

An Exploration of
Tipperary Regional Youth Service's
'Work Winner Youth Employment
Programme'.

Abstract

This report presents **an assessment** of Tipperary Regional Youth Service's 'Work Winner Youth Employment Programme' which operated in Co. Tipperary from **2009-2014**. The report evaluates the **achievements of the** programme **through a** qualitative and quantitative **methodolgy**. In particular, the programme is **evaluated** with reference to the Journey to Employment (JET) Framework (2013).

Key Words: youth, unemployment, youth work, voluntary participation, qualitative, quantitative.

Table of Contents

Tipperary Regional Youth Service

Tipperary Regional Youth Service (henceforth TRYS) provides quality youth service provisions to young people (8-25 years of age) in the Tipperary area. Formerly Cashel and Emly Youth Service, TRYS was founded in 1970. Our core aim is to enhance the social, personal, and educational development of young people through the development of new work skills, competency in decision making, and individual proficiency in pro-social behaviour. This approach is reached through (a) group activities, (b) issue-based work, (c) one-to-one sessions, and (c) community-based programmes.

--Region and operations:

Geographically, three regions fall under the the remit of TRYS: Tipperary South, Tipperary North, and East Limerick. TRYS currently operates four youth centres in Cashel, Templemore, Thurles, and Tipperary. TRYS also manages a number of voluntary led youth clubs, a youth information service, a community drug service, a traveller youth project, two family support projects, and two youth unemployment programmes.

In recent years, Tipperary Regional Youth Service has placed a strong focus on youth employment. To this end, a bespoke model was created to support young people who have been removed from the labour market and are long-term unemployed. This particular programme has been named, 'The Work Winner Programme'.

--Governance:

TYRS has a voluntary Board of Directors that holds overall responsibility for the organization. This Board of Directors is made up of local club and community representatives with an

interest in young people in Co. Tipperary and East Limerick. Its daily operations are the remit of its chief executive officer, staff and volunteers.

Graphic on TRYS services across tipp

The Work Winner Programme

The Work Winner (henceforth WW) programme is a youth unemployment initiative. It operates from a youth work model of *practice*. It was initially designed and developed from a pilot project that focused on young people living in Tipperary town. The primary goal of the programme is to engage young people (18-25 year olds), both males and female, and in particular, those who are long-term unemployed. The aim is simple: support them to become job ready and join the labour market. This is achieved through providing participants with opportunities to build skills, develop confidence, gain training, and partake in relevant work experience.

Description of Work Winner:

- Provides a 6 month Youth Employment Programme for young people in Tipperary who have a very low skill base, and who do not at present have the capacity to enter the jobs market.
- Combines basic skills development – the essential skills needed to secure employment – with specific skills depending on capacity and the interest of a young person, and requirements of employers – and with work placement which reflects both the interest and capacity of the young person and the jobs market in Tipperary
- Delivers a highly effective 26 week training/ placement programme, which utilizes participants own interests and skills. As a practical-based programme, WW

incorporates one-to-one mentoring that supports an outcome-focused programme--making a real difference in the local business community.

- Creates a partnership between local agencies that can become a model for operating in a cost effective, efficient and needs based way. This involves working with the support of agencies in the town, including DSP, the Development Companies, the ETB and local community and voluntary groups.
- Equips young people with certified training, a career roadmap and a large amount of work experience. All training/work placement will be relevant to what they want and will be individually tailored to meet each trainees needs.
- Aims to have between 70% of trainees progressed into employment/training by completion of programme.
- To have remaining trainees a step closer to their goals through education or work placement.

--WW's Philosophy: Individualized Interventions for Individualized Needs:

Core to the programme is its person-centred approach, which ensures that the participants' needs are of primary importance. In this way, WW is a bespoke training programme, which places the young person and their needs at its core. With this in mind, the programme structure is individually **designed in consultation with each** young person. This ensures that young people are the architects of their own career development as they are consulted in all facets including training, potential employers, and individual supports.

--WW's Model: Inclusive Participation:

WW operates from a youth work **approach** and is underpinned by a commitment to voluntary participation, self-direction and collaboration. These important features of the model ensure that the programme is grounded in youth work principles. The model is constructed in a way that guarantees that the majority of power rests with the participants.

It is participants themselves that identify their areas of interest, such as the identification of what local employment they may be interested in or suited for.

The programme is designed in consultation with the young person, creating and supporting the contexts necessary for training, qualifications and completion of relevant work experience. Purposeful work experience is a crucial component of the programme. It helps participants to become accustomed to the workplace, and also provides them with an advantage over other job seekers when looking for employment. Workplace experience is also seen as a **method** by which to balance out some of the disadvantages faced by participants, such as background, qualifications, and socio-economic status.

WW model : Participants

WW works with young men and women who are long term unemployed, aged between 18 and 25, and prioritises those deemed to be 'furthest from the labour force' and most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed. All participants will be in receipt of a social welfare payment. The participants meet the following criteria:

- Those that have the highest rate of unemployment in the State
- Young people with some of the lowest levels of education in the State
- Young people with some of the lowest rates of job skills in the State
- Young people that reside in TRYS's catchment area
- They are categorised by the Department of Social Welfare as having very low probability of exit from welfare.

