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Worcester Community Trust



Wellbeing Jobs Club

Evaluation Report

by

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Introduction

In July 2024, Worcester Community Trust (WCT) commissioned the University of Worcester to conduct an independent evaluation of their Lottery-funded Wellbeing Jobs Club service. This service aims to enhance confidence, improve mental health, and support local residents in securing employment. The program currently serves 150 participants who are referred by a variety of local agencies.

WCT requested an assessment of the Wellbeing Jobs Club’s quality and effectiveness, as well as a comparison with similar statutory services. The findings from this evaluation will be shared with stakeholders, including funders, the WCT board, referral partners, and participants. The objective is to gather feedback that can inform potential improvements to the service or its monitoring processes.

Overall objectives

- To evaluate the effectiveness of the wellbeing jobs club over the last year 2023-2024
- To explore the impact of the wellbeing job club on participants’ wellbeing
- To identify any groups of people whose needs are not being met by the service

- To collect examples and stories from individuals accessing the service
- To provide WCT with quantitative and qualitative data in relation to this in the form of a comprehensive report.

The Current Context

Unemployment

Recent unemployment data highlights the relevance of the Wellbeing Jobs Club's mission. As of December 2023, the unemployment rate for adults in Worcestershire stood at 3.4%, with approximately 1,900 individuals aged 16 and over unemployed in Worcester (ONS, 2024). This figure is slightly lower than the West Midlands' overall unemployment rate of 3.7%.

The link between employment and mental health

Research consistently demonstrates a strong link between unemployment and mental health issues. According to The Health Foundation (2021), common effects of unemployment include depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Additionally, a government study (OHID, 2022) found that mental ill-health can hinder both the ability to find employment and job retention, often resulting in lower-than-average income. However, the benefits of employment extend beyond financial gain, offering individuals social status, routine, socialisation, and a sense of purpose (Gedikli et al., 2023). Employment, as well as enabling people to earn money, impacts on social status and gives a sense of purpose to life, which is 'essential for psychological growth' (Ryan and Deci, 2001).

As well as outlining the relationship between unemployment and wellbeing, research by Gedikli et al (2022) also identifies a 'reverse causal link... i.e. individuals with poor wellbeing are more likely to be unemployed.'

Statutory unemployment services

In the UK, statutory benefits for people who are unemployed include Jobseekers Allowance and Universal Credit (Gov.uk, 2025). The new style Jobseekers' Allowance is a contribution-based benefit, based on National Insurance contributions over the past two years. It is for people who are actively seeking work and can be claimed alongside Universal Credit, a payment for people on a low income or who are not working. Since 2018, it has replaced Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Working Tax Credit.

A 'work and health programme', which was launched by the government in 2017 and included personalised support and coaching, was cancelled in 2024, to be replaced with Universal Credit. This

has been criticised, particularly for its impact on disabled people. For example, Tapper (2024, online) tells us that:

Elizabeth Taylor, chief executive of Employment Related Services Association, which represents providers said that scrapping WHP would leave “a big gap in provision”, as new programmes would not help as many disabled people, and those in some areas would have no support at all for a year.

An access to work scheme has been developed by the government; it provides communication support for job interviews for people with a disability, learning difficulty or health condition. It also provides support for people with physical or mental health conditions whilst at work. This scheme is only available to people who are already employed (gov.uk, 2023).

Mental health and wellbeing support

In the UK, mental health and wellbeing is primarily supported through the NHS, with key initiatives including talking therapies (for example cognitive behaviour therapy) for common mental health issues like anxiety and depression (accessible through GP referrals or self-referral); community mental health teams providing support in various settings; crisis response services; and a focus on integrating mental health support within primary care practices, alongside increased funding and awareness campaigns to promote overall mental wellbeing (NHS, 2025).

According to the mental health charity Mind, 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem of some kind each year in England and 1 in 6 people report experiencing a common mental health problem (like anxiety and depression) in any given week in England (Mind, 2020). In the Worcestershire area, Mental Health Matters (2023), a charity working in partnership with Worcestershire NHS, aims to provide pre-employment and employment support to people who are already accessing talking therapies. The NHS target for anxiety and depression programme is that 75% of people access services within 6 weeks, and 95% within 18 weeks (NHS, 2024). Talking therapies are provided by qualified counsellors and therapists; however, in 2022, the NHS in the UK reported a shortage of 2,000 qualified therapists (McCrary-Ruiz-Esparza, 2024), resulting in increased waiting times.

