. You're not forced to do anything you don't want. A room can be full and I feel alone, but everyone is so cheery here, it makes me feel comfortable.”

“It feels like a second home. I feel comfortable, relaxed and open, not hunched and closed off. People want to talk and get to know you, not because they have to. It feels natural.”

Katie has started to learn sign language and is interested in learning Braille. She finds it difficult to read people from their body language and tone, so this is helping her to better

understand herself and those around her.

Despite the challenges Katie experiences when engaging with people, she participated well in the group work and has been introduced to the NAS café by Sandra. She surprised her mum by feeling comfortable enough to stay at the café (Geek Retreat) for an hour and a half.

Katie described becoming very close to Jean through the MF group work and weekly 1:1 life coaching sessions, seeing her as more of a friend than a therapist. Jean has been supporting Katie through anxieties/emotional issues since her CAMHS service ceased and has also referred her to Lifelink for counselling. Jean has given Katie strategies to help her deal with situations which make her anxious, which Katie has found to be effective. Jean has also applied to the Independent Living Transition Fund to enable Katie to enjoy regular one to one falconry sessions at Strathblane, and a laptop to assist her studies.

Katie wishes she had support like this sooner. But is grateful to have it now. Her plan is to complete an animal care course at Motherwell College once she's cracked independent travel and can 'fly solo'.

Melissa

Melissa is 24 and joined Moving Forward last year. Melissa is from Glasgow and graduated from the University of Strathclyde in History but came to NAS for support with work experience and tips for securing employment. She feels her prospects are “quite grim”, frustrated by little career progress since graduating a year ago.

Melissa would like to do something utilising to her history degree but there are not many opportunities in this field, so she is now looking to move into an administrative role. Retail and catering trades would both be too noisy, busy and stressful for Melissa. She has experienced the common ‘Catch 22’ of not being able to secure work without experience, but not finding the opportunity to gain experience.

That sounds relatively straightforward, but of course no one is one-dimensional.

Melissa was diagnosed as being on the spectrum when very young (pre-school), although she is still unsure how it affects her. She used to pretend she wasn’t autistic but now owns it, has learned more about it and has found this useful.

“Autism has a stigma so I used to worry what people would think as I saw it as a very negative thing. I think I have a more balanced view of it now.”

Melissa has anxiety issues, so can find it difficult to voice concerns or issues that she has. This can lead to her leaving a situation rather than confronting the person or issue she has found challenging, as she doesn’t want to be seen to be difficult. This has obvious impacts on her own mental health and prospects.

Melissa also transitioned to presenting as a woman 3 years ago. This is a challenging time for anyone and it is known that autistic people are more likely to be transgender than those who are neurotypical.

Melissa has attended group work and receives 1:1 support from NAS staff. This support has helped her to move forward with bureaucratic aspects of transitioning, such as changing her birth certificate, driving licence details and sorting out benefits, which has been invaluable.

She also volunteers at LGBT Health and Wellbeing on a Friday, as an admin worker. She was interested in joining the women’s group at NAS but was discouraged from joining as one participant is very religious, so it was suggested she joined an LGBT+ group instead. She found this particularly discouraging, as it suggested another participant’s views and preferences were more important than her own and it didn’t feel very inclusive. It perhaps highlights that organisations, staff and other clients are at different points on the scale of understanding transgender issues, which must be a constant frustration for transgender people.

Otherwise, Melissa was keen to highlight how lovely everyone at NAS is, and how helpful staff have been to help her move things forward, with sound support and advice. This is particularly important to Melissa as she has mental health issues. She has a very supportive friend group but feels less equipped to deal with other interactions. For example, Melissa was nervous of telephone work in an admin role because of the potential of being misgendered, which would be distressing for her. Callers would not have any visual clues to help them use the correct pronouns and changing the pitch of the voice is challenging, requiring training over time and/or surgery. On a positive note, Melissa has now done some telephone work with LGBT Health and Wellbeing and has enjoyed helping people. However, she is still a bit anxious about potentially being misgendered, particularly outside an LGBT space.

Melissa is continuing her journey with the NAS Moving Forward team and hopes to build on her admin role in the LGBT Health and Wellbeing Project to find a work placement or paid employment soon.

Tia

Not all career paths are easy or run of the mill. Tia, 22, wants to be a tattoo artist. However, she – and NAS - has found this to be a very tough business to break into. Established tattoo artists are not always keen to take apprentices on, and apprenticeships are usually unpaid positions.

