



**'NO LIMITS'
PROGRAMME**

Impact Report

Oxford City

2024/2025

No Limits Programme funded by



In association with our delivery partners



Funded by
UK Government



OXFORD
CITY
COUNCIL

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Introduction



Aspire Oxford has been delivering the 'No Limits' programme in Oxford City, commissioned by OxLEP Skills and funded through the UKSPF (UK Shared Prosperity Fund), under Intervention E33: Support for Economically Inactive Residents. The programme ran from June 2024 to March 2025.

Initially funded through the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), OxLEP Skill's Social Contract Programme managed Phase 1 and the Phase 2 extension of the programme from August 2022 to June 2024 as SOFEA was subcontracted to deliver tailored support across the county, in partnership with Aspire Oxford, helping young people and adults overcome barriers to employment, education, and training.

As Phase 2 came to an end, OxLEP successfully secured further funding via the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) Support for Economically Inactive Residents', commissioned by Oxford City District Council. This marked the start of phase 3, a nine month project, enabling the continuation of No Limits across the Oxford City district from June 2024 to March 31st 2025.

The UKSPF-funded phase focuses on intensive, person-centred support for individuals aged 16+ who were economically inactive—not currently seeking employment—due to complex personal or structural barriers. These included challenges such as poor physical or mental health, low skills, long-term unemployment, social exclusion, and caring responsibilities.

Aspire's delivery in Oxford City aimed to:



Engage those most distant from the labour market



Raise aspirations and build confidence



Support participants in accessing training, education, or employment pathways



Improve personal well-being and long-term employment prospects

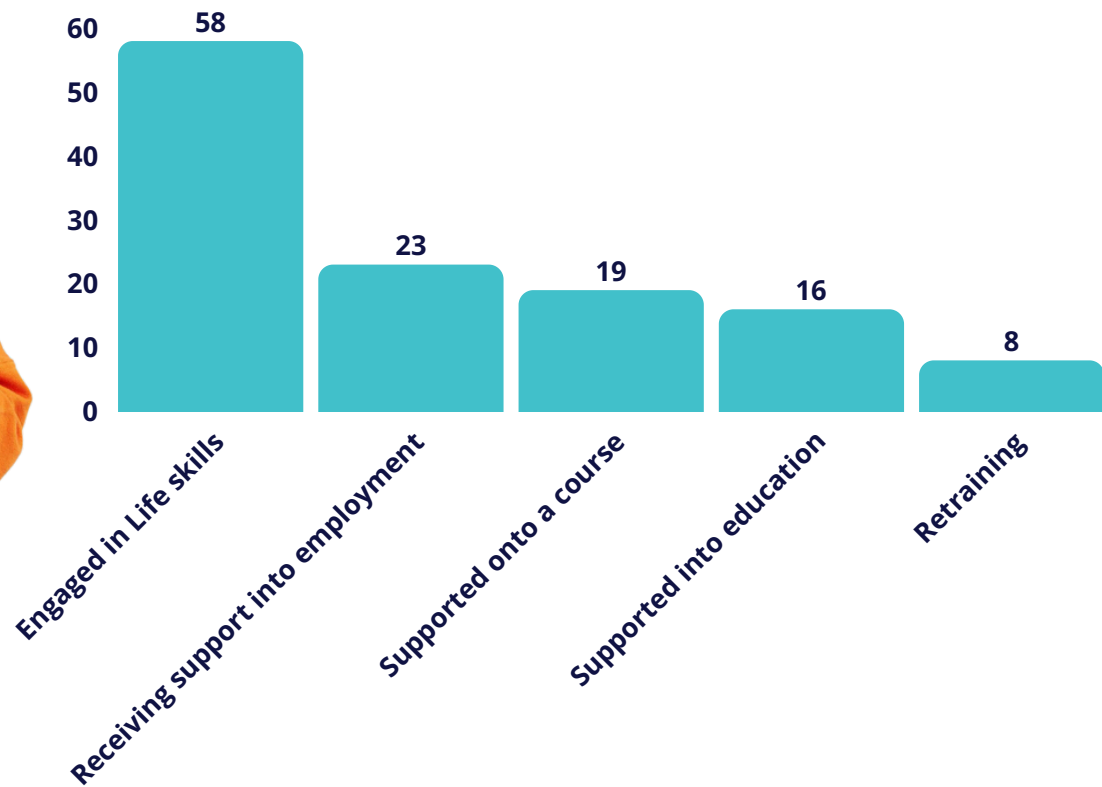
Through tailored one-to-one support and strong local partnerships, Aspire Oxford helped participants overcome key barriers and move closer to meaningful and sustainable work.

