

Insights

INTO THE

GEM Journey

Summary Evaluation Report

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Prologue to the Insights

Back in 2014 we had a vision: One County, a network of organisations working for the good of their communities and funders who were committed to providing the resources needed to improve lives, create positive futures, and help individuals realise their ambitions. This is how GEM started...

Across Gloucestershire organisations had for a number of years been going about their daily business of supporting some of the County's most vulnerable people, providing what they could in terms of support to help them engage in their communities. While those Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations were doing some great work, it was often limited by funding, capacity, customer group or geographical location. In 2016 The Building Better Opportunities (BBO) funding brought together these organisations with Gloucestershire County Council to form a unique partnership that harvested all that is great about Gloucestershire and planting new, fresh ideas that would grow to become the biggest and most important employability project the County has seen to date: Going the Extra Mile – The Gloucestershire GEM Project.

With funding in place, GEM grew quickly and exceeded all expectations within its first few months. The GEM partnership encompassed large statutory bodies through to micro organisations, all coming together to embark on a journey that would not only change the lives of the people it touched, but also change how we think as a society and how we work together as organisations with a common purpose.

The journey was fraught at times and there were risks – reputations were at stake, finances too. There was a time when we were near

full employment and then a global Pandemic brought with it an unstable economy and many new challenges for individuals, partners, and employers. But facing this immense challenge the project stood strong and maintained its position – helping those who needed it at a time that was quite possibly one of the hardest they have ever had to endure. And all whilst maintaining its financial compliance and robust governance.

As it grew and flourished, GEM provided people who were often overlooked with the opportunity to contribute. But it also helped those organisations involved to embed the principles of GEM at the heart of their offer to communities. As the network of GEM partners spread across the County, it was influenced by its participants and partners as they shared their stories. Through Green Impact, GEM addressed the issues of the environment; through Inclusivity Works it promoted inclusive workplaces; through its extensive and diverse partnership it built capacity and cohesion; through its unwavering support it helped participants to believe in themselves and their futures; and through its ongoing monitoring and evaluation it collected an unprecedented abundance of data and developed an evidence base that would influence future strategies and decision making.

So as we near the end of a six-year journey that has travelled to every corner of Gloucestershire, we reflect – through the insights from our evaluation – on the glorious and sustainable legacy that has been left to us by the unique and game-changing Gloucestershire GEM Project. We hope you will be inspired to keep the spirit of GEM alive as we look to build on its legacy in the future.

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Gloucestershire County Council



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Insights into the GEM Journey — Executive Summary



Going the Extra Mile — or GEM — is a social inclusion programme that has sought to move those who are vulnerable, disadvantaged or excluded from the mainstream economy and society in Gloucestershire closer to employment, training and education. With over 2,000 participants recruited to GEM over the course of the six-year programme, over 800 have gone on to find employment or self-employment, while over 300 have started or returned to education or have undertaken training.

With every step taken by participants along their GEM journey, not only have their skills, knowledge and achievements grown, but so has their confidence, social inclusion and in many cases their core physical and mental health and wellbeing. Participants experienced a statistically significant uplift in 12 psycho-social outcomes as a result of the programme (Mean 0.19, n=919). Similarly, a statistical analysis of the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) shows participants across all cohorts to have experienced positive impacts on their mental wellbeing (Mean 0.66, n=349). A more advanced analyses of the distance travelled data shows GEM to have provided participants with a sense of optimism about their future generated by employability relating to improved self-confidence, positive functioning and resilience; and generating feelings of empowerment through access to advice relating to improved competence and a sense of purpose.

Using distance travelled data to evidence change in a Social Return on Investment (SROI) model indicates that GEM has generated around £2.30 for every £1 invested since the start of the programme, representing a 230% return on investment with respect to the social value generated for participants alone. Qualitative findings drawn from a variety of inclusive evaluation methods including peer researcher interviews, digital storytelling and co-produced inclusive evaluation tools add depth and colour to the SROI metrics, and demonstrate both the gravity and individual stories of this change. The developmental approach taken to the evaluation also helped to ensure that such outcomes were sustained and deepened as the GEM programme evolved.

Many of these positive impacts can be traced back to the relational model that underpins GEM, and in particular the trust between the participant and the Navigator Developer — built up through consistency, motivation, reliability and the strength of the one to one relationships that were developed. Relationships between participants have provided another layer of support — even during the challenges of the Covid-19 Pandemic — reducing isolation and giving voice to many vulnerable or excluded individuals. The relational model also extends to the 30+ GEM partner organisations, with partners demonstrating favourable opinions on the nature of partners' contributions (4.7/5.0), a feeling of commitment toward the GEM partnership (4.2/5.0), and satisfaction about the partnership's accomplishments (4.0/5.0).

GEM's cross-cutting themes of sustainability and equality and diversity have also been evaluated — with implementation of the Green Impact toolkit leading an estimated 72,845 kg savings in CO₂, and the Inclusivity Works initiative leading employers to demonstrate a commitment to — and investment in — equality and diversity; encouraging this diversity in existing and prospective employees; and putting in place the systems and processes to support it. All have paved the way for a culture of inclusive employment and authentic leadership across the county.

GEM has succeeded because it has fostered agency in individuals to move their lives forward through a model of relational support where change has been done with the participants, not to the participants. And for policy makers the success of this model represents an evidenced shift from employment support to supported employment, and from a 'one size fits all' approach to a person-centred approach.

Going the Extra Mile - Key Insights



The biggest and most important employability project the County has seen

Headlines



Extensive and diverse partnership that builds capacity and cohesion



Participants believe in themselves and their futures



Influencing future strategies and decision making



Over 2,000 participants recruited

30+ GEM partner organisations

Trust between participants and Navigator Developers

800 have gone on to find employment or self-employment

300 have started or returned to education, or have undertaken training

Increased participant confidence

Positive impacts on mental wellbeing

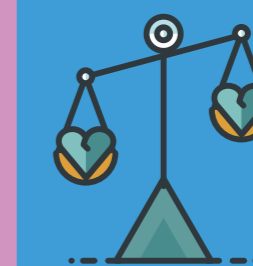


Social inclusion

Empowerment through access to advice

Optimism about the future

Statistically significant findings



Social value

£2.30 generated for every £1 invested

230% return on investment

Relational model

Giving voice to vulnerable or excluded individuals



Consistency, motivation, reliability

Covid-19 Pandemic — reducing isolation

Committed and satisfied GEM partners



- GEM fostered agency in individuals to move their lives forward
- Change has been done with and not to participants.
- GEM represents a shift from employment support to supported employment
- Person-centred rather than 'one size fits all' approach



72,845 kg savings in CO₂

Commitment to and investment in equality and diversity

1. GEM in Numbers

Going the Extra Mile – or GEM – is an employment inclusivity programme that has sought to move those who are vulnerable, disadvantaged or excluded from the mainstream economy and society in Gloucestershire closer to employment, training or education. With social and economic inclusion at its heart, GEM is based on a relational model whereby Navigator Developers ‘hold the hand’ of participants as they make their own unique GEM journey. Journeys that have often been life changing for those experiencing them, and others around them.

Since programme inception in October 2016, GEM has actively improved the lives of over 2,000 individuals who have participated in the programme. Telling the story of how their lives have changed – the outcomes for participants – is the principal focus of this summary evaluation report. However, before we begin that story it is useful to summarise it in numbers. The figures in Table 1 tell their own powerful story, and will always be a succinct reminder of the legacy of GEM in their own right. With over 2,000 participants recruited to GEM over the course of the programme, over 800 have gone on to find employment or self-employment, while over 300 have started or returned to education or have undertaken training to build their skills set. And with every step taken by participants along their GEM journey, not only have their skills, knowledge and achievements grown, but so has their confidence, social inclusion and in many cases their core physical and mental health and wellbeing. But that represents a deeper part of this story, and one that we will dive into throughout this report using a variety of lenses, and approaches.



Year to end	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022*	2016–2022
Total number of participants	68	429	381	289	274	320	240	2001
Number who move into education or training on leaving	0	31	50	47	75	84	35	322
Unemployed participants into employment	1	48	78	78	49	81	42	377
Economically inactive into employment – including self-employment, or into job search on leaving.	1	57	94	90	65	87	51	445

Table 1 - GEM Participant numbers and core outputs

With over 30 partners having been involved in GEM since its inception, the partnerships are another significant indicator of GEM's success. So important have they been to GEM and its legacy, that we devote an entire section of this report to it. The numbers in Table 1 also tell us how the momentum of success has slowly built as the programme has progressed, even when society hit the wall of the Covid-19 Pandemic in the spring of 2020.

The numbers in Table 2 also show how GEM is on course to exceed its own targets in terms of the sheer numbers of individuals for which a positive output was experienced – exceeding the targets for participants who have progressed into education, training and employment by 20%. But also with respect to the diversity of the population of economically and socially excluded individuals that it has targeted – the way that GEM has successfully reached out to the extremities of Gloucestershire's most excluded groups is clearly demonstrated by the numbers.



Overall Project Claimed Stats	Target	Actuals	#	%
Total number of participants	2,034*	2001	-33	98%
Number of men	1,017	1064	47	105%
Number of women	1,017	929	-88	91%
Number who are unemployed, including long-term unemployed	1,016	861	-155	85%
Number who are economically inactive, including not in education or training	1,018	1140	122	112%
Number who are aged 50 or over	324	395	71	122%
Number with disabilities	887	1049	162	118%
Number from ethnic minorities	268	338	70	126%
Number who live in a single adult household with dependent children	268	250	-18	93%
Number who are below 25 years of age	324	583	259	180%
Number who move into education or training on leaving	264	322	58	122%
(R1) Unemployed participants into employment	291	377	86	130%
(R2) Economically inactive into employment, including self employment, or into job search on leaving.	393	445	52	113%

*Projected total is around 2,050 participants at programme end

Table 2 - Participant numbers against targets across the cohort

2. The GEM Monitoring and Evaluation Story

What we see in Table 1 is a powerful summary of the Outputs generated by GEM – the tangible results or achievements – which in turn relate to the myriad Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that have helped to guide programme managers and keep the programme running on its upward trajectory. And that has also been the role of the GEM Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) – to continuously monitor the processes of GEM management, delivery and implementation, and not only learn formative lessons along the way, but take decisive action to translate these lessons into improvements as the programme progressed. This has been facilitated by the implementation of an annual evaluation cycle which has formed the centre piece of the GEM M&E, as illustrated in Figure 1. In essence the GEM M&E has been an on-going developmental evaluation from day one – to deliver both real-time learning and independent evaluation assessment in a robust and pragmatic way.

