



# Working in Sustainable Employment Project Evaluation

March 2022

Hannah Woods &  
Mark Richardson



# Acknowledgements

This project was funded and supported by The Hodge Foundation. Without their grant this project would not have been possible.

We are very grateful to many people who have contributed to the evaluation of the WISE Project including:

- 10 participants of the WISE Project in 2020 and 2021, who participated in detailed phone interviews
- WISE Mentors and WISE participants, who allowed us to observe the WISE group sessions and provided feedback on their experiences
- WISE evaluation working group of staff from The Wallich for their continued input and feedback including: Liz Warburton, Denise Rogers, Bethan Lewis, Cheryl Mably, Vanessa Richards, Bob Adams, David Bennett, Craig Herbert and Andrew Watson.
- The Wallich colleagues and partners who have contributed to this work through stakeholder interviews including, Emma Wilkins, Andrea McNeil, and Ellie Pearson.

# Executive summary

## Impact

The WISE project supports overall improvements in confidence and wellbeing. The qualitative evidence clearly demonstrates the progress many participants make in these feelings and functions to build their mental wellbeing. Even if participants do not gain employment by the end of the WISE Project, many achieve positive progression towards employment and becoming self-reliant.

## Critical Success Factors

The combination of support from a WISE Mentor and Support worker is crucial to address barriers to participation and maximise the likelihood of participants completing the WISE Project. Currently, the WISE Project recruits participants from other Wallich projects. All participants also have a support worker to address a range of their specific needs including accommodation, benefits, rehabilitation, and mental health. This dual aspect of support is

critical to deliver impact. The opportunity to repeat WISE, or return to WISE at a later date, is an important part of supporting growth in key impact areas including confidence and resilience

## Recommendations

The evaluation provides a measurement framework for key outcomes for the WISE Project to help collect quantitative data and measure distance travelled by participants. Embedding data collection into service delivery will improve the quality of impact data to evidence the journey of change for participants.

The evaluation also recommends the WISE Project develops a modularised approach to delivery to provide tailored pathways for participants in line with their aspirations and personal circumstances. Each 12-week programme will have a clear focus, making it easier to scale delivery across sites in Wales. This includes:

- **WISE Core**, which is an introductory project that helps participants to build wellbeing and confidence
- **WISE Flex**, which is a progression support project for those that are ready to take their next steps in education, volunteering, or employment. This will only be suitable for approximately 30 percent of participants completing WISE core.

Future WISE Project delivery should focus on a consolidated and consistent offer of 1-2-1 support, group sessions, and placements linked to key areas of impact. Where possible content and practice should be standardized across WISE core across different sites in Wales.

There is already evidence to demonstrate that WISE positively affects participants. These recommended changes will help WISE to deliver even greater impact in future.

# Contents

Section	Page
Introduction & context	5-6
Participants – who they are and the barriers they face	7-9
Impact overview	10-13
Core programme - outcomes and evidence	14-23
Progression into education, training, volunteering and employment	24-28
What helps WISE to deliver impact?	29-31
Recommendations for future service design – models and theories of change	32-37
A measurement framework for WISE	38-41
Conclusions and implications	42-46
A final word from participants	47
References	49

# Introduction

## Background to WISE

The Working in Sustainable Employment (WISE) Project began as a pilot project in 2015. WISE is a person-centred, strengths-based employment programme to support people who have experienced homelessness to find and sustain employment. The programme is designed to improve skills, confidence, and self-esteem.

Since 2015 the project has evolved to respond to: the changing needs of participants; best practice on finding and sustaining employment as a route out of homelessness; and an organisation-wide commitment to employing staff with lived experience.

The WISE Project has also made significant changes to delivery in order to respond to the impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic, including a heavy focus on using online platforms to support group work and learning. This resulted in the creation of a 8-week programme referred to as WISE Lite.

## The Evaluation

The Wallich commissioned Hannah Woods and Mark Richardson (independent evaluators) to undertake an external evaluation of WISE delivery in 2021. The evaluation of the WISE Project will inform the future development of services.

The evaluation focused largely on qualitative fieldwork with staff and participants across three areas in Wales (South-West, South-East, and Mid-North Wales) over a three-month period between November 2021 and January 2022. Specific activities included:

- Depth interviews with ten key stakeholders including management, operational-leads, delivery, and business systems staff at The Wallich and external facilitators delivering group sessions.
- Depth interviews with ten participants on the WISE project including current and past cohorts
- Observations of six online group sessions across

three regions

- Observation of one community engagement activity for WISE participants in South Wales
- Desk based review of the WISE project documentation and management information
- Two working group meetings with a range of staff to engage them in the decision-making processes and build their capacity and confidence to embed future evaluation and learning activities.

## Ongoing Impact Measurement

The evidence collected through this evaluation supported the development of a Theory of Change and measurement framework. This report is designed to enable The Wallich to take an evidence-informed approach to design the future delivery of the WISE Project across Wales.

# The context for WISE

## Barriers to Employment

For those who can work, finding and sustaining employment is often the best route out of homelessness. Barriers to employment for people experiencing homelessness (adapted from the *Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Homelessness and Poverty: Reviewing the Links* 2014) can include:

- a) Lack of stable housing
- b) Work disincentives through the tapering system embedded in Universal Credit
- c) Support needs including mental health and substance mis-use
- d) Low educational attainment
- e) A lack of workplace skills
- f) Limited or no work experience
- g) Criminal records
- h) Poor self-esteem
- i) Discrimination against people who have experienced homelessness
- j) Lack of peer support

## Employment Programmes

Whilst most people experiencing homelessness have previous work experience, there is a wide disparity between individuals in terms of their distance from the labour market. This means some people will be best helped by light touch support that helps them towards a rapid return to work. For those with greater obstacles, more specialist and depth interventions are needed (*Centre for Homelessness Impact: What works evidence notes – Employment*, 2022).

The evidence on homelessness employment programmes suggests a significant proportion of those who gain employment may struggle to sustain it, or to improve their incomes significantly (*University of York, Is Work an Answer to Homelessness?* 2019). Whilst employment programmes do not always result in gaining employment, some programmes do lead to improvements in wellbeing and quality of life (*ibid.*).

## What works

There is limited evidence on what works in voluntary sector approaches to promoting employment amongst people who have experience of homelessness. Emerging evidence in the *Centre for Homelessness Impact: What works evidence notes – Employment*, 2022 identifies beneficial service components as:

- Personal job coaching
- Trusted relationships with staff
- Services provided in familiar places
- Flexibility to provide bespoke and tailored provision
- Inclusion of specialist partners

The review highlights the importance of monitoring longer-term outcomes including job retention, housing stability, and benefits to engagement in the programme (for those that do not find work, as well as for those that do).

# Participants

*"I really did enjoy working with everyone. I learned from their stories and experiences, and I'm sure they learned from mine. I think the diversity is really important."*

Participant 5



# Who is engaging in WISE?

In 2021, 88 participants started the WISE Lite, and 42 completed the WISE Lite Programme (six weekly group sessions and 1-2-1 support plus graduation).

Table 1 provides a summary of participant demographics is taken from Management Information Reports. There is up to date demographic management information available for 69 of 88 participants involved in the WISE Project.

**Table 1: Breakdown of participant demographics in 2021**

Variable	Breakdown	Number
Sex	Male	40
	Female	27
	Unknown	2
Ethnicity	White	62
	Non-white	3
	Not known	5
Age	Under 18	4
	18 – 24	9
	25 – 34	17
	35 – 44	23
	45 – 54	10
	55 – 64	6
Location	South-West Wales	21
	South-East Wales	38
	Mid/North Wales	10

The qualitative interviews suggest the most common referral route to WISE is other

accommodation and support projects provided by The Wallich. Overall the referral and recruitment process was reported to be smooth and simple for participants due to the level of trust participants already had with The Wallich and their key support worker. Some participants were sceptical that they needed support to return to employment, or were ready to begin a return to employment. For these participants, **the taster sessions delivered at their residential projects were essential to provide an informal opportunity to understand more about the support available through the WISE project.** For WISE staff, this also helps to build a pipeline of future participants.