Job coaching

Rogers (1967) defined a “helping relationship” as a type of relationship in which at least one party has the intent of promoting growth, development or improved functioning and coping skills of the other person. The essential elements of the helping relationship, according to research by Sinai-Glazer (2020, p. 245), are “love and support; trust and feeling safe; listening and feeling understood; making an effort to help; humanness, compassion, and sensitivity; availability, continuity, and being there when

needed; and chemistry". One such relationship is a coaching relationship; coaching involves a partnership where a coach helps another person, inspiring them to maximise their personal and professional potential (Passmore and Sinclair, 2020, p.19). The UK coaching organisation identify the following areas of good practice in coaching relationships:

- Take a genuine interest in the person,
- Make yourself available,
- Take the time to develop a bond,
- Build respect, create support, develop trust and positively influence (UK coaching, 2025).

Group coaching is a collaborative process where a coach works with a group of people to help them achieve their goals. According to Leszcz (2023), groups can be more effective than individual therapy, thanks to the stigma reduction and solidarity that people experience in the presence of their peers. However, Baldelli and Givati (2024) highlight some of the advantages of individual coaching:

- A higher degree of safety and intimacy
- A stronger connection between coach and subject
- Customisation to the person's needs
- Promotes accountability – people are more likely to follow guidance provided for them individually
- Flexibility

Individualised support provided by job coaches has been shown to be the key to success (Kim, 2024), however, individual coaching is more time-consuming and more expensive.

Job coaches generally provide a range of personalised services to individuals, both prior to and after attaining a job position. Kim's (2024) research highlights the particular benefits for people with disabilities and communication difficulties, e.g. Autism. Job coaches are typically involved in career counselling, identifying job-related strengths and weaknesses, teaching job search strategies, and supporting people with applications and interviews. Another key skill that is incorporated in job coaching is confidence building. Confidence impacts our motivation and ability to communicate effectively, and it is a skill that can be learned. Confidence is developed by increasing awareness of one's strengths and skills, being assertive and developing a positive mindset (Kings trust, 2024).

Job coaching is far more than the learning and development of specific, work-related skills, it is about the development of individuals' belief that they are worthy of and capable of a job. It is about the whole person. And this came clearly through the data that we collected.

Research approach

Although this evaluation had the aim of ‘measuring the success’ of the Jobs Club, the ultimate goal for all social research is to “find new ways for positive change, which support human flourishing and well-being” (Bergmark and Kostenius 2018, p. 624) and such is the case with this research. The research took a case study approach, focussing on the voices of Jobs Club participants, coaches and referral agencies to paint a multi-faceted picture of the service. A case study research methodology can provide an in-depth examination of a service in its real-world context, producing “a detailed description of participants’ feelings, opinions, and experiences” (Rahman, 2017, p.103). Through such an approach we could gain a fully rounded understanding of the Jobs Club and how it was perceived through a range of stakeholder lenses.

The intention was for this research is to bring about ‘good’ (Bloor, 2010), through identifying those aspects of this club that are working well, enabling those to be built upon further to maximise their potential for the service user, but also by acknowledging weaker areas that might need development. However, in line with Bloor’s (ibid) thoughts about research, the process was just as important as the outcomes, and it was important to us that no one was made to feel uncomfortable during the process. We sought to have a positive impact *throughout* the course of the research, by taking a respectful, caring and sensitive approach. All aspects of the research were carried out within the guidelines for ethical research set out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2024) and all documents were scrutinised by the ethics panel at the University of Worcester before full approval was given for the research to go ahead.

With this research we aimed to better understand the “rich and contextually situated understandings” (McChesney and Aldridge 2019, p.227) of service users, advisors and referring partners. As such it took an interpretivist approach. Beyond the statistics of uptake, it was important for us to gain a glimpse of “the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (Schwandt 1998, p.221). There are areas of human experience that we cannot measure through numbers alone (Silverman, 2001, p.32), and we were interested in how people *felt* about their involvement in, or with the service, rather than just gaining an overview of the numbers involved.

