



**BBO Herefordshire
BBO Shropshire**
where will **your** journey take you?



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Evaluation of the impact of Covid-19 on Landau Ltd BBO Herefordshire & BBO Shropshire projects

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Foreword

In 2017 Landau successfully won a bid to deliver the Building Better Opportunities (BBO) Project in collaboration with local, small voluntary sector organisations that would not have had the ability on their own, to deliver a complex European Funded Programme. Landau Ltd is the grant holder for BBO Shropshire and BBO Herefordshire and provides the project management function, which includes central coordination of project data and referrals, reporting to the funders and management of delivery partners. Landau also has delivery teams in both projects so are, themselves, a delivery partner.

Landau has put a variety of systems in place, including a project database and rigorous financial systems that has resulted in our ability to ensure that the project has been successful in terms of performance at audit and overall performance to project targets. Both BBO Shropshire and Herefordshire projects have been extended to run until 2022 although originally due to complete at the end of 2019. This was due to the hard work of Landau and all our partner organisations resulting in high achievement on targets and outcomes, and excellent project compliance, passing all independent audits since project inception.

During the Covid-19 lockdown, Landau remained 'open for business' and continued to support our BBO participants across The Marches and also to support the organisations in our partnership so that they could continue to work with as many people as possible. Landau provided support to project partners by introducing an electronic signature tool to continue to compliantly process project paperwork required by the funder and supported project participants with online and remote support. We held partnership meetings and met with partners individually throughout the lockdown period, forwarding information on training opportunities for participants and key workers alike and any known support provided in the counties for people struggling during lockdown.

Whilst the numbers of participants coming onto BBO slowed during the lockdown period as detailed in this report, as we move out of the restrictions and businesses in the UK also begin to resume trading, our number of new participants on project and the number of people progressing with BBO project support into employment is increasing.

Sonia Roberts

Chief Executive Officer, Landau Ltd

Executive Summary

Introduction and method

This report evaluates the impact the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic had on the Building Better Opportunities (BBO) programme in Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin between March and July 2020¹. The methods used were: a series of interviews with the providers of BBO projects by phone or video call; and an analysis of assessment and performance data. The findings are summarised below. Case studies featuring some of the ingenious ways in which providers have continued to deliver the programme are included in the main body of the report, as are the results of the data analysis.

Key findings on the impact of the pandemic on BBO delivery

Continued provision

Landau continued to support the partnership to deliver outcomes during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown in a variety of ways. They worked from home and used digital means to stay in touch, share information and enable outcomes to be claimed and funding drawn down by providers.

19 of the 23 providers in the partnership managed to continue delivery in some form, but usually in a reduced capacity or in a completely different way using digital technology. This is despite nearly all providers having to close their offices and sites due to COVID. The personalised support, 'meeting every individual where they're at' approach of the BBO providers has been a real strength during lockdown. Knowing individuals' personal circumstances has helped put things in place that were really appreciated and helped build trust between worker and participant.

Most providers have been very adaptable and flexible in their approach. 'Work arounds' have been found to help participants overcome barriers. At the beginning of lockdown, the providers dealt with welfare issues first, checking whether participants were safe and had support to get supplies or even getting supplies to them.

The next step for providers was to establish ways of keeping in touch and delivering activities to participants remotely. Then to provide technical support to participants to enable them to do so, via phone, text, e-mail and/or video-call (Skype, Whatsapp, Zoom, Microsoft Teams). Access to IT and also the internet by clients (and for some provider staff) was a barrier to overcome for

¹ The Building Better Opportunities (BBO) programme uses Big Lottery Funds matched with European Social Funds (ESF) to invest in local projects tackling the root causes of poverty, promoting social inclusion and driving local jobs and growth. Landau is a supported employment and training organisation leading a partnership of 23 organisations in delivering BBO in Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin. The funding for the latter two areas began in 2017 and in Herefordshire in 2018. Data Orchard CIC (a research consultancy) were commissioned to evaluate their impact.

continued engagement. Some participants did not have a computer/laptop or tablet at home and only accessed the internet for job searching at community centres, which were closed during lockdown. Most participants have smart phones but not all could afford the mobile data required to access the internet. Several providers successful obtained grants to buy laptops for participants, so they could job search and take part in online courses.

Positive impacts of lockdown

Overcoming digital exclusion and improving digital skills have been positive impacts of lockdown both for participants and the staff of many providers. Some participants found they are more comfortable using digital platforms than face to face meetings, particularly early on in their journey with BBO. Demand increased for the services that were provided by some providers during lockdown, such as outdoor and craft activities. The BBO work enabled people to stay connected, particularly for those who live alone, and provided opportunities to get to know each other. The delivery staff helped reassure and guide participants through the changing government guidance during lockdown and helped reduce anxiety levels. Partnership working was identified a real asset during lockdown, building on and strengthening existing relationships.

Negative impacts of lockdown

Most participants are vulnerable in some way and some were shielding. All partners reported that lockdown had exacerbated mental health issues and anxiety. There was a lack of engagement by some participants who struggled to think of the future and take steps towards employment during this time. In some cases, provider staff had been the only consistent support for individuals and when urgent health support was needed, had to assertively advocate to get them access to services. Referrals from the Job Centre were delayed, and there were fewer job or volunteering opportunities available.