Two participants interviewed had started the WISE Project twice. One participant had dropped out due to challenges in their rehabilitation journey, the other participant had not felt able to complete the structured learning due to mental health problems. For both participants **the opportunity to re-engage with the WISE Project was an important part of their journey. The evidence highlights many participants will have non-linear routes to progression and therefore a flexible and personalised approach is vital to support successful transitions to employment.**

**Currently, the WISE project does not systematically collect data on individuals' reasons for not completing the WISE programme. It is crucial that this information is collected in order to understand if there are any patterns in the profile of participants who do not complete the programme and their reasons for not completing.**

# Barriers to taking steps towards employment

The interviews with ten previous participants highlight the challenges for participants to make progress towards employment and self-reliance. Table 2 highlights key barriers, many of which align to the documented barriers in *Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Homelessness and Poverty: Reviewing the Links 2014*. All participants interviewed had been referred to the WISE Project through a Wallich accommodation service, so short-term accommodation was often not a barrier, but many were in the process of moving into independent accommodation.

**Table 2: Key themes in circumstances of participants**

Circumstances faced by participants	Examples from interviews
Autism, and mental health issues such as anxiety	<i>'I'm autistic and spent years hiding it. So, I learned that it's okay to be myself and to not pretend to be something I'm not.'</i> (Participant in North Wales)
Work disincentives through benefit system	<i>'After rehab I pushed myself to go back to college as I then knew I wanted to do the animal stuff...I found out a week before I was supposed to start college that if I did do college I would lose my benefits, which would mean I lose housing benefits which would mean I lose my home. Which was a barrier I could not overcome.'</i> (Participant in Southeast Wales)
Substance use issues	<i>'After ten years of heroin addiction following my mother's death, when I got clean, all the pain came back. But thanks to the WISE project I'm able to access reflection counselling'.</i> (Participant in South East Wales)
Self-esteem and self-confidence	<i>'My aim is to get back to work - it is just taking longer than I expected. But I do want a change - rather than what I was doing before. I am actually quite scared of going it on my own, because of the time I have had off, I'm worried about the pressure side of things.'</i> (Participant in Southeast Wales)
Lack of peer support	<i>'I had been knocked down and lost my confidence when my husband passed away in 2018. So, people need to understand the importance of that. Because of COVID and my heart condition, I haven't been able to socialise with people much. So, for me, Wise was nice to meet other people, talk to people, and to talk to people in similar situations to me.'</i> (Participant in Southeast Wales)
Criminal record	<i>"My main issue was around the unspent conviction, so it was all about helping me get my head past that, as I would be going to interviews and getting the jobs but then falling down because of the unspent conviction."</i> (Participant in Southwest Wales)
Lack of stable accommodation	<i>"In 2019 I got sent to prison and lost private rental property. When I got released, I got placed in one of the Wallich's hostels and when at the hostel, and then found it really hard to get any housing or jobs due to unspent conviction."</i> (Participant in Southwest Wales)

# Impact of WISE in 2021

*“WISE is your first step, to your future”*  
Participant 7



*“I think people get slightly different things from the project. Not everyone who does The WISE project is going to be work-ready - they can be at many different stages, like addiction or housing problems. But when you are trying to change and get out of those patterns of barriers you need something to occupy your mind. So WISE is all about confidence in one aspect or another, but people get slightly different things out of it that then builds that confidence in the end - whether it is self-confidence or social confidence etc. For some it’s confidence for job interviews, others it’s just leaving the house.”*

**Participant 1**

# Journey to impact

People with experience of homelessness require tailored pathways to support their journey towards employment in line with their aspirations and personal circumstances. There are many indicators which can help track an individual's progress on their journey towards employment. The WISE Project tracks several such outcomes for The Hodge Foundation. These are shown in table 4. The outcomes are evidenced by anecdotal evidence from WISE mentors.

**Table 4: Reported outcomes to The Hodge Foundation for delivery in 2021/2022**

Outcomes tracked	Number of participants	% Reporting outcome
Improved literacy and numeracy skills	41	47%
Improved personal and social skills	69	78%
Improved relationships with others	70	80%
Improved feelings of stability and control	66	75%
Improved organisational skills	67	76%
Improved confidence and self-esteem	56	64%
Improved feelings of confidence for their future	68	77%

A core aim for this evaluation project is to help the WISE project measure what matters, alongside developing robust evaluation tools to capture the distance travelled by participants. To achieve this, we have worked with the staff to build alignment on the core purpose of the WISE project. We then produced a theory of change that helps to align the WISE Project impact to its delivery model and creates a shared understanding of the most important outcomes.

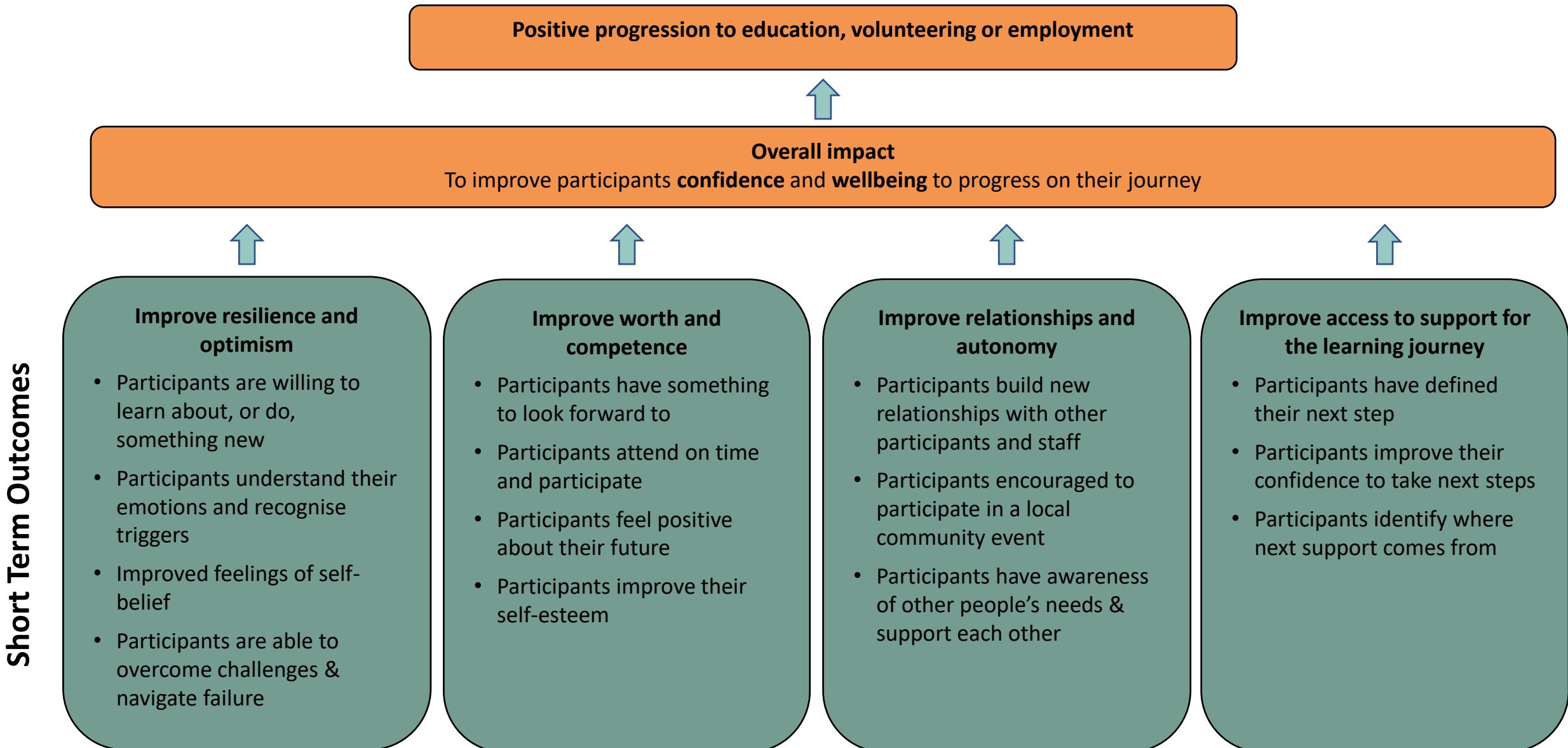
For the purpose of the impact evaluation, we have considered the WISE programme in two parts; the 8 week programme that has been running as WISE Lite which builds confidence and wellbeing, and then the more flexible, tailored support to help WISE graduates progress into employment, education, or volunteering.