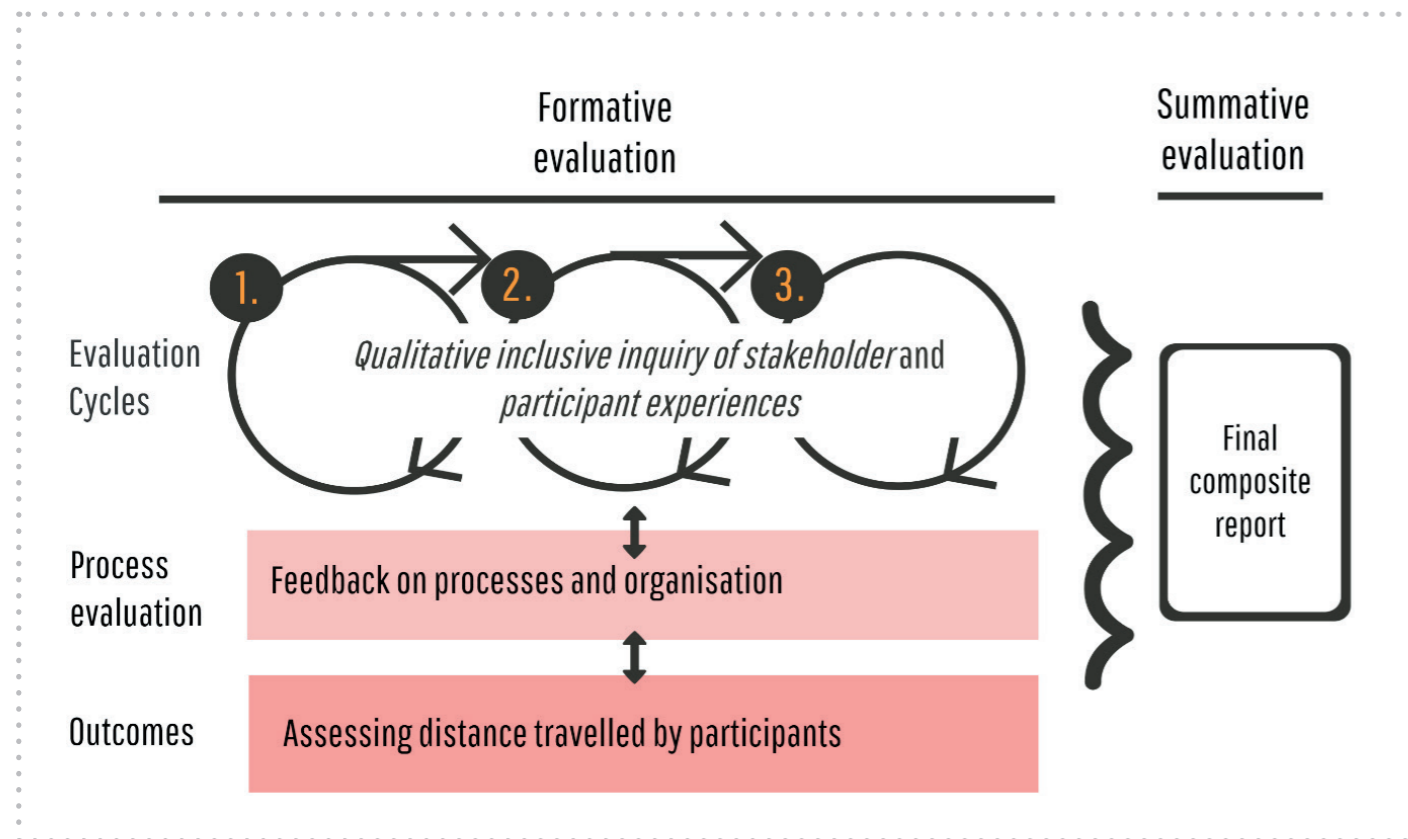


Figure 1: The GEM ongoing developmental evaluation

But the GEM M&E has not just been there to monitor the outputs and facilitate the formative learning around GEM processes. During the bid writing stage before GEM was born, a decision was taken to centre the M&E around a largely summative framework, which would bring into sharp focus the outcomes experienced by its participants, and by the myriad stakeholders that would see their practices change for the better through engagement with GEM. And to facilitate this the research team made a distinct contribution to the bid by consulting both the literature and the budding GEM partnership to formulate an initial GEM outcomes map – designed to help guide development of an outcomes framework should the programme come to fruition, and to demonstrate to commissioners that the partnership had a deep understanding of how their plans would affect change for participants. It worked, and as they say – the rest is history.

Indeed, demonstrating to the programme commissioners that the GEM partnership had a detailed understanding of its likely outcomes undoubtedly helped secure the £3.5M in National Lottery Community Fund and European Social Fund (ESF) funding back in late 2016. Just as evidencing change in these outcomes through the M&E almost certainly assisted the partnership secure two further rounds of funding in 2019 and 2021, taking the total National Lottery Community Fund and ESF funding for GEM to £7.2M over a six-year period.

As GEM was getting out of the starting blocks, we refined the outcomes framework by

consulting with its stakeholders in a world café style Theory of Change event in December 2016. This provided the detail around how one outcome might lead to another in a chain of events, thus ensuring that the final measurable outcomes could be identified – to explore, capture and measure – and in some cases value – the right outcomes, but also open the right doors to conversations and story telling that would help weave a rich tapestry of how and why GEM has affected change and led to those life changing experiences. The high-level Theory of Change (ToC) that has guided the GEM Monitoring and Evaluation since its inception is shown in Figure 2.

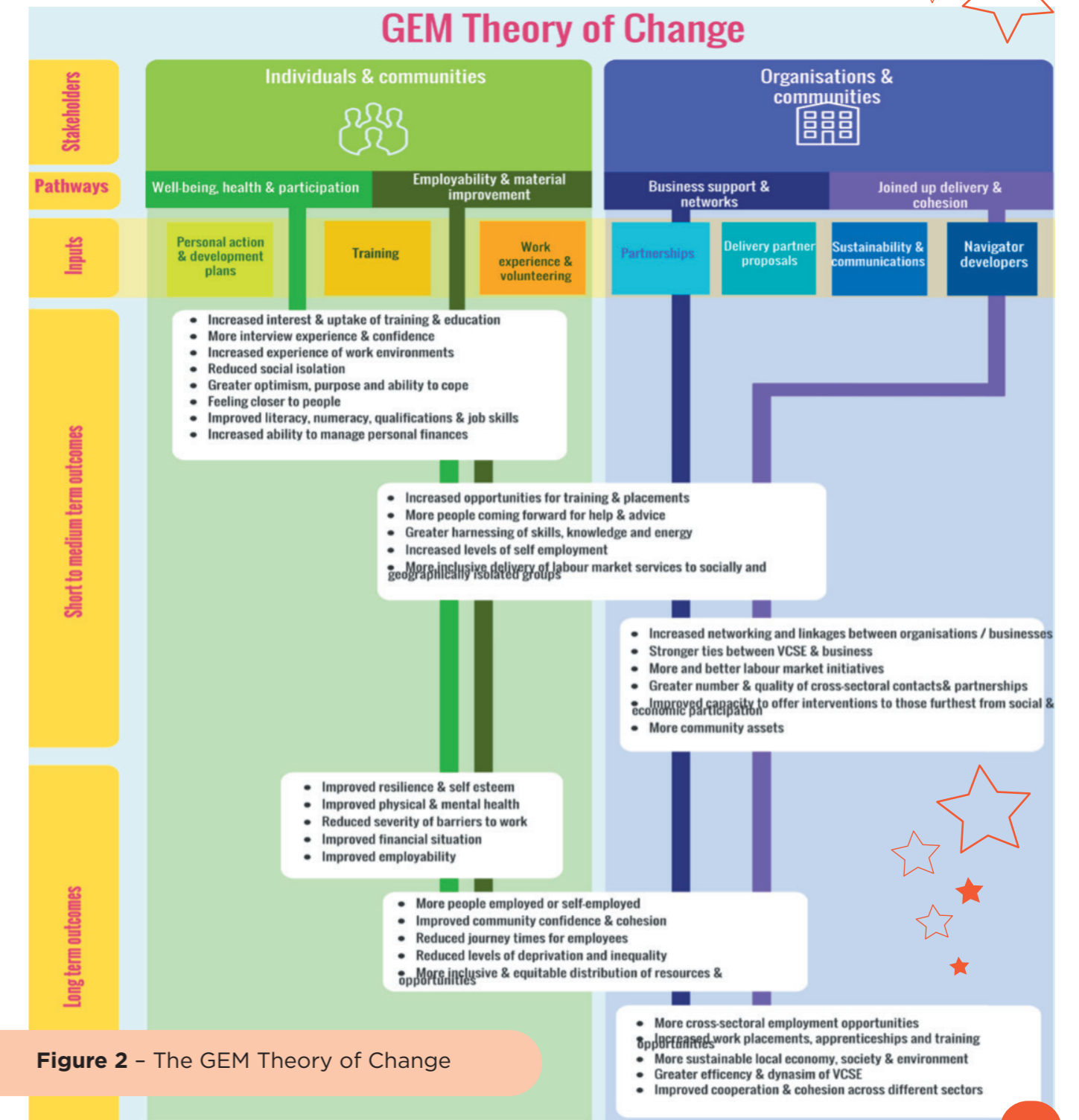


Figure 2 - The GEM Theory of Change

While the ToC - or Journey of Change (JoC) - provided the framework, setting out what should be captured and measured, it also provided the blueprint for how the change should be captured and measured. In short it implied not only the employment of mixed methods - combining tools and instruments along the full spectrum of qualitative and quantitative approaches - but also that in far as is practicable these methods should be inclusive. In other words, that they should respect the nature, diversity and individualism of the research subjects - especially the GEM participants - and be in tune with the socially inclusive nature of the programme itself, and what it set out to achieve from the very start.

