WCVA Active Inclusion Fund Evaluation

Thematic Case Studies

March 2020
Introduction

1. The Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) Active Inclusion Fund (AIF) supports suitably qualified organisations to help people who have, or continue to, experience challenged circumstances towards and into work.

2. This is achieved through a combination of help in acquiring soft and life skills with more formal help in moving towards work, for example, in preparing CVs and learning to manage job applications, and through experiential activities such as volunteering. A proportion of participants are supported through work placements and into longer term employment.

3. The evaluation of phases 1 and 2 of AIF ran from 2016 to 2020. The evaluation yielded insight into good practice in helping people in ‘hard to reach’ groups that might inform any successor arrangement, and which could have wider relevance in supporting people in challenged circumstances towards or into work. These case studies record aspects of good practice encountered during the evaluation, and particularly from field work in engaging with AIF beneficiaries (organisations funded to provide support) and with participants in receipt of support and help. The five are:

   1) Innovation in what works in initially engaging participants

   2) Achieving sustainable employment outcomes

   3) Supporting participants with complex needs

   4) Engaging small beneficiaries

   5) The benefits of supporting mixed age groups

4. There is an accompanying final evaluation report (WCVA Active Inclusion Fund Evaluation Phase 1 and 2 Final Report, March 2020), an executive summary (WCVA Active Inclusion Fund Evaluation: Phase 1 and 2 Final Report Executive Summary and Recommendations) and a set of five case studies that record individual experiences during and post participation in AIF.

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Thematic Case Study 1: Innovation in what works in initially engaging participants

1. The issue

1.1. The evaluation of phases 1 and 2 of the Active Inclusion Fund (AIF) judged it effective in supporting people in challenged circumstances. However, some AIF beneficiaries funded to provide support identified challenges in initially engaging sufficient numbers of participants, or finding participants that met the programme criteria. Some of these organisations put considerable effort into marketing and designing their programmes to make this early aspect work better. Conversely, other beneficiaries found few issues in locating and attracting participants.

1.2. This case study draws together lessons in what makes that initial engagement work well. For this purpose, ‘engagement’ is defined as the initial attachment to a service or programme, rather than ongoing attachment, involvement and retention, accepting that there is crossover between the two.

2. What works?

2.1. Some beneficiaries found some groups easier to engage with than others, for example, where they had established links with one age group, but found it harder to engage age groups with which they had less familiarity or experience. Some beneficiaries also noted that some localities were easier than others to engage participants, although this was not a consistent experience. One beneficiary found Swansea to be a “great place to start a programme”, another told us they had found it a “nightmare”.

2.2. A number of AIF beneficiaries identified that they were more successful in engaging participants if there were fewer ‘competing’ organisations in the same locality. As a result, they became more adept at understanding what the provision map was in an area and bidding where they saw gaps or adapting their services so they had a unique ‘hook’.

2.3. We identify five distinct and replicable approaches that were used effectively by AIF beneficiaries to engage participants. These are:

a) Strong referral links

b) Activities that attract interest

c) Location and co-location

d) Feedback: the importance of word of mouth

e) Developing support for specific clients

3. Strong referral links
3.1. AIF beneficiaries placed considerable emphasis on the value of referral networks. Referral partners often included organisations such as housing associations or Jobcentre Plus:

“the solution is having very good relationships with Jobcentre Plus”

3.2. Effective referral pathways are heavily dependent on the co-ordination of services, and therefore both on how well any particular programmes is known and understood by others operating in the locality, and on effective collaborative to enable appropriate referral. In part this is about ensuring shared knowledge of services, and successful AIF beneficiaries were proactive in building relationships:

“we go out on foot to different organisations...”

“Speaking to people really made a difference”

“Once the Housing Association put it in their magazine...we had 20 referrals just from that”

“we ended up hotdesking in Jobcentre Plus and that streamlined it a lot for us”

3.3. Where beneficiaries were new to a locality, they often needed considerable lead in time to build a local presence, especially if they had no previous or established links.

3.4. Referral relationships were often supported by marketing materials and we found a growing role for social media and podcasts alongside more traditional marketing methods, in improving programme referrals.