Young people who partake in the programme have typically given up on their aspirations to advance in the area of training and employment. This is often due to a lack of capacity to take the first steps toward skill acquisition and development as they lack the necessary support and guidance. Of course their inability to take the first-steps is only compounded by self-esteem issues, mental health issues, substance abuse and misdemeanours with local policing authorities.

Potential participants are primarily identified in conjunction with the Department of Social Protection. Generally, those selected have never been in previous employment or made a

PRSI payment, and are deemed by the Department of Social Protection as having a low probability of exit from welfare. These young people are invited to attend a short informational meeting about WW. At this initial meeting, the programme is explained and outlined for the potential candidate. Significantly, as the programme operates from a voluntary participation model, it must be noted that candidates receive no additional payment to their existing social welfare allowance should they agree to partake on the programme. Participants must therefore opt into the programme for something other than financial gain.

As such, the young person must buy into the values of the programme and be a willing participant in the process. Possible participants are given truthful and factual information about the programme, including honest accounts of the large time commitment and effort demanded of them. Each participant understands that the programme lasts 22 weeks approximately and that each of them will be working or training between 30 to 35 hours per week for no extra money. The key, therefore, to young people's participation, is the self-recognition and acknowledgment of their need and desire to secure a meaningful future for themselves and, in turn, also contributes to their local community and country.

Unique to the programme is that young people become the creators of their own destinies. This is *their* project, built around *their* own desires and dreams. It is the only project of its kind that asks the question of young people, 'what *you* want to do for the next 6 months?' This is critical as the premise is that all individuals at the completion of the programme are chasing something they want, something they feel strongly about and they leave the programme with the skills and motivation to realize their goals.

WW model: Placement

The significance of the placement component of the programme could not be underestimated. It is for many of the young people a clear manifestation of their dream job. For all it is a journey into uncharted waters, with the vast majority having never being previously employed. The learning achieved during this period is pivotal to any subsequent progression

After meeting with participants, and their interests and needs identified, potential employers are then approached by project workers from TRYS. Employers are carefully selected with many factors facing consideration, including business size, reputability and the future potential for employment. Once approached by WW's project coordinator, it is crucial that certain fundamentals about the programme are made thoroughly clear to potential employers. It is made explicit that the participant is *not* there to provide an extra pair of hands around the business but they are there to learn and progress. The participant may have issues adjusting to the normal demands of a workplace environment and will provide no short term gains for the business. But the employer will have the support of the project worker who will act as a buffer between the employer and young person particularly in the primary days. The project worker will work in consultation with the employer to provide any supports or training needed to progress the young person's development in the workplace. Needless to say the voluntary nature of the participation implies either party can cancel their working relationship at any time.

To date, the main areas of workplace experience secured by participants are labourers/operators and warehousing, followed by placements in the hair and beauty industries. In addition, trade related skills placements such as a mechanic, welder, landscaper, and electrician or in Information Technology occurred. Work experience in the sports and fitness field has also proved popular, as has the secretarial, childcare and elderly care fields.

Locally owned companies have been most successful to work with to date for a number of reasons: they generally employ local people from the very town; they recognize a strong possibility that they could gain a well-trained employee if the placement worked out they can make decisions on taking on a young person for job placement immediately where large corporations may need to redirect our programme to their director for approval, and it is also easier to build a relationship with a local business owner in any given town as the owners/managers themselves tend to work on site. The employers forge a strong partnership with the co-ordinator and are encouraged to opt into taking a placement by the tailored support and training which are provided to both them the employer and the participant.

Methodology

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to **assess the impact** of Tipperary Regional Youth Service's 'Work Winner' youth employment programme. This **impact** will be measured and recorded in relation to the Journey to Employment (JET) Framework (2013) and particular regard is shown to the youth work ethos underpinning the programme, the factors that ascertain a young person's chance of securing a job and the outcomes of programme completion.

Research Design

The research design takes both a qualitative and quantitative approach. The qualitative data was gathered in the form of interviews with Tipperary Regional Youth Service's CEO Cora Horgan and Work Winner Project Workers Donal Kelly and Laura Ryan. Participants and employers were also involved in the interview process and their views and feelings also reflected. This research and analysis was carried out by Sinead McMahon Lecturer at Limerick Institute of Technology. In terms of quantitative data, information was gathered on 156 participants who took part in the programme from 2009 to 2014. This data was analysed and collated by Dr Eileen Humphries University Limerick.

Findings

For the purpose of this document, the Work Winner employment support programme will be evaluated and explored. The focus is on the programme from the period of 2009 to 2014. During this period, the programme was delivered on six occasions and involved 156 young people. The programmes comprised of a Local Training Options Programme first run from November 2009 to April 2010 (26 participants) and a Linked Work Experience Programme from 2010 to February 2011 (57 participants). After these initial programmes, Work Winner

was run in the following towns in County Tipperary: Tipperary Town (2011); Cashel (2012); Thurles (2013) and Tipperary Town (2014) – See details in Table 1.