Tia is a talented artist, who has shared some of her work at NAS events. She is currently building her portfolio and actively seeking opportunities with tattooists in the city. NAS sourced funding for her recent attendance at a tattoo conference and the purchase of USBs printed with her contact details, to help share her portfolio with tattooists more easily. While both Tia and NAS have tried to find a placement, neither have been successful ... yet.

Tia lives in Glasgow and was diagnosed with autism around five years ago, after her art teacher suggested she might be on the spectrum. She is very independent, having completed a 2 year HND in Computer Arts and Design at the City of Glasgow College and regularly travelling to Aberdeen to see friends.

However, that doesn't mean it's easy to keep motivating herself to repeatedly visit each tattoo parlour to promote her work and seek a position. In fact, Tia's Nan, Jane, reported that her mum's biggest worry is keeping her motivated until a placement can be found. But Tia has learned to manage rejection and continues to push herself to visit tattooists, share her work and ask about apprenticeship opportunities.

"The first time [I was rejected] was like a slap in the face, but I'm used to it now. It helps to harden up and be assertive so you can deal with rejection better."

Tia found NAS as Jane had visited a few years ago and asked about what kind of support was available. She was looking for help with self-confidence, motivation and opportunities to be more sociable with people, to avoid being isolated and anxious. Tia was also aware that she needed to push herself more, with new situations and new people, as she was starting to realise the importance of being with people and the challenges she has with this.

For example, Tia is not naturally expressive, so her face does not always give away what she is thinking or feeling and people find this hard to read, particularly as she can be verbally direct. As a result, she tries to consciously remind herself to make facial expressions so that people do not misinterpret any lack of expression in a negative way. Tia is from a very close family who feel very protective towards her, but they also realise that they need to stand back and let Tia move on in life, even if that is hard. Her partner, Carla, is also very supportive.

Tia started Moving Forward in summer 2018. She found the first couple of weeks of groupwork quite awkward but enjoyed spending time with other autistic people. Tia found that shared understanding really valuable as it gave her confidence a boost and she made friends. She now feels more prepared for work and reported the 1:1 support from Becky has also been very beneficial.

Jane could see a positive impact since attending Moving Forward.

"It's helped her motivation and she's a bit more confident. I know she feels frustrated as it's such challenging work to get into, but she can see that it's possible and attainable now. She's not frightened by it."

"Having people with similar issues, experiences and challenges is marvellous. There's a sense of community here, which is nice."

Jane also rated NAS highly as the family all feel welcome and included, in addition to the positive differences they can see in Tia. Tia agreed, although she recognised that she still find it challenging.

"Without the support of my family, friends, the group and staff I would have given up by now."

Tia also thinks that the impacts go beyond her own development as she is able to communicate better with people and takes a moment to explain she is on the spectrum so they don't think she is rude or blunt. She think this not only helps communications and her relationships with others, but also helps to improve others' understanding of autism.

4.3 Year 1 case studies

James

James, 21, has moved on since the focus group last spring. He was relatively new to NAS's Moving Forward programme then, although he had already taken part in group work, had one unsuccessful work placement and was about to start a new one.

It paid off. James is now working a paid half-day shift with Media Co-op as Post-Production Assistant. He's very much part of the team, with his profile on the website and keys to the editing suite. He is also planning to speak to a work experience student shortly, to share his experience. This is real progress.

James wasn't diagnosed with autism until he was 17. Despite self-harming, he was deemed too old for support from CAMHS so went to the GP who referred him to a psychologist. Unfortunately, they weren't up to speed with autism and depression, which wasn't that helpful. Following diagnosis, he had support for a short period of time but then ...

"You're forgotten about once you reach a certain age. You don't know what to do so you're left in your bedroom."

After school he completed an HNC in Professional Writing Skills at the City of Glasgow College, followed by an HND in Media and Communications, then found NAS's Moving Forward programme via the Job Centre.

With Moving Forward, James learned more about autism – and himself - and found the coping strategies learned via group work to be really helpful. James is a very bright, articulate person who engages well with people. He maintains good eye contact, picks up well on social cues and has a good sense of humour. He doesn't bear any resemblance to the stereotypical 'person on the spectrum'. But that doesn't mean he finds it easy. It may not show externally but meeting new people and dealing with new situations can take its toll internally.

At the start, his mum Maureen attended NAS with James, but he is much more self-aware now and more comfortable being independent. Most of James's friends are online, although he had one good friend at college. He gets on well with his Mum and step-Dad, as well as enjoying the company of his dog. NAS also supported the family to understand the diagnosis and what that means for them, which has helped them and enables them to support James better too.