Data collection methods

Due to the range of data to be collected a range of approaches were used, therefore this might be referred to as a ‘mixed methods’ approach. The first was anonymous survey. Data was collected from Wellbeing Jobs Club service users by them clicking on a link to an electronic survey. This link was contained within an email composed by the researchers and sent out through the Jobs Club. This method had a number of advantages, including it being a cost-effective and fast method of data

collection (Singh and Sagar, 2017). But perhaps more important was the fact that it offered respondents the advantage of total anonymity; we would not know which of the 150 participants of the Jobs Club had responded, or who any of the comments made belonged to. This was made clear in the Participant Information Sheet that preceded the survey. The survey offered a range of both quantitative and qualitative questions, meaning that some quick responses could still be gained even by those pressed for time, or those who did not want to elaborate on their experience. Where an absence of access to technology or problems with literacy were an issue, the job coaches supported individuals in accessing and completing the survey. The data from the surveys was reviewed prior to the interviews that followed.

The same email that invited service users to take part in the survey, also included an invitation to take part in an interview (or a 'conversation with a purpose', Burgess, 1984) with one of the researchers, to explore some of the questions in more depth. The interviews were offered in person at the Jobs Club or online, and Jobs Club coaches made themselves available to accompany respondents if they so wished. Interviews were semi-structured; based upon the key aspects emerging from analysis of the online survey data.

We also planned to use informal interviews to collect data from referral partners. Job seekers are referred to the wellbeing jobs club from a wide range of agencies, including schools, mental health teams and the Department for Work and Pensions. The Jobs Club manager provided the researchers with a list of referral contacts to invite for an informal interview, to seek their views on the role that the Jobs Club played in supporting employability. These interviews were offered in person, online, or by telephone, whichever was most convenient for the participant.

Before all interviews participants were given a Participant Information Sheet that outlined the parameters of their involvement. This included the right to withdraw, confidentiality and what would be done with their data. They signed a consent sheet as a record that they were happy with the detail that the information sheet outlined. Interviews were recorded by Microsoft Teams and transcribed as soon as possible after, anonymising the data and deleting the recording. Participants were given the opportunity to review the transcription and make any changes.

Data Analysis

Once the interviews were completed the data was considered again as a whole. The researchers immersed themselves in the data before taking some time to reflect upon what appeared to be the key messages from the data (Naseem et al, 2023). Inductive thematic analysis was used to identify conceptual groupings from the data, to "reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of 'reality'" (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This approach is particularly useful when identifying typologies of experience

to inform future planning and policy. Data corresponding to each of the themes that the researchers identified was extracted from the data as a whole and triangulated with similar data. This process provided the opportunity to assess whether there was strong data to support the theme that was identified, or whether our claim lacked supporting evidence. The most compelling messages that were identified in the data are explored below. These include:

- The multi-faceted motivations for attendance
- The wide range of support provided: employment, mental health and practical support
- Job coaches' ability to see 'the bigger picture'
- High satisfaction and the positive and holistic impact on people's lives
- The value of the relationship between service user and job coach.

Presentation of data

Who responded?

- 22 service users completed the survey, a response rate of 15%.
- 50% are currently unemployed, 14% are working as volunteers and 36% are now employed.
- Of those who are currently unemployed, 10% had been unemployed for under a year, 10% were unemployed for 1-2 years, 14% for 3-5 years, 33% for 6-10 years.
- 64% had been told about the club by a professional, 9% from a friend, 14% had seen an advertisement.
- 50% (11 people) had accessed other services through WCT.
- 24% of people have been attending for under 3 months, 14% for 3-6 months, 38% for 7-12 months and 24% for over a year.

We also completed three interviews with staff and service users. Please note that when names are used, they are replaced by pseudonyms in order to protect individual's identity. Each survey response is given an individual code.

Our data suggest that this Wellbeing Jobs Club provides a service that is different from anything else available in the area, an individualised service that aims to meet people's specific needs. Treena, the service manager explained:

there are various welfare to work providers that provide welfare support, job coaching support, but just not on this level. It's supportive, rather than 'get yourself into work for 16 hours or you're not having your benefits', that doesn't work, we know it doesn't. And that's quite often how we end up with customers because they've been told, 'right, you've got to

work 16 hours, you might have a bad back, you might have depression, you might have cancer, but you must do this, this and this'. So, they end up with us.

This approach of sensitive and responsive, individualised support was apparent throughout the data.