Method	Evaluation element	Process*	Outcomes*
Journey of Change (JoC)	Identifying and mapping outcomes, considering methods and measurement	✓	✓✓
Deep Hanging Out (DHO)	Experiences, learning and stories from Participants and Navigator Developers	✓✓	✓
Social Outcomes Survey (SOS)	Participant Distance Travelled in psycho-social outcomes	✓	✓✓
Mental Wellbeing survey (MWB)	Participant Distance Travelled in Mental Wellbeing		✓✓
Social Return on Investment (SROI)	On-going estimates of monetised impact and calculation of benefit-to-investment		✓✓
Developmental Evaluation Cycle (DEC)	On-going Real time formative and summative learning for GEM Organisational Management Committee (OMC)	✓✓	✓
Peer Researcher Approach (PRA)	Participant stories of change told through interviewing each other	✓	✓✓
Economic Impact Case Study Approach (EICSA)	Estimates of cost savings to the state and social value derived from participant journeys		✓✓
Inclusive Employers Assessment (IEA)	Employers' strategies and experiences of Inclusivity in the workplace	✓	✓✓
Digital Story Telling (DST)	Participant stories of change told through scripting and photographs		✓✓
Partnership Assessment (PA)	Effectiveness and strength of the GEM partnership	✓	✓✓
Inclusive Evaluation Approaches (CPIE)	Various	✓	✓✓

*Relevance of the methods to the process (formative) and outcomes (summative) elements of the evaluation - with ✓✓ indicating stronger relevance.

Table 3 - Methods employed to monitor and evaluate GEM process and outcomes

What follows, therefore, is an inclusive story of change in outcomes told through a rich tapestry of methods, and incorporating the many stories, findings and experiences that we have uncovered. In reading this report you will therefore find hard statistics of mental health and social value sitting cheek by jowl with the fruits of digital storytelling and the varied nature of Co-Produced Inclusive Evaluation (CPIE) techniques. And you will find monetised estimates of benefit-to-investment speaking to the rich narrative obtained through our 'deep hanging out' with stakeholders and through our peer researcher approach, where participants were given the opportunity to interview each other. A summary of the various research methods employed in the GEM M&E, and how they relate to the formative (Process) and summative (Outcomes) elements of the evaluation is given in Table 3 opposite.

While our focus on outcomes have been paramount to telling a rich story of change, the M&E did not neglect the KPIs designed to guide and monitor the GEM programme, and where appropriate we acknowledge the KPIs with respect to various aspects of diversity, inclusion and sustainability that are woven into the outcomes story. While lessons learned were conveyed to the GEM programme managers qualitative and quantitative and those on the front line of delivery and implementation - throughout the programme, many lessons were also learned by the Monitoring and Evaluation team along the way. In short, if we were to do this evaluation again, we would make it even more diverse and inclusive, and our methods would reflect on an even deeper level, that success means different things to different people - that we are all individual and make our own unique journey's through life. So alongside those for policy makers, commissioners, programme managers and service deliverers, we reflect on the lessons learned for evaluators in the final section. And we highlight the successful outcomes of GEM for the academic and evaluation community - such as our statistically validated 6-item social inclusion scale, our co-produced Inclusive Evaluation (CPIE) tools and our refined model for assessing the success of partnership working.



So over the course of the next half an hour, sit back and enjoy this story of how and why GEM has affected change, and what it all means for where we might go next in the field of supported employment and socio-economic inclusion. In the spirit of the M&E, we have in structuring this summary report, been guided by the findings - and as such we have attempted to allow the story to unfold logically and thematically, and in a way that respects the many lenses we have used to examine and assess it - as well as the context-based nature of the lives and journeys it describes. For further detail and greater depth of analysis, readers are directed to the final GEM Monitoring and Evaluation report (Courtney et al, 2023), designed as a more extensive, formal reference document where findings are structured around methodologies as opposed to themes - distinguishing between - but by no means dislocating - the many statistical coefficients and rich narrative that can be found within.

3. Delivering Social Value – Generating Social Return

While the Journey of Change (JoC) indicated that the changes for GEM participants could be profound, it also highlighted the potential difficulties in capturing and evidencing this change effectively and efficiently. This set the research team firmly on a path of developing a mixed methods evaluation. But it also set in train the development of a relatively simple Distance Travelled Survey (DTS) tool that could be aligned with the GEM paperwork on inception, and completed by the participant again on exiting the programme. Working closely with GEM partners, a DTS was duly designed by the research team and implemented by the Navigator Developers, and served as the centre piece of the GEM outcomes evaluation over the course of the programme. A total of 2,432 responses to Entry and Exit DTS surveys were obtained over the course of the programme, with 1,371 participants completing an Entry survey, 1,061 completing an Exit survey and 919 participants completing both surveys in full – representing almost half of the participation population.

Findings from the DTS analysis demonstrate a positive uplift in the distance travelled across all 11 psycho-social outcomes, with all 12

statements of self-reported change showing statistical significance at the 95% level – in other words we can be 95% certain that these findings are generalisable to a wider, comparable population. DTS statements also served to provide indicators of change in the Social Return on Investment (SROI) outcomes identified through the ToC. SROI is a government recognised framework derived from social cost benefit analysis that seeks to capture and measure wider value, and is outcomes focused and driven by stakeholders. As well as providing a metric – and monetised value of the change derived through GEM, the SROI framework therefore also aligned well with the inclusive and participatory nature of the GEM evaluation.

A summary of the SROI findings, which clearly demonstrates the positive uplift in distance travelled across all GEM outcomes, in addition to the monetised values and ratio of benefit to investment of £2.32 for every pound invested in the GEM programme, is provided in Table 4. In other words, the return on investment for GEM over the lifetime of the programme has been around 230% in social and psychological outcomes for participants alone.

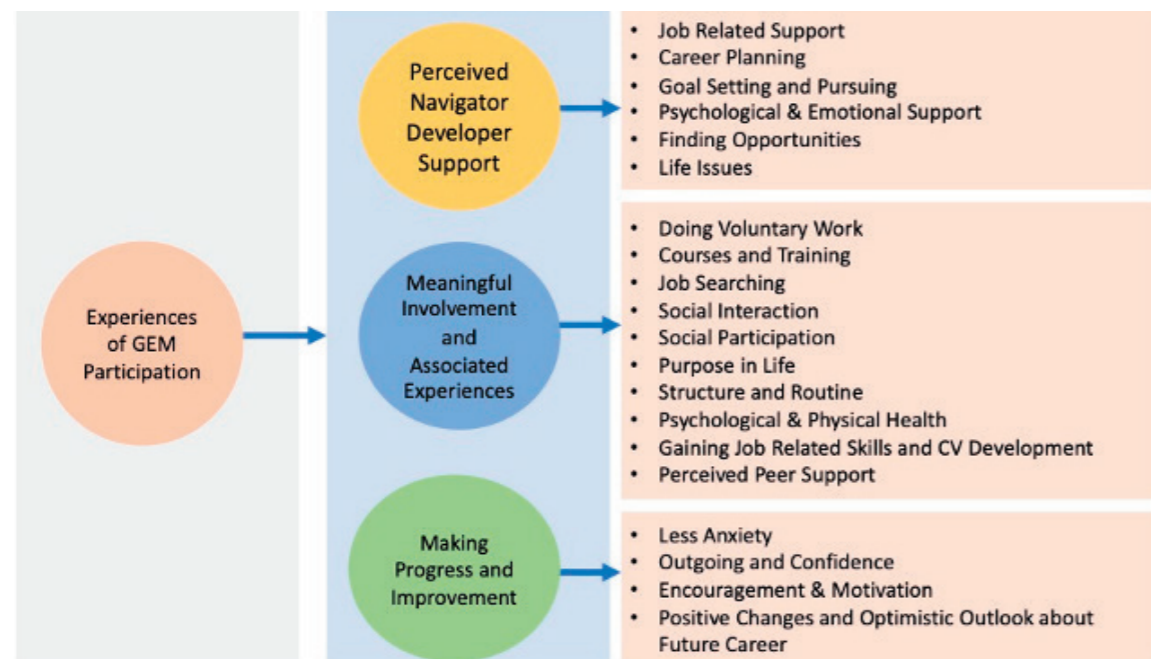


Figure 3 – Themes that emerged from the Peer Researcher Data

Journey of Change Outcome	Distance Travelled uplift (%)	SROI Outcome Incidence **	Present Value (£)***
Improved sense of competence engagement and purpose	31%	313	4,399,053
Reduced barriers to receiving help and advice	32%	324	2,191,563
Increased levels of interest and take up in training, volunteering and educational / vocational opportunities	20%	162	1,365,202
Improved resilience and self esteem	24%	243	400,358
Improved employability through job-ready knowledge, skills and attributes	11%	89	418,594
Improved confidence and motivation to engage with and access new opportunities	12%	116	1,621,751
Improved physical and mental health	17%	172	354,592
Improved positive functioning and coping strategies	15%	152	252,567
Reduced social isolation	15%	152	4,229,475
Improved financial literacy and ability to manage finances	13%	105	36,249
Improvement in life and work skills	19%	154	301,706
Total Investment in GEM (£)****			£6,722,376
Total Present Value of Benefits (£)			£15,571,115
Ratio of Benefit-to-Investment			2.32 : 1

* Based on data from 919 participants who completed both Entry and Exit surveys
 ** Based on total participants of 2,001 having completed GEM by the end of Q3 2022, and taking into account standard SROI parameters including Deadweight, Attribution, Drop off and Displacement
 *** Based on 2022 prices and discounted by HM Treasury's standard 3.5%
 **** As of the end of Quarter 3, 2022

Table 4 – Distance Travelled in social outcomes and related Benefit-to-Investment

The metrics of change summarised in the above table were complemented – and reinforced – by the stories of change obtained through various forms of data collection, including the peer researcher interviews, Deep Hanging Out and the Digital storytelling. The purpose of recruiting participants to interview each other about their GEM journey was to find out what was going on behind the scores being recorded by the surveys – the reasons for the change being self-reported. But it was also to facilitate conversation that would enable a deeper dive into participant journeys that could be obtained

via more conventional evaluation methods. Participants' experiences of GEM were found to cohere around three main themes; perceived Navigator Developer support, meaningful involvements and associated experiences, and making positive progress and improvement. Each theme – summarised in Figure 3 – helps us to understand how GEM has affected the lives of its participants, and in turn the change documented through the distance travelled survey.