Media Co-op don't usually take on work placements as they have a strong ethical stance and feel this takes advantage of people's goodwill, but NAS helped them to understand how much James would benefit from the work placement. The Media Co-op team gave the go ahead and James started volunteering one day a week in August 2018 for 4 weeks. The NAS team reported that James seems a lot happier and more settled since joining Media Co-op. The placement was extended and the team created a new role for James to continue working with them. He treated his mum to tea and cakes with his first pay!

Through his time on the Moving Forward project at NAS, James feels he has improved confidence and achieved greater independence, but more than this he feels like a different person. He also feels he has greater self-worth and, tellingly, hasn't self-harmed since joining Moving Forward as he feels he has more to live for now.

"I feel like a completely different person to when I started. I have a lot more hope and feel like I've made a new start. I'm more 'me' and genuine, not fake like I felt at school when I put a mask on."

For Maureen, it's been "lifechanging, he's grown up". Maureen was particularly keen to share her views and to promote the difference Moving Forward makes to families so that it continues to be funded. She also felt it was really important that the full spectrum of people

with autism are highlighted to debunk the myths around the condition, to encourage greater understanding and acceptance. Not all people with autism have the traits and characteristics represented in the media, but can present in much more subtle ways which are no less challenging to the individual and their families.

NAS continues to support James, regularly emailing for updates and helping him with his Scottish Government Independent Living Transitions Fund application for a laptop/software and driving lessons (currently awaiting a decision). Although contact with NAS has reduced, both James and Maureen are confident that they could call the team at NAS if there is anything they need assistance with, which helps them feel supported.

So, what's next for James? He is keen to increase his hours with Media Co-op, perhaps to two half-days in the first instance. He works 9 – 12.30 but the company is pretty flexible. This will help him get into a more positive routine, getting up and out the house on two mornings. Step by step, James is moving forward.

Nathan

Nathan, 23, is a very different person to the one who started Moving Forward in Year 1. He's more confident, getting back into hobbies he enjoyed and is heading back to university.

Nathan wasn't diagnosed with autism until he was 19 or 20, after he looked it up on Wikipedia when he was at university and suspected he might be on the spectrum. He was very bright at school and managed to cope. However, studying physics and astrophysics at Glasgow University was challenging without support and Nathan suffered from anxiety, so he dropped out. He lost interest in everything he previously enjoyed, couldn't face being around people and didn't leave the house much. It was tough.

He was referred to the NAS One Stop Shop in Kilmarnock following diagnosis, where he heard about the Moving Forward programme. Nathan started his NAS journey with 1:1 mentoring support rather than group work. He needed that support initially as he found groups particularly challenging after his negative experiences at university. Mentoring support gave him the opportunity to get out of the house and talk to someone outside his immediate family over a coffee every week for an hour or so. This helped to grow his confidence, which was shattered after university.

However, he has now completed group work, which illustrates how far he has come since joining Moving Forward. Nathan found the group work useful, particularly having to engage with other people as this had been such a challenge for him. He also benefitted from some 1:1 support from NAS to look at going back to university. School qualifications are only 'valid' for 7 years in terms of entry to further/higher education, so Nathan was on the cusp of losing the currency of his qualifications. He is now preparing to start the online summer school prior to re-admission to his Masters course in the autumn.

He feels ready for the challenge, although he recognises that it's the people side of things that are most difficult for him rather than the course work, particularly connecting to a group and knowing when to speak in a group setting. Sleep can also be a challenge, which is not uncommon for people on the spectrum, and this was the case when Nathan was at school and university. Getting up at the same time each day was not easy for him but he is hopeful that he will manage more effectively this time. His mum is very understanding and having family support makes a big difference to him.

Nathan has been away on holiday with family and has also rekindled interest in activities he previously enjoyed, such as bird watching. He's bought his own telescope and stand now. Nathan has taken some amazing photos of birds with it in his garden and when on holiday up north, where he enjoyed watching red kites, gannets and sparrow hawks, amongst others. He's also looking forward to getting back into the kayaking club at university – not a solo activity, which is great progress. Nathan is also thinking about doing some volunteering over the summer, which shows he is in a very different place mentally now and he is visibly more confident.

Rebecca

Rebecca, 22, joined the Moving Forward programme in Year 1 and has visibly changed since the focus group last year. She seems much more confident and self-assured. She starts Strathclyde University this autumn, studying French and Spanish, so is currently preparing for this on a pre-access course, where she's doing really well. She even has a buddy to support her.

Rebecca is more settled now and is clear on what she is working towards, so has less contact with NAS than she did, but knows she can make contact if she needs anything. For example, Rebecca has found access to PCs in the library to be challenging so NAS is trying to source funding for a laptop, to enable her to be more self-sufficient.