Individuals' motivation for attending

Service users access Worcester Jobs Club for a range of reasons, the main reasons being for job search support and mental health support. Responses showed equal numbers of people joining for employment support and mental health support. Fig 1 shows responses to the multiple-choice question 'why did you decide to use the wellbeing jobs club?

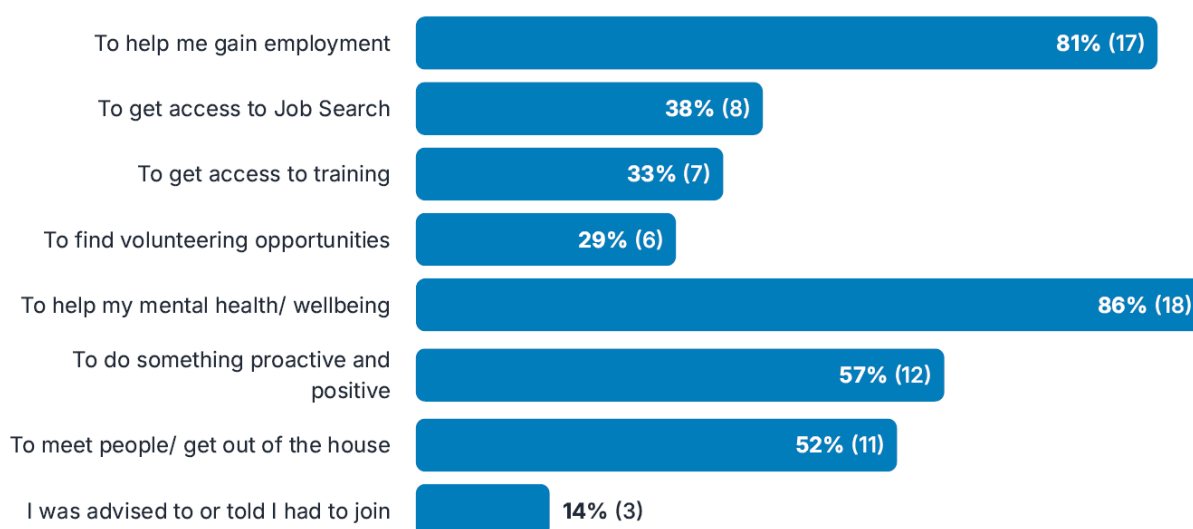


Fig.1 Responses to 'Why did you decide to join Worcester Jobs Club'?

Some people referred themselves to the club after seeing an advertisement or hearing about it from a friend, but referrals also came from a range of professionals and projects (for example, Sight Concern, job centre, social worker, psychiatrist, GP, other WCT projects, a social prescriber and the Autistic Society). 64% of service users completing the survey said they were referred by a professional and 23% were self-referrals. Worcester Community Trust organise many other services and support groups and 68% of survey respondents were also accessing these other services: JOY (women's project), DAWN (domestic abuse support) and Snack & Chat. This suggests that service users general satisfaction with the services prompts them to attend several simultaneously, increasing the potential for impact their social interaction, increasing opportunities for positive communication and supporting their mental health.

The popularity of the wellbeing jobs club is partly because WCT are well established and well known in the area. Treena, the service manager explained that their visibility is something that they continue to work on:

We attend quite a lot of events in the local area. We're very well known. I've been in this industry 20 years and been in the Worcester area for over 20 years. Todd has been a youth worker, so he's very well known in the area and again social media. Vicky did an amazing video with a client about her journey and that was posted out on social media and LinkedIn and all over the place... our coaches go out into the community.

The service appears to be of particular help to people with multiple and complex needs, whose needs have not been met by previous organisations. Treena explained the complexity of some of their clients' needs, and that even reaching them at the Wellbeing Jobs Club might have been a long and challenging journey for them. She referred to one client who had "been round the block a little bit and they've attended various things that haven't worked out for them until they finally come to us."

What shines clearly through all of the data gathered is that although the staff are called Job Coaches, they are so much more than that. The support provided by the service is multi-faceted. Treena indicated this expansiveness when she said, "we say job coach; it isn't just that.... we are literally everything". In her interview, job coach Vicky reflected: "It's not just jobs, jobs, jobs, it's actually reducing their barriers and increasing their confidence".

