



County Kildare
LEADER PARTNERSHIP



Ag tacú le daoine óga
atá faoi mhíchumas barr
a gcumais a bhaint amach
Supporting young people
with disabilities
reach their potential

Ability

2020

Kildare Ability Programme

Interim Review Report October 2020

1.0 Introduction

The Kildare Ability Programme (KAP) is one of 27 such programmes nationwide that focus on bringing young people with disabilities between the ages of 15 and 29 closer to the labour market. Funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020, the programme targets young people who are not currently work ready. Using a range of person-centred supports, it seeks to identify and deliver progression routes into education, training and employment tailored to participant capacity and need.

Funded from July 1st, 2018 to July 1st, 2021, Ability has an overall national budget of up to €16m which is administered by Pobal. The objectives of the programme are to:

- Assist young people with disabilities to develop the confidence and independence required to participate in education, training, and employment.
- Support young people with disabilities who are not in education, employment, or training to access and participate in same.
- Build the capacity of mainstream employment services and education, and training providers to support the progression of young people with disabilities.
- Build the capacity of employers to recruit and retain young people with disabilities within their workforce.

1.1 Background

County Kildare Leader Partnership (CKLP), the Kildare Ability Programme (KAP) Implementer is one of over fifty local development companies in Ireland with responsibility for the delivery of a range of Rural, Enterprise, Social Inclusion and Community Development Initiatives across County Kildare. With a mission to “facilitate individuals and communities to participate fully in social, economic and cultural activity by supporting a vibrant and inclusive society in County Kildare.” CKLP through initiatives such as the Rural Development Programme (LEADER) and the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) seek to empower local communities to improve their quality of life.

The funding application for the KAP in 2017-2018 was informed by a comprehensive consultation and planning phase with all key stakeholder organisations involved in the education, training, and employment of young people in the County. This process identified young people aged 16-19 with a disability as the target group for the KAP. This was based on stakeholder experience of the dearth of services available for this cohort which inhibited their capacity to achieve positive outcomes through lack of referral or onward progression options.

“We felt that this grouping aged 16-19 with a disability were being lost, even if they were completing the Leaving Cert, options were limited in terms of further education & progression and lack of tailored support” (Stakeholder)

With a county wide remit and its commitment to working inclusively and collaboratively, CKLP was identified through the consultation and planning process as the agency best positioned to implement the programme. CKLP set up a steering committee (all of whom were involved in the consultation and planning) to guide the implementation of the KAP, consisting of, the Health Service Executive (HSE), KARE, Employability Kildare, National Learning Network, (NLN), Kildare & Wicklow Education & Training Board, (KWETB), St. John of God's, Local Employment Services Network, DEASP, Kildare Sports Partnership and the Youth Advocate for the county.

The steering committee had a clear mandate to provide oversight to the KAP in its work to engage young people across the county aged between 16-19 with an injury, illness or disability who were not engaging with education, training or employment and had challenges engaging with other services.

As the KAP programme enters into its final year of delivery in the current funding phase, CKLP as the programme implementer are commissioning a review to identify the impact, progression, and key learnings to date. The conclusions and recommendations from the review will contribute to the implementation and continuous improvement of the Ability programme in the future. Business Improvement Solutions (BIS) were successful in the procurement process for this review and commenced the assignment in July 2020.

1.2 Evaluation Methodology

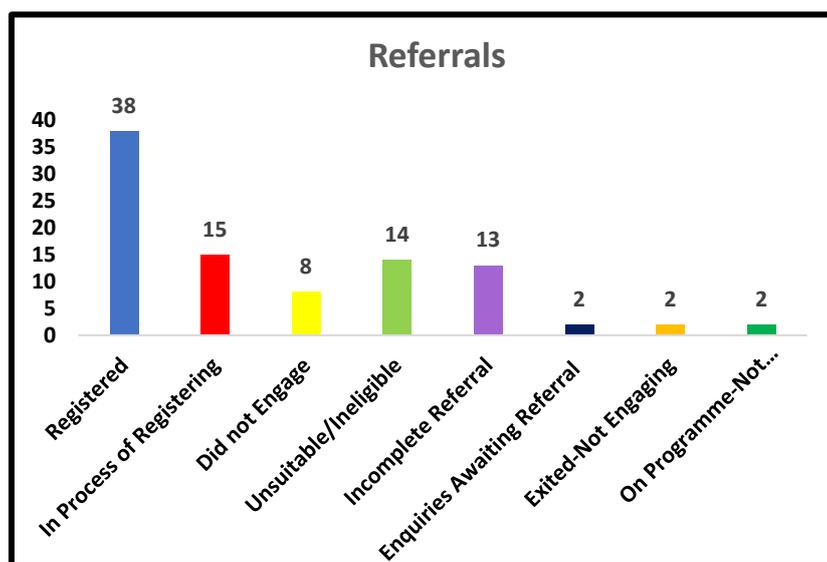
The methodology adopted by BIS to meet the terms of reference for this evaluation included:

- A desk review process to develop a deeper understanding of the Kildare Ability Programme.
- Analysis of the collected data from the Pobal tracking system on the number of interventions and courses undertaken by the participants.
- Review of impact/outcome data collated by the national programme evaluator to evidence participant and stakeholder impact.
- The design a consultation framework customised to each stakeholder group to capture the qualitative data necessary to evidence the impact and learning for each group. The framework including a questionnaire and additional theme- based questions.
- Semi-structured 1-1 engagement and questionnaire survey with 13 programme participants and 9 parents.
- Semi-structured 1-1 engagement with 5 referral agencies (Tusla, An Garda Siochana, Kildare Youth Service, HSE & HALO).
- Semi-structured 1-1 engagement with 10 steering group member organisations (CKLP, NLN, KARE, Employability Kildare, KWETB, St. John of God's, Local Employment Services Network, DEASP, Kildare Sports Partnership and the County Kildare Youth Advocate.
- Semi-structured engagement with two external contractors for the Kildare Ability Programme.
- Thematic analysis of the data.
- A succinct final report to meet all the terms of reference for the evaluation with findings and recommendations for consideration in the final phase of the programme.

