

**Outcomes from Making It Work – Lessons and Challenges
for Scotland’s Future Employability Services
Report to the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland**

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Introduction

From April 2018, the design and delivery of employability support services will be devolved to the Scottish Government. Following extensive consultation, the Scottish Government published its vision for future employability services, *Creating a Fairer Scotland: A New Future for Employability Support in Scotland*, in March 2016.

While substantial progress has been made in developing a commissioning framework for future employability provision in Scotland, there remains scope to influence the design and delivery of services on the ground. It is therefore important that we share lessons from the successes of – and challenges encountered by – *Making It Work* (MIW), the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland’s innovative programme of support for lone parents.

Although details of the specific models of provision for future services have yet to be finalised, the Scottish Government has identified six key principles that will inform the services commissioned and define a ‘Scottish Approach to Employability’.

Principle 1: Employability services should be designed nationally but adapted and delivered locally: The Scottish Government argues for employability services that are designed at a national level to ensure consistency, but that recognise that local flexibility remains key, and that we must encourage collaboration and the alignment of support available through a range of local partners.

Principle 2: Employability services should be designed and delivered in partnership: Partnership-working means that resources and assets can be pooled and employability can be linked with education, health and social care services. Local partnership-working is seen by the Scottish Government as a means of ensuring that employability funding maximises value for money and complements, rather than duplicates, locally-available services.

Principle 3: Employability services should offer a flexible, tailored, ‘whole person’ approach: The Scottish Approach to Employability will provide personalised support, particularly for those facing additional barriers in the labour market. Effective planning, person-centred services and in-work support are seen crucial in responding to individuals’ needs.

Principle 4: Employability services should be responsive to those with high needs: A key focus for future services will be developing a tailored and personalised service for those for whom work is a reasonable objective, but report substantial barriers. The Scottish Government has highlighted (among other features) the need for time and resources to be committed to the engagement of service users, the assessment of individual needs and life circumstances, and investment in intensive support for those some distance from the labour market.

Principle 5: Employability services should involve a drive towards real jobs:

The Scottish Government has prioritised supporting employability services that deliver real jobs and ‘prosperous careers’, an acknowledgement that some mainstream employability services have failed to deliver sustainable employment outcomes. Employer engagement and in-work support for progression is therefore seen as essential.

Principle 6: Employability services should be funded to support job outcomes and progression towards work:

The Scottish Government has prioritised avoiding the problems of ‘creaming and parking’ that affect many employability programmes (whereby funding linked to achieving job outcomes for users incentivises providers to support those closer to the labour market, rather than those most in need), and has acknowledged that attaching resources to users’ progression across their whole employability journey is likely to be valuable here.



Previous reporting from the Evaluation Team has identified a number of these themes as being present in the design and delivery of MIW, but the purpose of these reports is to offer more in-depth analysis from across the four-year MIW evaluation on lessons for each of the six principles of the Scottish Approach to Employability.

This report focuses on insights for the Scottish Approach in relation to these principles, bringing together key findings from a suite of six individual thematic reports.

About Making It Work

Making it Work (MIW) provided a programme of personalised support for disadvantaged lone parent families with complex needs in five local authority areas of Scotland: Edinburgh, Fife, Glasgow, North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire. MIW aimed to increase the numbers of lone parents moving towards sustainable employment.

The programme was designed to help lone parents to manage the jigsaw of childcare and family life and to facilitate access to services for lone parents who were some distance from the labour market and who were unlikely to be accessing or benefiting from mainstream employability services. The programme received £7 million in grant funding from the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland and was delivered between 2013 and 2017 by partnerships led by third sector organisations working in collaboration with the employability providers and other partners in the public and third sectors.

Local authority area	Lead Partner	Partners at programme launch	Grant	Number of lone parents supported
Glasgow	Jobs & Business Glasgow	Wise Group Rosemount Lifelong Learning One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS) Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) Glasgow City Council	£2M	1475
Edinburgh	Capital City Partnership	Edinburgh Council of Voluntary Services City of Edinburgh Council One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS) Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA)	£1.25M	422
North Lanarkshire	Routes to Work Limited	Greater Easterhouse Money Advice Project (GMAP) Circle One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS) Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire North Lanarkshire Council	£1.25M	308
South Lanarkshire	Routes to Work South	Healthy n Happy Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) South Lanarkshire CAB	£1.25M	454

Local authority area	Lead Partner	Partners at programme launch	Grant	Number of lone parents supported
		Network Healthy Valleys Voluntary Action South Lanarkshire South Lanarkshire Council		
Fife	Fife Gingerbread	Citizens Advice & Rights Fife (CARF) Fife Council Education & Learning Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS) Fife Childcare & Early Years Service	£1.25M	456

The MIW programme provided personalised, intensive support for lone parents with complex needs. For the purposes of MIW, there was a particular emphasis on targeting lone parents reporting complex needs such as:

- having a disability, or caring for someone with disabilities;
- having a large family (three or more children);
- living in an area characterised by a depressed labour market/high levels of worklessness;
- living in chaotic circumstances;
- having little work experience, or having been out of work for more than two years.

MIW was based on a model of support that included: (crucially) intensive Key Worker support; signposting to and support in accessing existing service provision; and linking between employability and support services, including childcare. MIW partnerships concentrated on activities covering a range of elements to support lone parents' employability journeys, including:

- pre-engagement work: establishing credibility and visibility with lone parents and other stakeholders, connecting with lone parents, engaging in personal development, supporting planning for work and childcare, and signposting improved and accelerated access to complementary services;
- engagement: continuing support to build employability and self-efficacy, signposting and facilitating access to mainstream employability and learning provision, and supporting the identification of and engagement with childcare and other support services.
- post-employment: in-work support for job retention and progression, assistance in identifying learning and development opportunities, and engaging with employers to encourage family friendly practice.

About the Learning and Evaluation Contact

The learning and evaluation contract is being delivered by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) at Sheffield Hallam University, and the Scottish Centre for Employment Research (SCER) at the University of Strathclyde. There are three overall objectives for the learning and evaluation contract to:

- track the success of the programme, and projects and interventions within it;
- identify what works well, for whom and in what circumstances;
- share learning and improve practice (including amongst grant holders).

The learning and evaluation contract had three work streams:

Work stream 1: bespoke partnership-level evaluations which captured the achievements of the MIW partnerships. A partnership-level evaluation report was produced for each MIW partnership in years one, two and three of the programme, and a summary of each MIW partnership's activities and achievements over the lifetime of the programme is included in the final reporting outputs.

Work stream 2: programme-level evaluation that built on the partnership-level evaluations to assess the impact of the programme, and identifies best practice with a view to informing future delivery. A programme level evaluation was produced for each year of the programme including this, final programme evaluation report.

Work stream 3: learning activities that provided learning to partners and other stakeholders to maximise the impact of the programme and support on-going activity.

This evaluation gathered data from a number of sources:

- Semi-structured interviews (conducted face to face and over the telephone) with representatives of MIW partnerships.
- In-depth interviews with MIW clients carried out between 2013 and 2017
- MIW participant surveys: Key Workers assisted MIW participants to complete an-online survey within 4 weeks of joining the programme, and at follow-up intervals of 6 and 12 months.
- Partnership data: MIW partnerships completed a template which collected standardised monitoring data across the five partnerships for each year of the programme.

Principle 1: Employability services should be designed nationally but adapted and delivered locally

How MIW reflects this principle of the Scottish Approach

There is good evidence to support the Scottish Government's argument that employability services work best when they combine a degree of national-level consistency and shared principles with strong elements of local adaptability and flexibility. While MIW was not a national programme covering all of Scotland, it targeted five diverse local authority areas. There was scope for substantial local adaptation, but the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland ensured that the five area partnerships responded to a set of shared and agreed principles. A number of distinctive features offer useful insights for Scotland's employability services.

Programme-level leadership that sets principles and supports partnership

MIW partnerships were effective in developing models of provision that reflected local assets and needs. Local flexibility was achieved due to the funding and governance model established by the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland. The Big Lottery Fund in Scotland prioritised and incentivised local partnership-working (including the requirement of a strong co-leadership role for third sector organisations) and provided grant-based funding that allowed partnerships considerable flexibility in building and continuously developing services. The Big Lottery Fund in Scotland's funding model also delivered substantial resources 'up-front' (early in the programme's development) and avoided elaborate payment-by-results mechanisms that have characterised some mainstream employability programmes. This approach to funding ensured that there were sufficient resources early in the process to focus on building effective, inclusive partnerships. The resulting local, multi-stakeholder partnerships have been important to delivering a 'whole person' approach to lone parents facing substantial barriers to employability. A key lesson is that if funders send clear messages that establishing locally-responsive services is a priority, then delivery stakeholders will respond accordingly.

Stakeholders involved in delivering MIW pointed to the value of working with a funder that favoured collaboration with and between partners rather than the micro-management of budgets and supply chains from the top-down.

Big Lottery Fund was an excellent partner. They didn't micro-manage. They were clear on priorities and then said 'Here's the project – get on with it'.