4. Health and Wellbeing for All

Effective support from a Navigator Developer has proved to be central to securing positive outcomes for participants, and we explore this crucial aspect further in section 5 of this report. But the two other themes help us to better understand the trajectory of social outcomes that have led to the positive uplifts in distance travelled. For example, the majority of study participants were involved in doing at least one meaningful activity – such as attending courses or doing voluntary work and they believed it to be a positive experience. Such involvement has led to increased social interaction and engagement with others, greater participation in the community, an increased sense of purpose and structure in everyday life and improved psychological wellbeing. Through peer support they have also been able to gain valuable work and life skills such as developing their CV.

Furthermore, it was revealed that study participants made some incidental progress and improvement as a result of these experiences. Indeed, several beneficial outcomes relate in some way to this theme, which also helps to understand how participation in the GEM project has impacted on participant experiences of getting into employment or moving towards their personal goals. Such outcomes include experiencing less anxiety and building up confidence, the existence of encouragement, motivation and making positive changes, and nurturing an optimistic outlook about their future career. All are important factors in relation to goal achievement and coping with persistent unemployment.

GEM has undisputedly improved the self—confidence of its participants to engage with people or opportunities, and our analysis shows that it is closely related to the myriad outcomes generated by the programme, and a successful journey towards employment, training or education. The depth and consistency of the changes to people’s lives facilitated by GEM – including confidence – is further supported by the relative lack of statistical differences between the various types of participant. In addition to looking for such differences we also employed more advanced analytical methods to look for underlying patterns in the data that might explain how and why GEM has had such a profound impact on the social and psychological fortunes of those who have engaged with it.

Applying a multivariate Factor Analysis to the distance travelled data shows participation on the GEM programme to have generated two distinct (and statistically defensible) areas of impact for its participants: it provides them with a sense of optimism about their future, generated by employability relating to improved confidence and positive functioning; and it generates feelings of empowerment through access to advice relating to improved competence, engagement and purpose. The analysis has also produced a statistically valid 6—item scale by which to assess the psychosocial outcomes of comparable socio—economic inclusion programmes in the future, representing a further legacy of the GEM programme, for programme designers, managers, evaluators and participants alike.

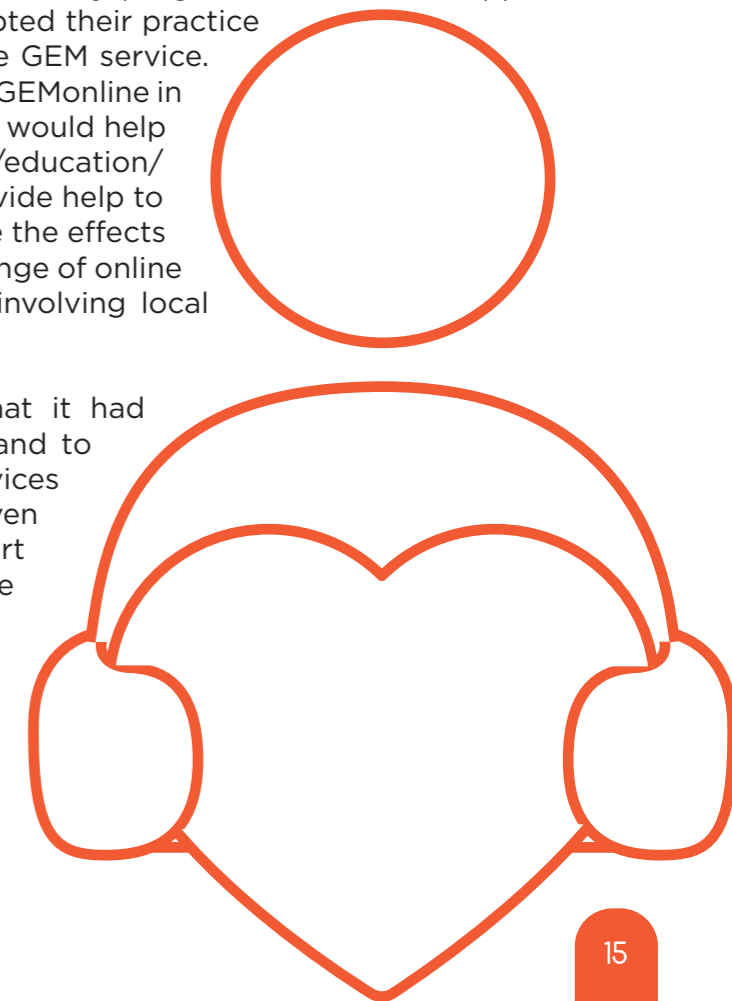
FA Dimension 1: Empowerment	FA Dimension 2: Optimistic Future
I find it easy to obtain help and advice about employment or training	I feel ready to take up a new opportunity – for example, training / work / volunteering
I often get a chance to learn new things	I will try something even if there is chance it might not work
I feel that I am making a difference to my life	I can do pretty much anything that I set my mind to

By Autumn 2019 – three years into the GEM programme – it was clear that GEM was having a profound social and psychological impact on participants – from improved skills, to increased self—confidence, to an improved sense of purpose and self—esteem, and to their general sense of health and wellbeing. While the Distance Travelled Survey (DTS) was capturing and evidencing most of this change, a finer grained, formal assessment of the impact of GEM on the mental wellbeing of participants was at that time more anecdotal. The research team therefore decided to introduce a nationally recognised method for measuring changes to the mental health of GEM participants – by introducing the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) into the DTS as a stand—alone section in January 2020. At the same time refinements and improvements were made to the DTS to make it more accessible and user friendly.

As it happened, the timing of this proved to be particularly insightful. Just a few weeks following the introduction of WEMWBS in March 2020, the UK went into lockdown in response to the Covid—19 global pandemic. In addition to the concerns about people’s physical health – and of course the threat of Covid—19 itself – health professionals quickly began to express concern about the mental wellbeing of the UK population, especially those from more vulnerable groups who would likely have to isolate more acutely and for longer periods than the general population.

Aware of this – alongside the sudden halt to face—face contact between Navigator Developers and participants – the GEM management team swiftly responded by introducing a range of online professional and pastoral support for participants. While this was to adapt to the ‘brave new world’ of lockdown, it was also in an attempt to mitigate the worst of its impacts on its socially excluded cohort of participants. A weekly programme of online support was established and all Navigator Developers adapted their practice accordingly. At no time was there any break in the GEM service. This swift action was followed up by the launch of #GEMonline in early April, which aimed to provide a platform that would help retain some focus on the end goal of employment/education/training, keep participants engaged with GEM, provide help to support and maintain their wellbeing, and minimise the effects of social isolation. As this grew it also provided a range of online sessions, from yoga through to full career days involving local employers.

During this difficult time GEM demonstrated that it had the agility and resilience to respond to a crisis, and to ensure that it could meet the needs of its services users, whatever those needs might be at any given point in time. And as reported in the interim report later that year, this agility helped to maintain the physical and mental wellbeing of its participant cohort in the face of an unprecedented public health, social and economic crisis. Such agility undoubtedly represents an integral element of the GEM programme – and of the GEM journey – for participants, for Navigator Developers, for programme managers, and the myriad stakeholders who in some way have followed that journey themselves.



By June 2020 it was apparent that the agility of GEM in responding promptly to the onset of lockdown had paid off handsomely. Early indications from a preliminary analysis of GEM WEMWBS data indicated that the worst impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic in terms of mental wellbeing had indeed been mitigated, and in a number of cases the researchers actually observed a positive uplift in mental wellbeing scores following the introduction of online Lockdown support and activities.

Diving deeper into what had happened over this distressing and unprecedented period only served to strengthen and reinforce the power and success of the GEM model in facilitating improvements to the mental wellbeing of its participants. By providing a holistic service in 2020, GEM not only succeeded in providing support towards employment, but also gave consideration to the mental health needs of participants through the provision of deliberative emotional and psychological support. At this time a number of Navigator Developers reported there being increasing issues of mental health disorders and related challenges, compounded by the climate of Lockdown. But the vital and important decision to shift the emphasis from employment and training to having a wider remit that would help participants to get through this very difficult period greatly supported people with anxiety and other mental health illnesses.

As Covid-19 very gradually receded into the rear-view mirror of the lives of GEM participants, GEM continued to harness its therapeutic power as a vehicle for the improvement of mental health and wellbeing. Evidence from the various GEM evaluation methods from mid 2020-22 - including Deep Hanging Out (DHO) and Digital Story Telling (DST) - supported and told the story of how this therapeutic power was harnessed, and the resulting benefits for GEM participants.

The Deep Hanging Out (DHO) with participants revealed the underlying improvements to wellbeing as participants gained in confidence, skills and motivation to take the next steps in their GEM journey. Participants expressed deep gratitude for the invaluable personalised support they received. This support took many forms, including regular one to one meetings, phone calls, Zoom meetings and accompaniment when attending significant events in the participant's GEM journey. Such interventions were all seen as extremely beneficial in providing a stabilising support and improved wellbeing.