There were also negative impacts on the provider staff, many of whom had to adjust to working from home and digitally, with broadband capacity/speed a constraint for some. Isolation also had a negative effect, so many implemented weekly staff virtual well-being meetings. Many staff reported being mentally exhausted by providing more emotional and mental health support. Staff missed not being able to meet participants face to face which made life harder.

Thoughts on future delivery

The personalised support provided to participants is still key to the BBO programme in Herefordshire and Shropshire. Most providers plan to continue to provide some online activities (Zoom has been a key tool for this) and many staff will work from home more after the pandemic lockdown eases. Several staff said they are using the time not spent commuting more productively. Providers are planning for gradually returning to sites and offices but are being understandably cautious, as they want to keep participants and staff safe. There has been mixed feedback to the implementation of a new system of getting forms signed electronically (SignRequest). It seemed complicated at the outset but once familiar, it has suited some providers and was quicker to get the

forms completed. However, the software needs further modification for those who are visually impaired and use screen readers.

Key findings from the data analysis

Issues faced by participants when they start

On entry to BBO, participants and key workers use an assessment toolkit in the Personal Employment Plan to score 10 areas of their life. High scores mean self-reliance, or no help/support required to low scores meaning the participant is not thinking or getting help on a problematic issue. Analysis of the data for 1,048 participants currently in the BBO programme showed that participants had lower scores on entry for the areas: Confidence, Challenges (e.g. childcare, age, criminal record), Job Searching and Work Experience. The overall pattern in each county is similar with some subtle differences. Analyses of the extent to which this changes over time in the programme will be explored in the next evaluation.

Profile of participants

- 57% of all participants are unemployed and 43% are economically inactive. 59% of participants in Shropshire and 51% in Herefordshire were unemployed.
- 62% of all participants live in a jobless household, higher in Herefordshire.
- 35% of participants enter with only basic skills, higher in Herefordshire.
- 53% of all participants are male, lower in Herefordshire.
- The average age of participants is 44.
- 51% of all participants have a disability, higher in Herefordshire.
- Of the ethnicity data provided, 92% of participants are White British.
- 12% of participants are ex-offenders.
- 11% of all participants are in single parent households with dependent children, higher in Herefordshire.

Summary of performance

Overall BBO Herefordshire and Shropshire continue to over-achieve targets for employment outcomes. There is a target shortfall for getting those who are economically inactive into job searching and for progressing people into education and training. This is due to funding 'rules' meaning that once an outcome is claimed, the participant needs to be exited from the project. Key workers are helping participants to job search and find meaningful training but the project are not claiming those outcomes as key workers continue to support the individual to find employment. The paperwork and evidence that the job searching and training outcomes are being achieved is held on the project database, but have not been claimed with the funders at this point.

Lockdown has made delivery during the second quarter of 2020 very challenging. Some participants managed to get jobs, and some have been job searching but the job market also paused for most sectors. For example, hairdressing for a newly qualified participant. Volunteering

opportunities mostly dried up too. There was demand for jobs in health and social care, but many participants are vulnerable in terms of their own health.

There was a considerable negative impact from COVID-19 lockdown on new starters to the BBO programme with a significant drop from quarter 2 to quarter 3. Progress across all outcomes and projects predictably slowed during quarter 2 showing the effect of lockdown. This reflects what providers said during interviews, that the main priority was to keep participants engaged - 'hold them steady' - so that progress can be resumed, and outcomes achieved when restrictions lift.

1. Introduction

The Building Better Opportunities (BBO) programme uses The National Lottery Community Fund matched with European Social Funds (ESF) to invest in local projects tackling the root causes of poverty, promoting social inclusion and driving local jobs and growth.

Landau is a local supported employment and training organisation leading a partnership of 23 organisations in delivering BBO in Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin. The funding for the latter two areas began in 2017 and in Herefordshire in 2018.

Landau provides the project management function, including compliance and audit and is also a delivery partner. This includes management of delivery partners, central coordination of project data and referrals and reporting to the funders. The projects help participants overcome barriers, gain skills and develop confidence through intensive personalised support to move towards and into employment.

Data Orchard combines specialist skills in research, statistics, and data, with a passion for making the world a better place socially, economically and environmentally by helping organisations use data for better decisions and greater impact. We were commissioned by BBO Landau in January 2020 to evaluate BBO projects across Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin.

This report summarises the findings of our research into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown on the delivery of BBO projects in Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin.

2. What we did and what we found

2.1 Interviews with providers

In order to understand the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on the delivery of BBO projects, interviews were conducted with providers of BBO projects (by phone or video-call). Questions were asked about how lockdown had affected delivery; positive and negative impacts on participants and staff; and thoughts on future delivery (see Appendix A for the interview questions). 15 interviews were completed during June and July, seven with Herefordshire providers and eight with Shropshire providers. Lockdown began on 23rd March and some restrictions were lifted in England in July.