MIW Fife Stakeholder, 2017

Flexible partnerships based on local assets and needs

There were distinctive features to the delivery mechanisms adopted across the five MIW partnerships, reflecting local need and circumstances:

- MIW Edinburgh was led by Capital City Partnership Development Workers, and embedded in four community locations, working closely with trusted local community organisations (two nurseries, an employability service hub, and a community centre). Alongside the intensive support provided by Development Workers, MIW was able to draw on the expertise of partner agencies including the Scottish Child Minding Association (SCMA), which supported a small number of participants to progress towards a career in child minding, and One Parents Families Scotland (OPFS), offering advice of benefits and childcare to both lone parents and MIW Development Workers. Effective working relationships and signposting routes were also established with local colleges and employability providers.
- MIW Fife was led by Fife Gingerbread, with its MIW Support Workers linking with local authority employability and work experience services delivered by the Fife Client Action Team (CAT) and money advice delivered by Citizens Advice and Rights Fife. Additional support and advice was available from SCMA and OPFS.
- MIW Glasgow was led by Jobs and Business Glasgow in partnership with The Wise Group (with both of these partners delivering sector specific and employability training), OPFS (which co-led engagement activities at four local hubs); Rosemount Learning (a community learning provider expert in delivering confidence, motivation and basic skills support), SCMA and Stepping Stones (a community family and childcare services provider).
- MIW North Lanarkshire was led by Routes To Work, working in partnership with OPFS, Greater Easterhouse Money Advice Project, which provided benefits and money advice, Circle, providing specialist support to families with substance misuse issues, and Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire, offering support for lone parents interested in volunteering.
- MIW South Lanarkshire was led by Routes To Work, with Key Workers embedded in four community locations. Additional support was made available by SCMA, Citizens' Advice (which provided benefits and money advice) and Voluntary Action South Lanarkshire (which supported volunteering activities). Effective and consistent signposting relationships were established with mainstream employability and employer engagement services delivered by South Lanarkshire Council and Routes To Work.

In all five partnership areas, we found that a focus on local delivery ensured strong integration with existing, complementary employability provision (thus avoiding 're-inventing the wheel'/double funding) and facilitated the development of effective partnerships with other community-based providers in areas such as childcare and community health. The collaborative approach supported by the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland and adopted by partners on the ground ensured that MIW participants had access to the right range of services. There are important lessons here for building effective and efficient employability services in Scotland.

The partnership-based approach supported by the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland meant that specialist third sector organisations run by and for lone parents, such as OPFS (which offered advice and guidance to MIW participants and partners in all partnership areas) and Fife Gingerbread, were able to play an important delivery role

in MIW. The inclusion of third sector partners with a strong record of delivery on the ground in local communities helped to establish the credibility of MIW, and helped gain lone parents' trust and buy-in. Organisations like Fife Gingerbread are also defined by a proactive approach to engagement – engaging with lone parents in their homes and communities, rather than expecting service users to take the first step in connecting with service providers. This can be particularly important if the aim is to convince vulnerable people to engage voluntarily with employability services.

Fife Gingerbread have always been a grassroots organisation, and have always been working with people in their own homes, and going out to the community rather than telling people to come to them. So that has worked really well. A lot of the cases that we're working with are very complex, and many of the parents do not feel confident on an initial engagement... So the fact that Support Workers are going to actually visit them in their homes has been really successful. And it also is good because it gives us a good understanding of exactly what is going on.

MIW Fife Stakeholder, 2014

We found that a similar commitment to outreach in other MIW areas was valued by lone parents seeking to balance childcare responsibilities with job search activity.

You know sometimes these girls are actually coming to my flat to help me with my jobsearch. In my home! The other week my son was unwell, so they said, well we'll come to you... I'm always worried about the Jobcentre and doing the job search and they're like, "Don't worry about that, we'll help you".

MIW North Lanarkshire Participant, 2014

In conclusion, MIW provides a model for innovative programme development, based on collaboration and co-production (including between the funder and partnerships), and extensive consultation with relevant communities and stakeholders.

Local flexibility in programme content

MIW partnerships benefited from the flexibility to develop locally-responsive provision, based on a consensus around 'what might work' within partnerships, and informed by the views of lone parents. A number of innovative interventions – some common across partnerships, others specific to local circumstances – emerged across the five partnership areas.

First, common to all areas, Key Workers (known as Support Workers or Development Workers in some partnerships) were central to the success of MIW – in all areas, these workers played a crucial role in linking up flexible local services, signposting lone parents to appropriate provision and (crucially) providing personalised, one-to-one support.

MIW partnerships experimented with different group-based activities to complement one-to-one support. For example, based on the preferences of participants, MIW South Lanarkshire combined Key Worker support with a flexible programme of group-based activities, with options that covered everything from confidence-building and life skills to budgeting and debt management to vocational skills development. Additional content such as the OPFS-led 10 week 'Transforming Lives' programme helped to combat isolation among MIW participants. More broadly, structured, group-based personal development interventions such as 'STEPS' (MIW Glasgow), 'ASPIRE' (MIW Fife) and 'SAFARI' (MIW South Lanarkshire) were welcomed by MIW users as helping to build confidence and peer support networks.

...It's quite scary the thought of going back into work with all these strange people. The groups helped me. It kind of breaks you into it. My favourite is the ASPIRE group... We can speak about anything. Like there are certain people that I'll not talk in front of. But in the group I can say anything. And they are the same, they talk about everything. And I hadn't ever met these girls before until the group started. It's strange, because I'll tell them stuff I wouldn't even tell my friends.

MIW Fife Participant, 2014

MIW stakeholders described the benefits of combining flexible groupwork with one-to-one support, especially in building peer support networks.

The social networks that are being formed, and the way that you see someone say: 'Well, I'll go and pick up your little one, if you want, and I'll drop them off...' I think that's a huge part of the groupwork... they're getting to know each other. They live in the same area. They're befriending each other, and they're supporting each other, so that's really positive.

MIW Edinburgh Stakeholder, 2016

Investing in engagement in local communities

The clear focus on flexible local services encouraged delivery partners to invest in engagement and outreach activities (as opposed to duplicating the existing effort of mainstream local employability providers). This meant that there was a substantial effort to reach out to communities and lone parent groups not being serviced by existing provision. A number of different, innovative strategies were deployed to achieve this. For example, MIW Glasgow co-located workers in community locations, in response to local need and to engage with particularly vulnerable groups of lone parents (such as those who had experienced domestic abuse, and those for whom English was a second language). MIW North Lanarkshire targeted successive disadvantaged communities in a time-limited, rolling programme of engagement and awareness-raising activities. The MIW Edinburgh team bypassed the city's well-established local employability hubs, instead basing MIW Development Workers in local childcare and community centres more often used by lone parents. Basing

Development Workers in local community hubs helped to establish a sense of trust and credibility with lone parents in target communities.

These organisations are well known in their local communities, so it gives you an air of credibility immediately if you say 'I'm based in Dr Bells in Leith' [a community-based family centre in one of MIW's target areas], which is well known for doing good things. People are either there anyway, or they are willing to come along, because it's not intimidating...

MIW Edinburgh Stakeholder, 2014

MIW South Lanarkshire's close partnership-working with local community health organisations similarly helped MIW to reach lone parents who were not engaging with mainstream employability services. At a most basic level, the most successful MIW partnerships supported extensive networking and engagement work to build relationships with key stakeholders and potential participants. MIW Key Workers were active in connecting with childcare providers, mainstream employability services, Jobcentre Plus, health professionals, learning and early years services, and other community organisations. MIW Key Workers described engaging with lone parents and potential partner organisations by attending jobs fairs, engaging with local community action groups, and even directly leafleting neighbourhoods in target areas. Such a proactive and dynamic approach to raising awareness and building relationships was clearly a distinctive feature of MIW.

What we've done is gone out and built those relationships from everything from health visitors, community learning development teams, health and wellbeing services, social work departments – everything that we possibly can do to get ourselves integrated into the communities.

MIW South Lanarkshire Stakeholder, 2014

Our research in these areas identified important benefits from committing resources – and the commitment of MIW staff – to proactive community engagement activities that form the basis for relationships of trust and collaboration between MIW teams and service users. Investing in this grassroots engagement work ensured that MIW was able to reach disadvantaged lone parents who were not being assisted by other programmes, and helped to establish MIW's credibility and so gain the buy-in of participants.

Challenges and lessons for future employability services

Over the four year period of MIW, our evaluation research with lone parents and key stakeholders consistently pointed to the value of local flexibility. There is substantial evidence that employability services that are rooted in local networks have the potential to be more responsive to the needs of communities and individual service users. MIW successfully combined a cross-partnership focus on shared principles

and priorities (a five-area equivalent of 'national design') with substantial adaptability and flexibility in the delivery of services.

There were challenges associated with MIW's approach to supporting flexible local delivery. Local partnership-based governance and delivery by their nature provide for variation in both approach and outcomes. There are challenges in identifying 'what works' and which lessons are likely to be scalable and transferable.