Table 1: Tipperary Regional Youth Services Employment Support Programme: Programmes and participants.

Programme	Participants	
	Number	%
Local Training Options Programme Nov 2009 to Apr 2010	26	16.7
Linked Work Experience 2010 to Feb 2011	57	36.5
Work Winner Tipp Town 2011	23	14.7
Work Winner Cashel 012	17	10.9
Work Winner Thurles 2013	14	9.0
Work Winner Tipp Town 2014	19	12.2
Total	156	100.0

Profile of Participants

In terms of place of residence of participants, 40% lived in areas (Electoral Districts) categorised as “Disadvantaged” based on the Haas Pratschke (HP) Relative Deprivation Index (2011) and a further 44% in areas categorised as marginally below average. Only 15.4% of the young people lived in an area that is characterised as above average.

Table 2: Place of residence of participation with reference to relative deprivation at local level (2011).

HP Relative Deprivation Category of local area (ED)	Number	%
Above Average	24	15.4
Marginally below average	69	44.2
Disadvantaged	63	40.4
Total	156	100.0

In terms of gender, participants on the Work Winner programme comprised of 98 males (63%) and 58 females (37%).

Table 3: Gender breakdown of participants

	Number	%
Male	98	62.8
Female	58	37.2
Total	156	100.0

Relating to participants educational attainment, just under one-third (31%) has ceased education at or below Junior Certificate level. Fifty-nine percent (59%) have completed Upper Secondary education (Leaving Certificate or Leaving Cert Applied) and a further 5.8% have obtained a Post Leaving Cert qualification. Of those with a Leaving Cert qualification (92), 26% took the Leaving Cert Applied option. Less than 5% of participants had a Third level qualification or degree.

Table 4: Highest level of educational qualification of participants

Level of education	Number	%
Pre-primary	1	0.6
Primary Education	4	2.6
Lower secondary (JC)	43	27.6
Upper Secondary (LC/LCA)	92	59.0
Post-Secondary (PLC, FETAC)	9	5.8
University Degree or Post-Graduate	7	4.5
Total	156	100.0

All participants (100%) were unemployed at the start of the programme. The average (mean) duration of unemployment at the start of the programme was 23 months, the median (22 months) and most common or modal duration 24 months. The participant with the longest duration of unemployment / inactivity was 72 months.

Table 5: Duration of unemployment / inactivity in months

Statistical Measure	Months
Mean	23.03
Median	22.00
Mode	24
Minimum	1
Maximum	72

N=156

All participants on WW were registered as unemployed with the Department of Social Protection (DSP) – i.e., on the Live Register – and in receipt of a social welfare payment. Details of amount of the Social Welfare payment are shown in Table 6. A significant proportion (39%) were on the minimum payment (up to €100), applicable to youngest unemployed and / or means-tested. Only a small number of participants (3) were in receipt of a payment of €200 or more.

Table 6: Amount of social welfare payment from Department of Social Protection

Amount	Number	%
Up to €100	61	39.1
€101 to €150	24	15.4
€151 to €199	68	43.6
€200+	3	1.9

A Youth Work Model

The Work Winner Programme is based in and operated by Tipperary Regional Youth Service. It is understandable then that a youth work ethos can be recognised in the way the programme is structured and delivered. Firstly, participation in the programme is voluntary and there are no sanctions/rewards imposed on people who chose to opt in/out of the initiative. This is a core feature of youth work practice – it is a voluntary commitment in which the young people themselves make decisions about their future.

To illustrate this point, Laura Ryan and Donal Kelly note the following:

“They aren’t being told that they have to do this. They don’t have to participate”
(Laura, Project Worker).

“They are not forced in here by the Dept. of Social Protection; they are opting in, voluntary participation. So that is another key to it...They are not being forced in.... It’s a difficult course if they don’t want to join they don’t have too. We don’t sugar coat it, we tell them it’s difficult. They have to work 30hrs a week for nothing. They separate it from other programmes out there” (Donal, Project Coordinator).

The two project workers, Kelly and Ryan, also take an informal approach to engaging with the young participants. This again, is a key feature of youth work, replacing traditional formalised approaches with more informal ways of working. Young people generally relate better to this change in approach. This informal approach used by Work Winner includes knowing people on a first name basis; being able to contact staff outside of typical working hours, drop in without pre-arranged appointments and communicates through calls, texts and Facebook.

“It works because it is relaxed, it’s not official. They become ‘friends’.” (Laura, Project Worker)

With the exception of formal training modules, there are no formal assessments of learning in the Work Winner Programme. Instead, learning generally takes place in the form of informal education. In this manner, learning occurs through the range of experiences and

conversations participants take part in throughout the programme. Interestingly, 'success' is also defined by workers in many different things and is not solely centred on young people gaining employment at the end of the programme. This, of course, is one of the goals of the programme, but workers are aware of the myriad of successes and benefits that can be derived from the programme.

