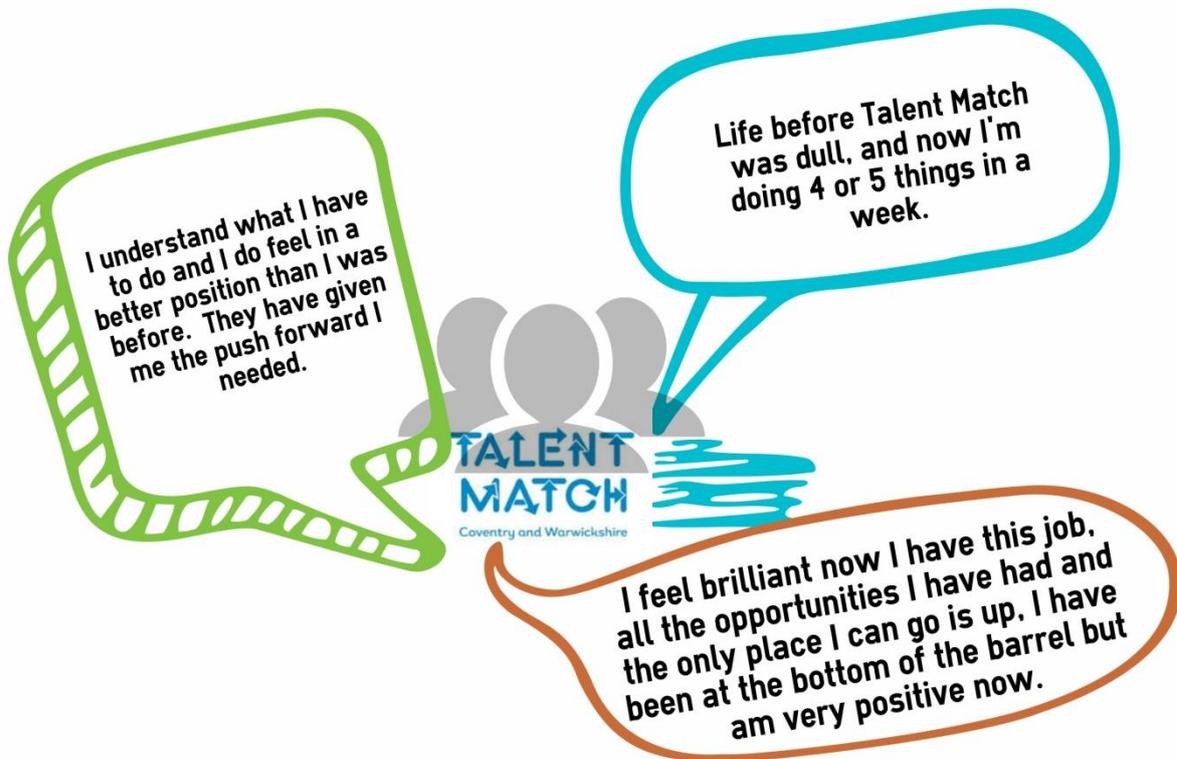


# Talent Match Coventry & Warwickshire: Year 2 Evaluation Report

March 2016



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March 2016  
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## 1. Introduction

This is the second local evaluation report for Talent Match Coventry & Warwickshire, one of 21 local Talent Match projects funded across England by the Big Lottery.

Talent Match is a 5 year programme intended to move those 18-24 years olds who are furthest away from the labour market towards sustainable employment, and to engage young people (often described as NEET - Not in Education, Employment or Training) in the design and delivery of the programme at local level.

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This report presents the findings from data gathered between September 2015 and February 2016. Detailed information about the design and set up of the project was provided in the local evaluation Baseline Report (July 2015).

## 2. Methodology

Theory of Change is the over-arching evaluation framework that the programme is using to map out how the activities delivered through Talent Match enable young people to create their individual pathways to achieve the outcomes of sustainable employment, self-employment or further education or training.

As part of the work undertaken for the local evaluation Baseline Report (July 2015) a Theory of Change (ToC) for Talent Match Coventry & Warwickshire was developed that took into account the **overall goal** of the programme which is “*To create cohesive employability pathways for unemployed 18-24 year olds in North Warwickshire, Nuneaton & Bedworth and Coventry to sustained employment, self-employment or further education or training.*”<sup>1</sup> The ToC identifies the **intermediate outcomes, programme activities** and **enabling factors** put in place by the programme to deliver the overall goal. See appendix I for the Theory of Change diagram.

For this second report the evaluation team explored how the programme has developed in order to continue to reach the overall goal and to understand more about the impact of the programme on young people’s lives. In order to do this we have used a mixed methodology to gather qualitative and quantitative data through:

- Filmed interviews with young people participating in steering group, celebration events and other group activities. The interviews were transcribed and key noted prior to analysis.
- An in-depth filmed interview with one peer mentor.
- 5 young people have engaged in one-to-one in-depth interviews on 2 or 3<sup>2</sup> occasions. These interviews were designed to build a relationship between the evaluation team

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<sup>1</sup> See Baseline Report - Merida Associates 2015

<sup>2</sup> Of these 5 young people we met 4 of them 3 times and one person twice

member and young person in order for the evaluation team to 'follow' them over a period of months to understand the impact of Talent Match more fully.

- An online survey for programme participants which was completed by 25 young people.
- An online survey for delivery partners completed by 7 groups. 2 groups submitted 2 survey returns making a total of 9 responses.
- A one-to-one interview with the Project Coordinator.
- A workshop with the peer mentors.
- A workshop with the Core Strategic Partners.
- A discussion (run contemporaneously with the CSP workshop) for Talent Match staff and youth panel member at the CSP.
- Analysis of postcode data to show the spread of participants across Coventry and Warwickshire.
- Analysis of some National Evaluation datasets for Talent Match Coventry and Warwickshire.

### 3. A maturing delivery offer

There is strong evidence to suggest that the programme is maturing, developing and learning from the day-to-day experiences of programme delivery.

The Project Coordinator and the wider delivery team have used the Theory of Change (ToC) to reflect on what is working well and to visualise what they do next. It was a useful tool to support the design and implementation of changes in the staffing structure during this reporting period.

#### One-to-one mentoring

The substantive and common offer to all participants continues to be the provision of one-to-one support from a peer mentor; and the role of the peer mentor is one of the areas where the programme has become clearer about the skills, attributes and abilities required to do carry out the role effectively.

Initially the programme recruited a group of peer mentors employed as apprentices and drawn from the target Talent Match client group. For one young person this has been an experience that has helped them to grow and develop; for the others it proved to be not the right opportunity for them at the time.

In learning from what works, the programme has moved from recruiting peer mentors drawn from the client group to employing young people with good inter-personal skills and

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For one apprentice Peer Mentor the experience of working as a mentor with Talent Match has been life changing. A combination of not knowing what she wanted to do, not knowing "where I fitted in" having no formal qualifications and being unemployed for 18 months led to her becoming "seriously depressed."

After 18 months as an apprentice peer mentor she now has an NVQ Level 3 in Youth Work, and feels that Talent Match gave her the tools to learn new skills, grow in confidence and "as a person," and following a formal recruitment process she is now taking on a new role within Talent Match as a senior mentor.