4. Activities that Attract Interest

4.1. Given the objective of reaching people in challenged circumstances who may be reluctant or unfamiliar with more formal approaches, initial engagement was enhanced for some individuals where support offered attractive activities as a way of drawing people into employability support:

“Employability support is not that attractive – we need to tailor it”

4.2. Some programmes were designed to support re-engagement with learning and work in non-traditional ways, including through sport, creative arts, outdoor activity or practical activities, for example, construction or recycling:

“It was a challenge to find families...we needed to find different ways, we got a lot coming from our cookery course...it was difficult to get them in if we just advertised training”

“the women need the wellbeing stuff to engage with the project”

5. Location and co-location
5.1. The location for the delivery of support can also be an important factor in engaging participants. There are a number of different elements to this, including effective outreach activity to encourage participants, the ‘attractiveness’ of the venues, delivering support in places that people attend anyway, and the co-location of services.

5.2. For example, some programmes aimed at young people used youth clubs that had other features that made them attractive to young people, including social space, access to sports equipment, and computer games:

“It’s the nature of the centre, they can play X box, have dinner, then go to an AIF activity so they tend to stick with it”

“For us it’s different, this is a drop in centre so most of our recruitment comes from self-referral”

5.3. Some beneficiaries conducted initial meetings with potential participants in what they described as neutral territory: for example, in a café, using an informal setting so that potential participants felt at ease.

5.4. One AIF beneficiary set up a ‘pop up’ recruitment out on the streets. This was initially their most successful approach, because they were able to talk to potential participants face to face:

“what worked best was 1-1 contact with folks, when we are able to describe what we want to do and see if people are interested”

6. Feedback – the importance of word of mouth

6.1. Beneficiaries also identified the value of positive ‘word of mouth’ as a vital factor in building engagement, with an emphasis on reputation, and building trust with participants once engaged, who then transmit positive messages more widely to other potential participants or their family or friends:

“lots is word of mouth and that takes a while to gather momentum”

“some will be referrals from friends”

7. Developing support for existing clients

7.1. Organisations such as Housing Associations or those working with disabilities recruited from existing clients. These organisations often effectively integrated services by combining help oriented to the specific circumstances of their participants with support in developing employability skills:

“using our ready-made contacts”.

“we do targeted texts to tenants so had a cohort to choose from”
Thematic Case Study 2: Achieving Sustainable Employment Outcomes

1. The issue

1.1. The phase 1 and 2 evaluation of the Active Inclusion Fund (AIF) found that job opportunities for participants varied in quality and permanence and that in some cases participants moved into sectors that are impermanent, seasonal or declining (high street retailing for example). Beneficiary experience and performance in networking with employers and helping participants to find employment was likewise variable. These organisations ranged from large bodies with national presence, through local authorities, to small or micro local organisations.

1.2. AIF – and other Welsh employability initiatives - operate in a complex economic and labour market environment with:

a) Structural shifts in the type and nature of employment opportunities which are broadly consistent with wider UK trends, for example reduced employment in high street retailing.

b) Variable regional and sub regional labour market conditions: employment opportunities therefore show wide geographical variations.

c) Accompanying geographical variations in economic performance, so, local as well as national economic conditions will impact on the availability and nature of local employment opportunities: the quality of such opportunities are highly variable both for placements and subsequent work:

“the labour market round here is not brilliant – lots of zero hours contracts, and minimum wage jobs. Really difficult to actually find anything that pays a decent salary.”

d) Suggestions that some job opportunities in Wales are ‘replacement’, i.e. replacing skilled employees with similarly skilled employees, rather than ‘entry level’ jobs where employees are trained and helped.

1.3. There is a reality that some parts of Wales remain reliant on employment sectors that are relatively volatile, low paid or declining, and often offer zero-hour contracts. However, some sectors including aspects of retailing and construction operate substantively on zero-hour contracts, yet may still offer relatively stable longer-term employment opportunities, so despite an understandable caution in counting zero hour contracts as an employment result, some zero hour contracts offer medium term and sustainable employment.

2. What works?

2.1. At its best, AIF secured appropriate work placements and longer-term opportunities for people experiencing or emerging from challenged circumstances. Success was dependent on the ability of the beneficiaries concerned to provide effective participant support and on being networked into where opportunities lie.
2.2. The evaluation identified two key factors that militate in favour of successful work outcomes for challenged individuals. These are:

a) Engaging with - or actively developing - local labour markets

b) Ongoing support for people once in work

3. Engaging with - and developing - local labour markets

3.1. A number of organisations were adept at finding quality jobs for participants, and some were actively developing local labour markets to open up new and sometimes creative employment opportunities (including in new sectors), rather than simply pointing participants to existing and sometimes low-quality posts. Success rested on:

a) Beneficiaries being effectively networked into local business to connect individuals to opportunities, i.e. the ability to engage suitable – and willing – employers, and to provide active help for participants to engage with opportunities where they are ready.