The short-term outcomes from the WISE Lite programme we have grouped into four categories based on the Warwick Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale:

- Improve resilience and optimism
- Improve worth and competence
- Improve relationships and autonomy
- Improve access to support for the learning journey

Qualitative evidence has been gathered for each of these impact areas.

# WISE Lite: Outcomes and Impact



## Resilience and optimism

*“I definitely feel more confident about the future, definitely more positive. I believe in myself that I can achieve what I want to do. Especially when you hear other peoples' stories on the course - I realised how strong people are, and how strong I can be. Even though we go through terrible times, others have done it and we can do it, and I can do it.”*

Participant 6

# Improved resilience and optimism

There are several steps to improve the overall outcome of wellbeing and confidence. An important preliminary step is that participants feel able to solve their problems (resilience) and feeling positive about the future (optimism). Many participants talked about the WISE project coming at the 'right' time for them. There is an acknowledgment that they need some amount of stability in their lives, particularly around accommodation, and rehabilitation, to be ready for the WISE project.

*"Perseverance is key ... You've got to be strong in yourself. It's all about timing for a lot of people. If you want it, you'll persevere."* Participant 6

The qualitative interviews with participants particularly highlighted the resilience sessions, facilitated by an external facilitator, as a vital first step to help them achieve the right mind set to be able to think about their journey back towards

employment. These sessions usually run during week two and three of the group learning work. The timing of this session was seen as important.

*"The resilience stuff came at just the right time with my mental health."* Participant 5

The resilience sessions enabled participants to shift their perspectives, and supported many to feel able to unlock their sense of potential to address their own challenges.

*"The life coach in the resilience session shows me how resilient I am. I said 'thank you, you've made me resilient' and she said 'no, no, I haven't made you resilient. You've always been resilient, you just lost yourself along the way'. She helped me to re-discover how strong I am."* Participant 7

For many participants struggling with challenges around their mental health, the learning around

resilience stayed with them. Not only does this support them to be in the right mindset to consider progression towards self-reliance, it also helps them to address other barriers and challenges they face including improving their communication, take up of support, and interactions with their peers. Several graduated participants talked about still regularly referring to their course notes.

*"The resilience sessions were the most useful. I learned to say no and not surround myself with the wrong people. It helped with my other work around recovery as well"* Participant 11

Two participants interviewed had completed WISE twice. The opportunity to repeat WISE was seen as important to put resilience into practice, and recognise that progression for some participants may not be linear.

## Worth and competence

*“It was the refreshing thing I needed at that time. And now that I have my zoology course I'm smiling every day. I finally feel like I'm moving forward ... I know there is always going to be barriers, but the WISE has made it easier to move forward.”*

Participant 5

# Improved self-worth and competence

Another important step towards building confidence and wellbeing, is feeling useful (self-worth) and competent. Participants valued being able to complete WISE Lite. The amended structure of group learning, 1-2-1 support, and a community engagement activity within a relatively short period of time (8 weeks) provide a focus and tangible aim for participants.

*"The whole life of addiction is that you never really finish anything, but now I remember sitting downstairs and thinking 'oh my god I've completed something. I've achieved something without cocking it up at the end."* Participant 6

For many participants, the graduation ceremony at the end of 8 weeks, was particularly important to develop and maintain a feeling of self-worth.

*"I thought I'd never make it to graduation - I thought it would be bloody boring! But I stuck it out and I thoroughly enjoyed it". Participant 8*

*"I loved the graduation ceremony. It was a big day, I had to make a speech, and being there for the rest of the group." Participant 9*

Not all participants are ready for employment at the end of WISE Lite. However, for many, the progress made through WISE Lite helps them to feel good about themselves and the advances they have made, and further demonstrates they can function well beyond WISE. The feelings of self-worth and competence are particularly important to help them progress beyond WISE on their own journey to independence and self-reliance.

For some participants, the WISE Lite support enables a shift in perspectives of their past experiences to help them consider their future.

*"I believe that everything I have been through in my life - I haven't been through that for nothing. So I've gone through all of that, come through the other side - I am a survivor not a victim - and I want to show other people who are in my situation that there is a way out, and to show them how to take control and reclaim their life." Participant 7*

## Relationships and autonomy

*“I found the diversity of backgrounds really interesting and useful. I enjoyed learning that other people had been through similar struggles that I was going through, and that people in more difficult situations than me were able to cope, which showed me I could do it too... Having people around you who understand allows you to be honest and open about yourself.”*

Participant 3

# Improved relationships and autonomy

For many participants, the personalised and consistent support provided by the WISE Mentor built strong levels of trust which enabled participants to try new things and learn about different skills, which they would have previously not attempted. Without the trusted relationship with the WISE Mentor many would have not stuck with the WISE project.

*“It was like a comfort blanket around me. The sheer belief in me, the encouragement, the inspiration, and the motivation, it was all there and it was constant.”*

Participant 2

The group peer learning component was also found to be powerfully supportive in developing participants' social confidence as well as autonomy.

For some participants, after completing WISE they had a very clear employment goal and defined next steps, and securing employment or re-training was a realistic and tangible next step. For other participants, at a much early stage of their journey, WISE provides a foundation to build stability and take the first steps towards re-establishing independence. The variety of participants' experiences and goals creates a richer learning environment.

*“I really did enjoy working with everyone. I learned from their stories and experiences, and I'm sure they learned from mine. I think the diversity [between having different goals] ... in the group sessions was really important because it allowed us to all learn from each other - from people at different stages of their journey.”* Participant 5

Many participants developed friendships and support networks that extended beyond the WISE Project. All get in touch via WhatsApp to support and celebrate next steps. And many took the opportunity to meet in person.

## Improved access to support

*'I found out a week before I was supposed to start college that if I did do college I would lose my benefits, which would mean I lose housing benefits which would mean I lose my home. Which was a barrier I could not overcome. So, when WISE came I jumped straight into it ... she [the WISE Mentor] was really caring. It was always a dream for me, I always wanted to work with zoo animals, and I got that sense that that desire stayed with the WISE Mentor a lot, and so when it came to it they [the WISE Mentor] did find the course for me to do online, and she has been in talks with two zoos - she has been bombarding them on a daily basis to see if she can get me to do a couple of days a week there as a volunteer to just get my foot in the door. She's been brilliant, anything I ask for she's been there and done it'*

Participant 5

# Improved access to support

The WISE Lite Project offers unique support via a WISE Mentor. There is one WISE Mentor per region, whose role focuses on assessing and supporting participants' individual pathways to progression. It includes a range of activities from weekly check-ins, to facilitating group sessions, alongside identifying for relevant work experience and volunteer opportunities.

*"The way she supported me was different to my key worker - I felt comfortable talking to Vanessa about things I wouldn't normally be. She is still in contact with me now."* Participant 8

All participants spoke incredibly highly about the support from the WISE Mentors, many citing this as the driver behind their successful progression.

*"I never, when I started WISE, did I expect to find*

*myself head-down, doing those courses all at once.... That is something that Cheryl made happen, I wouldn't have been able to push myself to do that on my own"*

Participant 2

They play a key role to connect the participant with the right local organisations, identifying suitable training and education opportunities which will not jeopardise their benefits, and find resources to help them on their journey beyond WISE.

*"The Wallich gifted me a laptop, to help me do my course work. I was blown away that somebody had that much faith in me. I asked if they were sure and they said, 'you're going to higher education, you're going somewhere, you need this!'" Participant 7*

One of the reasons the WISE Mentor can support a

wide range of progression opportunities is because all participants also have access to a Support Worker at The Wallich who helps them to address basic needs. It is the combination of the support provided through The Wallich that enables participants to succeed.

The WISE Project support peer learning. It creates opportunities for participants to build trust, shared understanding, and mutual support with others with experience of homelessness. Input from peers provides help to encourage and motivate participants to succeed. This could be further developed by a more structured approach to engaging of previous participants to support delivery, particularly the content of some of the group sessions.

## Confidence and wellbeing

*“WISE doesn’t just help you. It build you back up as a person. They give you goals. It solidifies and consolidates everything else I knew. ... You’ve taught me about resilience. I’m more confident about my future now. I’m much more happy about who I am. I now have a purpose in life. Before I was existing but now, I am living. ... WISE has helped me to think about taking small steps to move forward.”*

Participant comments from a session observation in Mid Wales

# Improved confidence and wellbeing

The WISE project was seen as being a gateway to taking critical first steps towards employment and self-reliance. The themes of wellbeing and confidence as an overall impact were strong in the interviews with participants.