• • •

a passion for helping other young people, and supporting them to gain the skills and confidence to support other young people achieve their employment goals. All the peer mentors who participated in the research spoke very eloquently about their passion for the work they do. They are excited by the changes they see in the young people they work with, and are mindful of, but not over-awed by, the responsibilities and potential for influence inherent in their role.

The delivery team has grown from 6 people to a team of 12, with 4 Peer Mentors, 2 Senior Mentors, a Project Administrator, 2 (job shared role) Recruitment and Progression Officers based with RightStep (to ensure synergy between Talent Match and other RightStep services), two Project Workers and the Project Coordinator. This growth illustrates the maturing of the programme as the need to extend and differentiate elements of the mentoring role, increase support for mentors and enable a focus on employer engagement emerged from reflection within the team.

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*"Through Talent match I've really grown as a person and without them I would still be trapped in home, crippled by anxiety. But Talent Match has done everything they can to help me both personally and with employment and training."*

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While peer mentors continue to work with participants on a one-to-one basis, the programme has built in more opportunities for young people to 'drop in' for more informal sessions such as the coffee morning that is regularly held in Nuneaton. This reflects the programme's increased understanding that young people are often lonely and isolated, without social networks, and that social isolation is one of the factors that adversely affects participants' mental health and wellbeing.

The programme team have identified that as many as 50% of the young people have poor mental health and generally poor mental wellbeing when they start the programme. This observation is supported by the findings from the National Evaluation 2015<sup>3</sup> report that noted: "Levels of well-being are startlingly lower among those completing the baseline survey compared to UK adults aged 16-24. Most notably the percentage giving a very high rating for "satisfaction with their lives nowadays" and the percentage giving a very high rating of how "worthwhile they think the things they do are" are both 18 percentage points lower than the national score." Many of the young people who were filmed in this evaluation period talked about feeling lonely,

feeling isolated, not feeling confident or experiencing poor motivation to seek work prior to joining Talent Match. To help address this, all the mentors have received training in Mental Health first aid and one of the support pathways available at Stage 2 of the Talent Match journey (see below) is referral to counselling and professional mentoring services provided by delivery partners (the relationship with delivery partners and other service providers is discussed more fully in section 7).

It is interesting to note from the National Evaluation Baseline Assessment tool that just 26% (n= 29) of those joining the programme identified a mental health issue, suggesting that

<sup>3</sup> Sanderson E. & Wilson I (Nov 2015) *Talent Match Evaluation and Learning Contract: 2013-19 Common Data Framework: Annual Report* Sheffield Hallam et al

many young people are unaware that some of the feelings and behaviours they are experiencing and exhibiting may place them at risk of mental ill health.

The team have become more adept at completing the National Evaluation's paperwork and monitoring requirements and now offer incentives for young people to come in for the 12 week reviews. They also conduct home visits if they have not been able to contact them through other routes. Reaching young people who have moved on for post-Talent Match reviews continues to be a challenge, however this is a challenge experienced across other Talent Match projects.

The team have conceptualised the delivery offer into 4 stages - which reflects a young person's journey through Talent Match and this is summarised in Diagram 1. For each stage the team have identified what a young person can expect from the service. Stage 1 addresses practical issues such as I.D. and bank accounts, building a relationship with your mentor, meeting and connecting with other young people and self assessment. Stage 2 encourages all participants to get involved with engagement activities, build team and group skills and develop interview and job ready skills. Stage 3 is geared to work placements, supported job search and vocational skills while Stage 4 offers in-work support.

The Talent Match Journey leaflet can be found at appendix 2.

Diagram 1 Talent Match Coventry and Warwickshire - Your Journey



The Peer Mentors appreciate the flexibility that the Talent Match Coventry and Warwickshire offer provides, and feel that it enables them to develop new ideas and test out new approaches in order to meet participants' needs.

Recruitment and Progression Officers (RPOs) are a relatively recent addition to the Talent Match delivery team. Peer mentors and RPOs work well together, and there is a sense across the team that this role is adding value in terms of engaging employers and helping young people access employment opportunities, particularly in designing non-traditional routes to employment which are discussed more fully later in this report.

## Sharing the learning from delivery to date

The Core Strategic Partnership<sup>4</sup> (CSP) is the main vehicle for the programme to share the learning and insights into what works across Coventry and Warwickshire. Members share information about Talent Match in a number of ways at local and County levels:

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- Reporting back to council officers and members; through this route people share good practice and learning to help shape strategies and develop policies
- Participating in a range of networks, for example the Local Enterprise Partnership and voluntary sector fora in Warwickshire
- With employers
- To agencies such as the Job Shop Hub in Coventry.

Talent Match has also fed into the Economy, Learning, skills and employability (ELSE) group in Coventry. Learning from the project has helped to inform priorities in relation to employability amongst young people and the Project Coordinator has delivered a presentation to this group in addition to the wider Coventry Partnership.

CSP members were clear that Talent Match has been able to inform the development of new initiatives, in particular the European-funded Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) programme.

The Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership in its 2014-2020 ESIF Strategy saw Talent Match as a key part of the offer to raise the aspirations of young people in the County, to re-engage them in learning and move them into employment. Members feel that Talent Match's learning about how to work with those young people who are not in education, training or employment (NEET) is helping a range of stakeholders from across the County understand how offering a more tailored approach can help address the overall NEET challenge.

The learning from Talent Match has also influenced whether or not to roll out the 'Bootcamp' model across Warwickshire - feedback from young people demonstrated that a similar model to Talent Match would be preferable. The success of the Talent Match peer mentor role has influenced the design of the Ambition Coach role<sup>5</sup> (part of the Youth Employment Initiative) for Coventry City Council.

Talent Match learning has been implemented into all three strands of the Building Better Opportunities Programme through attending development meetings / forums and sending data / good practice to lead applicants. As the applicants go through their second stage bid

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<sup>4</sup> Rightstep Careers Ltd; Warwickshire Community and Voluntary Action; Coventry City Council North Warwickshire Borough Council; Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council; Warwickshire County Council; Department for Work and Pensions; Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce; Warwickshire County Council; L2G Ltd; CSW Sport.

<sup>5</sup> Ambition Coventry is an exciting new programme that will ensure young people in Coventry get the best start in life through high quality support into job opportunities. Source Coventry City Council website - accessed March 2016

development, Talent Match learning will be used to help inform the interventions that are needed within the selected themes. Talent Match will link with the young person's strand in particular to align delivery and ensure that the two programmes complement each other through added value and additional support.

Some CSP members would like the partnership to do more to ensure that Talent Match is even more strongly strategically positioned and offered the following suggestions for doing this:

- Challenge and change other agencies thinking and assumptions around young people and mental health/mental wellbeing.
- Explore the potential to work more closely with DWP and JCC at both a strategic and operational level, particularly in relation to the DWP's 'District Provision Tool' to ensure that Talent Match is an option available for all Work Coaches.
- Develop a regular newsletter that has good news stories to expand the reach of the programme .
- Explore the potential to focus more on life skills such as budgeting, personal hygiene, and personal presentation.
- Representatives from the Talent Match governance structure to be included in the governance structures of new programmes coming on stream.
- Share learning from involving young people in both developing proposals and commissioning services - and lobby to make sure that these approaches get built into new initiatives.

