

Final Evaluation

of

**Start Up Citywide
Project**
(North Staffordshire YMCA)

January 2008

mwb consultancy ltd

Final Evaluation of Start Up Project

Completed January 2008

1. Introduction

This final report concludes the evaluation work on the most recent stage of development for the Start Up project. It covers the time period which saw Start Up move from the local Primary Care Trust to its new home with North Staffordshire YMCA.

In it we have attempted to give a rounded view of the results and achievements of Start Up and to make some recommendations about its potential future development.

This is the third evaluation of the project we have carried out over the last 4 years and the focus of the evaluation has remained the same; firstly on the outcomes the programme is delivering for customers, the 'so what?' question, and secondly on developing an understanding of the processes and approaches that have worked best. To reflect the changes in the management arrangements for Start Up we have also tried to understand what difference, if any, the new relationship with the YMCA has made to the project.

We have tried to make this a report that can be easily read and can be used in a variety of settings and ways. We have kept the report short and added extra information such as the methodology as appendices.

The key questions to be addressed by the evaluation are:

- Which customers is Start Up working with and what are they like
- What difference is Start Up making (Outcomes)
- How are they making that difference
- What is its future role

These questions link to the assumptions and hypothesis that underpin the work of Start Up, more detail on this is noted later.

In this next section we outline some of the key findings; these are then taken up in more detail later in the report.

2. Summary of key findings

Highlights

Our analysis suggests that Start Up is continuing to get excellent results with marginalised communities and individuals in Stoke on Trent. It has achieved well both against the targets set by funders and in terms of outcomes for customers.

Target 1 (a): clients into employment; target for the period 06 - 07 is 65 people into employment. The actual performance at December 07 is 84 people into employment

Target 1 (e): clients across the city coming off lone parent benefits; target for the period 06 - 07 is 15. The actual performance at December 2007 is 18 people off lone parents' benefits.

Target 9: clients supported into achieving some form of accredited training; target for the period 06 - 07 is 200 people. The actual performance at December 2007 is 219 people.

82% of current customers report that they have learned new skills (with Start Up) and are using them

85% of current customers report that they expect more of themselves as a result of working with Start Up

70% of exited customers report improved and sustained confidence following their involvement with Start Up

Feedback from customers continues to be good and reflects the hard work being done by frontline staff to engage and support people in the communities across the city. The following is taken from an interview with a current Start Up customer and reflects the views of many people using the project:

'At school I struggled because I hated it, this resulted in my leaving school with no qualifications. I did a confidence course ... and it was great. I now have more confidence. I also did a 1st Aid course which has given me new skills and I do use them. I then went on to achieve a Level 1 in literacy; this made me want to learn more.'

Over the last 3 years Start Up has continued to refine and improve its practice with customers and has now 'grown up' into a well organised and focused organisation. The management team and staff have been able to introduce a new level of organisation and 'professionalism'

without losing the very focused work with individuals in the communities they serve.

The recent introduction of the new senior support worker role and the training for workers has helped to increase consistency of work practices and case management.

The development of bespoke confidence building and goal setting courses for customers appears to have had a very positive impact.

The move to the YMCA has helped to secure some of these changes and the majority of people involved with the project at a strategic level feel that the move has helped Start Up to develop further in a supportive atmosphere.

Start Up continues to achieve outcomes and contribute to people's journeys back in to learning and eventually work. Our analysis suggests that Start Up is a project that is good at learning and developing.

Which customers is Start Up working with and what are they like?

Start Up has consistently been able to reach some of the most disadvantaged groups in the NRF areas of the city.

90% of all Start Up customers are women, this is consistent with the findings from earlier evaluations.

24% of the customers are from the BME community and over 90% of those are women. This exceeds the demographic proportions for the city but does reflect the reality of exclusion for Asian women in particular.

89% of customers from the BME community using Start Up achieved at level 1 or below at school.

75% of customers from the non BME communities using Start Up achieved at level 1 or below at school.

83% of customers from the BME community using Start Up have not taken part in any training or formal learning since school.

60% of customers from the non BME community have not taken part in any formal training since leaving school.

The initial hypothesis and rationale for Start Up highlighted these groups of people as key to the project's success, the figures suggest that they have been successful in getting to some of the most hard to reach groups in the City.

The majority of referrals and first contacts with Start Up still come through direct local contact with potential customers through Children's Centre programmes, by word of mouth and other low key approaches.

What difference is Start Up making (Outcomes)

At the start of the project we established a set of outcomes for people using the project. These outcomes (changes for people) were developed by the Start Up team with reference to research findings, stakeholders etc.

These outcomes focused on the personal change the customer needs to achieve in terms of confidence, new skills etc. These outcomes are built on the evidence base from research and other projects; they are the outcomes that can be described as the preconditions that support later development into training and work.

So for example a literature search and the Start Up team identified that lack of confidence was a barrier to a large number of customers entering training and work. So an outcome they needed to achieve with people was an increase in their self reported levels of confidence.

In the initial evaluation we identified that some success was being achieved in the delivery of outcomes. This second round of evaluation confirms that.

Customer outcomes achieved

The evidence taken from a series of interviews and surveys with service users and ex service users (a total of 130 interviews) demonstrate that Start Up is helping people to achieve the key personal outcomes that are helping to remove barriers to involvement in training and subsequently helping to lay down some of the building blocks for return to work.

We worked with Start Up to create a stratified sample of customers based on the basic demographic data for the whole project. Each interview was carried out using a standard interview format.

We also carried out a telephone follow up questionnaire with a sample of people who had completed their involvement with Start Up.

Those customers that took part in the interviews and other survey work reported significant improvement in the following areas:

- Improved confidence; 80% of current customers related that they had improved levels of confidence, for exited customers 70% reported that that new confidence was sustained.

- Have and use new skills; 82% of the current customer group and 77% of exited customers reported that they had developed new skills that they were using in their every day lives.
- I expect more of myself; 85% of current customers and 70% of exited customers reported that they consistently expected more of themselves following involvement with Start Up.
- Feel more positive about the future; over 85% of current customers we spoke to reported that they were consistently more positive about their future and 77% of exited customers reported positive feelings about their futures.
- Feel confident to tackle new tasks; 85% of current customers we spoke to said that they were more confident in tackling new tasks, and 70% of exited customers reported being consistently confident about taking on new tasks.
- Want to learn more; 92% of current customers and 96% of exited customers said that they consistently wanted to take on new learning challenges.

Given the sample size we can be confident that these results will be replicated across the whole of the Start Up customer group and that this represents a substantial change for some of the most disadvantaged groups in the city.

Distance travelled (in education terms the value added derived from a person's involvement with Start Up) is a useful measure to use in conjunction with the self reported outcomes noted above.

The most recent data (December 2007) suggests that a significant number of customers are making good progress through the project.

Over the period July 2006 to December 2007

- 1031 customers have signed up and engaged with Start Up
- 340 customers have been supported to undertake basic skills assessment
- 519 customers have entered onto some form of taught learning programme or experience, this accounts for 50% of the total number of customers. Of those 300 have completed a non-accredited training programme and a further 219 have completed a course of accredited training.
- 85 customers have achieved at entry level 3 literacy and a further 63 at entry level 3 numeracy.