b) Finding quality placements and helping people into longer term job opportunities (or volunteering) through beneficiary connections, or by creating pathways for participants, for example, initially supporting volunteering then moving into paid work. Some beneficiaries used their own procurement to create job opportunities for their participants: for example, a housing association required that contractors bidding to work for them, offered job opportunities and appropriate training, usually on 12 to 24-month fixed contracts.

c) Finding and supporting innovative opportunities, including new (and often micro) local markets or economic activities. Although not a binary experience, effective smaller AIF beneficiaries were often well placed to find or create innovative solutions for participants, and particularly for those who seemed remoter from work, who may be vulnerable and need time to build trusting relationships.

Example: supporting participants and local business growth: one AIF project worked with micro or sole trader businesses looking to expand. The project helped such businesses by engaging suitable AIF participants, and worked with the placement employer to develop the future job role and set up systems. Participants were given a potential transition into longer term employment with that business, and the business has the opportunity to engage staff and see whether they can make it work for the longer term.

These were often micro businesses, for example a honey farm taking on a bee keeper or a furniture up cycler employing a restorer. Such organisations can be nervous about making the transition from sole trader to employer, so help with an analysis of business needs, contracting, finance and human resource matters such as payroll as well as participant training and support, offered a more complete ‘package’. 
Innovative opportunities can often be individual or ‘niche’ and often outside the purview of larger mainstream programmes, so local knowledge and networking added value.

**Example: a North Wales arts centre:** the centre has a cinema and sound studio. They made a first feature film in 2017 and the centre aims to expand to become a community film company to offer creative jobs locally that people currently have to move to Manchester, Bristol or London to find. Their AIF project worked to ensure that there were jobs that participants can progress into after their AIF experience with a progression framework to show what their next steps should be.

### 4. Ongoing support for people in work

4.1. The evaluation confirmed wider research in that generally, the longer an individual is economically inactive, the more barriers they face to [re]entering the labour market, the more support they require to achieve employment, and the longer the time needed to achieve this. It also affirms that people experiencing or emerging from challenging conditions are likely to need, or at least benefit from support once in work.

4.2. Failure to do this is a classic weakness of employability initiatives, even at the simplest level of tracking outcomes for participants after receiving help and support.

4.3. However, successful AIF beneficiaries explicitly built outcome sustainability into their participant support, for example by engaging with employers through the supported employment phase to assess whether the participant could continue in that work after support is concluded. If this was unlikely during the project, then the beneficiary would actively look for alternative employment.

4.4. One organisation supporting funded placements in social care worked closely with employers to understood what made a successful placement convert into longer term employment:

> “keeping them engaged and working closely with them has been key to the success of our project”.

4.5. In practice, sustaining post participation contact often combined formal and informal measures that, for example, might include calls at three and six months, or calling groups in for a coffee and debrief. One beneficiary set up a peer mentoring programme to support people after they leave, alongside a process which involves telephone and email contact as well as catch up meetings and contact with the employer:

> “it’s a big shift to move into work – support afterwards is important. We never have a closed door”.

> “officially we are meant to exit people off the system but I would like to think that most people know that they can come back...”.
4.6. Also, short employability programmes do not necessarily help people with progression once in work, for example, into better paid and more secure jobs:

“It is probably not until the second six months [in work] that you see them cement themselves”

4.7. The AIF evaluation found that some beneficiaries established effective networks of support and were able to signpost participants to partners who could offer continued help:

“we have a sister organisation which offers post-transition support and continued coaching.”

4.8. One beneficiary working with young people noted that the young people they work with often have significant skills gaps which prevent them from getting the jobs they want. The need here was to focus on progression and identify options such as apprenticeships to help people move towards the jobs they want.

5. Looking to the future

5.1. Whilst a proportion of employability programme participants will continue to be successfully employed in declining sectors such as retailing (and not all retail jobs will disappear, and these jobs may be appropriate to some), identifying where appropriate, innovative and potentially growing opportunities lie and matching them to suitable participants is desirable. Shifts in national, regional and local Welsh labour markets are creating new and different opportunities so, whilst parts of Wales may remain challenged for the foreseeable future, there are new and emerging opportunities.

