



International

**NEW HORIZONS:
A CASE STUDY IN
IMPROVING
EMPLOYABILITY
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
THROUGH DEVELOPING
MENTAL TOUGHNESS**

Background

The New Horizons Program is targeted at those young people in Merseyside with attendance or/and behavioural issues in school and NEET young people, who are: Young Offenders (under order, ex offender, or 'at risk' e.g. under warning/caution); In Care/Leaving Care; or LLDD (i.e. Section 139a statemented/School Action Plus).

The programme has been delivered by Career Connect, a pioneering Employability Development organisation based in the North West of England whose roots are in Career Guidance activity. The programme was delivered within the framework of a Social Impact Bond (SIB) where payment from UK Government is only made for measurable and evidenced outcomes. It is directly performance oriented.

At the time of delivery this programme was the largest SIB in the UK.

Risk capital came through a consortium of Social Investors, the principal partner being Triodos Bank.

At the heart of the programme was the application of the Mental Toughness model and the use of the MTQ48 psychometric for assessment, diagnosis and evaluation. Mental Toughness is a personality trait identified by Peter Clough, Professor of Applied Psychology at Manchester Metropolitan University. It embraces concepts and ideas such as mindset, grit, resilience and character.

Widely used in development activity, Mental Toughness describes an individual's underlying mindset which explains their response to stress, pressure and opportunity. It is a major factor in individual behaviour, wellbeing and performance and can be considered an enabler for these important outcomes. There are 4 elements in Mental Toughness (the 4Cs) – Control, Commitment, Challenge and Confidence.

The programme was essentially based around assessing each individual in the programme to identify their particular needs and from that to introduce a development programme over a period of 6 weeks which use experiential learning to build the underlying mental toughness which enables the programme outcomes to be achieved.

The results showed that generally mental toughness was improved or developed for most participants, that the key programme outcomes were achieved to the satisfaction of all stakeholders and that these outcomes were correlated. The programme successes are described below:

Narrowing the Gap.

The New Horizons programme targeted these cohorts because in 2010/11 their outcome statistics were worsening at an accelerated rate whilst Education, Employment & Training (EET) rates for Merseyside young people remained relatively stable at 92%. The gap in key outcomes was widening and having an impact on their life chances.

Where we started - Education, Employment and Training (EET) benchmark rates 2010 and 2011.

	October 2010	October 2011
Care Leaver EET %	61%	47%
LDD EET %	83%	65%
Young Offender EET %	54%	37%
Combined eligible group	62%	50%
16-18 year olds as a whole in the Liverpool City Region	92%	92%

The worsening situation reflected reductions in public expenditure targeting these groups and an increasingly competitive employment market. The New Horizons programme was designed specifically to focus on these cohorts noting that a significant number of young people belong to at least two of the groups, face multiple barriers to progress and share common underlying support needs.

Employment Education and Training

In seeking to evaluate added value Career Connect used two comparator or control groups;

- A group of NH eligible young people in the Liverpool City Region who were never recruited to the programme – termed below the Liverpool City Region control group.
- The equivalent cohort in a statistical neighbour local authority area where there has been no NH intervention and where we have access to real time intelligence on exactly the same basis as we do in the Liverpool City Region – termed below the Stat neighbour area control group.

The destination analysis Career Connect carried for the New Horizons cohort of 3324 participants indicates that the programme has had a positive impact on the group as a whole and the attached table shows that of the Year 1 recruits the current EET position is 58%, this rises to 79% for year 2 recruits and for Year 3 recruits it is currently 93%* although the 2014 annual activity survey is not yet complete.

EET rates 2012-2014

	Year 1 cohort 2012	Year 2 cohort 2013	Year 2 cohort 2014
NH participant EET rate.	58%	79%	93%*
Liverpool City Region control group	48%	51%	54%
Statistical neighbour area control group	68%	71%	70%

NEET and Not Known

In addition to the current EET figures it is also important to look at the improvement in NEET figures for the New Horizons cohort we have worked with. In October 2011 13% of local LLDD were NEET, 29% of care leavers were NEET and 40% of Young Offenders were NEET. Taken together the average NEET % for the New Horizons target group was 21% and the table demonstrates that our interventions have reduced this 18% for year 1 recruits falling to 12% for year 2 and 6% for year 3.

These figures also need to be considered alongside the historical not known/cannot be contacted figures. Through our tracking we are reporting not known figures of 6% for year 1 falling to 1% for year 3. In October 2011 the average not known figure for the New Horizons target groups was 13%.

Qualifications

In 2010, within the Greater Merseyside region, 32% of Care Leavers failed to obtain a GCSE (or equivalent), 55% of Liverpool Young Offenders had no formal qualifications, and less than the national average of 16% of LLDD achieved 5 A-C* GCSEs.