Some CSP members raised concerns about the 'postcode' lottery for Talent Match as it is not available in 3 boroughs in Warwickshire and members want to know if there is the potential to extend provision into those areas based on the Talent Match model.

Members would like to see Talent Match do more to promote and share its work and suggested the production of short filmed and written case studies that are suitable for sharing with elected members and others and that show how young people are moving into employment, maybe with particular emphasis on client groups such as young offenders and refugees.

## 4. Young People’s engagement, voice and influence

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*“Talent Match is now a more youth-friendly programme and more sociable.”*

*“On the ground floor we hear what young people want, we feed that in and it actually happens.”*

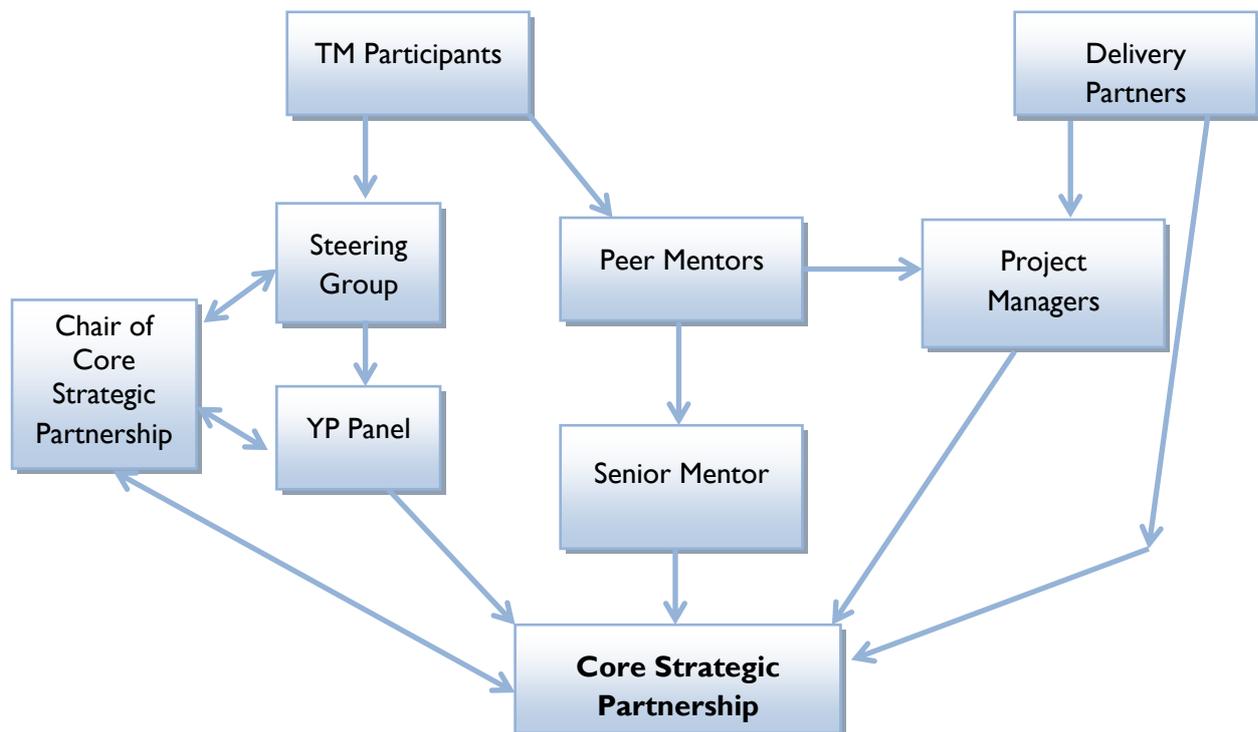
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A key aspect of the Talent Match Coventry & Warwickshire approach is that it responds to the social and emotional needs of participants, as well as to their training and work preparation needs. The staff team developed a number of ways in which young people can engage with the programme and increased opportunities for participants to interact socially, something that appears to help maintain contact with Talent Match and build young people’s confidence and self-esteem.

Participants and peer mentors feel that they are able to influence Talent Match. Diagram 2 shows the formal structure for information and influence that has been developed, and in

interviews participants and peer mentors claimed ownership of a lot of the changes in the programme over the last year.

Diagram 2: Information and Influence routes into Core Strategic Partnership



Peer mentors described how they have been supported to try things, reflect on them, and change the approach if necessary. For example, they changed the structure of the Young People’s Steering Group to make it more informal. Young People reported that their ideas

have led, for instance, to the offer of SIA security accreditation training and closer links with colleges that offer specialist qualifications.

### Steering Group

Young people are invited to join a Steering Group when they engage actively and regularly with Talent Match.

One participant reflected on how the Steering Group had changed over the year, noting that originally meetings were hard work, “*sitting round, looking at plans and documents*”, whereas now they are more flexible and less formal, more of a consultative forum. There are team building activities and meetings are more productive. Talent Match used to facilitate separate steering groups in both Coventry and Nuneaton Steering Groups, and following a period when the groups met together (which was welcomed by young people) they have now been successfully combined to form the one Steering Group.

The Steering Group meets every 4 weeks; members decide on social events and incentive options and contribute ideas to how Talent Match can be improved. They have become more popular and are somewhere young people can increase their social skills, make friends and grow their own social networks.

### Young People’s Panel

As the Steering Group has grown, it was decided to set up a Young People’s Panel of 6-8 participants. This is a more focused group that links in with staff planning days, conducts research into new incentive options and leads consultation with other participants through the Steering Groups. Panel members undertake a growing range of roles, they have been involved in staff recruitment and they are increasingly involved in the commissioning of training and support provision, having been trained to score tenders and sit on presentation and interview panels.

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*“I am on the Panel now, we get to decide lots of things. We attend Steering Group meetings and I recently went to the Core Partnership meeting – the Lottery was there and social services and other organisations – I obviously said the right things as they want me to go again.”*

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One Panel member described how he had attended a Core Strategic Partnership meeting where he was given space to talk about the work of the Young People’s Panel and to share what he has achieved on Talent Match personally.

Panel members are becoming Talent Match Ambassadors to help promote the programme and act as a voice for participants. They have attended the national Talent Match conference and employment fairs. They are gaining lots of skills and are updating their CVs with what they have learnt. Panel members are also now being offered peer mentoring training to recognise their learning with a formal qualification and to enable them to offer peer support to new participants entering the programme.

## 5. Moving young people closer to employment and training opportunities

This section looks at the profile of young people on the programme and at what works in moving young people closer to employment. Data for this section has been drawn from a number of sources including interviews with young people, an online survey, interviews with staff and national and local datasets.

All young people participating in Talent Match Coventry and Warwickshire get access to a bespoke package of support that meets their identified needs - which means that there is no one typical model or trajectory other than the format described in Diagram 1 (page 5) and in greater detail in appendix 2.



At 24 years old John has never worked, he found about Talent Match through the Princes Trust where he completed a team building course (which helped him with his CV), interview skills and preparation for work. The Princes Trust found him a placement at the Walk In Medical Centre. Whilst he was there he put in his application to study microbiology at University. He now has firm offers of places at two Universities.

John was very sceptical about whether Talent Match could offer what was promised. He found however he really liked the flexibility of Talent Match and felt that he was treated like a real adult.