Through one-to-one relationships and feeling supported on a deep level, participants were navigated towards a myriad of experiences that were meaningful for them with respect to their circumstances and individual contexts. And they were wide ranging - such as accessing volunteering opportunities, receiving help to overcome particular barriers such as financial issues or housing problems, getting help to find a job or training, and creating a structure through attending regular online or face-to-face events designed to provide learning and/or opportunities to socialise.

Through conversation, participants were positive about the progress they had made in their lives through the support of GEM. And despite universal outcomes such as confidence and empowerment, individual journey's varied greatly, with some participants taking strides while others took baby steps towards their goals and personal feelings of success - their 'wins'. The spirit of the GEM model was crucial then because it was person centred - tailored to the individual, and respecting the uniqueness of individual contexts, journeys and emotional sensitivities.

Reflecting the findings in the outcomes survey, these 'wins' were things such as gaining confidence having previously been anxious, gaining life skills to put more structure in place to operate more regular healthy routines, undertaking training such as a Green Impact Auditor, having opportunities to lead sessions with others in GEM, and building better support networks and making progress towards gaining employment. The participants also acknowledged the breadth of support available through the GEM programme, and not just through their Nav Dev - such as accessing clubs including the job club, Green Impact activities and wider online and face-to-face events and services.

The GEM participants who took part in the Digital Storytelling process were enabled to narrate the process of change they had experienced as part of GEM. Digital storytelling is a method that emerges from radical community media and is premised on co-creation and co-production. Stories were created with a collection of participant-chosen images from their own photographs, along with an audio that narrated the story of those images. Example images from the digital stories are given in Figure 4.

Participants were encouraged to tell a story about how GEM had changed or helped them.

By anchoring the narrative in this theory of 'change', participants took ownership of new narratives of positivity and productive change; they shared information on creative practices they were involved with, and that often they had never divulged before - about new employment experiences that GEM had afforded them and on positive interpersonal relationships. Of note, was that participants indicated how GEM allowed them to think of positive futures for themselves and how Navigator Developers had worked with them to disassociate themselves from negative pasts and practices.

These findings reassuringly chime with those from the peer researcher interviews, where participants were able to consult with one another, and as a result be more candid in disclosing the impacts of GEM on their inner worlds. The interviews uncovered a story of involvement in GEM reducing anxiety, and helping participants to become more outgoing and to build up confidence. Many of the study participants described limited levels of engagement with people and a lack of confidence in making first contact with people when they started the GEM project. Being out in public, talking and meeting new people were reported as being both initial challenges and subsequent benefits of GEM as their journey continued, and in many cases blossomed.



Figure 4
Images used in the Digital Storytelling

The previous three interim reports (June 2017, October 2018, October 2019) have identified a number of assumptions regarding what makes the project unique and more likely to succeed where others have failed. At this stage of the project these are being further confirmed and strengthened.

The richness of these findings, together with the inclusive and sensitive nature by which the data was gathered, tell their own unique story of how the GEM journey has unfolded with respect to the health and wellbeing of the participants who have taken it. And by mid-2022 the research team were duly able to formally evidence this impact by undertaking a comprehensive statistical analysis of the WEMWBS data, and specifically the change in mental wellbeing that had occurred for GEM participants as a result of their GEM journey. In fact, the results are not only conclusive, but also help confirm findings from other tools and methods.

A total of 785 participants completed the WEMWBS survey, equating to a total of 1,134 responses, with 349 completing both Entry and Exit versions. Using this more reliable sample reveals a positive – and statistically significant – uplift in all elements of mental wellbeing across the participant cohort, as depicted by the uplift parameters contained in Table 5.

WEMWBS statement. Over the past 2 weeks, I have:	Mean change (uplift)*	Strength of self-reported change in mental wellbeing**
1) Been feeling optimistic about the future	0.771a	Strong
2) Been feeling useful	0.874 a	Strong
3) Been feeling relaxed	0.576 a	Moderate
4) Been feeling interested in other people	0.570 a	Moderate
5) Had energy to spare	0.499 a	Weak–Moderate
6) Been dealing with problems well	0.676 a	Moderate
7) Been thinking clearly	0.736 a	Moderate
8) Been feeling good about myself	0.840 a	Moderate – Strong
9) Been feeling close to other people	0.602 a	Moderate
10) Been feeling confident	0.971 a	Strong
11) Been able to make up my own mind about things	0.562 a	Moderate
12) Been feeling loved	0.367 a	Weak
13) Been interested in new things	0.490 a	Weak–Moderate
14) Been feeling cheerful	0.745 a	Moderate–Strong

Table 5 – Results from the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) analysis

*2 tailed t–test significance – all mean changes between Entry and Exit are significant to the a99% level, implying that if applied to a comparable sample, we could be 99% sure that the equivalent result would be achieved.

**According to Cohen's 1988 validated measure.

The data in Table 5 also indicates the strength of the uplift in mental wellbeing across the various elements. Notable again is the particularly strong uplift in feelings of confidence recorded by the survey – further reinforcement of this widespread finding of the GEM evaluation. And strong uplifts for feeling Optimistic about the future (positive functioning, confidence), Good about self (self-esteem) and feeling Useful (purpose, competence) also triangulate strongly with findings from both the Distance Travelled Survey, peer researcher interviews and other evaluation methods. With no significant differences found between participants groups (such as gender, educational level etc), we can ascertain that impacts on mental wellbeing were felt uniformly across the participant cohort, reinforcing the gravity of the impact, and of the success of GEM in addressing the needs of its target population.

Reporting uplift in mental wellbeing across the various elements



5. Building Relationships — Building Partnerships

If we were to identify one characteristic of GEM that has enabled the generation of the profound impacts described in this report more than any other, it would have to be the relational model of GEM. The unique relationship between the Navigator Developer and the participant that GEM initiated and facilitated the growth in, lies at the core of the majority of positive outcomes described here.

While the Deep Hanging Out (DHO) proved successful in enabling continual improvements in the processes of GEM implementation and delivery in a formative sense, it also gave a unique insight into the nature of these many relationships that were formed and nurtured — and made the myriad social, psychological and economic outcomes come to fruition over the course of the six-year programme.

Navigator Developer — Participant

The relationship between Navigator Developer and participant is a unique one. In many ways the success of the GEM approach relates to the fact that Navigator Developers were based in the community, often working out of local charities. So they were immediately approachable, non-threatening and accessible to participants. Experiencing a difficulty with formal services such as the job centre can often deter people from seeking help, thinking it is 'not for them'. The GEM project — through its community-based model supported by an umbrella VCS Organisation and a Local Authority therefore had a considerably greater reach than other services.

Due to the nature and scale of the GEM partnership, Navigator Developers could call upon a wide range of skills and expertise across the partnership, which enabled them to take advice and if necessary, to refer participants on to a more suitable service. Establishing meaningful relationships with their participants gave them a good understanding of their individual support needs, which in turn facilitated efficient and effective signposting to partner organisations.

Employment can be sensitive issue for some, and the one-to-one relationship was an example of strength-based, person-centred practice in action. There was an inherent flexibility in the work and support of the Navigator Developer that also fitted well with the idea of social prescribing.

One Navigator Developer described it as 'spending time with people in the place where they're comfortable, so they can tell their story and build up their confidence. That is what social prescribing is about because it's non-medical and it's about people making time, listening, understanding



and being supportive and working with that individual.' While examples of the social prescribing model have previously been applied to people with disabilities in the county, GEM was ground breaking in the sense that it was delivered by multiple VCS organisations and extended beyond people with disabilities. GEM Navigator Developers trailblazed this new model and facilitated tangible changes in how this wider cohort of people engage those with complex needs.

In terms of what made the relationships work, many Navigator Developers and participants spoke about the need for two-way trust between the participant and the Navigator Developer — trust built up through consistency, motivation, reliability, the warmth demonstrated by the Navigator Developers and the strength of the one-one relationships that were developed. This is a central theme that emerges when exploring the uniqueness of the GEM model and the way that it has fostered real change — for its participants, and for ways of working in the county.

As the project entered in to 2021 and 2022 using ever more creative tools and scaling up these methods, the culture within organisations became supportive of more creative approaches to working with and supporting participants. The GEM budget enabled Navigator Developers to source creative materials, and time was given to enable this creativity to come to fruition — a good example being the creative evaluation approaches described in the following section. This process empowered Navigator Developers, giving them the freedom to be work differently with participants, to be relaxed and to push the boundaries of what could be achieved.

Participant — Participant

There have also been a number of ways that relationships between participants have developed throughout the programme, which as the peer researcher work has demonstrated — which itself gave voice to participants — has provided another layer of support, and of relational experience that has helped to forge the myriad of positive outcomes for participants.

In the early days of the programme a Participants' Council was set up that held regular meetings and socials, enabling connections between participants to be built. With some initial difficulties recruiting, the council soon began to establish methods that worked and became very established. As described in section 4, the lockdown of 2020 started a whole new area of GEM work including #GEMonline. This became host to a number of very innovative groups that participants were able to take part in and in some cases to lead as group members. Recognised for the valuable support it provides, some activities have continued in the post-pandemic world, such as the music groups, socials and arts activities.

GEM participants have also taken part in training other people on the GEM project, leading groups or taking part in the Green Impact audit training, and have been instrumental in making so many GEM events reflect the wide breadth of activities within the project. These were evident at the celebration in summer 2022 when the food, massages, haircuts, entertainment and sporting activities were all provided by GEM participants, culminating in a vibrant and fun event.

Partner — Partner

But the relational story of GEM doesn't stop at many 000's of fruitful relationships forged between Navigator Developers and participants along the journey of GEM. Being one of the biggest and most prolific partnerships ever constructed in the county, GEM's relational legacy also extends to the relationships — and ways of working — that it has facilitated between its 30 or so partner organisations. Recognising the magnitude and importance of this as the sun set on 2019, the GEM Operational Management Committee (OMC) talked it through with the

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) team, and the GEM Partnership Assessment got underway in Spring 2020 – in the depths of lockdown but with a strong appetite to learn more about the magic of GEM.