"At the beginning it was very black and white - are they in employment at the end. Now I have a very different view on it ...it's all about progression in a different context. Where they are emotionally, from the point of view of confidence – what they are chasing when the programme finishes. Because when you meet them first they are chasing nothing, they are sitting at home and they have been sitting at home for a long long time. If all you have done by the time it finishes is ensure they are chasing something, even if they are back on the live register but they are actively chasing something they want and they have the confidence to do that, that is a success" (Donal, Project Coordinator).

"I see success individually, I don't see the 80% progression rate...I actually see the individual, the young person. Whereas I think funders just look at the overall figure, they look at start here and end there. They don't see the climb and the dips" (Cora, Chief Executive Officer).

Another key aspect of the programme is the importance of relationship building. Of primary importance is the relationship that is built between the project worker and the young participants of the programme. The ethos, competence and personal qualities of the staff working in the programme are perceived as vitally important to this relationship. The two staff members of Work Winner, Kelly and Ryan, are held in high regard by past participants and employers.

"I would keep saying this, definitely, Donal was instrumental and an important part of the success of the programme...it's a certain type of person that needs to be involved it can't be just anybody" (Cora, CEO).

"I'd say Donal is a huge factor there to be fair because he's super. And he's like a father to them all" (Jane, Employer).

“Donal was very good to us” (John, Participant)

In some cases, staff members have a reputation that draws participants through word of mouth.

“My brother told me about Donal, he had heard about him getting work for others so I just went up and had a talk with him and he sorted me out” (Liam, Participant).

“I suppose that when my friend had said to me that he was going to try get work for everyone, I was saying no that actually can’t be true because you know when you hear from someone else, you know stories can get legs but the minute I met Donal I knew I was after doing something good” (Aine, Participant).

When good relationships are built with the participants, there are benefits to programme participation. ‘Trust’ is a positive outcome from the rapport and relationship that staff members build with the young person.

“They don’t want to let you down. They try harder...They always come back because they trust you. You helped them. Most of them have no one at home to help. Or it’s a learned behaviour that they stay at home. They do it because you helped them and no one else has bothered” (Laura, Project Worker).

Young Person Centred & Individualised : the taylorising approach

A unique and defining feature of the Work Winner programme is that it is highly individualised and had been designed around the needs of the individual young people participating in the programme. This makes the programme different from other employment based programmes and supports which routinely place participant’s needs as secondary.

“It wasn’t structured in any way at the start, it just kind of happened. We saw what was needed by young people and then we were trying to meet that need. It wasn’t us sitting down with a pen and paper, it was very much us seeing what young people needed” (Cora, CEO)

“The young person is the centre of everything. They will get tailored support. All the stakeholders ETB’s, Youth Service, Employers all circle around that individual. Nobody else is the priority...it is the young person at the centre of everything” (Donal, Project Coordinator)

Many employment programmes begin with a standardised set of activities that are uniformly offered to all participants regardless of their interest or abilities. In the Work Winner model, nothing about programme content is predetermined before meeting the programme participants. Each participant will experience the programme differently, based on their interests and abilities. Their programme is designed around them and tailored to their needs. Furthermore, work experience placements are not offered to programme participants based on what employers have made available, but rather placements are found to suit the young person’s interests and aspirations.

“You can’t have the tail wagging the dog...you really have to remember the model...that everything works around the young person...you have to remember who you are there to help. If the employer is out of order you have to always side with the young person...it is another aspect to the programme. We don’t work from what employers need...it starts with the young person” (Donal, Project Coordinator)

Participants too, recognise that they are central and that the programme is interested in them as individuals.

“I went down and spoke to Donal and he asked what job opportunities would you like to take. So you explain to him what your interests are and he’ll get you a place.... I thought he would be the step to my career. I didn’t think I’d get anywhere until he came along. I had a bit of bad luck getting jobs and I was still only young as well” (John, Participant)

The Work Winner Programme model rejects the assumption that participants should be treated with a ‘one size fits all’ approach. Instead, the programme takes a ‘tailoring’ approach. Tailoring allows the identification of barriers to employment associated with an individual’s personal circumstances and enables the programme to act to address such barriers. For example,

“We worked with a young woman who needed to be mobile, she bought car, we paid for driving lessons...her mobility was most important barrier to employment” (Donal, Project Coordinator)

“Because the programme is very flexible too, we have gotten people employment placements based around their child and participants personal circumstances. The programme is different in that way too, it is not going to be 9-5 for everyone, depending on what they want to do and their circumstances” (Donal, Project Coordinator)

Tailoring the programme can also be said to produce a certain amount of empowerment and autonomy among participants. To be consulted and involved in plotting the design of their own journey through the programme provides participants with opportunities to be heard, come to voice and make productive choices for themselves.