- 135 customers have achieved credits at level 2
- 84 customers have moved through Start Up into sustained employment.

The data appears to suggest that Start Up is being successful with a wide range of customers so that of those noted above we have evidence that they come from across the whole customer group and not just from the most able or easiest to engage.

Comments from customers

As we note above we have heard from a wide range of customers including a number who have gone on from Start Up into further training and employment. The comments are consistently very positive about Start Up.

Customers consistently report improvement in their confidence, their skills and in the ability to take on new challenges.

The customers who took part in the evaluation had some very positive things to say about the role of the programme and in particular the role of the support worker.

‘I come from a travelling background and didn’t attend much school, when I first joined Start Up I could not read or write. Start Up has helped me to achieve this and not be afraid of learning.’

‘I am looking for employment. Start Up has helped me to find a work placement (voluntary). I feel confident and positive about the future and possible job opportunities.’

‘I feel as if I have new skills and confidence because of taking part in courses. I would like to go on to do further qualifications.’

‘At school I struggled because I hated it, this resulted in my leaving school with no qualifications. I did a confidence course ... and it was great. I now have more confidence. I also did a 1st Aid course which has given me new skills and I do use them. I then went on to achieve a Level 1 in literacy; this made me want to learn more.’

‘I was very low in self confidence, Start Up sent me on a Men’s Health course and I have not looked back since, I have then gone on to achieve many other certificates, giving me the confidence to overcome my barriers.’

‘I had one to one support, and I was made to feel comfortable, having someone who speaks the language has helped a great deal.’

'I was helped to get on a fork lift truck training course. I was also helped to get an English and maths qualification. Through this I now have employment as a fork lift truck operator.'

'I was depressed, and the support worker put me on a short course, I met new friends....I left school with no qualifications and support worker helped me get my Maths & English... I have now done a business admin and computer skills course and am in full time college hoping to start my own business...my support worker helped me with all this.'

Recent feedback from the new customer forums suggest that people would welcome access to longer more challenging courses offered through the Start Up framework.

The development of the new confidence building courses has been highly praised by both customers and staff.

Staff interviews

For this 2007 evaluation we have spoken again to a sample of support workers and other staff.

In the last evaluation we reported that there was some inconsistency in the approaches being used by support workers. Our assessment is that these have been dealt with successfully and that the introduction of the new senior support worker role has helped to bring a more consistent approach to the work with customers.

We also recommended that staff be offered a bespoke training course on advice and guidance etc. this has been done and we had several favourable comments about the course and its usefulness. Although many support workers felt they had not learned many new things it had helped them to reflect on their practice and to think through day to day practice issues.

Comments from stakeholders

We spoke to stakeholders with a strategic interest in the project and to others with a more operational link e.g. training providers.

At a strategic level stakeholders are positive about the role played by Start Up and are keen to strengthen those links in the future. In particular to maximise the impact of Start Up in the emerging work on a 'journey model' for people moving from worklessness to employment.

Operational stakeholders were on the whole very positive about the link to Start Up and the willingness of the Start Up team to be flexible and innovative at a local level. There were also very positive comments

about the individual contribution made by support workers and managers in helping some stakeholders to achieve crucial training targets.

Overall Start Up is viewed by stakeholders as a very positive project that contributes to their outcomes and makes a difference for some very marginalised groups in the city.

3. Background to Start Up and the evaluation

What is Start Up?

Start Up is a project focused on helping some of the most excluded people back into training so that they can begin to move towards paid work.

All customers must live in one of the 49 Neighbourhood Renewal Fund priority areas and have a child under the age of 16 in their family unit.

Start Up's aim or overall Impact (long term outcome for customers) is **enabling people with children to successfully enter learning and work to develop new skills and become economically independent.**

Its focus is on developing confidence, raising aspirations and helping those who have had previously poor experiences in education to re-engage with learning.

Start Up is funded by the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) and works across the 49 NRF priority areas in Stoke on Trent.

There are 12 Start Up support workers across the city whose role is to work on a one-to-one basis with people in the areas they cover. The support workers work closely with local providers especially Children's Centres. Their key tasks are to get to know the person, understand their current needs and encourage and support them into a variety of suitable training opportunities.

In the central Start Up team there are a small team of workers who coordinate activities that support the area based workers. This includes a Programme Manager, Systems Manager, Training Manager and Administrator.

For many customers the initial training is often low key and aimed at confidence boosting rather than immediate skill development.

Outcomes for Start Up

The outcomes used for the evaluation of Start Up were developed with the Start Up management team as part of the initial set up of the evaluation project. They are based on the work done by the team during the set up phase of Start Up.

The definition of outcomes we find helpful is as follows: outcomes are changes for people in the way they think, feel, act and in their material conditions. This keeps a focus on the difference a project makes for people as well as on how many people they have made the difference for.

The key outcomes for Start Up customers are:

- ◆ People have more confidence
- ◆ People have new skills and are using them
- ◆ People expect more of themselves
- ◆ People are positive about the future
- ◆ People have new problem solving skills and strategies
- ◆ People feel more confident to tackle new issues
- ◆ People want to learn more

We have suggested these outcomes on the grounds that they currently appear to contribute best to the overall Impact that Start Up wants to achieve, which is **enabling people with children to successfully enter learning and work to develop new skills and become economically independent.**

Current thinking and theory on engaging adults in learning suggests that these outcomes are the best way of ensuring that people re-engage with learning and then go on to use those skills to improve work and home life.

Hypothesis and assumptions

During the set up phase for the evaluation we worked with the Start Up management team to identify their hypothesis or pathway of change. This part of the work helps teams to articulate how they think they make a difference for people and to explain why they work in one way rather than another.

We also ask people to be clear about what assumptions they are making about what will work, what their customers will want etc.

Both these pieces of intelligence gathering help to focus the evaluation and provide a start point for a theoretical framework.

Hypothesis:

Central to the Start Up hypothesis is the contention that Start Up is offering a key service that bridges the gap between those people who feel unable to learn or change their lives and the world of work and through that to fuller social inclusion. The people Start Up works with (their customers) will rarely make that journey on their own.

The diagram below sets out the hypothesis in a linear format.

Start Up Hypothesis



This hypothesis essentially states that through building a personal relationship with customers, in the terms that make sense to the them, you can help them overcome their barriers to change and then help them develop new skills and confidence. Without that individual help and encouragement they will not make that journey or change.

This in turn will lead to an escalation in their aspirations, a belief that they can change their world and then help them develop a desire to tackle new challenges, what is sometimes referred to as 'self efficacy'.

We could look to a number of theoretical start points for this hypothesis from Maslow's hierarchy of needs to the work of educators like Paulo Freire; the literature for this area of work strongly supports the basic premise of the hypothesis.

Assumptions

Assumptions are the building blocks we use each day to make sense of the world and to build our view of how we make a difference. Assumptions need to be articulated and checked out so that we can make sure we are focusing on the right things, making the right connections etc.

Your assumptions form the basis of your hypothesis and if they are wrong then the hypothesis will be wrong.