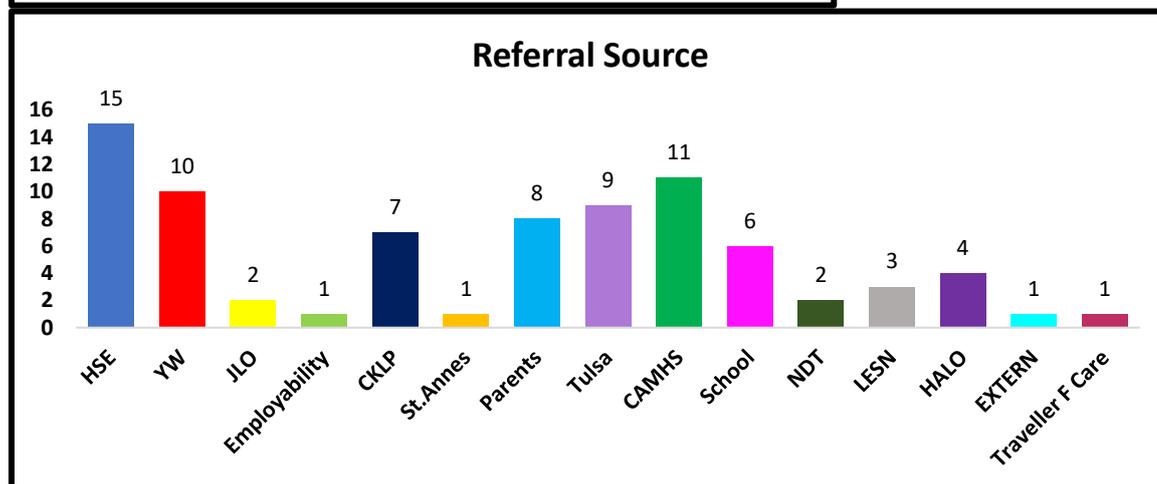
2.0 The Kildare Ability Programme 2018-2020

With funding approval secured in July 2018, the immediate subsequent months were focussed on staff and participant recruitment, steering group formation and the wider promotion of the programme across County Kildare. The recruitment for the Programme Coordinator was successful with the post holder in place by October 2018. However, the recruitment for the Project Worker despite many attempts was challenging and the post was not filled until August 2020. To mitigate this, the project coordinator had to assume the duties of the project worker in relation to the recruitment and assessment of participants and their on-going case management. The first participants commenced the programme in January 2019.

2.1 Programme Recruitment



As at September 2020, 53 participants are registered on the KAP or in the process of being so with some in the early stage of engagement. Referrals are continuing to come in and the age profile is becoming younger. Just over 15% of referrals have been deemed unsuitable or ineligible. Anyone in this category is offered guidance and support to access suitable services.

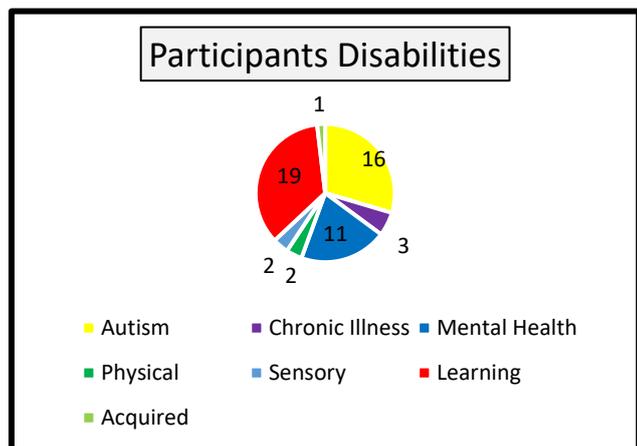


HSE Disability Services, Youth Work and Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services are the most frequent referrers to the programme. Of note is the low number of referrals from disability organisations which would support the finding that most KAP participants were not accessing any tailored disability supports prior to the KAP.

2.2 Participant Profile

This section will profile the participants on the programme in the period up to and including September 2020. A total of 40 participants have engaged with the programme in this period of which 28 were male and 12 females. 50% were aged 17 on commencement of the programme, with 22% aged 16 & 18 respectively and 6% aged 19.

2.2.1 Disability



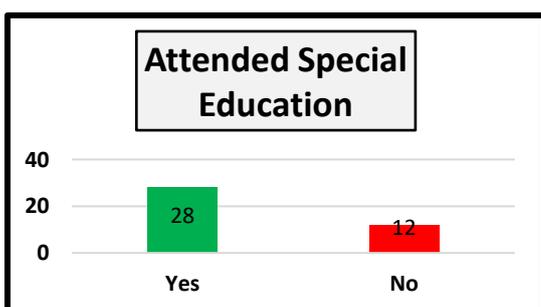
Autism, learning difficulties and mental health related diagnosis were the three most common disabilities presenting in the need's assessment. Participants can identify more than one disability during this process. This diagnosis is verified by a letter from a GP or consultant. In addition to having a disability, the qualifying criteria for the KAP states that participants must meet at least one of the following requirements.

- Be in receipt of a disability allowance, invalidity pension or illness benefit for more than 3 months.
- Be an existing service user or client of a disability organization that has the Ability Programme.
- Be referred by organisations or services that support people with disabilities in one of the 27 Ability Programmes nationwide.

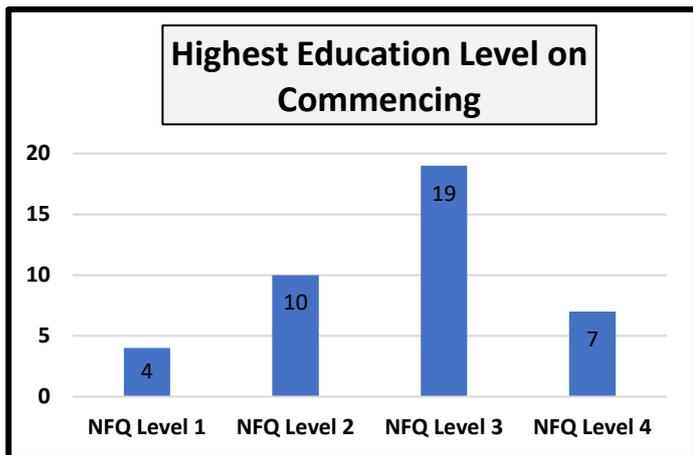
Engaging with young people around their disability has been challenging. Many of those referred to the KAP do not identify with their disability and therefore do not want to engage in services linked to disability services organisations. Many young people on the programme have hidden disabilities and mask these very well, presenting as "very street wise and capable young people, however they struggle to engage in any service".

Furthermore, while participants may not self identify as having mental health issues, most of the young people on the programme struggle to maintain positive mental health. This often results in significant secondary difficulties such as low self- esteem in addition to their primary diagnosis.

2.2.2 Education



In excess of two thirds of young people supported by KAP either attended a special education school or participated in a special education class at secondary school. Parents and other contributors to the review indicated that the participants who attended special education did not fully engage and found it to be ineffective.