Continued provision

Landau continued to support the partnership to deliver outcomes during Covid. The company carried on by working from home with regular one-to-one catchups with partner organisations who were all contacted in May and again in August for online meetings. There was a full partnership meeting in June on Zoom. The compliance and finance teams maintained regular contact with partners throughout lockdown; and information on local support for participants/learners was regularly disseminated to all partners. For example, job centre information on benefit changes; local council support; free online training for participants and also mental health first aid training

for key workers from Public Health England. Funding was made available to BBO partners for additional PPE; and an electronic signature system (SignRequest) was introduced. This gave partners the ability to draw down BBO funding if they were able to continue working during lockdown, as the electronic signature system enabled compliance to release funding as outcomes were achieved. Landau also arranged for one partner (Telford & Wrekin Council for Voluntary Services) to support other partners on the programme, as they (TWCVS) were unable to continue with their own delivery with participants due to a lack of available volunteering. Initially they provided administrative support to Small Woods and then the Landau delivery team, thereby avoiding CVS workers being furloughed.

19 of the 23 providers have managed to continue delivery in some form, though usually in a reduced capacity or in a completely different way using digital technology. This is despite nearly all providers having to close their offices and sites due to COVID. For example, Wem Town Hall Community Trust had to close their centre and all but one member of staff were furloughed. The one remaining member of staff continued to stay in touch and provided support to participants.

All provider staff who continued to work, did so from home, which presented challenges for some in terms of broadband speed, childcare and adjusting to it if they had not done so previously.

Most providers have been very adaptable and flexible in their approach. 'Work arounds' have been found to help participants overcome barriers. For example doing online job searches for them, and even applying for jobs online with the participant on the phone if they have no laptop/computer.

At the beginning of lockdown, the providers dealt with welfare issues first, checking whether participants were safe and had support to get supplies. Many have been going over and above the call of duty to ensure basic needs were met including delivering food parcels, providing activity packs to families (Vennture), posting masks and delivering DVDs to someone with no internet or TV. This helped keep them in touch with participants and solidify trust between key worker and participant.

The personalised support, 'meeting every individual where they're at' approach of the BBO providers has been a real strength during lockdown. Knowing individuals' personal circumstances has helped put things in place that is really appreciated

The next step for providers was to establish ways of keeping in touch and delivering activities to participants remotely. Then to provide technical support to participants to enable them to do so, via phone, text, e-mail and video-calls (Skype, WhatsApp, Zoom, Microsoft Teams). Access to IT and also the internet by clients (and for the staff of some providers) was a barrier to overcome for continued engagement. Some participants did not have a computer/laptop or tablet at home and only accessed the internet for job searching at community centres, which were closed during lockdown. Most participants have smart phones but not all could afford the mobile data required to access the internet.

"85% of our participants don't have their own IT at home - many have smartphones but often with insufficient credit to use for anything more than Whatsapp and Facebook to stay in touch with

family and friends. Some stopped going out so didn't get credit topped up." [Kindle Centre - South Wye Development Trust]

Several providers successfully obtained grants to buy laptops for participants, so they could job search and take part in online courses (notably Wrekin Housing Group and Red Spark Learning). If participants did not have a computer or smartphone, providers stayed in touch by landline and post.

A recent national report on digital skills in charities during COVID-19² showed that two thirds of charities are delivering all work remotely, whilst 61% will be offering more online services. It's also encouraging that almost half (47%) are collaborating or sharing learnings with each other around digital service. However, 27% have cancelled services because either their charity or their users don't have the necessary skills or tech.

² Effects of COVID-19, [Charity Digital Skills Report](#), July 2020, Charity Digital

Examples of continued provision

The Small Woods Trust had to close their Greenwood Centre but designed and delivered 6 different activity packs to participants to do at home with instructions. This was accompanied by weekly group Zoom meetings and encouraged participants to go and get things from outside. Most participants hadn't met each other but they all engaged with the weekly meetings and were disappointed at the end of the 6-week course - so the group meetings were continued, doing minor activities like tree identification. Small Woods Trust have been inundated with requests and referrals, to expand their online entry level courses for those with high anxiety levels as a means to progress onto face to face group meetings in the woods. One participant with extreme anxiety who wouldn't normally leave the house pre-lockdown did the 6-week course remotely, engaged with the group and wants to join in further activities at the Greenwood Centre.

"Changing and responding very quickly was tough, balancing home-work life. It has been a lot of work. We would need more resources to run it long term. It's stressful not knowing what the future will bring. Referrals from agencies increased from community mental health teams and other partners - and we now have a waiting list... We're really ready to get back on site. Aiming for September to complete the bench making course with one group." [Small Woods Trust]

Red Spark Learning stopped face to face learning in mid-March as many of their participants and staff have compromised immune systems. They purchased an online learning platform (Moodle) in March in preparation, developed and delivered the IT, English, Maths and well-being courses completely online during lockdown. They also used Microsoft Teams, Zoom and WhatsApp groups to stay in touch with participants. This has involved a steep learning curve for the tutors and participants with a higher workload for staff, but their duty of care has kept them going. One tutor was really ill with COVID-19. 60 out of their 80 participants managed to continue learning during lockdown and gained qualifications. Red Spark Learning also managed to get funding from the Herefordshire Community Foundation to purchase 16 reconditioned laptops to enable participants to take part in the online courses and stay in touch during lockdown.

