



National Autistic Society Moving Forward+ with Cashback for Communities Year 3 Evaluation, July 2023

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Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the NAS Moving Forward+ participants, parents/carers, mentors and other stakeholders who gave their views and time over the last three years. The global Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on Moving Forward+ and everyone involved in it, in all sorts of different ways, so your input was very much appreciated in this context. The feedback provided by you all was invaluable to the evaluation and the development of the Moving Forward+ project as it progresses.

A big thank you also to Jim Doherty and the Moving Forward+ team at NAS for their updates, finding the variety of stakeholders to give their views and sharing their own perspectives on progress along the way. It has been great working with you over the past six years and hopefully our paths will cross again in the future. Very best wishes for Phase 6.

Both NAS and Clear as a Bell Research & Consultancy are very grateful to Inspiring Scotland and the Cashback for Communities Fund for supporting the Moving Forward+ with Cashback for Communities programme and its evaluation during such a challenging time for us all.

Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

The National Autistic Society (NAS) was awarded three years' Phase 5 Cashback for Communities Programme funding for its Moving Forward+ project April 2020-March 2023. The Cashback for Communities Programme is run by Inspiring Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Government, investing the proceeds of crime in young people's futures, in the areas most affected by crime.

The Moving Forward+ project has two elements: one focussing on supporting autistic young people aged 12-15 who are not attending school in Glasgow city; and one focussing on 16-24 year old autistic young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) living in West and Central Scotland. Both target autistic young people from the 20% most deprived areas.

NAS tailors support for each young person, from a range of group work and/or 1:1 support, mentoring, volunteering or placement opportunities. Support involves understanding autism and how it affects them better, exploring their strengths and what they would like to do and working on various employability skills to reach those goals. The NAS team's holistic approach means that many other aspects of life skills come into play, e.g. independent travel, confidence building and social opportunities, while autistic young people are also supported to access benefits, funding or other aspects of independent living.

This independent evaluation by Clear as a Bell Research & Consultancy relates to the full three years of funding. It involved review of data gathered via surveys and staff, review of monitoring reports, discussions with staff and discussions with 27 stakeholders: young people (9), parents/carers (13), mentors (2) and partners/referrers (3) in Year 3; to supplement the 23 individuals interviewed in Years 1 and 2.

KEY FINDINGS

The NAS Moving Forward+ project was impacted significantly by the Covid-19 pandemic which meant that, while a highly rated service was delivered throughout Phase 5, the number of young people supported was not as high as expected and fewer positive outcomes have been achieved than had been hoped. Both the new service for autistic young people aged 12-15 not attending school and the continuing service for NEET autistic young people aged 16-24 were perceived to be unique and support young people in a holistic, person-centred way, which was highly valued. The average 'marks out of 10' from a variety of stakeholders ranged from 8.8 to 9.5 illustrate this well.

The outcomes achieved were as follows:

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total	Targets
<i>Outcome 1: Building capacity and confidence</i>					
Young people report increased confidence	11	5	12	28	122
Young people feel able to do new things	11	7	12	30	122
Young people feel more resilient	8	2	8	18	122
Stakeholders report increase in young people's confidence	91%	71%	66%	75%	70%
Young people report positive changes in their behaviour	11	4	11	26	122

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total	Targets
Stakeholders report positive changes in young people's behaviour	91%	57%	60%	69%	70%
Outcome 2: Developing physical and personal skills					
Young people report an increase in their skills	10	7	12	29	122
Stakeholders report increase in young people's skills	91%	57%	60%	69%	60%
Outcome 3: Improvement in wellbeing					
Young people report increase in wellbeing against SHANARRI	13	5	14	32	105
Stakeholders report increase in young people's wellbeing	73%	86%	73%	75%	60%
Outcome 4: Participating in activity to improve learning and positive destinations					
Young people achieving a positive destination	6 (+7 in Yr2)	15	18(+1)	47	95
Young people improving school attendance	0	10	5	15	20
Employment	2 (+1 in Yr2)	0	3	6	5
Further Education (including remaining at/returning to school)	1 (+3 in Yr2)	2	3	9	30
Training	2 (+1 in Yr2)	2	5(+1)	11	10
Volunteering	1 (+2 in Yr2)	1	2	6	30
Young people take part in training and learning as part of programme	37	25	31	93	122
Outcome 5: Contributing positively to communities					
Young people engage in activity outwith the home and investigate/participate in opportunities in their community	7	4	7	18	82
Other stakeholders report young people feel more able to engage in activity outwith the home and investigate/ participate in opportunities in their community	45%	29%	33%	36%	60%
Outcome 6: Diverted from criminal behaviour or involvement in the criminal justice system					
Young people feel less inclined to participate in anti-social and/or criminal behaviour	1	0	1	2	92
Young people report they are less vulnerable to being exploited and/or manipulated by others	7	0	6	13	92

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Participants and stakeholders understood and appreciated what the NAS Moving Forward+ team is doing and the way in which it is doing it, so the key challenge for Phase 6 Cashback for Communities funding is to increase the number of autistic young people being supported and their progress into positive destinations.

A few suggestions for improvement were made by stakeholders and these are offered for consideration by the team:

- Consider awareness raising afresh to be more consistent and aim for a steadier flow of referrals. This could include more publicity/information leaflets or flyers on the project, as requested schools, and a regular programme of activities and reminders to maintain a presence with potential referrers.
- Given that support is more intensive at the start, there may be scope to take referrals closer to the end of funding - targeting specific issues such as anxiety, sharing information and potential partner services - to provide some positive impacts for people, albeit less than usual if funding does cease.
- Providing a 'handover' to parents/carers, schools or other stakeholders, with permission, to share what approaches or tools work with an individual to assist if/when issues arise, avoid relapse and maintain momentum.
- Consider a 3 or 6 month review after exit to help young people maintain progress.
- Greater clarity for referrers around the support provided and the need for/frequency of updates on progress.
- Pursuing other funding options so that postcode criteria are no longer a barrier to referral.
- More social groups, particularly for younger adults.
- Reducing the age to 10+ was also suggested, so it is great to see that happen in Phase 6.
- The mentoring element was perceived to be a beneficial element of the project by, and for, both mentors and mentees so it is unfortunate that it has been cut for Phase 6 as there is reduced funding available. Given its success and benefits, it would be helpful to consider if there is another way to fund or deliver this part of the service in future as it is a way to provide valuable 1:1 support on issues such as socialisation and independent travel which take time to achieve, are key priorities for young people and complement wider progress for individuals.
- NAS team to share methods, tools and approaches regularly to maximise skills and experience held within the team.

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1 Introduction

1.1 This report

This report is an independent evaluation of the National Autistic Society's Moving Forward+ Cashback for Communities project at the end of a 3-year tranche of funding (2020-2023). This section provides a brief outline of the Cashback for Communities Programme and the Moving Forward+ project which was delivered against the backdrop and significant impacts of the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic.

1.2 Background

1.2.1 Cashback for Communities Programme Phase 5, 2020 - 2023

The Scottish Government established the Cashback for Communities Programme to invest the monies recovered via the Proceeds of Crime Act (PoCA) into communities. The aim of this national programme is to expand the horizons of young people across Scotland and increase opportunities to develop their interests and skills, aligning with the Scottish Government's Justice Vision. This work stream commenced in 2008 and Phase 5 has just been completed, supporting 24 projects. The total amount committed until the end of Phase 5 in March 2023 was £110million, administered by Inspiring Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Government, with a further £20million in line for Phase 6.

Phase 5 specifically targeted projects whose main aim was either:

to provide a range of activities for young people aged 10 - 24 which

- support people, families and communities most affected by crime;
- support those most at risk of being involved in antisocial behaviour, offending or reoffending into positive destinations;
- support young people most at risk of entering the justice system;

or

provide support activities, which are not limited by age, which

- provide intergenerational support for parents, families and children impacted by Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs);
- support people, families and communities most affected by crime;
- support those most at risk of being involved in antisocial behaviour, offending or reoffending into positive destinations; or
- support young people most at risk of entering the justice system.

1.2.2 Moving Forward+ with Cashback for Communities

The National Autistic Society (NAS) was successful in securing Phase 5 funding for its Moving Forward+ project. This targets autistic young people who live in the 20%¹ most deprived areas in West Central Scotland to support them into employment, education or training. Cashback for Communities focusses on criminal justice and NAS and its partners have found that autistic people are over-represented within the criminal justice system, as both perpetrators and victims. Young autistic people can be more vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation which can lead to criminal behaviour. This can be further exacerbated by low autism awareness within Police Scotland and

¹ Exceptions can be made if they have involvement with the Police or have poor mental health.

the wider criminal justice system. Autistic young people's common vulnerabilities - misunderstanding social rules, behaviours or context, fixations and naivety - mean they are also unfortunately more likely to be victims of crime.

The Moving Forward+ project was delivered via two different work strands. One strand focusses on autistic young people aged 16-24 who are not in employment, education or training (NEET), continuing the work of Phase 4.

The second strand was new for Phase 5, targeting autistic young people aged 12 - 15 in Glasgow City who were not attending school. This new strand aimed at younger people moved 'upstream', building on the learning from earlier iterations of the project where young people often spoke of their difficulties at school. It also aimed to address the fund's priorities of reaching those most at risk of entering the justice system, with Glasgow's high rates of deprivation and crime alongside the increased likelihood of social isolation and vulnerability amongst autistic young people.

The original plan

The original plan was to offer a similar pathway to both target groups, as follows:

Initial assessment (Target 85 young people: 15 12-15s, 70 16-24s)

Meeting young people referred from schools and relevant agencies such as Social Work Services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Skills Development Scotland, Jobcentreplus and Cashback partners. This meeting aimed to hear the young person's views, identify or clarify their support needs and whether the MF+ project was a good fit for them at that point in time.

Options to meet immediate needs (Target 25 young people: 5 12-15s, 20 16-24s)

For those not ready or appropriate for the full programme below, alternative support would be offered. This may be provided via mentoring, social groups or referral to other agencies.

Preparation (Target 60 young people: 10 12-15s, 50 16-24s)

Up to 8 group workshops, with an appropriate mix of age, ability and interests. 1:1 support was also offered if more appropriate. The curriculum included learning around understanding autism and managing social confidence, anxiety etc. in addition to employability skills such as interview skills, CV preparation etc. A bespoke Police Scotland session around keeping safe on and offline focussed attention on reducing offending or becoming a victim of crime.

Placement (Target 25 young people: 5 12-15s, 20 16-24s)

Practical work experience hosted by autism-friendly employers for up to 8 weeks.

Progression (Target 60 young people: 10 12-15s, 50 16-24s)

Up to 10 weeks' support to identify and apply for their preferred positive destination.

Alongside this, NAS provided opportunities for autistic young people to be involved in social groups and activities, and new groups were proposed for the 12-15 year olds not attending school as a structured opportunity for them to socialise and develop social skills and confidence as they are often isolated and vulnerable.

Impact of the Covid-19 global pandemic etc.

However, the Covid-19 global pandemic struck, with the UK going into its first full lockdown on March 23rd 2020, just a week before the new phase was about to start. This obviously had a massive impact on everyone and everything, and was an extremely worrying time. The NAS MF+ team had to cancel all the awareness raising and recruitment activities planned for World Autism Awareness Week in early April 2020 - including staff and former participants speaking at 4 schools where at least 85% of pupils were from SIMD 1 or 2 - and, once things had settled a little with such a seismic shift to how we approached everything, move the project online rather than face to face.

The start of Phase 5, Year 1 was therefore delayed. The NAS team provided ad hoc support (via informal online activity, themed discussion groups or 1:1) during Quarter 1 to young people who had already been referred for Phase 5 and continuing participants from Phase 4, and also used this time to re-design course materials for online delivery. Online delivery commenced in July 2020 for 16-24 year olds. Schools had advised that young people not attending school aged 12-15 would not wish to engage over the school holidays, so this strand of the project was initiated in the autumn of 2020.

The pandemic did not just affect the delivery of the project, however. It affected the number of referrals, as referral agencies took time to adjust to home working (some were still without access to IT months later) so the number of referrals reduced, despite online presentations to referral agencies and social media promotion. The cancelled awareness raising and recruitment activities for World Autism Awareness week will not have helped. The number of referrals were likely to also have been influenced by higher anxiety levels of autistic young people - who are generally more likely to experience anxiety and conditions like OCD than neuro-typical young people, exacerbated by the many challenges a global pandemic presented to them. For many, having months at home in a 'safe space' with little or no external contact made it impossible for them to re-engage with school and wider society. For some, fear of infection was an issue but forced isolation was a catalyst for preferred isolation for most, allied to mental health issues (their own and/or parents'). The shift to online learning and lower levels of support at college/university also impacted on autistic young people from Phase 4 who were about to start college/university and for those who had already started a course pre-pandemic but found the shift to online learning challenging.

It is understood that the Inspiring Scotland team were very supportive of the challenges facing NAS and its client group. Initiating and maintaining some support for autistic young people was the agreed priority alongside adapting to new ways of working. The pandemic in Scotland experienced a number of different waves of infection and associated lockdowns and restrictions, which also inhibited the Moving Forward+ project from generating momentum with referrals and service delivery, particularly in Year 1.

Targets were therefore removed for Year 1 and reduced for Years 2 and 3, at a level of 35 young people to be supported. Some young people who had participated in Phase 4 of Moving Forward were also supported for longer than usual during Year 1, as their intended positive destinations (college/university, work placement or employment) were no longer available or something they felt unable to take up, but these were not included in the figures.

Given the pandemic, NAS froze recruitment from March to September 2020 so the Young Person's Engagement Coordinator (YPEC) for the 12-15s not attending school could not be recruited until October (Q3), when a replacement for the Employment Support Advisor was also secured. It should be noted that NAS also moved office in August 2021, which presented further challenges for staff and their young people as it was a very different, more open plan and noisier shared space than the previous office. Staff worked from home until then and now work in a hybrid way.

As might be expected, the changes and interruptions to service delivery, delayed promotional work, reduced face to face delivery and delayed staff recruitment all contributed to budget underspend. Reallocation of budget was agreed with Inspiring Scotland, however, to address these and maximise the investment in young people.

The one benefit of this very challenging time is that the NAS Moving Forward+ team now have even more flexibility in their offering to young people as they can offer at home online support if that is all a participant is able to participate in (some have started with camera off, etc.) in addition to face to face interactions at home, the NAS office or another location. Given the degree of withdrawal from society and anxiety levels of some participants, this means a start can be made when this might otherwise not have been possible. However, staff noted that progress was much slower online than when meeting face to face - and autistic young people often need that socialisation experience - so online support is an initial option if required rather than the preferred option going forward.

1.3 This report

The next section of this report outlines the approach taken to the independent evaluation, the primary and secondary research undertaken and provides a profile of participants for information. The report goes on to highlight the key findings of the evaluation, structured around the outcomes set by the funders, and additional feedback from stakeholders. Case studies of individual participants follow, and the report closes with conclusions and recommendations for consideration.

2 Method

2.1 Introduction

This evaluation of the NAS Moving Forward+ project was designed following reflections on the Phase 4 evaluation process and discussions with the NAS team. One thing which was clear from Moving Forward with Cashback for Communities was the high quality, holistic and person-centred approach taken by the NAS team to supporting its young people. The key success of the project was the quality of interactions with its young people in supporting them to reach their employability goals and also supporting them to become young adults. The project assisted participants in all sorts of different ways, affecting many different aspects of their lives. Staff took a very individual approach to every young person, exploring what specific support they needed, what they were interested in and provided assistance, referrals and support accordingly.