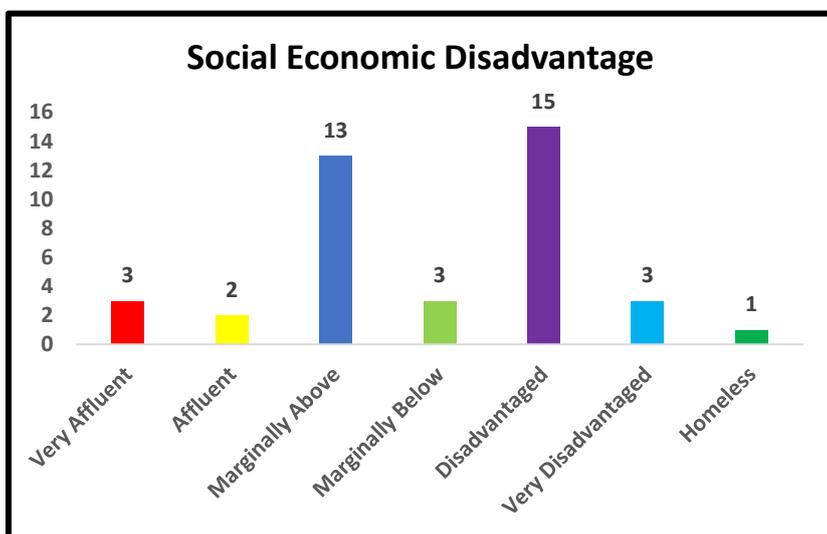
The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) is a system of ten levels. Each level is based on nationally agreed standards of knowledge, skill, and competence.

These standards help define what an individual is expected to know, understand and be able to do following successful completion of a process of learning. The State Examinations Commission (SEC) makes school awards.

These include the Junior Certificate (NFQ Level 3) and the Leaving Certificate (NFQ Level 4 and 5).

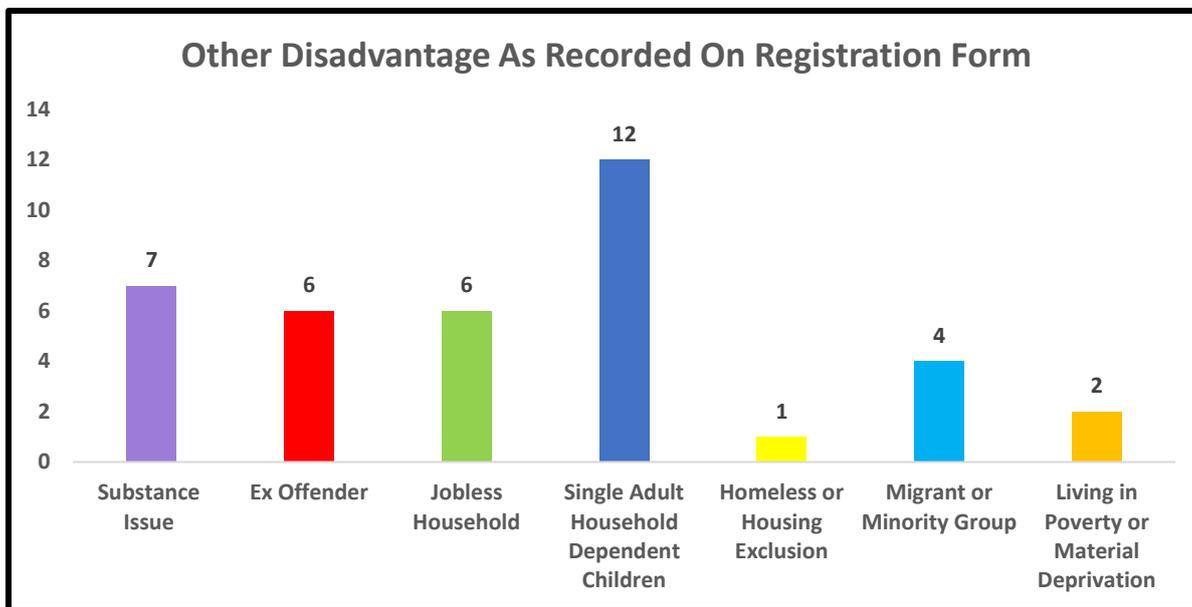
Just under 50% of KAP participants are educated to Junior Certificate or equivalent. In excess of one third are educated below Level 3. Numeracy and literacy issues are prevalent for many participants.

2.2.3 Socio-economic classification



Overall, the socio-economic profile of participants is disadvantaged with 55% from areas that are marginally below average, disadvantaged or very disadvantaged as per the 2016 Pobal HP Deprivation Index which is underpinned by data from the 2016 Census.

33% are from areas classified as marginally above average with 12 % from areas that are affluent or very affluent.

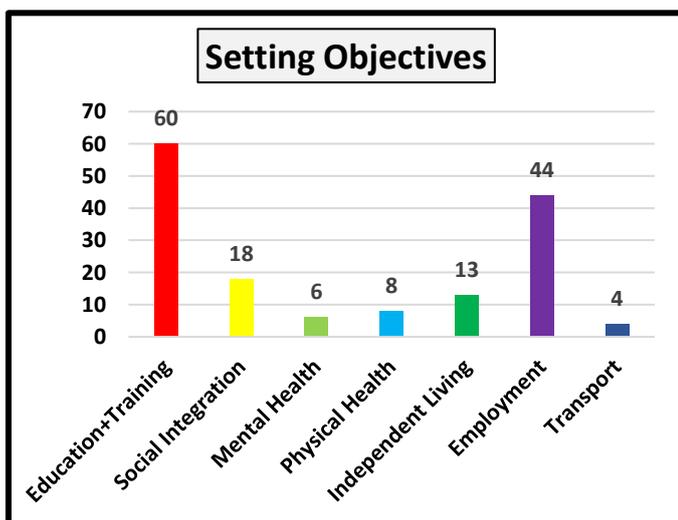


The analysis of other disadvantage indicators from the registration forms reveals that participants who are dependent children in a single adult household is the most frequently reported indicator. Participants from jobless households is also a common indicator as are substance misuse issues, offending behaviour and being from a migrant or minority group.

2.3 Programme outputs

This section will explore the key programme outputs in the period up to and including September 2020.

2.3.1 Setting Objectives



The KAP was underpinned from the outset by a person - centred approach, co-designing tailored support with participants to identify and achieve their objectives and goals.

Given the barriers to progression such as disability and poor educational attainment, support planning to facilitate objective setting was not a linear process.

Frequently there was a considerable amount of time required to build the relationship and the trust necessary to facilitate engagement on what they wanted to achieve from the Ability Programme.