John found this was somewhat in contrast to his experience of JCP.

His mentor has helped him to look for work and John has received support for his mental health issues. John has now secured his first job working in a warehouse which will fill his time until he goes to University. Getting a job has been a massive confidence boost but he's nervous about going to work and is pleased that Talent Match is able to continue supporting him during his employment.



### Reaching young people

Talent Match is continuing to focus on reaching those who fall into the category of hidden NEET<sup>6</sup> and the report to the Big Lottery for January 2016 notes that 37% (n=7) of young people supported between October - December 2015 were hidden NEET and not accessing benefits nor in education, training or employment before joining Talent Match.

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<sup>6</sup> Across the Talent Match funding programme the BIG Lottery defines Hidden NEET young adults aged between 18-24 as “not receiving benefits and not working less than 16 hours per week, working 16 or more hours per week, self-employed, in an apprenticeship, in formal education or in training.”

Across the programme to date<sup>7</sup> 23% (n=37) of all beneficiaries were hidden NEET at the time of joining.

One of the best routes to reaching hidden young people is through friends already engaged

on the programme. The team have implemented a 'finders' fee' for all young people who tell someone about the programme who subsequently joins.

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Of those young people who responded to the online survey 30% (n=6) found out about Talent Match from someone already on the programme.

Finding out about Talent Match through word and mouth or the job centre (25% n=5) were the top scoring answers for those people who completed the survey. Word of mouth combined with home visits/'door knocking' has seen numbers increase, particularly in Nuneaton, and the team is set to expand again to cope with the increased workload.

Across the programme, young people who identify their ethnicity as White British account for over 90% of all participants.<sup>8</sup>

National evaluation baseline data for Coventry and Warwickshire shows that:

- around a quarter (no. 40) of all young people are 19 years old when they start the programme
- almost 50% (no. 80) live with

their parents; and 30% (no.33) have experience of being homeless

- 19% (no. 31) were not looking for work in the 4 weeks prior to joining Talent Match
- 30% (no. 46) have achieved 5 GCSEs A\*- C including English and Maths (or equivalent) prior to joining the programme.

NB: Not all respondents answered all questions and this accounts for the apparent anomalies in percentage figures.

<sup>7</sup> Source National Evaluation dataset Appendix 2 for Cov and Warks

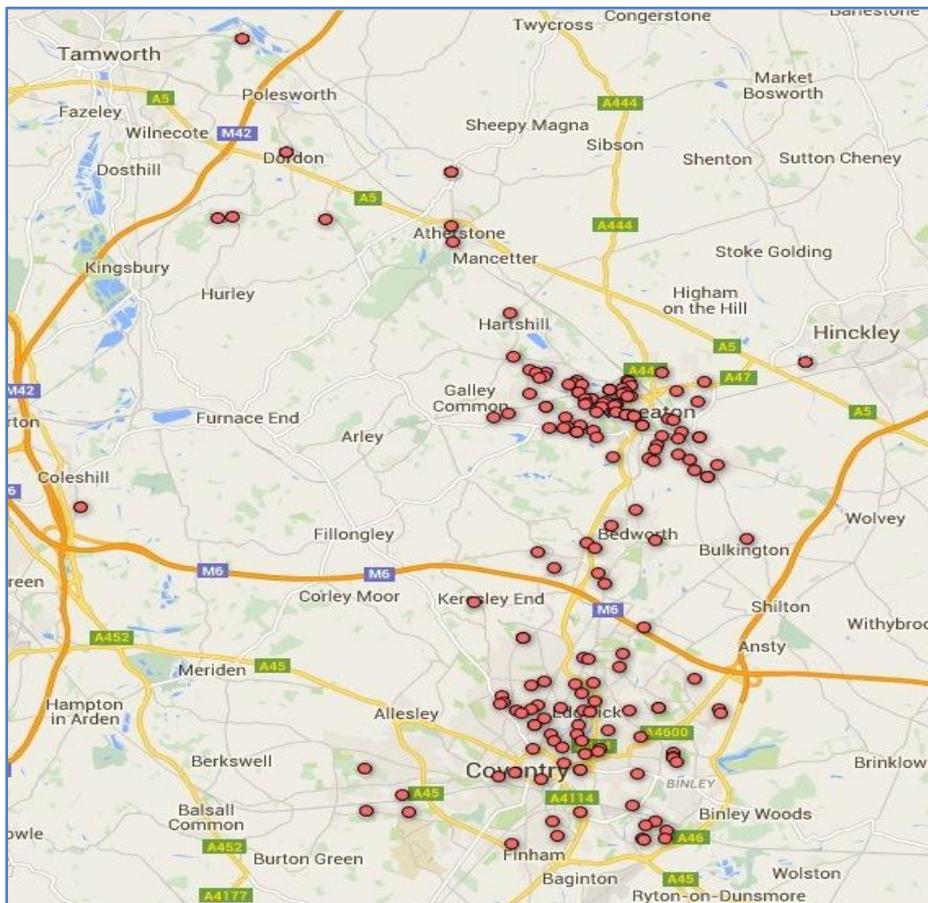
<sup>8</sup> Source National Evaluation dataset Appendix 2 for Cov and Warks

The programme has been particularly successful in recruiting young people from Nuneaton, including the key wards of Abbey, Wembrook and Camp Hill, which supports reported evidence that an incentive scheme to encourage young people to bring people into the programme by recommendation has been successful. The programme has also recruited young people from key wards in Coventry, particularly Foleshill, Radford and the city centre ward of St Michael's.

Postcode data also highlights areas for further development of recruitment, in particular in North Warwickshire. While there has been an increase in participants from the Borough in the last year, this area has been identified by programme staff as a focus for recruitment in the next year.

Map I below shows the reach of the programme by postcode.

Map I: Distribution of participants by postcode area at March 2016



NB: Red dots represent individual postcodes, not individual participants. Some participants share the same postcode

Appendix 3 provides postcode distribution maps for 2015 and 2016 showing the growth in reach over the past 12 months. It also presents reach by participants post codes for Talent Match priority wards in Coventry and Warwickshire.

Table I on the following page provides data on the reach of the programme by postcode and Local Authority area.