However, survey completion was less successful. The number of different surveys used in Phase 4 was therefore reduced and content refined for Phase 5. The evaluation approach taken in practice pragmatically included four key elements:

- 27 stakeholders' views gathered by individual, paired or group face to face discussion, or via phone, Teams or Zoom, as preferred with young people (9), parents/carers (13), mentors (2) and partners/referrers (3) in Year 3, to augment the views of 23 stakeholders in Years 1 and 2;
- discussions with key staff members and regular update discussions on progress;
- the data gathered via the re-designed surveys which young people, parents/carers, mentors and other stakeholders were encouraged by NAS staff to complete at various points in the process; and
- review of NAS quarterly and annual reports to Inspiring Scotland.

2.2 Profile of participants

Funding for the Moving Forward+ project sets specific recruitment criteria for participation to help meet its objectives, particularly in relation to age and SIMD area. Equality Impact Assessment information across the nine protected characteristics is also gathered by projects for monitoring purposes.

A total of 31 young people engaged with Moving Forward+ in Year 3, so 93 young people took part across the three years of funding. The profile of participants is detailed below.

Table 1: Age

Age	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total	% of total
10-15	11	15	9	35	38%
16-18	11	4	7	22	24%
19-24	15	6	15	36	39%
Total	37	25	31	93	

Table 2: Gender

Gender	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total	% of total
Female	7	4	6	17	18%
Male	30	20	22	72	77%
Non-binary	0	1	2	3	3%
Other	0	0	1	1	1%
Prefer not to say	0	0	0	0	0%
Total	37	25	31	93	

Table 3: SIMD

SIMD	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total	% of total
0-20%	27	20	27	74	80%
20-30%	6	0	4	10	11%
30-40%	2	0	0	2	2%
40-50%	0	2	0	2	2%
50-100%	2	3	0	5	5%
Total	37	25	31	93	

Table 4: Local Authority Area

Local Authority area	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total	% of total
East Ayrshire	1	0	0	1	1%
East Renfrewshire	1	0	0	1	1%
Falkirk	1	0	0	1	1%
Glasgow	28	22	20	70	75%
North Ayrshire	1	0	0	1	1%
North Lanarkshire	2	1	3	6	6%
Renfrewshire	3	2	6	11	12%
South Lanarkshire	0	0	2	2	2%
Total	37	25	31	93	

3 Key findings

3.1 Introduction

This section outlines the achievements of the NAS Moving Forward+ project against the outcomes set by the Cashback for Communities programme funders plus additional feedback on the project from stakeholders. The findings draw upon both the quantitative data gathered by the NAS Moving Forward+ team and qualitative primary research conducted with a range of stakeholders by Clear as a Bell Research & Consultancy.

3.2 Outcomes

3.2.1 Overview

NAS focussed on the following 6 outcomes:

- Outcome 1: Young people build their confidence and resilience, benefit from strengthened support networks and reduce risk taking behaviour
- Outcome 2: Young people develop their physical and/or personal skills
- Outcome 3: Young people's health and wellbeing improves
- Outcome 4: Young people participate in activity which improves their learning, employability and employment options (positive destinations)
- Outcome 5: Young people contribute positively to their communities
- Outcome 6: Young people are diverted from criminal behaviour or involvement in the criminal justice system

Each outcome has associated indicators, against which NAS recorded progress. These are detailed below, with additional feedback from the primary research discussions to provide context.

Clearly the global Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on the number of young people referred to the NAS Moving Forward+ project, the number supported and the number of young people achieving outcomes and positive destinations. It also impacted on the way in which people were supported, for example more online work, meeting outside once this was possible and reduced work placement availability (this also depended on how work-ready participants were and where referrals came from as this was not relevant to younger people not attending school). The NAS Moving Forward+ project focusses more on the quality of support provided, however, and strong feedback was provided by all stakeholders on the positive impacts the project and its staff have had on the young people they have supported over the past three years in both the existing focus on 16 - 24 year olds and the new service for young people not in education (YPNE).

3.2.2 Outcome 1: Young people build their confidence and resilience, benefit from strengthened support networks and reduce risk taking behaviour

Anxiety and low social confidence are common issues for autistic young people and can be significant barriers to them accessing opportunities. These also contribute to social isolation, poor mental health and potentially increases their vulnerability, in terms of their own behaviour and the behaviour of others towards them. Increasing confidence (and reducing anxiety) was a priority for the majority of Moving Forward+ participants.

Moving Forward+ helps young people - through group work, mentoring and other 1:1 support and volunteering opportunities in particular - to build their social confidence by learning coping strategies and accessing support, including from their peers, to develop social skills and techniques, manage their anxiety and increase both their confidence and resilience. Bespoke

sessions from Police Scotland were also designed to raise awareness around online safety, county lines, etc., thus reducing vulnerability and risk-taking behaviour and increasing positive choices.

Over the course of Phase 5, there has been progress in young people reporting increased confidence (28), feeling able to do new things (30), feeling more resilient (18) and reporting positive changes in their behaviour (26). The numbers are much lower than the targets set, however. This is impacted by both lower referral numbers than hoped and the starting point for some participants. Some participants have been extremely isolated, lacking in confidence and have a range of challenges so progress has been necessarily slow, at the young person's own pace.

The majority of stakeholders who commented reported seeing an increase in their young person's confidence (75%) and positive changes in their behaviour (69%), in line with targets set.

Table 5: Outcome 1, Building capacity and confidence

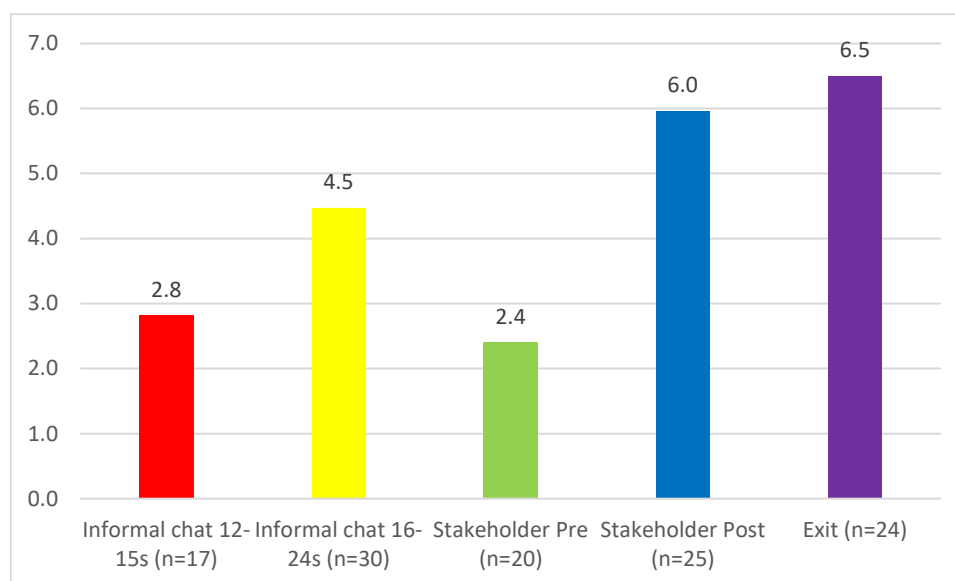
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Young people report increased confidence	11	5	12	28	122
Young people feel able to do new things	11	7	12	30	122
Young people feel more resilient	8	2	8	18	122
Stakeholders report increase in young people's confidence	91%	71%	66%	75%	70%
Young people report positive changes in their behaviour	11	4	11	26	122
Stakeholders report positive changes in young people's behaviour	91%	57%	60%	69%	70%

Confidence

Various surveys of young people and stakeholders also sought views on how they rated their confidence on a scale of 0 to 10 and whether it had increased, stayed the same or decreased since starting Moving Forward+. The numbers are too low and from inconsistent individuals to track change effectively on an individual basis, but the general impression is of positive movement as informal chat and 'pre' stakeholder survey scores are lower than 'post' stakeholder and exit survey scores. This is very good to see as increasing confidence was perceived to be such a priority area for improvement by participants and stakeholders.

It should be noted that outcome data was gathered when young people felt able to measure progress. That is not to say that other participants have not made progress, just that they did not feel able to comment upon it yet.

Figure 1: How would you rate your self-confidence on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all confident and 10 is very confident?



Twenty-four young people completed the exit survey and they were asked how their self-confidence compared now to when they started Moving Forward+: no-one felt it was worse, 3 felt it was the same, 12 a little better and 9 much better, i.e. **88% felt it had improved**. Stakeholders who completed the 'after' questionnaire were asked the same question about their young person: 7 said a little better and 17 said much better, so **96% felt it had improved**.

Feeling able to do new things

All 24 young people completing the exit survey said they were able to do new things because of Moving Forward+. Most cited one new thing they had achieved but ten cited two or more. The new things they had already achieved included things like making friends and/or socialising more, volunteering, attending school more, horse riding, getting out of the house more, passing their driving test, finding a good work environment, exercising, travelling independently and advocating for themselves, for example.

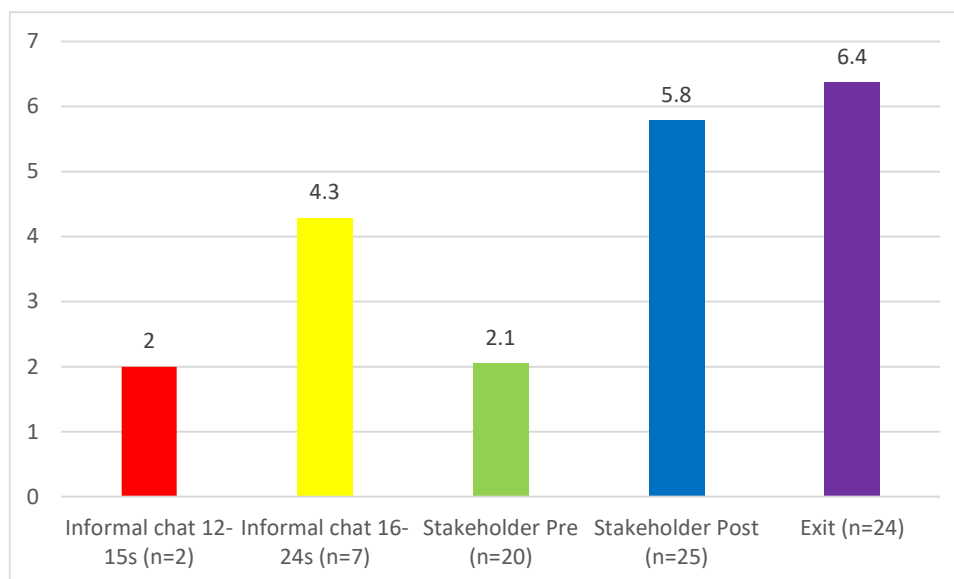
The new things they were about to do included finding a job, starting college, starting work, new classes at school/new school, starting the gym, learning to drive and maintaining friendships, including more in person contact, for example.

Nearly all (96%, 24 of 25) stakeholders who completed the 'after' survey also felt their young person was able to do new things because of Moving Forward+.

Feeling more resilient

Similarly, whilst the number of people commenting is low and not tracking individuals, there is some upward movement in resilience, as can be seen in the figure below.

Figure 2: How would you rate your resilience on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all confident and 10 is very confident?



Again, those completing the exit survey were asked how their resilience compared now to when they started Moving Forward+: no-one said it was worse, 5 said it was the same, 11 said a little better and 8 much better, i.e. **79% felt it had improved**.

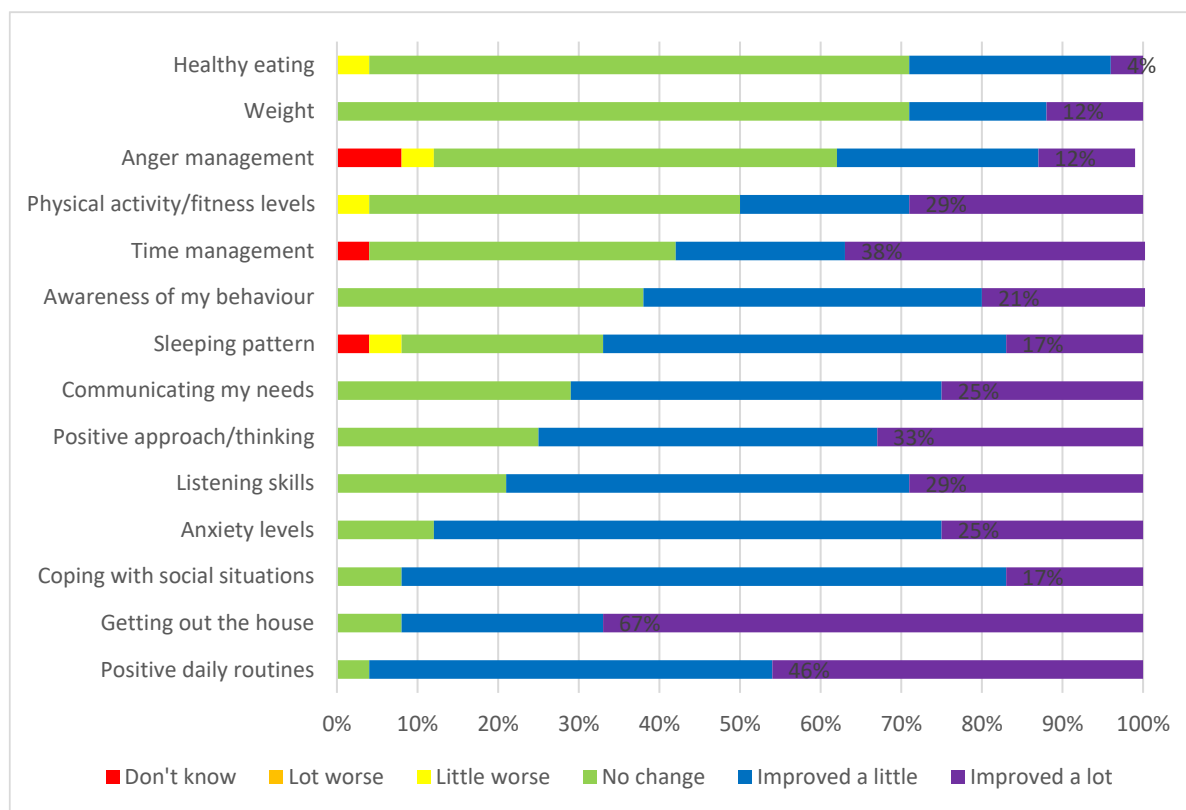
All (100%) stakeholders reported improved resilience: 12 stakeholders felt their young person's resilience had got a little better and 13 said it was much better.

Positive changes in behaviour

The exit survey brought some of this to life as it asked participants to say if any aspects of their behaviour had changed since participating in Moving Forward+. Obviously not all participants needed to improve each of the behaviours tested, which may account for the higher number of 'no change' responses for some factors such as healthy eating, weight, fitness and anger management, but there was still an improvement for 29-50% for each of these factors.

All except one person exiting Moving Forward+ who gave their views in the exit survey (96%, 23) felt it had improved their positive daily routines and 92% (22) that it had helped them get out the house and cope with social situations. Nearly 9 out of 10 (88%, 21) felt it had improved their anxiety levels - a big issue for participants - and other behaviours tested all saw significant improvements. Given that the NAS team help autistic young people to understand their behaviours, become more aware of them and share coping skills to manage the things they find challenging, this is hopefully something that the young people can maintain and continue to work on after exiting the project.

