

---

**National Autistic Society  
Moving Forward+ with  
Cashback for Communities  
Year 2 Evaluation, July 2022**

**Clear as a Bell Research & Consultancy**

0780 350 3374

[nikki@clearasabellresearch.co.uk](mailto:nikki@clearasabellresearch.co.uk)

# 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 two years. The global Covid-19 pandemic had a massive impact on everyone 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.

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 first two years of funding and a final evaluation will be completed in 2023. It involved review of data gathered via surveys and staff, review of monitoring reports, discussions with staff and 23 individual interviews with young people (8), parents/carers (3), mentors (5) and partners/referrers (7).

## KEY FINDINGS

The NAS Moving Forward+ project was impacted significantly by the Covid-19 pandemic and its associated waves of infection and restrictions. This meant that, while a service was delivered - which was rated very highly by autistic young people and other stakeholders - the number of young people supported was not as high as expected and fewer positive outcomes have been achieved in the first two years of funding 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. Average 'marks out of 10' from a variety of stakeholders ranged from 8.7 to 9.67, for example.

The outcomes achieved were as follows:

	Year 1	Year 2	Total	%/n commenting
<i><b>Outcome 1: Building capacity and confidence</b></i>				
Young people report <b>increased confidence</b>	11	5	16	76%/21
Young people feel <b>able to do new things</b>	11	7	18	90%/20
Young people feel <b>more resilient</b>	8	2	10	50%/20
Stakeholders report increase in young people's <b>confidence</b>	91%	71%	83%	15 of 18
Young people report <b>positive changes in their behaviour</b>	11	4	15	79%/19

	Year 1	Year 2	Total	%/n commenting
Stakeholders report <b>positive</b> changes in young people's <b>behaviour</b>	91%	57%	78%	14 of 18
<i><b>Outcome 2: Developing physical and personal skills</b></i>				
Young people report an <b>increase</b> in their <b>skills</b>	10	7	17	81%/21
Stakeholders report <b>increase</b> in young people's <b>skills</b>	91%	57%	78%	14 of 18
<i><b>Outcome 3: Improvement in wellbeing</b></i>				
Young people <b>report increase in wellbeing</b> against SHANARRI	13	5	18	86%/21
Stakeholders report <b>increase</b> in young people's <b>wellbeing</b>	73%	86%	78%	14 of 18
<i><b>Outcome 4: Participating in activity to improve learning and positive destinations</b></i>				
Young people achieving a <b>positive destination</b>	6 (+7 in Yr2)	15	28	45%, 28 of 62
Young people <b>improving school attendance</b>	0	10	10	10 of 26
Young people <b>improving school attainment</b>	0	0	0	0 of 26
Employment	2 (+1 in Yr2)	0	3	3 of 36
Further Education (including remaining at/returning to school)	1 (+3 in Yr2)	2	6	6 of 36
Training	2 (+1 in Yr2)	2	5	5 of 36
Volunteering	1 (+2 in Yr2)	1	4	4 of 36
Young people take part in <b>training and learning</b> as part of programme	37	25	62	100% of 62
<i><b>Outcome 5: Contributing positively to communities</b></i>				
Young people <b>engage in activity</b> outwith the home and investigate/participate in opportunities in their community	7	4	11	50%/22
Other stakeholders report young people feel more able to <b>engage in activity</b> outwith the home and investigate/ participate in opportunities in their community	45%	29%	39%	7 of 18
<i><b>Outcome 6: Diverted from criminal behaviour or involvement in the criminal justice system</b></i>				
Young people feel <b>less</b> inclined to participate in <b>anti-social and/or criminal behaviour</b>	1	0	1	100%/1
Young people report they are <b>less vulnerable</b> to being exploited and/or manipulated by others	7	0	7	100%/7

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Stakeholders were supportive of what the NAS Moving Forward+ team is doing and the way in which it is doing it, so the key challenge for the final year of Phase 5 Cashback for Communities funding is to increase the number of autistic young people being supported - particularly in the 16-24 age group - and the progress towards positive destinations.

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

- More publicity/information leaflets of flyers on the project, particularly in schools.
- 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, to go even further upstream and help support young people during the transition to secondary school, i.e. to prepare them to face those challenges rather than help them address them once they had become established.
- Potential refinement of the mentor programme, such as:
  - clearer training around 'what makes a good mentor/how to do it well';
  - more information/reminders on the wider MF+ project; and
  - continue the opportunities for mentors/mentees to socialise, factoring in more sharing of knowledge during these and via other means (as not all mentors will want to or be able to attend social events).

# Contents

Acknowledgements .....	2
Executive Summary .....	3
1 Introduction.....	7
2 Method.....	10
3 Key findings.....	12
4 Case studies.....	28
5 Conclusions and recommendations .....	33

# 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 Year 2 of a 3-year tranche of funding (2020-2023). A final evaluation will be conducted and reported in 2023. This section provides a brief outline of the Cashback for Communities Programme, the Moving Forward+ project and highlights the significant impacts of the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic.

## 1.2 Background

### 1.2.1 Cashback for Communities Programme 2020 - 2023

The Scottish Government established the Cashback for Communities Programme to invest the proceeds of crime 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 is currently in Phase 5, supporting 24 projects. The total amount committed (until 2023) is £110million, administered by Inspiring Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Government.

Phase 5 specifically targets projects whose main aim is 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 Moving Forward+ project targets autistic young people who live in the 20%<sup>1</sup> 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 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.

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

The Moving Forward+ project is 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 is new for Phase 5, targeting autistic young people aged 12 - 15 in Glasgow who are not attending school. This new strand aimed at younger people built on the learning from earlier iterations of the project, where young people often spoke of their difficulties at school, so moved 'upstream'. 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, Skills Development Scotland, Jobcentreplus and Cashback partners. This meeting hears the young person's views, identifies or clarifies their support needs and whether the MF+ project is 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 will 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 is also offered if more appropriate. The curriculum includes learning around understanding autism and managing social confidence, anxiety etc. in addition to employability skills such as interview skills, CV preparation etc. Bespoke Police Scotland sessions around keeping safe on and offline focus 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 provides 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 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020, just a week before the new phase was about to start. This 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 not initiated until 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 number of referrals are 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. 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 Year 2, 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, 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.