Here are some of the key assumptions Start Up is making for this project:

- ◆ People have real barriers to learning and employment
 - Emotional
 - Social, practical
 - Confidence
 - Lack of experience

 - ◆ Personal Confidence is key to learning and change
 - ◆ People want to learn and work but often feel stuck
 - ◆ Some people need one to one support to get started
 - ◆ Some people have basic skills needs
 - ◆ You can't go straight from the sofa to work
 - ◆ You can't go straight from the sofa to formal learning.
 - ◆ That people have had negative experiences of learning
 - ◆ Believing that you can make a difference to your own world is important.
 - ◆ That training will bring the barriers to work down
 - ◆ That training can raise
 - Self worth
 - Expectations
-

4. Detailed Findings

In this section we will break down some of the key questions for the evaluation and provide some more detailed evidence of the results being achieved by Start Up.

Does the original hypothesis stand up to scrutiny?

The evidence from the evaluation suggest that as a working model the hypothesis does provide a useful start point for thinking about the project and how it should develop in the future.

Through the interviews, survey work and other data sources we believe that we have sufficient evidence to say that the hypothesis has proved to be accurate.

The hypothesis should be used as a touchstone during any re-design or new design phase for the project to ensure that the underpinning values and principles that have been effective are retained.

In particular it will help those designing and implementing a joined up journey for people moving from disadvantage and worklessness in to employment.

Key questions to be answered by the evaluation

- Which customers is Start Up working with and what are they like
- What difference is Start Up making (Outcomes)
- How are they making that difference
- What is its future role

In this next section we will go through each question in turn and provide our conclusions based on the whole range of data we have looked at.

Who is Start Up working with?

Start Up has consistently been able to reach some of the most disadvantaged groups in the NRF areas of the city. This most recent evaluation suggests that they are still achieving this. The one group that Start Up has been least successful in reaching is men.

90% of all Start Up customers are women; this is consistent with the findings from earlier evaluations.

24% of the customers are from the BME community and over 90% of those are women. This exceeds the demographic proportions for the city but does reflect the reality of exclusion for Asian women in particular.

89% of customers from the BME community using Start Up achieved at level 1 or below at school.

75% of customers from the non BME communities using Start Up achieved at level 1 or below at school.

79% of all customers left school with qualifications at level 1 or below.

83% of customers from the BME community using Start Up have not taken part in any training or formal learning since school.

60% of customers from the non BME community have not taken part in any formal training since leaving school.

80% of customers are in the age group 17 to 35.

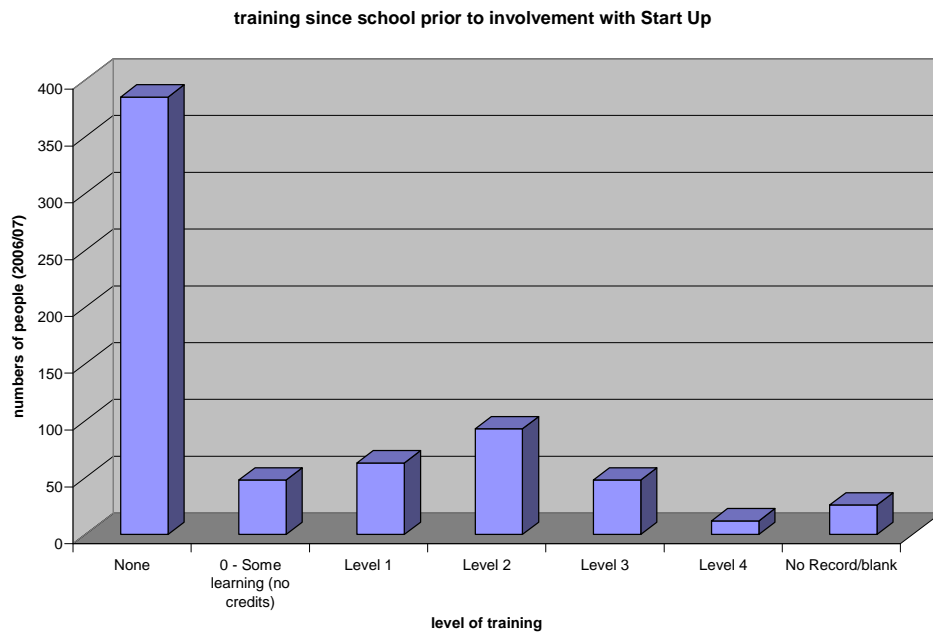
Start Up has a good spread across the 49 NRF priority areas of the city, and as we noted earlier good reach into the Asian community.

There continues to be a strong link between Start Up take up figures and the link to Children's Centres, this is supported by the contextual evidence that in the one area with no children's centre (Middleport) the take up of the project presents a challenge to local support workers.

The evidence from the data collected by the Start Up team as part of their monitoring processes suggests that 59% of all Start Up customers have not been engaged with any formal learning since school.

Graph one shows the level of training since school by numbers of people at each level. The figures are for the period November 06 to October 07.

Graph one

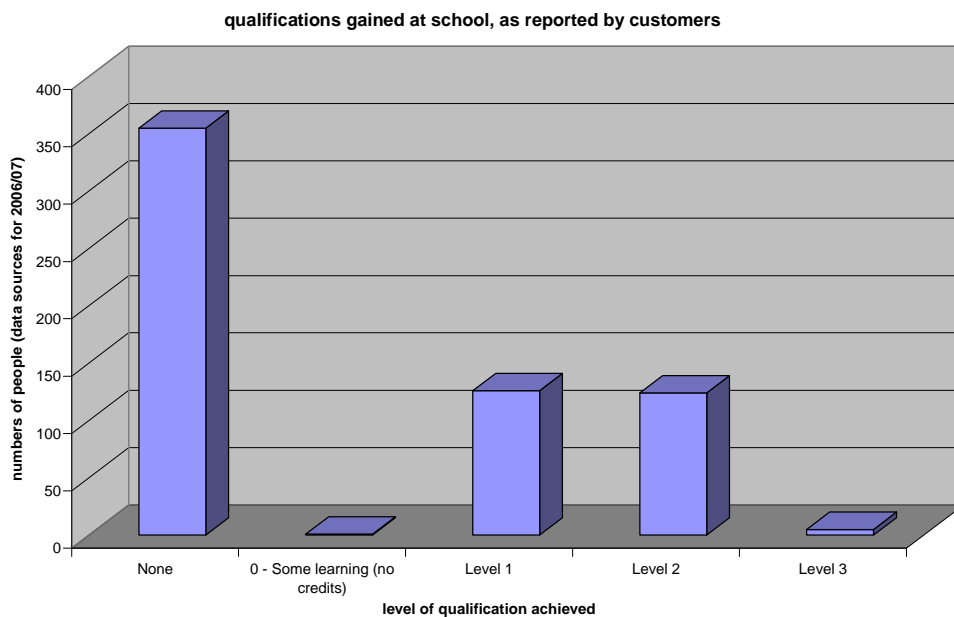


Data source: Start Up data base

This pattern of low uptake of training undertaken since school is most marked in the BME community where 83% of Start Up customers have not done any formal training since school.