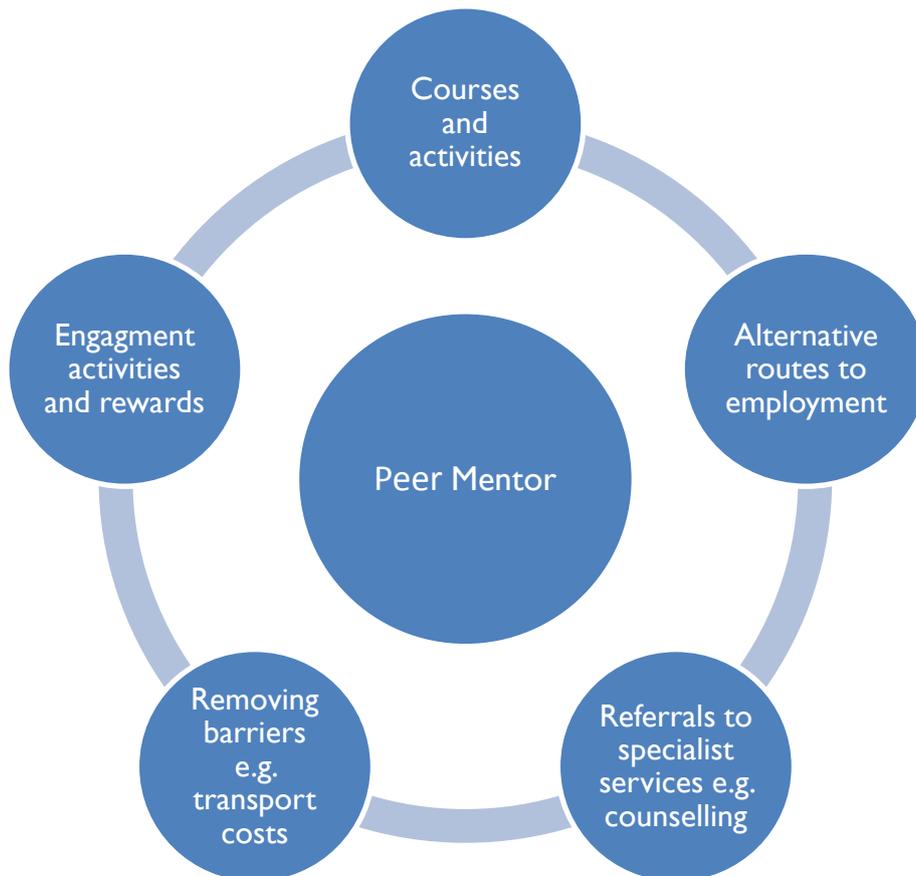
Table 1 Participants by postcode in Local Authority areas

Local Authority area	No. participants
Coventry	69
Hinckley & Bosworth	1
North Warwickshire	11
Nuneaton & Bedworth	88
Unidentified postcodes	7
<b>Total participants</b>	<b>176</b>

## 6 What is effecting change for young people?

While mentoring is at the 'core' of the Talent Match Coventry and Warwickshire offer to young people, the evaluation research findings show that what works is a combination of activities, courses, work experience, social opportunities, team building and motivation plus support from the peer mentors who display an innate understanding of the challenges and issues young unemployed people are experiencing.

Diagram 3 Routes to effecting change for young people



*“.... it is often a combination of courses and mentor support that gets young people to where they need to be”*

*One-to-one mentoring and support:* all the young people who were interviewed and the majority (92% no. 22) of those who responded to the online survey felt that they had a good relationship with their mentor and that their mentor is helping them to look at what they need to do in order to move into work or training.



Before Joe joined Talent Match he stayed at home playing games and watching TV. He had never worked, and although he left school with 5 A-C's and did a BTEC in Engineering, he wasn't sure if this was what he wanted to do. He was very shy and got very anxious and because of this found it hard to talk to people, even family members.

He found out about Talent Match when someone knocked on the door and decided to join as it would give him something to fill his time. Talent Match helped him to socialise with other people and treated him like an adult. Looking back he feels it has definitely helped his confidence to grow.

Joe has enjoyed being involved with Imagineers, and tried Motorvate but has decided driving isn't for him. His Mentor helped set up an appointment at the National Careers Service. Talking to a Careers Advisor has helped him to see that there is a route into engineering should he choose but he now knows that there are other options for employment too.

He recognises that before he joined Talent Match he always felt negative about things and looked for ways in which things could go wrong and then got very anxious - which stopped him trying anything new.

Support from Talent Match has taken this worry away and Joe knows that Talent Match has given him the push forward he needed and he is now actively seeking work.



Young people felt that they had trusting relationships with their mentor. Most meet their mentor weekly or bi-weekly, however most respondents were keen to emphasise that the frequency of meetings worked for them and fitted in with their Talent Match activities and other commitments.

Mentors are seen as knowledgeable about what Talent Match has to offer, able to motivate and guide individuals to make appropriate choices and most of the young people who engaged in evaluation activity felt that their mentor had/was giving them tools to be successful.

People appreciate being able to build an open friendly relationship with their mentor, and many talked about how much their mentor cared about them and wanted them to succeed.

For some young people this contrasted sharply with their previous experience, for example with Jobcentre Plus. They described how they got 'a bit of a shock' when they first arrived at Talent Match to find that they have a mentor who tried to find out what makes them tick; saw them as a the whole person; was there by their side through the ups and downs, and who is not pressuring them but helping them develop as an rounded individual in order to get them ready for employment.

*Combining a number of activities and courses to create a bespoke programme of activity:* the programme has delivery partners registered on a commissioning framework and there are systems in place to spot purchase additional activities.

Courses and activities range from basic maths and English, food hygiene, health and safety and first aid through to creative activities from providers such as Imagineers. In addition mentors have a range of referral options into counselling and mental health services and the National Careers Service.

*Help with transport and travel costs, and supporting people to learn to drive:* given that access to transport or the cost of travel has been a factor in deciding to not apply for or to turn down employment offers for 48% (no. 77) of young people according to the National Evaluation data for Coventry and Warwickshire, removing these barriers increases the likelihood of young people engaging with programme activities. The offer of help with driving skills from a provider called Motorvate has proved very popular.

*Removing financial barriers to gaining qualifications:* a number of the young people interviewed talked very eloquently about how Talent Match had supported them to complete qualifications and training that will have a direct impact on their employability that would otherwise have been unaffordable. The Motorvate courses and SIA (Security Industry License) are frequently cited examples.

• • •  
"The Costa training is working for me at the moment. I am dealing with a lot of people so it is improving my confidence. Costa is helping me to feel that I am working towards something."  
• • •

*Creating alternative pathways into employment:* Talent Match recognised that many of the young people they support, while being work ready, struggled with the interview process for a number of reasons. As part of their role in challenging traditional recruitment processes and creating job

opportunities for young people, the Recruitment and Progression Officers (RPO) have developed a relationship with Costa Coffee. A chance meeting at a skills show with a Costa recruitment officer who had personally faced long-term unemployment led to the provision of work placement opportunities from which apprenticeships for baristas in their coffee houses would be offered. Costa has offered 5 places for work placement and 3 apprenticeships. Talent Match aims to work with more employers in this way and, with the support of the CSP employer representative from the Federation of Small Business and who is the Director of Learn2, links are being made with Nando's. The RPOs have also been working to get more employers on board with work trials and non-traditional recruitment methods that fit with job requirements, for example encouraging a call centre to offer telephone interviews to interviewees.

*Rewards and incentives:* participating in Talent Match is voluntary, young people choose to engage or not, so to encourage them to maintain their engagement Talent Match has instituted a number of rewards and incentives. Engagement is defined as, for instance, turning up for courses, meeting with their peer mentor, attending the Steering Group or going to work. Incentives include food provided at Steering Group meetings and bus fares, rewards include group activities and special trips, such as to Comic Con at the NEC. One young person reported how that was a joint trip bringing the regular members of the Coventry and Nuneaton & Warwickshire Steering Groups together. Peer mentors felt that

word of mouth about the rewards is motivating other participants to engage more. Talent Match continues to offer rewards and incentives when participants progress into work.

In addition, they have set up a voucher incentive scheme where participants receive a voucher when they recruit new young people. One participant told how he has brought people into Talent Match who would not have come otherwise.