### 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 at Year 2, 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. It is always helpful to retain flexibility and this was particularly apparent during the pandemic as no one knew how that would progress and what impacts it, and other world and more local issues, would have on the Moving Forward+ project and its participants.

One thing which was clear from Phase 4 of 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. This project was not so much about high numbers, but 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.

The number of different surveys used in Phase 4 were therefore reduced and content refined for Phase 5. The evaluation approach taken in practice pragmatically included four key elements:

- 23 individual interviews by Teams, Zoom or phone with young people (8), parents/carers (3), mentors (5) and partners/referrers (7);
- discussions with key staff members (individually and attending a team meeting) 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 monthly, 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 37 young people engaged with Moving Forward+ in Year 1 and 25 in Year 2. The profile of participants is detailed below.

**Table 1: Age**

Age	Year 1	Year 2	Total	% of total
10-15	11	15	26	42%
16-18	11	4	15	24%
19-24	15	6	21	34%
Total	37	25	62	

**Table 2: Gender**

Gender	Year 1	Year 2	Total	% of total
Female	7	4	11	18%
Male	30	20	50	81%
Non-binary	0	1	1	2%
Prefer not to say	0	0	0	0%
Total	37	25	62	

**Table 3: SIMD**

SIMD	Year 1	Year 2	Total	% of total
0-20%	27	20	47	76%
20-30%	6	0	6	10%
30-40%	2	0	2	3%
40-50%	0	2	2	3%
50-100%	2	3	5	8%
Total	37	25	62	

**Table 4: Local Authority Area**

Local Authority area	Year 1	Year 2	Total	% of total
East Ayrshire	1	0	1	2%
East Renfrewshire	1	0	1	2%
Falkirk	1	0	1	2%
Glasgow	28	22	50	81%
North Ayrshire	1	0	1	2%
North Lanarkshire	2	1	3	5%
Renfrewshire	3	2	5	8%
Total	37	25	62	

## 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 a number of 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. 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 NAS Moving Forward+ project and its staff have had on the young people they have supported over the past two years.

#### 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 can be a particularly common issue for autistic young people and it can be a significant barrier to them accessing opportunities in addition to contributing to social isolation, poor mental health and potentially increasing their vulnerability (in terms of their own behaviour and the behaviour of others towards them).

This was highlighted during the informal chat stage of assessing the needs of potential participants. For example, 84% of young people aged 16-24 logged in the informal chat survey responses (21 out of 25) cited anxiety and/or depression and 72% (18 out of 25) low self-confidence/self-esteem as issues they face, with 76% (19 out of 25) and 60% (15 out of 25) citing maintaining an active social life and making friends as issues for them.

Anxiety and/or depressions was also an issue for nearly all of those aged 12-15 logged in the informal chat (95%, 19 out of 20). Low confidence/self-esteem was an issue for 80% (16) and communicating with peers (85%, 17), challenging or aggressive behaviour (85%, 17) and sensory

issues (90%, 18) will also contribute to and add a degree of complexity to developing confidence and resilience.

Increasing confidence was the second highest priority for those aged 16-24 completing the informal chat (52%, 13 participants out of 25) after securing paid employment (64%, 16 out of 25) and 36% (9) added they wished to become more confident socially. 36% (9) gave increasing confidence generally as the main issue they wanted to address when they had their initial chat with the NAS team, just second to securing paid employment (40%, 10).

The Moving Forward+ project 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 are designed to raise awareness around online safety, county lines, etc., thus reducing vulnerability and risk-taking behaviour and increasing positive choices.

In the first two years of the project, there has been some progress in young people reporting increased confidence (16), feeling able to do new things (18), feeling more resilient (10) and reporting positive changes in their behaviour (15). A high proportion of stakeholders who commented also reported seeing an increase in their young person's confidence and positive changes in their behaviour.

The starting point of each young person also needs to be considered when interpreting these figures. For example, NAS MF+ staff reported that the 12-15 year old participants had not been attending school for some time so were more isolated and some were extremely fragile. They may therefore be seen to have further to go in terms of improving confidence and capacity. Their increased isolation and reliance on parents also meant that a 'softly, softly' approach was required to build trust in the first instance before any substantive work could be done and progress made, even in terms of such simple things as speaking to the young person directly (rather than through a parent) or meeting face to face. In light of this, any perceived improvement in confidence and capacity can be viewed as a significant achievement for them and NAS MF+, with 'quick fixes' being very unlikely.

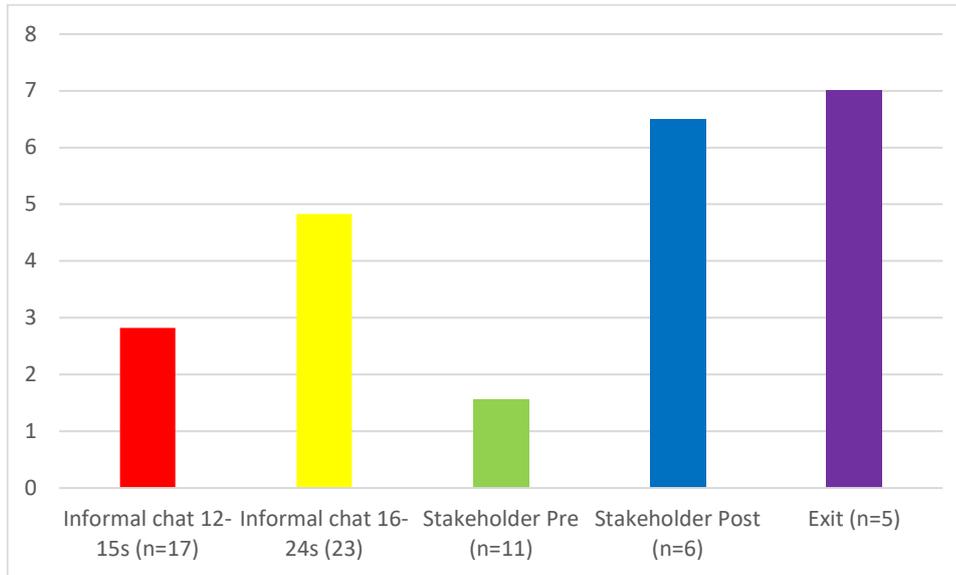
**Table 5: Outcome 1, Building capacity and confidence**