Figure 3: Do you think any aspects of your behaviour have changed since participating in Moving Forward+? (Exit survey of participants)

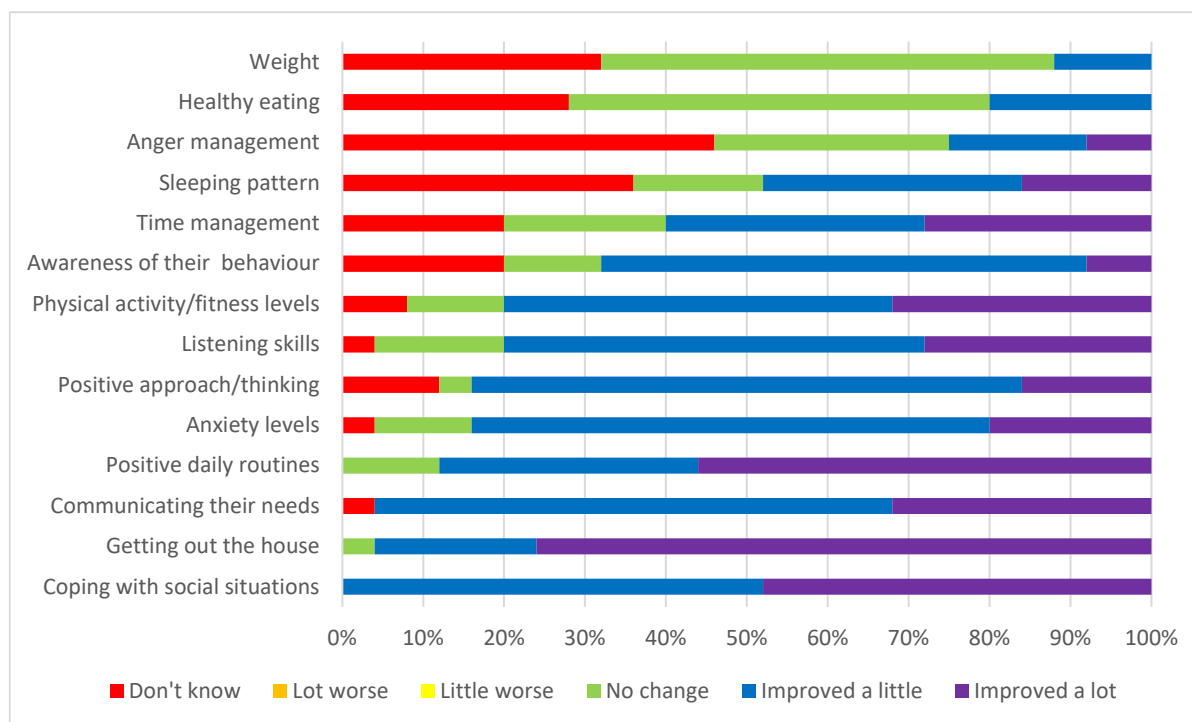


n=24

A similar question was asked of stakeholders in the 'after' survey. Please note that whilst there was some cross-over, this does not relate to exactly the same sample of young people who completed the exit survey and more than one stakeholder (parent/carer, mentor, referrer) may have commented on one young person.

No stakeholders reported a deterioration of behaviours and there was positive progress to report, as the figure below illustrates, particularly around coping with social situations (100%, 25), getting out the house (96%, 24), communicating their needs (96%, 24), positive daily routines (88%, 22), anxiety levels (84%, 21) and positive approach/thinking (84%, 21), although all but four issues showed an improvement of 60%+. There are higher levels of 'don't know' responses for some aspects as would be expected for those who were less close to individuals so may not have discussed it or been in a position to observe it, for example referrers may not be aware of sleeping patterns or diet.

Figure 4: Do you think any aspects of the young person's behaviour have changed since participating in Moving Forward+? (Stakeholder 'after' survey)



n=25

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

Supporting Outcome 1, the project's young people learn new skills and techniques to manage social situations, reduce anxiety and work in a group setting/as part of a team. Part of this involves learning more about autism and how this affects them. This increases the young people's self-awareness and understanding of how to raise their diagnosis when working, volunteering or studying and seek reasonable adjustments so they can access opportunities on a more level playing field with neuro-typical people. Core employability skills like CV preparation and interview skills are also developed during the Preparation phase of the project.

29 young people reported an increase in their skills. Just over two-thirds (69%) of stakeholders also reported improvements, exceeding the target set.

Table 6: Outcome 2, Developing physical and personal skills

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total	Targets
Young people report an increase in their skills	10	7	12	29	122
Stakeholders report increase in young people's skills	91%	57%	60%	69%	60%

New or improved skills

All but 1 young person who completed the exit survey (96%, 23 of 24) said they have new (54%, 13 of 24) or improved (42%, 10 of 24) skills because of Moving Forward+. New skills included practical skills, motivation, CV development, critical thinking skills, independent travel, social skills, being able to go out or ask for help, coping strategies, confidence and learning about autism and other things. Improved skills included teamwork, organisation, listening and other communications skills such as turn taking in conversation, socialising, travelling independently and understanding situations better.

All 25 stakeholders who completed the 'after' survey felt their young person had gained new (76%, 19) or improved skills (24%, 6 - although 17 gave details of improved skills suggesting this is a more accurate figure) because of Moving Forward+. Stakeholders echoed some of the new skills cited by young people above, but also included things like being more comfortable around people, learning to drive, volunteering in a charity shop, customer service skills, money management and banking (personal and when volunteering), communications, leadership, managing paperwork, managing anxiety, improved life skills to help independence (including travel but also cooking, etc.), fitness activities and greater tolerance, ability to recognise emotions and initiative, etc. In terms of improved skills, one stakeholder highlighted their young person was no longer selectively mute, which was a huge step forward, and confidence, communication, social and independence skills were highlighted in particular.

3.2.4 Outcome 3: Young people's health and wellbeing improves

SHANARRI indicators were developed for Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) to support good practice and provide a shared language to discuss wellbeing with children and young people. It was designed as a framework for discussions around areas where support or progress was required but is used as a proxy for measuring each of the seven aspects of health and wellbeing. It can be challenging to explain and understand, particularly if not explained in person but the surveys used attempted to give examples to help with comprehension as far as possible.

Moving Forward+ aims to support each of these 8 aspects, as follows:

Safe	Identifying where young people have/had issues and helping them to stay safer in future. Police Scotland inputs to raise awareness of potential dangers on and offline, plus provide practical advice to help young people stay safe.
Healthy	Confronting the barriers that lead to poor mental health, in addition to advice around healthier sleep and activity behaviours, for example, as appropriate.
Achieving	Identifying each young person's goals and tailoring the support provided to help them build the necessary skills to achieve them.
Nurture	NAS staff are very experienced in working with autistic young people and work as a team to nurture, support, guide and gently challenge young people as required.
Active	Young people are encouraged to try new things, meet new people and become more active in their communities.
Respected	The MF+ team take a person-centred approach, respecting each young person's needs, goals, strengths and weaknesses.
Responsible	Building young people's confidence, motivation and skills to engage in the different elements of the MF+ project, other NAS social activities and to play a role in their communities and wider society, achieving the goals they set for education, employment and volunteering and general life skills as they develop into young adults.
Included	Building young people's understanding of autism and awareness of how it affects them individually, what challenges they face and how they might overcome these in different settings - general society, learning, training and working. This includes helping them to feel more comfortable sharing their diagnosis and seeking help or reasonable adjustments, as appropriate. Wider awareness raising and training work with young people, referral agencies, partners, education providers and employers also helps to break down barriers, build understanding and help autistic young people to feel more included.

A total of 32 young people reported increases in their wellbeing against the SHANARRI indicators, lower than the target set, and the majority of stakeholders who gave their views noted an increase too (75%, exceeding the target of 60%).

Table 7: Outcome 3, Improvement in wellbeing

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total	Targets
Young people report increase in wellbeing against SHANARRI	13	5	14	32	105
Stakeholders report increase in young people's wellbeing	73%	86%	73%	75%	60%

SHANARRI survey responses

More data was gathered via the exit survey and stakeholders 'after' survey, to gauge whether young people and stakeholders felt each SHANARRI point had improved, stayed the same or deteriorated. The feedback is very positive, with a minimum of 64% responding 'better' up to both surveys giving a perfect 100% better score for Achieving.

Table 8: SHANARRI survey responses

	YP Exit survey (n=24)	Stakeholders 'after' (n=25)
Safe: Staying safe, e.g. independent travel, health & safety issues in learning/work environment or other support to stay safe when interacting with others/different environments (incl risk-taking, anti-social or criminal behaviour)		
Better	75%	84%
Same	25%	16%
Worse	0%	0%
Healthy: Healthier choices and behaviours, e.g. reducing isolation/making friends/building social networks, sleeping better, losing weight, exercising more		
Better	87%	88%
Same	13%	12%
Worse	0%	0%
Achieving: Building confidence and self-esteem, learning and developing new skills		
Better	100%	100%
Same	0%	0%
Worse	0%	0%
Nurtured: Feeling supported to fulfil your potential, e.g. by peers and staff team, as well as being connected to relevant support services elsewhere		
Better	92%	96%
Same	8%	4%
Worse	0%	0%
Active: Being supported and encouraged to take part in activities, which gives you confidence to take part in more (linked to healthy above)		
Better	71%	80%
Same	29%	20%
Worse	0%	0%
Respected: Having opportunities & encouragement to take on responsible roles in your community, feeling you have a say in decisions which affect you & are more confident/supported to express your opinions		
Better	79%	64%
Same	21%	36%
Worse	0%	0%

	YP Exit survey (n=24)	Stakeholders 'after' (n=25)
Responsible: Having the confidence and motivation to engage in your community and helping you to understand how to overcome any barriers you experience, knowing your rights and responsibilities in society.		
Better	71%	79%
Same	25%	21%
Worse	4%	0%
Included: Feeling included in society - especially learning, training & work environments - and more able to overcome any perceived or actual barriers from being on the spectrum		
Better	79%	88%
Same	21%	12%
Worse	0%	0%

Those responding to the exit survey could comment on this question if they wished to do so. Increased safety largely focused around greater confidence travelling alone or further afield, although one person also highlighted feeling safer from reduced criminal activity. Feeling healthier was due to increased physical activity, getting out of the house more, eating and sleeping better, which all impact positively on both physical and mental health. 'Achieving' comments related to improved confidence, attending/continuing college, being able to ask for help and things like socialising offline, which was seen to be a real achievement for some autistic young people. Improvements in 'nurtured' related to the support from NAS and other services, plus the confidence and ability to seek help.

Improvement around 'active' largely related to being more open to try new things. Comments on 'respected' related to feeling listened to at NAS and being able to talk about their needs. There were fewer comments regarding 'responsible' but these included both applying for more jobs and not breaking the law or associating with those who encourage this, with greater awareness of their role in the community. Comments about 'included' related largely to feeling more acceptance, confidence and ownership of their autism, plus their volunteering activities in the community and having friend groups.

The above comments were also reflected in the stakeholder 'after' survey.

3.2.5 Outcome 4: Young people participate in activity which improves their learning, employability and employment options (positive destinations)

All of the 93 participants have taken part in learning and training in different forms as appropriate throughout their time with Moving Forward+ and 47 (51%) had achieved a positive destination by the end of Phase 5. This is lower than the target set, which was set for a higher number of participants, but it is worth reiterating that some participants had not attended school for years and some had a number of challenges which required to be addressed before progress could be made towards a positive destination. That is not to say that these young people will not achieve a positive destination, it may just take longer for them to do so. The many impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on autistic young people, employers, volunteering opportunities and education providers also need to be taken into account as this was an extraordinary time, which will have ongoing impacts for some.

Fifteen of those aged 12-15 not attending school have been supported to improve their attendance but others - particularly older ones in Year 1 who have not attended school at all for some years - were supported to address other challenges prior to working on next steps as a return to school was less feasible. This is still huge progress for these young people even though it may not be measured fully below.

For NEET young people on the Moving Forward+ project, one of the key things can be working out what they want to do and the MF+ team help them to do this. The Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns/restrictions have impacted on the opportunities open to autistic young people, such as workplace placements which had been very popular ways to experience the working world and hone future plans. Some young people have also been extremely anxious and isolated following Covid-19, so this has also curtailed activities.

A small number of employment and training destinations have been secured, exceeding the targets set. Volunteering and Further or Higher Education opportunities have been secured, however these did not meet the targets.

Table 9: Outcome 4, Participating in activity to improve learning and positive destinations

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total	Targets
Young people achieving a positive destination	6 (+7 in Yr2)	15	18(+1)	47	95
Young people improving school attendance	0	10	5	15	20
Employment	2 (+1 in Yr2)	0	3	6	5
Further Education (including remaining at/returning to school)	1 (+3 in Yr2)	2	3	9	30
Training	2 (+1 in Yr2)	2	5 (+1)	11	10
Volunteering	1 (+2 in Yr2)	1	2	6	30
Young people take part in training and learning as part of programme	37	25	31	93	122

Positive destinations were as follows:

Employment

Year 1: 1 Trainee Audio Assistant, BBC
1 Trainee Clerical Assistant, Renfrewshire Council

Year 2: 1 Paid Warehousing Internship, Diageo

Year 3: 1 Full-time Picker, GXO Logistics
1 3 month paid internship, Infinity 27
1 12 month contract as Release & Configuration Analyst, DXC

Education

Year 1: 1 HNC Technical Theatre, SCQF Level 7

Year 2: 10 improved school attendance
2 NC Intro to Landscape Design and Greenkeeping, SCQF Level 4
1 Gateway to College Life Skills, SCQF Level 2
1 NQ Gateway to College, SCQF Level 4
1 NQ Computer Games Development, SCQF Level 6

Year 3: 5 improved school attendance
1 COSCA Counselling Skills Certificate, SCQF Level 8
1 NQ Fundamentals in Computing, SCQF Level 5
1 NQ Sport & Fitness, SCQF Level 4

Training

- Year 1: 1 Project Search, GCC & University of Strathclyde
1 Bike Mechanic Course, Bike for Good
- Year 2: 1 Gateway to Employment, Celtic FC Foundation
1 Creative Pathways, Impact Arts
1 Fitness for Purpose Programme, Action for Children
- Year 3: 2 Personal Development Programme, Princes Trust
2 Cashback Towards New Futures, Rangers FC
1 Creative Connections, Impact Arts
1 Wrestling course, Iron Girders Gym

Volunteering

- Year 1: 1 Oxfam Music
- Year 2: 2 Oxfam Books
1 Online volunteer, People's Trust for Endangered Species
- Year 3: 1 Usher, Glasgow Film Theatre
1 The Conservation Volunteers, TCV

3.2.6 Outcome 5: Young people contribute positively to their communities

Eighteen young people reported engaging in activity outwith the home and investigating or participating in opportunities in their community, with stakeholders also reporting a positive shift for young people. These are both below the targets set, however.

Before many autistic young people can contribute positively to their communities, their barriers of social isolation and disconnection from their communities (of place and interest) need to be addressed, by building their confidence, supporting them to reduce anxiety levels, providing opportunities for social interactions and identifying relevant opportunities within their community. This can therefore take some time, particularly for those most isolated and with a number of challenges, as MF+ participants often are.

