ROCKET SCIENCE

Evaluation of the BounceBack Programme

An evaluation report of the first two years of the programme by Rocket Science for The Walcot Foundation

November 2023

Contents

1. Introduction

Background to the programme

The BounceBack programme was launched in 2021 by the Walcot Foundation (WF) as a response to a growing need to support young people back into the labour market following the pandemic.
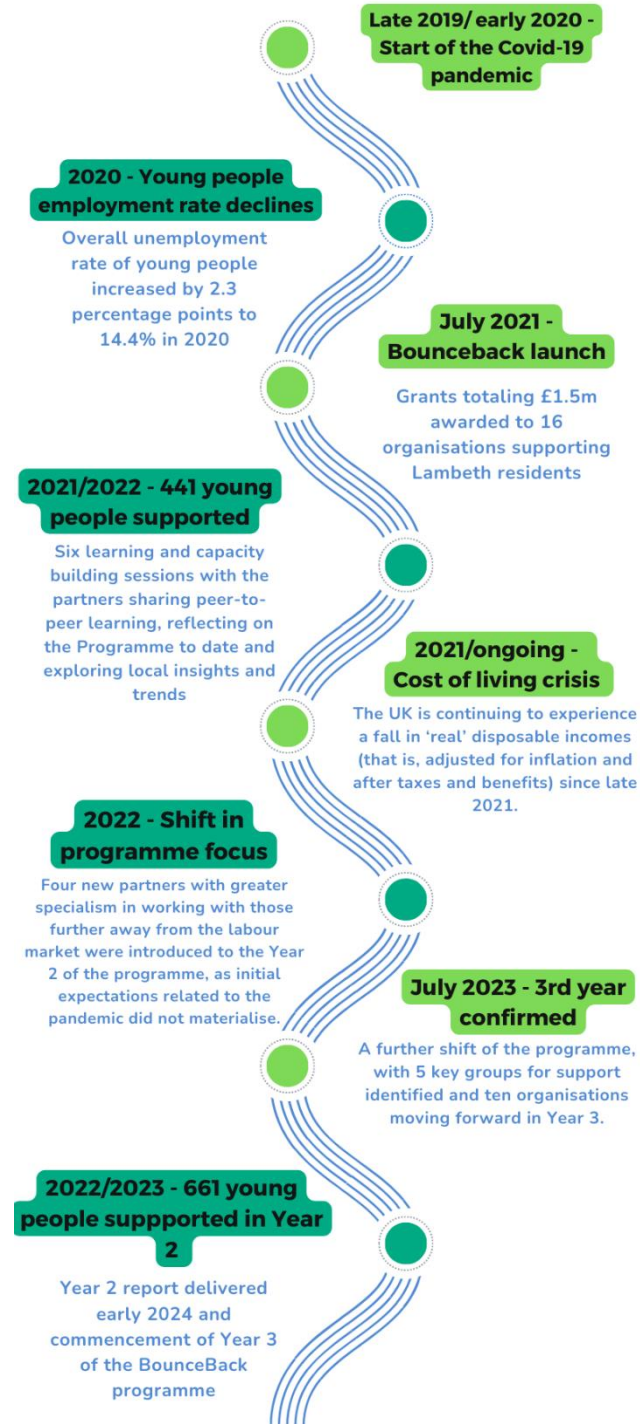
The programme was designed to help Lambeth residents under the age of 30 who were displaced from employment and those who found their opportunities narrowed by the pandemic's effect on the labour market.

The partner organisations were chosen to represent a range of sectors, specialisms and locations to support the widest range of young people across the borough. Funding was offered to supplement existing services and support rather than fund new projects and to encourage collaboration between partners.

Initially 16 different projects across 17 partners were funded across the borough. One partner dropped out early into the first year before beginning any programme delivery, and another was not funded in year two.

Over the course of the two years BounceBack has adapted to changing contexts and labour market conditions. The predicted jump in youth unemployment was short-lived, however the longer-term impacts of the pandemic on young people's mental health meant that those that were already disadvantaged were left further behind.