Delivery was carried out in line with the branding, data, and performance requirements outlined in the UKSPF service agreement.

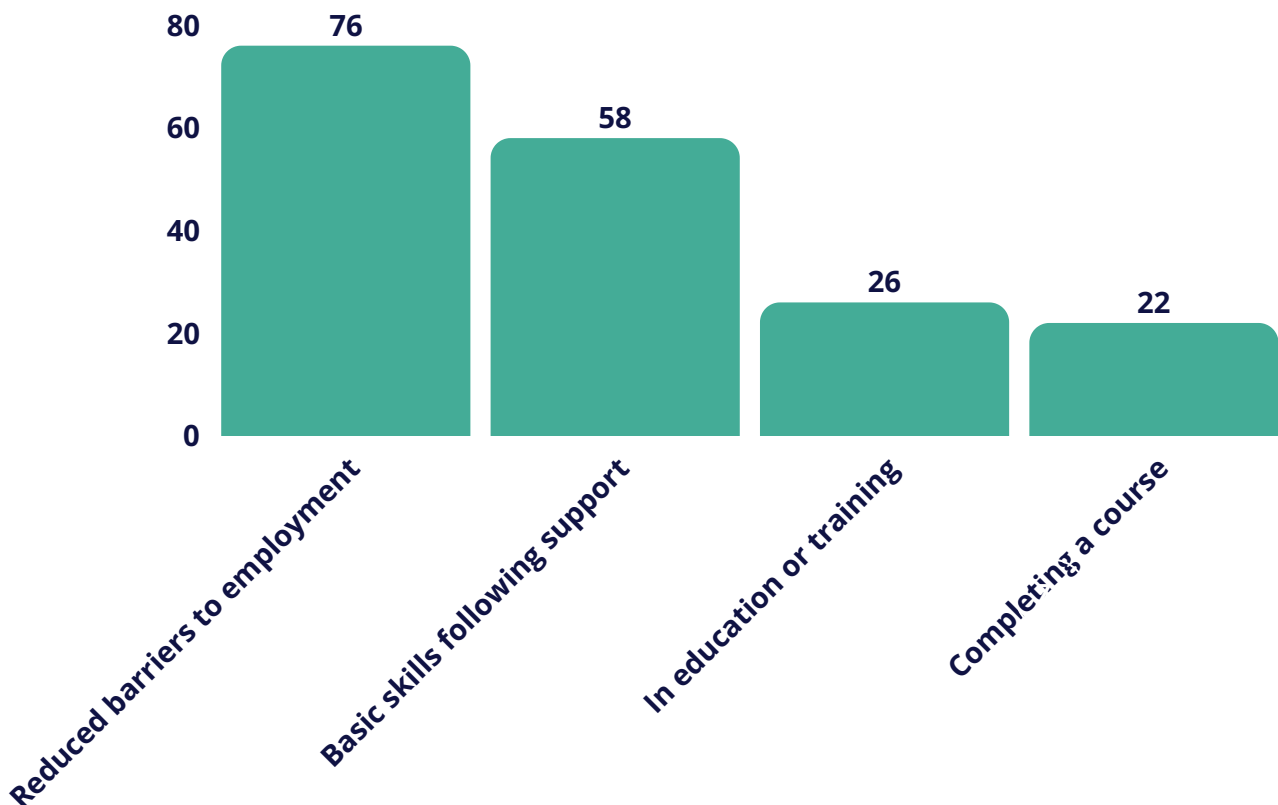


Outputs & Outcomes

Outputs



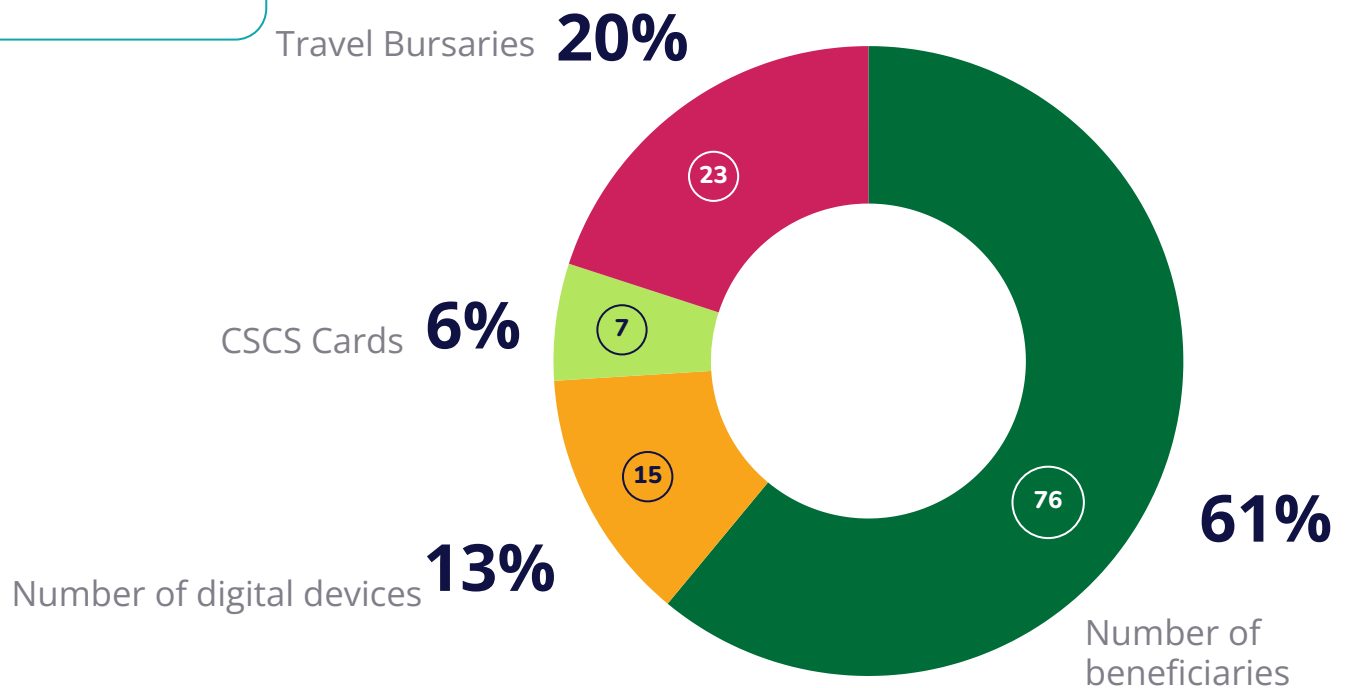
Outcomes