Table 10: Outcome 5, Contributing positively to communities

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total	Targets
Young people engage in activity outwith the home and investigate/participate in opportunities in their community	7	4	7	18	82
Other stakeholders report young people feel more able to engage in activity outwith the home and investigate/ participate in opportunities in their community	45%	29%	33%	36%	60%

Those answering the exit survey were asked about three elements of their community of interest or geography. None of the 24 young people completing the exit survey felt they had fewer links or connections, interactions or contributions to their community/ies and more than half felt these had improved:

- 38% (9) felt they were the **same** and 54% (13) felt they had **more links or connections**, e.g. finding out what's on or of interest to them, with 2 responding don't know;
- 38% (9) felt they were the **same** and 58% (14) felt they had **more interactions with their community**, e.g. by participating or attending groups or events, with 1 don't know; and

- 42% (10) felt they were contributing the **same** to their community/ies more by volunteering or coaching and 46% (11) were **contributing more**, with 3 don't knows.

Three-quarters (19) of the 25 stakeholders who completed the 'after' survey felt their young person had more links or connections to their community/ies and 64% (16) greater interaction with their community/ies. Eight (32%) noted greater contribution to their community/ies by volunteering or coaching.

3.2.7 Outcome 6: Young people are diverted from criminal behaviour or involvement in the criminal justice system

The Cashback for Communities Programme has a longer-term outcome of diverting young people from criminal behaviour or involvement with the criminal justice system. Autistic young people can be more likely to be both victims and perpetrators of crime and can be more vulnerable to influence by those involved in criminal activity. Some participants are known to have had contact with the Police and qualitative feedback suggests greater awareness/understanding of the issues now and efforts to change behaviours or reduce contact with people who are a negative influence.

The focus of NAS's Moving Forward+ project has been largely preventative in nature. The team has worked to raise awareness and understanding of these issues with participants, equip them with insights to enable them to identify potential threats, behaviours or challenging situations and therefore be less likely to be involved in criminal behaviour or the criminal justice system, either as perpetrator or victim. A central part of this was working with Police Scotland, who were scheduled to work with participants on a number of occasions over the two years. Only one session was possible given Covid, participant numbers/stages and Police Scotland availability due to other priorities, but 7 young people attended. Whilst reported participation in anti-social and/or criminal behaviour was low to begin with, participants felt more equipped to protect themselves from being exploited or manipulated by others. Given the more targeted nature of this element of the project, the numbers were much lower than the targets set.

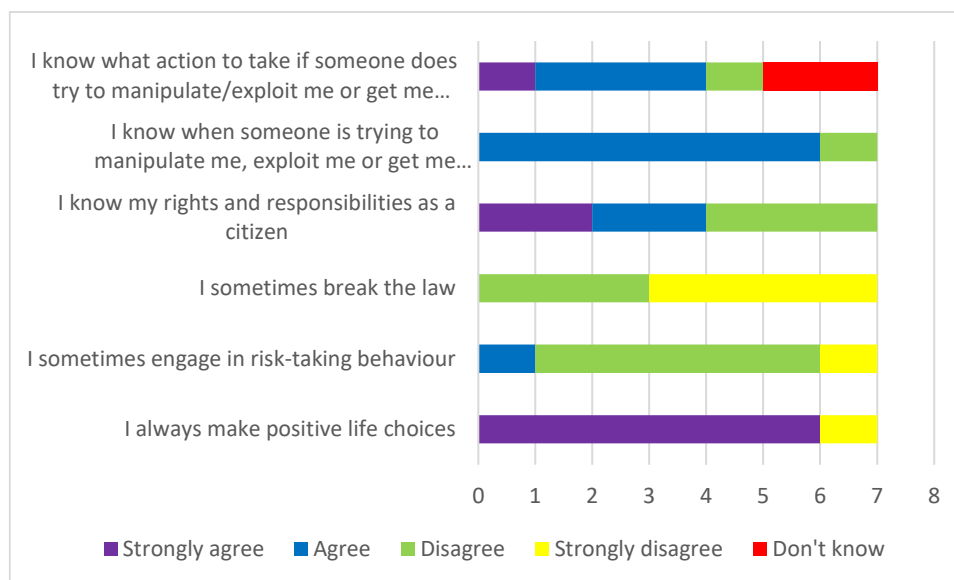
It is noted that NAS has also assisted Police Scotland with an online careers event for neurodiverse people and promoted this to participants of MF+. NAS was also scheduled to contribute to an online session to help improve officers' understanding of autism and raise awareness of the project but this has been delayed so did not take place as planned during Phase 5.

Table 11: Outcome 6, Diverted from criminal behaviour or involvement in the criminal justice system

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total	Targets
Young people feel less inclined to participate in anti-social and/or criminal behaviour	1	0	1	2	92
Young people report they are less vulnerable to being exploited and/or manipulated by others	7	0	6	13	92

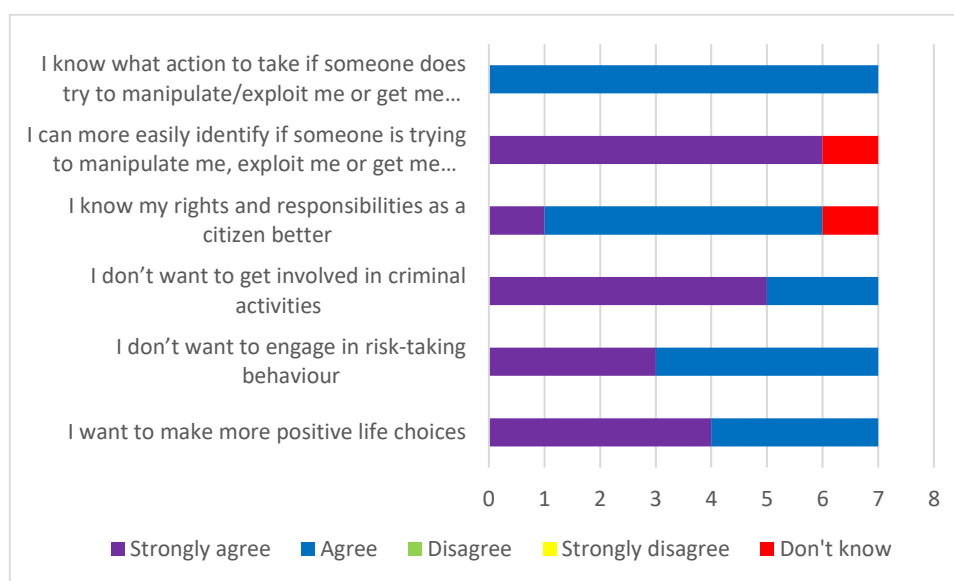
Police Scotland worked with a group of 7 autistic young people aged 16-24 in January 2021. A questionnaire was issued to the participants before the Police Scotland session and afterwards to try to gain a sense of any shift in knowledge and views as a direct result of the input from Police Scotland. The charts below show a positive shift in knowledge and impact on behaviour or confidence in future behaviours, particularly around knowing what action to take if someone does try to manipulate/exploit them or get them involved in criminal activity.

Figure 5: Responses BEFORE the Police Scotland session



n=7

Figure 6: Responses AFTER the Police Scotland session



n=7

The comments made reveal that participants found the session to be enjoyable, informative, helpful, worthwhile and interesting.

The exit survey respondents also gave positive feedback around these issues:

- All 24 agreed they were making more positive life choices.
- 22 agreed they understood their rights and responsibilities better and 2 didn't know.
- 58% (14) agreed they know when someone is trying to manipulate or exploit them, with 7 feeling no change was required (i.e. they already knew), 1 disagreed and 2 didn't know.
- 67% (16) agreed they know what action to take if someone does try to manipulate or exploit them, with 7 feeling no change was required and 1 didn't know.
- 21% (5) agreed they were involved in less risk-taking behaviour, with the remaining 19 feeling no change was required.

- 13% (3) agreed they were involved in less criminal behaviour, with the remaining 21 saying no change was required.

The stakeholder 'after' survey also gave positive feedback around these issues:

- Nearly all (96%, 24) agreed they were making more positive life choices.
- 60% (15) agreed they understood their rights and responsibilities better, 12% (3) felt there was no change, 24% (6) that no change was required and 1 didn't know.
- 24% (6) agreed they know when someone is trying to manipulate or exploit them, with 36% (9) feeling no change was required (i.e. they already knew), 20% (5) felt there was no change and 20% (5) didn't know.
- 36% (9) agreed they know what action to take if someone does try to manipulate or exploit them, with 16% (4) responding both no change and no change was required and 32% (8) didn't know.
- All said there was no change (24%, 6) or no change required (76%, 19) in terms of being involved in risk-taking behaviour.
- Similarly, 16% (4) said there was no change and 84% (21) no change required regarding being involved in criminal behaviour.

3.3 Additional feedback on the Moving Forward+ project

3.3.1 Overview

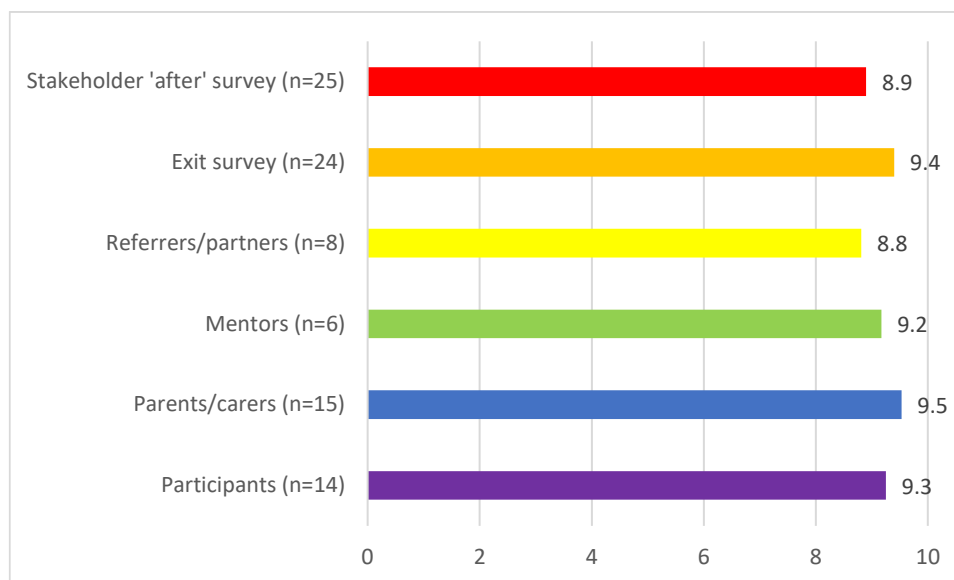
Feedback was very positive about the Moving Forward+ project and the impacts it had on the autistic young people who had participated, as well as volunteer mentors, referrers/partner organisations and parents/carers themselves. This section aims to add to the outcome data by pulling out additional key feedback from the qualitative discussions to help provide greater illumination of what MF+ does and how the team delivers it to its stakeholders.

3.3.2 Marks out of 10

Those who gave their views during any primary research (surveys and interviews) over the three years of the project were asked to rate Moving Forward+ in terms of 'marks out of 10' (where 0 is low and 10 is high), as a useful proxy for how they viewed it overall. All were extremely positive, with the lowest mean average of 8.8 for referrers/partners and a high of 9.5 for parents/carers. The lowest score given was 7/10 (by one person) and there were 44 10/10s in total (48% of all scores awarded).

For information, where stakeholders verbally gave 'an 8 or 9', for example, 8.5 was used in the mean calculation and if someone said something like "it's at least an 8", this was logged as an 8. Several stakeholders gave a 10+, 11, 12, 20 etc. out of 10 and these were logged as 10s.

Figure 7: 'Marks out of 10' given during surveys and interviews



"It's definitely helped me understand autism more and how to deal with meltdowns and stuff. We've talked about eating habits and sleeping, which has been helpful. We did sheets or questions to talk through things, like emotions, which were good. I'm trying to come to school more. I've done four days last week and this week. I'm catching up with work." Young person aged 12-15

"10 out of 10! This project has lifted a weight off my shoulders. I'm not the only person trying to help him any more. It's been a godsend, they know how to help and understand how much of a struggle it can be." Parent/carer

"I feel less worried. Someone gets us. I feel well supported and it's about knowing it's not just them, others here have the same issues. It's helped my husband and other son understand better too." Parent/carer

"I do feel more hopeful, that he has more options now. The advice we've had has been really useful." Parent/carer

"10, [staff member] helped advocate for us and we both definitely feel well supported. I put a lot down to NAS, it's been a real catalyst for things to change. It's definitely good. NAS have an understanding of autism, I just get ratty. We really value their input and don't want to lose it, I wish it could be for longer." Parent/carer

"10 out of 10 because all pupils have all needed the support and they've made great progress." Referrer

"I would definitely recommend the Moving Forward+ project. I already have actually." Referrer

3.3.3 Holistic, person-centred approach

The NAS Moving Forward+ project team clearly continues to take a holistic, person-centred approach to supporting their young people, parents/carers or other stakeholders. This was evident from every conversation with stakeholders and the young people who completed the exit survey felt the project was tailored well to autistic young people. This tailoring of the service to suit each individual's needs, along with their expertise in autism, was perceived to be what made the NAS

MF+ project unique and so highly rated. It was also seen to be a much-needed service for both autistic young people not attending school and for NEET 16-24 year olds.

"X had a lot of worries about it [another programme] but [staff member] was amazing! She worked hard to prepare him with lots of calls and reassurance, a white board and liaised with me and other workers which was really helpful. She also provided taxi support which made all the difference between getting there or not. Independent travel is a challenge and makes X very anxious and agitated quickly so [staff member] went in the taxi with him the first couple of times to support him. They prepared him really well, I was very impressed. They did all they possibly could to make it a success, above and beyond really." Parent of 16-24 year old

"NAS really tried to find something that would fit for X. They genuinely care about X and 'get' him, out of all the people he has come into contact with. They are very client centred, unlike others. [staff member] has challenged me and made me think, am I doing this right? Which has been very useful. She's on the ball and knows what she's doing." Parent 16-24 year old

"There's no comparable service for autistic children or young people like this, offering all that they do. It's fab for mainstream schools and we need more support for autistic teenagers and for younger kids." Referrer

"If it [NAS MF+] wasn't there I don't know what I would have done. Nowhere else provides that kind of support." Referrer

"It was the first step in him becoming a young adult. I don't think that progressions would have been made without the help of Moving Forward+." Stakeholder

"I only know of Moving Forward+ who could support pupils like this. I couldn't do it and don't know of anyone else who could provide the breadth of support to them. It's really good." Referrer

"There's not much out there for autistic young people around employability." Referrer

"I feel very hopeful about these young people's futures because I couldn't find anything else for them and NAS is a very good organisation. They are so passionate about what they do. They provide wrap around support - whatever they [the young people] need - and we can't provide that. It's what's needed for us and the young people." Referrer

"Their USP is their person-centred approach. It really is tailored to each young person, you can see that from the feedback I get. No-one else does it." Referrer

"NAS is very person-centred because it is very specific. There's not the same investment in more 'challenging' individuals from other providers or such hands on, wrap around and longitudinal support... just CV and job search for 12 months then out the door with no outcomes really." Referrer

Stakeholders felt that a holistic, person-centred approach was the right one to take. It may take longer to achieve project outcomes and positive destinations but young people are more likely to feel listened to, equipped and empowered to make changes in their lives and to maintain these positive behaviours. Young people, parents/carers, mentors, staff and referrers all cited examples of significant progress made which are not logged as outcomes for the Cashback programme but have and will continue to make a huge difference to the young person's quality of life and their ability to live an independent life, realising their potential (such as the changes in behaviours noted

in the exit and stakeholder 'after' surveys detailed earlier). Whilst it is not a panacea and some young people leave the project with challenges still to be met, the increased positivity and hope for the future is tangible.