The New Horizons programme is accredited at NQF level 1 and our Open Awards qualification that focuses on employability skills, life skills and personal development has proved to be very successful and is well received by pupils and school staff. Of the recruits who have reached the statutory school leaving age for whom Career Connect tracked the evidence they have seen over 45% achieve at least a level 1 qualification and a further 16% have achieved a level 2 qualification.

Career Connect also tracked a further 68 students who have successfully completed a level 3 qualification. These figures will go up when we track the groups who will be completing school and college courses in 2015.

This improvement in qualifications for the New Horizons target group has impacted positively on the numbers of school leavers remaining in education or training with the aim of gaining higher qualifications before joining the labour market.

For those who have completed a full academic year and taken GCSEs or equivalent qualifications the level 2 achievement rates have grown significantly

	Baseline achievements in 2011.	August 2013.	August 2014.
Percentage achieving Level 2 qualification	11%	22%	29%
Liverpool City Region control group	11%	13.2%	15.4%
Statistical neighbour area control group	16%	18.1%	18.4%

*The improvements in Level 2 for qualifications for all young people in the Liverpool City Region were 1% between 2011 and 2013 and 0% between 2013 and 2014.

Numbers in employment

The over-arching effect of such a significant improvement in educational attainment has been to boost the numbers of New Horizons young people continuing in learning beyond the age of 16, delaying their movement into the labour market and giving them access to a broader range of opportunities and vacancies at a higher level than before.

The numbers of New Horizons recruits gaining and sustaining employment had not been as high as originally forecasted but over 230 young people have gained a job or apprenticeship. Of this group Career Connect has verified that 140 have reached a 13-week outcome and 90 have gone on to sustain that job for 26 weeks. Of this group of 90 there are currently 73 still in the job some of whom have been in the jobs since late 2012.

Of the remaining 90 in jobs or apprenticeships there are 46 who are verified as being in a legitimate and claimable 13-week outcome position in the coming months and the remainder are either in part time work less than 16 hours or we are still in the process of verifying their job status.

An emerging feature of the programme is that coach support whilst in employment is having a measurable impact on retention rates in employment. The dropout rate between 13 and 26 weeks for the last five months of the New Horizons programme has been zero whilst for the period preceding the change in coach case loading to target young people in employment it was 40%

One of the principal reasons for the lower numbers gaining employment has been the raising of the participation age which has resulted in more young people remaining in education to improve their qualifications which in turn will improve their job prospects albeit at a later stage than previously anticipated. RPA or “staying on” rates have improved at a rate of 3% for all 16–18-year-olds across the Liverpool City Region and by 32% for the New Horizons group.

A commitment to longitudinal tracking of the effects of the New Horizons programme means that Career Connect has continued to track the movement of participants in and out of the labour market beyond October 2015.

Whilst the late entry into the labour market means that many employment outcomes will fall outside of the financial claim period for this programme these outcomes will be monitored and form part of the overall evaluation of the programme.

Drop out and switching.

There are more than 5,000 young people across the Liverpool City Region who are NEET at the time of the project and, on average, more than one thousand young people leave this group in a month and more than one thousand join the group. This high degree of drop out and switching (churn) is an enormous waste of resource and expensive to map, track and support.

A key performance indicator for Career Connect in delivering this work has been the degree to which we foster resilience and persistence in the face of the problems faced by our participants. The key measure used to evaluate the degree to which the programme tackled the churn issue is the early drop out and switching rate.

Churn rates (NEET to EET to NEET)

	Baseline achievements in 2011.	August 2013.	August 2014.
NH participants	25%	12%	11%
Liverpool City Region control group	22%	21%	20%
Statistical neighbour area control group	16%	15%	16%

Drop out from employment has been zero over the last six months of the project as we have directed coach time to employment support and developed prompt and keep in touch strategies with this group of young people.

Continuance and completion of courses of learning had delayed entry to the employment market (forty started a job in August 2014) but has bolstered local strategies for Raising the Age of Participation (RPA) and been the most important factor in the achievement of level 2 and Level 3 qualifications.

Kieran Gordon, Chief Executive of Career Connect said:



“We have really valued the opportunity to work with social investors in delivering support to the most vulnerable young people across the Liverpool City Region. We have seen real impact in terms of better attendance in schools and improved behaviour amongst those who have been on the New Horizons programme – and consequently their exam results have shown dramatic improvement. We also take great pride in the fact that so many young people are today in a job with training having been through the programme.”



Bridges Ventures, who were also part of the consortium of Social Investors in the SIB made a short film celebrating Career Connects story.

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