Support provided

Employment support

72% of survey respondents reported feeling more confident about their chances of gaining employment since attending the wellbeing jobs club. They spoke about having built the skills to search for a job and feeling more confident about gaining employment. One respondent said that she had felt unworthy of employment because of her disability and that the wellbeing jobs club had made her value herself and see her own worth.

The figure below demonstrates the range of services is provided by the wellbeing jobs club to support people to find employment. It is interesting to note that the most prominent of the support recognised by respondents is in supporting their wellbeing.

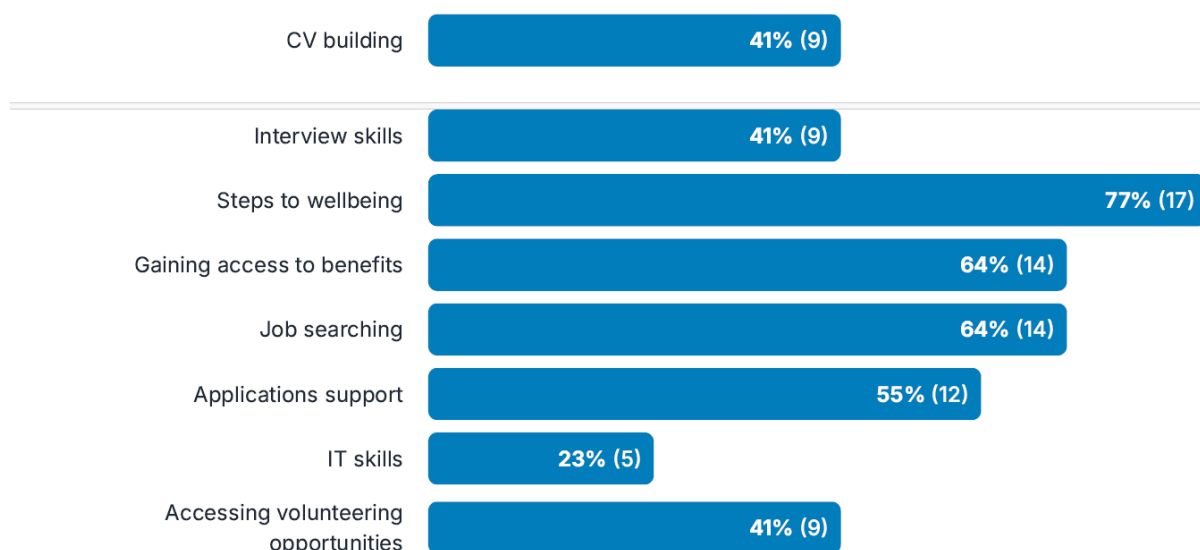


Fig. 2 Job search activities provided

Job coach Vicky explained that the club runs some sessions as group sessions, mostly for generic subjects like CV building and interview skills, which work well in a group. However, the figure above demonstrates that these are not the elements of support most enthusiastically attended. The survey data makes clear that service users prefer 1:1 sessions with their job coach. 86% of respondents said they preferred these 1:1 sessions, with the remaining 14% finding the 1:1 sessions and group sessions equally useful. This has significant implications for the continued funding of this support.

Looking at 'the bigger picture'

Interestingly, achieving paid employment is not always the ultimate aim of the support given. One service user explained: "I have now been recognised as limited capability to work, when I first joined the club I wasn't even aware that this was a thing and was stressed and depressed because of pressure being applied by the job centre to look for work" (SW3). This exemplifies how support provided by the wellbeing jobs club is individualised, it is not possible to offer a 'one size fits all' service which results in everyone gaining employment within a fixed time period, as people's lives are complex.

Many people arrive at the jobs club feeling hopeless after perpetual knockbacks, and it takes time to build the skills and confidence needed to eventually find employment, as these examples attest:

When I started I was depressed and thought there was no hope due to my age now I'm 60. My skills had died due to technology and my health, but with time and the right people around me it built my hopes that I could be useful to someone in a job of some kind. For now I have a small job, not many hours but it's a start and I get satisfaction I'm helping someone (CX9).

If you need baby steps, they'll let you take those baby steps (Mandy, service user, during interview).

This approach of taking time to get to know individuals and sensitively taking a step-by-step approach is necessary for some who would not cope with a more normative approach. Job coach, Vicky, recalled a client who took 16 attempts to be brave enough to attend the appointment that they had made. She explained that for them, “That's an achievement, that they come to the appointment... and then they go away a bit more positive if we sort one thing out at a time.”