An initial workshop to scope out the impacts of GEM for the partner organisations highlighted a number of benefits that were keenly felt – including trust, synergy, satisfaction and impact. These were unique in the sense that they arose because partners were working together. By working together, GEM partners were not only able to achieve better outcomes for beneficiaries but secure a number of benefits that fostered cooperative behaviour, breakthroughs in thinking and action, a strong psychological bond with the partnership and the sense that GEM really made a difference.

Not surprisingly, partners in GEM had experienced a number of challenges along the way, Covid–19 featuring particularly large. The combination of home–working, an inability to meet face–to–face, and social and political upheaval, meant that it was more difficult to interact with beneficiaries and partners alike. Such issues served to sharpen the focus and resolve of the partners who intensified efforts to navigate the complex demands of partnership working and continued to work through a range of issues relating to partner aims, practices and culture so that a common approach could be maintained. The evaluation revealed how, despite these challenges, partners were able to share resources and advice, including, staff expertise and knowledge and mutual support. In this way, the GEM partnership had proved to be highly resilient and able to sustain its activities, demonstrating an inherently communicative approach which valued cooperation, trust and respect.

Partnership working is characterised by a number of benefits and drawbacks. This was no less true for GEM where it was clear that the partnership had led to more responsive and creative approaches, a high degree of flexibility, and an appetite for learning which helped partners understand what worked, for whom and why. These benefits were set against a backdrop of trust and equality that ensured partners generally felt included in key decisions and processes. Things which served to undermine or offset these benefits included burdensome but necessary paperwork and occasional challenges in supporting access to continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities to ensure GEM partners were in the best possible position to deliver the project.

As the GEM project continued to evolve, the evaluation team set out to investigate in more detail the benefits and drawbacks (costs) of the GEM partnership in order to explore in more detail what it was that ‘made it tick’, and what could be done to further improve its processes and practices. To do this, a partnership survey was distributed in early 2022. We received 23 responses to the survey (females accounting for 67%) including those from Navigator Developers, managers (teams, project and other delivery) and senior organisational staff.

Speaking to the widespread use of partnerships, 83% indicated previous experience and nearly 50% considered themselves as being very or extremely involved in the GEM partnership. Indeed, on average partners spent approximately 20 hours per month on activities in support of the GEM partnership including project work, networking and preparing for meetings. Early indications of partners’ perceptions concerning how the GEM partnership operated were borne out in the survey results (Figure 5) where 70% indicated that they were very or extremely confident in decision making processes and generally felt able to influence them. Grouping the various aspects in the survey demonstrated favourable opinions on a number of items, notably contributions (which described the nature of partners’ inputs), commitment (describing the feeling of commitment toward the GEM partnership), and satisfaction (how partners felt about the partnership’s accomplishments). All scores (using a 1–5 Likert–type scale) averaged between 3.5 (Benefits) and 4.5 (Contributions), except barriers (2.8) and Costs (2.0).

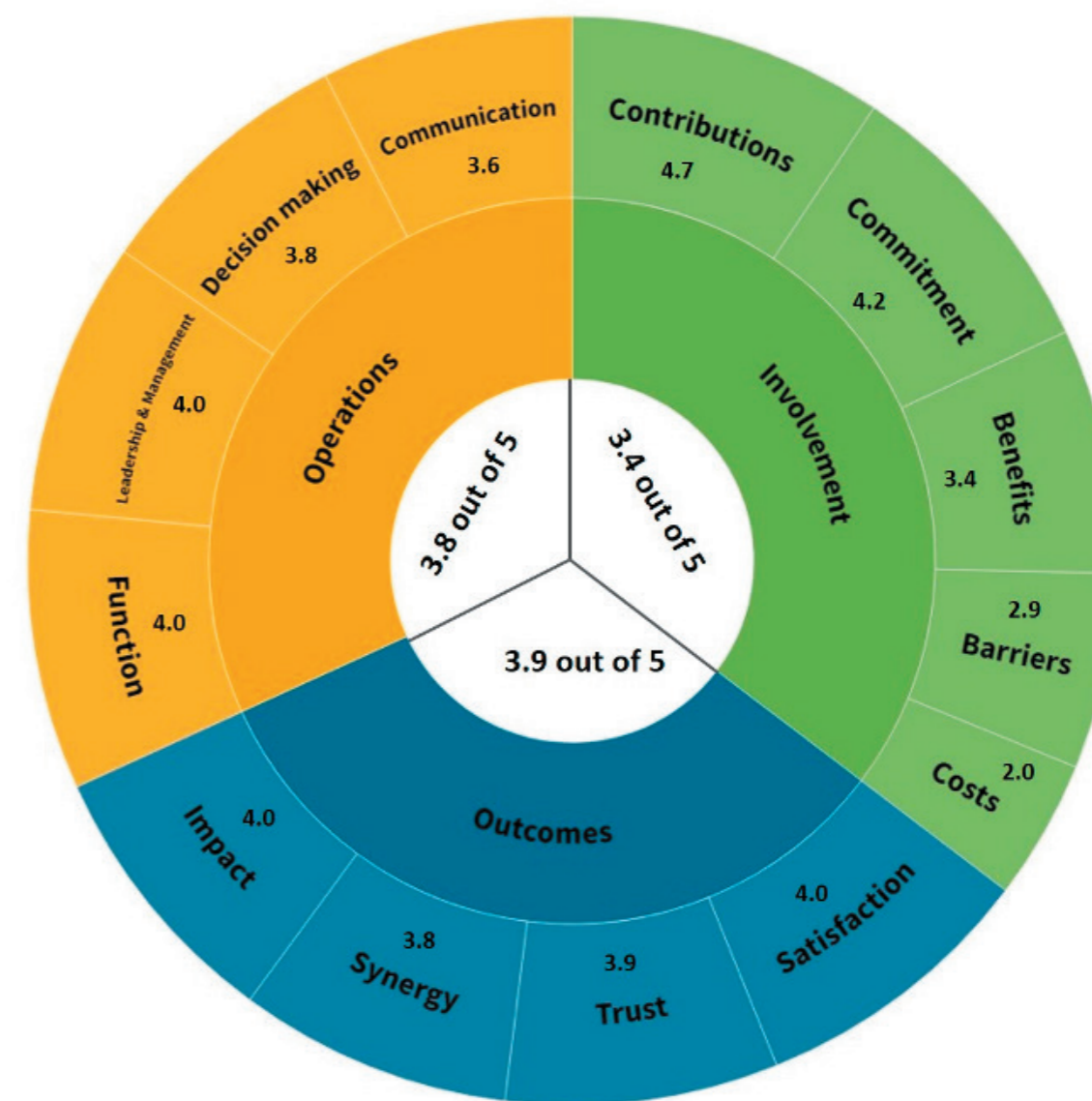


Figure 5 – Findings from the GEM partnership survey

Given what had already been identified it was perhaps not a surprise to see very low perceptions of barriers. More surprising was how consistently partners felt that the benefits of working in the GEM partnership outweighed the drawbacks, these being double, even for those partners who felt that there were more drawbacks than benefits. This further supported the notion that partners saw the value, relevance and role of GEM, even in the face of challenges which might otherwise have served to lower expectations and commitment. Central to this was the role of communication which assisted with decision making and leadership and management – which played an important role in identifying synergistic opportunities that maximised the impact of the GEM partnership’s activities.

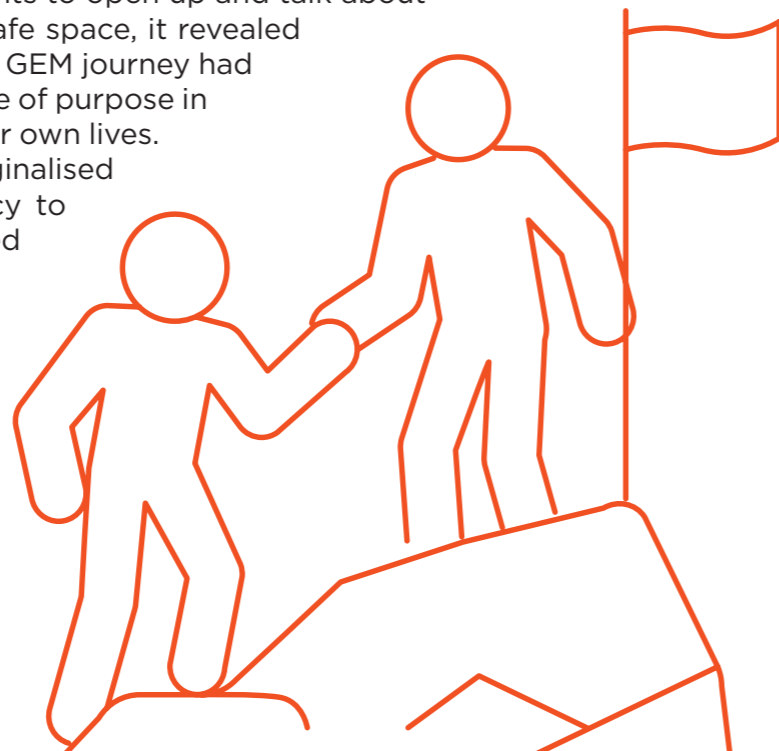
6. Inclusivity, Diversity and Sustainability – New Heights and Bright Futures

While Inclusivity was a thread that ran the course of the GEM journey, it was also a deliberate thread in the GEM evaluation right from the very start. Inclusivity was implicit in all evaluation methods that we designed and implemented, in that we always strived to involve the recipients of the evaluation – from programme managers through to participants – in the design and implementation of the methods. And as far as possible while remaining objective and academically rigorous, we also strived to ensure that the evaluation reached out to the far corners of the participant and partnership cohort, and gave voice to those who are so often overlooked in evaluative exercises such as this. One philosophy that underpins this, is that attributes such as happiness and success often mean different things to different people – so we cannot assume that a successful outcome for one will mean the same for another.