	Year 1	Year 2	Total	%/n commenting
Young people report increased confidence	11	5	16	76%/21
Young people feel able to do new things	11	7	18	90%/20
Young people feel more resilient	8	2	10	50%/20
Stakeholders report increase in young people's confidence	91%	71%	83%	15 of 18
Young people report positive changes in their behaviour	11	4	15	79%/19
Stakeholders report positive changes in young people's behaviour	91%	57%	78%	14 of 18

### 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 on this vital issue for those who were able to comment, which was perceived to be a priority area for improvement by participants themselves and stakeholders.

**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?**



Five young people have completed the exit survey and they were asked how their self-confidence compared now to when they started Moving Forward+: 1 felt it was the same, 3 a little better and 1 much better. Stakeholders who completed the 'after' questionnaire were asked the same question about their young person: 1 said a little better and 6 said much better.

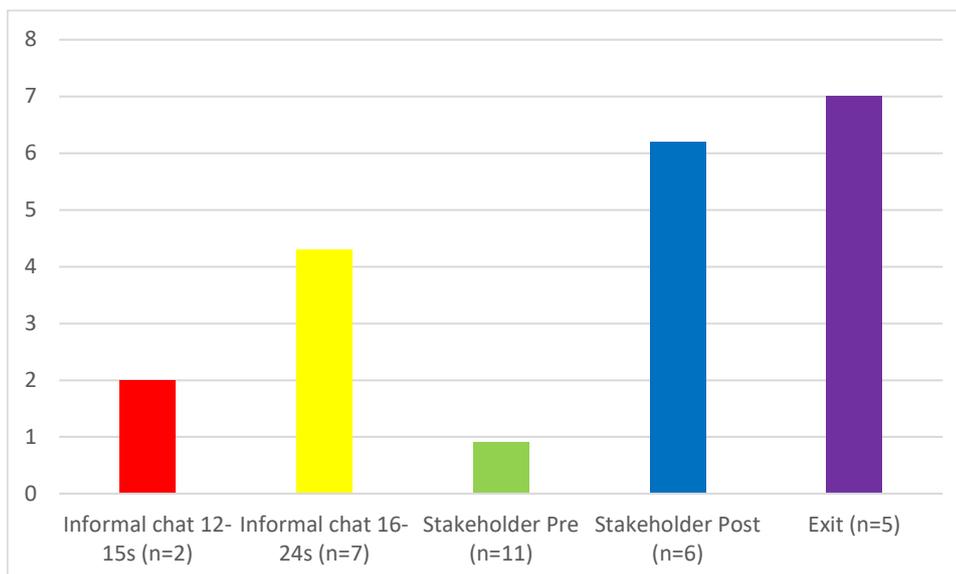
#### **Feeling able to do new things**

All 5 young people completing the exit survey said they were able to do new things because of Moving Forward+. All 6 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. Hopefully fuller responses by the end of Year 3 will provide a more robust picture.

**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+: 3 said a little better and 2 much better. Two stakeholders felt their young person's resilience had got a little better and 4 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+. The following changes were noted:

- All (5) said their positive daily routines had improved a little.
- All reported improvements in getting out the house (60%, 3, a lot; 40%, 2, a little).
- Anxiety levels had improved a lot for 20% (1) and a little for 60% (3).
- 80% (4) reported improvements in coping with social situations (20% a lot, 60% a little).
- 80% (4) had also improved communicating their needs (20% a lot, 60% a little).
- 80% (4) said their sleeping pattern had improved a little.
- 40% (2) said their physical activity/fitness levels had improved a lot and the same proportion had improved a little.
- 60% (3) had improved their listening skills (20% a lot, 40% a little).
- 60% (3) had improved their positive approach/thinking (20% a lot, 40% a little).
- 50% (2) of the 4 who commented felt their time management skills had improved a lot.
- There was a more mixed picture around healthy eating, with 20% (1) improving a lot, the same improving a little or getting a little worse and 40% (2) staying the same.
- Weight had improved a lot for 1 person, a little for another person and stayed the same for the other 3.
- 40% (2) reported a little improvement in their anger management, but 20% (1) reported it had deteriorated a little.
- 20% (1) felt they were a lot more aware of their behaviour.

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

Linking to Outcome 1, participants 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.

Ten young people in Year 1 and 7 in Year 2 reported an increase in their skills. Stakeholders also reported improvements - 100% of stakeholders in Year 1 and 45% in year 2.

**Table 6: Outcome 2, Developing physical and personal skills**

	Year 1	Year 2	Total	%/n commenting
Young people report an increase in their skills	10	7	17	81%/21
Stakeholders report increase in young people's skills	91%	57%	78%	14 of 18

### New or improved skills

All 5 young people who completed the exit survey said they feel able to do new things and have new and/or improved skills because of Moving Forward+. New things they were able to do included making friends, volunteering, travelling independently, starting a new sport, embarking upon a course or paid employment. New skills included practical skills, motivation, CV development and critical thinking skills. Improved skills included teamwork, organisation, listening, socialising, travelling independently and understanding situations.

Stakeholders who completed the 'after' survey also gave a variety of suggestions of ways in which their young person had gained new skills, largely echoing the ones listed above but also including things like being more comfortable around people, learning to drive, volunteering in a charity shop with key holding responsibilities to open the shop and serving customers, outdoor activities and meeting people in real life not just online, etc. One person was no longer selectively mute, which was a huge step forward, and confidence and communication skills were stressed as having improved.