In October 2022 four new partners started to deliver their own BounceBack projects in response to the need for a more holistic offer of support for young people.

BOUNCEBACK TIMELINE

Late 2019/ early 2020 - Start of the Covid-19 pandemic

2020 - Young people employment rate declines
Overall unemployment rate of young people increased by 2.3 percentage points to 14.4% in 2020

July 2021 - Bounceback launch
Grants totaling £1.5m awarded to 16 organisations supporting Lambeth residents

2021/2022 - 441 young people supported
Six learning and capacity building sessions with the partners sharing peer-to-peer learning, reflecting on the Programme to date and exploring local insights and trends

2021/ongoing - Cost of living crisis
The UK is continuing to experience a fall in 'real' disposable incomes (that is, adjusted for inflation and after taxes and benefits) since late 2021.

2022 - Shift in programme focus
Four new partners with greater specialism in working with those further away from the labour market were introduced to the Year 2 of the programme, as initial expectations related to the pandemic did not materialise.

July 2023 - 3rd year confirmed
A further shift of the programme, with 5 key groups for support identified and ten organisations moving forward in Year 3.

2022/2023 - 661 young people suppported in Year 2
Year 2 report delivered early 2024 and commencement of Year 3 of the BounceBack programme

Evaluation methodology

We co-designed a mixed methods evaluation approach with WF and delivery partners this included:

- **Quarterly monitoring data** tracking participation and outcomes
- **Interviews with delivery partners** at the beginning, midpoint and in October 2023
- Six **capacity and learning sessions** bringing together the delivery team for peer-to-peer shared learning and reflecting on the programme.
- 25 **interviews with young people** supported by the programme

Challenges and limitations

Encouraging young people to participate has been difficult and we have relied on delivery partners to provide access to people that they have worked with.

Attribution of BounceBack to achieving outcomes was self-reported by delivery partners as it was difficult to separate the additional funding provided with the existing support offer. This also affected access to other stakeholders as we relied on partners to provide contacts.

Recommendations for the future

For the final year of the evaluation, we are continuing to collect monitoring data on the programme in its refocused format which is on supporting those more vulnerable young people with mental health and wrap around help.

We recommend that the following elements are incorporated into the evaluation design:

1 Greater involvement with young people in the evaluation including more regular focus groups and interviews possibly quarterly and more representative of the ten delivery partners. This could be agreed and co-developed in consultation with the delivery partners.

2 Developing a stakeholder map using information about referral routes into and out of the programme so that we can better understand how BounceBack sits within the wider employment support ecology in Lambeth and the strength of relationships between delivery partners and stakeholders. This would enable us to better understand the 'system' of support and the relative strengths, weaknesses and potential gaps in support in the borough. This would need to be agreed and co-developed with delivery partners and would require data to be collected by them.

3 Given the strength of data on participation and outcomes through the monitoring processes, a focus for the final year should be on capturing better impact stories about the journey of young people before, through and after the programme.

4 Finally we would like to build in reflection sessions with delivery partners on what would have happened without BounceBack in this final year. We are keen to explore the impact of collaboration in reducing 'competition' and the enablers and barriers to achieving a 'family of delivery partners' approach to supporting young people. This with a view to challenge traditional models of employment support which focus on individual delivery partner performance to models where collaborations between delivery partners are incentivised and rewarded.

2. What has BounceBack achieved?

BOUNCEBACK IN NUMBERS

19 Year 2 partners

1,102 Registrations in Year 1 and 2

35% living in the 2nd decile for most deprived LSOAs nationally

50% between 19-25 & Black, African, Caribbean or Black British

Groups reached:
35% long-term unemployed
27% young people with SEND
25% reporting a disability
15% involved with the criminal justice system

50%

1 in 2 completed the BounceBack programme

Out of all young people who completed the programme:

37% started a job
27% achieved no hard outcome
14% started full-time education
13% achieved employment related outcomes
9% achieved a new qualification

Only 37.5% of those who were long term unemployed or had no qualifications achieved an outcome compared to 52% of overall cohort

For 68% of those who achieved an outcome, this can be attributed mainly or entirely to BounceBack participation

70 Job Transition Grants awarded

88%

88% JTG recipients attributed employment outcomes to involvement in BounceBack than participants overall

Summary and recommendations

BounceBack reached over 1100 young people in the first two years, at least half of 19–25-year-olds were from Black African, Caribbean of Black British communities.