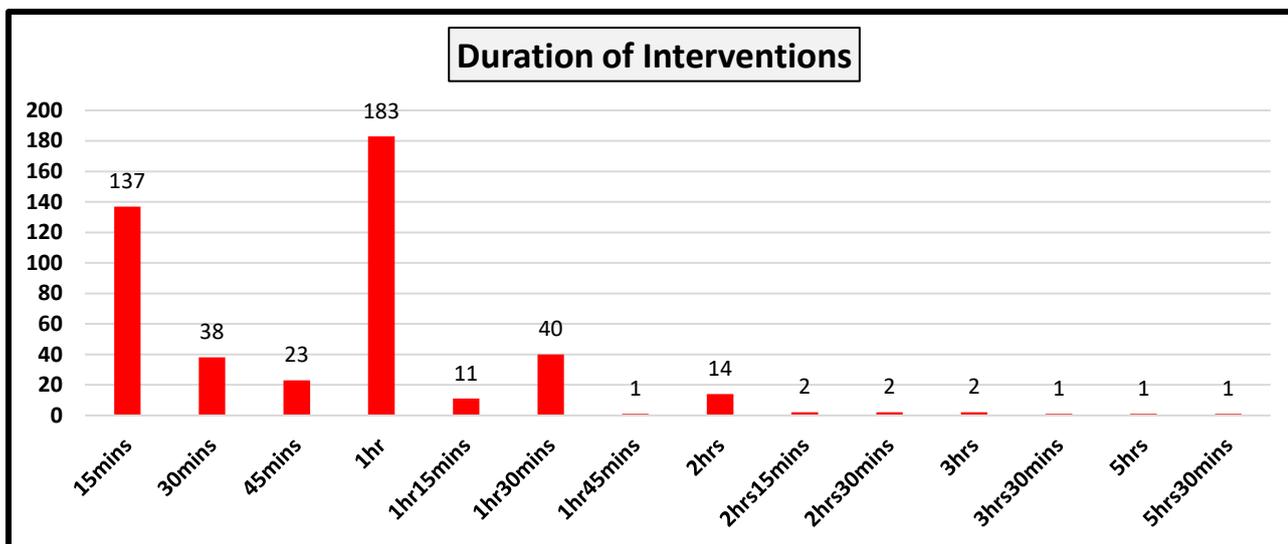
Two thirds of the objectives set by participants related to education, training, or employment while the remainder were related to social integration, independent living and health and well-being.

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2.3.2 Interventions

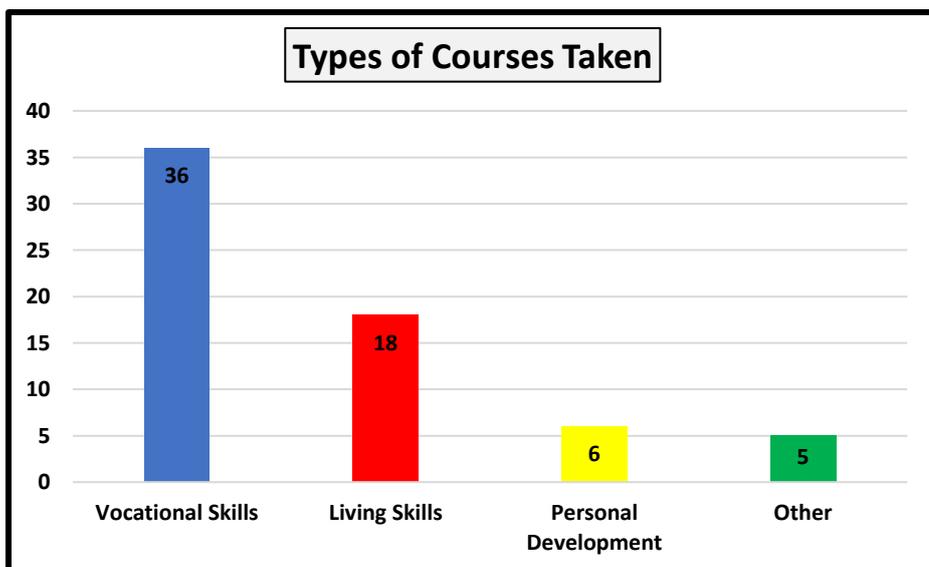
Each face-to-face engagement with a participant is recorded as an intervention.

The total number of interventions was 457, ranging in duration from 15 minutes to in excess of 5 hours. 40% of the interventions lasted for at least one hour.



We would also highlight the additional work outside of these interventions. The statistics only represent face to face meetings with young people. A lot of phone calls and parental support is not represented in this data. The current system does not allow tracking of family supports offered.

2.3.3 Courses taken



57% of courses completed by participants were vocational, it is noteworthy that 43% related to living and personal development indicating that participants required interventions in these areas prior to considering a vocational option.

2.3.4 Progression & Impact

The Ability Programme recognises that for participants to progress in education, training, or employment, they must possess or acquire the requisite level of confidence, motivation, resilience, communication skills and independence to sustain on this pathway.

This is evident from the data in section 2.2.1 where 33% of the objectives agreed as part of participants support plans were not directly related to education, training, or employment.

The national programme evaluator for the 27 Ability Programmes nationwide designed a data collection tool to evidence progression in the areas referenced above.

A sample of 15 KAP participants completed a questionnaire to provide a baseline score in each of these areas at commencement of the programme.

After engagement with the programme for 1 year, 13 out of the original sample of 15 completed a similar questionnaire to measure progression in the same areas

This data set was made available to this review and the key findings were

- 100% of the sample (n =13) reported a positive progression in 2 or more of the 5 indicators of increased confidence.
- 100% of the sample (n =13) reported a positive progression in 2 out of the 3 indicators of enhanced goal setting.
- 100% of the sample (n =13) reported a positive progression in 2 out of the 3 indicators of motivation and resilience.
- 100% of the sample (n =13) reported a positive progression in 2 or more of the 5 indicators of improved communication.
- 100% of the sample (n =13) reported a positive progression in 2 or more of the 4 indicators of increased independence.

Qualitative feedback on progression and impact for participants is explored further in the stakeholder feedback presented in Section 3.

2.3.5 Key Performance Indicators (KPI'S)

Table 1 provides an overview of the KAP against the programme KPI's

Output/outcome	Target	Actual
No of young people participating in work preparation initiatives	25	38
No of employers worked with	180 ¹	20
No of service providers supported	10	10
No of young people engaged in job searching	20	14
No of young people in accredited training	10	7
No of young people engaged in volunteering	10	1
No of young people in part time employment (less than 8 hours)	5	2
No of young people in part time employment (more than 8 hours)	5	1
No of young people in/awaiting return to full time education	N/A	9

Table 1 Kildare ability Programme Key Performance Indicators

3.0 Participant Engagement

This section presents the feedback from the consultations with 13 participants carried out throughout August and September 2020 using a mix of semi-structured interview and questionnaire survey. The programme of engagement was agreed in advance with the KAP Coordinator and due to COVID, all consultations were undertaken remotely either by video platform or telephone.