"I'm really glad X was referred to the project because of the way they went about it and the work they managed to do. I didn't think we would ever be here."

Parent/carer

"The third sector brings something different, more specialist skills and the family feel supported. It's all about relationship building and they feel more empowered. There may not be a great relationship with school so NAS can help to bridge that gap." Referrer

A case which exemplifies this holistic, person-centred approach well, and the progress which can be achieved, is a young transgender man who had not attended or engaged with school for years and rarely went outside. He met with one of the NAS MF+ team at home. He was mute but a game of Animal Crossing *"changed everything"* as it provided a common interest and language to build trust and a relationship. Slowly, this safe space moved to Waterstones café and the cat café. He has a keen interest in horses so went on to volunteer at a stables, is now managing the two hour commute on public transport independently and is doing an online course to qualify as a stable hand. NAS can't take full credit as other services have also been involved, but complex cases can need support of different types to achieve progress. Having no pressure or expectations but building a supportive safe space in which to explore possibilities really helped this young person move forward in their life, from a very isolated starting point.

"A lot of clients are at crisis point when they're referred so there is a lot to be done but also a more dramatic transformation. They feel part of NAS, recognised and seen for who they are and not masking or adapting to others. They feel validated here, which makes a big difference to how they feel about themselves." NAS staff member

"The essence of Moving Forward+ is seeing the person before the problems, then tailoring the support to them - starting wherever they are comfortable and building from there. That's why it works." NAS staff member

3.3.4 Communications and partnership working

Communications were rated highly by most interviewees. The referral process was perceived to be straightforward, by those who had used it, as it sought the right information and the NAS MF+ team were accessible to speak to in order to clarify any points about referral or anything else. Members of the team were considered to be proactive in providing feedback to some stakeholders, which was rated highly, although a couple would like to have more direct feedback from the team.

"It's not hard to refer, just complete the form. I have a good relationship with [staff member], who calls or emails every couple of months to catch up on progress. It's not a 'black hole' like it can be with some services!" Referrer

The fact that MF+ can take those without a formal diagnosis was also particularly valued by partners given the delays in diagnosis at present.

"Anxiety and mental health issues definitely increased over lockdown and there's now at least a two year waiting list for CAMHS. For an autism diagnosis it's more like 3 years at the moment, so it's really helpful that NAS will take referrals without a formal diagnosis as they need the support." Referrer

The NAS MF+ team were perceived to be a helpful 'bridge' to referrers, other services and family members, working in partnership, gathering and communicating the views of young people where

appropriate and providing a different perspective or insights which are helpful. This was particularly pertinent for young people not attending school as they and/or their parents/carers may not have a good relationship with school for a number of reasons. Referrers felt NAS MF+ benefitted them and the autistic young people. They felt reassured that the young person and their families had other support and that it didn't rely on school attendance.

"They wouldn't speak to school staff who visited them but they have been happy to develop some reach outside their immediate world. [staff member] has been successful in doing this and has actually gathered views around school generally which I think has been massive!" Referrer

The autism awareness sessions were also rated highly by those who had experienced them:

"The Moving Forward+ team are very passionate about what they do, which is great. We always get great feedback on the sessions about how autism affects people and we've had lots of other autism awareness sessions." Referrer

Most referrers noted a quick response from NAS getting autistic young people into the programme, but one did report a delay in Year 2 which unfortunately meant the young person, who had been struggling, regressed further before they engaged in the programme. This was considered to be an isolated issue which was rectified as soon as NAS were aware of it and not something which would deter the referrer from future referrals or overly impact on their rating of the service, it was just put down to bad timing.

3.3.5 Making a difference

Whilst it might be early days for some participants, nearly all those giving their views were able to highlight some progress made because of Moving Forward+ and for some this was significant. Even progress which might seem minimal on the face of it was actually perceived to be substantial, particularly for the younger people not attending school as their experience was largely restricted to family members (apart from any online contact) and being at home. Stakeholders were thrilled to see this progression and were hopeful that this would continue on a positive trajectory given time. They had confidence that NAS MF+ would provide the right support to help young people get there.

"It is a comfort to know I have support and where I am going with it. I feel my confidence is growing, and I am optimistic about an online course I am hoping to do to help me towards admin related jobs. I am feeling positive that I will get a job in the future. I now recognise that when a problem arises it is not the end of the world. I feel I am beginning to develop skills that would make me more employable and my mentor encourages me to go out for walks which I have been doing lately and that gives me a boost." Young person aged 16-24

"I enjoyed the group sessions and now feel more comfortable in working with small groups and talking to people. Anxiety was the most useful session, but they were all helpful." Young person aged 16-24

"I don't have a bad word to say about NAS Moving Forward+, I've been so impressed by them. It's a brilliant project and it has made a massive difference in a short time." Parent/carer

"[staff member] has been a really good influence on him and helped with the social side of things and what to do. He talks to her about things he wouldn't talk to me about, it has really helped him... He finished school and did better than expected. She helped him with forms for college, ILF and took him to college so he knew where he was going. The transition has been better than I expected. She really went out of her way to tailor everything to him and looked after me too... I can see a

big difference in him and we have a better relationship now. I do feel more hopeful about his future, he's hoping to get a job after college." Parent/carer

"It's made a big difference. She's a lot more confident, felt supported and listened to. I think she feels free to be herself, even more than with me. She took on board the advice given and got a lot out of it... It took a lot of pressure off me and her dad too. She's in a much better place than this time last year, we had no clue what we could do to help but she's in a good place at the moment." Parent/carer

"It's been so beneficial, I see a big difference in him. He wouldn't interact with anyone really but they've worked on confidence and anxiety and he's able to speak now. He doesn't always say that much or give a very full response but it's much better than it was. His confidence has grown massively because of [staff member] and she's opened up other opportunities for him - no-one could come to the house and speak to him before and now they can because of her. It has had a big impact on his medication too." Parent/carer

"Yes [feeling hopeful], I'm confident he will do well. He's articulate, focussed and interested - this could be the career for him!" Mentor

"It's tremendous what they've managed to achieve for this pupil." Referrer

"It has made a difference to our organisation and to me, to know that people are being supported fully." Referrer

"There have been some real successes with people moving into work but they've made an impact in so many other ways too: more self-belief, confidence, reduced anxiety, being heard... someone listening to them and believing them means a lot because these young people have heard a lot of negative comments from other services and it's huge for them to feel validated. They definitely do move them forward, pushing and encouraging them to take the next step. It's much better than other projects which don't seem to suit people as well... I can't be anything other than positive about the experience people have, there's just not enough of that kind of support." Referrer

"This service is needed, I really want it to continue to be available for pupils, their families and us. It's a big help to us all. I know the mum is very happy too." Referrer

3.3.6 The new element: 12-15s not attending school

The new element of the service for Phase 5 targeted young autistic people aged 12 - 15 who were not in education (YPNE). This was trialled in Glasgow city only, for young people who have *"got lost in the transition to secondary school"*. We know that times of transition can be extremely challenging for autistic young people, and the shift from primary to secondary school is a significant one (more pupils, different teachers, moving classrooms, more homework, peer pressure, bullying, sensory challenges, puberty, etc.). It is clear that some of these young people have become extremely isolated, withdrawn and have complex needs including trauma (such as PTSD, domestic abuse, death of a loved one, parental mental health or addictions issues, etc.), so support will be more time intensive and longer-term before positive outcomes can be achieved. Parents/carers and schools can also present barriers to the young person and the service achieving progress, so the team sometimes need to work hard to get them on side.

This was certainly the case for the young people referred, largely by schools, in the first year in particular. The challenge was to build their confidence and knowledge of themselves to then be able to cope with situations like school better. This takes time: to build trust, find the right form of communication and build an understanding of need and what is required to, as one referrer put it,

"bring them out of their bubble". But significant progress has been made for some already - little wins are hugely significant for this target group... and bring hope to them and their loved ones.

"[staff member] explains how autism works and how to manage it. It's been helpful to me. We meet in school and it's good to get used to getting up, putting my uniform on and being in school again. I'm attending two classes now. I like those classes." Young person aged 12-15

"I need to get more motivated to go outside and clean my room. It's all good, I've felt a lot better - not so angry, more calm and less anxious." Young person aged 12-15

"I can see the improvement in X after a call, you can see he got things off his chest and that he's happy to have spoken to [staff member]. That's a big thing because he wouldn't have spoken to anyone before and his mental health has been very poor. It's boosted his confidence and he's trying new things and getting out more. He wouldn't go out before and now he can." Parent

"[staff member] is helping him. I don't know where I would be without her, it's been a real struggle." Parent

"It has had a big impact on attendance and engagement for pupils. When or if they attended they would spend all their time in the base but now they're in class much more. The project has helped build their social confidence, which is very important. Helping them to understand their autism and why they think as they do has really helped them to feel less isolated so attendance and engagement has improved." Referrer

"NAS has been invaluable. [staff member] built up a great relationship with [pupil] and is making progress. I don't know what success will look like for him but a lot of good work has been done already as huge steps forward have been made. It's been such a lifeline for that family." Referrer

"It's excellent that they're doing a school project. I believe if things were caught early I wouldn't see people with such significant issues. It would be very different if they were supported early. There can be a lot of red flags in P7 but they probably fly under the radar until S1 or 2." Referrer

For the NAS team, the new project has a different feel to the NEET age group. Younger people not attending school can present more challenges as they are so isolated and perhaps need to be supported in a different way to their older counterparts. There are also often more stakeholders to keep in the loop - parents/carers, school, Educational Psychologists, CAMHS, Community Link Workers plus potentially other Third Sector providers - so partnership working and communication skills are especially important here.

With the Phase 6 shift to serving a 10+ age group, this will allow the team to support autistic young people prior to transition to secondary school. Stakeholders were supportive of this as they felt that at present some primary schools do not prepare their young people or the secondaries for transition, with advice on what works for individuals or how to deal with sensory challenges. Some secondary schools are not as nurturing as they could be, lack teacher understanding of autism or are not keen to make reasonable adjustments for young people, so assistance is required there.

3.3.7 The NAS team

The high quality of NAS MF+ staff was consistently raised by stakeholders. All were mentioned at various points in the interviews and all were rated very highly indeed. Victoria, Teri and Kerry were key contacts for a lot of the stakeholders interviewed given that the 12-15 service and mentoring

have been busy elements of the project and all were considered to provide an exceptional service to young people and work very well with stakeholders. Other team members - Becky, Billy, Jim and Kieran - were also spoken of very highly. The personal qualities of all team members, their understanding of their clients and empathetic but empowering ways of working to achieve the best possible outcomes for participants and stakeholders were evident from discussions, and mark them out from other projects.

"[staff member] is very talkative, she's fun. She worked out what I needed help with. I feel more hopeful that I'll be able to do what I want to do. I feel more confident about S4 now anyway, but I'm still worried about exams because I missed a lot of school." Young person aged 12-15

"They've done all they can with X, working on confidence and emotions, what she needs to do next. They support me too, give me moral support and information. It's good for X to have someone else in their corner, they're offering lots of things. It has made a difference but X just isn't in the right place to take the big steps yet. [staff member] does an amazing job though, I can't praise the organisation highly enough, especially [staff member]." Parent/carer

"They have so much experience, they always know how to help." Parent/carer

"I think they do such a good job, I advocate for them in [my] organisation. A lot of organisations say they work with autistic people but the people taking the groups don't know enough... they might think they do but Moving Forward+ has a very different take on it. They [MF+] have a great understanding of autism and how it can affect people and they're tuned into their needs and how to be the best version of themselves. That's what I like. I always consider them if I have an autistic client." Referrer

"I have a very good relationship with NAS. They're excellent, very supportive to us and the young people. We all work hard on partnership working and sharing information to help the person, it's all very person-centred. Some discussions can be difficult for autistic people but we have good discussions and better outcomes if NAS is involved." Referrer

"It can be slow progress [because of the young person's challenges] but they make baby steps and see results. They don't always get good support at home so Moving Forward is great for them as someone really gets them, often for the first time. They structure support for them which works. 99% of them have not had good experiences at school and their parents don't know what to do." Referrer

The fact that the NAS team includes a range of ages, genders, autistic and neurotypical staff helps to ensure there is 'something for everyone' in terms of making connections. Younger staff are excellent at making connections, knowing what is cool or not, using social media language and tools and having fun with clients, for example if a young person is not talking, then coming from a different angle to engage around board games or gaming in order to gain trust and build on that into project-relevant work. More established team members have excellent skills for those who are more job-ready, so play a particular role at that stage. The knowledge, understanding and connections of all staff were rated highly by all stakeholders, with genuine interest and empathy shown consistently and very much appreciated.

The NAS team also clearly gain a lot from helping young people to realise their potential and to address the challenges they are experiencing.

3.3.8 Mentoring

Mentors were extremely positive about their experiences of mentoring for NAS MF+ and most were keen to do more. Both Teri and Kerry were rated very highly by mentors, as being supportive, proactive and responsive Mentor Co-ordinators. The shift to Microsoft Forms for feedback after each session was seen to be an improvement on Word as it saved a step, and mentors felt this was read and responded to quickly, which was very much appreciated.

"It's easy to go to NAS and see what they have [e.g. tools or resources] if you need anything. I've been very well supported in that respect." Mentor

"[staff member] is awesome, very proactive. You always get an immediate response so I get in touch if I have any questions while I'm with [mentee] and we can then move things forward." Mentor

Whilst the mentor training (mainly via online modules) was viewed positively and seen to be necessary, some mentors would like there to be more direction on what a mentor should be/do as well as what they shouldn't (which it was felt the training focussed more on). The role of mentor was felt to be hard to define, however.

"I felt supported as a person but I'm still not sure what it really means to be a mentor. I have a chat and see what they want to do but mentoring is an odd thing to define. There isn't a guidebook and it's quite fuzzy." Mentor

"There's a lot of training but no module on mentoring itself, which would help. If I've not been sure of something I'll check in with [staff member] and as soon as I send the report they respond and offer the support I need. She's very approachable, easy to get on with and gives suggestions, which is really helpful." Mentor

Much of mentoring support focuses around socialisation and independent travel (as this takes time) but mentors also reinforced many of the aspects learned via MF+ so assisted with refining CVs, preparing for college etc. too. There is a bit of an art to matching mentors and mentees and both young people and mentors reported that NAS have been really successful with this, with only one being matched with a mentor they didn't click with, so another was (successfully) matched after this became apparent.

"It was a good matching process, we got on well so we could get on and achieve the aims." Mentor

Mentors and mentees reported enjoying their sessions and positive comments were made on useful resources such as booklets on assertiveness and confidence, CV templates, etc. Mentors also spoke very positively about how much they enjoyed seeing their mentee develop over time, and young people were also very positive about their mentors.