Graph two shows the levels of qualifications achieved at school as reported by customers who joined Start Up in the period November 06 to October 07.

Graph two



Data source: Start Up data base

Both the sets of information above suggest that Start Up is reaching into some of the most disadvantaged communities in the area and that they are attracting people with no active involvement with learning since school.

These are the groups of people that Start Up most wanted to reach. At the same time they are also helping those who have done some training since school to re-engage with learning this is a positive bonus for the project.

The Government has set targets for a 40% reduction in the number of adults in the workforce without a level 2 (or equivalent) attainment for literacy.

At the time of reporting 340 customers had taken part in a basic skills assessment and the later data on achievement suggests that Start Up is making a contribution to this Government target.

As a result 85 customers have achieved at entry level 3 Literacy and a further 63 at entry level 3 Numeracy.

What are the barriers to people's involvement in training and work

Overcoming barriers to learning, engagement and finally to work is at the heart of the Start Up project. Key assumptions have been made that most customers of Start Up will need some help in overcoming these barriers.

The feedback from interviews suggests that the majority of customers who have engaged with Start Up have issues with low confidence, poor experiences in the school environment and with low aspirations for their futures.

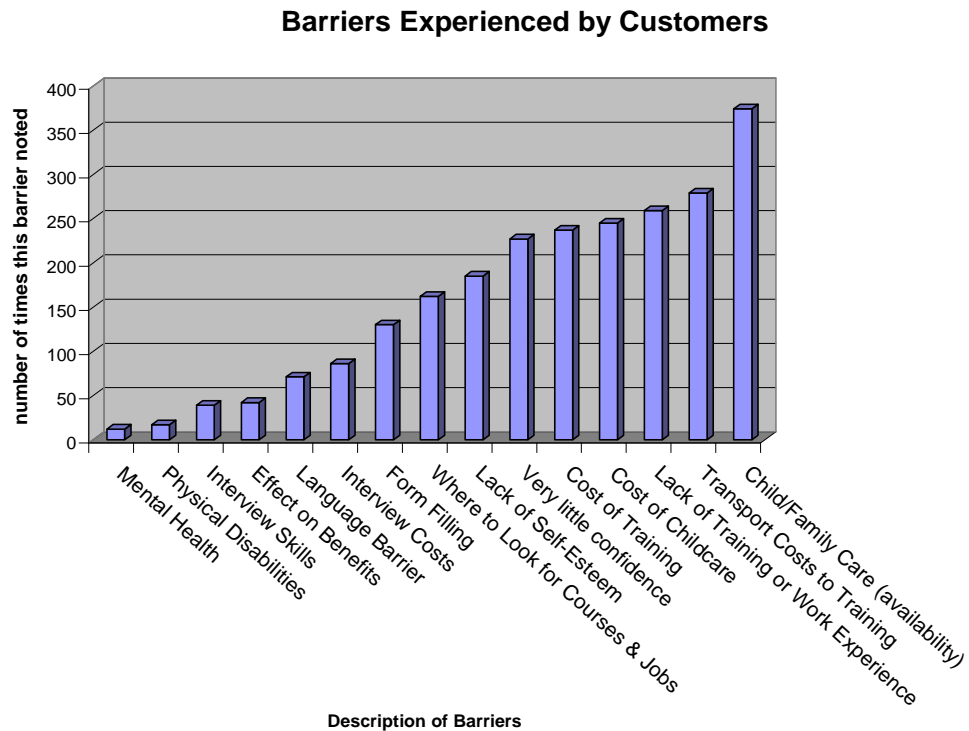
They also face a number of practical barriers such as access to and the cost of child care. Other significant barriers are the cost of training and equally important **lack of training or work experience**.

The evidence from the evaluation is that these assumptions are correct and that customers do almost all face some barriers to re-engaging with learning etc.

The feedback on 'what has worked' suggests that a focus on positive solutions to barriers has been appreciated by customers and has been an effective way of engaging with people who might otherwise not have become involved. **Graph three** below shows the customers assessment of their barriers at the point they began their involvement with Start Up.

A standardised list of barriers is used based on earlier evaluations and research. Each person can choose as many barriers as they think are relevant so the graph should be interpreted as a rating of barriers relative importance to the whole customer group.

Graph three: Barriers to Accessing Learning etc



Data source: Start Up data base and interviews

It is worth noting that there is a slight shift in emphasis and ranking customers give to the different barriers once a person has become involved in Start Up. The data from the interviews suggests that the more fundamental barriers people have to overcome are confidence, low self efficacy and lack of experience. Practical barriers remain a factor but customers appear to be more willing to disclose more of the emotional and social factors that maybe acting as barriers.

Who is Start Up working with?

Our analysis suggests that Start Up continues to work with some of the most disadvantaged groups in the city and that they have been particularly good at making connections with the Asian community in the key areas.

Start Up is working with significant numbers of people who have had no formal training since leaving school and is encouraging people to take up the challenge of mastering basic skills.

Women make up the vast majority of the customers involved with Start Up.

Start Up has worked with the people it set out to engage with and has consistently helped those people to make changes in their lives.

Start Up has also helped a substantial number of people to tackle gaps in their basic skills.

Start up is helping people who face practical and psychological barriers to entering training and work.

Start Up is successfully focusing its efforts on the customer group it is designed and funded to work with.

What difference is Start Up making for people

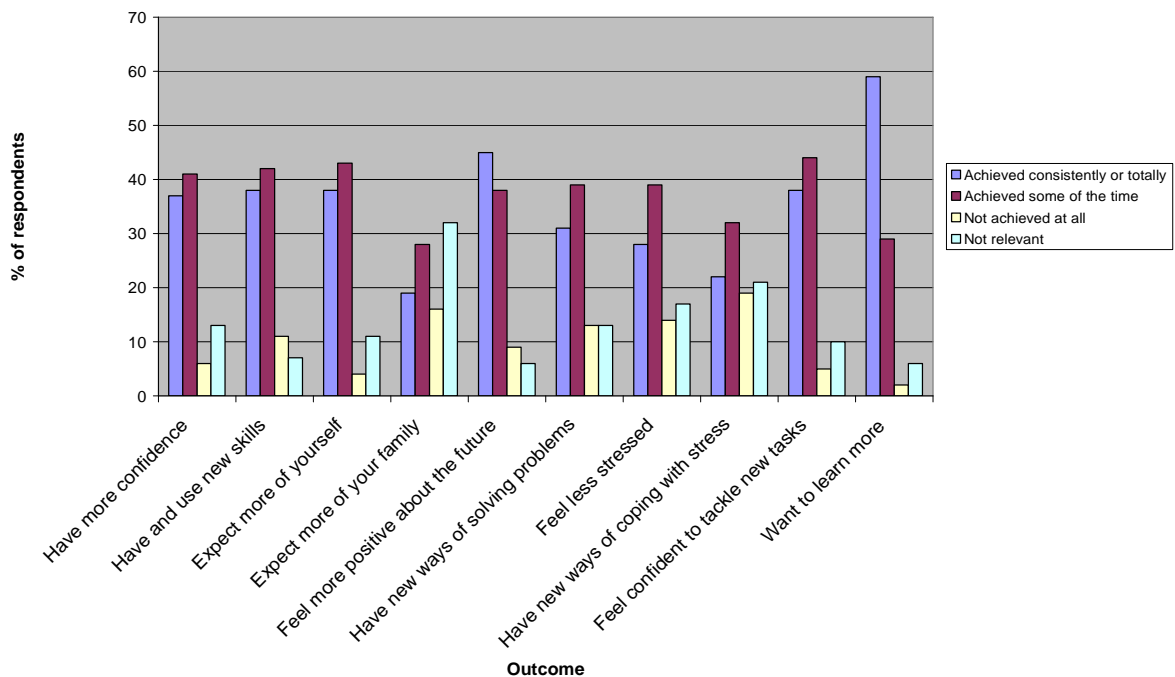
As we noted in the summary Start Up is making a difference for the majority of its customers, and we think that there is enough evidence to suggest that the success is spread across all groups using the project.