Wrekin Housing Group continued to offer support to as many participants as possible, using the phone, Whatsapp and Facetime to stay in touch and continue engaging with participants instead of meeting up face to face. Finding out what each individual needed at the outset, to 'meet them where they're at' ensured they also supported their well-being needs by signposting to benefits, housing, grants and even posting DVDs to someone who was shielding and didn't have a TV licence. About half of their current participants did not have access to the internet, so job searches were done online on behalf of some participants and the information conveyed to them over the 'phone or by post. However, one participant now has a new laptop after getting a grant that the key worker applied for so the participant can job search and do some online courses. In the words of the key worker *"I'm doing what I can to help and support people in some way and keep them engaged"*.

The Cart Shed have stayed in touch with participants with weekly phone calls (*"holding them steady"*) and then delivered practical course/activity kits to continue their outdoor activities at home. None of their 25 participants have dropped out during lockdown. Many are longing to get back into the woods with others which is a positive step, as just leaving home and going into the woods for the first time is hard for some. One participant noted a 'hive' effect where many participants and staff were going through similar phases during lockdown: week 1, everyone OK; week 2, high anxiety levels; week 3, depression; week 4, lack of motivation. Recent anxiety about going back to courses has been followed by now wanting to go back.

Herefordshire Wildlife Trust ran 'Taking Note of Nature - Stay Connected' courses online for Orchard Origins participants. After adjusting to using Zoom, participants met twice a week about a different topic which involved going outside to find and identify different species throughout lockdown. The emphasis was taking notice of what's around you in nature. Participants have also stayed connected via a WhatsApp group. One participant dropped out, who was really struggling with mental health issues (complex history) and found even individual Zoom sessions stressful and overwhelming. Another had worked all his life on dairy farms and was made redundant aged 62 and didn't know what to do with his life. BBO support through the Wildlife Trust has meant he is now volunteering as a gardener at a care farm during lockdown.

"I had been feeling pretty low having been made redundant and I'm now feeling a lot more myself again. It felt really nice."

"Meeting twice a week has really helped me as I need to know I have things happening in my day."

"I feel it has been a very good thing to do during the lockdown, it has given me a new interest."

[Herefordshire Wildlife Trust participants]

Herefordshire Voluntary Organisation for Support Services (HVOSS) instigated very creative ways of keeping people in touch and learning new skills. They ran a weekly quiz for participants on Zoom, who took turns to host and provide quiz questions. Part of this was also negotiating the technology and learning to mute screen readers for visually impaired participants.

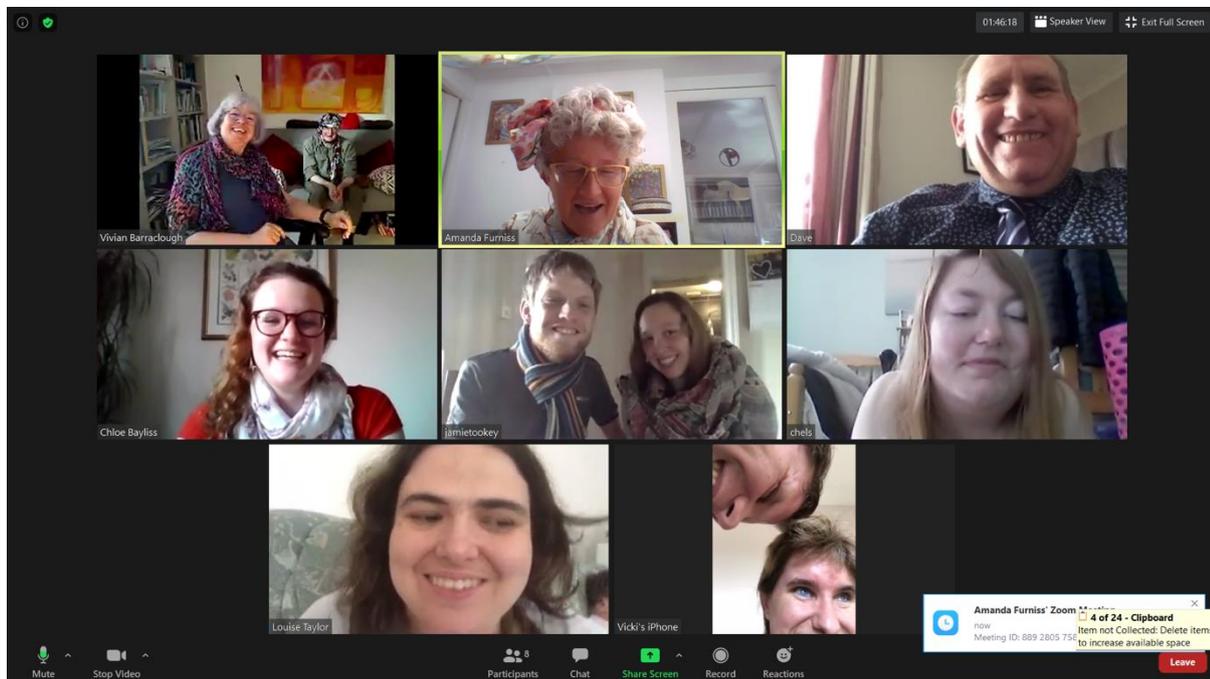


Photo of HVOSS BBO participants' weekly quiz during lockdown

Another great way used to engage and support participants was 'The Great BBO Bakeoff' using Zoom, as many participants had never baked before. This meant: delivering baking materials including scales; weekly baking days using Zoom to learn and share the results remotely; sharing recipes; and culminated in a BBO Baking Book. A Christmas bake-off is also being planned.