"I don't want it to end! I've got a huge amount from it, I've loved every minute. It's been empowering and very rewarding to see [mentee] develop. It's been a learning process, it makes you more self-aware and able to break things down." Mentor

"It exceeded my expectations. Even if I had a rough day, we had a chat and there was always something in it for me too. It picked my day up, knowing that I was doing something worthwhile to help someone." Mentor

"They made good steps forward. We did a lot of work together around confidence and self-esteem - a lot of work on anxiety - the worked on pulling a CV together and deciding what to do next. They're going out more now with pals, have applied for

ILF and are on to the next thing. They're much more confident and have the tools they need, like grounding techniques, to manage anxiety if or when it hits. A big thing is that they know they're not alone as so many people experience anxiety." Mentor

"I like to be needed and feeling I can support them helps me too." Mentor

"I felt the mentoring support added something. They needed someone to give them a nudge and I was able to do that. I have felt valued by both young people." Mentor

"They have flourished! It's so rewarding to see how different they are now, I'm delighted. I'd love to continue working with young people with additional support needs." Mentor

That's not to say mentoring was without challenges - time needs to be invested and those working earlier in the funding cycle felt the negative impact of online contact. It can also be hard to let go after investing so much time and effort.

"The biggest challenge is working out what they want to do. I get to know them and understand their hobbies and interests and see if we can build on that to evolve into something to pursue at college or a relevant job. It can take a few weeks to get to know them enough to identify possibilities." Mentor

"It was harder on Teams. They had no confidence to have the camera on and didn't speak so it was only 15 minutes for the first call, then 30 minutes then longer. It's much easier to develop a relationship face to face and to talk while doing something else, like walking." Mentor

"Our mentoring finished when there was no more I could help them with but it would be good to know whether they did make it where they wanted to go, for example if they got into college or passed their driving test or whatever. I know we're not friends, this is a different relationship, so there would need to be a way to do that appropriately." Mentor

Whilst some activities were cancelled because of Covid, mentors appreciated the effort made to provide opportunities for networking, such as meeting the alpacas, murder mystery with afternoon tea online and the rage room.

"It was good to have the option to get together every couple of months and it was helpful to meet new people doing the same thing and get some new ideas." Mentor

Mentoring will not feature in Phase 6, unfortunately, as the project had to be trimmed to fit budget availability. However, mentoring for adults will be active in NAS and it is hoped that this might give MF+ mentors an opportunity to continue if they wish to do so. Learning has been shared with the new NAS Adult Mentoring Co-ordinator.

3.3.9 Recommending MF+ to others

All stakeholders were asked if they would recommend the project to others and all said they would, with some saying that they had already done so. No reservations were expressed around this as the project was rated highly and perceived to be unique in the way it supported young people and its specific target groups.

Some referrers had referred a number of young people for support and encouraged others within their organisation to do so, which also indicates the value they place on the support provided.

“Some autistic people can present very well but their anxiety is high so they don’t cope very well with rigid or prescriptive systems. For them to be able to move forward they need Moving Forward’s help to build their confidence and reduce anxiety for them to start to look for work and do what they want to do. Anxiety can be a real barrier otherwise... Or they might have tried jobs but sensory issues or anxiety have meant they couldn’t do them.” Referrer

3.3.10 Participant ‘exit’ and stakeholder ‘after’ views

Approximately a quarter (24) of those who engaged with Moving Forward+ completed an exit survey. It has always been extremely challenging to complete surveys with participants so this is not necessarily a sign of a negative experience, more a disinclination to respond to emails then engage in surveys and obviously it is particularly difficult to encourage completion once someone has left the project.

Twenty-five stakeholders also gave their views once their young person had received support from MF+. This included parents/carers, referrers and mentors so different respondents could have been commenting on the same individual and they will know them in different contexts and/or to different degrees. There is some cross-over between those young people responding to the exit survey but not a complete match.

How participants felt on exiting Moving Forward+

The exit survey asked those responding to agree or disagree to several statements, to gain a sense of their views and experiences. As can be seen below, the views were very positive, with low levels of disagreement for most statements, although there were higher ‘not applicable’ scores for some responses. There was particularly high agreement with the statements around:

- the helpfulness of the 1:1 support provided (100% agreed, 24) and the group session (25% agreed, 6 - all of those who gave a view as this was most likely to have a ‘not applicable’ response, reinforcing the point that there was more 1:1 support in Phase 5);
- staff approach (100%, 24) and understanding of what being on the spectrum is like (96%, 23);
- feeling more positive about their future now (96%, 23);
- improved social skills (96%, 22 out of 23);
- feeling more able to manage challenges (96%, 23) and anxiety (88%, 21);
- feeling happier (92%, 22);
- being more independent (83%, 20);
- improved understanding of autism (83%, 20); and
- employability skills training being helpful (58%, 14 - all agreed who gave a view, the balance said it was not applicable).

It was interesting to note the responses around the length of support provided - whilst 30% (8) agreed the programme was too short, 38% (10) disagreed with this statement. The full responses can be seen in the table below. 0% responses are omitted to make the table easier to read.

Table 12: Do you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to Moving Forward+?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don’t know	Not applicable
I enjoyed the group sessions (n=24)	25%					75%
I found the 1:1 support helpful (n=24)	71%	29%				
I understand autism better now (n=24)	50%	33%	4%		8%	4%
I feel more able to manage my challenges now (n=24)	25%	71%	4%			

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Not applicable
Employability skills training was helpful (n=24)	25%	33%				42%
The work placement gave me good experience of working life (n=24)	17%	4%				79%
We had a good mix of participants (n=23)	22%	13%				65%
My social skills have improved (n=23)	48%	48%	4%			
I am able to manage anxiety better (n=24)	25%	63%	4%		8%	
I made friends (n=24)	21%	21%	4%		4%	50%
Staff understand what being on the spectrum is like (n=24)	92%	4%			4%	
I liked the approach taken by staff (n=24)	79%	21%				
It helped that some staff members are on the spectrum too (n=24)	13%	4%				83%
The programme was too short (n=26)	15%	15%	19%	19%	12%	19%
I learned a lot (n=24)	58%	38%			4%	
I feel more able to get and keep a job now (n=24)	13%	29%	4%	4%	13%	38%
I feel happier (n=24)	58%	33%	4%		4%	
I have a healthier lifestyle, e.g. eating, sleeping and exercising better (n=24)	29%	38%	8%		8%	17%
I am more independent (n=24)	54%	29%	8%	4%		4%
I feel more positive about my future now (n=24)	54%	42%	4%			

Comments were as follows:

- *"I am hopeful that I will be able to secure a job in the very near future and feel a lot more confident going into this now that I was a year ago."*
- *"Grateful for the support from [staff member] and my mentor. Waiting patiently on the Christmas temp jobs opening up..."*
- *"Really enjoy the social group theme of the week and meeting new people."*
- *"I feel really positive about my future. I feel like I'll be good at what I do."*
- *"I'm thinking about my future, instead of thinking I don't have one. I definitely think I have one now."*
- *"X's issues seem to need more input from CAHMS for his mental health so he hasn't been able to use this service at its full potential just now."*
- *"It has given me the confidence I need to go to college."*
- *"I am very happy thinking about the future as I look forward to studying for a job that will be in line with my interests."*
- *"I am happy that I have the confidence to travel independently now that I have my car."*

How stakeholders felt after Moving Forward+ support

The stakeholder 'after' survey asked a similar question to gain a sense of their views and experiences. Again, the views were very positive, with low levels of disagreement for all statements. There was particularly high agreement with the statements around:

- all felt supported by NAS (100%, 25);
- improved social skills (96%, 24 out of 25);
- liking the staff approach (92%, 24);
- the young person is more independent (92%, 23);
- the young person is happier (91%, 21);
- the stakeholder feeling more positive about the young person's future now (88%, 22);
- the young person feeling more positive about their future now (84%, 21);
- knowing more about what support an autistic person might need (84%, 21);
- the young person is more able to manage challenges (81%, 21) and anxiety (80%, 20); and
- improved understanding of autism (72%, 18 - all agreed who gave a view, with 1 don't know and 6 not applicable).

It was interesting to note the responses around the length of support provided - whilst 30% (8) agreed the programme was too short, 38% (10) disagreed with this statement. The full responses can be seen in the table below, with 0% responses omitted to make the table easier to read.

Table 13: Do you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to Moving Forward+?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Not applicable
I understand autism better now (n=25)	28%	44%			4%	24%
The young person understands their autism better now (n=25)	24%	32%	12%		28%	4%
I know more about what support an autistic person might need (n=25)	32%	52%				16%
The young person is more able to manage their challenges now (n=26)	27%	54%	4%		8%	8%
Their social skills have improved (n=25)	36%	60%	4%			
They are able to manage anxiety better (n=25)	16%	64%	8%		8%	4%
They made friends (n=25)	8%	44%	4%		24%	20%
I liked the approach taken by staff (n=26)	73%	19%			4%	4%
I felt supported by NAS (n=25)	84%	16%				
The young person is happier (n=23)	26%	65%			9%	
They have a healthier lifestyle, e.g. eating, sleeping and exercising better (n=25)	20%	44%	8%		12%	16%
They are more independent (n=25)	28%	64%	4%			4%
I feel more positive about their future now (n=25)	36%	52%			4%	8%
They feel more positive about their future now (n=25)	32%	52%			12%	4%

Comments were as follows:

- *X is definitely in a much better mind set and feels a lot more positive and I think is beginning to believe in himself a little more.*

- *I think the support should continue longer than it does, there should be more emphasis on bringing young people with similar interests and challenges together, for example, music club, political discussion group, gaming group etc.*
- *Before Y started working with [staff member] and [mentor], for the last 10 years I wasn't able to leave the house as Y didn't want to. Now that he has been working with NAS his confidence has grown so much and he is now going out on his own. It's a big change for me to have time alone and to be able to leave the house whenever. I have my own anxieties and seeing Y overcome his is really great to see. I have felt nervous about growing older and what Y will do without me but now I know he'll be totally fine. He can cook, clean and ask for help if he needs it - there is not much more I can ask from [staff member] and [mentor]. I hope Y continues to try new things and push himself like he has done for the last year.*

Likes

Those exiting Moving Forward+ were asked what they liked best and least about the project. Likes focussed on the quality of support from staff and mentors, getting out of the house, the fun activities and socialising with peers, as the comments below illustrate:

- *activities - quizzes, murder mystery*
- *Having a mentor and staff member who understood my needs was good. it was a mix of being social and getting work done*
- *meeting with staff in person for walks and food*
- *Talking to people who help me expand my way of thinking about things.*
- *One to one meetings with my mentor*
- *I like theme of the week as I like meeting other people with similar interested like marvel and D&D. Enjoyed meeting my mentor and staff a lot.*
- *Getting to interact with other people on the spectrum. I enjoyed spending time with my mentor as we had a lot in common. The groups were fun too, it broke up my week.*
- *The support from [staff member] was the first time I've felt listen to and heard. She took the time to get to know me and understand my daily challenges. She was patient and kind and took a genuine interest in my life and support it's good to know there are people like that out there outwith my family.*
- *Help getting my work placement sorted with [company name] and helped me when it became challenging. [staff member] and [staff member] helped me understand my autism and advocate my needs. Mentoring was ok too.*
- *Speaking to [staff member]*
- *I would give 11 out of 10 if I could! The best thing was having people be nice to me and help me. It was nice and I also liked the cat cafe!*
- *It was good having a buddy to play animal crossing with and someone to help me.*
- *My visits from [staff member]*
- *Having the chance to talk to other people, as its a good excuse to get me out and about. It helped that financially most things were covered as he wouldn't have been able to afford the travelling or meet ups otherwise. He much prefers the chance to meet other people rather than go on outings.*
- *That I had a member of staff who treated me normal and spoke normally. she sounded like me and was very relatable. Offered me a lot of help.*
- *Working 1-1 with my mentor.*
- *Having help with different things - recently before we finished the help with my CV, guidance for my future and work.*
- *Learning more about me and autism.*
- *Talking every week, games and activities. Mum says MF brought him out of his shell.*
- *X enjoyed how the session were tailored to him and how his mum was able to take part and contribute too. He liked that he had quizzes each week after an modules that [staff member] made for him especially. He also enjoyed the routine and conversation each week.*

- *Talking to someone.*
- *Its improved all of my skills, especially self esteem and confidence to talk to people and try new things*
- *Enjoyed having one on one time with [staff member] during the school day, it encouraged me to go in on a Friday. I enjoyed the Christmas gaming activity too*

Stakeholders were asked which aspect of Moving Forward+ they thought had the most impact on their young person and why. The regular one to one support and understanding from staff and mentors was highlighted with this group too, alongside having a structure through the modules to learn about autism, the opportunity to develop employability and other skills, the social connections made and confidence built to take part in new opportunities.

- *X enjoyed having someone else to talk to and has a better idea of what he wants to do in the future.*
- *The Moving Forward modules. It allowed us to complete an education activity, whilst learning more about autism. The person I supported enjoyed completing the modules and it was a nice activity as it helped my mentee understand better oneself (i.e., where their strengths and weaknesses lie, set goals, learn strategies to cope with their anxiety, learn how to write a CV and look for jobs). But most importantly, the modules helped my mentee to identify their interests and hobbies. Moreover, the PowerPoint movie quizzes were a nice activity. My mentee really enjoyed those, so we moved on to a more interactive activity, to illustrate, completing online movie quizzes which were timed and had visual aid.*
- *mentor support , setting goals , monitoring progress, signposting funding available, NAS modules*
- *I think having support outwith their family, from impartial persons who they could talk to without fear of judgment or resentment has made significant improvement to their social and communication skills. Being presented with opportunities and supported in undertaking them.*
- *X felt understood*
- *It was the first step in him becoming a young adult. I don't think that progression would have been made without the help of Moving Forward+.*
- *Having a one to one meeting every week where we were initially able to establish a relationship and then moving forward allowing me to work with him identifying his goals and setting out a route to achieving those goals .*
- *I think building confidence in order to feel ready for work really positively impacted X. I think being able to get into the city centre by himself for volunteering can give a feeling of independence.*
- *Also being able to answer and work through X's questions and concerns before his very first shift at Oxfam and about what to expect when he has a job was a good way for X to feel prepared and less anxious about new situations.*
- *I think the social connection with myself but also other members of the Moving Forward+ scheme was the most valuable. Also, the routine of the meetings and the other opportunities that X had because of staff at NAS were great and had a lot of impact.*
- *I think having [staff member] to co-ordinate and research a suitable opportunity for after mentoring was really beneficial as it can be really hard to know what's out there. But mentoring really made a difference to X's confidence and we were able to work through things together and their pace as I was able to use my own experiences.*
- *I think the groups and work with [staff member] have been beneficial as X has had the chance to meet [past participant] who has given him an insight into the tattooing industry.*
- *Fantastic 1:1 support as well as the opportunity to meet other young people in a group setting. Staff were very responsive to our needs and did everything they said they would*
- *I would give the staff very high marks and they undoubtedly have had a very positive impact.*
The underlying issue is that there is not enough funding available to support Autistic people right across the board.