There is a need to consistently reinforce and support the ethos of partnership and collaboration in at the local level. Some individual partner organisations in some partnership areas emphasised the need for regular, consistent communication and consultation between Lead Partner organisations and other delivery partners. While in most cases partnership-working was effective, there were some disconnects, and stakeholders pointed to the need to invest time and resources in making local partnerships work.

Nevertheless, there are important lessons that can be taken from MIW for Scotland's future employability services. An important element in the success of MIW was a commitment to working towards agreed national/programme-level principles (with strong leadership from the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland reinforcing the priorities for the programme and an ethos of partnership in governance and delivery), alongside local flexibility in delivery, realised in innovative approaches to building local partnerships, developing tailored content that complemented existing local services, and investing in community engagement.

Principle 2: Employability services should be designed and delivered in partnership

How MIW reflects this principle of the Scottish Approach

There is evidence to support the Scottish Government's prioritisation of a partnership-based approach to the design and delivery of employability services. While Local Employability Partnerships have sought to promote collaboration and co-production in Scotland's local employability landscape, funding models have sometimes incentivised counter-productive behaviour and 'silo' working. Scottish policymakers instead wish to support joined-up, collaborative approaches that maximise value for money, and the development of an employability agenda that connects with relevant expertise and resources in other areas such as health, learning and social care. Partnership-working in design and delivery was central to MIW. There are a number of useful insights for Scotland's employability services.

Programme design and action on the ground that prioritised collaboration

The Big Lottery Fund in Scotland's prioritisation of partnership-working incentivised local MIW partnerships to build inclusive collaborations, which helped to deliver more tailored, 'whole person' services. It is important to emphasise the role of the funder in setting the context for the emphasis on partnership that defined MIW on the ground. The Big Lottery Fund in Scotland ensured that partnership-working was a condition of successful finding bids and provided support and guidance during the partnership formation process. The result in all areas was a careful (if occasionally lengthy) process of relationship-building rooted in consensus and collaboration. There is evidence that this approach may have contributed to a better-informed and more inclusive approach to programme design and development.

There was extensive consultation on partnership formation, with the partnership gradually narrowing to those able to make a contribution to the design and delivery of MIW on the ground. The broad starting point for the partnership – which was very inclusive – lengthened the whole process, but was interesting in providing a space for discussion.

MIW Edinburgh Stakeholder, 2014

Stakeholders involved in delivering MIW pointed to the value of working with a funder that explicitly emphasised collaboration rather than unnecessary and counter-productive competition. This was particularly important in establishing a string co-leadership role for third sector organisations within MIW partnerships. Whereas contracted-out mainstream employability services have sometimes seen the third sector marginalised, the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland's insistence on evidence of genuine partnership-working encouraged a more collaborative approach to resource-sharing and decision-making. However, there was also an acknowledgement that MIW partners, and especially the Key Workers who were central to the programme,

had been proactive in building strong and extensive partnership relations in each of the local areas. Key Workers and MIW stakeholders described an extensive and ongoing process of engagement and relationship-building, targeting childcare providers, local employability services, Jobcentre Plus, healthcare services and other community organisations.

Key Workers went out of their way during the first two to three months of the project to establish relationships and they have built good contacts. We need to continue to build networks, especially on practice-sharing on the ground.
MIW South Lanarkshire Stakeholder, 2014

This is arguably a more inclusive form of relationship-building than would be found in many other parts of the current mainstream UK employability marketplace, where relational contracting is the norm, and specialist ‘partners’ are sometimes included in the provision of services, but also often frustrated in their efforts to add value to employability programmes. There are again lessons to be taken from the funding and governance model established by the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland, which supported collaboration and provided the time and resources at the outset of the programme to invest in partnership-building.

Partnership-working for joined-up, ‘whole person’ services

The opportunity provided by MIW to develop integrated, innovative ‘whole person’ services for lone parents was both an outcome of, and a catalyst for, a continued focus on partnership-working. The development of partnerships that harnessed the expertise of different agencies was particularly important. The provision of specialist expertise in personalised support, childcare and debt and money advice alongside employability support provided a ‘whole person’ service developed in collaboration with lone parents.

For example, the MIW Fife partnership was designed to encompass expertise in engagement, employability-focused adviser services, expert money and benefit advice, child minding training and support, and broader expertise on policy, legal and research agendas. Other MIW partnerships developed similarly broad-based collaborations in order to connect up the complementary services that were considered necessary to addressing lone parents’ needs. MIW partners worked hard to establish close, trust-based working relationships.

An important outcome of close partnership-working was the development of seamless handovers of MIW participants from one partner organisation to another. For example, the MIW Fife partnership particularly prioritised close collaborative working between Fife Gingerbread’s Support Workers (leading on early engagement and intensive support for lone parents) and Fife Council’s Client Action Team (providing practical, employability-focused support). MIW Fife stakeholders described a complementarity relationship between these two elements of MIW.

I would say progress has seen two teams become one seamless team – they always worked well together but are now a fully integrated team... from a client perspective we feel we have got a 'no wrong door' approach.

MIW Fife Stakeholder, 2015

There were similar examples of collaboration in MIW Glasgow, where a particular emphasis was placed on handovers between OPFS and Rosemount Learning (which played key roles in early engagement and support) and Jobs and Business Glasgow (working with MIW participants as they progressed towards work). A MIW participant witnessed, and benefited from, the growing partnership between OPFS and Jobs and Business Glasgow.

I think at the beginning it almost seemed like two separate people but now I think they're all working together and they all know one another so that really helps it. It makes it feel like you're not going to two different places, everything's just amalgamated and it's all very comfortable, it makes you feel better because you don't have to keep repeating yourself, telling people the same story over and over again, they all kind of know what's happening because they tell each other.

MIW Glasgow Participant, 2014

Lead partners were fundamental to building effective collaborations and played an important role in leading practical efforts to support partnership development. In MIW Glasgow, partnership away-days proved an important mechanism for developing understanding of the services offered by each partner organisation, and for helping partners to share expertise and experience. MIW Glasgow also ran half-day 'spotlight' sessions to build a deeper understanding between partners of each other's practice, and the value they brought to the MIW partnership. In all five MIW areas, Partnership Groups were established and met regularly to share lessons, update on progress and discuss next steps.

MIW partnerships also worked to establish a presence in wider partnership structures. For example, MIW Fife's involvement in the Fife Employability Forum provided important opportunities to liaise with frontline staff and to share practice and information. Finally, the flexibility to expand and/or recalibrate partnership networks was also important. MIW's governance and funding model allowed sufficient flexibility for partner organisation's roles to develop and change, and for additional partners to be recruited as new opportunities for engagement arose. For example, MIW South Lanarkshire particularly prioritised partnership-working with health and well-being providers, and the partnership was able to negotiate access to condition management and psychological therapies through the development of new partnership arrangements established as MIW progressed.

Consensus around values of co-production and empowerment

A final, but crucial, element that contributed to effective partnership-working was the establishment of a consensus around the aims and ethos of MIW. The Big Lottery Fund in Scotland played an important role in communicating to prospective bidders that funding would be allocated on the basis of evidence of partnership-working and a holistic approach to responding to the needs of lone parents. These ideas seem to have come together within MIW partnerships to produce activities informed by an ethos of partnership in design and delivery and co-production with lone parents – that is, empowering lone parents to make choices and shape their own services.

So MIW's emphasis on collaboration extended to partners' relationships with lone parents, who were seen as full partners in the co-production of services. Our research with MIW partners found consistent evidence of lone parents having a strong role in shaping and informing services and practice. Key Workers highlighted how lone parents' ideas and priorities had led to adjustments and enhancements to the services provided.

The clients have more of a voice than us, to be honest, because ultimately it's about the clients. And every client, at every initial appointment, I do say to the clients, "If there's anything that you feel that is missing or you identify anything that you want to be able to put into the project, please speak up about it, because if we don't know, you know, we can't run it for you".

MIW South Lanarkshire Stakeholder, 2015

We found a consistent ethos and way of working across all MIW partnerships – that MIW was about working with and drawing on the assets of lone parents, not about 'doing things to them' or imposing standardised provision upon them.

We never had a plan of how we were going to do things when we started. It has really evolved, and that is mainly because of the people that we're working with. Certainly, from my point of view, all the groupwork that I have done... has actually been as a result of people asking for particular things, and I've thought, 'Wow, I could do that. I could introduce them to this'...

MIW Fife Stakeholder, 2015

There were clear benefits associated with extending MIW's ethos of collaboration to establish relationships of co-production with MIW participants. Such an inclusive and collaborative approach helped to secure the buy-in and commitment of MIW participants (reflecting their sense of choice and involvement), who were excited by the idea that their views were being treated as valuable assets. As a result, MIW participants' insights, ideas and enthusiasm added value to the efforts of service delivery partners. MIW services were better targeted and more personalised due to the voice of participants in shaping their content, and the result was a range of innovative MIW activities informed by the needs and priorities of lone parents.