"BBO has given me something to look forward to, with the baking workshops especially. It gives me contact and communication with others and a routine for the week. I would have gone crazy without it over the last 3 months living alone. Baking relaxes me, I switch off from what is going on and my worries. I have to concentrate on what I am doing, shop and prepare for it. I really enjoy it. Less time to stress. Other services have closed that I thought would support me or just haven't been in contact. I don't know what I would have done without HVOSS. " [Participant]

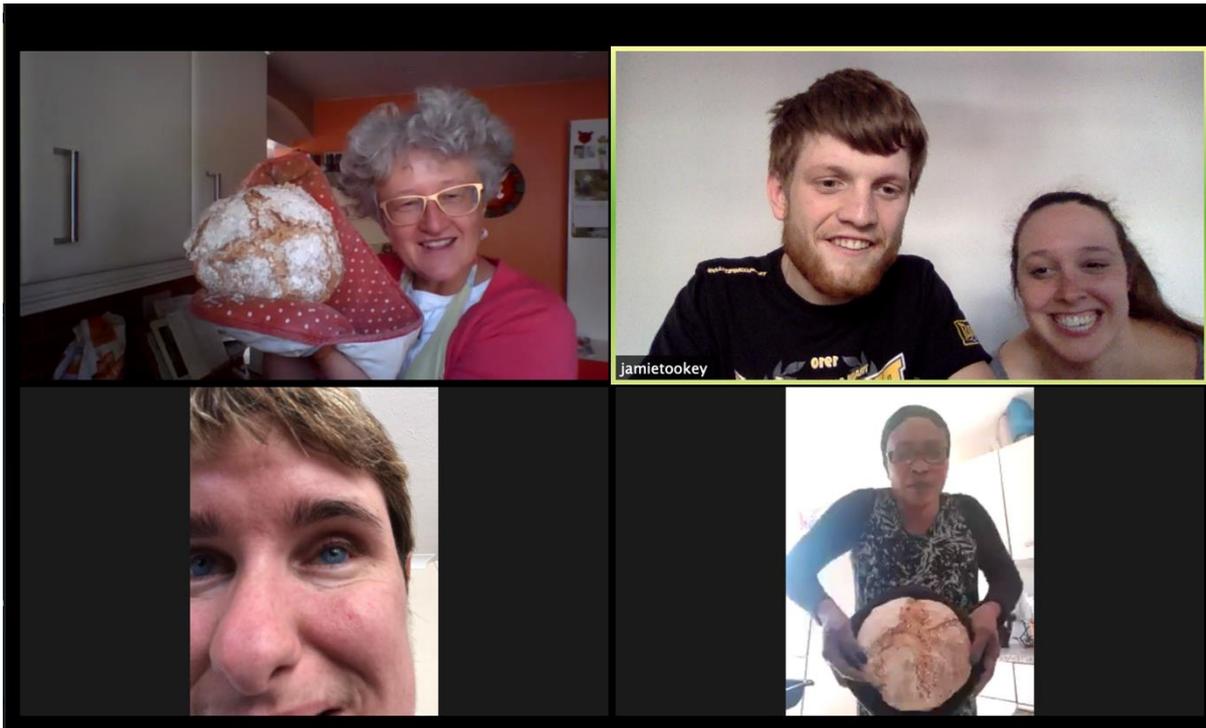


Photo of HVOSS BBO participants' weekly baking lessons during lockdown

Last but not least a [video](#) was created with 10 participants based on the poem by Benjamin Zephaniah: "People will always need people". The participants read out a section each from their homes, and this was videoed, which was a particularly meaningful and relevant record of lockdown.

Positive impacts of lockdown

- Continued provision, overcoming barriers to do so.
- Overcoming digital exclusion and improving digital skills have been positive impacts of lockdown both for participants and many provider staff members.
- Some participants are more comfortable using digital platforms than face to face meetings, particularly early on in their journey with BBO.
- Demand increased for some of the services provided during lockdown by some organisations in BBO such as Small Woods Association, and Herefordshire Wildlife Trust.
- Social connection. BBO work has helped people stay connected which has been particularly beneficial for those who live alone.
- Delivery staff have helped reassure and guide participants through the changing government guidance during lockdown to help reduce anxiety levels. Several providers in Herefordshire used the words 'holding them' about their support to participants – 'holding them steady'.
- Provider staff enjoyed getting to know the participants as individuals a bit more
- Partnership working was a real asset during lockdown, to be able to build on existing relationships and strengthen these. Referrals between partners have continued.