“There were a number of jobs we could have filled and it might have looked good on the stats but the biggest thing we have going for us is that people get to do what they want to do...and they are not getting paid for it... so that is why they stay doing it” (Donal, Project Coordinator)

“It’s hard to know what you want to do. We had an opportunity to do what we wanted we weren’t just assigned to places. It’s good to have a choice” (John, Participant)

Training, Qualifications and Work Placement

All participants on the Work Winner Programme undertake a set of common modules in Figure 1 Following this, participants were offered a choice of courses in other vocational areas. These courses were intended to provide participants the opportunity to develop skills and knowledge in areas where there is potential for employment in “entry” levels jobs on completion of the programme. Just over three-quarters of all participants (76%) on the programme participated in only one set of courses (course 1), over one-quarter (27%)

participated in two courses (course 2), 10 participants took three courses (course 3) and a further two participants took four courses (not shown in Table 7).

Figure 1 TODAY WE USE WRAP ???

First Aid FETAC level 5	Manual Handling
Pre-employment workshops	Workplace etiquette

Table 7: Course subjects taken by participants

Course subject	Participants on Course 1		Participants on Course 2		Participants on Course 3	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
ICT and digital media	16	10.3	6	3.8	1	.6
Business services	15	9.6	6	3.8	1	.6
Job preparation and personal development	5	3.2	3	1.9	3	1.9
Personal care	21	13.5	2	1.3	2	1.3
Sports and fitness	3	1.9	3	1.9	1	.6
Driving equipment and safety	35	22.4	6	3.8	1	.6
Trade	11	7.1	9	5.8	1	.6
Food handling in retail and catering	9	5.8	2	1.3	0	0
Social care	3	1.9	3	1.9	2	1.3
Training and coaching	1	.6	3	1.9	0	0
Not applicable	37	23.7	113	72.4	146	93.6
Total	156	100.0	156	100.0	156	100.0

Of the subjects taken, the largest proportion (22%) on course one (taking only one course), as shown in Table 7, took driving equipment and safety, generally reflecting the larger number of male participants on the programme. This was followed by personal care (14%), ICT and digital media (10%), trade (7%) and food handling in retail and catering (6%). Focusing on those who took two courses, the subject areas were well spread across the various options with the largest number taking a course in trade (9 participants, 6%).

Participants on the programme were required to complete a work placement sourced by Tipperary Regional Youth Services Work Winner staff. These placements were generally offered in local businesses / organisations. The large majority of participants undertook only one work placement as the placement secured proved suitable / satisfactory to both the participant and the employer. Twenty percent (20%) took a second work placement while eight participants (7%) took a third work placement. Up to four work placements were offered to participants. Four participants refused a work placement. The sectors of placements – for three sets of placements – are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Work placements: business area of work placement of participants

Sectoral area of work placement	Participants on placement 1		Participants on placement 2		Participants on placement 3	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Labourer / operators / warehousing	40	25.6	12	7.7	4	2.6
Mechanic / welding / woodwork / electrician / IT installation	20	12.8	2	1.3	0	0
Hair and beauty	29	18.6	6	3.8	2	1.3
Sports and fitness	14	9.0	0	0	0	0
Food and catering	7	4.5	1	.6	0	0
Retail / butcher	8	5.1	3	1.9	1	0.6
Secretarial and admin	14	9.0	2	1.3	0	0
Child care and elderly care	13	8.3	2	1.3	1	0.6
Other	7	4.5	0	0	0	0
Refused job with placement	4	2.6	4	2.6	4	2.6
Not applicable	0	0	124	79.5	144	92.3
Total	156	100.0	156	100.0	156	100.0

Focusing on placement one, over one-quarter (26%) of participants took a placement as a labourer / operator or in warehousing while the next largest proportion, under one-fifth (19%), took a placement in hair and beauty. A work placement in trade-related skills as a mechanic, in welding, wood work, electrician or in IT installation was taken by a further 20 participants (13%). Sports and fitness and secretarial and administration were the sectoral

areas of work placement of 14 participants (9%) and childcare and elderly care by 13 participants (8%). For those that took a second work placement and third placement, the largest proportion also worked as a labourer / operator and in warehousing.

A strong element of support provided by the programme is the option to avail of training courses that are specifically connected to the occupational area participants are interested in. This again, relates to the fact that the programme is person centred and young people really are the architects of their own path. Participants readily recognise they could not afford to pay for these courses themselves and are supported financially by TRYS to avail of these opportunities.

“Laura and Donal rang me up one day and they said they had a Gel Nail Course sorted for me. Like that was just fantastic, I would have been waiting to save 2 years to pay for a Gel Nail Course” (Aine, Participant)

“I’m doing a chainsaw course at the moment through the company but Donal is helping with the payment of it... I wouldn’t be able to do the course myself” (Mark, Participant)

Participants also felt that the courses completed gave them a competitive edge over others when it came to securing a work experience placement in their chosen area of interest. They acknowledge the positive impact the courses had on their C.Vs and also felt that they might provide an incentive for employers to keep them on as employees after their placement period was completed.