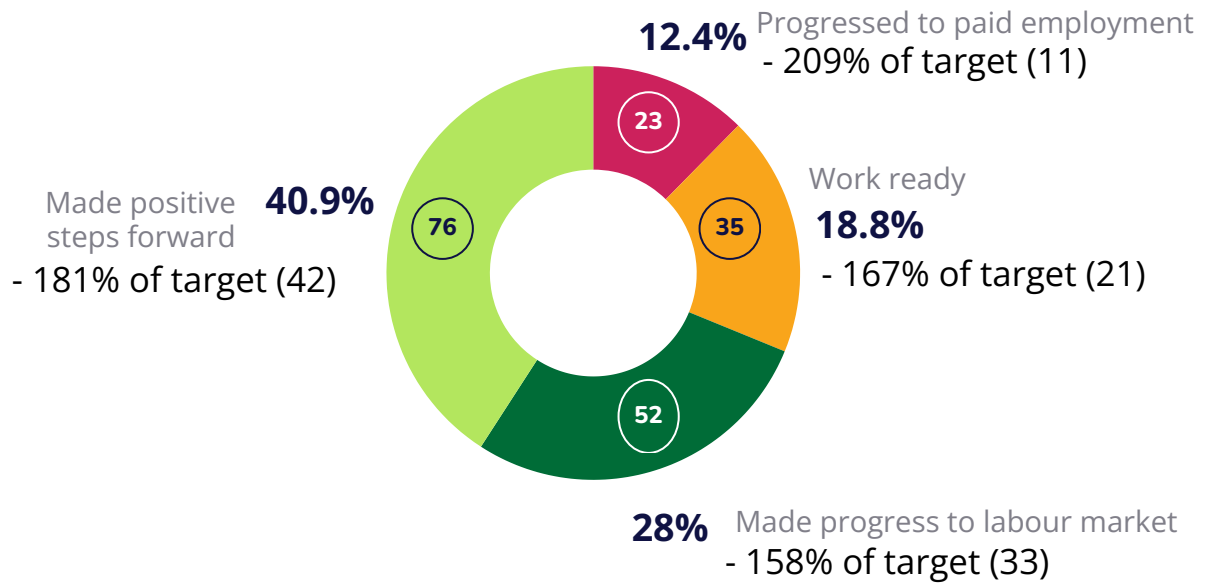


Outcomes

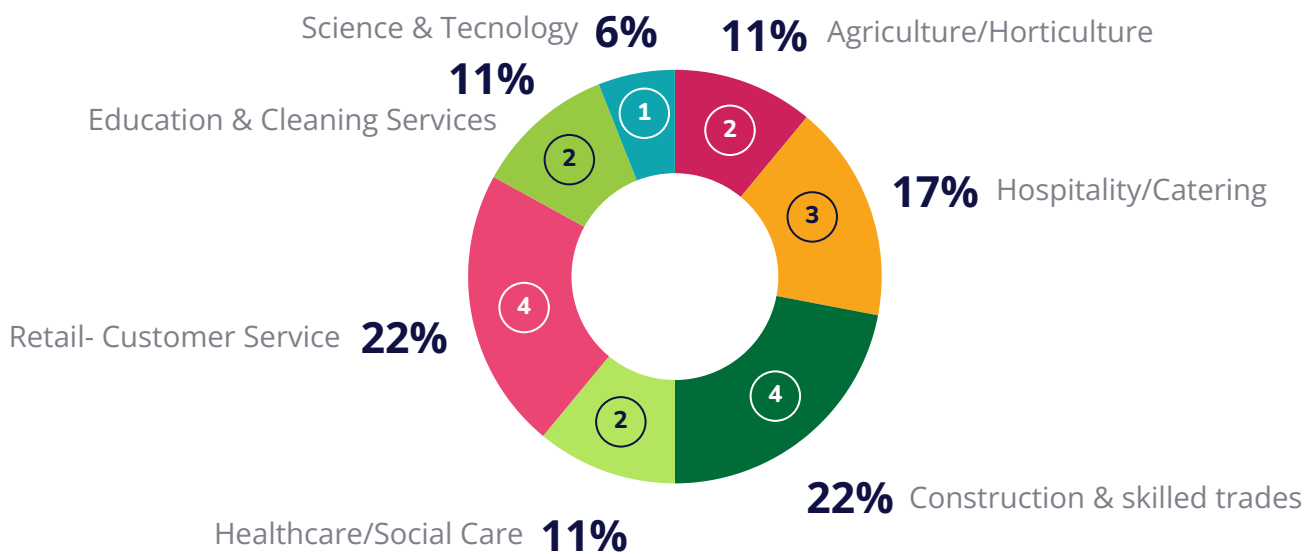
Solutions to reducing barriers



Beneficiary Outcomes



Employment breakdown



Community & Partnerships

8 organisations

collaborated with 'No Limits'

Oxford Wood Recycling

Restore

Abingdon & Witney College

NHS

Oxfordshire Youth

Aspire – METS programme

The Cornermen

Turning Point

This strong multi-sector engagement has helped individuals develop workplace skills, improve confidence, and gain access to employment pathways.