Wellbeing is the positive aspect of mental health. People with good wellbeing feel good and function well. Mental health is influenced by external circumstances and how we respond to them. People who function well respond to challenging external circumstances in a way that is resilient and enables rapid recovery. (*Definition by Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing*)

Participants credited the WISE Project with having enhanced their confidence and strength. In most cases, this was the sum total of all elements of WISE Lite. Whilst most participants had not been able to secure a job by the end of the WISE Lite support, they

were positive about the confidence, feeling good, and functioning well to be able to take their next steps.

*"WISE has made me more confident; it has given me my life back, I mean that with every morsel of my being. It was crucial, it came at the exact time I needed it. It was fate. Wise has empowered me. Every session we had built me up a little bit more each time, and I was bouncing by the end. They showed me how to be strong, how to be confident, how to build a life for myself and improve my life further."* Participant 7

The value of the routine, structure, and approach to providing holistic support and tailored advice as part of the WISE Project was apparent across the qualitative interviews with participants.

*"I needed confidence, I needed structure and routine. I was needing to build myself up."* Participant 6

Participants may not necessarily be able to get all the

information they need from their WISE Mentor, though some undoubtedly do, but they value the fact that their WISE Mentor can advise on people with experience of homelessness-specific issues. Specific advice that was highlighted as being useful included a personal plan in line with the participant's goals and ambitions, which was realistic to their individual circumstances.

The 1-2-1 support from the WISE Mentor provided continued positive encouragement to nurture positive mental and social wellbeing.

*"The way she supported me was different to my key worker - I felt comfortable talking to Vanessa about things I wouldn't normally be. She is still in contact with me now."* Participant 8

# Flexible progression support

*"When you do WISE, it opens up more doorways for you to do other things."*

Participant 8



# Progression

For about half the WISE participants, their experiences on the programme give them the confidence and resilience to progress into volunteering, education, or directly into employment.

The WISE Project tracks five progression pathways for The Hodge Foundation, two intermediate and three longer-term. These are shown in table 5. The outcomes are evidenced by anecdotal evidence from WISE mentors.

Based on the 2021/2022 data summarised in table 5, 42 participants, of the 88 that enrolled, completed WISE Lite (48 per cent). Almost all of these participants progress to some form of training, accessing course via The Wallich's online platform.

The next step for many participants is then education or further training. Some participants do reach employment, but it remains necessary to track them beyond the WISE Project. At the moment there is no systematic approach to do this, or place to store this data on the management information system.

Qualitative evidence on the three longer-term progression pathways is given below.

**Table 5: Reported outcomes to The Hodge Foundation for delivery in 2021/2022**

Progression pathways	Total	%	Details
Gained industry standard qualifications	32	36%	29 participants accessed training through e-learning platforms 1 participant doing zoology qualification 2 participants referred to Business Wales for business coaching and financial support to set up their own business
Started to actively job searching	24	27%	This includes submitting job applications and attending job interviews
Started education or training	10	11%	This includes training to be a Peer Mentor for The Wallich, Open University, Widening Access Courses for Universities, and FE colleges
Started volunteering	15	17%	
Secured employment	5	6%	

# Education

Many participants with a clear career goal, who move into higher or further education as a result of WISE, are looking to gain qualifications to support a career change. For many, their personal experiences of homelessness, prison, or rehabilitation have changed their career goals.

*“I have completely changed my career now. And it was WISE that shaped that for me. After WISE I did Housing and Communities Studies which was really interesting and a higher qualification than anything I had before. I also took Institute for Leadership and Management (ILM) management courses.”*

Participant 1

The WISE Mentors help participants to identify the right education routes, often helping participants to join widening access part-time courses to support progression into university, NVQs level 2 and 3, and

The Open University.

*“I’m training to become a support worker so I’m doing Peer Mentoring and Information and Guidance qualification at level 3. I had done level 1 and 2 in prison, so they asked me if I wanted level 3 and so I bit their hand off, of course I want it! The WISE staff really helped me plan my next steps. We talked about my ideas, planned out my next steps, and they found me a volunteering placement ... obviously, I jumped on that.” Participant 7*

As well as supporting participants to identify the right qualifications, WISE Mentors play an important role to tackle barriers to re-joining education. This includes providing laptops, helping with anxiety about joining the course, and regularly checking in to provide constant encouragement and advice. The 1-2-1 support was particularly important to sustain

and complete their training or courses.

*“I just want to get as many qualifications as I possibly can. I’d love to go to university - I’d love to take it all the way!. “The Wallich gifted me a laptop, to help me do my course work. I was blown away that somebody had that much faith in me”.*

Participant 7

Participants who had progressed to education following graduation from WISE also valued the group sessions on preparing for interviews, positive disclosures, and preparing a CV. As well as the opportunity to do a mock interview. Many of these skills had been important to be able to move through the application process to access education.

# Volunteering

The WISE Project refers participants into a wide range of volunteering opportunities, from a structured volunteering peer-mentor placement with The Wallich to external opportunities linked to a specific career route, for example, volunteering with a local zoo. Motivations for participants wanting to volunteer largely fall into two categories. Participants are either looking to gain very specific experiences to support their progression into a particular career, for example, support work, or a volunteering placement provides an opportunity for participants to put into practice the skills and learning they have gained through the WISE Project.

*“My next step is peer mentoring as a volunteer then hopefully employment. I’m training to become a support worker.” Participant 7*

*“But my aim is to get back to work - it is just taking longer than I expected. But I do want a change -*

*rather than what I was doing before. "I am actually quite scared of going it on my own, because of the time I have had off, I'm worried about the pressure side of things, but I feel going through WISE opens the door for me". I want to do some volunteering first - it's my way forward. Such as British Red Cross. Paid work makes me scared because of the pressure to perform. Whereas volunteering makes sense as it doesn't carry that pressure.” Participant 6*

The holistic benefits of volunteering including improvements to health and wellbeing, personal growth, employability, and social life all complement the outcomes of the WISE Lite programme (*Institute of Volunteering Research, 2019*). Regardless of whether participants move into employment after volunteering, supporting participants into volunteering should be considered a positive progression route.

Similar to participants who had progressed to education, participants who moved to volunteer valued the group sessions on preparing for interviews, positive disclosures, and preparing a CVs. As well as the opportunity to do a mock interview. Many of these skills had been important to be able to move through the application process to access volunteering placements.

Currently, the involvement of previous WISE participants to support the delivery of WISE tends to be ad hoc. The evaluation includes a number of recommendations on how to extend opportunities to provide peer support from previous WISE participants.

# Employment

The journey back to employment for people with experience of homelessness can often be challenging. Two participants interviewed had completed WISE in 2021 and gone on to secure employment. But this had taken at least six months from the end of the programme. For both participants, despite having a clear goal to get back into work from the start of their engagement with the WISE Project (thus, potentially closer to the job market than other participants) they still needed and valued the support from WISE Project.

*"The WISE Project helped me to build a bit of confidence. My main issue was around the unspent conviction, so it was all about helping me get my head past that, as I would be going to interviews and getting the jobs but then falling down because of the unspent conviction. So, it was all about*

*getting my head around that and finding out how to strengthen myself by hearing from and learning from people who have gone through similar situations. Because in reality it really is a barrier. But WISE helped me to get past that."* Participant 1

Both participants valued the continued 1-2-1 support, particularly to help plan for interviews, and stay connected with their Mentors during the job search period to help keep them on track. The WISE Mentors retained contact with participants once they were in employment, and this was important to help them successfully sustain work.

The journeys to employment will take time. To understand the impact of the WISE Project, an investment into retaining some contact with the participants is required for 12 to 24 months after the project. It is important to track indicators

towards employment to help evidence the journey between the short-term outcomes for WISE and gaining employment.

For WISE Mentors it can be difficult to balance the needs of new cohorts, against staying in contact with previous participants. Clearer expectations on the package of support following graduation from the WISE Project would help to manage the case load for WISE Mentors.

Some participants felt there could be more opportunities to bring different employers' perspectives into the WISE Projects, to motivate participants and provide examples of employers who will employ people with experience of homelessness beyond The Wallich.

