

MyGo Evaluation: Final report

Summary

September 2018

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*In January 2016, NIACE and the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion
merged to form the Learning and Work Institute*

Learning and Work Institute

Patron: HRH The Princess Royal | Chief Executive: David Hughes
A company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales
Registration No. 2603322 Registered Charity No. 1002775
Registered office: 21 De Montfort Street, Leicester, LE1 7GE



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Introduction

This report presents findings from the final evaluation of MyGo – an integrated employment and skills programme, designed to tackle youth unemployment in Suffolk, established as part of the Greater Ipswich City Deal.

The MyGo service aimed to provide more effective support for young people to enable them to make informed decisions about their future and move towards and into sustainable employment. Key elements include:

- Co-location of Jobcentre Plus services with additional employment support in order to provide a personalised and more intensive support offer.
- Working collaboratively with partners to facilitate access to a wide range of support options.
- Offering a range of different pathways towards the labour market, tailored to young people's needs and aspirations.
- Providing an improved environment for the delivery of employment services to young people.

Key findings

- Joint working between Jobcentre Plus, local authorities and other partners has been one of the key successes of MyGo. Across all phases, it was felt that there was a good working relationship between MyGo and Jobcentre Plus. The evaluation points to **the importance of effective partnerships, collaborative leadership and good governance at both strategic and operational levels.**
- The ability to **co-locate partners** in MyGo centres proved to be highly effective in improving access to services, encouraging effective working relationships and supporting a shared understanding of roles. Effective joining up of provision was also underpinned by **simple referral processes, active management of partners, regular communications and effective sharing of information and data.**
- MyGo was successful in delivering a single service that extended beyond the JCP claimant offer and Council/ partner-led services, with two fifths of participants not claiming benefit at the point of referral. **Establishing effective partnerships was important to engaging hard-to-reach young people.**
- **While the MyGo centres were viewed positively, this was not essential to the MyGo brand.** This was instead a result of welcoming and friendly staff, effective support and convenient locations. A service dedicated to young people was welcomed and did appear to be effective in the engagement of non-claimants, but this did not need to be a distinct MyGo centre.

- A key strength of MyGo was the **quality and effectiveness of the coaching support**. Many participants directly attributed successful outcomes to the quality of the support received. These relationships, and the co-ordination of activity between MyGo and JCP coaches, were key to delivering a single and seamless service.
- **An in-house employer engagement and training team appeared to enhance the MyGo offer**, enabling greater use and sequencing of work experience, traineeships and work-focused training.
- More work remains to be done in designing integrated services that can manage **the trade-offs between shorter-term job entry on the one hand and supporting longer-term jobs that lead to careers** on the other.

Overview of MyGo

MyGo was designed and delivered by Suffolk County Council, in partnership with PeoplePlus and Jobcentre Plus (JCP) and was rolled out over three phases, in different parts of Suffolk:

- Phase 1 of MyGo began in November 2014, operating in the Borough of Ipswich, with services delivered by PeoplePlus from a dedicated MyGo centre, where Jobcentre Plus services for young people are also co-located.
- Phase 2 of MyGo began in May 2016, operating in co-located or ‘pop-up’ locations across Greater Ipswich, including in Jobcentre Plus offices and other youth services within the districts of Mid Suffolk, Babergh and Suffolk Coastal. It is also delivered by PeoplePlus.
- Phase 3 of MyGo began in July 2016, delivered by Suffolk County Council in Lowestoft. Like Phase 1 it has a dedicated MyGo centre, but participants can also engage with the service at Jobcentre Plus or on an outreach basis.

The evaluation findings are based on an analysis of management information (MI) from November 2014 to September 2017; several waves of qualitative interviews with MyGo participants, staff and employers; and an assessment of the costs and benefits of MyGo compared with ‘business as usual’ support.

Findings

Delivery of support

Engagement and referral

Participants were generally positive about their referral and initial engagement with MyGo. This worked well where participants found out about MyGo through people

they trusted who could tell them what to expect or through partner organisations who had good knowledge of the service.