A second philosophy is that the methods that we use to gather data on experiences and outcomes need to respect the individual contexts which people find themselves in – whether that be personal, emotional, societal or environmental. The Journey of Change is itself a context-based framework that ensured – as far as possible – that the outcomes we sought to explore and measure, and the way that we set about this, was as inclusive as possible. But we also took more deliberate steps to make inclusivity an explicit element of the evaluation, in order that we may capture those stories and experiences at the extremities of individual contexts. One example is the Digital Storytelling, which as the report on mental wellbeing impacts in section 4 indicate, added considerable depth and colour to the metrics of change in wellbeing provided by the WEMWBS survey. Indeed, throughout the evaluation, triangulation between different methods – in other words using different techniques and lenses to examine the same phenomenon – was itself a central thread of the approach.

Two deliberate phases of Inclusive Evaluation were undertaken – in 2019 and again in 2021 as we emerged from the Covid-19 Pandemic. Led by Anna Bonallack, CEO of GEM partner Creative Sustainability, and involving their own Navigator Developer, Anna Reeves, this work involved a range of activities designed to be not only inclusive, but to innovate in the evaluation space. These included achievement journals, mindful photography and creative engagement tools designed to support the work of Navigator Developers.

Reviewing the outcomes of implementing the creative engagement tools is particularly insightful – with respect to not only their evaluative power, but also the GEM journey itself in that by enabling participants to open up and talk about their feelings and their experiences in a safe space, it revealed at a greater depth, the extent to which the GEM journey had helped participants to gain not only a sense of purpose in life, but also a sense of autonomy over their own lives. In other words, even for those most marginalised from society, it was giving people agency to forge their own journey in a way that suited them.



And indeed, evidence of a symbiotic relationship between this story of individual agency and the impact of the creative engagement itself also began to emerge. By giving participants an easy – and often natural – way to express themselves, the CE tools helped participants to feel more relaxed which enabled them to have more meaningful conversations and to make the most of their journey on GEM. They also reduced that sense of feeling alone, which also helped to deepen conversations and connections, and to reflect on the GEM journey and the behavioural changes that they were making along the way. In this way the monitoring and evaluation itself was playing a role in the personal development of the participants – by facilitating a greater awareness – of themselves, and of the changes they are experiencing along their journey – and helped to reinforce the positive impacts of GEM.

Application of the CE tools therefore helped to give participants voice, but also agency. They had control over their evaluation and as a result they were able to be more authentic. And in this regard, the use of the creative engagement actually facilitated an almost therapeutic experience – certainly an empathic one. For example, one participant felt very strongly that the inclusive evaluation group – though it was calm and peaceful – surfaced some emotions for her that were a bit disorganised but after a time it felt like coming through the fog, with the fog lifting. Another who had been struggling with anxiety and panic due to a previous trauma felt that the artwork had enabled her to feel much calmer. And all the participants in the group were very bonded and planned to continue meeting independently after the facilitated 4 weeks of groupwork with the Navigator Developer had finished.

In large part, this was because the CE tools were co-produced with the participants themselves, and in this regard, the application of the inclusive evaluation methods have also led to further outputs from GEM for the evaluation community. In the same way that the Distance Travelled Survey led to a validated 6-item scale for application in future social and economic inclusion programmes (see section 3), a Co-produced Inclusive Evaluation (CPIE) toolkit – comprising training in principles and inclusive methods, a questionnaire creation template, a rich picture and word library and an Inclusive Theory of Change (ToC) template – evolved from the inclusive evaluation. Together with the 6-item scale, this will benefit commissioners, practitioners and participants of future social inclusion programmes alike.



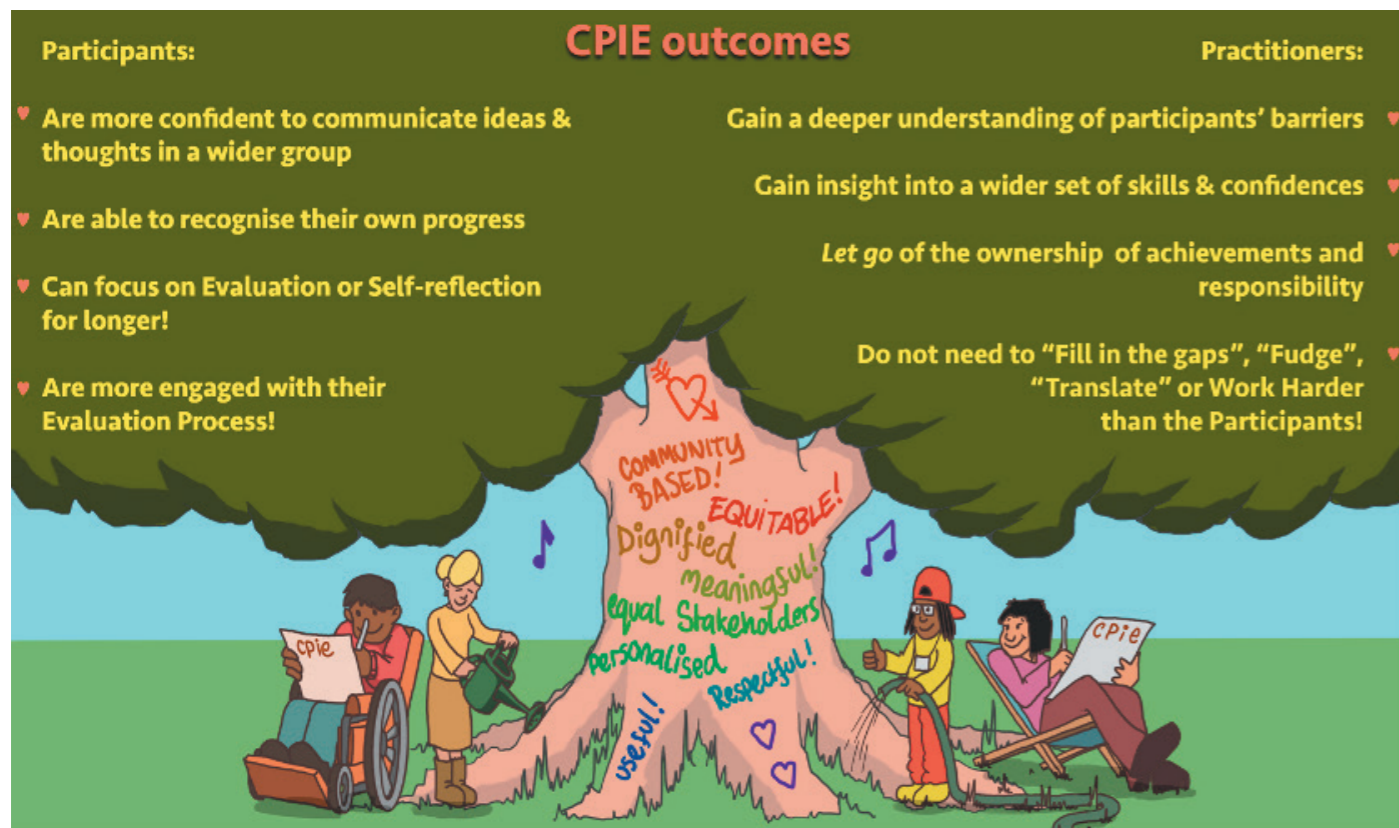


Figure 6 — Outcomes of Co-Produced Inclusive Evaluation (CPiE) methods

Inclusivity, Diversity and Equality

In the latter years of the GEM journey it became apparent to the programme managers – and to the partners – that as a result of GEM, the principals of inclusivity were extending deep into the management, recruitment and working practices of the many employers who have provided work based opportunities to GEM participants. This led to launch of the Inclusivity Works initiative in late 2020, designed to further build this culture of Inclusion amongst employers in the county – in which people can come to work, feel comfortable and confident to be themselves and work in a way that suits them to deliver the needs of individual businesses – and build a strong network of inclusive employers across the county.

To provide insights into the effectiveness of this initiative, alongside the wider impact of GEM on Gloucestershire employers, we undertook some in-depth interviews with a handful of inclusive employers, to shine a light on the changes taking place in the recruitment, management and employee engagement practices of these employers, and to develop a survey to systematically evidence these changes across a wider cohort – a survey which at the time of writing is still open. Findings from these exploratory interviews are summarised in Figure 7 below. As can be seen, impacts emerging from this initial research cohered around four main elements – a commitment to, and investment in, equality and diversity; encouraging diversity through fostering a journey of self-discovery in existing and prospective employees; normalising inclusivity in the workplace; and putting in place the systems and processes to support it.

The sub-text of these findings is the shift toward an authentic leadership agenda, which takes inclusivity, equality and diversity in the workplace to the next level, and is based around the principals of developing self-awareness of leaders and of employees, of aligning behaviours and processes with the values of individuals, and fostering authentic relationships in the workplace. This shift represents another important legacy of GEM in the county.

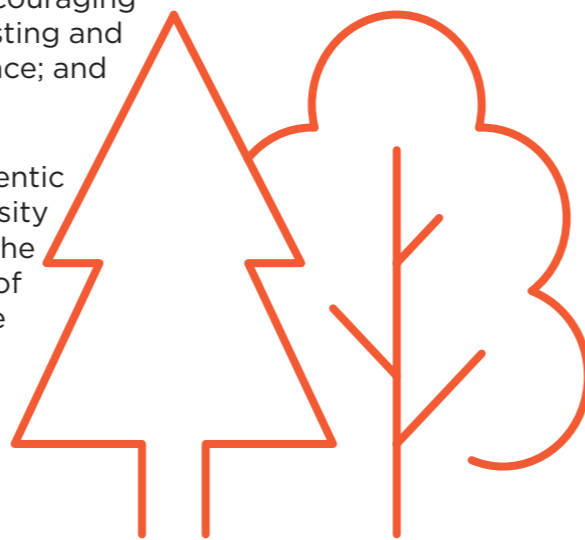


Figure 7 — Headline findings from the Inclusive Employer Interviews

Sustainability

The steps taken through Inclusivity Works to engender a lasting change with respect to employment inclusivity, related in part to the part to the cross-cutting theme of Equality and Diversity, which was never far from the design, implementation and development of GEM as its journey continued. A second cross-cutting theme was Sustainability, which sought to foster environmentally sustainable behaviours in the county. And again, deliberate steps were taken by GEM programme managers to facilitate this, through the international Green Impact change and engagement toolkit. The Green Impact toolkit also provided a vehicle for tracking the impact of GEM on sustainability in the county. In addition to the impacts summarised in Figure 8, the initiative was successful in saving an estimated 72, 845 kg in CO2 and an estimated £26,292 in related financial cost savings for GEM partners.