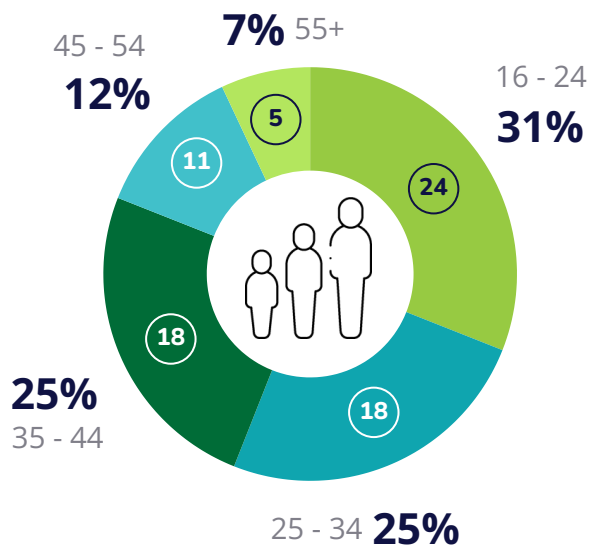


Demographics

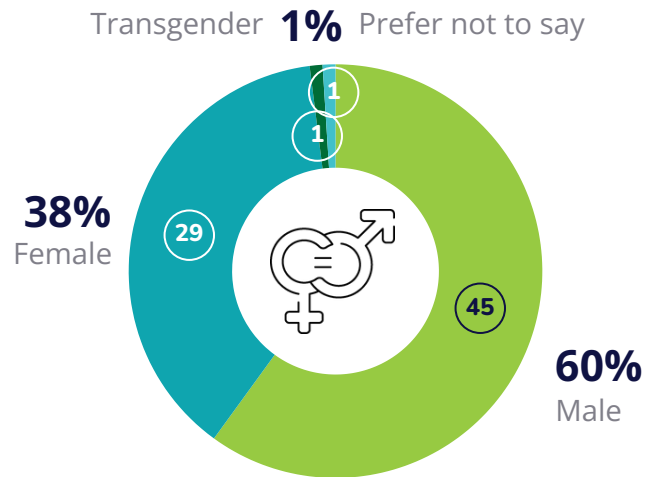


Age and gender

Age range

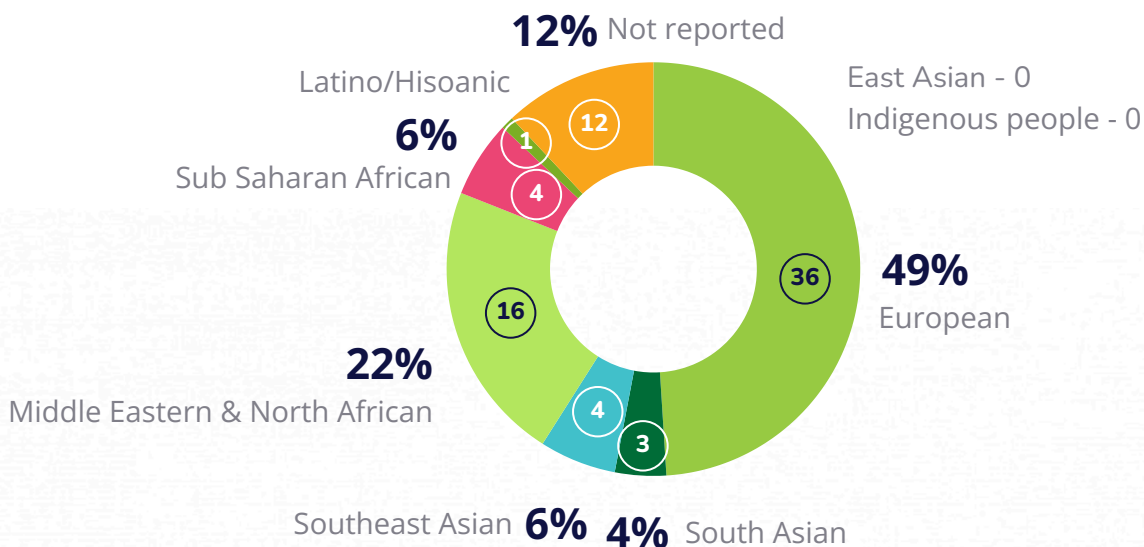


Gender

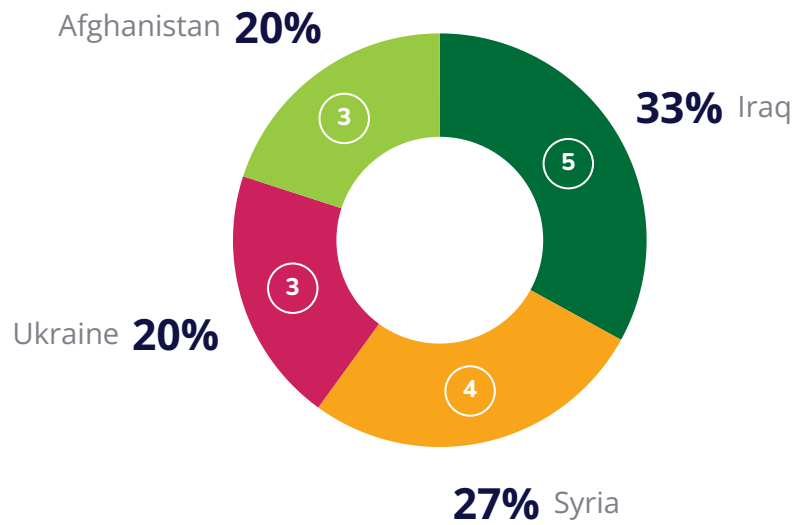


Ethnicity & Refugees/asylum seeker

Ethnicity

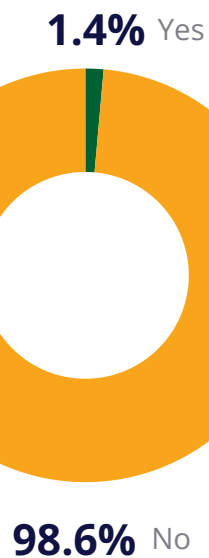


Refugees/Asylum Seekers



Disabilities

Disabilities Known



Travel and Device Support

Travel Assistance:

Provided to

28 individuals to support access to employment, training, and key services.