### 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: safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included. 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.

The Moving Forward+ project's different elements and approach aim to support each of these 7 aspects, as follows:

Safe	Police Scotland inputs to raise awareness of potential dangers on and offline, and provide practical advice to help young people stay safe.
Healthy	Confronting the barriers that lead to poor mental health, in particular, for autistic young people, in addition to advice around healthier sleep and activity behaviours where 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.

A total of 18 young people (13 in Year 1 and 5 in Year 2) reported increases in their wellbeing against the SHANARRI indicators and the majority of stakeholders who gave their views noted an increase too (100% in Year 1, 63% in Year 2).

**Table 7: Outcome 3, Improvement in wellbeing**

	Year 1	Year 2	Total	%/n commenting
Young people report increase in wellbeing against SHANARRI	13	5	18	86%/21
Stakeholders report increase in young people's wellbeing	73%	86%	78%	14 of 18

### 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. Whilst the number of responses is low and should be treated with caution, the feedback is positive.

**Table 8: SHANARRI survey responses**

	YP Exit survey (n=5)	Stakeholders 'after' (n=6)
<b>Safe: Staying safe, e.g. independent travel, health &amp; 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)</b>		
Better	60%	100%
Same	40%	0%
Worse	0%	0%
<b>Healthy: Healthier choices and behaviours, e.g. reducing isolation/making friends/building social networks, sleeping better, losing weight, exercising more</b>		
Better	100%	83%
Same	0%	17%
Worse	0%	0%
<b>Achieving: Building confidence and self-esteem, learning and developing new skills</b>		
Better	100%	100%
Same	0%	0%
Worse	0%	0%
<b>Nurtured: Feeling supported to fulfil your potential, e.g. by peers and staff team, as well as being connected to relevant support services elsewhere</b>		
Better	80%	100%
Same	20%	0%
Worse	0%	0%
<b>Active: Being supported and encouraged to take part in activities, which gives you confidence to take part in more (linked to healthy above)</b>		
Better	80%	100%
Same	20%	0%
Worse	0%	0%
<b>Respected: Having opportunities &amp; encouragement to take on responsible roles in your community, feeling you have a say in decisions which affect you &amp; are more confident/supported to express your opinions</b>		
Better	60%	67%
Same	40%	33%
Worse	0%	0%
<b>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.</b>		
Better	60%	83%
Same	40%	17%
Worse	0%	0%
<b>Included: Feeling included in society - especially learning, training &amp; work environments - and more able to overcome any perceived or actual barriers from being on the spectrum</b>		
Better	80%	100%
Same	20%	0%
Worse	0%	0%

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

All of the 37 participants in year 1 and 25 in Year 2 have taken part in learning and training in different forms as appropriate throughout their time with Moving Forward+.

Ten 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.

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 have been very popular ways to experience the working world and hone future plans. Some young people have also been extremely anxious about the impact of Covid-19 on themselves and fear passing it on to their families, so this has curtailed activities. A small number of employment, volunteering, Further Education and training opportunities have been secured, however, as shown in the table below. This includes participants taking up training opportunities with Cashback partners Celtic FC, volunteering with Oxfam and a two year contract with the BBC, for example.

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

	Year 1	Year 2	Total	%/n commenting
Young people achieving a positive destination	6 (+7 in Yr2)	15	28	45%, 28 of 62
Young people improving school attendance	0	10	10	10 of 26
Young people improving school attainment	0	0	0	0 of 26
Employment	2 (+1 in Yr2)	0	3	3 of 36
Further Education (including remaining at/returning to school)	1 (+3 in Yr2)	2	6	6 of 36
Training	2 (+1 in Yr2)	2	5	5 of 36
Volunteering	1 (+2 in Yr2)	1	4	4 of 36
Young people take part in training and learning as part of programme	37	25	62	100% of 62

### 3.2.6 Outcome 5: Young people contribute positively to their communities

Eleven 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.

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.

**Table 10: Outcome 5, Contributing positively to communities**

	Year 1	Year 2	Total	%/n commenting
Young people engage in activity outwith the home and investigate/participate in opportunities in their community	7	4	11	50%, 22
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%	39%	7 of 18

Whilst the 5 young people completing the exit survey did not feel they had more links or connections to their community/ies, 60% (3) felt they were interacting with their community/ies more, for example by attending groups or events, and the same proportion felt they were contributing to their community/ies more by volunteering or coaching.

Two-thirds (4) of the 6 stakeholders who completed the 'after' survey felt their young person had more links or connections to their community/ies and interaction with their community/ies. One (17%) 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.

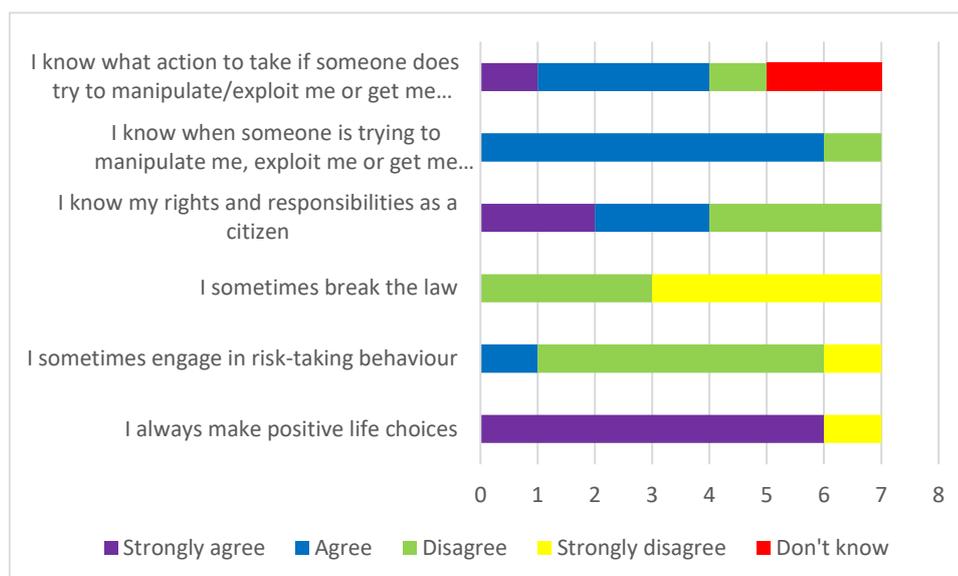
The focus of NAS's Moving Forward+ project has been largely preventative in nature. The team has worked to raise awareness and understanding of these issues with participants, equip them with insights to enable them to identify potential threats, behaviours or challenging situations and therefore be 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 and further sessions are planned for Year 3. 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.