Vicky explained how overwhelmed clients can be with the multiple challenges that they are facing, and how identifying one aspect of need at a time is a strategy that works well. Only then will they be able to experience the successes that will further motivate them to continue. She elaborated:

Break it down, make it easier, don't overwhelm people, especially for people like from domestic abuse, they might also have social services and have to go to loads of meetings. It's very overwhelming. Sometimes I'll take one of their goals we're like, OK, so this is how we're going to do this one, and we'll break it down, make it a little bit simpler. And if they fail, we break it down again. We can obviously break it down further as they've got time.

The benefit of the fact that the support was not time-bound was apparent throughout the feedback. Clients can have as long as they need, meaning that they do not experience the same pressures that might be experienced through other employment support services where they “have to get everything done in six weeks and then kick them to the curb” (Vicky). In addition, the fact that respondents were not forced to attend, and that they were not “sanctioned” if they did not attend, was also deemed significant.

As well as recognising the smaller steps needed by many, there was also an appreciation, and an acceptance, that things might not always go according to plan, and that success is not always linear. Vicky explained that “Sometimes they don't improve, sometimes they go a bit backwards... because they've gone out of their comfort zone” but that did not mean that improvements would not be seen further down the line when the client had “done whatever they need to do.” There would be peaks and troughs as clients struggled through, and overcame, new challenges.

Mental health and wellbeing support

The data indicates a symbiosis between employment and mental health and wellbeing. Improvements in people's mental health and their opinion of their own self-efficacy, could significantly impact upon their work opportunities. This client explained:

As a disabled person, I never thought someone would see past my disability, I assumed it would always hold me back and lower my worth in others' eyes. [The Wellbeing Jobs Club] helped me to recognise myself, the skills I have and my own knowledge. I now have the experience, alongside my knowledge and education. I see my worth (SW3).

The data demonstrated below suggest that mental health, confidence and self-esteem had all been improved by the survey respondents that had accessed the jobs club. 86% of service users reported an improvement in their mental health since attending.

	Improved a little	Improved a lot
Mental health improvement	27%	59%
Confidence improved	29%	62%
Socialisation improved	58%	29%
Feeling less anxious	45%	40%
Feel better about self	42%	47%

Table 1 Improvements in mental health and wellbeing (survey)

Job coach, Vicky, gave an example of how this could happen, and the opportunities that could be opened up through their supportive approach:

One of the best cases that I ever had was a client who couldn't read and write. She had no confidence she was going for a really difficult time with her husband and it took me about 8 weeks to get her to come to this course. I said 'what course do you want to do?' Because at the time the WI (Women's Institute) would put on any course which had 10 people, she said she'd like to do sewing. And I said 'OK, we'll do sewing' and she said, 'but I can't, I can't do the writing' and I said 'we'll do that for you. We'll write what you say and we'll fill in the application' and then she got her first certificate, and she was so blown away by it, she went on to do her English and her maths

What is also clear through this comment is the emotional investment of the job coaches in this work. It was these small but significant successes that motivated them to continue.

Practical support / Dealing with life's challenges

Examples of practical support provided by the Wellbeing Jobs Club are extensive; terms drawn from the data are shown in the word cloud below:

- Updated new telephone number and email addresses with all relevant creditors, agencies and supporting organisations.

For vulnerable clients help with any one of these aspects would be invaluable, and where else would such support be available? The feeling of being overwhelmed by a multitude of problems and then being supported to tackle these problems is illustrated clearly in this example from a survey respondent:

I always come away from our meetings feeling so much lighter. I have more confidence now knowing that even on days I don't see her she's only on the other end of a phone call. I feel she really understands not just me but my whole situation. She's helped me fill in forms, add to my universal credit journal and locate things my children need within my budget, which in itself was such a weight off my shoulders. She has helped me create a budget I can stick to as well as helping me start saving money, she's helped me find other local clubs that have the same interests as me, she's been someone I can just rant to when life feels too much and then she gives me a fresh perspective on things. She really has kept me going (O20).

Service manager, Treena, explained how the services provided by Worcester Community Trust work together to provide holistic support for people. As well as managing the Wellbeing Jobs Club she also managed two other support groups, and the three of them focused upon: “supporting people to break down complex barriers and move forward to either get into work or training, improve mental health, well-being and improve their financial situation. We are moving people gently towards their goals and it's around that sustainable outcome”.