Challenges and lessons for future employability services

The Scottish Government has called for future employability services to be designed and delivered in partnership, and there is a broader shift towards collaborative approaches and co-production in Scottish public services. There are lessons that can be drawn from MIW on the critical success factors, and benefits, associated with effective partnership-working on employability.

The Big Lottery Fund in Scotland and MIW partnerships invested time and resources in a careful process of partnership formation that was inclusive, emphasised resource sharing and sought to engage the right mix of partners to respond to lone parents' needs in the relevant local communities. The flexibility advocated and supported by the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland meant that partnerships (and their membership and the roles of different members) could adapt and develop in response to MIW participants' priorities or emerging local needs.

Practical activities within MIW areas ensured that there was information-sharing at a strategic/governance level between partners, while considerable effort was put into establishing services on the ground that tapped the complementary expertise of different MIW partners but offered a seamless, joined-up approach for lone parents.

Actions on the ground also ensured that MIW participants had a strong role and voice in shaping services. This exercise in co-production produced services that were better tailored to lone parents' needs and which benefited from MIW participants' insights.

There were challenges associated with MIW's approach to supporting partnership in design and delivery. Further support and guidance on partnership formation might be of value under future funding programmes. While delivery partners valued the 'bottom-up' approach to building inclusive partnerships, there was concern in some areas that progress could have been quicker towards the formalisation of partnerships and delivery of services on the ground.

Nevertheless, there are important lessons that can be identified for Scotland's future employability services. The planning of most mainstream employability provision in the UK continues to be informed by a market logic, whereby funders seek efficiencies through tendering and potential providers are encouraged to compete against each other for business. A key lesson from MIW is that it is possible to commission effective local employability services that are based on flexible, collaborative partnership agreements and informed by an ethos of co-production.

Principle 3: Employability services should offer a flexible, tailored, ‘whole person’ approach

How MIW reflects this principle of the Scottish Approach

The Scottish Government and its partners wish to see devolved employability services defined by a flexible, tailored, ‘whole person’ approach. Specifically, there is a consensus that the Scottish Approach to Employability should be built around personalised support, particularly for those facing additional barriers in the labour market. This will require effective action planning with service users, the development of co-produced, person-centred services that respond to individual needs, and programmes that offer a range of flexible interventions to support people’s employability journeys and progression in the workplace. Our research with MIW participants found consistent evidence of a flexible and ‘whole person’ approach to supporting lone parents. There are therefore a number of useful insights for Scotland’s employability services.

Flexible, tailored services that respond to the needs of individuals and families

The Big Lottery Fund in Scotland strongly emphasised that MIW should be designed and delivered in partnership, with the aim of tapping the complementary expertise of different partners to produce flexible and tailored (and in the terminology of the Scottish Government, ‘whole person’) services. There is clear evidence that MIW partnerships responded to the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland’s leadership on this issue. Inclusive partnership agreements shared resources among – and brought in the expertise of – a range of public and third sector organisations.

MIW was largely successful in developing flexible, tailored services across all five partnership areas. The flexible and tailored approach delivered by MIW was reflected in the broad range of employability interventions taken up by participants, including: intensive Key Worker support; confidence-building activities; CV building and interview skills development; vocational training; business start-up advice and support accessing business development services; and volunteering to gain workplace experience. Our survey research capturing the experiences of MIW participants confirmed that a substantial proportion of lone parents had taken up more than one of these support services. The same survey data demonstrates that many lone parents had ‘high needs’ and faced multiple barriers to work – a ‘whole person’ approach is likely to be essential when engaging vulnerable groups, including lone parents.

There is also evidence of MIW effectively responding to individual needs through the delivery of, or signposting to, other support services, including: money and debt management services; advice on claiming benefits and dealing with housing problems; wellbeing interventions delivered directly by MIW partners or by signposting users to NHS services; and (importantly) transitional support to fund childcare and assistance in sourcing childcare as users prepared to return to work.

Such holistic, but essential, support was not available from mainstream employability services. The distinctive, 'whole person' approach offered by MIW was acknowledged by organisations involved in delivery and lone parents using services.

*It could be jobs, it could be health, it could be childcare, it could be finance.
And I then realised that it's a sort of all-round service, all round help,
everyday things that happens in people's lives.
MIW North Lanarkshire Participant, 2014*

*I think it's probably the flexibility and the time to focus on people, and to
focus on their needs and be adaptable to do it at their pace, and respond to
the things that need dealing with at the time... I can see the impact of it. It
pulls together so many different things... it's been amazing to see that these
things do actually work, and that they help people.
MIW Edinburgh Stakeholder, 2016*

*I think the Making it Work project, what they did was they just took this
completely holistic approach to it where they covered every single avenue. I
didn't feel pushed with my time, you know it was, "We will get you to where
you want to be. We just need to work through all these things." It was just
constant encouragement rather than pushing. It was gentle encouragement
to do the things that you needed to be doing.
MIW Fife Participant, 2017*

This commitment to a 'whole person' approach informed innovative programme content. For example, group-based confidence and employability-building programmes were a prominent feature in most areas, and had a positive impact in building self-efficacy and (crucially) combating social isolation and supporting social networks.

There were excellent examples of flexible groupwork activities designed in collaboration with lone parents in Glasgow, Fife and South Lanarkshire. In MIW Edinburgh, groups of 10-15 lone parents were brought together to work through a flexible suite of activities, which might include vocational training, life skills and wellbeing-focused activities, or less formal craft-based work designed to build relationships. As noted above, a key outcome of such work was the strengthening of peer support networks, combating social isolation. In this case, groupwork activities led to a group of MIW participants building services in their own community. MIW supported these participants to develop their own 'parent and toddler' group in Muirhouse, a community in Edinburgh with few services for lone parents. It is an example of how MIW was able to strengthen social capital in communities where there are few support services for vulnerable groups. MIW partners and participants

in other partnership areas were able to point to similar legacies in informal peer support networks that have outlived lone parents' participation in the formal elements of the MIW programme.

Other distinctive 'whole person' features of MIW included a strong focus in all areas on supporting lone parents to cope with debt and money issues. A particularly effective example was developed within the MIW Fife programme, which drew heavily on expert money advice services delivered by Citizens Advice & Rights Fife. There was consensus among MIW stakeholders that these services were of crucial importance given the poverty experienced by many MIW participants, and the gaps in financial management skills reported by some.

Finally, a distinctive feature of MIW's 'whole person' approach focused on ensuring that family and caring responsibilities were addressed alongside action to improve participants' employability. Action plans that participants established with their MIW Key Workers emphasised progressing towards only those work or learning options that would allow parents to manage family life. MIW venues and services were child-friendly, where necessary providing crèche facilities while parents participating in programme activities. Across all the MIW partnerships, the provision of flexible childcare support was an important aspect of a 'whole person' approach, driven in part by assumptions at the outset of the programme that the availability of affordable and accessible childcare would be a significant barrier for lone parents. Discretionary funding was important in assisting lone parents to manage transitions to work and/or training, and empowering lone parents to make their own childcare choices. For example, in all areas, MIW deployed discretionary childcare budgets to help participants to manage immediately after finding work. In MIW North Lanarkshire, discretionary funding was used to provide childcare while lone parents attended addiction services. The integration of discussions on returning to work with a commitment to finding childcare solutions was acknowledged by participating lone parents.

*They don't see you as a number, they see you as a human being. They will mention family and...they don't see it as work.
MIW North Lanarkshire Participant, 2014*

Across partnership areas, MIW funded crèche facilities alongside employability-focused activities to ensure that family responsibilities were not a barrier to participation and to encourage lone parents' confidence in childcare. Some participants also talked about benefits for their children attending crèche services.

*They had a nursery and it was just through the wall, my wee girl was in there all the time and she loved it, just being out the house, and it was a massive change. She used to be clinging to me when we were walking to her gran's and it brought her out of her shell.
MIW Glasgow Participant, 2016*

More broadly, MIW's 'whole person' approach helped participants to make the connection between progression towards employment and benefits in terms of family life. MIW participants spoke of more stable and improved family relationships, and the benefits of a sense of pride in providing for their families.

Me and [my son] are a lot happier than we were before. He's getting his interaction with other kids and we're able to go and do more stuff, like soft play. Aye, he's a lot happier... I think he sees the difference in me. Just the routine is changing, but for the better. He sees me a lot happier, because I feel a wee bit safer being able to try new things because I know Laura [MIW Development Worker] is right there.

MIW Edinburgh Participant, 2015

It's having a great effect on me. They [children] respect me now. They look at me different now. They all actually say, "Mum's going to work"...

MIW Fife Participant, 2016

Co-production as a route to 'whole person' services

The development of integrated, innovative 'whole person' services for lone parents under MIW was facilitated by a shared ethos around the value of co-production – empowering lone parents to make choices and shape their own services.