We have two measures we have used, reported outcomes by customers and the monitoring data collected by Start Up against the targets set by the funders.

As we noted earlier we have heard from 130 customers, both current and exited.

The graphs below show the responses from current and exited customers, which includes people who have been with Start Up for as little as a few weeks through to those with up to a year with the project.

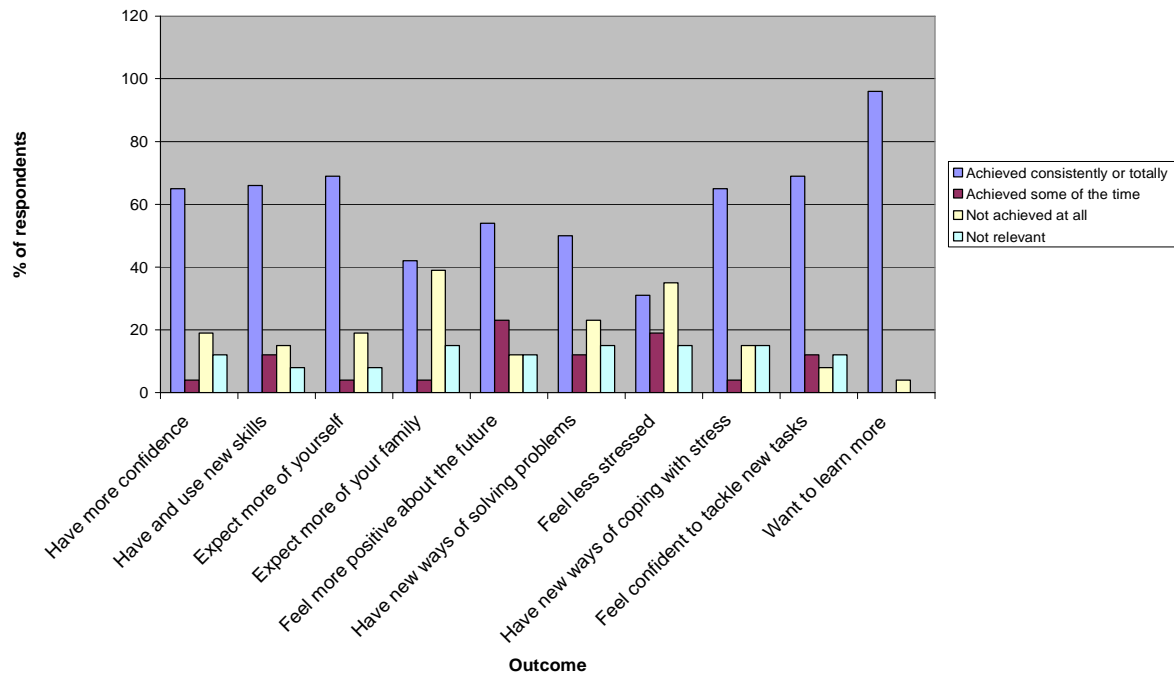
Graph four: Current Customers (December 2007)



Data source: interviews with 102 customers

This graph shows the responses from a sample of customers who have completed their involvement with Start Up.

Graph five: Ex-customers (December 2007)



Data source: interviews with 28 customers

These good results were seen across all the groups of people we spoke to directly or from other survey work undertaken with them. The responses are based on people assessing the difference they have experienced as a result of their involvement with Start Up.

These findings demonstrate good results for customers.

Some highlights worth noting

I have more confidence: all the customers we spoke to are reporting increased confidence, up to 80% saying that they have some substantial change in their levels of self confidence. This outcome is an important precondition of moving into further training, tackling barriers etc.

I have new skills: 76% of exited customers report that they have new skills that they use either consistently or part of the time following their involvement with Start Up. These skills range from new inter personal skills through to language and numeracy skills.

82% of current customers report that they have new skills and are using them either consistently or part of the time. The evidence from the

literature and from practice suggests that being able to master new skills and use them provides a substantial boost to a person's ability to tackle new challenges and situations.

I expect more of myself: 85% of current customers report that they expect more of themselves all or some of the time and 70% of exited customers report that they consistently expect more of themselves following their involvement with Start Up. Some of the literature on aspirations in disadvantaged communities suggests that 'low self expectations' is a major barrier to people creating positive change in their lives.

I feel positive about the future: over 85% of all those who have been involved with Start Up are reporting that they feel more positive about the future. The many comments we received from customers suggest that Start Up has had a major role to play in this change.

I feel confident to tackle new tasks: 80% of exited customers and 85% of current customers report that they feel confident to tackle new tasks all or some of the time. This is an important outcome for those that need to make the shift back into work.

Want to learn more: 92% of current customers and 96% of exited customers expressed the desire to carry on learning and to develop new skills. This is a real success for Start Up and for the customers means that some of them will have completely changed their outlook on learning and their ability to learn.

These last three outcomes are all potentially important outcomes to be achieved by people if the level of aspirations and drive for change are to be both stimulated and then sustained.

There are some differences between the reported results for current and exited clients. In most cases the outcome rating dropping by a small percentage, we believe this reflects two things; firstly that the environment in which people have to sustain these changes e.g. greater confidence is not changing as rapidly as they are and secondly that a small number of the customers may require a top up intervention to help them sustain changes beyond their initial involvement with Start Up.

That the gap between current and exited is usually small (and could be accounted for by variations in the sampling or statistical error) suggests that Start Up is laying the groundwork for sustainable change with its customers.

Distance travelled

The Start Up team has been able to pull together some useful data about some of the achievements of people using Start Up.

Over the period July 2006 to December 2007

- 1031 customers have signed up and engaged with Start Up
- 340 customers have been supported to undertake basic skills assessment
- 519 customers have entered onto some form of taught learning programme or experience; this accounts for 50% of the total number of customers. Of those 300 have completed a non-accredited training programme and a further 219 have completed a course of accredited training.
- 85 customers have achieved at entry level 3 Literacy and a further 63 at entry level 3 Numeracy.
- 135 customers have achieved credits at level 2
- 84 customers have moved through Start Up into sustained employment.

The results above appear to be evenly spread across the customers using Start Up so that we can suggest with confidence that the targets are being achieved with some quite challenging customers.