Long term unemployed young people or those that had no qualification were less likely to achieve an outcome. Over 50% of young people participating achieved an outcome. There were no significant differences between the gender, ethnicity and disability status of the young people taking part in the BounceBack programme.

There were lower levels of primary outcomes achieved among the four new providers compared to the other delivery partners, as they were engaging a larger proportion of harder-to-reach groups (e.g., long-term unemployment, no qualifications, CJS involvement and SEND).

Delivery partners noted that fewer young people applied for a Job Transition Grant (JTG) because of concerns around financial scrutiny of themselves and their family or worries that the grant would impact benefits they already received such as Universal Credit. The inflexibility in certain grant eligibility criteria also posed a challenge, especially for individuals who had not transitioned into full-time roles at the time.

A key recommendation for WF is to revisit the purpose of the JTG grant and the conditions associated with it to encourage greater take up.

3.What has been the impact for young people

Quality of support

The support provided to young people across the BounceBack programme differed depending on the expertise and specialism of the organisation helping them. However, all organisations focused on equipping young people with soft and hard skills they can take forward into education and employment, to strengthen their prospects and access to opportunities. Young people reported positive experiences.

> **Activities and approaches that worked well.**
> - ✓ **One-to-one support around writing job applications, improving CV's and looking at financial support applications.**
> - ✓ **Group learning and activity sessions where they could hear others' experiences and improve their inter-personal communication skills.**
> - ✓ **Flexibility of the delivery partners allowing young people to feel that they have a say in how they engage with the project, and level of support they received.**

> *"Genuinely perfect "*

> *"The whole experience was really great, and staff were super friendly and supportive."*

> *"It went beyond my expectations."*

> *"Just wanted to express gratitude for the project and generosity because I know through that commitment that the project is enriching us."*

Challenges and improvements

The major challenges faced by young people in achieving outcomes were attributed to external barriers. This was mainly stated by those organisations that worked exclusively with young people from minority backgrounds and those seeking asylum. Similarly, one challenge identified by young people in interviews was the lack of communication around the support or opportunities available to them. Often this was about late notification of networking or events meaning that they could not always attend.

Soft skills and personal development

In addition to more quantifiable outcomes around job and education attainment, feedback from young people showed that BounceBack improved softer skills around confidence, communication and social interaction.

> - ✓ **Improved confidence in social situations**
> - ✓ **Improved inter-personal and communication skills.**
> - ✓ **Improved mental and physical health.**
> - ✓ **Greater participation in local community**
> - ✓ **Increased independence**

Employment was the main goal for some young people. For those furthest from the labour market, the development of softer skills and independence were more important.

> "It has really helped with my mental health, being outside and learning different skills and being physical was a massive thing for me."

> "The leaders themselves were from different backgrounds so nice and understanding, it was really meaningful to know women in colour could make it, so it was quite empowering."

> "Looking forward to new things that are coming and just grateful to have a bit more confidence to believe I can do them."

> "It's helped me a lot in terms of personal skills. Spiral allowed me to be in a comfortable space where I can speak to new people."

> "It has helped with personal development in life, I am more polished, take myself more seriously. Very proud of my personal development."

Education and Employment outcomes

Young people had wide ranging experiences of education and employment prior to BounceBack. The majority had either experienced some form of part time work, full time work or education. Although many attributed the pandemic as having a negative effect on their experiences and their health.

Many young people showed improvements around their employment, education or financial situation, particularly for those who were supported by partners that specialised in employment support. The range of outcomes are demonstrated below.