This distinctive, co-produced approach led to tailored services that responded effectively to lone parents' needs, achieved high levels of buy-in from MIW participants, and contributed to the emergence of strong peer support networks that have the potential to impact positively on people's lives beyond the lifetime of MIW. This ethos of co-production was made real in the practice of MIW Key Workers and partners, and in personalised services that were co-designed with lone parents. In contrast with some employability services that have a merely rhetorical engagement with the idea of 'personalisation', in this case the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland and partners demonstrated a genuine commitment to co-production with lone parents. These are important lessons for future employability services in Scotland.

This emphasis on co-production, choice and empowerment was reiterated in MIW Key Workers' characterisation of their own practice.

The service is one-to-one support based around them. The whole conversation is based around, "This is your journey, what do you want to do?" We don't have maps and plans of: "This is what's going to happen to you".

MIW South Lanarkshire Stakeholder, 2014

It is really client led. From day one when we are getting to know someone and understand, "What is it you would really like help with?"... We don't have a designated programme of "day one you do this, day two you do this".

MIW Edinburgh Stakeholder, 2014

I basically just explain, "This is a completely voluntary programme. What are your expectations? What do you want from it?"

MIW South Lanarkshire Stakeholder, 2015

MIW participants consistently echoed these views. Participants underlined their sense of control over their MIW journey, something they had not experienced before when engaging with mainstream employability services. Participants reported having control over aspects such as the pace of work and the flexibility to engage in a range of activities, the frequency of contact with Key Workers, and the target for their progression towards work or training. For example, one MIW participant (reflecting views expressed by many others) could think of few other spaces where they had been asked to make choices and take control.

He [Key Worker] brought me in and he told me all about it properly and asked me what I wanted. I thought, "Hang on a minute. I've actually never been asked what I want". I think that really helps because then it's rather than going, "You do this, this and this". He was like, "What do you think would make you feel better?" I went, "I don't know. I've never really been asked that before. It's always been said, you either do this or you lose your money". He was like, "No, this is completely different".

MIW South Lanarkshire Participant, 2016

Other MIW participants told similar stories of the sense of empowerment that came from being asked to share their preferences and ideas, make choices and take control.

She [MIW Development Worker] made me feel really valued... she was willing to help. From the beginning she was basically about, "What do you want to do?"... she didn't say, "I think you should do this". It was me saying, "I want to do this", and she was like, "Right, let's get started".

MIW Edinburgh Participant, 2015

It's not someone saying, "You have to do this." It's like, "Do you want to do this? Is this what you want? Do you feel happy about doing this?" They would always bring it back to you... As soon as you tell someone, "You have to," they're going to be like, "No." Changing it to a more positive place and, "Do you want to?" It's changing words and speaking to people a wee bit

*differently and just making someone feel, “Wow, I actually do have a choice here.” It’s all about choices and wanting to do stuff, if that makes any sense?
MIW South Lanarkshire Participant, 2017*

There were clear benefits associated with the distinctive ethos of empowerment and co-production that defined MIW across all five areas. An emphasis on co-production, as part of a ‘whole person’ approach, helped to secure the buy-in and tapped the assets and energies of MIW participants. MIW participants’ insights helped to inform the content and delivery of services, ensuring that the programme was more responsive to individuals’ needs.

Challenges and lessons for future employability services

The Scottish Government has called for future employability services to deliver a ‘whole person’ approach. There are lessons that can be drawn from MIW on the critical success factors that co-produced effective services for participating lone parents.

The establishment of inclusive partnerships was important to the delivery of a ‘whole person’ approach. The presence within partnerships of stakeholders with specific expertise in delivering a broad range of services meant that MIW could offer a service tailored to individual needs.

An ethos of co-production was a unique and defining feature of MIW in all five partnership areas. MIW participants consistently reported that MIW Key Workers and partners emphasised that they were in control of their own employability journeys. MIW partners were able to offer numerous examples of responding to individuals’ aspirations and needs and/or of making changes to programme content based on user voice. Co-production is hugely valuable in ensuring that services are informed by users, creating a sense of empowerment among users and tapping the assets, resources and energies of those engaging with services.

There remained substantial challenges experienced by MIW partnerships seeking to deliver a ‘whole person’ service. For example, all the MIW partnerships acknowledged ongoing problems in relation to identifying affordable, flexible and accessible childcare provision once lone parents have made the transition into work, particularly given the often short timeframe available after a job offer was made. Across areas, MIW participants reported continuing challenges around identifying childcare provision that was local and flexible enough to fit with shifts in sectors such as retail and care (the type of sectors often targeted by lone parents).

There were also limits to return-to-work ‘choices’ available depending on local labour market circumstances. Many MIW participants entered work of their choice, but that was relatively low-paid and with limited opportunity for progression.

Nevertheless, important lessons can be identified for Scotland’s future employability services. The Big Lottery Fund in Scotland supported the development of a

programme that sought to address the range of barriers faced by lone parents and stipulated that partnership-working was essential to the development of 'whole person' services. The result was a programme of flexible provision that could be tailored to individual needs. Even more importantly, the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland's emphasis on collaboration informed an ethos of co-production in how MIW partners engaged with lone parents, with benefits for the programme and its participants.

Principle 4: Employability services should be responsive to those with high needs

How MIW reflects this principle of the Scottish Approach

The Scottish Government and its partners wish to see devolved employability services that engage with, and offer a tailored and personalised service for those for whom work is a reasonable objective, but report substantial barriers (those with 'high needs'). The Scottish Government has highlighted (among other features) the need for time and resources to be committed to the effective identification and engagement of people facing substantial barriers, and investment in intensive support for those some distance from the labour market. Our research with MIW participants and stakeholders identified important lessons in relation to building a consensus around a core aim of targeting those further from the labour market, and supporting a 'Key Worker' approach that is likely to be crucial if future services are to deliver the intensive support required by vulnerable groups (including lone parents).

Building consensus around the aim of targeting those further from the labour market

MIW was successful in targeting people facing substantial barriers to employability in all five partnership areas. The Big Lottery Fund in Scotland's identification of lone parents as MIW's key target group ensured that resources were effectively targeted at a particularly vulnerable population. Lone parents are significantly more likely to be at risk of poverty. They are also subject to increasing welfare conditionality that requires them to seek work, but are not a priority group for mainstream UK Government employability services.

MIW partnerships were asked specifically to target lone parents facing substantial barriers to employability. Baseline survey data gathered as part of the evaluation demonstrates that MIW reached lone parents facing multiple barriers. The majority reported negative views about their self-confidence and ability to succeed in a job interview. More than two-fifths held negative views of their skills and ability to find a job that would allow them to manage childcare responsibilities. Almost two-fifths of MIW users cited 'not having friends or family to help out' as a barrier to employability, and social isolation was a recurring theme of our qualitative research with participants. More than one-quarter reported health or disability-related barriers. And our qualitative research with MIW participants identified important additional barriers associated with coping on a low income.

The Big Lottery Fund in Scotland's leadership appears to have helped partnerships to achieve a consensus around the importance of targeting resources on individuals and communities facing greater disadvantage. During the initial stages of MIW (and of our evaluation) there was consistent mention of the Scottish Government's Employability Framework or Strategic Skills Pipeline (which visualises the employability journey as a five stage process, beginning with the engagement of those some distance from the labour market and the identification of barriers, and

culminating in the provision of in-work support for those making successful transitions). Such frameworks were intended to help stakeholders to visualise and plan their contribution to service users' employability journeys.

All MIW partnerships gave a clear account of their priority as being the engagement of lone parents facing substantial barriers (often described as being at 'Stages 1 or 2' of the employability journey). There was consensus that MIW added value by targeting people who were not a priority for mainstream employability services and who were less likely to engage with local employability and learning hubs. A lesson would appear to be that there is value in clearly communicating to all relevant partners that engaging those some distance from the labour market – rather than achieving 'quick wins' by targeting the more job-ready – should be a key priority for employability programmes.

We are still targeting people at stage one and two... We have got a lot of really difficult situations just now... We are trying to attract people who are vulnerable, need support and who don't have anyone else.

MIW Edinburgh Stakeholder, 2015

I think there is complementarity. We have a very clear five stage employability pipeline. Our four community employability hubs have a very clear offer. The offer from MIW connects with childcare and has a family-focused approach that doesn't exist within the other services... This is not about somebody who's job ready. This is for someone who has a journey...

MIW Edinburgh Stakeholder, 2015

The collaborative, 'whole person' services delivered by MIW partnerships were designed to ensure that participants could be assisted by appropriate providers at all stages of the journey back to work, from early engagement activities that combated social isolation to 'harder-edged' employability-building support, and then towards and into employment. For example, MIW Fife prioritised effective handovers between Fife Gingerbread Support Workers who focused on early engagement and confidence-building, and Fife Council Client Action Team (CAT) Workers who delivered vocational and job matching support (often characterised as 'Stages 3 and 4' in participants' employability journeys).

We feel that we have made progress in streamlining the journey from working with Gingerbread workers for clients at Stages 1 and 2 to working with CAT and Citizens Advice & Rights Fife teams at Stages 3 and 4. We have improved progression and the dovetailing of services. The partnership is a good fit – Gingerbread workers don't do 'hard' employability; whereas as CAT provide employability support... We triage.