5.2. Examples may lie in Welsh economic developments around:

a) The foundational economy i.e. that element of a future Welsh economy and labour market that is rooted in Wales and often in locality and community, including community enterprises.

b) Opportunities and support through Corporate Social Responsibility commitments.
Thematic Case Study 3: Supporting participant journeys for those with complex needs

1. The issue

1.1. The Active Inclusion Fund (AIF) was designed to support disadvantaged individuals who are ‘hard to reach’ through mainstream employability programmes, and who therefore either miss out on support offered by such programmes or are unready to participate in them. The AIF phase 1 and 2 evaluation found that once participants are engaged, AIF successfully reached and helped people in these groups. It also confirmed that programmes such as AIF alone may not necessarily help such people who may be on long and challenging journeys towards labour market participation.

2. What works?

2.1. Effective inter organisational collaboration and working is often essential to a successful outcome for the individual, yet is patchy in practice.

2.2. This case study examines good practice in how to link and work with other interventions to create pathways of support for individuals and illustrates the value of effective support through collaboration to help people experiencing substantial challenges towards and into work, and in particular:

   a) Working in partnership
   b) The value of progression
   c) The value of specialist support and collaboration
   d) Tailoring to the individual

3. Working in partnership

3.1. The AIF evaluation found diverse attitudes to collaboration with a concern that inter-organisational competition prohibited partnerships, for example in some instances competition in engaging participants or failing to signpost them to others when desirable:

   “people don’t move between projects...what the participant needs should matter most...”.

3.2. Collaboration and networking with partners, and particularly Jobcentre Plus is important:

   “we deliver on our own but have a wide network of partners...when someone has mental health issues it is not straightforward and no one organisation has all the answers...it’s about the most effective pathway for that individual, and finding the expertise to make that work.”
3.3. So, for example, a successful AIF beneficiary that specialised in supporting people experiencing mental health challenges collaborated closely with community health teams, general practitioners and the Department for Works and Pensions to engage and support participants. Another noted that breaking down institutional and employability programme barriers enabled them work collaboratively to establish the best way to:

“move young people between us”.

3.4. In addition to inter-organisational networking, shared learning and a suitable operational structure is needed to secure effective collaboration:

“progress should be inter-agency – we should be able to pass and share people. We need a more open culture around that stuff, it would benefit the young people if organisations worked together.”

4. Understanding the value of progression

4.1. The typically slow rate of progression for people with higher levels of need highlights the importance of pathways of support with multiple interventions to fully benefit, for example one AIF beneficiary supporting people with learning difficulties identified that:

“.... people who did something last year may have done one course but are now ready for volunteering but can’t access that...”

“we work with the hardest to reach – we need time ....”.

“it’s lovely to see someone go through their own personal journey”.

4.2. The AIF evaluation also identified the value of:

a) Individual learning plans that are participant led, and can be changed and developed as they progress.

b) Building participant trust and confidence in the delivery organisation so that they feel able to articulate what they want to accomplish and what their needs are.

5. Value of specialist support and collaboration

5.1. This has two dimensions.

a) A number of AIF beneficiaries specialised in supporting participants who have specific needs: examples included people with mental health issues, learning disabilities or needs arising from domestic violence:

“mental health is not a general skill”.

b) Conversely, a significant number of AIF beneficiaries noted significant numbers of young people with mental health issues, some diagnosed, some not. One identified that 50% of the young people they were engaging with had mental health issues
and a significant proportion experienced learning difficulties. They worked with mental health specialist partners to develop appropriate support.

6. Tailoring to the individual

6.1. The AIF evaluation confirmed the value approaches to support those in challenging circumstances that start with the individual to explore aspirations and hopes and with creating action plans derived from that knowledge base. In practice this often resulted in a combination of therapeutic or wellness interventions and practical employability activities and training so that participants:

a) Came to value looking after themselves as a first step, before they can move towards or into work; and that

b) Individuals therefore need help in changing feelings, attitudes & behaviours as well as specific skills, qualifications and experience; and that this

c) Requires a learning environment that provides for these psychological aspects:

“to continue providing a service to the most marginalised, the interventions cannot be the same as usual.”

“if you don’t value yourself ... then you can’t think about what you can offer a potential employer”.