- *He was listened to. Wasn't told that he couldn't achieve his goals but was actually supposed and helped to find out what he needed to do to accomplish them.*
- *[staff member]'s 1-1 work with X initially really helped as she understood exactly what X needed. Finding a mentor like Y was great as she really went over and above for him. I wish support could be longer but there is not much else either of them could do to help support X.*
- *Mentoring support, young person needed that 1-1 approach to build up trust and give encouragement.*
- *Mentoring service was a great help and support with progressing into College*
- *Social aspects/inclusion*
- *Being mentored weekly, understanding their challenges and needs, and how to support that as part of the role.*
- *we really enjoyed it each week as it was a different focus. I liked that i could be involved too but by the end X didn't need me there, I stayed to take part in the quizzes at the end. We appreciate [staff member] taking the time to make them up*
- *building relations*
- *the one to one interaction and opportunities outside school.*
- *Having the ability to meet regularly with someone and explore their emotions and feelings in a safe space out with school or home environment.*
- *One to one sessions and communication with NAS. Support offered by [staff member] to X and her mum, Y.*

Dislikes

There were few dislikes from participants apart from having to re-schedule meetings (2), wishing it lasted longer (3), wishing it was more than once a week (1), talking face to face (1) and one comment around the intensity of college/having a low social battery which can't really be attributed to MF+. Positive feedback was also given:

- *I wish it lasted longer as I really benefitted from having a mentor and the support.*
- *Nothing, I loved it all.*
- *Nothing bad to say really. I can't really hold them accountable for not solving all of my problems as they're personal but the main ones were solved :D like getting out more and stuff.*

Similarly, stakeholders found few negative impacts of MF+ on their young person:

- *There are not many social groups for younger adults. It would have been nice for my mentee to be able to attend a social group where he can make new friends.*
- *nothing can think of apart from young person would have preferred continued mentor support longer than year*
- *Time management*
- *Covid was a really hard thing to navigate with everything being online etc*
- *Switching mentors at the start was pretty hard, Hard for him to re-start and get to know me but we made it work.*
- *In this case, having group activities in a busy city centre office caused more stress and anxiety that outweighed any benefit from attendance.*
- *Perhaps an area of improvement could be lifestyle associated with healthy diet and sport*

There were also some positive stakeholder comments to add:

- *No. I felt it was amazing. Also someone there to answer any questions.*
- *Nothing, I'm grateful [staff member] looked for another more suitable mentor for X as this really has been the making of him.*
- *nothing we really thought it was worthwhile*
- *no negatives other than it has to end!*

Additional feedback

Additional feedback from the exit and stakeholder 'after' surveys was as follows:

- Two-thirds of young people exiting (67%, 16) felt Moving Forward+ was better than expected and the remaining third didn't know what to expect.
- The one thing which made most difference to participants was the 1:1 support (71%, 17), followed by mentoring (13%, 3), group work (8%, 2) and work placement (8%, 2).
- All bar one participant (96%, 23) felt better equipped to move forward with their life now.
- All participants and stakeholders felt that Moving Forward+ was tailored well to young people on the autistic spectrum (participants: 92% very well, 8% quite well; stakeholders: 68% very well, 32% quite well). This was because the NAS team were easy to talk to, non-judgemental, listened and understood challenges, tailored the support and pace to each individual and genuinely cared. These were meaningful relationships which helped the young people to move forward with their lives.
- When asked the Net Promoter Score question about how likely they would be to recommend MF+ to others, 63% (15) of participants and 80% (20) stakeholders gave 10/10 and the NPS was +71/+92 respectively, both extremely positive scores with no detractors.
- Just under half of participants (46%, 11) felt they needed further support, whilst 54% (13) did not. Further support which would be helpful included things like talking about options, support with applications, checking in to see how they are getting on but several recognised that this was support for other areas of their life (e.g. mental health, so not from NAS), some liked the 'comfort' of NAS/mentor knowing them or that they needed to start doing things on their own.
- Other comments reiterated their enjoyment of participating in MF+, appreciation of the support they had been given and thanks. The degree of appreciation was significant:

"I feel that providing the support to get my son to his course was life changing for him. He has never managed to attend or complete a course ever. With NAS support he managed to complete a 20 week course and only missed 2 sessions because of toothache. Every staff member at NAS was tremendous." Parent/carer

"Keep up the amazing work. It's really helped us. They have put X in touch with other courses which we would have never found on our own." Parent/carer

"Really happy with how X has improved since working with [staff member] and [mentor]. These are skills which will help him for the rest of his life, it's really eased my worries of growing older. It's been great with [staff member] helping with ILF and forms etc and sending them on paper format as that can be overwhelming with most things being online." Parent/carer

3.4 Suggestions for improvement

As noted above, there were very few suggestions for improvement apart from a sense of *"more of the same please"* from participants and stakeholders. Suggestions from surveys and discussions over the three years included, in the order given:

1. Be clearer on the journey for the young person, although it was recognised that this is difficult as this is so individual because of the tailoring of the project.
2. More social groups, particularly for younger adults.
3. A few suggestions were made around mentoring. This was perceived to be a beneficial element of the project by, and for, both mentors and mentees so it is unfortunate that it has

been cut for Phase 6 as there is reduced funding available. Consideration should therefore be given to whether there is another way to fund or deliver this part of the project as it is a way to provide valuable 1:1 support on issues such as socialisation and independent travel which take time to achieve, are key priorities and complement wider progress for individuals. Suggestions made around mentoring were:

- a. Longer mentor support. This was partly driven by a feeling there were still things on the 'to do' list but also that mentors and mentees had bonded so did not wish to end the connection. Longer support generally (in total, number of sessions per week and time per session) was also suggested by some participants or stakeholders.
 - b. More meet-ups in person, perhaps for activities with animal: the cat café was very popular with participants, as was the 'meet the alpacas' trip, plus the Safari Park and zoo were suggested as alternatives.
 - c. Whilst the mentor training was praised for covering important and relevant issues, mentors felt it would be helpful to include more about how to be a good mentor rather than what not to do! Obviously the mentoring relationship is a very individual one and different people bring different things, but a broad overview of the process and recognition that it is "fuzzy" and will vary would be helpful. There was also a comment on the shifting imagery and vibrations on some of the training videos which made them challenging to watch, so this could perhaps be taken into account. Training could also benefit from more information on the wider MF+ project and where mentoring fits within that (or a reminder of this, as mentors were less clear on this apart from what they knew from their mentee).
 - d. More mentor/mentee socialising and sharing of knowledge amongst mentors. It was recognised that efforts had been made around this, which were enjoyed by those who attended, but some had been cancelled due to Covid-19. The focus of these comments was perhaps more on the sharing of knowledge and tips rather than just a social networking opportunity, which also picks up on mentors' wishes to have more of a steer on how to be a good mentor.
4. Referrers were keen to have more of the same so requested more information on the project in schools as more people need to know about it and so they are clear on what the service can/cannot do. It was suggested that flyers or leaflets would help (as teachers don't have time to go looking for information and parents are not all IT savvy so need another route) the project promote itself more. More networking events within the third sector/employability was also suggested to increase awareness.
- "Not enough people know about the amazing work NAS do, it's so significant to the individuals they support. We also have confidence that NAS is there to support and hold people, they're a great asset. They need to shout louder about what they do." Referrer*
5. The NAS team were praised for regular updates by one referrer *"without the need for hounding!"* but a couple of others felt they weren't directly updated sufficiently, as they would put this information on their own systems. This may perhaps be something NAS could explore with referrers at the start of the process to manage expectations, so they agree any timeframe for feedback, be that a regular interval or when something substantive is noted.
6. Reducing the age to 10+ was also suggested, to help support young people during the transition to secondary school so it is great to see that this has been picked up on for Phase 6.

"It's a much-needed service and has the recipe about right. Transition from primary to secondary can be particularly challenging for autistic young people. It would be good if support could start younger to facilitate that, maybe from age 10."
Referrer

7. Having postcode criteria was identified by a few referrers as a barrier to referral (referrers don't want to raise expectations unnecessarily) and obviously a barrier to some young people who would benefit from the service so would be keen for this to be addressed. The postcode 'lottery' was also highlighted by grateful parents/carers.

"Postcodes are a barrier. One young man would have benefitted from the programme but wasn't in the right postcode and I know he will struggle without their help." Referrer

"The postcodes rule a lot of people out or I would have referred a lot more people. I have to check first so I don't disappoint people, but they need this service too. It's a real barrier, it's the only one really for this service." Referrer

"I know we're lucky to have received this service and not everyone who needs it will be able to access it, which isn't right." Parent/carer

8. Where progress has been made, make sure those NAS is 'handing over' to - teachers, parents, college, employers, other projects - have the necessary information (with the young person's permission) on what approaches/tools have worked to achieve that progress, to provide immediate assistance, avoid relapse and to help maintain momentum.
9. Similarly, a review three or six months following exit of Moving Forward+ was suggested to help pick up any loss of momentum and remind the young person and stakeholders of useful tools or techniques plus praise progress made or maintained. This was suggested by parents/carers and referrers, recognising that doing things to 'please' or impress their mentor or NAS staff was different to being able to maintain or progress things for themselves and it may help if the young person knows they will be back to check in x months.
10. It was also suggested that the NAS staff team share methods, tools and approaches - the things they have found to work well - with each other regularly, for example at team meetings, to help grow skills and maximise the expertise and experience within the team, recognising that they all currently approach things differently so all potentially have something to learn from each other.
11. The biggest issue for the project has been achieving the target number of referrals. This Phase has been exceptional given the pandemic, but it is always a balancing act for short-term funded projects who spend a long time with participants as they do not want to take people on if they do not know if they can fulfil that commitment. Early notification of funding decisions is always important. However, it might also be helpful for NAS MF+ to consider awareness raising for the service afresh. It has been quite 'stop/start' because of both external and internal factors which has been really challenging but there is an argument for a more consistent approach and accepting a wait list may be required and/or the merits of providing some support to young people (being clear that there may be an exit if funding ceases) even if that is not as full as usual. This could target specific issues, share information and highlight potential partner services. Work is often more intensive at the start of the process, so some positive impacts could be achieved, particularly if work is done to equip the young person to manage immediate challenges such as anxiety and there is a hand over process to parents/carers, schools, partners, etc., to continue that support.

4 Case studies

4.1 Introduction

The evaluations of NAS' Moving Forward (Phase 4) and Moving Forward+ (Phase 5) projects have consistently illustrated the 'wrap around' nature of support provided, placing the young person at the centre, helping them to develop self-management skills and seeking to support them with the issues they prioritise in terms of employability and many other aspects of life as they move into young adulthood. Many participants are quite distant from education, training or employment because of the challenges those additional issues can present. This includes low levels of confidence and self-esteem, which sounds relatively common, but for some this can mean rarely leaving their home, interacting with very few people (including family members), sleep, exercise and nutrition issues plus other mental and physical health challenges in addition to housing, benefits, the ability to travel independently, etc. Support from the Moving Forward+ team can therefore be over a number of months and may also involve support from other NAS services or partner organisations before outcomes for Moving Forward/+ are achieved. The number of issues individuals are facing can add additional challenges to unlocking potential but can also make progress when it happens more dramatic, life-changing and rewarding for the NAS team, young people, parents and other stakeholders.

Because of the depth and quality of support provided over a period of time, it was agreed during the Phase 4 evaluation that a more longitudinal approach would be taken, to gain a sense of sustained impacts and to examine whether this holistic and steady approach pays dividends for the young people in the long run. This final evaluation therefore involved interviews with participants from Phase 4 to see how they were doing now plus those interviewed early in Phase 5. The case studies therefore involve recent and more distant past participants. It must be noted that Covid-19 will inevitably have had an impact on everyone, which might reasonably be expected to be negative, so sustaining impacts or minimal steps backwards are themselves seen to be positive outcomes. Whilst it was challenging for people who were on Moving Forward/+, it is clear that they were better equipped to deal with those challenges and outcomes have largely been sustained by those interviewed.

All case studies have consented to share their story and approved the text below, with some preferring to use a different name to their own.

4.2 Participants from Phase 5

Carson, 21

Carson came to Moving Forward+ after experiencing some mental health challenges during a two year college course, although they still managed to complete the course. Carson participated in group sessions, 1:1 support from the NAS MF+ team and received mentoring support. Mentoring support focussed on developing a CV and working on college applications in particular.

Carson is a creative and artistic individual who spoke very enthusiastically of the creative social group they participated in with NAS. The group grew from 2 or 3 members to 4 or 5 others and everyone created something for the theme set for each session, using whatever media they wished. This had largely taken place on Teams initially but there were also meetings in real life, including a trip to the cinema, although it is now on a break as everyone is at college - which could be seen as a sign of success in itself.

At the time of the first interview, Carson was clear that they wanted to work in makeup and NAS helped identify courses, accessing SAS and ILF funding for palettes, brushes etc. They were

considering undertaking a 6 month HNC course with Glam Candy, who were hosting a course with support for autistic students, which sounded an ideal route in for Carson. Carson has now graduated with an HNC in Fashion Makeup, run by a social media influencer at Glam Candy, and it went really well! Too few autistic students enrolled to enable a separate course to be run, so Carson joined the mainstream course, three days a week. Whilst this was a bit daunting to start with and provided challenges for Carson, who has sensory issues around noise in particular, they found ways to deal with difficult situations/environments. For example, working on photoshoots were very busy with many models and makeup artists, loud music and lots of talking but Carson managed this themselves, taking a moment in a quieter space when things were beginning to overwhelm.

Carson felt the confidence and tools/techniques gained through Moving Forward+ helped them to attend college and be able to talk to people and deal with the different situations they encountered there. This was evident from our two discussions - Carson was so much more relaxed, talkative and confident when we spoke a year after our first discussion. In the earlier discussion, Carson also highlighted the benefits of building a network of support via NAS staff, peers and their mentor, plus gaining time management skills. Increased confidence was the game-changer for them, though, which their family had also noticed and credited to their involvement with Moving Forward+.

Carson is now considering whether to continue their studies with an HND in TV, Film and Theatre Makeup this year or next. Taking the 18 month course this year means travelling to Edinburgh, but waiting a year means attending in Glasgow, which is more convenient. If Carson decides to wait for the Glasgow course, they will likely return to volunteering activity in the interim - they previously volunteered at a local youth club doing special effects makeup.

"NAS helped me, it was all really good. They put your interests first and help you work towards them."

David, 23

As reported in the Year 2 evaluation report, David was supported by NAS Moving Forward+ early in Phase 5 (summer 2020). He had been unemployed for a few months and was focussed on looking for employment options across the UK broadcast industry as he specialises in sound - through his studies, an apprenticeship with the BBC in Glasgow and years of experience in community radio. While he sees himself as relatively confident, he can find it challenging to read people and was not converting interviews to job offers. Developing skills in retail was his pragmatic Plan B.

Finding employment was his main priority for his time with MF+ and he was supported in this by a mentor. They found they shared interests and both found it worthwhile and enjoyable, working to prepare David for a specific interview via mock interviews. All contact was online via Teams because of Covid, but that worked well for both mentor and mentee. David's mentor formulated competency-based interview questions to give David practice in answering these with relevant examples, delivered in a clear manner (not getting bogged down in the details). He also advised him how to make the most of the experience he had and to showcase this alongside his strengths. It was a rigorous, multi-stage and multi-mode interview process so David was very appreciative of the preparation for this he was able to do with his mentor. He also found this assistance boosted his confidence, which he felt helped him to perform well and keep going, despite feeling nervous.

There were only a handful of mentor sessions but they made all the difference to David. When we first spoke in year 1 of Phase 5, David had landed the role of Trainee Audio Assistant at the BBC in the South East so had just moved and was looking forward to starting his post. This involved working in multiple productions, including Eastenders.

By spring 2023, David had been working solidly with the BBC for two years and has had a promotion! The working days are long - often 11-14 hours - and he works at different sites,

including BBC Elstree, TV Centre and Pinewood. He now lives in South East England and tries to see his family when he can. He disclosed his autism to his bosses and thinks that most of his colleagues know or “figured it out”. Interestingly, work can be challenging at points but David felt that is often because of the social stigmas around autism, and how perceptions may change of him if he were to discuss his diagnosis more openly.