## **7 Working with delivery and other partners**

In reflecting on the commissioning of delivery partners at this stage of the programme, Talent Match recognises that it has been a learning process. The programme is clearer now about the needs of young people than they were when providers were first recruited to the delivery framework. Young people require a range of provision to motivate them, build their confidence and self-esteem, help them build social skills, address any mental health needs, gain life skills and skills for specific jobs. Talent Match fills gaps on the framework with spot purchasing from specialist providers of places on existing specific courses e.g. forklift truck driving; this also means they can purchase training places with providers in different locations to be more accessible to young people.

Talent Match has moved away from cost-per-head contracts (which were difficult to fill) to higher value mini-programme contracts. These tenders require a more detailed procurement process which has allowed Talent Match to involve young people directly in commissioning at the second stage (see section 4). Peer mentors report that most of the commissioned provision now stems from young people's requests and they are pleased that the views of young people, as channelled through the peer mentors, are being listened to by 'management' and acted upon.

The overall view of providers on the delivery framework, (reported in an online survey for the evaluation), was that organisations had received fewer callouts than expected, call outs were for small amounts of work and for work with fewer young people than they (providers) had originally anticipated. Some providers felt that where they had been commissioned contracts had worked well, but one noted that with low numbers and frequent drop-out rates it was difficult to sustain a service. A couple of providers felt there was a lack of transparency as to how contracts were commissioned, for instance one provider had been commissioned directly and did not respond to callouts and another was not sure if all partners on the framework received callouts or a selected group depending on what was required.

All applied to be on the framework because they already offered services Talent Match was looking for and felt they had the skills and experience to work with 18-24 year olds. Six organisations already worked with vulnerable people or people with complex needs and one worked with 'disaffected' people. Two wanted to extend or broaden the range of services they offer to young people, two were interested in adapting and tailoring their services to meet the needs of 18-24 year olds and to extend their own skills and abilities.

Benefits they hoped for their organisations would gain from being on the framework included reaching NEET young people with their services, one organisation had struggled to reach them and hoped working together with Talent Match would help; another hoped to develop their services by tailoring them to meet Talent Match clients' needs, another welcomed the opportunity for partnership working on a programme they could not have done on their own and in the hope it would generate work for their organisation.

All providers who responded to the survey agreed Talent Match was clear about what was required on callouts. All disagreed that callouts had been for services with young people whose needs were too complex for them to support and they had all received callouts that fitted their offer. A majority of organisations felt the system had worked well when they had been commissioned to deliver for the programme and disagreed that the lots were too small to bid for.

Some were puzzled as to why their generic employability provision has not been accessed, especially when they have referred eligible existing clients into Talent Match. Talent Match has learnt that there is a range of generic provision available, it is a field that is constantly changing, and they need flexibility to access what is most useful for the vulnerable young people they support. Other providers did not know how to inform Talent Match that they have a broader offer of services than in their original application to the framework. Talent Match has recognised the need for more regular communication with providers and they are planning to hold joint meetings with delivery partners and the Core Strategic Partners in the coming year.

Talent Match Coventry & Warwickshire is not promoted as a standalone programme ; it is articulated as part of a package of services around each young person. This position was stated by several staff members.

The programme is exceeding its overall participant targets so it is not competing with other services for young people, rather looking to offer additionality and support. Peer mentors report that some agencies are 'possessive of their clients' and are not referring into Talent Match because they need to claim young people as outputs.

Peer mentors are clear that their relationships with providers are really important; a good relationship helps them to achieve the best offer for the young people they support. Where there is strong contact, for instance with Careers Advisers in Nuneaton, there are regular referrals. In Coventry where peer mentors see different careers advisers each week, it is more difficult to build a relationship and generate referrals.

A good example of this close working is with the Princes Trust. A senior mentor has built a strong relationship with the Princes Trust team at Warwickshire College which is proving mutually beneficial for both organisations through cross-referral and joint working to enhance the support to young people without duplication. Talent Match participants who join the Princes Trust 12 week programme are supported by their peer mentor throughout and anecdotal evidence suggests that the additional support helps to maintain them on the

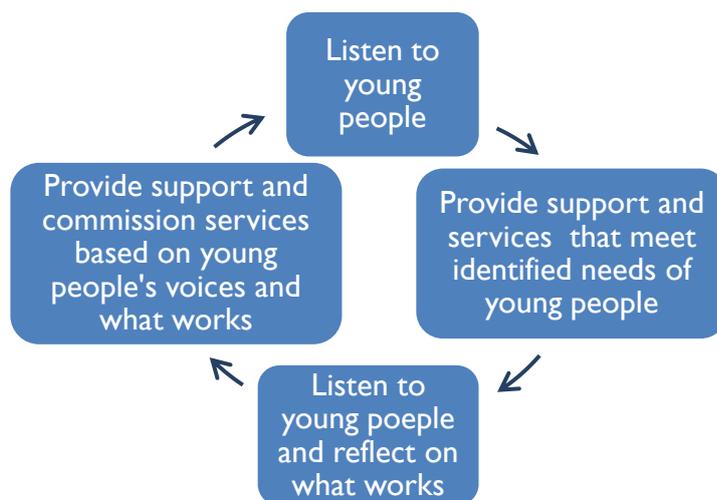
course. A Princes Trust Team Leader reported how she values the input of Talent Match into the course, such as help with activities like mock interviews, as it enables young people to engage with and test out their emerging work skills with a range of professionals. The senior mentor has also provided informal professional support in working with vulnerable young people from diverse backgrounds who need a lot of additional support to get through a 12 week programme. Talent Match is then able to continue support for eligible young people after the Princes Trust on their journey to employment.

## 8 Conclusions

Core Strategic Partnership members are excited by the work of Talent Match to date and are ambitious for the programme’s influence and longevity, certainly beyond the life of the current funding, and want to understand where Talent Match needs to influence to ensure that the approach can continue. Partners want to see more in terms of promotion of what works and would like, for example, case studies that can be used to influence both members and senior officers. They have a growing sense that Talent Match is offering something different that works and the evaluation research so far can support this view.

Reflecting on two years of evaluation work to date, the Talent Match programme team continues to learn from experience and it is clear that they are using a combination of listening and learning from what works to shape how the project is delivered on a day-to-day basis. Responsiveness to need and a strong ethical commitment to ensuring that young people succeed, combined with a professional understanding of what young people need from trusted adults, underpins the overall Coventry and Warwickshire approach.

Diagram 4 Talent Match Coventry and Warwickshire learning from experience



This approach was in place during the design phase of the programme (which had strong input from young people across the County). It enables Talent Match to offer a tailored package of training and interventions that respond to young people's initial and ongoing

needs. The flexibility to offer a bespoke service, combined with skilled mentors who are appropriately supported, trained, managed and supervised has created an atmosphere of joint endeavour and a genuine drive across the programme team to do their best for young people. Moreover team members are given the freedom and flexibility (and trust) to try new things and respond to situations as they arise.

The delivery team have learnt that participants require a lot of 'handholding' and encouragement and peer mentors became stretched because of the success in recruitment. Maintaining the intensity of support and motivation Talent Match participants require to sustain their engagement became a challenge and coffee morning drop-ins were partly a response to this while the team was expanded. The informal nature of the drop-ins has been successful in enabling young people to support each other, build friendships and continue the team spirit initiated on residential and courses like the Princes Trust.