6.2. Factors that contribute to success include:

a) Building self-confidence, social skills and creating structure in lives that are otherwise chaotic, for example, motivation to “get out of bed”, encouraging healthier diets, seeing familiar faces, making friends and providing stability and structure to the day.

b) Empathetic support through trusting and encouraging relationships with tutors and providers who are responsive to the needs of the individual, and to their peers: “I'm not alone”. Although not universal, peer groups frequently help by developing camaraderie and enabling people to share experiences.

c) Responding to individual needs, for example, managing anxiety and depression, and suicide prevention: “depression busting”, recognising the impact of abusive relationships, and acknowledging that this is not the victim’s fault, or helping people with anger management i.e. helping participants to develop coping strategies where the impacts of past or present challenges remain.

d) Reflecting that individuals may take significant time to develop skills and may need different learning styles. This involves creating an appropriate environment and context for learning: quite often people (young and old) find office based learning a challenge and some associate ‘classroom’ style learning with poor past experiences at school. Often this also requires creating a safe and non-judgmental environment, and suitably designed programme structures:
“Our traditional 8 week programme didn’t work...we had to see them less often for longer”

“The reality of our situations, it’s helped talking through our past - we didn’t feel we did well at school and received little help in achieving. Here they really help you, listen to you, understand that we all have different needs and may struggle to learn in certain ways. They make it fun and different. We also have lunch provided for us when we are in doing a programme or when we go out.”

e) Generating a sense of achievement and introducing creativity and a ‘fun’ element to foster sharing experiences in an informal, relaxed environment (particularly important for those who have experienced traumatic circumstances), for example, blending participation in sport or physical activity appears to be useful for young people when combined with more work-related support.

f) Solving associated challenges for some participants such as the cost of travel to and from programmes or placements.

g) Where appropriate, beneficiary bodies having effective connections with local employers, and particularly to work with those employers that engage in diversity and are prepared to employ those less able, and a wider ability to generate opportunities and guide participants to them.

h) Effective safeguarding.

“we can tell the story of every young person that has walked through the door and participated, they have been on amazing journeys and are living happy lives.”

“the difference it makes to people is absolutely amazing – the difference between day one and two weeks in...the spring in their step, the confidence they've gained...it makes so much difference to that individual”.
Thematic Case Study 4: Engaging smaller beneficiaries

1. The issue

1.1. Support for at least some of the most challenged individuals is ideally provided through locally based or locally knowledgeable providers of support, some of whom will also have specialist expertise in aspects such as mental health, learning disability etc. Such organisations are often small scale with modest administrative capacity, and very often third sector based.

1.2. All employability programmes, whether funded from public funds or charitable, or other sources must have sound administrative and accountability arrangements in place. However, the accompanying requirements and systems need to be proportionate to the scale of funding awards, the nature of the activities funded, and therefore not place undue or unworkable burdens on organisations well placed to able to deliver on programme objectives. The AIF evaluation provides a commentary on what works and what works less well in this context.

2. What works

2.1. In seeking out and supporting very challenged individuals, the AIF evaluation found that the characteristics that support success in helping people in such circumstances revolve around:

a) Having an inherent flexibility to respond to local, individual and very specific needs: there is no formula or singular ‘what works’ approach to engaging and helping such participants.

b) Sitting on the cusp of employability and wellbeing objectives to acknowledge that individual wellbeing, confidence and soft skills are as important as acquiring specific work-related skills.

c) Mobilising organisations with specific and relevant skills to particular localities, or to groups who may be outside the mainstream of employability initiatives.

d) Supporting innovative opportunities, that include engaging with new (and often micro) local markets or economic activities that may have potential for growth.

e) Engaging dedicated beneficiaries who use commitment and energy to create opportunities.

2.2. The AIF evaluation identified how the design of employability programmes can enable – or deter - smaller organisations to engage with programmes to provide support. These factors are not specific to AIF, and some can be equally relevant to larger organisations albeit that they are particularly acute for smaller organisations. These factors revolve around:

a) Proportional funding requirements and administrative systems: small local or specialist organisations in particular may be challenged to handle complex
administrative requirements. Whilst there is a legitimate expectation that projects should be embedded within wider beneficiary ‘missions’ and therefore draw on organizational expertise and commitment, burdensome administrative and process requirements can place undue pressure on smaller organisations.

a) Processes that establish realistic project targets over realistic timescales:

“it does make us question at every stage: is this the best thing we can do for this person’s employability?”

b) Creating a positive environment between the funding body and potential beneficiaries, with effective communication and engagement: this will ultimately better deliver programme objectives as well as saving all parties time, cost and aggravation. This should extend to project level cultivation of, and sustaining of, constructive interactions through:

- Consistency in decision making and processes
- Consistency of individual contacts (accepting that this is not always a possibility).
- Careful management of the transition and handover of cases between funding body staff in relation to beneficiaries.
- Funding body staff who are skilled in handling what will sometimes be challenging circumstances in ensuring performance and compliance, yet sustaining good working relationships and managing beneficiary frustration or incomprehension.
- Effective communication of process or system changes once operative.