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

	Year 1	Year 2	Total	%/n commenting
Young people feel less inclined to participate in anti-social and/or criminal behaviour	1	0	1	100%, 1
Young people report they are less vulnerable to being exploited and/or manipulated by others	7	0	7	100%, 7

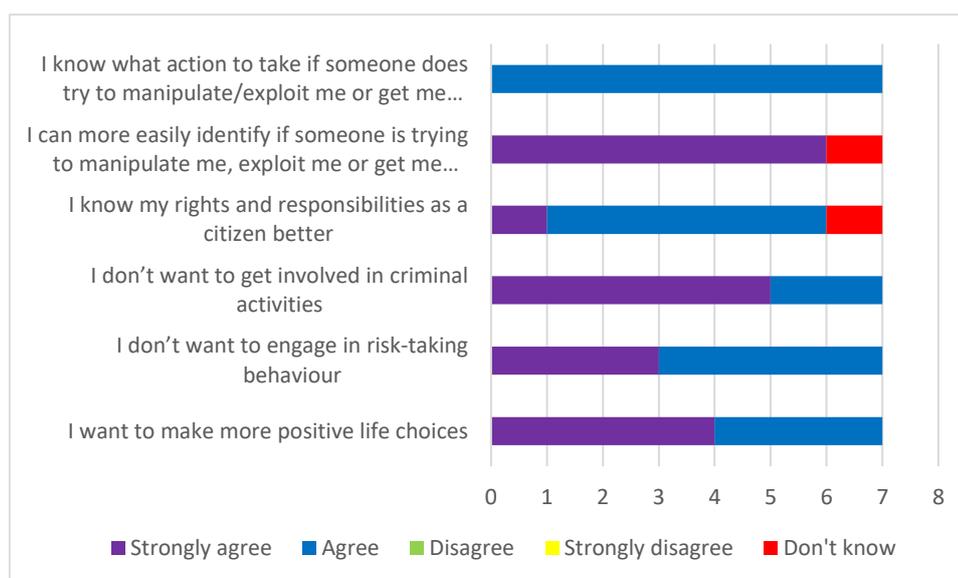
Police Scotland worked with a group of 7 autistic young people aged 16-24 in January 2021. A questionnaire was issued to the participants before the Police Scotland session and afterwards to try to gain a sense of any shift in knowledge and views as a direct result of the input from Police Scotland. 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 3: Responses BEFORE the Police Scotland session**



*n=7*

**Figure 4: 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 5 agreed they were making more positive life choices.
- All 5 agreed they understood their rights and responsibilities better.
- 80% (4) agreed they know when someone is trying to manipulate or exploit them.
- 80% (4) agreed they know what action to take if someone does try to manipulate or exploit them.
- 20% (1) agreed they were involved in less risk-taking behaviour.
- 20% (1) agreed they were involved in less criminal behaviour.
- The balance felt no change was required (as they were already doing these things).

## 3.3 Additional feedback on the Moving Forward+ project

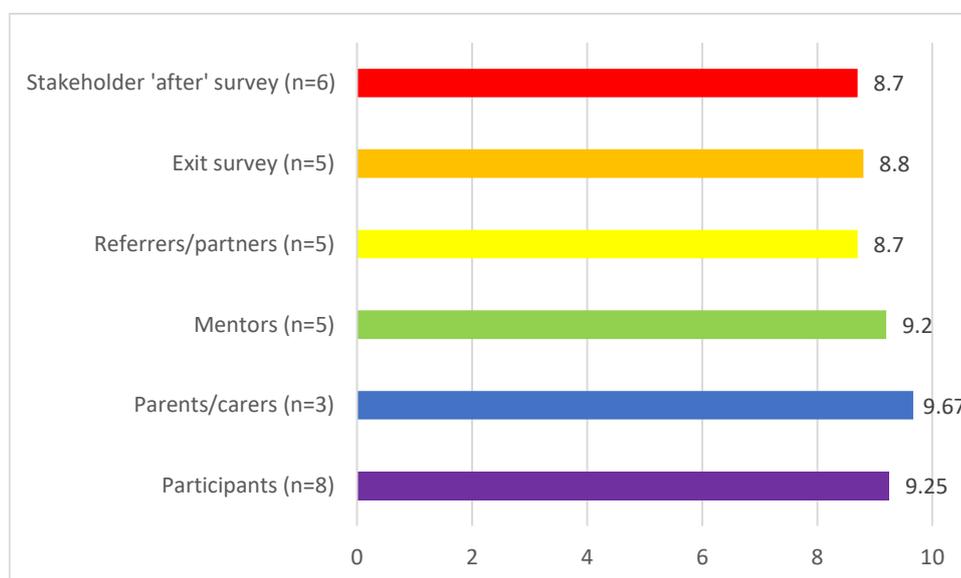
### 3.3.1 Overview

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. There was very little criticism of the project and research participants found it challenging to make suggestions for improvement, which reinforces the positive views expressed.

### 3.3.2 Marks out of 10

For example, those who gave their views during the primary research (surveys and interviews) were asked to rate Moving Forward+ in terms of 'marks out of 10' (where 0 is low and 10 is high), with the lowest average of 8.7 for referrers/stakeholders after survey and a high of 9.67 for parents/carers.