“Yes we did first aid, health and safety and others every Monday. Yes I definitely think they were good. We got some CV work too” (Angela, Participant)

“They told me what we would be doing like Safepass... all the stuff that is good for your CV so I thought go for it, it would help get a job. Build up CV” (Jack, Participant)

“Yes without a doubt the forklift course helped me secure the job here... It was a way to get in the door. It is great for employers and employees” (Paul, Participant)

One employer indicated the importance of certain training and qualifications prior to his agreement in taking on someone even for work experience, demonstrating the esteem with which qualifications and training courses are granted.

“So I said get him Safe Pass, get him Manual Handling and get him First Aid and I’ll take him on for a couple of weeks and I’ll see. So I said I’ll take him on for the 4 weeks but he has to have these before I take him on. Otherwise he’s not covered with my insurance etc.” (Mark, Employer)

The work placement component is a significant element of the Work Winner Programme and both workers and participants regard this aspect of the programme as extremely valuable to them.

“At least I got something out of it afterwards and everything. If you can get your foot in the door it is great, even without qualifications” (Karen, Participant)

“If I wasn’t on the scheme I wouldn’t be where I am now because it got me the experience. It’s great to get experience coming out of school and employers are delighted to get someone in at nearly no cost and then the people build up experience and they might be kept on if the work is there. I would recommend it to anyone” (Warren, Participant)

“I just enjoyed the overall chance of getting the work experience out of it” (Angela, Participant)

Employability Skills [should there be a jet reference here](#)

The JET framework, which is designed to understand and measure the impact interventions have on the journey to employment class employability skills as being one of seven key factors that impact a young person’s journey to employment. Employability skills are generally defined as attributes required to succeed in the workplace, and work with others. These include communication, teamwork and leadership skills.

Employability skills are generally referred to as a range of ‘soft’ skills that employers look for in potential employees. These ‘soft’ skills include a range of competencies including the

ability to communicate well, work as part of a team, solve problems and be self-managing. There were few references made by participants or employers in relation to the development of these soft skills through programme participation. However, both staff members did acknowledge that these soft skills and the ability to fit into the culture of a workplace are important things that participants need to learn. As part of the tailored approach to the programme, if participants are deemed as needing it, they can avail of communication workshops or customer care training. Otherwise, it is in the one to one work with our participants where staffs address any issues regarding 'employability skills'.

"Oh yes you know even by the way they arrive, looking like they were dragged through a bush, they don't care. They are stuck in a rut. But we need them to see it first. We get them placements and you might see a complete change. You just need to pick them up" (Laura, Project Worker)

"They may have never worked or no anyone who works, they don't have the basic things like personal hygiene or the idea that 9 o'clock means 9 o'clock not 10.30 or that when you go for a cigarette break you don't stay outside for 35 minutes on your phone...things like that. Because they've never worked. These are things many people take for granted" (Donal, Project Coordinator)

"Obviously you are doing a lot of one to one work. If there is an issue with an employer, say for example the young person is being bullied...the best solution is if the young person can handle it themselves...you teach them how to do that...and if they can do that, their confidence will be better but you need to teach them to communicate better to do that" (Donal, Project Coordinator)

Support for Personal Circumstances

Obviously there are numerous challenges and circumstances that participants face while on the programme and the WW programme staff, where possible, attempt to support young people and the particular issues they are facing.

“Because the programme is very flexible too, we have gotten people employment placements based around their child or other personal circumstances anyway. The programme is different in that way too, it is not going to be 9-5 for everyone, depending on what they want to do and their circumstances” (Donal, Project Coordinator).

The workers are extremely aware that people’s lived realities will ultimately affect their opportunities for gaining and keeping employment. Laura, a Project Worker for the programme, believes that staff can support participants through some of these obstacles but firstly, staff need to be made aware of any issues facing the young person.

“I think they should be told at the beginning of the programme - if there is anything going on in your life, tell us” (Laura, Project Worker).

Furthermore, TRYS as an organisation has been equipped to offer other services to participants should they need them, including Youth Information, Family Support and access to a Community Drugs Worker.

“Participants with substance use issues can access support from the Drug Worker through TRYS. We offer support as much as we can again” (Donal, Project Coordinator).

“It fits because you have an umbrella organisation. You are seen as a company; participants know they can go to TRYS (front desk) for CV, paperwork. You have a base to work off. And we get referrals from them” (Laura, Project Worker)

“You tap into resources that are in the youth service...like finding out about useful programmes that are there” (Donal, Project Coordinator)

Programme participants frequently spoke of the level of support they received from the project workers during the initiative. Throughout the qualitative research this was the most frequently mentioned aspect of the programme and the aspect that was frequently cited as the reason for the success of the programme. Furthermore, participants spoke of how this support was available not just for the duration of the programme but also beyond programme completion.

“Donal and Laura always keep in contact with you and are very helpful. There is always someone there. Yeah the support is very important. You always know there is someone there to talk to” (Mark, Participant).

Repeatedly, it was evident from participant interviewees that they felt a constant sense of support and this is crucial for the success of the initiative.