A number of subheadings are identified within the participant feedback and within these are thematic overviews of the consultation findings. We have included quotation marks to identify verbatim quotations from participants which represents their views and not those of the evaluators.

3.1 Disengaged from Services

¹ This figure relates to the number of employers who have been engaged with through the recent needs' assessment questionnaire.

Respondents found out about the KAP from one or a combination of the following sources, HSE, Youth Services, Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Social Worker, DEASP or Social Media.

Most reported that since leaving school, they had not engaged with any education or youth- based service. For some who had reached aged 18 and were previously engaging with CAMHS, the transition to Adult Mental Health Services was challenging with a number indicating that they were currently awaiting formal assessment.

The KAP offered a pathway back into education or training and crucially for some participants, the Ability Programme met them where they were at in life.

“I hadn’t done anything since leaving school, and the longer this went on, the more isolated I was becoming, I was struggling to come out of my bedroom. The first few meetings with Laura took place in my home, gradually I came out of myself and met Laura in the Centre. This was a big thing for me, but it helped me

3.2 Transformational

Participants referenced the KAP as being transformational particularly where there were challenging mental health issues. Having someone working with them at their own pace who was non- judgemental and sensitive to their thoughts, emotions and personal challenges facilitated a relationship that was based on trust and mutual understanding.

With this established, participants were able to engage positively with the programme and challenge themselves in areas where previously they did not feel capable.

“Everything is done at my pace in the programme. If I don’t feel up to something on a certain day, then we would park it and come back to it at another time. I have done the Safe Pass course and along with the CV development I am starting to believe that I can get a job in construction.” *(Participant)*

3.3 Structured Pathway

With being out of education and training for a period of time, for some participants getting an idea of a pathway towards progression in employability was an important milestone. The starting point for many was engaging with the KAP about what they would like to do, followed by receiving information and advice on the options available to help them make decisions. Participants highlighted that they had not received this type of one-to-one support in any previous education or training environment.

“I had done some career guidance at school, but it always felt like just going through the motions. For the first time in my life through the Ability programme, I had a two-way conversation about what I was interested in and what I wanted to do. I did the First Aid, CV and Manual Handling and this gave me a good foundation of confidence, I have enrolled for a PLC starting in late September.”

(Participant)

3.4 Enhanced Confidence

Building the confidence of participants is an important factor in sustaining on an employment programme. Many participants due to previous negative experiences of education and services or traumatic life events presented with very low confidence and self-esteem at commencement of the programme. Section 2.2.4 reported increased confidence levels for a sample of KAP participants from the national evaluation. This trend of increased confidence continued through our engagement with participants who reported that feeling listened to, having their opinion valued and having someone that believed in them were critical catalysts for increased confidence.

“I didn’t get great results at school; my confidence was pretty low, and I felt that courses and a job was beyond me. I went into the Ability programme with no big hope for what I could get out of it. However, as I got more involved in it and did more things, my confidence started to increase. The big thing for me was feeling listened to and having someone that believed in me enough to put me onto the courses such as Manual Handling and First Aid.” *(Participant)*

3.5 Increased Motivation & Resilience

Progression towards employability for young people with a disability is not a linear process and there are many challenges along the way to be overcome. Hence, having the motivation to sustain on this journey and the resilience to withstand setbacks and overcome challenges is essential. The KAP combines vocational interventions with living skills and a personal development programme with a focus on goal setting and building resilience. Participants reported increased capacity to identify and set clear goals in addition to increased motivation and resilience (See Section 2.2.4) They now feel much better equipped and empowered to cope with a training or employment-based environment in the knowledge that they have access to on-going support and guidance from the KAP.

“Laura has made this about me from the start and I feel motivated to see it through to the end. My goal is to get a job and I know that there will be many problems for me to overcome but I feel up to the challenge. Knowing that Laura is there for any assistance is great and this helped me a lot during lockdown.”
(Participant)

3.6 Improved Communication Skills

Many young people with a disability may struggle to communicate effectively, this may be a direct clinical consequence of their disability (learning, disability, autism) or it may be related to associated issues such as low self-esteem. The tailored person-centred interventions of the KAP are designed to assist participants to improve their communication skills in a vocational and social environment. This includes one to one communication, with the key worker to set objectives and participation in a group environment to enhance social integration. Participants reported feeling more comfortable talking about their hopes and aspirations. Nonverbal communication skills such as listening and the sensitivity around raising a problem or concern has also improved.

“I had become withdrawn and had lost touch with friends, when I started the Ability Programme, I had to communicate with people, or it would have been no benefit to me. I started off talking about what I wanted to achieve, and I became more comfortable talking about myself and this helped me in the group stuff”
(Participant)

3.7 Greater Independence

Feeling more confident with increased motivation and resilience allied to improved communication skills combined to make participants feel more independent. On a practical level, participants reported being able to, travel on their own, be on time for courses and events, dress appropriately for whatever the occasion and learn new skills. Consequently, participants were less reliant on family and friends which they felt improved these relationships.

“Getting out of the house and having to be on time helped to take me out of my comfort zone. I found that I could arrange transport, organise myself to be on time and make up my own mind about how to dress. Learning new skills such as CV, preparing for interviews and volunteering has made me feel more independent. I am less reliant on my parents, family and friends and I am getting on better with them” *(Participant)*

3.8 Mental Health & COV-ID 19

Mental health issues were prevalent for many participants and counselling was available via Kildare Youth Services. This was a crucial intervention for many as some had been discharged from CAMHS and were awaiting assessment from Adult services while others were unable to access any counselling support due to lack of availability in the CHO7 area.

The counselling intervention facilitated the stabilisation of mental health issues enabling the young person to participate fully in the programme. For some, the outcomes they achieved from the programme would not have been possible without the counselling intervention.

To sustain engagement through the lockdown period, an online cooking programme was devised with 17 participants taking part and a painting programme was uploaded to the YouTube Channel. Funding has been secured through CYPSC and SICAP to continue cooking programme and activity packs for families until the end of November 2020.

“I availed of the counselling and found it very useful. I had been out of CAMHS since I turned 18 and I had no other support. I would not have got as much out of the Kildare Ability Programme were it not for the counselling. It gave me stability and I was able to give it my all.” *(Participant)*

While there was also an increased need for counselling presenting among participants during the COV-ID restrictions, for some that had been on the programme for a significant

time prior to the lockdown in March 2020, the increased capacity they had gained was a robust buffer for dealing with the restrictions.