"Feel fortunate to have an honest discussion with Landau when we were struggling to know what to do to avoid shutting down for 3 months. It's really helpful to be part of a wider programme." [Telford & Wrekin CVS]

"Really positive that BBO funding has continued during lockdown!"
[The Cart Shed]

Negative impacts of lockdown

- Most participants are vulnerable in some way and some were shielding. Lockdown has exacerbated issues with those who suffer with mental health issues and anxiety. All partners reported this effect. For some, lockdown has suited their inclination not to go out and meet people face to face. Those on the autistic spectrum are able to consume huge amounts of information from the news about Covid-19 but this can increase anxiety and there is also a tendency towards conspiracy theories.
- Tragically in one case, a participant died of an overdose during lockdown.
- In some cases, provider staff had been the only consistent support for individuals and when urgent mental health support was needed, had to assertively advocate to get them access to services. The Cart Shed staff found it really difficult to register all those who were shielding to get support in place. Opiate-based prescriptions are tricky for volunteers to collect and deliver.
- Social isolation - especially those that live alone and those with very little support other than BBO.
- Transport has been flagged up as a potential barrier to getting people to sites in September and October. Some participants will not use public transport in current circumstances.
- Referrals from Job Centre were delayed (one provider thought that job centres have been dealing with a lot of fraud so were not managing to talk to job seekers individually).
- Fewer job opportunities.
- Very few volunteering opportunities.
- Lack of engagement by some participants who struggled to think of the future and take steps towards employment. Some may just be too comfortable not looking for work and have found not having to go to the job centre a relief.

"This disengagement of clients due to the lockdown situation is a natural occurrence. Clients are finding themselves with children or other family members at home and so the focus on moving themselves forward has in some instances had to take a back seat, for others, unfortunately, the need and pressure has perhaps been decreased due to the current lock down situation."

[Landau delivery team, Herefordshire]

- Negative impacts on staff:
 - Adjusting to working from home and working digitally.
 - Isolating effect of lockdown. Many have implemented weekly virtual well-being meetings and having honest conversations about when they're not coping - talking more collaboratively - 'back to better'.
 - Mentally exhausting.
" Providing more emotional and mental health support, including bereavement via weekly telephone calls. Thankfully I have counselling experience." [Qube]

- Broadband speeds in rural areas has been a constraint for some.
- Not being able to meet participants face to face.
"Keyworkers have had to remodel their conversations to suit gauging emotional health over the phone rather than face to face."

[Telford & Wrekin CVS]

Thoughts on future delivery

- Personalised support to participants is still key to BBO provision.
- Most providers plan to continue to provide some online activities and many staff will work from home more after the pandemic lockdown eases. Several providers said they are using the time not spent commuting more productively.
- Providers are planning for gradually returning to sites and offices but being understandably cautious, as they want to keep participants and staff safe.
- Zoom has been a key tool used for the continued provision for many providers during lockdown.
- There has been mixed feedback to the implementation of a new system of getting forms signed electronically (SignRequest). It seemed complicated at the outset but once familiar, it has suited some providers and was quicker to get the forms completed. However, the software didn't work with those who are visually impaired and use screen readers.

2.2 Case studies

Lockdown setback

EB joined the BBO programme with provider A4U at the end of 2019. Economically inactive and educated to post-graduate level, she is on the autistic spectrum and suffers with anxiety and struggles in group situations. She rarely, if ever, left the house to go to any new place and has post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of events in her past.

Individual support by a trusted key worker to reassure, encourage and build confidence has really helped EB. She took part in a money skills course run with a small group over several months and started to join in on group discussions. She developed really positive relationships with her fellow students and started an accredited course through distance learning in January. Her confidence levels and social skills improved. She attended some group meetings on Zoom during lockdown and found the craft activities provided by A4U helpful to focus on.

Unfortunately, she experienced a period of mental ill-health since Christmas and with support from her BBO support worker, was eventually clinically assessed in April but the recommended 'talking therapies' were not available during lockdown. In July she became so unwell she was admitted to hospital which has been a setback, although she has remained in touch with her BBO support worker at A4U throughout.

This case study really highlights the difficulties people on the autistic spectrum and those with mental health issues have in accessing services remotely. Such as being expected to respond to unplanned conversations over the phone with a stranger with no support from a known person. As a rule, people on the spectrum need additional time to process conversation and concepts. The burden of trying to process very difficult questions over a phone (a medium most struggle with at the best of times) is extremely challenging. As the only professional in contact with EB at this time, the BBO provider offered vital support, enabling her to have a person she feels confident in sharing her current mental health struggles with, and a route to ask for support when needed.

"The key points are the challenges our participants face in accessing any new service – including our own, and how so many services are unaware of how to appropriately support people on the spectrum. I think the key take away for BBO is the acknowledgment that in order to move these participants towards greater social inclusion and economic activity takes a long time and enormous amounts of work on skills which are not necessarily recognised as being work related but are fundamental to the participant being able to take the first steps and overcome the barriers they face." [Lucy at A4U]

Lockdown launch: from BBO to BBC

Michelle wanted to start an organisation to help give parents a voice. She was put in touch with Nicky at Wrekin Housing Group who specialises in helping individuals set up their own businesses. Michelle became a BBO participant in February 2019 after she left her job and needed help with job searching or starting a business, overcoming personal challenges and confidence building. Nicky provided mentoring support and advice on starting a business and suggested Michelle went to

networking events. She did so and made many useful contacts. She also did a teaching/training course and one on grieving to sort out a personal issue which was troubling her.

She found it really helpful to bounce ideas off Nicky who advised her on grants, financial support and business planning. After some market research about demand for services to support parents, she started a social enterprise called PEGS (Parental Education Growth Support) in November 2019. PEGS provide online support to parents who suffer from abuse by their children, and training courses to parents and professionals in the public sector.