“But there was always a positive vibe no matter if I called in and they were completely under pressure they still gave me time which means so much” (Aine, Participant)

“...and there was always someone to help” (Angela, Participant)

Some participants compared their experiences of Work Winner with other employment programmes they had been on.

“With the FAS programme, I was on my own. I was just given the form to sign and then I was on my own, I got no support what so ever... I got good experience from the FAS but I just got so much more support and even hope by the end of the Work Winner. I was really isolated on the FAS, no one to ask questions, no one to have a bit of support, no one to connect with” (Aine, Participant)

During the Work Winner programme, the young people are provided with one to one mentoring. The frequency and method of mentoring varies from one participant to another, depending on the individual's needs. This tailored approach is 'labour intensive' and requires knowing each participant well. The range and availability of support for participants is extensive and 'always on'. Participants might make contact with staff outside office hours, through text or Facebook. These young people may feel the need for a word of advice or encouragement the night before starting a course or placement or even a helping hand getting out of bed in the initial programme stages.

“I could get a text or call at 8 pm, it doesn't bother me. They know someone will always get back to them and they like that” (Laura, Project Worker).

*Some kids are living alone, so we have to knock on the door and get them going.
(Laura, Project Worker)*

The most evident aspect of ‘personal circumstances’ that confronted participants on the programme related to the issue of transport namely travelling to work destinations. Many people partaking in the programme live in the rural hinterlands around the main towns served by the programme. Unsurprisingly, being young and living in the countryside presented a number of participants with transport difficulties and ways needed to be sought to overcome this. Public transport was generally not an option as there is a lack of public transport infrastructure in such rural area. This, in turn, proved a significant obstacle to participants who do not own their own mode of transport.

In terms of travelling, the average distance from participants’ place of residence to the site of delivery of the training component of the programme was 9.14 km and 14.81 km to the work placement component. However, one participant commuted a longer distance of 75 km. The median distance to the work placement was 10km. The modes of transport used by participants was examined from the onset of the programme and again, upon completion. At the start of WW, the majority of people walked (39%), 2% used public transport and 2% cycled to work. At the end of the programme, the numbers who use public transport had risen to 4% while the numbers combined for walking and cycling had dropped slightly to 38%. Some 36% used their own car and further 8% organised a lift at the start of the programme. The combined total requiring a car increased to 55% by the end of the programme. For 21 participants (14%), TRYS facilitated access to the programme at the start by organising a lift to the service. By the end of the programme, this had reduced to 6 participants (4%).

Table 9: Mode of transport for participants at the start and by the end of WW

Mode of transport	At the start		By end of WW	
	Number	%	Number	%
Walking	61	39.1	55	35.3
Bike	3	1.9	4	2.6
Self-organised lift	12	7.7	23	14.7
Own car	56	35.9	63	40.4
Programme-supported transport	21	13.5	6	3.8

Public transport	3	1.9	5	3.2
Total	156	100.0	156	100.0

Participants, employers and staff referred to the support that the Work Winner programme provides to help solve the problems associated with lack of transport. This can include: staff giving lifts; helping participants negotiate lifts from others and financial support for driver training.

“We regularly sort out transport for people, which could mean driving them, yourself to and from work for the first couple of days or for a couple of months”. (Donal, Project Coordinator)

I was very impressed with it. Donal gave lifts to the lads when we couldn't. (Mike, Employer)

A further aspect of ‘personal circumstances’ that impacted on young people’s employment chances was that of computer and internet access. Despite the assumption that young people are ‘digital natives’, the reality is that not all young people are familiar with using computers, especially as a progressive tool in the job marketplace. To rectify this disadvantage, the Work Winner Programme provided participants with access to computers and support to in relation to using the internet for job seeking.

“We try and support them to learn to use computers for job searches, applying for JobsBridge. All that stuff. Most of them would not have known how to do this even though they all have Smartphone’s and have internet at home...they don’t know how to do it. So we get very involved in that side of things” (Donal, Project Coordinator).

Tipperary Regional Youth Service’s Youth Information Projects played a pivotal role here also, providing participants with guidance and support through digital communication technologies.

“Some people don’t even have their own email address. That’s were TRYS come in again it gives them access through the Youth Information Project” (Laura, Project Worker).

Enhancing Emotional Capabilities

Commonly, before the onset of the programme, participants were feeling low, isolated and lacked self-confidence and self-esteem. Indeed, when selecting participants for the programme, staff members spoke of being conscious of selecting people who are feeling low and lacking in confidence.

“It’s very big in how we choose the 20 programme participants because they are generally isolated, sitting at home, not socialising an awful lot, staying in bed until 2 or 3 in the day ...it starts to eat away at them sitting around ...they know for a fact that community and society does not hold them in high regard in any way...they probably didn’t achieve high marks in school so will have left school early, in and out of court ...now they can’t get a job, they are on the dole...these same people don’t feel great about themselves ...so confidence is the big big thing” (Donal, Staff).

Through engagement with the programme, and engagement with the project staff, a change occurred in participants, not just in skills related terms, but a change in relation to emotional capabilities.