“There needs to be an element of trust”

“.....for many years and they know us...it's about knowing the system, our relationship ... goes back 8-10 years”

c) Investment in beneficiary training to help them understand and handle programme requirements and systems: AIF experience supported the value of this:

“training has been useful. It has been useful to chat to other people with the same issues.”.

d) Facilitating inter beneficiary learning and exchange this should ideally be both in terms of:

- Process, for example, having a cadre of best practice beneficiaries willing to share practical and administrative experience with others; and therefore also
• Professionally in terms of exchanging experience and best practice: the AIF evaluation highlighted the value of beneficiary networking and of positive inter-beneficiary relationships.

e) Appropriate requirements for establishing participant eligibility to enter a project (known as validation in AIF terms) at the outset, for example, by being a first step within an award rather than a pre-requisite: this challenged some AIF beneficiaries despite an established process to accommodate situations where this was particularly difficult.

“proving eligibility, remembering to save letters, is a life skill that young people need to learn, ... they should be rewarded for learning to do that”.

“We have someone who has run from Birmingham for her life...we can’t ask her for her passport and National Insurance number...”

“Those we most wanted to help were least able to provide the required information”.

f) Ensuring that any information technology or other information systems are user friendly, intuitive and familiar so that beneficiary users feel confident and are able to operate the systems. Also, where appropriate, beneficiary access to programme data should likewise be user friendly and intuitive.

g) Prompt payments to beneficiaries when claims are made: smaller organisations in particular can experience cash flow challenges given limited resources.
Thematic Case Study 5: The Benefits of supporting mixed age groups

1. The issue

1.1. One change made during the course of phases 1 and 2 of AIF was to enable beneficiaries to run mixed age groups in the belief that the young and those of an older age have potential to learn from each other, as well as offering practical and administrative advantages to those providing support in bringing groups together with common needs or interests (for example, through economies of scale when delivering group activities).

1.2. This case study records at AIF experience in this context.

2. What works?

2.1. The AIF evaluation identified many similarities in the needs of young people aged 16 – 24 age group and those aged 25 and over, for example (and depending on individual circumstances), both often benefit from:

   a) The use of groups to develop a sense of camaraderie, and share experiences.

   b) Steps to build or rebuild self-confidence.

   c) Bringing structure in lives that are otherwise chaotic.

   d) The importance of trusting and encouraging relationships with tutors or others providing support and being responsive to the needs of the individual, and also with peers

   “I am not alone”.

2.2. Any distinctions between young and old revolve around factors such as:

   a) Camaraderie between peers being even more important to young people:

   “we find that delivering in groups works as people bond instantly and is an important factor in them wanting to come back”.

   b) Older people valuing interaction to share experience and discover that they are ‘not alone’ in their experiences.

   c) Although a generalisation, older people tend to be more focused on outcomes for them and on turning their lives around.

   d) Young people who are NEET typically had fewer specific goals, reflecting that many are starting out on the route to employment with little or no past experience to draw on, or any specific desired vocation.
2.3. In practice, the AIF evaluation found that mixed groups were welcomed by those providing support, subject to the specific needs of the group targeted, or where particular safeguarding concerns arose.

2.4. Participant interviews also supported the value of mixed age groups to individuals provided such safeguarding issues could be adequately addressed.

2.5. When groups were run together, this was sometimes for efficiency and cost reasons, but other beneficiaries embraced the wider benefits that can result from mixed aged groups. Examples for younger participants included benefits from:

a) The experience of elders around childcare and how younger parents can successfully handle their own children.

b) Insight into work experience and sometimes into specific roles, e.g. what it is like to be a nurse or a shop assistant.

2.6. Examples of older participants benefitting from younger participants included:

a) How to use IT and the internet, for example for job searches, and in using word or excel.

“it’s more about what the individual needs”

Example: using sport to achieve multiple benefits for a diverse range of individuals (mixed age groups, low skills, jobless households, single parent etc.). The benefits included confidence building, healthier lifestyles, team skills as well as developing employability skills. The beneficiary developed a relationship with a local organisation with employees of that organisation taking part in sports training, including some in senior positions, offering opportunities to interact with people at all levels.

AIF participants were positive in mixing with employees, enjoyed the sporting activities (e.g. rugby and running), with some organising their own running group. The programme offered structure and routine to their day and building confidence helped to create a positive attitude to future possibilities and employment, and encouragement to think ‘outside the box’ about what employment might be of interest to them.