After receiving funding from Shropshire Council and Shropshire Community Foundation, PEGS launched in April 2020 during lockdown, and has really taken off with a lot of media interest. Michelle has appeared on BBC1 and is due to appear on 'Loose Women' and also a Panorama programme about the issue. These have raised awareness of the problem and increased demand for PEGS services (150 calls after she appeared on the BBC). Michelle has trained 30 magistrates, education welfare officers in Telford and is about to train Independent Domestic Violence Advisors. PEGS has also submitted evidence to government to make changes to the domestic abuse bill currently going through parliament, to reflect this type of abuse.

Michelle is a director and part-time employee of PEGS and is aiming to employ a Child Parent Abuse worker by September. She also intends to create a satellite PEGS in Staffordshire. Michelle's journey has been inspirational - from BBO to BBC, and in her words:

"Built out of trauma and gone forward with passion"

2.3 Analysis of participant data

Project data and information collected at assessment were combined and analysed after data cleaning, using a statistical software package called 'R'.

Length of time in BBO

There are currently 1,048 participants in the BBO programme, 532 in Herefordshire and 820 in Shropshire. As of 30th June 2020, there is a considerable range in the length of time they have been on the programme with an overall average (median) of 430 days. So far, the median for Herefordshire is 446 days and for Shropshire, 531.

The longest time for engagement in the programme among current participants is 1,260 days (3.5 years) in Shropshire and 872 days in Herefordshire. To note that the BBO programme started in Shropshire in 2017 and in Herefordshire in 2018, which might account for this difference in average length of time in the programme.

Those that have left the programme have stayed for much shorter time periods than those that are currently still in the programme, possibly because their starting point was closer to the job market than others.

Issues faced by participants

Personal Employment Plan (PEP) assessment forms are completed by participants at the outset of the BBO programme, where they score themselves on 10 areas of their life. The higher the score, the less of a problem the issue is to the participant. These are the 10 areas:

- Addiction issues
- Challenges
- Confidence and aspiration
- Functional skills (such as literacy and numeracy)
- Job-search skills
- Mental wellbeing
- Personal and independence skills
- Physical wellbeing and disability
- Social skills
- Work experience

The areas where current participants have lower scores on entry are:

Challenges, Confidence, Job Searching and Work Experience (based on analysis of 1,048 current participants). The overall pattern in each county is similar, with some subtle differences.

It is possible to explore in more depth the numbers of participants affected by each issue and indeed the extent to which they are affected. Indications suggest the change in extent to which

people are affected by these issues is by no means certain. The PEP assessment is a useful indicator of where a participant is and to capture any change over time but is limited as it is subjective and used differently - some participants carefully read through the statements associated with each level while others do not. Key workers sometime avoid doing the assessment at the first meeting with the participant as they may overestimate where they are in terms of acknowledging they need help in some areas of their life.

Evaluation of the change from one 'band' or level to another over the course of a participant's time on BBO, will be investigated in more detail at the end of this calendar year.

Profile of participants

- 57% of all participants are unemployed at the start of the programme and 43% economically inactive. 59% of participants in Shropshire were unemployed and 51% in Herefordshire.
- 62% of all participants live in a jobless household, higher in Herefordshire (68%) and lower in Shropshire (60%).
- 35% of participants enter with only basic skills, similar in Shropshire (34%) and higher for those in Herefordshire (38%).
- Just over half (53%) of all participants are male with a slightly higher proportion in Shropshire (55%) and a lower proportion (48%) in Herefordshire.
- The median (average) of participants is 44 years old.
- 51% of all participants have a disability, with similar rates across the two counties.
- Of the ethnicity data that was filled in³, 92% are White British for all participants (the same for both counties).
- 12% of participants are ex-offenders, similar in Shropshire and slightly higher in Herefordshire (14%).
- 11% of all participants are in single parent households with dependent children, higher in Herefordshire (15%) and lower in Shropshire (9%).
- Total number of participants as of mid-September 2020 was 3,191. 70% of which are based in Shropshire and 30% in Herefordshire.

Profile of Participants

57% unemployed
43% are economically inactive
62% live in a jobless household
35% start with only basic skills
Average age is 44
51% disabled
11% in single parent households with dependent children

³ Very high rates of 'prefer not to say' was found in the data which has been flagged up to Landau.

2.4 Summary of performance

Overall BBO Herefordshire and Shropshire continue to over-achieve targets for employment outcomes and the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) target for volunteering/work placements. For education and training and job searching outcomes; there is still work to be done. This is due to key workers helping participants to job search and find meaningful training but not claiming the outcome as they continue to work with the individual to find employment.

Lockdown has made delivery during the second quarter of 2020 very challenging. Some participants managed to get jobs, and some have been job searching but the job market also 'paused' for most sectors. For example, hairdressing for a newly qualified participant. Volunteering opportunities mostly dried up too. Job Centres, one of the project's key referral sources, were diverted to supporting claimants during the summer months. There was demand for jobs in health and social care, but many participants are vulnerable in terms of their own health.