# What helps WISE to deliver impact?



# Change mechanisms

Through the evaluation, we identified important change mechanisms, which are the ways of working linked to the quality and experience of support provided as part of the WISE project. Through the working group, we identified many of the change mechanisms linked directly to The Wallich's organisational values. The diagram below aligns the Wallich's values, against insights from the evaluation about ways of working that creates impact.

The evaluation found clear evidence to demonstrate how The Wallich's values translate to practical ways of designing and delivering services for people with experience of homelessness.



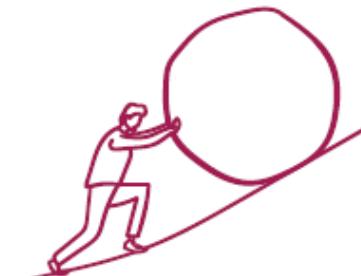
## Community

- Participants interact and positively engage with staff and the group
- Diversity of participants' experience and goals in WISE
- Participants feel supported and encouraged by their peers



## Courage

- Participants are ready to learn and explore difficult questions
- Participants are willing to try something new
- WISE mentors provide 1-2-1 support to assess what is realistic



## Determination

- Participants receive second chances to participate if it doesn't work the first time
- Participants value the reliability and dependability of the staff
- WISE mentors support participants to overcome all barriers to engagement



## Authenticity

- Participants receive personalised care and 1-2-1 mentorship during their journey
- Everyone is encouraged to participate regardless of background or goals
- WISE Mentors and peer mentors share their own experiences



## Compassion

- Participants feel listened to and respected
- WISE mentors take the time to understand personal needs and aspirations
- Participants feel positive about their engagement with the WISE mentor and enjoy activities

# Programme adaptions

The interviews with key stakeholders also identified a number of adaptions that have been made to the WISE Project in its six years of delivery to better meet the needs of participants. Table 3 summarises the challenges and the ways in which the WISE project has responded to them.

**Table 3: WISE Project adaptions**

Area	Challenge	Changes
Referrals to the programme	Participants basic needs must be addressed before they begin WISE in order to make the most of the opportunities. The project is not suitable for those in unstable accommodation or in the early stages of rehabilitation.	Building time into the programme delivery for programme set up to include taster activities in other projects, building in an informal interview to assess whether this is the right time for the participant.
Dedicated WISE delivery team	Providing dedicated staff to deliver the WISE project to ensure participants had the right support to join, participate, and progress on the programme. The relationship-based support is focused on building positive progression pathways to education, employment and volunteering. It sits alongside the support a participant will receive from their Support worker on core issues including accommodation, benefits, and health.	Introducing a WISE Coordinator, and regional WISE Mentors (South-east, South-West, and Mid/North) to deliver local programme and build relationships with the right external partners to support progression.
Pre-progression support	Most participants require encouragement and practical support to improve their wellbeing before they begin their journey to education and employment. WISE now includes a structured preparing for progression component of group-based and 1-2-1 support.	Introducing the WISE-Lite eight-week group sessions and 1-2-1 support focusing on building confidence and wellbeing to start their journey.

# Improving Impact

Recommendations for future  
service design



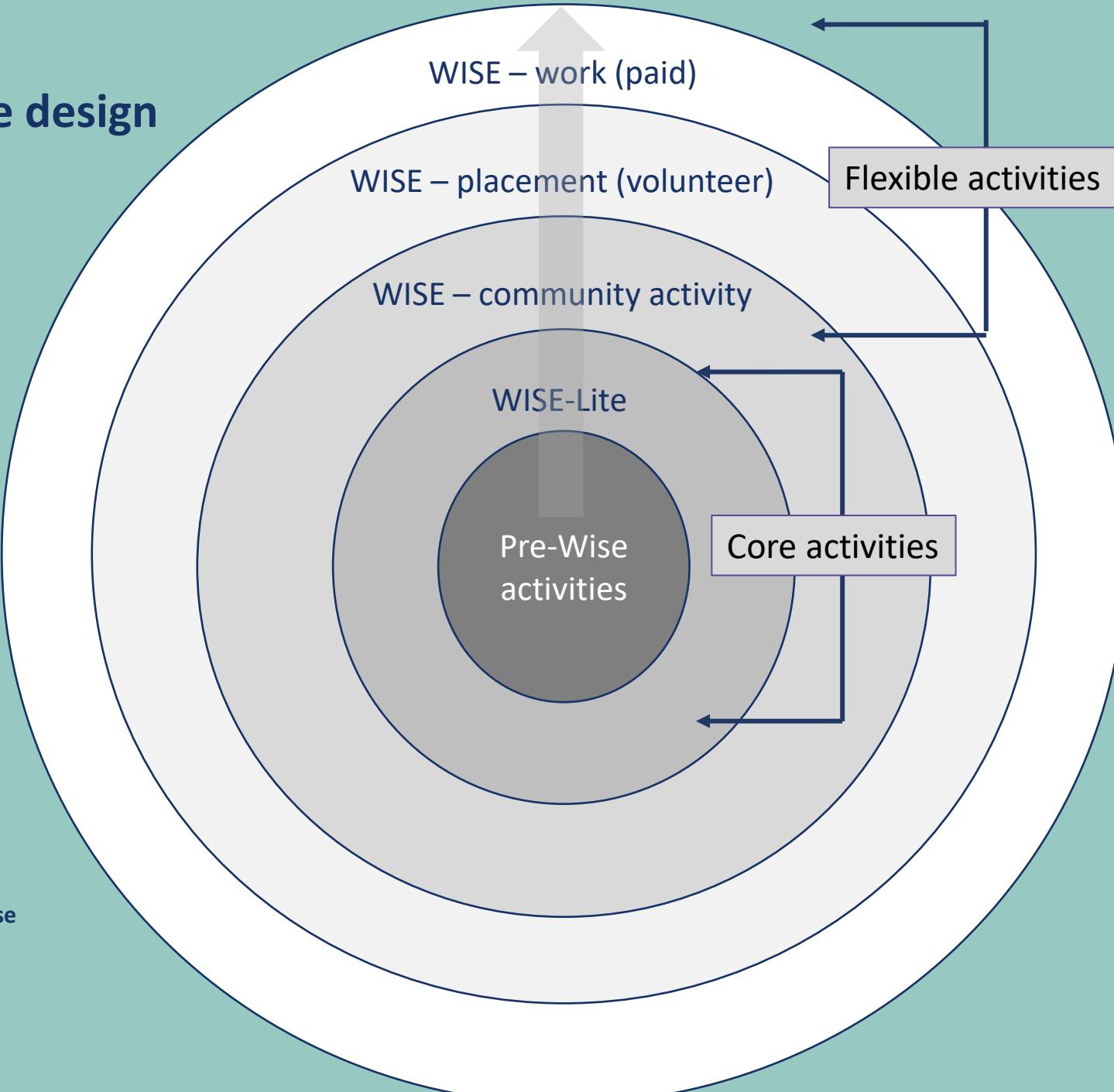
## Recommendations for future service design

With the insights from the qualitative interviews' data and external evidence, the evaluation recommends future WISE delivery cycles adopt a modularised approach that supports **participants' dynamic pathways through WISE**.