MIW Fife Stakeholder, 2015

A further important lesson from MIW relates to the importance of investing heavily in engagement activities in order to reach out to, and gain the confidence of, potential participants who are some distance from the labour market. MIW partnerships invested in a range of user engagement activities to extend the reach of their offer. These included engaging with community-based wellbeing and/or childcare services (South Lanarkshire; Edinburgh) and targeting successive disadvantaged communities in a rolling programme of engagement and awareness-raising activities (North Lanarkshire). MIW Glasgow worked through engagement Hubs (supported by OPFS) and a range of other local service locations to recruit participants and provide early engagement support. In all five areas, Key Workers described an extensive and ongoing process of engagement and relationship-building, targeting childcare providers, local employability services, Jobcentre Plus, healthcare services and other community organisations. Key Workers even directly leafleted and/or 'door-knocked' homes in target neighbourhoods.

Finally, as we have acknowledged elsewhere, attempts to engage those some distance from the labour market are unlikely to succeed if employability providers are then unable to offer joined-up, 'whole person' support that has the potential to address a range of barriers. MIW was largely successful in building effective partnerships tapping the complementary expertise and resources of different public and third sector stakeholders. As a result, MIW participants had access to a range of services, including: intensive support to build confidence and self-efficacy; signposting to health and wellbeing services; employability skills development; vocational training; business start-up support; and (crucially) advice and resources to cope with transitional childcare needs.

Key Worker services as a route to engaging and supporting people with high needs

Key Worker roles were established in all five partnership areas. Key Workers were essential to engaging and providing intensive support for MIW users. They played a crucial role in empowering lone parents to co-produce under MIW. The value of the Key Worker role – and the need to support and invest in people undertaking this role – is an important lesson from MIW. First, MIW stakeholders and participants saw Key Workers as important in providing a sense of continuity and personalised support.

MIW is very different because they've got the continuity through their Key Worker. Although their Key Worker is not an expert in every single matter and every subject, they know someone who is so they're that cog in the middle that helps that wheel go round. They'll be that person that the client will always come back to so they might get referred out to another service for health and wellbeing, confidence-building, whatever. That key worker will be in touch with them every stage of the journey...

MIW Glasgow Stakeholder, 2014

Stakeholders across all five partnerships argued that there was a solid evidence base that informed a consensus that a Key Worker model was the best way to engage and support vulnerable lone parents.

The Key Workers are crucial to this, and the evidence base for that came from a range of people round the table saying “that’s the model we use”.

MIW Edinburgh Stakeholder, 2014

MIW participants consistently highlighted the importance of the intensive support provided by Key Workers in encouraging gradual progress and further engagement with employability-focused activities.

I had quite a lot going on and then I spoke to Angela [MIW Support Worker] and Angela helped me out a lot. To start with our meetings were just, she would talk to me and stuff, I had a lot going on... I was dealing with domestic abuse and that kinda stuff and that’s when I started coming to the group...

MIW Fife Participant, 2014

The biggest thing was the support and knowing I had somebody to turn to, for anything, because it is a daunting thing to start out on your own. It's keeping the positive in people’s lives, because it's not nice not having a job... Eric [MIW Key Worker] never pushed me. He just encouraged me. He supported me... I’m actually quite proud of myself. I’m running my own business now. It’s mine. Yes I’ve got two kids and a house and my business. That’s all me.

MIW South Lanarkshire Participant, 2014

The continuity of support provided by Key Workers was not simply a matter of ‘being there’ – it required proactive practice and commitment on the part of Key Workers, and depended upon their ability to build relationships of trust with MIW participants. MIW participants spoke consistently of the value of being able to build relationships of trust with Key Workers.

You get to build a relationship with that one person instead of it being with all different people going through your paperwork.... it definitely helped having just one person... and obviously the more and more you go and see them...

having the same one really does benefit you.

MIW Glasgow Participant, 2015

Key Workers established creative and flexible ways of engaging with clients, ranging from home visits, regular (or, if more appropriate, occasional) face-to-face support, and the use of text, phone and social media to offer support.

Building an effective Key Worker offer required substantial investment and commitment on the part of MIW teams. Key Workers were carefully recruited to bring a range of expertise and experience to the delivery of MIW. Relatively few Key

Workers were recruited from mainstream employability services, instead reporting backgrounds in childcare and personal development services for young lone parents, volunteering support, and educational welfare services. MIW partnerships sometimes struggled to keep Key Worker-participant ratios at a reasonable level, but in most partnerships for most of the time there was a commitment that Key Workers should have caseloads of fifty or less, to allow them to maintain relationships with individual service users.

Crucially, Key Workers across all MIW areas demonstrated practice rooted in an ethos of co-production, choice and empowerment for lone parents. The sense that Key Workers were there to support, encourage and empower people to make choices was a consistent theme in our discussions with MIW participants.

She [Key Worker] never made me do anything that I didn't want to do. It's like she'll talk me through things... but if there is a goal that I want to set it has to come from me... She's more there to support us to feel supported, she doesn't tell us to do something. It's like we're making the decisions and the changes and she's just sort of being that person to lean on.

MIW Edinburgh Participant, 2017

If future Scottish employability services are to be voluntary and based on principles of respect and empowerment, then Key Worker services are likely to be important. Highly skilled, well-resourced Key Workers can be crucial in engaging people further from the labour market and securing their voluntary participation as co-producers of employability.

Challenges and lessons for future employability services

The Scottish Government has called for future employability services to engage and respond to people with 'high needs' and substantial barriers to employability. There are lessons that can be drawn from MIW on the critical success factors that co-produced effective services for vulnerable lone parents.

MIW partnerships were supported by the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland to build a consensus around the need to focus engagement activities on lone parents experiencing substantial barriers and who were less likely to engage with mainstream employability provision. A funding model that incentivised engagement with people further from the labour market – rather than rewarding 'quick wins' – was important to building this consensus.

While there was considerable local flexibility in the design and shape of services, a partnership-based approach ensured that MIW participants reporting multiple barriers were able to access a range of different services. Crucially, there was also consensus around the need for intensive Key Worker support, which proved to be crucial to the success of the programme.

There were challenges associated with MIW's approach to responding to lone parents with substantial barriers, and some limits to the partnerships' success. A quantitative analysis of MIW participant journeys suggests that some of the most disadvantaged lone parents engaged by MIW were also least likely to progress into work (although many of these participants made substantial progress in terms of 'distance travelled' towards employability). While there is no evidence of deliberate 'creaming and parking', further research is required into the package of services that is most likely to assist the most disadvantaged to progress under future employability services. The MIW approach also requires resources. MIW partnerships were required to invest heavily in Key Worker-participant engagement activities at the 'front end' – an essential step if employability services are to engage and gain the voluntary participation of vulnerable groups. It is unclear as to whether future funding models will facilitate substantial investment in engaging people further from the labour market. Nevertheless, a key lesson from MIW would appear to be that governance and funding models that support partnership-working and tailored, 'whole person' approaches can provide that context for employability services that engage effectively with people facing substantial barriers to work.

Principle 5: Employability services should involve a drive towards real jobs

How MIW reflects this principle of the Scottish Approach

The Scottish Government has prioritised supporting employability services that deliver real jobs and ‘prosperous careers’, an acknowledgement that some mainstream employability provision has failed to deliver sustainable employment outcomes. Employer engagement and in-work support for progression are therefore seen as essential. MIW performed well in achieving job outcomes for users (although there was significant variation across partnership areas). The vast majority of those entering jobs were somewhat or entirely satisfied with their work. Our research with MIW participants and stakeholders identified important lessons in terms of employer engagement, the need to work with participants to think about what appropriate and fair work means, and the value of investing in in-work support.

Investing in employer engagement

MIW partnerships adopted a range of strategies to engage with employers. These included partnership-working with mainstream employability providers’ employer-facing services, establishing specific MIW job broker roles, working with employers to provide work experience placements, and supporting Key Workers to engage directly with large employers in key target sectors.

For example, the MIW Glasgow partnership developed a specific MIW job broker role, with a dual focus of engaging employers and advising MIW participants. Vetting and mock interviews were provided as part of the MIW offer to employers. MIW Fife brokered six to eight weeks workplace experience placements for MIW participants with local employers. The aim was to assist participants to gain practical ‘real workplace’ experience while strengthening their CVs and (in some cases) leading to an offer of employment from the host organisation.

In other MIW areas, employer engagement activities were delivered through existing partnerships with mainstream employability services. MIW Edinburgh Development Workers built their own employer networks, but also sometimes signposted participants to local employability hubs for additional job matching support. The MIW South Lanarkshire team worked closely with employer-facing job-matching services delivered by colleagues at Routes To Work, while South Lanarkshire Council’s ‘Connect 2’ offer and a range of ‘academies’ vocational provision provided sector-specific training. MIW North Lanarkshire adopted a broadly similar approach, accessing existing employer engagement resources through Routes To Work consultants. MIW North Lanarkshire also worked closely with local NHS employers to support a number of participants to take up Clinical Support Worker roles and with Community Jobs Scotland, which provided job opportunities of six months to one year in the third sector.