- ✓ **Completion of PIP applications**
- ✓ **TFL freedom pass received**
- ✓ **CV updated**
- ✓ **Job applications supported and processed**
- ✓ **Part time or full-time apprenticeship/employment/education secured**

> "The CV we put together was one of the best ones I've ever had."

> "It pushes you outside the box "

> "Being in this environment has really reassured me with going to employers and having confidence."

"Getting my first job, increasing my work experience, and learning about the different kinds of benefits that support me into functioning in the world."

"I love the support the programme gives me. If I didn't find IRMO I probably would have followed the same role in retail because you don't know how you can do anything else."

Case Studies

"I want to be a more consistent, disciplined and self-sufficient person, and happier with what I've done and direction I'm heading. I've almost had a transformation with Spiral, so I's only going up from here."

Seb

Organisation	Spiral Skills
Outcomes	✓ Trained as a young leader at Spiral ✓ CSCS card achieved ✓ Improvement in confidence and personal development, and reduced anxiety

"Being in this environment has really reassured me with going to employers and having confidence."

Jude

Organisation	Walworth Garden
Outcomes	✓ Greater confidence networking ✓ Increased knowledge about sector-specific employment

"(The JTG) made it a lot easier, made me less worried and simply focused on being me in my new job."

Zach

Organisation	Leadership through Business and Sports
Outcomes	✓ Job transition grant received ✓ Level 2 Accountancy and apprenticeship

"It's really good. Very helpful and useful."

Lucia

Organisation	Toucan Employment
Outcomes	✓ Received PIP and Freedom pass ✓ Finance advice and continual employment

"If I hadn't taken part, I probably wouldn't have got a job."

Anthony

Organisation	Unity Works
Outcomes	✓ Improved IT and communication skills ✓ Support applying for full-time employment

Partners' perspective

The following section explores the perspectives of the delivery partners, based on analysis of the end of year narrative reports submitted to the Walcot Foundation.

What has worked well

Arranging for participants in BounceBack to attend networking or sector-specific events where they can meet industry professionals and develop transferable skills.

For the course-based projects, delivery partners found it helpful to **ensure that young people were working towards something** such as a portfolio, individual project or in-house qualification they could take with them on completion and use in the future.

Continual support being available on a one-to-one basis. Delivery partners felt that seeing young people face to face regularly was essential to ensure they felt comfortable.

Taking into account young people's wellbeing and complex needs throughout their time as a participant. This included having wellbeing sessions built into course weeks and crisis management training for staff.

Challenges

Due to the impact of Covid-19, some young people presented with very low self-confidence, and a lack of digital, communication organisation skills. This meant progressing young people into employment could be challenging as there was a large gap to close in terms of both hard and soft skills to prepare them for the workplace.

The digital literacy gap experienced by young people limited their ability to take part in some of the elements of the programme. Similarly, many young people had particular complex needs which meant they could not engage fully, for example being unable to travel to locations. Childcare was also a recurring issue when attempting to help young people secure employment.

Due to complex needs staff were required to take a much more holistic support role outside of the primary aims of their support. They noted the need for more support around mental health for participants on the programme.

Difficulty monitoring and forecasting outcomes for each quarter due to the unpredictable nature of engagement of the young people and their particular interests in education or employment pathways.

Lessons learnt

Outcomes are achieved when **course content is streamlined** and aligned with employment opportunities.

The use of peer support or recommendations to encourage engagement. For example, utilising peer youth outreach workers to help with recruitment through flyers or sharing of events, to give new participants the chance to see the real life impact the programme can have.

Peer mentoring was also a **useful tool to encourage those who are more disengaged** when working with staff.

To ensure engagement from young people, several organisations have developed **formal frameworks or action plans** that outline the commitment of both the young person and the organisation.

Introducing an ongoing form of drop-in support can mean participants who have finished with the programme can still return for one off advice or help.