Participants highlighted the importance they attached to staying in contact with their key worker and having some on-line programmes through the lockdown period. Some were determined not to lapse back into isolation during lockdown as had been the case for them previously.

“I was very isolated before I joined the Ability Programme in early 2019. It took me a couple of months to get totally engaged and build trust. By the time that COV-ID 19 came, I had built up a lot of resilience and I was able to stay connected with the programme through the on-line course. The lockdown was not a big problem for me (*Participant*)

4.0 Stakeholder Engagement

This section presents the feedback from the engagement with external stakeholders which was undertaken in July & August 2020, the programme for external stakeholder engagement was as follows.

- Semi-structured interviews and questionnaire survey with 9 parents
- Semi-structured 1-1 engagement with 5 referral agencies (Tusla, An Garda Síochána, Kildare Youth Service, HSE & HALO).
- Semi-structured 1-1 engagement with 10 steering group member organisations (CKLP, NLN, KARE, Employability Kildare, KWETB, St. John of God's, Local Employment Services Network, DEASP, Kildare Sports Partnership and the County Kildare Youth Advocate.
- Semi-structured engagement with two external contractors for the Kildare Ability Programme.

A thematic overview of the consultation findings segmented per stakeholder group is offered in this section. We have included quotation marks to identify verbatim quotations from participants which represents their views and not those of the evaluators.

4.1 Parental Impact

As per the participant consultation, parents referenced positive progression for their child in confidence, self-esteem, motivation, resilience, communication skills and independence.

“The Kildare Ability Programme gave ***** the confidence to go on work placement **** has a newfound ambition and has applied for a Level 6 course in College. **** has become so much more independent travelling unaccompanied, a truly changed young person through participation on this excellent programme.
“(Parent)

Parents highlighted the professionalism of “Laura” and the time that she spent engaging with the parents imparting advice, guidance and information on services and programme related issues which benefitted both parents and participants. They highlighted the frustration at the lack of support from services that they encountered for years preceding the programme. Parents referenced the improved relationships that had been forged with their son/daughter as a result of engagement with the KAP.

“Witnessing the positive change in ***** over the past year on the Kildare Ability programme has improved my own well-being enormously. Since leaving school, **** has had no structured programme to attend and **** was spending increasing time in the house and not getting out to meet friends. It has truly been life changing for both of us. “(Parent)

“*****’s mental health has declined in recent times and was discharged from CAMHS on reaching 18. I could not get any counselling for **** unless I paid privately which I could not afford. I think Laura has helped me as much as she has ***** She had to come to our house for the first few meetings as **** would not go out. Once **** engaged the change was rapid, much more outgoing, motivated and independent “(Parent)

4.2 Referral Agencies

The range of referral agencies for the KAP demonstrate the complex needs that young people presented with upon referral to the KAP. We have offered a brief synopsis below of the pathway from the referral agency to the KAP.

4.2.1 Tusla – Child & Family Agency

Tusla provide support to families where there is an assessed need and where there is a young person who is under 18 in the family. Tusla have referred young people to the KAP where they have left school after the Junior Certificate or where they have left prior to reaching aged 16. In such cases there is often a gap in the provision of further education or training which increases the vulnerability of the young person to anti-social social behaviour and substance misuse. Many of the young people referred by Tusla would have mild to moderate mental health issues which in some cases might be undiagnosed.

4.2.2 An Garda Síochána

The Garda Juvenile Liaison Officer (JLO) for North County Kildare has referred to the programme in cases where young people aged 16-18 has been assigned to a JLO and are on a Garda Youth Diversion Programme. This can be part of an inter-agency approach where Tusla might also be involved in leading a Meitheal process. The person-centred approach adopted by KAP has been effective for some of those referred as it offers a diversionary pathway from the youth justice system through building capacity to access employment opportunities.

“I have seen a great improvement in those young people that I have referred to the KAP, they have really bought into the programme. I think it is the youth work type model that works particularly well with the young person. It complements the work in the Garda Youth Diversion programme, where the focus is on diversion and the KAP focus on building capacity.

4.2.3 HSE Day Services

The gap in provision identified by HSE Day Services was in the 16-18 age range where there is a mild intellectual disability and social skills deficit. Many of this cohort have left school early and are not in employment, education, or training. The HSE cannot fund any day care provision until the young person reaches age 18. HSE Day Services have referred some young people aged 18 or over to the KAP with positive outcomes. Where the need is so complex that a positive employment outcome is not achievable, there is the potential for the KAP to refer back to the HSE day opportunities.

“Young people who are not engaging in services need a lot of help and support to re-engage. The KAP has done a great job in getting young people back on a pathway to employability using a case management approach where they may refer to courses and programmes but retain oversight of the progression of the young person”

4.2.4 Kildare Youth Services (KYS)

There has been considerable collaboration between the KAP and KYS with a number of cross referrals. KAP participants based on assessed need, are referred to KYS for counselling and they also provide support for drug and alcohol issues for the under 18's, this is a highly effective mix of services delivered by the HALO programme. KYS have referred some young people to the KAP from communities where there is no engagement with services. The prevailing view within KYS is that the demand for the county wide intervention offered by the KAP exceeds the resources available. The environment offered by the KAP is welcoming and non-judgemental especially for those with social anxieties which can contrast with the previous experience of the young person in other education or training environments.

“We are seeing an increase in the number of people presenting with cognitive impairments, dyslexia and dyspraxia. We do not have the resources or expertise to deal with such issues, we refer these onto the KAP, and we work collaboratively with the young person”

4.3 Steering Group

This section presents the feedback from the consultations with 10 steering group members undertaken by semi-structures interview throughout August and September 2020. The programme of engagement was agreed in advance with the Kildare Ability Programme Coordinator and due to COV-ID, all consultations were undertaken remotely either by video platform or telephone.

A number of subheadings are identified within the participant feedback and within these are thematic overviews of the consultation findings. We have included quotation marks to identify verbatim quotations from participants which represents their views and not those of the evaluators.

4.3.1 Knowledge & Expertise

The group includes representatives from all of the key agencies in vocational education and training across Co. Kildare. Most of the group were involved in the consultation and planning process which underpinned the original KAP application. The targeting of the 16-19 age group with a disability for the KAP was based on the group's experience that "this was a cohort that were not being reached" There is considerable expertise and experience of employer engagement and delivering innovative supported employment programmes for adults with a disability within the group.

4.3.2 Recruitment

The Steering group felt that the difficulties in recruiting to the project worker post has impeded project development as the coordinator has had to take on much of the project worker duties in terms of direct engagement with participants. This has impacted on the capacity of the programme to engage with employers to assess their needs and match participants accordingly. The group welcomed the recent appointment to the role and the immediate impetus that this has enabled in dealing with a backlog of referrals and freeing up time for to develop and circulate the needs assessment questionnaire to employers.