Drop-ins and group activities help to build confidence and social skills that really improve young people skills and ability to move into employment. This has been particularly beneficial for those young people who experienced social isolation and/or mental ill-health prior to joining the programme. These activities also help young people to build resilience, which helps them to keep coming along to Talent Match even when their peer mentor is stretched.

The fact that mentors focus on building skills and confidence and work on getting those young people with complex needs to engage in activities they will enjoy, such as Wild Earth and Imagineers, makes the Talent Match programme very different to anything else they have previously experienced. Talent Match brings young people with diverse backgrounds and experience together (class, experience, education); in that way it simulates the workplace and helps to break down cultural stereotypes.

It is the subtle changes that indicate sustainable progression, for instance being able to look people in the eye. One young person, who was interviewed as a case study on 3 occasions over several months, found it challenging to make eye contact at the 1st meeting but at the final meeting was making good, appropriate eye contact and was able to articulate how much more confident he felt. The evaluation team has observed changes in participants over time and one researcher commented: "*The thing that stays with me the most is the delight on X's (names young person) face at having got his first job at the age of 24. He also felt some trepidation that he didn't know how to act at work and was relieved to still have Talent Match support.*"

The programme team has taken a proactive approach to reaching young people; for both the recruitment of hidden NEETs and following up those who have progressed, the team make home visits and do door-knocking in target areas. This approach has been successful in recruiting isolated young people and in capturing follow up data.

The use of incentives is not indiscriminate, young people have to demonstrate engagement to get rewards and there is evidence that hearing from other participants that they are

losing out if they are not engaging, motivates them. Giving incentives for completing follow up reviews is more in recognition of the time given to do them.

As the programme has matured, routes for young people to influence and shape provision have become established. Participants are involved in decision-making at an individual level, concerning their own pathway to employment, and collectively through the evolution of the Steering Group and Young People's Panel structures. Page | 20

There is evidence of young people's involvement in recruiting new staff members and in commissioning providers. Young people and peer mentors were able to give concrete examples of where feedback from participants' had resulted in new provision being commissioned. There is now a clear route for participant involvement in the Core Strategic Partnership and this has been further strengthened by the personal link between the CSP Chair and the Steering Groups and Panel. There is an overall sense from all research respondents that the programme is participant-centred and this is reflected in the evidence gathered for this report.

The relationship with delivery partners is changing and maturing. In the initial set up phases organisations were recruited to the delivery framework based on consultation and 'best estimates of what young people would need. The programme is much better informed now about what participants actually need and the commissioning process is adapting accordingly.



Rosie has always wanted to work with animals. Before joining Talent Match she went to college for a year and studied animal nursing. The course didn't work out and she lost all her confidence. She stopped socialising with friends and spent all her time at home. She has always been a quiet person and was often bullied at secondary school. Rosie gradually became more afraid to get a job and suffered from acute social anxiety.

She heard about Talent Match through her brother who had joined a few months before her. Shortly after joining Rosie went on the Wild Earth provision: *"Wild Earth really worked for me it showed me there is so much more I could do"*. This experience really helped her to be around other people and enabled her to make new friends. She signed up to do Maths and English courses and also joined the Talent Match Steering Group. Rosie feels that Talent Match has built up her confidence and she likes having a mentor to support her. At present she is undertaking a trial for a Costa Coffee Apprenticeship and she feels this is really helping her confidence as she has to deal with a lot of people on a daily basis. If this doesn't work out she will continue to apply for jobs and look for work with animals.

The flexibility to adapt and change as it learns about what works for young people is very much one of the strengths of the programme.

Delivery partners who responded to the evaluation survey are overall willing to continue supporting Talent Match participants but would welcome more communication on what is required and more opportunities to tender for work. The programme is already developing a route for more strategic engagement with delivery partners.

There is evidence from the CSP workshop that the Talent Match approach is influencing the future design of services in the County and is seen as a valuable asset in tackling youth unemployment across Coventry and Warwickshire. However members want to make sure that Talent Match secures its place within the evolving youth employment landscape; particularly in relation to the work with Hidden NEET. Page | 21

## 9. Recommendations

### Continue to build spheres of influence

It is recommended that the programme team develops a 'map' of existing and forthcoming initiatives across Coventry and Warwickshire; where they operate; who is leading the work and what their youth employment training offer is. This will enable Talent Match to articulate how it can support and enhance the delivery of other initiatives.

Once mapping is completed, a plan should be put in a place that allocates a named contact, either a staff member or a Core Strategic Partner, to take a lead role in making and maintaining the relationship and connections with each strand of the map. With a view to:

- ensuring the ability of Talent Match to influence what is offered and to guarantee that all youth employment and training initiatives and providers are fully conversant with the Talent Match offer;
- ensuring where necessary there are clear lines of delineation between programmes to avoid duplication and competition;
- fostering stronger collaborative working and providing opportunities to explore, for example, the potential benefits of co-location;
- managing and ensuring reach and equitable access to provision across Coventry and Warwickshire.

### Make more effective use of data and information

To support future funding bids, Talent Match may find it beneficial to make better use of the data it already captures. For example, drilling down into the CRESR data to build a picture (that is updated on regular basis, monthly or bi-monthly) of those young people coming into the programme. Further analysis could identify patterns or trends and there may be other quantitative data that could be used to support outcomes and impact or evidence reach.

It is recommended that Core Strategic Partners spend some time thinking about what information they would like to share to support their continued influencing role. For instance there may be data that Talent Match could collect that would demonstrate

connectivity to other initiatives, such as Troubled/Priority Families, which are particular priorities for some CSP members.

#### Refresh the delivery framework

To ensure clarity and transparency in respect of commissioning decisions, consider refreshing the delivery framework to reflect the better understanding of the range of provision and interventions needed to effectively support Talent Match participants. This would enable existing providers listed on the framework to refresh their offers to reflect specific requirements and enable the inclusion of a wider range of providers.

#### Maintain direct contact with participants for the Chair of the Core Strategic Partnership

The success of the CSP Chair's interaction with participant Steering Groups and the Young People's Panel suggests that this valuable informal route of contact with young people should be built into the role of Chair to ensure it is maintained.

#### Evaluation focus for 2016/17 should help to support future sustainability

Core Partners were asked about their future evaluation priorities and the majority of members want evidence and information that can be used to secure future funding to enable the Talent Match offer to be available after the current funding round. They would like to see some cost consequence case studies undertaken in anticipation that they will demonstrate how future investment in the approach used by Talent Match could bring financial and other benefits to individuals and agencies.

In order to ensure that the national and local evaluations are complementary (as it appears some cost benefit work is being done nationally), it is recommended that BIG Lottery (the grants officer), a member of the National Evaluation team, the Project Coordinator and members of the local evaluation team meet (this could be virtually) to discuss a way forward. CSP members would like to see cost consequence work take into account the Troubled Families Cost Benefit Calculator. For more information about the calculator use this link [Troubled Families Cost Benefit Calculator](#).