7. Insights for our Future Journey

Local engagement at GEM in 2021-22

Since Green Impact launched at GEM in 2018, over 2,460 positive sustainability actions were completed, including over 1,040 as a direct result of the programme, and a further 10 Green Impact projects reached at least the planning stage. At its peak, the programme had 30 participating organisations across GEM taking part. Almost 1,500 people were reached by the various activities. 27 local students, GEM participants and NavDevs were supported to become Green Impact auditors, and over 230 staff across GEM partners were directly involved in running the programme as team members. **Here's what has been achieved in 2021-22...**



18 teams working through the toolkit and receiving an award



232 people led Green Impact teams - your average team size is 13



Provided 13 GEM participants and NavDevs with training and development opportunities in their roles as auditors



Reached 1442 colleagues via Green Impact teams



Put 724 actions into place, 376 as a direct result of Green Impact

Green Impact: 2021-22 Impact Report



Figure 8 — Achievements of the application GEM's Green Impact toolkit



We end this short report with some insights for the future – for policy makers and commissioners, programme managers and evaluators, for organisations at the front line of delivery and implementation, and for service users. Such insights can be construed as recommendations, lessons learned, examples of good practice or a mix of the three.

For policy makers and commissioners, we can identify two evidential shifts arising through the GEM experience – a shift from employment support to supported employment, and a shift from a 'one size fits all' approach to a person-centred approach. Making these high level shifts in the way we think about supporting people along their personal and professional journey will open a myriad of doors to the wealth of possibilities documented here – from the building of agency and resilience in individuals to carve their own future, to building a strong civil society that enables communities to harness the power of their own local context, to building the infrastructure to enable the depth of partnership working that can truly demonstrate that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. And for policy makers and commissioners alike there is a further message – that the GEM model – itself built around a relational approach to fostering inclusive change for individuals – is applicable to everyone who requires some form of personal or professional support, and not only to those most excluded from society. It can indeed be even more inclusive; the main caveat being that it remains person-centred and true to local contexts – in every sense.

As documented here, the GEM evaluation focussed in large part on the outcomes arising through the programme – real and often profound changes have occurred for individuals, organisations, working practices and relationships. And commissioners and programme managers will perhaps recognise more than anyone the power this has in demonstrating the wider – and sometimes incidental – impacts that GEM has had. The impacts of GEM on mental wellbeing and on the self-confidence of individuals being shining examples. No one would have anticipated the magnitude or gravity of such changes at the start of the GEM journey. So, we would whole heartedly recommend an outcomes focused evaluation for comparable social inclusion programmes, along with a formative developmental approach to facilitate a wealth of learning along the way. And of course, another secret weapon – involvement in the evaluation team not just at programme inception, but at the stage of programme design. The co-produced nature of GEM – at the levels of design, delivery, management and implementation – is arguably the biggest lesson of them all.

From an evaluator's point of view the GEM experience has not only been a success but an absolute delight. Beyond the opportunity to evidence the outcomes for thousands of individuals using a variety of lenses, the formative elements have been particularly satisfying as they have helped to drive the programme forward through two funding extensions, and to consolidate and improve its delivery along the way – which in turn has led to even greater and more widespread change. While this is testament to the success of a developmental, theory-based approach to evaluation, the outputs of this experience such as our 6-item social inclusion scale, the co-produced inclusive evaluation (CPIE) tools and the partnership assessment model will – it is hoped – help bring this insight to even greater fruition in the future. But perhaps the most profound insight from an evaluators point of view is that we have learned first-hand that success and happiness means different things to different people. If we were to do this 6-year evaluation again it would almost certainly be even more inclusive – in terms of methods, engagement and our underlying philosophy.



GEM was unique, not only with respect to its person-centred relation model, but also with regard to the sheer size of its partnership, which has enabled the magic of GEM to weave itself into the working practices of the many tens of organisations who are at the front line of service delivery in the county. And some important insights for future working and service delivery arise from the GEM journey – not least the importance and strength of partnership working itself. GEM is testament to the fact that, with a common vision and purpose, the whole really is greater than the sum of the parts. And with awareness and determination, the spirit – if not the formality – of this partnership will not be lost as we move beyond GEM. Nor will the lessons learned at the coal face of nurturing and supporting individuals as they move from a sense of adversity to a sense of pride, purpose and agency – to drive their lives forward towards happiness and prosperity. For one thing, the legacy of how GEM partners demonstrated such agility and resilience to serve GEM participants throughout the Covid-19 Pandemic will never be lost. Again, inclusivity is the quintessential insight here, not only in terms of who is served, but how they are served – in a flexible and context-based way – an insight that extends out to the management and recruitment practices of the organisations themselves. The evident shift towards authentic leadership and truly inclusive employment practices arising from GEM is indeed heartening.

So, what of the insights for the service users themselves – for our future programme participants, and for those supported along their journey as we enter this brave new post GEM world? As the material summarised here demonstrates, there are many. But if we were to choose three insights to take these individuals on their way it would perhaps be these. First, develop some awareness about what you want to achieve. Ask yourself – what do I really want? If all individuals work towards goals that align with their values, skills and aspirations we will undoubtedly go a long way as a society. Opportunities for goal setting – and perhaps even completing the distance travelled surveys – very likely helped GEM participants to push the boundaries of possibility for them – which is half the battle. Second, be mindful of your wellbeing – for in the face of adversity and in fact of modern life generally, it underpins so much of what we do as individuals. So be mindful to nurture your wellbeing, to monitor it, and to reach out to others when you need to. The relational model of GEM undoubtedly lies behind the profound impacts on mental wellbeing along the GEM journey, and those wellbeing outcomes lie at the heart of many of the positive outcomes for individuals documented here. And finally, strive to develop your own sense of agency – the sense of feeling in control of your own life, and your destiny. This requires building resilience, and often self-confidence – outcomes many participants have developed profoundly along their GEM journey, as we have documented here. But there is a fundamental insight that underlies this. GEM has succeeded because it has fostered individual agency through being supported, nurtured, guided, coached and in the most difficult of times, held. In other words, change has been done with the participants, not to the participants – a lesser told secret is that real change has happened because the Navigator Developers have been true to the participant’s agenda, not their own. Participants have developed what is often termed a ‘coaching mindset’, and with it the agency to move their lives forward. And we can all do a lot worse than that.



GEM has been a real journey in so many ways – for individuals, for organisations and for the GEM partnership as a collective. But it has also been a journey for the Monitoring and Evaluation team – a memorable journey, and a relatively long journey – certainly in twenty-first century research terms. It has also been immensely enjoyable, and we have learnt a lot from working so closely with the GEM Management team, and to following the stories of participants and other stakeholders as they have brought not only GEM related activities, but the underlying philosophy of GEM into their everyday lives and working practices.

We have also learnt a lot about evaluation methods and approaches, and about the immense power that lies in combining different methods and in viewing the same thing through a different lens. To telling stories in a variety of ways. As a team we knew a fair amount about the theory of this, but to apply it in a real live situation, and derive real world impacts as a result, is indeed a real delight. We have been honoured to play our part in the GEM Project, and as the curtains are

drawn on this programme, we look forward to facilitating learning, and evidencing impact, for the stakeholders of our home county in the future – wherever the social inclusion journey next takes them.

We would like to take this opportunity to say a wholehearted thank you to the many individuals who have not only helped to make the GEM Monitoring and Evaluation possible, but also to make it such a success, and a pleasure to undertake. There are obviously too many people to mention here, but most likely you know who are. From participants, to Navigator Developers, to organisational leaders, and to the many other stakeholders, actors and allies of GEM whom we have met, conversed with and contacted as the GEM journey has unfolded. All have had your role to play, and your own unique story to impart – so Thank You to you all – for your time, for your honesty and for your integrity.

Here’s to reaching new heights in 2023, and beyond!
Paul Courtney and Leonie Burton, University of Gloucestershire



Prof. Paul Courtney
University of Gloucestershire – A research leader and specialist in social value, Paul is an advocate of context-based, co-produced methodologies that generate real-world impacts for research participants and end users, and seek meaningful solutions to complex problems.



Leonie Burton
University of Gloucestershire – An experienced development manager with a demonstrated history of working in the higher education industry, Leonie is skilled in the management of teams and large projects, bid writing, research work, client development and public speaking.



Dr Colin Baker – A researcher and evaluator with an interest in exploring interventions in the health and community sectors, Colin has vast experience of research aimed at tackling the thorny issues affecting people, and supporting them to lead healthier and happier lives.



Dr Fahimeh Malekinezhad – A social science researcher with a background in the mental health impacts of green space, Fahimeh is a talented statistician and peer researcher whose own journey as a GEM participant led her to join the Monitoring & Evaluation team in 2019.



Prof. Abigail Gardner – A Cultural Studies researcher with an interest in listening as a methodology, Abigail has facilitated digital storytelling projects in a number of different communities and groups where meaningful pieces of video are owned by the participants.



Chris Jones – A Research Officer dedicated to providing effective and efficient project support, Chris provides a range of valuable services to colleagues that enable them to prioritise tasks and add the most value to projects.



Anna Bonallack – A co-founder of Creative Sustainability in 2010, Anna strives for fairness, for boldness and innovation in how we research and develop community led action, and for better processes of decision making to overcome inequities and allow all voices to be heard.



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