This holistic approach was clearly working, with 95% of clients saying that they were satisfied with the survey. Importantly, service users felt they could discuss sensitive issues like mental health problems, food bank use and domestic violence with Job Coaches without being judged. There were some compelling statements from service users, demonstrating the impact of the club on their lives, including: ‘it saved me’ (0XE), ‘I am so thankful’ (O20), ‘the sessions got me through a turbulent time’ (CX9), ‘I felt accepted’ (2ZF) and ‘it’s an amazing service’ (SW3). Many of these responses centred upon the relationship that was developed between coach and client.

Supportive Relationships

The data made clear that clients accessing the Wellbeing Jobs Club felt seen, listened to and cared for. They felt that someone was unconditionally on their side, or in their corner. It is easy to forget the significance of this for adults. Below are two examples from service users, but many more were littered throughout the responses:

Having a job coach gave me the confidence and support I needed to be able to apply for jobs. I really struggled with my sense of self-worth and did not believe I had the skills or capabilities for employment. Vicky supported me through this and helped encourage me to try for positions that worked towards my skills. It was amazing to have someone who wants to work with me and never pressures me (SW3).

They're quite protective of their clients as well, which is really nice. they just want to look after you and do the best they can for you... you feel comfortable to be able to tell them anything really... to be honest, they just made you feel comfortable, relaxed (Mandy, service user, during interview).

The word cloud below, created from service users' survey comments highlights the words used most frequently by respondents. The larger the word, the more times it was mentioned:



Fig. 4 Word cloud illustrating supportive relationship between service user and job coach

The dominance of words related to pastoral care in comparison to those related to subject knowledge speaks volumes.

How could the service be improved?

Service users and coaches were asked how the Wellbeing Jobs Club might be improved. For service users, all responses to this related to the further marketing of, and expansion of the service. Appreciating the support that they had received, they felt that it should be made available to more people. One suggested that social media would be the most appropriate approach for this, in order to provide “a clearer view of what a job club is” (Mandy, service user, during interview).

For the coaches, they felt that a small budget for the clients that they worked with would make a significant difference. Job coaches commented on how difficult it was to see a client in need, and how they had taken to carrying certain items with them, such as sanitary products, because it was so difficult for a client to focus when they were hungry, or suffering other basic discomforts. After some thought Vicky shared:

I would like a budget for things that people might need... a budget for things, like, if they needed a birth certificate, if they needed a book for a course, or for interview clothes. If they needed to travel somewhere, they could get a bus ticket. We haven't got that ... a budget per client of even if it was £30.

She added, “How can they concentrate on what they need to concentrate on with me if they're hungry and they haven't eaten for two days?”. A small funding pot had been provided for service users in the past, and job coaches really appreciated being able to purchase items such as bedding, coats, shoes and socks for clients in need.

A survey comment from a service user reiterated the difference that it would make if this funding for necessities were made available:

For me personally the only issue I have is the cost of attending appointments. Due to several factors I have to get a taxi there and back so each meeting costs £30 in travel funds. There have been occasions where I've had to cancel appointments because I've simply not been able to afford to get there which has several knock on effects of my mental health (TE5).

The service manager, Treena, added, “there's no funding for things like courses, travel, and the therapy side of things as well because quite often we have people that are on a waiting list for 10 years for CBT”. Clearly this is an organisation that would like to provide a holistic service whilst being significantly restricted by limited funding and resources. One objective of this research was to see whether any needs of service users were not being met, but the only ‘need’ identified within the data was funds, or means of travel to meetings.

The wellbeing jobs club is providing a much-needed service to around 150 service users presently, but it is clear that with more funding and more staff, they could have an even greater impact within their community. Service manager Treena explained that they were using funding across projects to maximise the potential of their limited resources:

I've got three projects, and they work in very similar ways, so there's no dual funding issue. The clients that we have can work across all three programmes. So that is how we cope with it, because yes, I could absolutely have another six to eight job coaches if I was allowed. But the funding doesn't allow... lottery funding for us is great, but it's not as much as we have previously had in the past... funding is difficult so, yeah, it can be challenging sometimes.