Targets set by the funders

A full set of the data on targets achieved is available from the Start Up Team and we have used the most up to date data (December 2007) for this report. In the next section we highlight some of the key target monitoring information.

Performance against key targets as at December 2007

Note that the targets are set for the two years from April 2006 to March 2008 so the last quarter of activity is still to be completed.

Target No.	Start-Up Target Description	EDE Reference	Project Target Y1 & 2	Cumulative Yr 1 & 2 to date
Target 1(a)	Clients across the city into employment	EDE 1.1.1 (i)	65	84
Target 1(c)	Clients from BME community into employment	EDE 1.1.3	9	7
Target 1(e)	Clients across the city coming off lone parent benefit	EDE 1.1.9	15	18
Target 2(a)	Clients across the city achieving credits at Level 2	EDE 1.3.1	150	135
Target 2(c)	Clients from BME community across the city achieving credits at Level 2	EDE 1.3.4	16	30
Target 3	Clients across the city achieving credits at Level 1	EDE 1.1.6	60	71

Target No.	Start-Up Target Description	EDE Reference	Project Target Y1 & 2	Cumulative Yr 1 & 2 to date
Target 4a	Clients across the city achieving Entry Level 3 - <u>LITERACY</u>	EDE 1.3.5	80	85
Target 4b	Clients across the city achieving Entry Level 3 - <u>NUMERACY</u>	EDE 1.3.5	60	63
Target 5	Clients engaged on the Start-Up Programme	N/A	1000	1031
Target 6	Clients receiving Advice and Guidance	N/A	1000	1031
Target 7	Clients supported to access Jobcentre Plus Services	N/A	100	100
Target 8	Clients supported into Basic Skills Assessments	N/A	220	340
Target 9	Clients supported into achieving some form of accredited training	N/A	200	219
Target 10	Clients supported into achieving non-accredited training	N/A	0	300
	Referrals to Other Agencies	N/A	20	70
	Referrals From Other Agencies	N/A	20	22

Commentary on the targets and performance

Start Up has performed well against many of the key targets set by the funders. In many cases, and with a whole quarter still to run, targets have been exceeded.

Start Up is making an important contribution to directly helping people into employment; there is some evidence that those moving through Start Up and into employment have made a considerable journey with the help of the project.

Start Up is on track to achieve its target of helping 150 people to achieve credits at level 2. Given the numbers of customers who start their journey with the project with either no qualifications or with credits at level 1 this is an important achievement. (79% have no qualifications above level 1 = 814 people)

We have already noted the success in reaching targets for people achieving at entry level 3 and level 1.

One final target is worthy of mention in the context of explaining how Start Up achieves initial engagement with customers, the relevant target is 'Referrals to Start Up from other agencies'. Start Up has achieved this target of receiving 20 referrals from other agencies.

It could be argued that the relative scale of this target is out of line with the scale of the target for customers who sign up to Start Up (1000) however our analysis suggests that Start Up is able to reach so many customers through low level involvement and through the connection with local services such as the Children's Centres that this provides strong evidence that Start Up **provides one of the early stages or gateways for the journey people make from worklessness through to employment.**

Our analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data suggests that the project does indeed act as an entry point for a significant number of disadvantaged individuals. There is evidence that many existing customers act as a link to people not yet engaged and that word of mouth is an important source of referrals.

What difference is Start Up making for people?

The evidence noted above suggests that Start Up is making a significant difference to the **key outcomes** for people using the project and that these are being sustained once people move out of the project.

Start Up is enabling people to gain new skills and qualifications and in some cases to enter and sustain work.

Start Up has performed well against the specific targets set by the funders.

Customers we spoke to were very positive about their experience with Start Up and the difference it made for them.

Start Up appears to occupy a place at the start of the journey into training and work for numbers of disadvantaged groups.

90% of current and exited customers would recommend Start Up to a friend or family member.

How is it making that difference?

The evidence from both customers and from stakeholders suggests that the assumptions and initial hypothesis about what would work for people has proved to be accurate.

- It starts with a mixture of targeted recruitment, word of mouth referral and low key presence in Children's Centres etc that help those who might be wary of getting involved in training to make a start on their journey into training, formal learning and in some cases work. As we note above the majority of recruitment comes from these routes.
- This is then followed up with a person centred focus on developing relationships, assessing barriers, goals and needs. This in turn helps the support workers to plan a personal approach with each customer.
- The development of the confidence building courses and the existing low level non-formal courses, such as those run with Wedgwood College has added value for customers and helps those with poor experiences of learning to be gently re-introduced to developing new skills etc.
- As the person's journey progresses the support worker continues to provide both practical and emotional/social support to ensure that people stay engaged. This is then used as a platform for setting more challenging goals for the customer. The practical support can vary from directly accompanying a customer through to phone call reminders and sign posting.
- As the person becomes more confident the support lessens and they begin to operate as independent learners where that is possible.
- When it is appropriate the support worker helps the customer to make the transition to another project or more independent learning opportunities e.g. college.

The customers responding to our survey all commented on the importance of the individual relationship with the support worker, the time taken to get to know them and involve them, the time spent building confidence through both informal courses and the one to one attention of support workers.

Many customers noted the sessions at Barlaston College as being both enjoyable and a great confidence boost. The feedback from those taking part in the new confidence building courses, although still at an early stage, suggests that it is already helping to motivate and create change for people.

It appears that the pace of the work with customers which is determined by the customer and therefore not hurried, contributes to the feelings that the customer is important, valued and therefore helps to boost confidence and self worth.

Work on overcoming barriers and sign posting to other services appears to be very important to customers and encourages them to develop trust in the project and its staff. This work can have a non-training element such as a referral to CAB. Our estimate from staff time logs is that as much as **30% of customer contact time can be taken up with non-training support**. However without those interventions it is unlikely that the customer would continue, or in some cases even start, training and learning.

The following are comments taken from the survey work:

‘The support work is brill. I really liked the courses at Wedgwood.’

‘I was stuck in the house and suffering from panic attacks...the involvement in Start Up has helped me to become more confident, meet new friends and become more confident in (my) learning.’

‘The support worker was always there for me. Helped me get into college. Just lots of help and support.’

‘Without Start Up I wouldn’t have any knowledge of the courses that I have been doing.’

‘It helped me by providing information, advice and guidance, support from support worker, working in small groups, meeting with parents in similar circumstances.’

‘The one to one support made me feel comfortable ... having someone who speaks the language has helped a great deal.’

‘Speaking to someone more professional in Start Up, not just a relative, this helped loads.’

‘Start Up helped me by getting on courses that touched on confidence as well as a particular subject.’

‘... by supporting me on a one to one basis. By being non judgmental. With the confidence building course and the teenage mums, this helped me to meet other mums of my own age.’

‘Start Up has helped me with reading and writing which has given me more confidence to try new things in all areas of my life. ... without the Start Up support worker “pushing and nagging” I would not have done anything about reading and writing.’

‘Start Up arranged childcare while I was on a training course. I was worried about meeting other people on the course but felt at ease once I got into the room and started talking to other people. I did not like the last years at school but I now enjoy learning again.’

‘Start Up helped me to open up and be more confident through going on a confidence building course.’