Engagement of 'harder to reach' young people was achieved through outreach activities and partnerships with other organisations in the local area and MyGo was successful in reaching a wider cohort of young people beyond those claiming DWP benefits. Providing suitable 'hooks' to engage young people and making the MyGo offer sufficiently flexible helped to engage young people with more complex needs.

Participants had positive initial impressions of the MyGo centres in Ipswich and Lowestoft due to the space, facilities and the welcome from staff. The open plan and sometimes noisy environment could be off-putting, however, for some young people, especially those with mental health conditions or learning disabilities.

MyGo coach support

One-to-one support from a MyGo coach was usually the most valuable aspect of the service for participants. Across all phases, participants often felt that their adviser was helpful, caring, approachable and knowledgeable. Continuity of adviser was important; changes of coach could disrupt support and prevent effective relationships being formed.

There were some cases where participants felt that their coach did not respond appropriately to their needs, especially when they had additional/complex needs or were highly qualified. Young people with mental health conditions did not always appear to receive sufficient support around confidence building and wellbeing alongside more focused job preparation activity. Enhanced staff training, for example around mental health or learning disabilities, could have benefited participants with additional needs.

Employment-focused support and employer engagement

A wide range of employment-focused support was provided by MyGo and external training providers. This included in-house support with job applications, online tests and interview preparation and access to work experience, accredited qualifications and signposting to careers advice and guidance. Much of this was highly regarded by participants and felt to make a real difference to job prospects.

However, there were concerns that JCP off-flow targets could prevent the use of longer-term provision that was appropriate for higher need participants, and some young people with learning disabilities did not feel that the support provided was appropriate for them. There was also more limited access to training provision in Phase 2 areas due to smaller caseloads and less demand.

Employer engagement was a key strength of the service, and highly regarded by employers. Employers especially valued the support received in filtering, screening, preparing and matching of candidates to vacancies.

In-work support

There was a dedicated in-work support team in Phase 1 and 2, and MyGo coaches were responsible for this element of support in Phase 3. However, the nature, extent and frequency of in-work support received by participants varied greatly. Some participants who did not receive support would have valued assistance to either find better work, progress or resolve issues in the workplace, while others wanted more regular contact or more structured support to resolve challenges that arose. Improvements to MI systems would have facilitated better quality in-work support and there was potential for greater joining up of in-work support with MyGo coaching services and employer engagement.

Outcomes and impact

9 per cent of participants in Phases 1 and 2 and 6 per cent of participants in Phase 3 achieved an education outcome while on MyGo. These outcomes were more common for younger people.

There was a job outcome rate of 44 per cent in Phase 1, 43 per cent in Phase 2 and 29 per cent in Phase 3. Job outcome rates steadily increased over time for all cohorts, which means that **MyGo got better over time at placing people in jobs.**

The lower outcome rates in Phase 3 reflect the less buoyant labour market context and the shorter delivery period. They also reflect the different performance management structure in Phase 3 where a wider range of soft outcomes were rewarded as well as job sentry. **This suggests that the different performance management systems in operation across the phases of MyGo had a role to play in influencing outcomes.**

Across all phases, job outcome rates were higher for participants assessed as lower need. Outcome rates also related to benefit type and referral route and to other personal characteristics, such as health conditions, disabilities and caring responsibilities.

Job sustainment varied considerably – a fifth of first jobs were sustained for less than a month, while two fifths were sustained for six months or more. If total time in work is measured, rather than time in first job, the rate of 6-month sustainment rises to almost two thirds of all claimable job outcomes. **This indicates that first jobs did not always last but that many participants were successful in obtaining subsequent work.**

Our best estimate of the impact of MyGo, comparing changes in the youth claimant count for MyGo and comparable areas, suggests only a marginal and non-significant impact of MyGo on youth claimant rates. There are important caveats to this assessment, however, most notably that it is limited to assessing impacts on benefit claimants (who comprised only three fifths of total MyGo participants), cannot assess impacts on sustained employment, earnings or participation in learning, and does not assess impacts for different groups of participants. Nonetheless, it appears that MyGo did not have the transformative impact on youth outcomes that was envisaged when it was created. Given the rapidly reducing unemployment rate over the period in question, and the relatively small employment impact made by employment programmes in general, this is perhaps not unexpected.