Device Distribution:

A total of



27 laptops



5 mobil phones



2 SIM cards



2 Wi-Fi dongles

were distributed, ensuring participants had the necessary digital access for job searching, education, and communication.



Quality Assurance & due diligence



Quality Assurance & Due Diligence



- All clients wishing to participate in the No Limits programme require a data collation form completed. This is to ensure they fit the eligibility criteria to engage with the programmes support and ensures they are consenting to our handling of their data and for it to be shared with funders where required.
- All clients require a risk assessment to be completed. This can be provided by an external or partner agency or if one is not provided (if self-referring) the triage worker will complete following their first meeting to ensure we are aware of and can attempt to mitigate any known risks to the participant, staff or others.
- Staff processing referral forms and risk assessments have been briefed on the eligibility criteria for individuals wanting to engage in the No Limits programme. Clients should be 16+, unemployed, live in Oxfordshire (specifically within Oxford City). Anybody living within Oxfordshire but outside of these areas will be referred to a SOFEA triage worker for Cherwell or South & Vale districts.
- Risk assessments have been established, reviewed and monitored for any known or potential risks to delivery of the No Limits programme.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures are closely adhered to and monitored. We hold regular meetings with our Safeguarding team to discuss if any issues or concerns arise and can contact the team if anything urgent occurs as per our safeguarding policy.



Key Highlights, challenges & lessons learned

Key Highlights



76

We have seen great demand for the No Limits programme in Oxford City, with 76 clients engaging with employment, training and education support.

23

The No Limits programme has supported 23 participants into employment and 48 have engaged in courses or education.



Listening to the needs of participants and taking pro-active steps has been crucial to the programme's success. An example of this was when our triage worker met with a group of people who were struggling due to language barriers and having no digital devices. The worker responded to this by providing the group with devices and training them in how to use their new laptops. This meant they could engage in their online ESOL courses which was instrumental in many of them progressing onto further courses at a local college with some then achieving employment.



Through our knowledge and understanding of the complex barriers experienced by participants, we have extended the support clients can access by utilising our connections both internally and with external agencies. This has been with issues around homelessness, immigration, benefits, mental health and wellbeing and substance misuse. This person-centred, holistic approach has ensured clients are able to access the most appropriate support to help them progress with their journey on No Limits, helping them to achieve successful education, training and employment outcomes.



Strong connections have been fostered within the community with organisations such as Iraqi Women of Art and War and Asylum Welcome amongst others. This approach has ensured we are extending the No Limits offer of support to individuals who are furthest from the labour market, providing them with the opportunities to rebuild and make positive steps towards their futures.



Throughout Oxford City, we have built solid relationships with external agencies to promote the programme and extend this support to their service users. This has been achieved by networking, attending meetings and events such as job fayres and care leaver events which has ensured we are targeting those individuals who are difficult to reach or engage with.

Challenges




Issues in project commencement due to funding delays.

High caseloads due to the demand for the programme and lack of triage staff to support which has sometimes caused delays in participants being able to access the programme.

Challenges enrolling clients onto courses or linking in with apprenticeship opportunities due to ages when under 18.

Sporadic or disengagement from participants.

Lessons Learned

- 
- ✓ Improved communication across the team to ensure there is awareness about any issues with caseloads in order for us to mitigate this wherever possible. We have established weekly 1:1's to support with this providing robust support to triage workers, giving them the opportunity to raise these concerns and work towards a solution.
 - ✓ We need to be more aware of opportunities particularly around education and apprenticeships for 16-18 year olds and better understand any funding issues to ensure they can access these and make progress.
 - ✓ Participants disengage for multiple reasons and ensuring they have access to additional support options outside of education, training and employment is fundamental to their level of engagement. We therefore need to ensure participants understand the support we can link them in with to maximise their level of engagement.



Case studies



Case Study: Supporting Iraqi Women Through Digital Inclusion and Employment

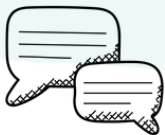
For over a year, No Limits has been supporting the Iraqi Women and War (IWAW) group by providing essential digital resources and employment guidance. Recognising the importance of digital access, we supplied laptops to enable the women to continue their ESOL classes and gain greater independence in their daily lives.

While access to technology was crucial, many of the women required training in digital skills. To bridge this gap, I dedicated a morning to delivering a focused digital skills session, equipping them with the knowledge needed to navigate online learning, job searches, and essential digital tools.