Some MIW partnerships developed programme content to help lone parents to gain vocational skills and experience valued by employers. For example, MIW Glasgow facilitated an employer presence during sector-specific training sessions. Finally, some MIW partnerships engaged directly with recruiting employers, offering advice on how best to support lone parents' returns to work.

We've supported a few employers who've come to us with specific needs of what they were looking for, and we've spoken to them about specific needs of the lone parents that we've got. We've gone out because the lone parents are keen...

MIW South Lanarkshire Stakeholder, 2015

However, there was also recognition of the need to continue to challenge both negative attitudes among employers and unhelpful contractual models (that often denied lone parents the sixteen hours of work required to access tax credits).

A lot of the employer engagement has been in terms of educating them... But we're struggling with the 16-hour jobs. We do struggle with them quite a lot. We've sometimes had to look at "Are there two eight-hour shifts, or would you be able to do 20 hours instead?" So I think there needs to be more of a kind of... education policy that says to employers, "Do you know, if you tapped into this resource...?" And also, to dispel the myths about lone parents being unreliable and not turning up, and taking time off because their children are out of school. Because we've got some really good case studies now that would help to back that up.

MIW Edinburgh Stakeholder, 2016

Supporting participants' choices around 'fair work'

An ethos of co-production and empowerment was distinctive to MIW, and these values were important in shaping MIW partnerships' approaches to delivering 'real jobs'. MIW participants consistently reported that a unique feature of the programme was that they did not feel pressured to apply for any and all jobs. Lone parents consistently referred to how they had been encouraged to make choices, 'take control' and consider a broader range of career and learning options. For example, one MIW participant spoke of the encouragement she had received to pursue training through Edinburgh's childcare academy, rather than returning to entry-level employment in the service sector.

I already knew I wanted to work in a nursery but I just never got round to it. We talked through lots of different things then we made an appointment at the academy, and I went to their info day. My Development Worker helped me with the application... otherwise I would have had to go and do it on my own which to be honest I probably wouldn't have done, I would've probably just got any job, but because I spoke to her and she said "you can do whatever you want to do"...

MIW Edinburgh Participant, 2014

MIW Key Workers and partners emphasised choice and encouraged participants to pursue opportunities when ready and if work was decent, sustainable and could be balanced with caring roles. These priorities were communicated clearly to MIW participants.

Making it Work, they're dedicated to finding you something that's suitable for you. So it's the longevity in the job... If you're happy in a job and you enjoy your job, and you're making decent money you're not going to go anywhere...

MIW Fife Participant, 2015

She [MIW Development Worker] always says, "Look for a job that best suits you. Don't do it for anybody else. Do it for yourself".

MIW Edinburgh Participant, 2015

MIW Key Workers similarly argued for an emphasis on achieving appropriate job matches that would leave parents better off, offer opportunities for development and achieve a balance between work and childcare responsibilities. In contrast to some compulsory employability programmes that seek to pressure participants to take any job regardless of its appropriateness, MIW focused on targeting the right job for participants.

We could probably put ten of them in a cleaning job tomorrow... we could do that but... I don't want a reputation of putting people into work and it failing, we want a reputation of putting them into work when they're prepared and ready to go. They're skilled and they know what they're doing and their home is prepared.

MIW Edinburgh Stakeholder, 2015

We get a number of approaches from employers. There's a local chicken factory, and places like that. Turnover's high. We tend to avoid those. Recruitment agencies are better suited for dealing with that kind of thing. We're about sustainability, because you're not going to change someone's life just by increasing their churn.

MIW South Lanarkshire Stakeholder, 2016

MIW's focus on supporting lone parents' choices arguably contributed to high levels of job satisfaction (and in many cases sustainable job outcomes) for those entering work. There is a need for realism about the transitions to work achieved by MIW participants – many entered relatively low-paid work in retail, care or other service sectors. However, for many these opportunities represented a chance to get back

onto the jobs ladder after a substantial period out of work, and allowed for work and family responsibilities to be balanced.

In-work support

The in-work support offered by MIW to a minority of users was important in helping these lone parents to sustain transitions to employment. Partnerships were aware that, for some vulnerable MIW participants, there was likely to be a high-risk period immediately following job entry, during which time parents might struggle to sustain transitions given the loss of benefits and the additional demands of managing work and family life. In-work support took a range of forms, from advice on benefits and tax credits, and discretionary funding for transitional transport and housing costs, to encouraging and supporting people to pursue in-work training and progression opportunities.

In most MIW partnerships, in-work support was made available mainly through continued engagement with Key Workers. For example, MIW Edinburgh Development Workers maintained contact with participants who required additional support, often providing advice on managing work and childcare or making the transition from benefits to paid work. We spoke to a number of participants who valued the practical and moral support offered by Development Workers.

I'm still in a lot of contact with her [MIW Development Worker]. I still text her; she still texts me and things... she's really good at helping me because when you start back to work it doesn't get explained to you how scary it is and how the money situation's going to work out... But even now she's still here to give me a hand... or, if you just need to talk, you just give her a phone and she is there for you. The first month of me working was the hardest month of my life. It really was and she was always there...

MIW Edinburgh Participant, 2015

Similarly, Key Workers in the Fife, North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire MIW programmes provided continuing in-work advice for participants who had moved into employment. This support again tended to focus on the financial challenges of moving off benefits, but sometimes also included help to identify learning and progression opportunities in the workplace (including practical support to access funding for work-based learning). MIW Glasgow's job broker role ensured that MIW had open lines of communication to both employers and participants – the Glasgow team pointed to a number of examples where this role have proved important in managing early challenges encountered by lone parents returning to work.

Finally, our research with MIW stakeholders and participants highlighted the importance of transitional support with the cost of childcare for some lone parents. All MIW partnerships had access to discretionary budgets to assist with childcare costs. Many MIW participants, anticipating the need to make their own arrangements for childcare in the long-term, did not take up the offer of transitional support.

However, more than 30 per cent were assisted with childcare costs, including some of those managing transitions to work.

Challenges and lessons for future employability services

The fair work agenda is a central element of Scottish policy makers' strategies to promote inclusive growth. It is therefore understandable that the Scottish Government has called for future employability services that deliver real jobs and the prospect of fair work and 'prosperous careers'.

MIW partnerships were supported by the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland to build a programme of activities that emphasised choice for lone parents as they considered a return to work. Effective practical support was provided in the form of Key Worker services that helped participants to consider what sort of opportunities would be worthwhile and enable them to balance work and family commitments. A key lesson from MIW would appear to be that employability services will deliver better quality transitions to work if they empower participants to make informed choices, rather than pressuring people to accept any job available.

There were other important good practice lessons associated with the need to invest in employer engagement and the importance of in-work support and advice for some of those making the transition to work.

There is a need for realism regarding the quality of jobs available to some MIW participants. MIW partnerships faced the context of local labour markets where the jobs open to many lone parents were relatively low-paid and sometimes with few opportunities for progression. MIW stakeholders acknowledged the need to challenge employers on pay, shifts and hours of work that sometimes exclude lone parents. We should also reiterate that there was significant variation in the proportion of users achieving job outcomes across partnership areas. Further research is required to explore the combination of individual, family, workplace and labour market factors that are likely to particularly disadvantage some lone parents. Workplace and labour market factors are likely to be crucial in shaping lone parents' (and other disadvantaged groups') chances of transitioning to work, and this needs to be reflected in the planning of future employability services.

Principle 6: Employability services should be funded to support job outcomes and progression towards work

How MIW reflects this principle of the Scottish Approach

The Scottish Government has committed to supporting employability services that are funded to deliver both job outcomes and progression towards work. The Scottish Government has prioritised avoiding the problems of ‘creaming and parking’ that affect many employability programmes (whereby funding linked to achieving job outcomes incentivises providers to support those closer to the labour market, rather than those most in need), and has acknowledged that attaching resources to users’ progression across their whole employability journey is likely to be valuable here. There are important lessons to draw from MIW, given the programme’s success in achieving targets on job outcomes, but also in delivering a number of other progression outcomes for participants (see our End of Programme Impact Report).

Flexible funding that encourages partnership-working and a ‘whole person’ approach

MIW partnerships performed effectively in achieving the job outcomes targets set by the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland, but there was also evidence of progression among participants. Our survey evidence sometimes picked up relatively modest shifts in employability indicators among those still registered with MIW after six months (perhaps reflecting the often complex range of barriers faced by many lone parents, which might take some time and a range of interventions to address). Nevertheless, there were significant positive outcomes in terms of: improved confidence and self-efficacy; the development of employability and vocational skills; and reduced social isolation (see below).