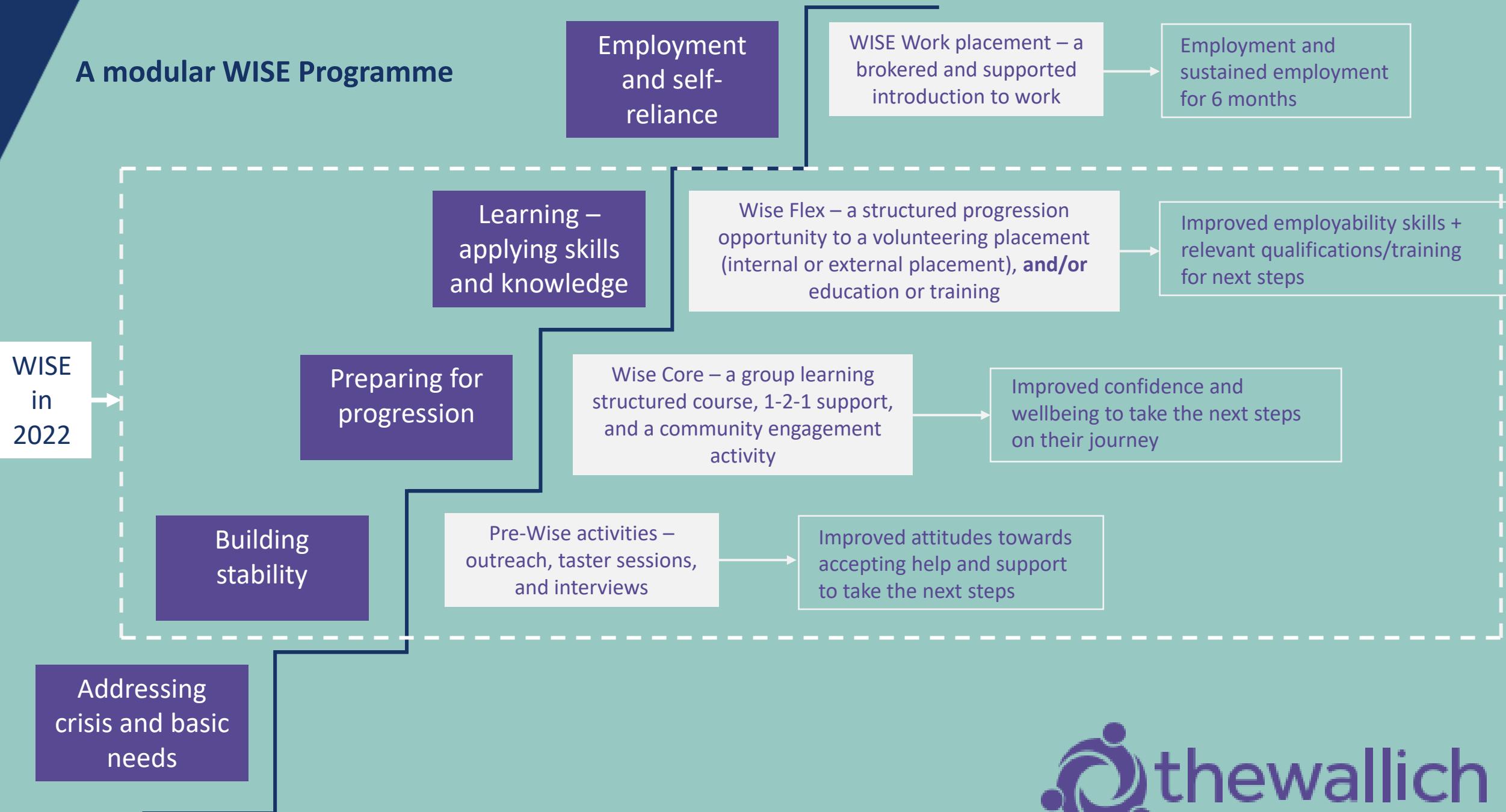
The model – as detailed on slide 34 – defines a core component that could be supported by additional flexible components, depending on the individual needs of participants. This recommendation is based on the Dartington Service Design Lab Confidence Framework designed to help service delivery organisations design scalable programmes. Defining the core and flex components for projects helps to deliver consistent impact at scale.

A modular WISE Project model would take into account:

- **Progression through these stages is not linear for all participants**
- **Not all participants will do all stages**
- **Some participants will drop out, and might repeat parts of the course**