Understanding the financial challenges these women face, we also provided travel bursaries to ensure they could attend their courses without barriers. Additionally, several women sought extra employment support, which led to tailored CV workshops designed to improve their job prospects.

One standout success story involved a client who was job-ready but struggled with interview anxiety. To support her, I conducted interview practice sessions both in person and over the phone. This dedicated coaching helped her build confidence and ultimately led to her securing a position as a teaching assistant at a local school—a significant personal achievement.

Rana, the leader of IWAW, highlighted the impact of this work:



"The support from No Limits has allowed IWAW to fulfill its mission of empowering women through art and storytelling while providing them with practical tools to achieve personal and professional growth. Women who previously faced significant barriers now have consistent access to learning opportunities and resources, helping them build confidence and independence."

This collaboration between No Limits and IWAW demonstrates the profound impact of digital inclusion, financial support, and tailored employment guidance in transforming the lives of women who have faced significant challenges. By continuing to provide these opportunities, we aim to further their journey towards independence and professional success.



Case Study Report: Shakhida's Journey

Shakhida, a refugee from Ukraine, arrived in the UK with her daughter and settled in Oxford. Her daughter, attending a local school, was her primary focus, but Shakhida was eager to find a job that aligned with her background in hospitality management and human resources. She sought a position that would offer career progression while also fitting around her responsibilities as a mother.

Initial Meeting at Cuttleslowe Community Larder

Shakhida approached us with a well-prepared CV reflecting her strong experience in hospitality management and HR. She expressed interest in both fields but was particularly motivated by opportunities that offered long-term career growth. Together, we refined her CV, creating two versions—one tailored to hospitality management and the other focused on HR. This ensured she was well-prepared for job opportunities in both areas.

Challenges

While Shakhida was committed to job hunting, she faced significant housing instability and was at risk of becoming homeless. Securing stable accommodation for herself and her daughter became a priority, and job searching had to be placed on hold. Shakhida engaged with our homeless prevention team, who provided crucial support and advice, helping her navigate this challenging period.

Progress

Eventually, Shakhida secured stable housing outside Oxford after her daughter was accepted into a local school. With housing issues resolved, she was able to refocus on job hunting.

Support and Outcome

I was able to assist Shakhida by providing her with a one-month bus pass, allowing her to transport her daughter to school in central Oxford. This not only stabilized her routine but also expanded her job search area, enabling her to explore employment opportunities further afield. Shortly afterward, Shakhida secured a position at a restaurant, marking the beginning of a more stable and promising chapter for her and her daughter.

Conclusion

Shakhida's resilience in the face of personal and logistical challenges was commendable. By addressing her housing issues and expanding her job search area, she was able to secure employment in hospitality, aligning with her experience and career aspirations. This case demonstrates the importance of providing holistic support—addressing both immediate needs (like housing) and long-term goals (like employment)—to ensure successful outcomes for refugees and those facing similar challenges.

Shakhida's Feedback



Dear Mike and all representatives of the No Limits Project,

I hope this letter finds you in good health and spirits. I wanted to take a moment to express my heartfelt gratitude for your incredible support and kindness. You've been more than supportive; you've been my driving force, my confidant, and my partner in all sorts of adventures.

In searching for jobs matters, you've been my guide. Your assistance in assignments, your encouragement during challenging times, and your belief in my capabilities have all played a pivotal role in my success.

In the springtime when I first met Mike at the Cutteslowe community centre, he with no doubt offered me his help, after which he supported me with rewriting my CV twice. Then during our next meeting when he found out that my difficulties being faster with filling documents and forms to submit to the job roles was regarding I had no computer, he offered me a very helpful computer. In some very challenging times for me and my family, he supported me with free tickets that were incredibly useful and generous.

And now, all your continuous support shines just as brightly. Whether it's capturing or offering insightful suggestions, your contributions are immeasurable.

I want you to know that your presence in my life has been a true blessing.

*Thank you for being there for me and my family.
With heartfelt gratitude,*

- Shakhida



Case Study: Morgan's Journey to Employment through Aspire Oxford

Morgan, a 17-year-old, was referred to Aspire Oxford's No Limits program seeking to obtain his CSCS card and begin a career in construction. Like many young men referred to our program, Morgan had left school without achieving his GCSEs in English and Maths.

For these individuals, the CSCS card is often seen as a gateway to construction work. However, we've found that hiring under-18s in the industry is uncommon due to insurance constraints, which posed a challenge for Morgan.