4.3.3 Steering Group

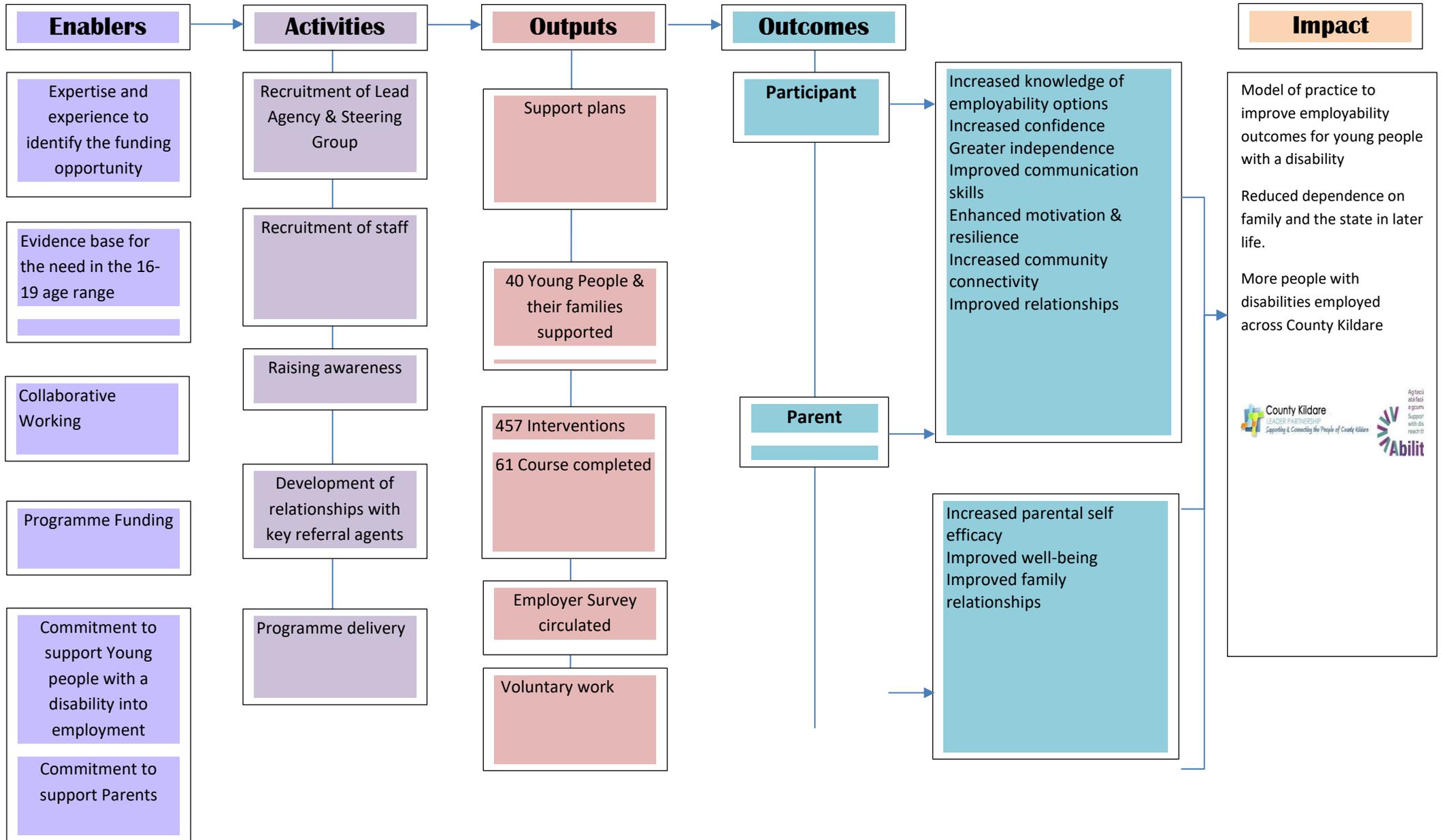
Each of the steering group committed to an involvement in the project, however attendance at steering group meetings has been inconsistent and as a result many of the group have become disconnected from the programme. Some contributors highlighted that the profile of KAP participants (moderate to severe mental health and behavioural issues with significant barriers to labour market progression) was a different profile to what they had originally envisaged.

This has resulted in much less focus on employer engagement as many participants would not be job ready within the lifecycle of the programme. While some steering group member organisations have referred to the KAP, there have been very low numbers referred from disability organisations. COV-ID 19 and its associated challenges was also highlighted as a barrier to engaging fully in the steering group.

4.3.4 Strategic Alignment

Steering group members felt that the KAP is strategically relevant to a range of cross cutting themes across employment, social inclusion, and health & well-being. The interventions in the 16-19 age range can mitigate against a lifetime of dependency for people with a disability on their families and the state.

Kildare Ability Programme 2018-2020 – Logic Model



5. Conclusions & Recommendations

The discussion in the main body of this report has already included some conclusions and pointed towards recommendations, with varying degree of explicitness. Therefore, the summary of conclusions and recommendations below should be considered in conjunction with the findings already raised.

5.1 Conclusions

We would like to highlight the following conclusions drawn from our interim evaluation study.

5.1.1 Effective Model of Practice

The KAP has been effective in engaging young people who are hard to reach and have disengaged from services. Using a person-centred approach KAP has engaged with the young person at the point in life at which they are at. While sometimes slow and complex, this approach has facilitated commitment from the young person built on trust and understanding.

“It can take up to two years of working with the long term unemployed to get job ready, where there is a disability, it is likely to take more than two years.

100% of the participant sample for this evaluation reported improvements in confidence, motivation, resilience, communication, and independence.

Parents who engaged with this evaluation perceived the programme to be a vital non-judgemental source of advice and information which hitherto had not been available to them. Consequentially, seeing their child achieving positive outcomes has had a positive impact on the overall well-being of parents.

Among the Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) for the programme was that 25% of participants (n=10) would progress to part-time employment (minimum of 8 hours per week) Whilst this has not been attained, a comparable figure (n=9) are now back in full time education which was not included in the original KPI's.

5.1.2 Filling gaps in services

Given the finite boundaries of other employability support services for young people, the KAP has been able to fill the gaps that can connect young people with a disability to other services such as NLN, Youthreach and Kildare Youth Services. The need of the young people targeted by KAP is complex and challenging and a significant amount of key working is required to engender their engagement.

Finding appropriate services to refer onto has been particularly challenging for the under 18's. A total of 457 interventions were delivered to 38 young people in the period up to September 2020. While such interventions have enabled positive outcomes for participants and their families, this level of resource might not be sustainable in an employability programme where there is an expectation from the funder that the primary focus will be on achieving employment outcomes.