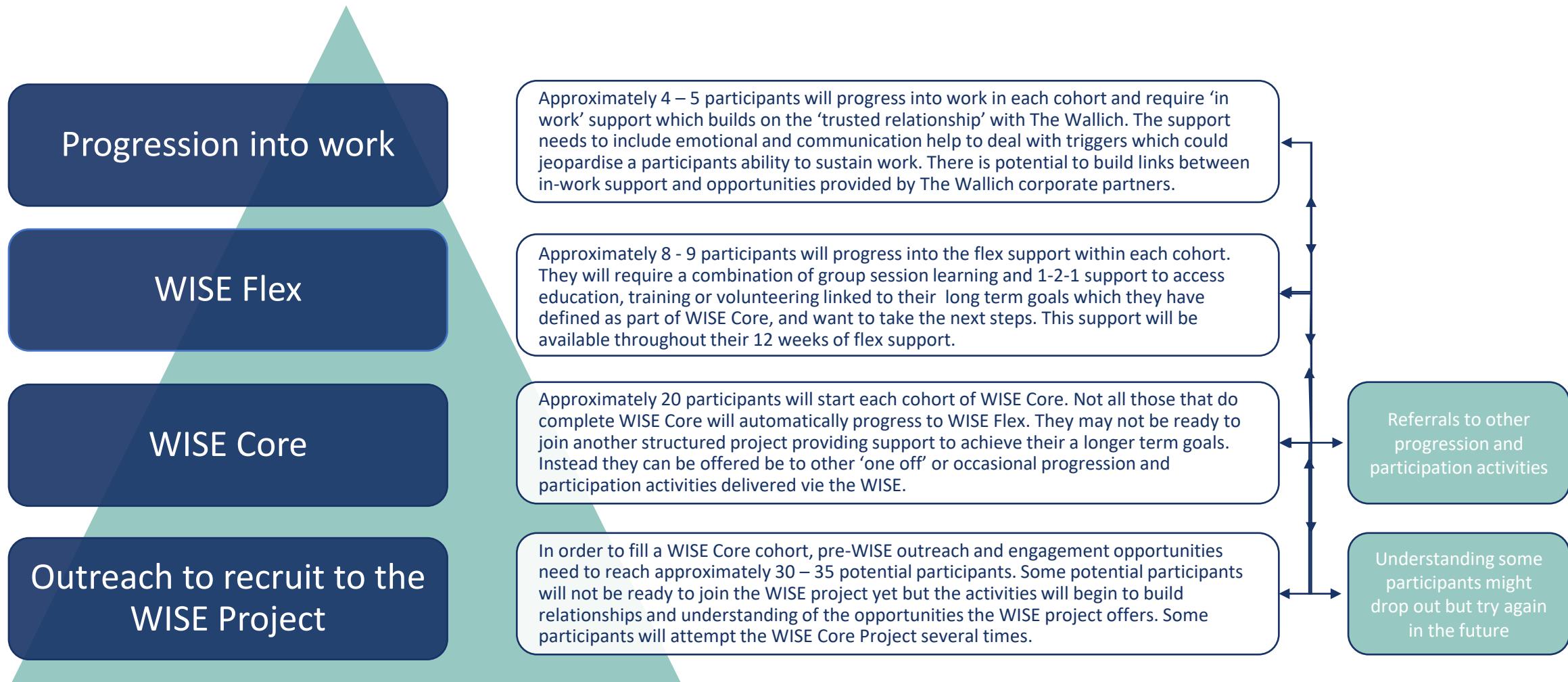


## A modular WISE Programme



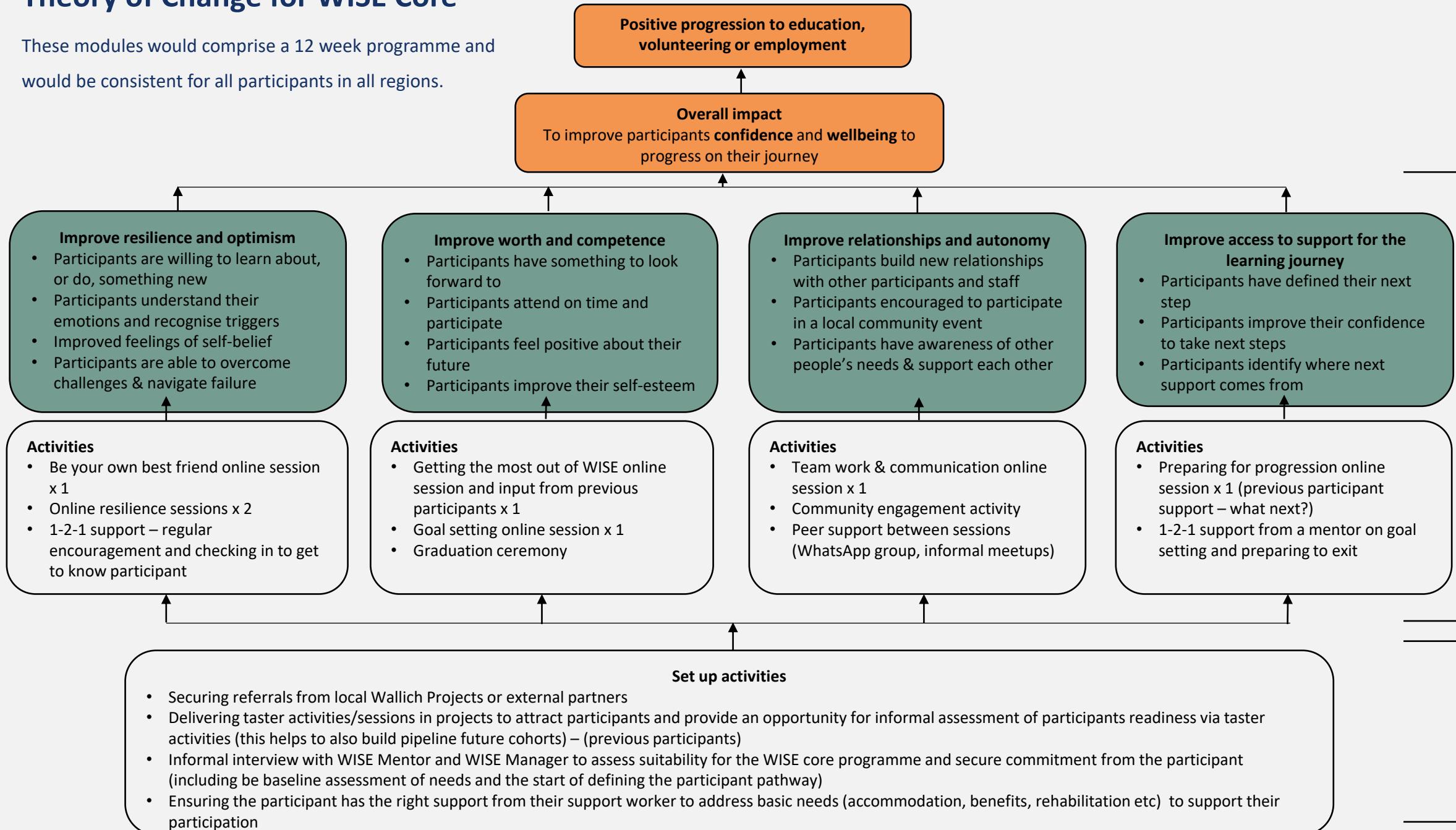
# Dynamic pathways through the WISE Project

As already explained, participants will often not take a simple, linear route from homelessness to employment. The ability for participants to exit the WISE programme positively at different stages is vital, as is the ability to repeat different components of the programme.



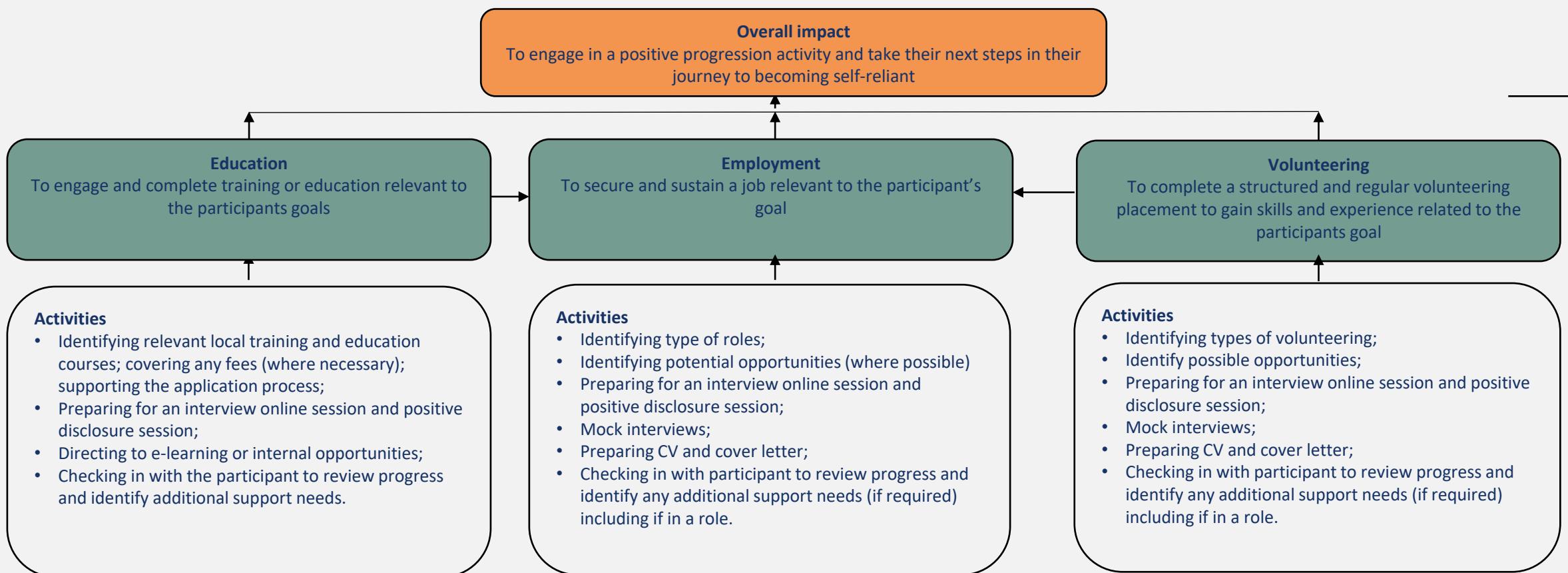
# Theory of Change for WISE Core

These modules would comprise a 12 week programme and would be consistent for all participants in all regions.



# Theory of Change for WISE Flex: flexible progression support

The WISE Flex Theory of Change maps out specific support for participants who complete the WISE Core Programme, and are ready to take the next steps to progress on their journey to self-reliance. The management data suggest this is approximately 30 percent of participants who start on the WISE Core Programme. The aim of the theory of change is to identify standard components of support for each area of progression to help replicate best practices and shared outcomes across different regions. The flexible support would last up to 12 weeks.



# Measurement Framework



# Recommendation for impact data collection

To understand how the WISE project supports the participant journey the quality and consistency of collecting management information and outcome data must be improved. The insights from the evaluation have informed the development of a measurement framework. The measurement framework is designed to help The Wallich gather proportionate and pragmatic data, using externally validated tools that are appropriate for people with the experience of homelessness.

The evaluation recommends the following approach to impact data collection:

1. Review the core management information requirements, so that they are able to collect information on key impact indicators including:
  - Profile of participants – who does WISE support;
  - Participation – how do participants engage with the WISE Project (attendance, key milestones, and drop out data).
2. Collect wellbeing data three times to track changes over time:
  - First WISE Core Session;
  - Exit from WISE Core/graduation;
  - End of flexible support.

3. Pilot the *digital-first approach* where the participant is sent an electronic survey directly to complete. Store survey data in InForm, alongside a participants individual profile and participation data so that results can be analysed by key demographics and levels of participation.
4. Build time in for Mentors to support the completion of impact surveys as follows:
  - Mentors to promote and support completion of wellbeing surveys;
  - Mentors and Management staff can see if this has been completed;
  - Mentors can check-in to see if the participant has any questions or concerns (during sessions or 1-2-1 support);
  - Mentors can offer to complete with the participant if appropriate.
5. Participants do not have to provide this information – it is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the survey at any time.

# Participation and progression

Table 6 provides recommendations for management information, which can be used as indicators of progress towards impact. It is necessary to have the capabilities to track employment outcomes beyond the participant's engagement with The WISE Project. There are several different approaches to collecting this data:

- Management information field on InForm that can be completed by WISE Mentors if past participants contact them to share stories of success;
- Annual online survey of previous participants;
- Follow up phone calls with a small sample of previous participants.

**Table 6: Impact indicators for participation and progression**

Outcome	Indicator data	Data collection
Progress towards, and participation in, education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Attending educational courses</li><li>• Qualifications obtained</li></ul>	Information should be collected and stored within the management information system. Where possible fixed response categories should be used across services to reduce the burden of time for staff on data collection and reporting.
Progress towards, gaining, and sustaining employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Take up of employment support (steps to employment)</li><li>• Employment status</li></ul>	Not all impact indicators will be relevant to all clients. Services could select which set of impact indicators relate to their work.
Progress towards, and participation in, volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Attending one-off volunteering</li><li>• Attending volunteering training and induction</li><li>• Engagement in regular volunteering</li></ul>	Where possible data collection should be embedded into frontline staff service delivery to record progress of work and conversations with a client.
Participation data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Group sessions</li><li>• 1-2-1 engagements</li><li>• Graduation</li><li>• Referrals to other projects</li><li>• Drop outs</li></ul>	

## Tracking outcomes - tools

The evaluation recommends using The Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) to measure overall changes in wellbeing. WEMWBS is a tested and validated measure for wellbeing, suitable for use with people from a range of backgrounds. The questions and response categories are show in table 7 below. The scale scores different aspects of wellbeing that help people think about where they are and where they want to be. The answers together give one score that measures psychological wellbeing. Each question response facilitates a better understanding of mental wellbeing and what helps to drive positive change and action.