It is again important to highlight the benefits delivered by MIW in terms of creating a sense of empowerment and control among service users. An ethos of co-production – where service users were challenged to make choices and take control of their own employability journeys – contributed to improved self-confidence and self-efficacy among those participating in our research. There are fundamental lessons for how service users should be engaged by future employability services in Scotland.

The Big Lottery Fund in Scotland’s prioritisation of partnership-working and grant-based funding helped to minimise problems of creaming and parking. Instead, partners were encouraged to work collaboratively to achieve targets on engagement and job entries, but also to support progression towards employability. There is evidence that these funding and governance principles may be effective in supporting the development of services that prioritise both progression and job outcomes. Our research with MIW stakeholders and participants suggested that the absence of pressure to compete for job entry targets resulted in an environment where lone parents were encouraged to make progress at their own pace and where a range of personal outcomes were valued and supported.

Valuing job outcomes but also progression

The funding and governance model put in place by the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland produced partnership-based services that were able to support a range of progression outcomes. For example, our research with MIW participants consistently highlighted benefits in confidence and social engagement for vulnerable lone parents as a result of the one-to-one, intensive support provided by Key Workers.

A few months ago I felt lost. Pauline [MIW Development Worker] has helped me in the right direction. She is helping me with all these personal issues.

She has been like my rock. She has given me the kick up the backside I needed to get me where I am now.

MIW Edinburgh Participant, 2014

Elsewhere, MIW participants reported benefits that can be seen as reflecting gains in self-efficacy (the belief that one can find work and that there are opportunities to work).

I think they [MIW team] make you feel secure and that you have a support there. Because it has made me feel more confident, definitely, that there is a job out there waiting for me... It put my mind at ease to have that support.

And I know that things are getting done for me to move on. And I can see it's coming.

MIW South Lanarkshire Participant, 2015

It is important to note that these gains in confidence and self-efficacy were not produced simply by providing moral support and opportunities to engage with other lone parents. At the same time, Key Workers and other members of MIW teams were working with participants on the practical barriers that they faced, in terms of gaps in skills and employability, but also problems around debt, benefits, housing and other issues. It was the resourcing of this 'whole person' approach (rather than incentivising partners to move people into work as quickly as possible) that helped to empower participants to address the range of barriers that they faced.

At first I wasn't 100% optimistic. But the minute I started meeting Denise [MIW Development Worker] regularly and we started doing more work, she done a lot of stuff that really cleared a lot barriers so quickly, so I feel I have progressed so quickly. In a couple months I was in a much better place and just much more stress-free.

MIW Edinburgh Participant, 2015

Social isolation was a problem identified by many MIW participants who spoke to us. There was evidence that MIW made a substantial difference to some participants who were isolated and had little by way of informal or family support networks.

Just having someone to turn to if something goes wrong. I have family, but it's not a big family and most of them stay quite far away. In terms of just having support, it's good to have.

MIW Edinburgh Participant, 2014

You just want to get out the house and meet people and it's done that. Just getting out. Because when I was with my husband I just used to stay in the house all the time and you just felt trapped and I didn't even see my pals.

Now it's just good to get out.

MIW Fife Participant, 2014

Alongside intensive Key Worker support and a range of employability-building services, MIW provided supported group-based activities, sometimes focused on practical employability skills, sometimes supporting family resilience and always with an underlying purpose of building social capital through mutual support networks. Taking the time, space and resources to support these activities was important to delivering many of the confidence and self-efficacy benefits reported by lone parents.

The initial stage for me was just getting me out of the house and meeting new people and then finding my voice again... I think the potential in me has always been there but it's possibly been pushed to the back because of the things that were going on in my life at the time so I think it's managed to draw it back. The confidence is back. I'm confident enough that I could go and have a good job and have a good life and not have to worry about – it's helped me a lot.

MIW Fife Participant, 2015

When you are a single mum, you do get tarred with that brush... the judgements people make on the basis that you are a single mum... But there was loads of different people there, different backgrounds, and it was really, really great just seeing how we all worked together and it was actually quite nice just to feel that you weren't alone. But that really built my self-confidence up loads because if it wasn't for that I probably wouldn't be... I don't know where I would be without the chance.

MIW South Lanarkshire Participant, 2016

A number of broader indicators of progression were identified by our research. For example, qualitative research with service users highlighted benefits in terms of family resilience. Lone parents who made progress towards employability through MIW reported improved family circumstances; a common theme was that progressing towards work was a source of self-esteem and pride within service users' families.

I hated being on benefits. Not because of the money, because I was surviving. But I was the only one of my family on benefits. I hated it and I ken't that my family hated it... I'm not the "single mum, drop out, had bairns too early" daughter anymore.

MIW Fife Participant, 2016

Don't get me wrong, we still have our ups and downs. But it's so much better. I'm more willing to interact with the kids, whereas before I was quite withdrawn. And probably not emotionally stable to be quite honest. As much as I probably thought I was, I wasn't.

MIW Fife Participant, 2017

Finally, in terms of more objective 'distance travelled' outcomes, a substantial proportion of MIW participants progressed into employability-focused activity, including basic skills and/or vocational training, and engagement with debt and money advice support. Partnership monitoring data suggest that more than one-third of participants achieved some form of accredited training outcome.

A relatively small proportion of MIW users were supported to progress into volunteering. Nevertheless, for some, this proved an effective alternative approach to building workplace-based experience. Qualitative research with these participants highlighted benefits in terms of self-efficacy and employability skills, and there may be value in exploring the value of volunteering as a progression outcome in future employability services.

MIW Key Workers used volunteering as a means of helping some participants to take the first step towards the kind of work that they are interested in. Rather than forcing clients to pursue any job available, volunteering provided basic work experience in areas chosen by participants.

One of the things that struck me when people were talking about volunteering... was that you've clearly communicated, or you've co-produced it together, that there's a sense that this is valuable work... It's absolutely not about forced things; it's about finding something that you really enjoy.

MIW Edinburgh Stakeholder, 2016

I just think if I hadn't worked with Making it Work then I don't know that I would be in the, kind of, area of work that I want to be in. I think I might have just gone back to hospitality and just been like, 'I just have to work'. But it's really, kind of, helped me to get the relevant skills, I think. I don't know that I necessarily would have known how to do that without Kate [development worker] suggesting the volunteering and looking at job descriptions and then trying to find the skills from either volunteering or courses and things like that.

MIW Edinburgh Participant, 2016

For some participants, volunteering activity undertaken as part of MIW led directly to a transition into good quality jobs.

They helped me to get a placement within a school, voluntary. I was working Monday to Friday voluntary in the school as a pupil support assistant. Then there were three positions that I applied for, two pupil support assistant jobs and one was with social work... I think just being involved and actually being able to go out and put my skills to use for people to see, that was a humongous help... I think definitely being involved definitely got my foot in the door. Because I was volunteering with Fife Council and then within about four or five weeks I had a job with Fife Council.

MIW Fife Participant, 2017

To summarise, the evidence of stakeholders and participants involved in MIW is that the programme was able to deliver both job outcomes and (based on some indicators) progression for lone parents facing substantial barriers to work. An important lesson here is that employability services like MIW that address the needs of the 'whole person' and value both progression and job entries are likely to be associated with a range of additional positive social outcomes (see our End of Programme Impact Report).

Challenges and lessons for future employability services

The Scottish Government has called for future employability services to be funded on the basis of, and required to deliver, both job outcomes and progression towards work for people further from the labour market. Scottish policymakers are justified in advocating such an approach – mainstream employability programmes in the UK have been undermined by problems of 'creaming and parking', because funding for job outcomes only has incentivised providers to push people into work as quickly as possible (this can lead providers to target more employable service users, at the expense of those facing multiple barriers).

The Big Lottery Fund in Scotland established MIW as a grant-based programme, with delivery partnerships encouraged to achieve job outcomes for lone parents ready to return to work, but also supported to help the more disadvantaged to progress towards a range of other positive outcomes. There is solid evidence that this funding model supported MIW partnerships to focus on positive progression outcomes for vulnerable lone parents, many of whom reported benefits in confidence and self-efficacy, access to social networks and the development of employability skills.

It should be acknowledged that the MIW approach encountered considerable challenges. Some of the most disadvantaged lone parents engaged by MIW were also least likely to progress into work. Even in terms of 'distance travelled' progression measures, survey data suggest that progress was quite modest in some indicators. These findings are in some ways unsurprising, and are similar to the

results for previous programmes targeting lone parents, such as the Scottish Government's Working For Families Fund. The complex combination of barriers faced by some lone parents – many of which are connected with fundamental inequalities in access to public services and the labour market – are likely to limit perceived progression even under 'whole person' services like MIW. This suggests that we need to continue to explore which combination of employability services and other interventions are best able to assist the most disadvantaged lone parents to progress towards work. Nevertheless, a general lesson for future employability services in Scotland is that we need to consider and support a range of forms of progression towards employability for service users. MIW's flexible funding model, support for partnership-working, and commitment to an ethos of co-production in engaging lone parents may offer useful lessons for services that value progression towards and into work for those further from the labour market.