5.1.3 Strategic Relevance & Contribution

Our analysis of strategic context within which the KAP is being delivered and consultation with key external stakeholders finds that the programme is strategically relevant. It is a cross cutting initiative spanning, education, training, employment health & well-being and community development. Building the capacity of this cohort to sustain in employment will reduce their dependence on family and the state as they get older.

5.1.4 Community Development Principles & Enablers

A community development ethos and approach led by CKLP is evident across many aspects of the Programme. Meaningful and effective connections with the right people, combined with a unity of purpose and collective will to deliver positive change, is at the forefront. The roles and contributions of various organisations, statutory, community & voluntary have been respected and valued through the consultation and planning phase and many of same organisations are now part of the steering group.

5.1.5 Staff Recruitment

The impact of the KAP is perhaps more noteworthy given the challenges associated with recruitment to the project worker role which has recently been filled. With nine months left of the programme, the project worker has immediately taken responsibility for addressing the backlog of referrals while the project coordinator has begun to engage with employers to identify their needs in relation to employing young people with a disability. The findings from this engagement will inform the development of a database of employers in County Kildare and their needs in relation to employing people with a disability which will be used by job coaches to target supports and interventions.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the research carried out for this evaluation and our knowledge of this sector, a number of recommendations are proposed for consideration by the KAP for the final months of the programme.

5.2.1 Steering Group

To enable the recommendations to be actioned effectively, the steering committee need to restate their commitment to the project and be proactive in their leadership of the KAP. In the first instance, this must include at a minimum attendance at all future steering group meetings which we recommend should be convened monthly. We would recommend a presentation of this interim evaluation at the earliest point to the full steering committee to facilitate planning in relation to the final months of the programme, leading to an agreed action plan for 2021 to be signed off by Christmas 2020. This facilitated planning must include input from the Department of Social Protection and it may identify the need for input into the action plan from referral agencies such as Tusla and HSE.

5.2.2 Transitional plan for all participants

By June 2021, each participant should have a transitional plan that includes a pathway for their next stage of progression. For those that require further education and training, a course or programme that best meets their progression needs should be made available to them and the relevant introductions made with the provider and their relevant staff (tutors, disability officer, access officer)

For those with the most complex needs, where intensive on-going case management and pastoral supports may be required, CKLP should explore whether they could secure resources to deliver this. Where such complex need cannot be supported in the community & voluntary sector, referral back to HSE Day Services may be most appropriate. In appreciation that this transitional planning will be resource intensive, it may be necessary to incrementally reduce the supports to those that have been on the KAP for the longest period to ensure that those newly registered on the programme have access to the required interventions.

For those that are job ready the emphasis must be on sourcing appropriate opportunities through employer engagement. Should such opportunities not be available by July 2021 then the job ready participants can be referred to the most appropriate local employability programme (LES, SICAP, CKLP). This process of transitional planning will require intensive engagement with the agencies who initially referred young people to the KAP such as the HSE, CKLP, Youth Services & Tusla.

5.2.3 Impact Measurement & Data Collection

The KAP utilise the i-Planit TOOL to measure the impact that the programme is achieving while the national evaluator of the Ability Programme has also designed a distance travelled tool to track progression (Section 2.2.4). The data generated by both tools has been useful to this evaluation however, the current system only captures face to face interventions and does not allow the tracking and recording of family supports provided.

We would recommend that consideration be given to the design of an overarching reporting framework which presents all the project activity, outputs, outcomes, and impact. Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA)² reporting is a renowned international reporting framework that succinctly presents project results under three headings

1. How much did the project do (outputs, activity)?
2. How well did it do it (participants experience of the project? levels of satisfaction)
3. Who was better off (the difference that the project made and to whom, outcomes and impact)

Many employability programmes funders are focussed on the number of participants that progress to employment. For many of the KAP participants, employment may not be achievable with the timeline of the programme, it is therefore essential that KAP highlight through its reporting, progression in capacity building and behavioural change such as desistance from anti-social behaviour, substance misuse and improved mental health. The value accruing to the state from such changed behaviour represents a significant saving and should be factored into a value for money analysis in the final evaluation of the programme.

The amount of additional support that is provided to parents was highlighted in the consultations. While recognising that such supports are masking the gaps in other existing services and are not sustainable for KAP, the relief and improved well-being that parents reported from their son/daughter's participation in the programme was palpable.

It is evident that though the participant is the main beneficiary of the KAP, there are also positive outcomes for parents and family.

² <https://www.ncb.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachment/OBA%20Guidance%20-%20Updated%20postO%26I.pdf>

5.2.4 Awareness Raising

Contributors highlighted a relatively low level of awareness of the KAP throughout the County. While recommending that some resources be invested into the marketing and promotion of the programme on a County wide basis, the implications of increased referral levels in the remaining months need to be carefully planned on the basis of the capacity available and the level of intervention that can be delivered.

5.2.5 Lobby for funding

CKLP and the agencies represented on the KAP steering group have proven experience and expertise in lobbying for policy change and associated funding. This experience must be utilised in the remaining months of the programme to highlight the urgent need for continued funding to support this vulnerable and at-risk KAP cohort. Should funding not be achieved, there is a real risk that the great work done by KAP in engaging the most “hard to reach” might be undone and the young people may regress. The statistic that County Kildare has one of the highest levels of youth unemployment in Ireland must also be highlighted as part of the context for this lobby.

5.2.6 Employer Engagement Strategy

Planning for a possible future programme must include an analysis as to the extent to which employer engagement should be included. This could factor in having a separate employer engagement strand to be led by an organisation with proven experience and expertise in the area. Any such prospective strategy must be underpinned by representation of employers which would facilitate the fostering of a collaborative relationship to map employer needs against the competencies and skills of KAP participants.

The strategy should be framed around raising awareness of the incentives for employers to employ people with a disability namely.

- The Wage Subsidy Scheme
- The Youth Employment Support Scheme
- Disability Awareness Training Support Scheme
- Workplace Equipment and Adaptation Grant
- Personal Reader Grant
- Job Interview Interpreter Grant
- Employee Retention Grant
- The Employability Service

The strategy could also include the co-design with employers of a bespoke vocational programme to provide employment opportunities for graduates of the KAP.

There are some successful live supported employment projects in County Kildare such as Project Search³ in Naas hospital which are excellent exemplars. This expertise combined with the capacity of the many big employers in the County could be utilised to provide opportunities for sustainable employment for KAP graduates with the appropriate supports available to the employers.

³ <https://naashospital.ie/about/19757/>