Taking forward the MyGo model

Features of MyGo that were effective and could be built on in the future, include:

Partnership working. Effective engagement and support of young people requires a range of partnerships with organisations in contact with the target group (e.g. local authority teams, schools and colleges), training providers, employers and specialist organisations such as local charities. However, such partnerships can only be effective with simple referral processes, good quality data systems and sharing processes, regular communication and a shared understanding of the aims and objectives of the service in question.

For effective partnership working, it was also important to clarify the role of MyGo in the customer support journey vis-à-vis other organisations and to communicate that to partners, including delivery level staff. For future provision, there would be real benefits in improving the mapping of local provision and services; building on the good practices in MyGo in actively managing and engaging partners; prioritising efforts to share data and information; and where possible exploring opportunities to increase (or pool) funding to support onward referral for those with more complex needs.

Engaging non-benefit claimants. This is arguably where MyGo can have most added value. Partnerships were essential to this as were the marketing messages and approach of engagement staff. Improved partnership work with providers that engage with specific communities and staff training around disabilities and health conditions would help to engage individuals with more complex barriers such as learning disabilities or ESOL needs. Additional development of digital channels is also required to support a wider range of participants including those who were not able to access the MyGo centres due to health conditions.

Accessible and youth-friendly locations for the delivery of support were important and enhanced engagement. Having a dedicated centre is not essential,

but it is important to have a brand that is appealing (and distinct from JCP) when trying to engage non-claimants.

Personalised coach-led support remains key to effective provision, and therefore so does ensuring that services have high-quality staff who are enthusiastic and approachable. Driving outcomes for young people with more complex / additional needs is an area which requires further innovation and exploration. There would be value in providing staff training in areas such as mental health first aid and welfare rights to ensure that they feel confident in addressing such issues. There is further potential to trial coach specialisms by support category or needs, such as health conditions.

The enhanced MyGo offer of trainers, employer engagement and in-work support appeared to add value and the employer engagement function was seen as high quality by staff, participants and employers alike. There is value in having staff dedicated to employer engagement, since this requires a different skill set to that of delivering employment support, is time consuming, and importantly, is key to outcomes.

Having resource dedicated to employer engagement enabled greater efforts to be placed on sourcing a range of quality opportunities for participants and providing 'after-care' to overcome any initial challenges faced. This should be built on in future programmes. Targeting employer relationship managers on job sustainment led to a greater focus on meeting longer-term career aspirations. There would be scope to build on this further, for example through exploring the possibility of using earnings outcome targets.

In-work support. Supporting participants with longer-term career aspirations also requires an element of in-work support to support participants in working towards their longer-term goals while in work. Participants expressed a preference for receiving this from someone whom they had a relationship, who understood their situation. Thus, building in adequate time for this amongst staff and having good quality data systems to track participants are important considerations. This is an area of the MyGo service that could be substantially enhanced in the future, especially with Universal Credit in-work conditionality requirements.

The **performance management** in Phase 1 and 2, with outcome-based targets for the provider, appeared to pay off in terms of higher job outcome rates than in Phase 3, but it is unclear how much of this difference was driven by better recording or by better achievement of outcomes. Moreover, tensions between JCP off-flow targets and the use of training and other provision that could delay entry into work but may have longer-term benefits suggests that more work remains to be done in designing integrated services that can manage the trade-offs between shorter-term job entry on the one hand and supporting longer-term jobs that lead to careers on the other.

Outcome targets. Differentials in provider payments for participants with different levels of need did not appear to drive improvements in support for higher need participants to a sufficient extent to lift their job outcomes substantially. Assessed level of need remained a key predictor of job outcomes throughout MyGo. The wider range of 'soft outcome' targets in Phase 3 appeared to promote referrals to other services, but deficiencies in tracking systems meant that any ultimate job outcomes from this were not always identified and recorded. Better data tracking systems across providers would enable more joined up support and allow an assessment of whether a broader range of targets resulted in better long-term outcomes.