‘Training in small groups helps to build up confidence; there is no pressure to achieve.’

These types of comments were repeated consistently by those people we spoke to or had contact with through the survey work.

We did get a small number of negative comments which highlighted where the things noted above had not happened. These formed less than 5% of the comments we received BUT are still important, firstly as they suggest we had access to a range of experiences which strengthens the positive findings and secondly because those people had a poor experience that needs to be addressed.

Put bluntly for the most part Start Up has a Ronseal effect... ‘it does exactly what it says on the tin’. Customers noted that in almost all cases if workers promised to do something they did it, this was highly prized by customers.

The range of training programmes on offer and the emphasis on helping customers to get the ‘right course’ at the start of their involvement is also a potentially crucial factor in creating positive outcomes for customers. In essence the approach is loaded in favour of the customer being successful as a crucial first stage in their development.

In the last evaluation customers suggested that Start Up run more courses, the management team have worked with local providers to set up new confidence building and goal setting courses which are proving to be very popular.

Factors contributing to success

The project and its staff have a substantial presence at Children’s Centres and make regular contact with new customers through informal sessions and word of mouth referral at these venues.

All the workers are **proactive in engaging with people**, this is reported by both customers, stakeholders with direct experience of working with Start Up and by staff.

Support workers are proactive in sustaining contact with customers and providing practical help.

Support workers in all areas have developed links with other service providers which help with informal customer recruitment. In many cases there are very strong links in to the Children's Centres and good working relationships with key partners.

There are strong links with training providers ranging from Workers Educational Association (WEA) through to College in the Community.

The Start Up management team has worked with support work staff and with new colleagues at the YMCA to develop a robust and consistent framework of supervision and training for staff which is beginning to pay dividends.

The provision of the new confidence building and goal setting courses appears to be making an early contribution to success.

The recent establishment of a customer forum across the project has enabled Start Up to receive feedback and new ideas in a systematic way, already ideas generated from these sessions are being developed into training and product ideas.

Although not universally popular with support workers the new senior posts are introducing consistency in terms of case management, a coherent customer journey and maximising staff time.

Recommendations from past evaluations have been reviewed and implemented in a thorough and appropriate fashion. This and other evidence suggests that Start Up is a 'learning organisation' and that its prospects for development and continual improvement are strong if funding can be secured.

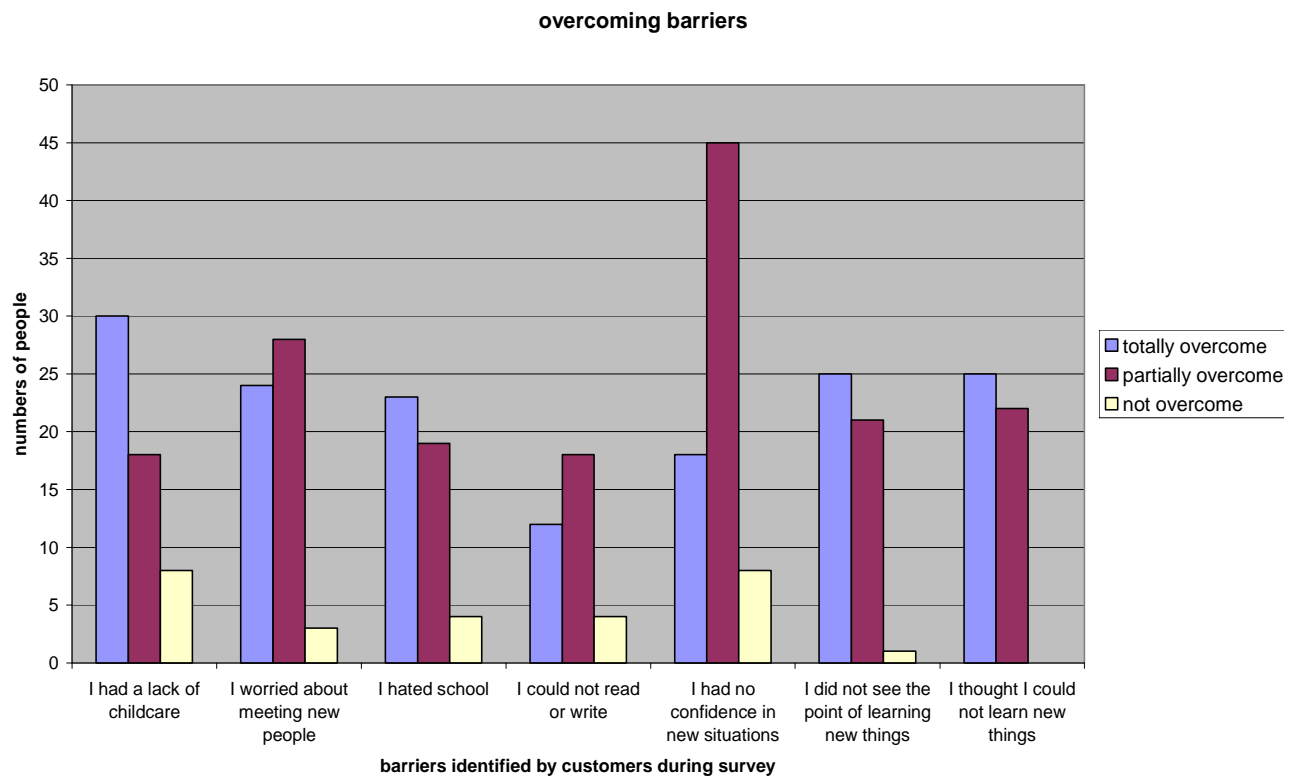
The link to the YMCA has provided a good strategic fit, more on this specific area later in the report, which appears to have given the management team confidence to make strategic links with the City Council and others.

The management structure of the YMCA now provides a robust framework for Start Up.

Overcoming barriers to engagement remains central to the projects success Graph six below highlights customer feedback on the key barriers they identify and how the success the project is having in over coming them.

The graph shows the customers current assessment of how well they have overcome the barriers that are or were relevant to them. Each set of columns does not add up to the full sample of 100 respondents because not all respondents to the survey thought that any given barrier related to them, this not applicable category has been left out of the graph.

Graph six



Data source: interviews with current customers (sample size 100)

The graph and the data suggest that the subtler barriers of experience, confidence etc are being successfully overcome with the help of Start Up. The feedback from customers suggests that the new confidence building course and the less formal training opportunities are an essential part of this process of overcoming barriers at the start of a person's journey with Start Up.

How is Start Up making a difference?

The message is relatively simple and the hypothesis at the start is born out by the evidence from customers and staff. Building relationships, being trustworthy, starting at the point the customer wants to start at and dealing with things that get in the way of learning such as child care, debt etc.

'Keep it simple and do what you say you will do.'

Successful work with people to overcome their barriers to engagement including those that might be regarded as non-training issues or barriers.

The links at operational and strategic level are now beginning to pay dividends in terms of opportunities for customers both as individuals and as a whole.

Start Up is good at reflecting, learning and creating change which promotes continual improvement.

Stakeholders comments worthy of note

We have mentioned stakeholder comments as we have gone through the evaluation report, however it is worth noting some specific issues raised by stakeholders in the short section below.