Summary and recommendations

1 **Encourage in-person industry and networking events** –These provide young people access into events and spaces that they may not have had reach to before and can increase feelings of self-confidence and independence.

2 **Ensure there is optional ongoing support for participants who have completed the programme** – This ensures that young people feel supported in achieving longer-term goals that cannot be attained during a short-term course or programme.

3 **Utilise opportunities for peer learning** –There is the opportunity to further utilise this peer element in the referral process and to reach more disengaged participants who may struggle with communication with staff.

4 **Increase communication between organisations to ensure young people have access to referrals** – Many young people noted that they would have liked greater links to other services. Increasing understanding of aims, objectives and services offered by other organisations, delivery partners could increase and improve cross-referrals.

> *"This cohort has been more challenging and harder to reach so we're working with multiple barriers to success. it's much more complex and multi-layered."*
> **Delivery partner**

4. The partnership & collaboration approach

Reflections on the partnership model

Comparison with other funding and delivery models
BounceBack was flexible and enabled frequent interaction among delivery partners. The programme stood out due to its continuous support, regular catchups, and ease of monitoring information.

Value of partnership across organisations
Partners enhanced their awareness of each other's work, which led to more cross-referrals and improved collaboration. Communication between partners was valuable and continued informally outside of meetings and events.

Benefits of the collaborative funding model and BounceBack partnership
Mutual aid, attending networking events, having opportunities to share challenges and best practices, and being up to date with valuable labour market data exchange were noted as significant benefits to the model

Engaging and reaching young people

Referrals were a priority for establishing routes for engagement and building connections with local partners. Some partners received DWP referrals and sustained positive connections while others struggled with establishing engagement with referral organisations.

Most delivery partners relied on existing connections and promoting opportunities in diverse ways across the borough (e.g., social media, connecting with local organisations, attending events). Recruitment and referrals were challenging in Year 1 for some partner organisations but improved in Year 2. Referrals from DWP lacked consistency despite their initial support which had an impact on BounceBack's reach.

> *"It's been interesting and valuable to work with the other partners and hear about their experiences and we're very proud of what we achieved with the partnership."*
> Delivery Partner

> *"I have really appreciated having a bank of local organisations that I know I can cross-refer to, and it has been wonderful to be able to have participants accessing what they need without worrying about conflicts of interest."*
> Delivery Partner

Onboarding and supporting young people

Flexibility: This was a core component of engagement, which allowed young people to get involved in ways that suited their needs and preferences, especially around timetabling and delivery methods, including online, telephone and face to face.
Timetabling: The need to be adaptive around the timing preferences of young people. In some cases, this meant revising delivery plans to ensure more flexible opportunities.
Online vs in person. Online delivery has proved useful for those who did not typically engage face to face or struggled to travel to locations, but for others in person sessions were more productive and were likely to support ongoing interaction and engagement.
More young people seeking support have displayed additional or more complex needs than anticipated. This included greater

numbers joining the programme with mental health needs. This required the support to pivot to more rounded and holistic approach to young people.

> *"We were very flexible around the timings of how long they have to train for, especially because it's all around the individual needs."*
> Delivery partner

Keeping young people on the programme

Digital and IT skills training was essential where digital literacy was poor and had an impact on job search.

The 24-month model of funding was beneficial as it gave flexibility and time for delivery partners to offer tailored and in-depth support for young people.

There was a significant challenge in retaining participants within the programme, reasons ranging from receiving compelling job offers to complex personal issues, often related to mental health concerns.

> *"Young people would show initial interest but would not respond to emails, texts, they would not show up to sessions. This group could drop out at any time, not all got that final certification, they achieved loads of soft outcomes but in the eyes of the programme we did not offer enough support."*
> Delivery partner

Collaborating on referrals

The collaboration resulted in an improved awareness of opportunities for young people in the local area and in some cases facilitated young people's moves in between different services and opportunities to develop other skills.

The programme could be improved with greater communication between partners around cross-referrals, with clearer communication around the aims of each service being helpful. Some partners expressed concerns around **recruiting from the same cohort** or the same 'pool' of young people.