**Figure 5: 'Marks out of 10' given during surveys and interviews**



### 3.3.3 Holistic, person-centred approach

It is clear that the NAS Moving Forward+ project team continues to take a holistic, person-centred approach to supporting their young people and their parents/carers or other stakeholders. This was evident from every single conversation with stakeholders and all of the 5 young people who completed the exit survey felt the project was tailored well to autistic young people. This, along with the specialism in autism, was perceived to be what set the NAS MF+ project apart from any other service provider as far as stakeholders were concerned.

*"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

*"[participant] felt understood."* Stakeholder

*"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

*"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

This means that progress may be slower to achieve - particularly when some participants are starting from a very isolated, vulnerable position - but that participants are sticking with the programme, seeing progression and feel more hopeful about reaching their goals.

### 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 perceived 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.

*"Communications are brilliant - if our key contact is going on holiday, I get linked to someone else, who are also great. If we need to ask anything they get back to us very quickly. The NAS team have been invaluable to us."* Parent

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/insights which are helpful. 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 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 Flexibility

The project was seen to have responded to the changes due to Covid well and, linked to the point about being holistic, were perceived to be flexible in how young people could engage to ensure they were comfortable, whilst still encouraging them to try something different when they thought they were ready to try a group or social activity, for example. Whilst some young people preferred meeting online, others preferred the opportunity to meet their mentors, for example, face to face. Some of the 12-15 year old participants needed a very gentle start to participation, communicating via their parents, moving on to meeting with their parents prior to meeting MF+ staff by themselves. It was clear that the MF+ team let the young people set the pace, knowing that pushing too hard or fast can be counter-productive.

*“[staff member] gets it, she has a real understanding of autism and brings a lot to the service as an individual. Her approach is lovely and she is very understanding which empowers young people.” Referrer*

### 3.3.6 The new 12-15 not attending school service

This is restricted to Glasgow city only, but demand has been strong for this service as young people 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 quite dramatic (more pupils, different teachers, moving classrooms, more homework, peer pressure, bullying, sensory challenges, etc.). It is clear that some of these young people have become extremely isolated, withdrawn and have complex needs, so support will be more time intensive and longer-term before positive outcomes can be achieved. The challenge was seen to be to build their confidence and knowledge of themselves to then be able to cope with situation better. This obviously 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.

*“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's definitely been useful, it's helped me to accept my autism more. We talked it through and I understand it better. It's good to have someone to talk to if I feel bad and I think it's helped my confidence."* Young person aged 12-15

### 3.3.7 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 orbits were largely restricted to family members and being at home. Stakeholders were thrilled to see this progression and were hopeful that this would continue on a positive trajectory given time and they had confidence that NAS MF+ would provide the right support to help young people get there.

*"X still won't leave the house but he is trying new things and pushing himself a lot more."* Parent 12-15 year old young person

*"X has been forthcoming and chatty with [staff member] and that is a big achievement for him."* Parent of 12-15 year old young person

*"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've had a mentor for 4 weeks now and I enjoy the meetings every week as it gives my life some structure. I went for a haircut this week which I usually find quite stressful, but if I want to be able to volunteer I need to try new things outwith my comfort zone. Even though this is only week 4 I feel like I see small changes that are good and it's impacting my attitude. I hope to get a volunteering role soon to get me out the house. [staff member] said joining a social group would be something that could improve my confidence so she is looking into that."* Young person aged 16-24

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

*"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 of 16-24 year old

*"It's going really well [for the pupil], I know they [NAS] organised work experience. They [pupil] found Covid very difficult so it was very challenging for the family. The project has been very supportive for the family too, amazingly good and a great option for the parents too, having someone to talk to. That is definitely missing for parents otherwise."* Referrer

*"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

*“It helps me because I feel I’ve done as much as I can and not let them down by getting them [via NHA MF+] onto the path of progress to the best of their abilities, whatever that is. I’d be lost without them.” Referrer*

### 3.3.8 The NAS team

What really helped to make a difference to young people and stakeholders was the quality of NAS MF+ staff. All were mentioned at various points in the interviews and all were rated very highly indeed. Victoria, Kerry and Teri were key contacts for a lot of the stakeholders interviewed given that the 12-15 service and mentoring have been the two busier 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 in particular - 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.

### 3.3.9 Mentoring

Mentors were extremely positive about their experiences of mentoring for NAS MF+ and most were keen to do more. Both Kerry and Teri were rated very highly by mentors, as being supportive, proactive and responsive. The shift to the online form 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 appreciated.

*“If there are any issues or you have a question or need anything, you just need to contact them and will find the support is there.” 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*

Mentors and mentees seemed to enjoy their sessions and positive comments were made on useful resources such as booklets on assertiveness and confidence, CV templates.

*“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*

Whilst some activities were cancelled because of Covid, mentors appreciated the effort made to provide opportunities for networking, such as meeting the alpacas and 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*

### 3.3.10 Recommending MF+ to others

All stakeholders were asked if they would recommend the project to others and all said that would, with some saying that they had already! 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.

### 3.3.11 Suggestions for improvement

As noted above, there were very few suggestions for improvement. These include:

- 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.
- More social groups, particularly for younger adults.
- 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.
- 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! 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).
- 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.
- 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.

*"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

- 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, so they agree any timeframe for feedback, be that a regular interval or when something substantive is noted.
- Reducing the age to 10+ was also suggested, to help support young people during the transition to secondary school.

*"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

- 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.

*“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*

## 4 Case studies

### 4.1 Year One

Please note that all participants have consented to share their stories and some have preferred to use a different name to their own.

#### David, 23

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 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. At the time of interview, 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 involves working in multiple productions, including Eastenders.

#### Kevin, 18

Kevin joined MF+ in early 2021, and was interviewed for this case study in Year One and Year Two as activity straddled both years. He was quickly taking part in group work and being supported by a mentor. Kevin had been at college but stopped after the pandemic moved things online and this was tough for him as he wanted to learn. His confidence and self-esteem was low, particularly in social situations with peers. Kevin can find situations anxious or difficult to navigate, but he was keen to work out what to do next.