As part of the evaluation we spoke to a number of stakeholders from a range of organisations, WEA, College in the Community, elected members, strategic partners etc. Consistently people we spoke to were positive about the impact Start Up has on the lives of the customers who use it.

Many of the stakeholders with an operational link to Start Up commented on the high quality of the contribution the Start Up management team makes to local partnerships and their willingness to 'get things done' and to be innovative.

A number of these same people were also very complimentary about the work they experience support workers doing with individual customers. Most commonly people commented on the level and high quality of the one to one support offered, which meant that customers turned up for courses and completed courses etc. This was contrasted with other providers where course sustainability was often an issue.

Lastly a number of stakeholders commented on Start Up's potential role in the newly developed 'journey model' being developed across the City. In particular its potential to keep its focus on the most disadvantaged and to act as the start point or gateway for many people who would otherwise miss out on opportunities for learning, change and work.

The shift to the YMCA

Since the last full evaluation Start Up has become part of the North Staffordshire YMCA network of services. Our assessment of the impact is based on observation, stakeholder and staff comments.

It appears that the move to the YMCA has provided the management team with the opportunity and framework to review and change day to day practice, e.g. the operation of supervision, setting up new courses etc. This may have occurred anyway but our assessment is that the YMCA has enabled this to be speeded up as part of its own development programme, e.g. the customer journey work.

Stakeholders in the City have a positive view of the YMCA and commented that they felt Start Up fitted well with the emerging raft of services being provided through the new YMCA Community Training and YMCA networks. For some this increased their confidence in the sustainability of Start Up.

The move to the YMCA has been a positive one which the Start Up team has made the most of.

Future role for Start Up

We have mentioned this on a number of occasions throughout the report but it is worth a final comment.

Start Up has fulfilled a unique role for some of the most disadvantaged communities in the city, in particular for women with young children. It has been successful with women from the BME communities in a way few other local projects have been.

As a more coherent approach is being developed to helping a wide range of people in Stoke on Trent into work, often for the first time, Start Up could continue to play a crucial role for these marginalised groups of people.

As a gateway or start point the project has demonstrated and achieved good outcomes for customers, has ensured that these outcomes are sustainable for many people and has helped to raise aspirations. Start Up has a tried and tested approach which helps people to overcome some of the subtler barriers to engagement e.g. confidence, low aspiration etc.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Overall conclusions

Start Up has made significant changes for people and helped them to move back into education, improve their sense of well being and laid the ground work for people to enter the work place. Customers report that they are achieving and sustaining very important outcomes in their journey into training and work.

Start up has achieved, or is on the way to achieving, all of its funders key targets and has been highly successful in reaching out to groups of people in marginalised communities. Its work with Asian women is of particular note.

Start Up has demonstrated the value of its approach and the hypothesis they developed their work from has proved to be a workable model for the project.

Customers have valued the role Start Up has played for them and have particularly valued the way in which Start Up has taken their needs seriously.

Stakeholders value the contribution Start Up makes both operationally and strategically.

Start Up occupies a unique role in the city as a gateway for some of the most disadvantaged groups in the community and could form an integral part of the 'journey' model being developed across the City partnerships.

The move to the YMCA has been a positive one.

The key questions for the evaluation:

- Which customers is Start Up working with

As we note above Start Up has reached into the BME community successfully and has made contact with mostly women in some of the most deprived areas of the city. 79% of all customers left school with qualifications at level 1 or below. At least 60% of Start Up customers have done no formal training or learning since leaving school.

Men are still the minority of customers for the project and this has shifted little in the last few years. This reflects the nature of the local links made by Start Up through Children's Centres and its close historical connection to Sure Start.

- What difference is Start Up making (Outcomes)

Start Up is helping significant numbers of customers to achieve key outcomes and supporting people into training and in a small number of cases into work. Customers report improvement in confidence, raised aspirations and a desire to take on new challenges. For example the 96% of exited customers who want to go on to further training.

- How are they making that difference

Start Up has maintained an approach which is based on a supportive and hands on style. Encouraging the customer to share their concerns and barriers and dealing with barriers across a wide range of areas for example from referrals to CAB through to direct support to access training. The approach could be characterised as 'starting where the customer is' and working with the issues they raise as a way into learning and work.

The easy access to Start Up and its local presence means that it acts as a gateway for many people who would otherwise not get involved in training.

Start Up's original hypothesis was that customers needed a range of support, often not directly related to learning or training, in order to get the most from their learning opportunities. This could be related to our understanding of motivation for change. This original hypothesis seems to be born out by the evidence from customers.

The barriers customers experience prior to their involvement with Start Up have not changed significantly from the first evaluation and remain childcare, cost of training etc. Our direct contact with customers suggests that subtler barriers also exist such as low confidence, fear of trying new things and poor experience in school. This information is important in terms of the future development of a journey model for people in the city.

Recommendations

Given the current phase of development the nature of the recommendations focus on the future of the project rather than on specific operational developments:

- Start Up continue to play a key role in the development and implementation of the emerging 'journey model'
- Start Up carries out a specific evaluation of the new confidence building and goal setting courses they are running
- Start Up continues to operate within the framework of the YMCA network

- Start Up considers how its services could be extended to promote the engagement of men in the learning and work journey
- More work needs to be done using the new data base to develop a data set which can provide robust information on the cost to result for key customer groups.

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January 2008

Appendix 1 Methodology; brief outline

This is a brief outline of the methodological approach taken for the evaluation; more information is available on the methodology by contacting MWB Consultancy directly.

We used a mixture of types of data for the evaluation to provide some 'triangulation' for the findings. This approach of using qualitative and quantitative data is a well tried and respected methodology for projects like Start Up.

We opted to use a range of survey techniques with the customers, some of which were more successful than others. Building on the initial evaluation we developed the following approaches:

- Direct interviews with customers
- Follow up interviews with ex-customers

In total we were able to survey over 130 people (representing over 10% of the total current customers at the time we carried out the study). We worked with the Start Up team to develop a stratified sample of customers so that we heard from a representative mix of customers.

The direct interviews with customers were carried out by the support workers. This is not ideal but it allows for a greater number of direct interviews to be carried out in a relatively short period of time. There are clearly issues about the willingness of customers to share any negative experiences with staff from the programme.

In order to minimise this we worked with Start Up by; firstly ensuring that support workers interviewed people they had not had contact with previously, by providing training for the support workers in using the interview tool and thirdly by developing an interview tool and script which emphasised the need for Start Up to hear both positive and negative things about the service.

We also designed a simple telephone interview schedule which we used directly with customers who had finished working with Start Up. The Start Up team organised the data base from which we randomly chose and interviewed exited customers.

This range of approaches provided a sound basis for making judgements about the qualitative elements of the evaluation.

The Start Up management team was able to provide us with substantial amounts of data, not all of which is shown in the report. They also took a key role in facilitating the survey work, their help has been invaluable.

Quantitative data was taken mostly from the Start Up data base which provided us with a wide range of data from ethnicity to levels of training since school.

We are confident that the mix of data sources and the range of data we accessed has provided us with a consistent and clear picture of the work of Start Up.