Stakeholder reflections

In the context of Bounceback, stakeholders are representatives of the following potential organisations: Youth Hubs, employment providers, local providers of mental health services, Lambeth Social Care, Youth Justice Service and Job Centre.

Collaboration: Stakeholders valued the co-ordinated partnership approach and active communication that resulted in finding young people most in need.

Onboarding young people: Stakeholders' felt partners' were largely successful at engaging and creating connections with the young people and onboarding them in to the programme.

Sustaining engagement: They reflected that there was a continual need for partners to be more informed around young people's risks, complex needs and changes in their personal circumstances.

Referral process: They praised the effectiveness of partners referring young people on to other services, to help secure employment and further support.

> *"Really useful to us to have strong communication. For a young person, if the organisations don't communicate, the support is not hugely effective. Because we have a fantastic working relationship, [the organisation] can bring them to us."*
> **Stakeholder**

> *"They're really responsive to network invites or referrer emails, really good at engaging with that and seeing what we do."*
> **Stakeholder**

Meeting outcomes and managing labour market challenges

Outcomes and impact
- Young people were supported to meet their goals and achieved positive impacts (e.g., progress in education, new qualifications, and improvements in confidence and self-esteem. Completing the programme motivated young people and resulted in work placements which when successful materialised into permanent roles.

Challenges
- Partners had concerns around **not wanting to oversaturate support for young people** accessing the programme, with a suggestion to refine the targeting strategy to meet needs more effectively.
- Collaborative working around achieving outcomes and goals was challenging when **multiple parties were striving for the same results and funding**. Working across boroughs and diverse partners added another layer of difficulty.

> *"[They are] slower to move into work than our other cohorts, we tried to rework with them, tried to support them further, introduce them to different pathways, have speakers from recent graduates."*
> **Delivery partner**

> *"Collaborative working around outcomes and programmes can sometimes be quite difficult because we're all trying to achieve the same goal with the same outcome and be paid for the same thing."*
> **Delivery partner**

> "We've had BounceBack organisations referring to our other programmes as well. We've been able to cross reference and work with other organisations off the back of it. We have quite a good footprint across London, but it was nice to reignite some of those fires."
> Delivery partner

> "We definitely wouldn't have been able to reach these individuals without the support of the programme."
> Delivery partner

> "It's been going great, it's been powerful and transformative, amazing to see them grow in confidence, it's impactful."
> Delivery partner

tailored support, better communication among partners, and realistic expectations for hard-to-reach groups.

Future recommendations

1 Shifting programme's eligibility criteria concerning age requirements and the transition into employment. There could be greater flexibility in the criteria and expectations of the programme in order to ease the process for participants.

2 Suggestions of coproduction with partners during design stages and who might be more knowledgeable to set target numbers of young people involved in the programme.

3 Partners encouraged more communication efforts and information sharing between them in order to understand young people's needs, risks and key areas of support.

4 Appointing a dedicated support worker to serve as a central contact point for participants, with experience relevant to the challenges faced by young people.

5 Continue to host events tailored to participants or collaborative workshops to help spotlight diverse opportunities offered by various organisations and promote cross-referrals.

Learning and recommendations for the future

Learning

- ✓ Delivery partners appreciated Walcot's understanding and flexibility compared to other funders.
- ✓ Walcot was proactive in sharing good practice, was respectful of everyone's time and acknowledged the need for and provided necessary support.
- ✓ The collaborative partnership model enhanced morale and sharing of experiences but there were issues in facilitating referrals between partners.
- ✓ Transitioning from programme delivery to establishing partnerships presented challenges.
- ✓ The programme faced initial challenges in recruiting young people. While the delivery model focusing on employment components worked well, it faced challenges when participants had conflicting commitments like part-time jobs or schedule clashes.
- ✓ Identified challenges related to engagement, retention, and supporting complex posed hurdles in achieving outcomes. There were valuable lessons learned regarding the need for

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