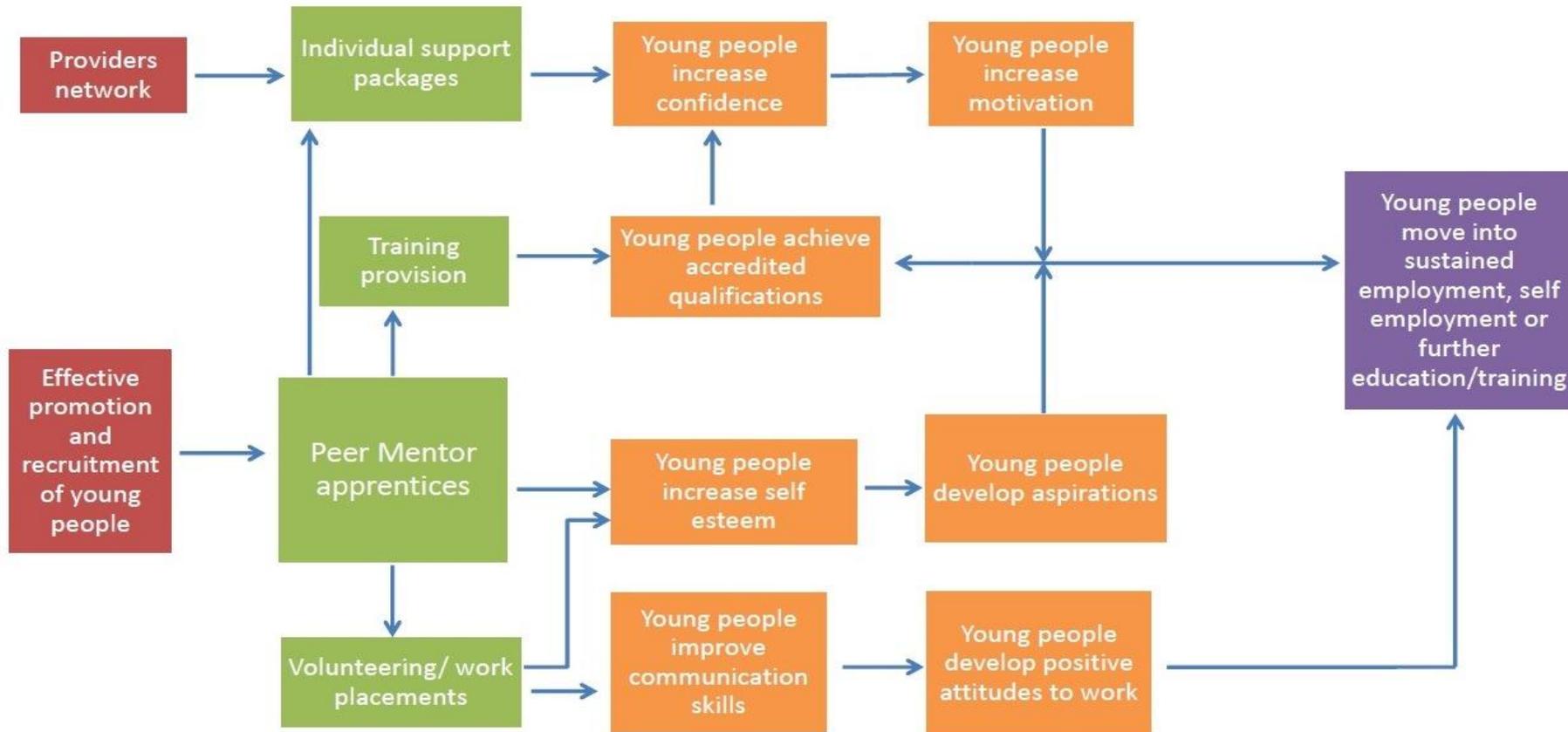
Core Partners would also like the evaluation to identify what works in engaging employers and particular groups, such as young offenders and Hidden NEETs.

Merida Associates

March 2016

## Appendix I

### Theory of Change for Talent Match Coventry & Warwickshire



Theory of Change key: **Enabling factor** **Activities** **Outcomes** **Goal**



### Appendix 3 : Geographical reach of Talent Match Coventry & Warwickshire

Red dots represent individual postcodes, not individual participants. Some participants share the same postcode.

**Map 1: Distribution of participants by postcode area at March 2015**



**Map 2: Distribution of participants by postcode area at March 2016**



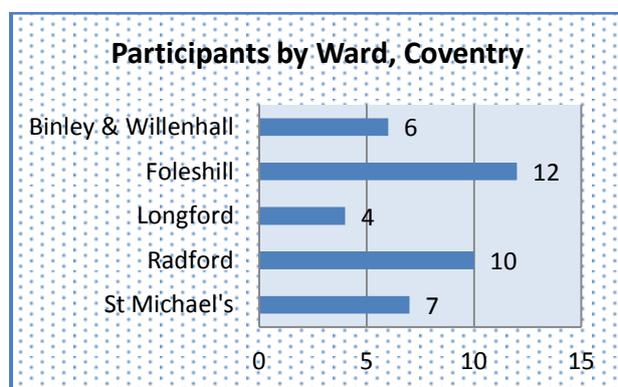
Maps 1 and 2 show the growth in reach of Talent Match Coventry and Warwickshire over the past year.

The maps plot the postcodes of Talent Match participants and illustrate the areas where the project has been successful in referral and recruitment and areas for further development, in particular North Warwickshire.

Project staff interviewed for the evaluation all highlighted North Warwickshire as an area to be targeted in the coming year, once the new staffing structure is fully operational. Project staff recognise that transport is an issue for young people in more rural areas but also that those in North Warwickshire may find it easier to access services in Tamworth or Birmingham than Nuneaton and Bedworth, so an element of cross-border working with other initiatives may be necessary.

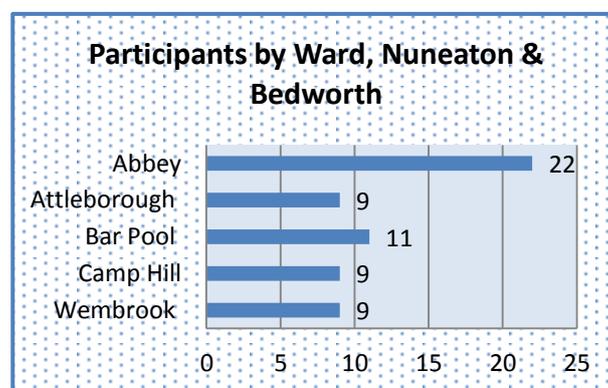
At inception the project identified key wards for high long-term youth unemployment across Coventry and Warwickshire. The postcode data enables a review of the reach of the project into those priority areas. In Coventry the key wards were Foleshill, Binley and Willenhall and Longford. Chart A shows good reach into Foleshill and the adjacent Radford ward and a cluster in Binley & Willenhall.

Chart A



Other wards = 30, total participants in Coventry = 69

Chart B



Other wards = 28, total participants in N&B = 88

In Warwickshire, the key wards of Abbey, Wembrook and Camp Hill in Nuneaton and Bedworth were identified. Chart B shows good reach into all key wards, and excellent reach into Abbey ward. This supports the reported evidence from Peer Mentors and participants of the successful implementation of an incentive scheme to encourage young people to bring people into the project by recommendation. The clustering of participant postcodes in Nuneaton suggests young people are recruiting friends and acquaintances into the programme.