Likewise, Vicky joked that having extra staff was her 'dream'. She said "I could definitely deal with another couple of us, to be honest. Because my caseload is currently 36 and I've got another 5-6 people to ring and book in". She also added that funding for two of the parallel groups running at the centre was due to expire in March. The value of this service to its users is encapsulated in this survey respondent's comment: "just don't get rid of the service because it is vital for the community and users" (O1R).

Discussion

The data collected during this evaluation reflects the "vicious cycle" described in the OHID study (2022) and recognised by Gedikli et al. (2022), with poor mental health reducing employability and unemployment adding further to poor mental health. The complex and multi-faceted needs of users of this Wellbeing Jobs Club add weight to the argument that unemployment cannot be 'solved' in isolation, without supporting the development of the whole person. And this cannot be rushed or fitted within a rigid timeframe; for each person the journey to wellbeing will be very different. People who are struggling have complex and multiple needs that cannot be easily disentangled, and there is no obvious source of support for this complexity within England's siloed and diminishing services. Similar issues may have been tackled by the previous 'Work and Health Programme', but this was cancelled in 2024. It is clear that this termination has, as Elizabeth Taylor warned, left a "big gap" (Tapper, 2024, no page) in support for a significant number of people.

This is a gap in services that the Wellbeing Jobs Club appears to be plugging, demonstrating significant 'value added' by this service. The support offered by these dedicated staff, some of whom have taken pay cuts when starting their role as Jobs Coach, is relieving caseloads for other stretched services. It is preventative. Just this small sample of data demonstrates some 20 individuals who may have gone on to require mental health support from the NHS had this Wellbeing Jobs club not intervened. In a landscape where a shortage of 2,000 qualified counselling therapists was recorded in 2020, this is

noteworthy (McCrary-Ruiz-Esparza, 2024). And this is just one aspect, these Job Coaches are likewise relieving the workload of disability services, housing services and other government funded interventions, at the same time as increasing the number of willing and able volunteers for the charitable sector.

Another aspect of the data that must be acknowledged is the dedication of the staff, despite low pay and high caseloads. These staff are going 'over and above' to provide a lifeline for individuals who are struggling. The qualitative comments such as: 'it saved me' (0XE), 'I am so thankful' (O20), 'the sessions got me through a turbulent time' (CX9), 'I felt accepted' (2ZF) and 'it's an amazing service' (SW3), as well as the palpable joy when coaches shared success stories, all signify a service that is invaluable to those involved. These are not just job coaches, but life coaches. The descriptions of coaches found throughout this data embody the essential elements of the helping relationship described by Sinai-Glazer (2020, p. 245). Despite no formal training in this area the Job Coaches intuitively provide their clients "love and support; trust and feeling safe; listening and feeling understood; making an effort to help; humanness, compassion, and sensitivity; availability, continuity, and being there when needed" (ibid). These things were infinitely more valuable than the basic mechanics related to employability.

Conclusion and recommendations

In a landscape of financial instability and ever- increasing mental health needs, WCT's Wellbeing Jobs Club provides an invaluable resource for a range of unique reasons; these include:

- Clients are under no pressure to attend
- Clients are treated with unconditional positive regard, enabling them to be open and honest about their struggles and needs
- Clients are offered support with life challenges that they would not find elsewhere
- Clients are offered personalised support at a pace that suits them
- The complex and unique needs of each client are taken into consideration
- Job coaches foreground the general and holistic wellbeing of the client, acknowledging that clients will only be in a position to thrive when they feel safe and secure
- Job coaches take on a preventative role where mental health is concerned, and also take some of the weight from other support services
- Clients are given practical support that can help them find employment.

We have purposefully left the direct link to employment until last, as the data makes clear that only when the holistic needs of each individual are attended to, will they be in a position to take the substantial step into preparing for paid employment.

This club, and more importantly, the individuals providing this support, are invaluable to local communities where they are a 'lifeline' to some of those who are most struggling, and for whom very little comparable support is available. The job coaches take on the role of carer, advisor, counsellor and trusted friend, lightening the load for other services, and all for a basic wage. It is clear that this service needs to not only remain but to grow. When so much difference has been achieved by so few coaches, one can only imagine the impact that the service could have should funding, and staffing, be increased.

In order to do this, we reiterate those things that would make a significant difference to this service moving forward:

- Consistent funding that enables improved continuity of the service
- A small budget for individual service users
- Increased funding that enables the employment of more staff

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