He didn't hang about! Half-way through group work, he was accepted onto a 3 week hospitality programme run by Action for Children which opened up dialogue with Diageo about a 6 month paid internship. This took a bit longer to organise than first thought, so Kevin participated in the Celtic Foundation 10 week course while he was waiting. He's a huge Celtic FC fan, so this was ideal, especially as he made friends there and enjoyed the variety of the curriculum, plus the opportunity to volunteer at Celtic Park.

*"I look and feel more confident and I've got a pal now."*

The Diageo internship was part of their 'We Are All Able' programme for people with additional support needs, based at one of their warehouses. Kevin was on the pallet line and was delighted to be working and earning a good salary. It wasn't always easy for Kevin as there were strict health and safety rules and different personalities of colleagues to negotiate but the NAS MF+ team helped to support the dialogue around understanding each other better, which helped Kevin

to settle into the role. He has learned a lot and enjoyed the work, so was hoping there may be other opportunities when his internship finishes.

*"It's great experience, I'm very lucky. I'm glad I challenged myself. It's taught me that it takes time for things to fall into place, I need to be patient and get people on board. NAS have been excellent support for me. I wouldn't be getting stuck in without NAS. It's good to have someone advocating for me."*

## 4.2 Year Two

### Aidan, 22

Aidan lives in supported accommodation in Glasgow and joined Moving Forward+ about a year ago. He started college during lockdown but found it difficult to continue as so much was online and many students didn't engage, so the numbers were low and it wasn't a great experience.

Aidan was around 10 or 11 when he received his autism diagnosis but felt Moving Forward+ had given him a better understanding of his condition. He took part in group work with 6 or 7 others and found it interesting and even fun! Aidan has also had 1:1 support from the NAS team and a volunteer mentor. He has enjoyed meeting his mentor and benefitting from another person's perspective outside his support worker and family members.

Work with his mentor has focussed around social support and Aidan finds independent travel challenging. There is no-one of a similar age group in his accommodation so Aidan also enjoyed the 10 week course with Celtic FC as he had become *"out of the habit of interacting with other people"*. Whilst he enjoyed the course, he wished it had been longer as he prefers face to face meetings and a lot of contact in the last couple of years has been online or by phone. Aidan has experienced high levels of anxiety and it can be challenging to access support as services are so stretched.

Aidan is really into music so NAS had set up a meeting with the Prince's Trust to explore the possibility of a music course and he was looking forward to hearing more about that.

*"I think I'm engaging in more than I did. I'm going to the gym and going out more, so progressing incrementally from where I was. Working with NAS has a lot to do with it, they're very encouraging and very person centred. Celtic was a success - I wanted more so that's a sign of success! I've made positive steps but it can be a struggle so I've a wee bit to go... My family have seen a big change in me too."*

### Carson, 20

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 has received mentoring support for around a year. Mentoring support has focussed on developing a CV and working on college applications in particular.

At the time of interview, Carson was considering undertaking a 6 month HNC course in make up with Glam Candy, which is hosting a course with support for autistic students, which sounded an ideal route in for Carson. If they wanted, they could then continue to HND level at college.

*"I feel NAS helped and supported me. I know what I want to do now and feel ready to do it."*

Carson is a creative and artistic individual who spoke enthusiastically of the creative social group they participate in with NAS. This had largely taken place on Teams but they were looking forward to meeting soon in real life, perhaps at the cat café! The group has grown from 2 or 3 members to

4 or 5 others and everyone creates something for the theme set for each session, using whatever media they wish.

The biggest difference Moving Forward+ and the NAS team had made to Carson was improved confidence and providing a network of support through the staff team, peers and mentor.

*“What difference has Moving Forward+ made to me? The biggest one is my confidence I think. My family can see how much it has helped my confidence too. It (taking part) was nerve-wracking at first but over time it got better, when it was more familiar.”*

Time management is also a key skill that Carson has developed through their time with the project.

### **Daniel, 25**

Daniel joined Moving Forward+ in 2021 after a Creative Media Studies course at college, which was delayed because of the pandemic and not a great success for him. Daniel was diagnosed at primary school and attended a special school in later years. He enjoys writing and woodwork but can find it hard to motivate himself into action.

MF+ has helped Daniel to work out what he wants to do and equip him for job searching. He is currently volunteering at the Oxfam book shop, which he enjoys and it exceeded his expectations, surprised that he felt comfortable using the till. He feels more competent now when interacting with customers, although felt he doesn't have a deeper interest in or knowledge of books despite being an avid reader of things in which he is interested.

Daniel is completing group work face to face and has also received 1:1 and mentoring support to build a CV. It can be challenging to seek out help so the scheduled sessions via MF+ provide a structure for Daniel to be well supported and he feels able to ask for clarification or help if he needs to do so. He's also enjoying the NAS craft-based social group with a different topic each week for participants to create something. He doesn't have an issue with social skills when with people, but finds it can be tiring to maintain friendships.

Whilst he acknowledges there are challenges to moving forward into the world of work, Daniel feels more hopeful now than he did when he started MF+. He's looking forward to completing the MF+ project, more volunteering opportunities, developing his CV and looking for jobs, perhaps near Oxfam.

### **John J, 17**

John had negative experiences at school so his attendance suffered and he fell behind his peers in his learning as a result, which in turn affected his attendance. He was referred to MCR Pathways just before the first Covid-19 lockdown so could only attend once and was referred to NAS and CAMHS after lockdown. He hasn't had a formal diagnosis yet because of waiting times but it seems to be the prevailing view of school staff and family members that John is autistic, in addition to being dyspraxic, so his pastoral care teacher referred him to NAS.

The big issues for John have been to get out and do something without his mum as he is very socially isolated, and to find something he would like to do in the future. John is very protective of his mum, who has had health challenges. John exhibits stimming behaviour, particularly when stressed. He has also been keen to get fit again - he was the Player of the Year at primary school and loves football. He would like to get into football coaching, ideally with Rangers FC as he is a big fan.