David feels he is coping most of the time without support, not feeling the need to seek out NAS or similar services in the South East. He has sought advice from his boss a couple of times, particularly when navigating office politics, which has been helpful. He is struggling with some aspects, for example he still experiences panic attacks sometimes but this rarely happens at work as there is too much work to do! The work is physically challenging, easily achieving 10-15,000 steps a day so David is now fitter and leaner too. Most importantly, David is happy. To sum up how he feels now, David said:

“I’m really happy where I am. I’ve got to adapt quickly but I think it’s been a success. I’m getting better at doing everything and I’m fitter. I’m really glad I made the move.”

4.3 Participants from Phase 4

James, 25

James took part in a focus group shortly after participating in group work with NAS Moving Forward and then a later discussion around his second placement when he was exiting the project. I caught up with James and his mum, Maureen, three years on to find out how he was doing.

He was doing very well! At the end of Phase 4 he was working (paid) for a half-day shift every week with award-winning Media Co-op as a Post-Production Assistant, a role created for him following a voluntary placement (which NAS had fought hard to explain would be beneficial for James as Media Co-op do not usually take interns). He felt like part of the team, featured on the website, and he was so proud to be trusted with keys to the editing suite from the start. James works with the photo archive, edits videos, adds subtitles, and maintains databases. He created a video about the archives for colleagues so they knew what to do too, and he enjoys researching things to help his team. Whilst the Covid-19 pandemic brought challenges, James continued to work for Media Co-op throughout and enjoyed the flexibility of working from home and managing his workload to suit other commitments - James is now also enjoying looking after his young niece.

In Phase 4 I learned that James had not been diagnosed as autistic until he was 17 and he had received very little support at that time. James presented as very bright and articulate, with a lovely sense of humour who made good eye contact, was empathetic and picked up on social cues well. After school he completed an HNC in Professional Writing Skills and an HND in Media and Communications. However, the effort of ‘fitting in’ to social norms can be exhausting, particularly when meeting new people or encountering new situations, and James was self-harming and was not in a good place when he joined NAS.

The Moving Forward programme helped James and his family to understand more about autism to help make him more self-aware, comfortable as himself and confident, which meant he could then travel independently, and taught him coping techniques to deal with anxiety. James reported that he has not self-harmed since joining Moving Forward and Maureen felt strongly that:

“If it wasn’t for NAS my son wouldn’t be here today”.

James and Maureen were very happy to meet and give their views, even though it was years since they had engaged, as they valued the support from the NAS Moving Forward team so highly. Both

could see the difference it made to James but Maureen also highlighted how supportive the team were to families, to help build understanding of autism and how best to support family members.

"You don't realise the weight you've taken off my shoulders as a mum. It has meant so much to us. NAS threw us a lifeline and we grabbed it with both hands. NAS made it so easy for us."

Their experience with the NAS Moving Forward team was very different to the negative experiences they had with clinical services. They felt NAS's involvement had been literally life-changing. As Maureen said,

"When we came into the [NAS] office every single stress was off-loaded. Everyone was so welcoming and like family, from the person at reception to all the other staff we met. We just wanted, and needed, help and assistance and we couldn't have asked for more. They were so knowledgeable and always had examples of other people experiencing the issues we had and suggestions for how to help. We didn't know anything so it was really helpful. Before we found NAS I had sleepless nights and was chapping doors getting nowhere. Why did we not find out about NAS from CAMHS, the GP or psychiatrist? Why did we find out about it from the Job Centre? More services should have this information so people get the help they need."

For James, the added value of having support from people with expertise and understanding of autism made all the difference:

"80% of my knowledge about autism came from NAS, the rest when I got my diagnosis... It was exhausting playing two 'parts' but I learned to be myself... NAS have normalised disability, it's more acceptable... All my skills came from NAS really. It helps everyone in the family - if I'm feeling better everyone else's anxiety reduces too."

When their main contact at NAS left, James's contact with Moving Forward came to a natural end. He hasn't felt the need to contact NAS for further support or to participate in other programmes or activities like the social groups:

"I got what I needed... Moving Forward gave me confidence and it has been a catalyst for so many other things too."

Rebecca, 27

Rebecca joined Moving Forward in Year 1, taking part in group work, two work placements and 1:1 support from the NAS team and a volunteer mentor. I first met Rebecca during a focus group for the evaluation not long after she started, then an interview later in her Moving Forward journey and her positive progress in that time was marked. She knew what she wanted to do and was pursuing that aim, whilst working part-time and was much more comfortable and confident.

Rebecca struggled socially and, whilst she had online friends, she did not go out with friends in real life although she would like to do so. Her mum worried about this and they felt that Rebecca's late diagnosis (at 19) probably didn't help as there were not as many social opportunities for autistic young adults as there were for autistic children. One of her aims was - and still is - to become more confident about meeting people of her own age (Rebecca is comfortable talking to younger people and adults but finds it harder to talk to peers) and doing new things, recognising that this is something she needs to work on herself and it is not easy to know where to start.

"I want to socialise but how?"

I caught up with her and her Mum, Angie, to see how things were four years on. When I last met Rebecca she was working part-time database checking with OccuTrace, following a successful placement there via NAS Moving Forward. The MD was delighted with the quality of her work and would have been happy for her to work more shifts but Rebecca didn't want to take on too much as she was also completing a pre-access course prior to starting a BA in French and Spanish at the University of Strathclyde. Rebecca continued working one day a week at OccuTrace until March 2020 (lockdown) alongside her university studies. A change to the role - making telephone calls - was less appealing, so Rebecca chose to concentrate on her studies instead.

When we met, Rebecca was still at university - a real achievement given the pandemic, although it had not been without challenges. The Covid-19 pandemic hit when Rebecca was half way through her first year at university. Rebecca finds social situations (making small talk and making friends) difficult so she had focused her efforts to begin with on familiarising herself with the academic side of university rather than the social side. When learning went online, this became a more isolating experience. The university had provided a mentor to support Rebecca - they would talk about work and how she was handling it, etc. - but she was on her third one as they kept moving on to different roles. Whilst she understood why this happened, this was unsurprisingly frustrating as she just got used to someone when they moved on and she had to start again with someone new.

University was online throughout second year and it took a hybrid approach in third year (on campus once or twice a week). There was variability in the quality of online resources, which presented challenges and obviously speaking the language is a key element of learning, which was less easy to facilitate. Most language courses require students to have a year away to immerse themselves in the language. This was done virtually for all students during 2020 and 2021 but Rebecca was the only one to do it this year, as she found the prospect of going away too daunting.

Lockdown had undone some of the progress Rebecca had made, unfortunately, in terms of confidence in social or new situations. This was exacerbated by some family issues which significantly impacted on Rebecca. The virtual exchange was not great for Rebecca as she was matched with a number of other students who all wanted to practice English and there were no Spanish speaking classes, so she found it challenging to find the opportunities to speak much Spanish, compounded by time zone issues (they were based in Mexico).

To counteract this, Rebecca and Angie travelled to Palma in March this year to gain some verbal language experience and is looking for other opportunities for verbal practice. Because of this, and some online discussion about dissertation deadlines, Rebecca was quite stressed about her course when we met but she and her mum were heading off to the university to find out more about the dissertation requirements and put her mind at ease. Whilst Rebecca may have felt negative about progress with her studies, her attendance has been perfect and she had stuck with it, which is admirable given the circumstances. Lesser candidates would have given up well before then and Rebecca deserves real credit for that. I hope her one remaining year goes well for her and her next chapter is a rewarding one.

Melissa, 28

Melissa was diagnosed as autistic at a young age and has performed well academically, graduating with a History degree from the University of Strathclyde. I met Melissa after she had undertaken group work and 1:1 support from the NAS team, when she was seeking support with work experience and tips for securing employment.

"I liked the mock interviews, they were good, and the CV support. It was all helpful... A lot of employers don't want to accommodate your needs. It could be for different reasons but they blame it on lack of experience as that's easier. They're [NAS] limited in what they can do in terms of getting a job, there's only so much they can do for you."

Moving Forward also helped Melissa's knowledge and understanding of autism and her acceptance of it, as she had previously feared it carried stigma. She therefore felt she had more of a balanced view and "owned it" more.

One of the significant things NAS helped Melissa with was some of the bureaucracy around transitioning to a woman, such as changing her birth certificate, driving licence details, passport renewal and sorting out benefits.

"The NAS team were great, I couldn't have done all this without them, it's not easy. PIP made the most difference. The additional money was really helpful to me."

Melissa experiences anxiety and mental health issues so can find it difficult to voice concerns or negative opinions. She enjoys strong support from her friend group but other interactions can be more challenging. As a result, Melissa felt quite low about her future prospects prior to joining Moving Forward, but found the advice and support helpful albeit there may be wider challenges for her.

"I felt set up for failure before, more from a trans perspective than autism."

Volunteering for ten months (until the pandemic) with admin and telephone support for LGBT Health and Wellbeing was a positive experience for Melissa but she was anxious about being misgendered outwith an LGBT space. She was keen to use her History knowledge but found there to be few opportunities in this area so was considering an administrative role instead, although this was challenging without experience.

"There have been ups and downs but with NAS's help it's better. They have given me support when I needed it, which has been really great. I can't thank them enough, I've lost track of all the things they've helped me with. I don't know how much more they could help. They've made a big, noticeable, positive influence on my life and I'm glad they're around."

When we met, Melissa had been working at the Platform community theatre on a zero hours contract as an usher, etc., for the past month. She felt it was a nice organisation to work for and a popular venue so was hopeful it would work out well. A job with Glasgow Guarantee had fallen through, so it was great that she had found an alternative. She is still applying for admin roles when they come up and I'm sure Melissa will find her ideal role.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Concluding comments

Feedback from young people and stakeholders has been extremely positive for the Phase 5 NAS Moving Forward+ with Cashback for Communities project. The new element of the project for 12-15s not attending school was welcomed and worked well, as did the support for NEET 16-24s, despite the many challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic. Both elements were seen to be making a difference to the autistic young people being supported, even if there was some way still to go before they reached a positive destination. As highlighted in last year's report, both of these services were perceived by referrers to be unique and desperately needed for autistic young people and their families as this degree of tailored support and understanding is not available elsewhere.

Demand for the new element for YPNE has been evident, despite restricting this to Glasgow city only, and the extension to North Lanarkshire and 10+s in Phase 6 are positive steps. Whilst the NAS team knew there was a need, the degree to which these young people were isolated (both before and triggered by the pandemic) and the amount of support required to address this before other things could be progressed was underestimated. The team had always, rightly, anticipated a different approach would be required, but the additional time required to make progress - in terms of overall support time but also the amount of in-home support with travel time, etc. which impacts on the number of people who can be seen each day - was higher than expected. The pandemic has raised the profile of school non-attendance and it is hoped that the provision of support earlier (in terms of age and when experiencing difficulties) will help to reach young people before they become so isolated in future.

For many people, Covid-19 seems a long time ago now but the repeated waves of infection and restrictions to daily life have had a significant and sustained effect on the Moving Forward+ project in a number of different ways and these should be noted here so they are not forgotten. For example:

- Having to cancel all the events and promotion planned for World Autism Awareness Week, which would have kick-started referrals and awareness of Phase 5 and the new element of the project.
- Not being able to provide a service for new referrals for the first quarter, despite having some in the pipeline.
- The need to re-design all materials to provide support online instead of face to face.
- The focus of the project on more deprived young people was evident as the tools and connectivity for online engagement were not always easily available for young people and their families.
- Delay to staff recruitment, for the new post to work with the 12-15 year olds, which delayed initiation of the service further.
- Low referral rates as referring agencies took time to settle into their new way of working and consider referrals. Some were, in turn, experiencing lower referrals.
- Increased anxiety levels of autistic young people, which affected those who had already progressed to positive destinations and increased the reluctance of others to make to the move to employment, education or training. Whilst many members of the public may now feel like Covid-19 is just another part of life, before the vaccines were developed and administered, when death tolls were climbing, things felt more 'apocalyptic' and this was particularly acute and terrifying for many autistic young people.
- Lack or reduction of work placement and volunteering opportunities for young people because of lockdown restrictions and increased working from home for many workplaces.

- Young people preferring the 'safe space' of home and restrictions during the pandemic and not wishing to relinquish this and participate more fully in society once able to do so and/or finding this to be of greater sensory overload once it is less familiar.
- Fear of Covid-19's impact on themselves and/or loved ones significantly affecting what some autistic young people were willing and able to do.
- The wider NAS organisation was also affected financially by the pandemic, which required an office move. This took time to organise and waves of lockdown/high infection rates meant that staff 'return' to the office and client to face to face meetings was later than anticipated. The unknown nature of the Covid journey was frustrating to all concerned as just when things looked like they could return to face to face work, case numbers increased again, more than once.

Taking all of this into consideration, it is not surprising that the number of autistic young people who have been supported by NAS Moving Forward+ over Phase 5 is much lower than projected. The number of young people aged 12-15 not attending school supported was closer to targets, but these were not 'quick fix' cases as behaviours were more embedded, so have not progressed through the service to achieve positive destinations as quickly as anticipated. The lower number of referrals of NEET 16-24s has been marked, but the many compounding impacts of the pandemic have been noted above. It is also worth noting that progress for autistic young people is not necessarily linear as small setbacks for neurotypical people can have a bigger impact on autistic young people, particularly if they face multiple challenges as many of the participants do, which can impact on achieving or maintaining positive destinations.

However, the service was still delivered throughout the pandemic and was very much appreciated by participants, parents/carers, mentors and referrers/partners. The quality of service is there, but work needs to be done on achieving the numbers consistently. It is hoped that the NAS Moving Forward+ team will be able to consolidate progress with both the 10-15s and 16-24s in Phase 6 and it is understood that the numbers are already looking healthier.

5.2 Recommendations

Participants and stakeholders understood and appreciated what the NAS Moving Forward+ team is doing and the way in which it is doing it, so the key challenge for Phase 6 Cashback for Communities funding is to increase the number of autistic young people being supported and their progress into positive destinations.

A few suggestions for improvement were made by stakeholders and these are offered for consideration by the team:

- Consider awareness raising afresh to be more consistent and aim for a steadier flow of referrals. This could include more publicity/information leaflets of flyers on the project, as requested schools, and a regular programme of activities and reminders to maintain a presence with potential referrers.
- Given that support is more intensive at the start, there may be scope to take referrals closer to the end of funding - targeting specific issues such as anxiety, sharing information and potential partner services - to provide some positive impacts for people, albeit less than usual if funding does cease.
- Providing a 'handover' to parents/carers, schools or other stakeholders, with permission, to share what approaches or tools work with an individual to assist if/when issues arise, avoid relapse and maintain momentum.
- Consider a 3 or 6 month review after exit to help young people maintain progress.
- Greater clarity for referrers around the support provided and the need for/frequency of updates on progress.
- Pursuing other funding options so that postcode criteria are no longer a barrier to referral.
- More social groups, particularly for younger adults.

- Reducing the age to 10+ was also suggested, so it is great to see that happen in Phase 6.
- The mentoring element was perceived to be a beneficial element of the project by, and for, both mentors and mentees so it is unfortunate that it has been cut for Phase 6 as there is reduced funding available. Given its success and benefits, it would be helpful to consider if there is another way to fund or deliver this part of the service in future as it is a way to provide valuable 1:1 support on issues such as socialisation and independent travel which take time to achieve, are key priorities for young people and complement wider progress for individuals.
- NAS team to share methods, tools and approaches regularly to maximise skills and experience held within the team.