There was a considerable negative impact from COVID-19 lockdown on new starters to the BBO programme, as evidenced by the chart below showing when the current participants joined BBO. There was a significant drop in the number of new starters from quarter 2 and quarter 3. This is in contrast with previous years: in 2019 new starters remained fairly constant during the year and in 2018, new starters increased gradually from the beginning of the year onwards.

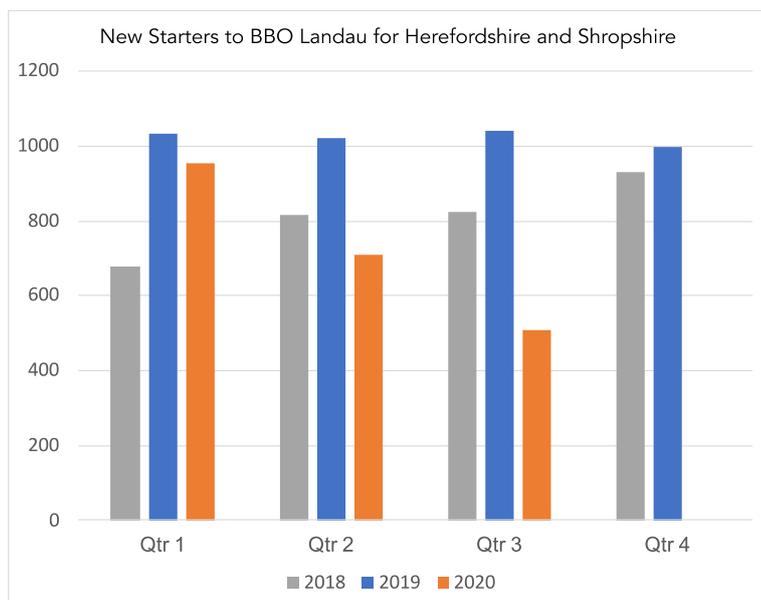


Figure 3 Chart of when current participants joined the BBO programme

Note: BBO Shropshire was in operation from 2017 which is not shown here

Progress across all outcomes and projects predictably slowed during quarter 2 showing the effect that lockdown has had, as shown in the following table (Figure 4). This reflects what the providers said during interviews that the main priority was to keep participants engaged so that progress can be resumed and outcomes achieved when restrictions lift. Figures for quarter 3, as restrictions have started to be relaxed are also shown.

Number of participants*	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3
	Jan-Mar 2020	Apr-Jun 2020	Jul-Sep 2020
HEREFORDSHIRE	837	874	922
(change since last quarter)	(+70)	(+37)	(+48)
-into education & training: claimed (evidenced and retained on the database)	18 (208)	18 (216)	18 (219)
-into employment - claimed	146	152	163
-economically inactive into job-searching: claimed (evidenced and retained on the database)	2 (93)	2 (98)	2 (102)
-volunteering/work placement: LEP target	261	263	269
SHROPSHIRE	1938	1978	2,013
(change since last quarter)	(+92)	(+40)	(+35)
-into education & training: claimed (evidenced and retained on the database)	18 (277)	18 (289)	18 (289)
-into employment - claimed	427	432	443
-economically inactive into job-searching: claimed (evidenced and retained on the database)	0 (121)	0 (128)	0 (130)
-volunteering/work placement: LEP target	472	474	474

Figure 4 Table of performance data for BBO Herefordshire and Shropshire

* Cumulative since project inception in 2018 for Herefordshire, 2017 in Shropshire

Green highlighted cells indicate the target has been met or exceeded for this outcome.

3. Key findings

- Delivery during lockdown has continued albeit in different ways, using a variety of innovative methods to keep participants engaged.
- Lockdown has meant a vastly reduced number of new starters in quarter 2 (April to June) of 2020 and only a handful of outcomes achieved. However, provider staff have by and large managed to continue engaging with participants and 'held them steady' in the face of increased risk of deterioration in mental health and confidence during lockdown.
- The positive impacts have been increased digital inclusion, improved digital skills for participants and providers' staff, inventive new ways of online delivery and managing to stay connected and make some progress during a pandemic lockdown. This has been a lifeline for most participants.
- Negative impacts have been a complete change to the delivery of BBO projects which has been stressful and taxing for staff. Despite significant effort some participants have disengaged, and progress has halted or reversed for some.
- Digging into the huge amounts of data available over several years of BBO delivery is yielding some interesting information. We have further curiosities to explore in the data, particularly the journey travelled by participants, which will be reported in future.

4. Recommendations

- A recognition of the time it takes those furthest from the job market to move towards employment. Explore the data on journeys made for this group.
- Continue with personalised support to help participants overcome barriers towards employment. The variety of approaches across this BBO partnership is a real strength in this regard. Most of the providers have demonstrated resilience, flexibility and innovation during lockdown.

5. Appendix A: Interview questions

Evaluating the impact of COVID-19 on BBO delivery (June 2020)
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- 1) How has the lockdown affected your delivery?
 - a. Managed to continue at all?
 - b. What are you doing differently?
 - c. Thoughts on future delivery? (what might you do differently after lockdown lifts)?
- 2) What have been the positive impacts?
 - a. on participants
 - b. on your staff/delivery
- 3) What have been the negative impacts?
 - a. on participants
 - b. on your staff/delivery
- 4) Any stories to share?