Initially, Morgan was hesitant to engage fully with the program, but after some time, we were able to meet and discuss his options. I explained the CSCS card process, while highlighting that his best long-term route would be to return to college to complete his English and Maths Functional Skills. Alternatively, he could seek out a work placement by reaching out to smaller local contractors.

Morgan and I spent the next couple of 1-2-1 sessions reaching out to various businesses such as electricians, gardeners, and builders. Unfortunately, most of them gave the same advice: to pursue his Functional Skills and seek an apprenticeship.

After discussions with me and his family, Morgan decided to give college another try, expressing an interest in electronics. I arranged a meeting at Blackbird Leys College for him and his aunt, where he could explore a foundational course that also offered the opportunity to complete his English and Maths qualifications.

While waiting for the college term to start, Morgan unexpectedly heard back from a local employer—a landscape gardening business looking for a labourer. Excited by the prospect, Morgan immediately accepted the position and has now been working full-time for the past few months. He enjoys the work and has found himself thriving in this environment.

Though initially uncertain about his future, Morgan has chosen to focus on his new job rather than pursuing college. He enjoys his role, sees potential for career growth, and is earning a steady wage while learning practical skills on the job. I am thrilled to see Morgan in a role that brings him satisfaction and stability, and I fully support his decision to continue with the landscape gardening business where he has promising career prospects.

Morgan's journey shows the importance of flexibility and perseverance when supporting young people with non-traditional pathways into employment. While his original goal was to secure a CSCS card, Morgan ultimately found a rewarding and fulfilling career through a different route. His success demonstrates that with the right support and a willingness to explore various options, young people can find meaningful and sustainable work, even when the path isn't as straightforward as initially planned.

County-Wide Programme Summary

No Limits Phase 3, funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and commissioned by OxLEP Skills, was delivered between July 2024 and March 2025 across Cherwell, Oxford City, South Oxfordshire & Vale of White Horse, and West Oxfordshire. Delivery partners SOFEA and Aspire Oxford provided intensive, bespoke person-centred support to economically inactive residents facing complex and structural barriers to employment.

The overall county-wide programme supported over 245 individuals, helping them build confidence, access training, and take meaningful steps toward employment. Participants benefited from tailored one-to-one guidance, digital inclusion support, building awareness of Green skills courses and providing access to training—particularly in Green Skills and Construction pathways.

Building on the success of the No Limits programme since its launch in November 2022, we are now working successfully with councils across the county on a six-month extension, funded through the second round of UKSPF. Meanwhile, OxLEP Skills is seeking to expand the programme's reach and secure the delivery of the Department for Work and Pensions Connect to Work programme through Oxfordshire County Council.

The positive outcomes, strong engagement, and the learnings from No Limits have demonstrated a clear need and appetite for continued support. As a result, the programme is planned to evolve and develop over a three to four year period with a county-wide focus, ensuring sustained impact and broader access for individuals across Oxfordshire. This continuity reflects both the effectiveness of No Limits and the partnership's commitment to evolving and scaling successful initiatives.



Key Highlights of No Limits Programme County-Wide



53+

Individuals progressed into paid work



130+

Individuals became work ready



80+

Devices (laptops, phones, dongles) distributed



Dozens enrolled in vocational, ESOL, CSCS, and Green Skills courses



Strong outreach through local hubs, job clubs, youth programmes, refugee support and local engagement along with wraparound support played a vital role in connecting participants to meaningful opportunities.

Conclusion



The Oxford City No Limits programme has been a tremendous success and as the data demonstrates, has had an incredibly positive impact on the participants who have engaged.

The person centred, holistic support provided by triage workers has enabled participants to progress in their education, training and employment journeys and has helped many individuals learn new skills, build confidence, self esteem and improve their individual circumstances in a multitude of ways.

In addition to the support provided on No Limits, triage workers have linked many participants into the wider Aspire offer of support through our social prescribing, homeless prevention, enterprise and inclusive recruitment teams and this has been hugely beneficial to the programme's participants, bolstering the support provided by the No Limits programme. This extra support has helped many clients through our wellbeing walks, boxfit, gymclub, skills bootcamp, digital skills courses, functional skills, budgeting skills, our Fairer Access to Work programme and linking participants to job opportunities with local employers through our inclusive recruitment team.

The No Limits programme has supported many participants who experienced significant and complex barriers to engage in education and training and in many cases move into secure and sustainable employment. No Limits has helped empower programme participants to become more skilled, knowledgeable and financially independent, providing them with opportunities to build more positive futures.

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