**Table 7: Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (short) questions and responses**

Wellbeing areas	Statements	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
Optimism	I've been feeling optimistic about the future	1	2	3	4	5
Worth	I've been feeling useful	1	2	3	4	5
Peace of mind	I've been feeling relaxed	1	2	3	4	5
Resilience	I've been dealing with my problems well	1	2	3	4	5
Competence	I've been thinking clearly	1	2	3	4	5
Relationships	I've been feeling close to other people	1	2	3	4	5
Autonomy	I've been able to make up my mind about things	1	2	3	4	5

# Conclusions & implications



# Process learning

The interviews with key stakeholders identified a number of key learnings that have shaped the way WISE has evolved to better meet the needs of participants in six years of delivery. Table 8 summarises the challenges and the ways in which the WISE project has responded to them, or intends to respond to them in the future.

Area	Challenge	Solution
External facilitators and expert content	The WISE Mentors are often experts at building relationships with and supporting participants to address a range of circumstances around positive progression pathways. Some of the group learning sessions require expert content and facilitation, especially when delivering online.	Introducing external facilitators for a specific sessions which require, or would benefit from, specialist input, for example, resilience sessions delivered by True Resilience.
Measuring the journey	Not all participants are able, or want, to progress to employment due to complex personal circumstances or health conditions. However, their progression into volunteering or education as a result of WISE is a positive outcome. WISE supports pathways towards independence and self-reliance, it is not solely focussed on accessing and sustaining employment.	Tracking and measuring outcomes during and beyond WISE to measure progress in all areas including education, training/education, and wellbeing. Tracking reasons participants do not complete the WISE Project, to better understand the challenges and barriers participants face, to help inform future service design.
Sustaining employment	For those participants who do access employment, they benefit from continued support from WISE mentors to sustain their employment.	Formalising the support package, and who is best placed to deliver this, to ensure participants have access to trusted support and advice to sustain employment. The support must build on the 'trusted relationship' model of support provided by The Wallich, and have some expertise on helping to resolve a range of challenges (including emotional) that could trigger the end of employment.

# Conclusions

It is clear that the support offered by the WISE Project is valued, appreciated, and seen as essential to help those with experience of homelessness take steps towards finding and sustaining employment.

The evaluation largely draws on qualitative evidence to demonstrate how the WISE Project is meeting many participants' needs and already helping them to improve their wellbeing, and ultimately take important steps towards self-reliance.

The WISE Project works effectively in regions where The Wallich already delivers frontline support and services to address crisis and basic needs of people with experience of homelessness. The WISE Project enhances and extends The Wallach's offer of support so people are able to make progress. The link with other services provided by The Wallich is a key enabling factor to successfully deliver impact on participants journey towards employment and self-reliance. The WISE Project, in its current format, would not work as a standalone programme.

The evaluation includes a number of recommendations, based on the findings, which will help the WISE Project to have a greater impact while operating more efficiently.

In order to embed consistent and proportionate learning on impact, The WISE Project now needs to embed quantitative evaluation tools. The impact framework will allow The Wallich to evidence the dynamic and non-linear pathways through The WISE Project. This will create a deeper understanding of the value of bringing together different types of support to help people with experience of homelessness move towards self-reliance.

The evidence and learning from this evaluation has helped to define the core and flexible components of the WISE Project. A clear delivery model will enable The Wallich to consider the capacity, roles, and responsibilities required to deliver the WISE Project. It will also open up the potential of incrementally expanding to new areas in Wales.

# Recommendations (1)

1. **Build a consistent delivery model**, that ensures core content areas reliably deliver key impacts. The core content could be supported by flexible components to address the different progression routes for participants. Consolidating the core content and materials will help to deliver consistent impact across different regions.
2. **Incrementally extend the regional model of delivering the WISE Project**, allowing additional time to set up and embed the WISE Project in new areas. WISE Core can be piloted in a region first, to help establish referrals from local projects to WISE, as well as building partnerships to support progression to local education, volunteering, and employment opportunities is critical to deliver WISE. Mentors can only be expected to cover a realistic geographical local area, especially as some face-to-face contact with participants is considered to be beneficial.
3. **Provide a blended model of online and offline support for WISE participants**, aspects of online group learning have been beneficial to overcome some barriers to participation including anxiety, isolation, and rural location. Dedicated budget must be set aside to ensure participants can access online learning and have the right support to gain basic IT skills. Many participants enjoyed the online group sessions, once they were able to overcome issues around online access or technical challenges. Whilst participants were not able to meet face to face in 2021, there is an appetite from participants to take a blended approach to group sessions to combine the benefits of both online and face to face learning.
4. **Develop an in-work support package to help participants sustain employment**, participants who reach employment value the ongoing support from Mentors to help them settle into their new work. There is currently no formal package of support. Mentors do keep in touch with participants informally. As the WISE project continues it is important to consider what in-work support helps to sustain employment. These considerations must include the caseload, types of support required in work, and opportunities to link with regional corporate partners.

## Recommendations (2)

**4. Embed The Wallich value pledge to help participants clearly understand expectations for them to participate in the WISE Project.** The evaluation demonstrates a strong link between The Wallich values, and the ways of working to deliver impact. Feedback from stakeholders identifies many participants need encouragement to attend regularly and actively participate in the group sessions. All staff at The Wallich are asked to sign a pledge around supporting its values. The pledge document could form the basis of the first or second group session to establish clear expectations for participants during the WISE project.

**5. Extend the peer mentoring volunteering programme to provide structured opportunities for previous WISE participants to support the delivery of the WISE Programme.** Many participants who complete WISE are passionate about the opportunity and impact of the Project. Previous participants are sometimes involved in delivering WISE, but there is not a consistent approach to planning how and when to involve them. This presents an ideal volunteering progression route for participants interesting in working in charities or support roles. The Wallich already offers a dedicated peer mentoring training programme. This

could be used to train previous participants as volunteers to help deliver WISE. Feedback from the qualitative interviews with participants would be particularly useful at the start of the group learning and again as participants prepare for progression from WISE core activities, as it provides the participants the opportunity to hear and learn from previous participants.

**6. Review and update group sessions.** During the evaluation participants identified that group session content directly contributes to improvements to their wellbeing. In line with the new theories of change, the content for the group sessions should be updated to deliver the specific key areas of impact that they are linked to. The evaluation provides clear evidence to support the continued use of external facilitators to bring new expertise and approaches. As well as providing training to support the WISE mentors to be confident and effective at delivering online groups.

# Final words from participants



We asked participants what advice they would give individuals who are considering getting involved in The WISE Project:

*“You can stay where you are, and you can get worse. Or you could try it and it could be great. At worst it won’t be right for you and you’re just where you were before WISE.”*

Participant 3

*“There’s no pressure in WISE whatsoever. There’s no pressure involved. If you can’t read or write, it’s not an issue. It’s there, it’s open, and you do need to meet people in a similar boat.”*

Participant 5

*“They let you be comfortable and be yourself. It’s great to see others improve and that inspires you to move forward.”*

Participant 6

*“Listen, turn up to every single appointment if you can, and just believe in yourself. Because there were days when I didn’t believe in myself, but then there are days that are better for you - you make the days better when you actually get out and do things for yourself.”*

Participant 7

## References

Johnsen, S & Watts, B (2014) *Homelessness and poverty: reviewing the links*. Heriot-Watt University (report available [here](#))

Gray T, Rodriguez-Guzman G, Argodale S & Bartholdy N (2022) *What works Evidence Notes* Employment Centre for Homeless Impact (report available [here](#))

Bretherton, J & Pleace , N (2019) *Is Work an Answer to Homelessness? : Evaluating an Employment Programme for Homeless Adults*. University of York (report available [here](#))

The Confidence Framework: <https://www.theconfidenceframework.org.uk/>

*Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scales - WEMWBS*: Warwick Medical School: The University of Warwick (for more information see [here](#))