John has been meeting [staff member] for outside walks for over a year now and they were just about to meet to visit McDonalds together for the first time at the time of interview. It has taken a long time to build trust with John, starting with phone calls to his mum as he doesn't like Zoom and wouldn't go on camera before progressing to outside walks with his mum. Lockdown restrictions have obviously had an impact on what has been possible to do, as well as what John is

comfortable doing so things have moved at his pace. John will go out if there is a clear purpose but spends most of his time in the house with his mum, where he feels safe. John hasn't had any benefits since he left school so NAS has also helped with PIP forms and is looking into a free bus pass for John.

*"[staff member] is such a lovely person and very flexible. It's clearly all about John and it goes at his pace. She's the right personality to help him and he would refuse if he didn't like her. I hope this is the start of something good for John. Without [staff member] I'd just be sitting at the traffic lights with John, with no other options. This gives me hope. John feels that too."* Mum, Gillian

## John S, 17

John was referred to NAS Moving Forward+ by his pastoral care teacher. John hasn't attended school for two years, since the pandemic hit, and has been participating in Moving Forward+ for around a year. He was bullied at school and misbehaved to get out of class. John recognised it would have been helpful to have more support at school and has enjoyed the 1:1 support from [staff member] as he didn't feel comfortable in group settings.

*"If it wasn't for [staff member] I don't know what we would have done, it was a real struggle but she's helping him. She's a gem. She phones John every week and has helped him through some hard times in the last couple of months. He's comfortable talking to her and she's very nice, she talks to John for ages... You can see a visible improvement in John after each call. He's got things off his chest and is happy that he's spoken to [staff member]. His mental health is poor and [staff member] checks in with him, which CAMHS doesn't do. I think it's a boost to his confidence and he's trying new things - new food and going out more. He wouldn't go out before and now he can."* Mum, Angela

John wasn't diagnosed with autism until he was nearly 15 but won't tell people about his diagnosis which can mean that people misunderstand his behaviour. For example, John had a job interview with Sainsbury's at Christmas time but he couldn't make eye contact and was unsuccessful.

*"It's definitely been very useful. I understand autism better now, after we talked it through. It's helped me to accept my autism more. It's good to have someone to talk to if I feel bad. It's helped me to feel more confident too."*

Security (at events/clubs) or football coaching is what John would love to do, and there may be an opportunity for John to participate in the Celtic Foundation 10 week Cashback programme activities. He was due to go for an interview to see if it was appropriate after we spoke.

## Lewis, 21

Lewis was studying for an NC in Media when the pandemic hit and he found it too challenging to complete the course. He discovered NAS Moving Forward+ in the summer of 2021 and was keen to access support around finding paid employment, as he had been looking for a job since the pandemic, without success. Lewis received his autism diagnosis when he was 5, so had a good understanding of autism prior to starting Moving Forward+.

Lewis took part in a group and 1:1 support from NAS team members. He has also been volunteering at Oxfam music store and at Glasgow Film Theatre. Lewis has been supported with developing his CV and interview skills so feels more confident about finding paid employment now. He feels he already had good leadership and organisational skills but MF+ has helped him to develop his communication skills and the volunteering opportunities have provided useful experience in customer-facing roles. He is hoping to secure a part-time role, possibly in retail.

*"I've really enjoyed it (Moving Forward+)."*

Lewis has also enjoyed NAS social groups, which have offered a wide range of activities with peers, such as go karting, movies, laser tag and opportunities to socialise with peers in town.

## 5 Conclusions and recommendations

### 5.1 Concluding comments

The feedback from young people, parents/carers and referrers/partners has been extremely and wholeheartedly positive for the Phase 5 NAS Moving Forward+ with Cashback for Communities project. Both the new element of the project - 12-15s not attending school - and the tried and tested approach from Phase 4 - the NEET 16-24s - received very positive feedback and 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. 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 is not available elsewhere.

Demand for the new element for autistic young people aged 12-15 not attending school has been evident, despite restricting this to Glasgow city only. What was perhaps not quite so expected was the degree to which these young people were isolated, anxious and the very small orbit they had, often restricting themselves to interactions with family only and not going anywhere much beyond their own home. This has required a very gentle approach, at the young person's own pace, to establish trust and build a working relationship before they feel comfortable doing things others may take for granted, like having a direct conversation (rather than via a parent), turning on a webcam or meeting face to face without a parent. These are all significant steps forward for these individuals but illustrate the pace of change and the distance to be travelled in order to 'count' as a positive destination for the purposes of this programme. However, this support is perceived to be a lifeline for these young people and their families.

The Covid-19 pandemic and 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. 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.
- 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 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.
- 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 the first two years of funding 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 so have not progressed through the service 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.

On the upside, a service was still delivered and was appreciated by participants, parents/carers, mentors and referrers/partners. The mentoring support, in particular, was a thriving element of the service to the older age group. It is hoped that the NAS Moving Forward+ team will be able to consolidate progress with both the 12-15s and 16-24s in the third and final year of funding, now that they have moved and are up to speed in terms of online, face to face or hybrid approaches. It is noted that there is always a challenge towards the end of a project in terms of balancing promotion to achieve referrals whilst not over-committing to young people with more complex needs who need a longer period of support, in case funding is not in place for 2023 onwards.

## 5.2 Recommendations

Stakeholders were supportive of what the NAS Moving Forward+ team is doing and the way in which it is doing it, so the key challenge for the final year of Phase 5 Cashback for Communities funding is to increase the number of autistic young people being supported - particularly in the 16-24 age group - and the progress towards positive destinations.

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

- More publicity/information leaflets of flyers on the project, particularly in schools.
- 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, to go even further upstream and help support young people during the transition to secondary school, i.e. to prepare them to face those challenges rather than help them address them once they had become established.
- Potential refinement of the mentor programme, such as:
  - clearer training around 'what makes a good mentor/how to do it well';
  - more information/reminders on the wider MF+ project; and
  - continue the opportunities for mentors/mentees to socialise, factoring in more sharing of knowledge during these and via other means (as not all mentors will want to or be able to attend social events).