Rebecca completed the usual group work with Moving Forward and also benefitted from two work placements. First, she completed a four week placement with Glasgow City Council in July 2018, where she worked on data entry. She received great feedback from her manager but unfortunately the placement could not be extended given changes within GCC and challenges around access to the IT system.

NAS then found a work placement at OccuTrace, one day a week. OccuTrace is a small, informal recent start-up where most employees wear headphones so Rebecca was able to get on with the task of database checking, without the need to engage with people face to face or by telephone. Rebecca did an excellent job during her placement, so MD David was keen to offer her paid employment. She is now paid to work one day a week and coped well with a recent office move. She could have more hours, but did not want to take on too much alongside her pre-access course/university commitments.

“I’ve seen a difference in Rebecca from day one. She’s so much more confident and seems quite comfortable here. She’s very good at the job.”

When Rebecca is talking about something she's interested in or feels she can contribute to she is very articulate. She is an incredibly talented artist and is very engaging when she is talking about or sharing her pictures in the manga/anime style, for example. However, Rebecca can find small talk challenging.

Rebecca enjoyed having a volunteer mentor via Moving Forward once a week, as this gave her the opportunity to socialise. But she is still struggling socially and would like more opportunities to socialise, as she doesn't really go out with friends at the moment. She has online friends but not peers she can go out with locally and her mum, Angie, worries about that. She was diagnosed with autism relatively late so missed out on the social opportunities which are aimed at children on the spectrum. But Rebecca and Angie have found there are fewer opportunities for young adults on the spectrum to socialise.

She would like to be more confident meeting people and doing new things, particularly as she has to complete a year away from home with university. Rebecca knows she needs to work on this herself, but it is not easy. If her progress over the last year is anything to go by, though, she'll get there.

“Rebecca is more confident, outgoing, settled, calm and content. It’s a huge achievement and I’m really proud of her.”

5 Conclusions & recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The Year 2 evaluation again affirms the approach taken by NAS in its Moving Forward with Cashback for Communities programme. Participants and stakeholders who gave their views were very positive about the person-led support provided by a committed team and the impact it has had/is having on them. Participants and other stakeholders feel welcome, comfortable and supported at NAS. Participants have been supported to overcome whatever barriers they were facing and those exiting the project felt they have been able to move their lives forward significantly. They have reported a wide range of impacts including:

- learning new or improved skills, such as independent travel, learning to drive or budget plus employability skills;
- having improved understanding and acceptance of their autism diagnosis;
- increased confidence and self-esteem;
- improved social skills;
- reduced anxiety and greater resilience to cope;
- they have a clearer idea of their next steps in life (and some have already moved into these); and
- they feel more hopeful about the future.

NAS has honed the service it offers to meet the needs of its target group very effectively. The key action going forward is still to increase the number of people tapping into the support offered, however. It is understood that NAS has had staffing challenges in both Year 1 and 2, which will have had an impact on referrals. However, posts were filled during Year 2 and a key staff member in terms of referrals has now returned from maternity leave (despite several attempts at recruiting someone to provide maternity cover, this proved impossible to fill). It is hoped that this provides a period of staffing stability for the organisation, which will have positive impacts on participant numbers.

5.2 Recommendations

Stakeholders were consistently positive about the Moving Forward programme, which suggests it should continue in a similar way for Year 3. There were few suggestions for improvement from participants and other stakeholders, but the ones which were made are detailed in section 3 for consideration by NAS. Three key recommendations are offered for consideration:

1. Continue efforts around recruitment and referral to achieve targets in Year 3.
2. Consider how support might be provided in schools. Those with later diagnoses felt this would have been extremely beneficial for them. This could perform several useful purposes:
 - a) to raise awareness of autism with pupils and staff, to encourage earlier diagnosis and support;
 - b) to dis-sell myths and reduce stigma around what autism is and is not, highlighting the diversity of people's experiences on the spectrum and the strengths being on the spectrum can bring, as well as the challenges;
 - c) to raise awareness of NAS' services and signpost pupils and staff to other relevant support services; and

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- d) to offer self-management tips, such as coping mechanisms for anxiety, which may be beneficial for young people on the spectrum and neurotypical young people experiencing anxiety or similar challenges.
 - 3. Work on higher response rates for surveys at each of the key points in the process, for participants in particular. A more complete response profile will allow a clearer quantitative picture of the distance travelled by each individual, to supplement the qualitative information gathered by the team and FMR.