“It might be hard to measure in certain regards but it is a very easy thing to see. You meet people who are very very down, can barely look you in the eye, maybe haven’t had a shower for a long time...you meet them a week later and they are proud as punch and they are looking at you in the eye, they are confident...they are coming in for a coffee and they are mixing with people in the front office, people they would have just walked past before. These are very easy things to see, when you are working with people, you can see what works” (Donal, Project Coordinator).

This sense of improved and renewed confidence was evident to not only the project workers but also to the employers and most importantly, it was something that participants themselves recognised.

“I got out of that mind frame of I’m going to be sitting here forever and not going to be doing anything. It just got me out of the frame of mind and now I really love working and I enjoy myself too and not feeling like a failure anymore” (Aine, WW Participant).

In particular, the work experience component of the programme was cited as being an arena in which people’s emotional capabilities flourished and developed.

I didn’t think I would be able to the job. Afterwards I was proud I could. I realised how anti-social I was but after that I was able to open up more. (Sean, Participant)

Yes, because you go in to work and meet different people, groups of people and it would build up your confidence. (Angela, Participant)

It worked out very well for him more so socially. Such a big difference between the man that came in here and the man that left. He came out of his shell. (Mike, Employer)

Yes, he has come out of his shell big time, you know with customers. (Ben, Employer)

I think my last student was the best because it’s where he came from, his different background, and he so lacked confidence but he was so genuine...He has changed and it’s all down to self-confidence, I think he felt he was accepted, and encouraged. (Jane, Employer)

It changes people; I came here with no confidence, now I do. It changes people. (Paul, Participant)

The development of self-confidence is stated by workers as the most important thing the programme does. For Donal – Project Coordinator, he asserts that confidence is crucial because, *“nobody will ever chase anything unless they have the confidence to chase it”*. Donal also declares that the building of confidence within participants is actually a key part of the programme and crucial to his work. Furthermore, Donal relates some of this new

found confidence to the fact that the programme design and pathway is in the participants hands; it is an empowering and inspiring process.

“Well going back to the very first day, I guarantee you they have never been asked ‘what would you like to do?’ Not in any real way. Here is a blank piece of paper for you...what would you like to do for the next 18 weeks. People are really taken aback by that and it really gets them thinking and dreaming a little bit maybe. You are empowering them and with that comes massive confidence, and they start to believe again” (Donal, Project Worker).

Programme Results

Qualitative data revealed a number of participants had changed their attitudes towards their future career paths as a result of the programme.

“Yes I definitely got out of that mind frame of I’m going to be sitting here forever and not going to be doing anything” (Aine, Participant)

“I was worried that I wasn’t prepared for the 8 hour work and meeting new people in the job, so just getting the experience, and realising what work was like was good” (Sean, Participant)

“Yes I got confidence that I could get a job and have the responsibility of getting up to go to work on time rather than just getting the dole” (Liam, Participant)

Though the staff members agree they promote positive attitudes toward employment, Donal also points out that those young people who voluntarily opt in to the programme already show those key aspirations and attitudes by voluntarily agreeing to partake in the first place.

“Well it tries to challenge attitudes to work but the participants have opted into the programme so that aspiration is there already” (Donal, Staff).

Perhaps, a better indication of changing attitudes towards employment can be illustrated through an analysis of the quantitative data, surrounding employment, after programme completion.

Table 10: Status of participants at programme end, after 6 months and after 12 months

Status	At programme end		After 6 months		After 12 months	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Job	23	14.7	18	11.5	29	18.6
Supported job (e.g. JobBridge)	15	9.6	15	9.6	0	0
Job (retained by employer from placement)	36	23.1	33	21.2	39	25.0
Self-employed	3	1.9	2	1.3	2	1.3
Education	8	5.1	6	3.8	7	4.5
Training	23	14.7	24	15.4	23	14.7
Unemployed	42	26.9	30	19.2	29	18.6
Inactive	5	3.2	6	3.8	5	3.2
Unavailable	1	.6	22	14.1	22	14.1
Total	156	100.0	156	100.0	156	100.0

Based on available data, Work Winner showed strong results in terms of progression. At the end of the programme, approximately 70% of participants achieved a positive progression outcome. Some 40% (62 participants) got a job with 17% (26 participants) accessing a job or becoming self-employed and 23% retained by the employer where they undertook the placement (36 participants). An additional 10% entered a supported job (such as JobBridge, the national internship scheme). As such, half of all participants achieved a positive result in terms of access to employment. A further 20% (31 participants) progressed to further education or training. The remaining 30% re-entered unemployment (27%) or inactivity (3%) at the end of the programme.

At the period of six months post-programme completion, 63% of all participants achieved a positive outcome and 23% were unemployed (19%) or inactive (4%). Of those who achieved a positive outcome, 13% got a job or were self-employed, an additional 21% were in a job with the employer where they undertook their placement and a further 10% in a supported job (e.g., JobBridge internship). Just under one-fifth (19%) were in further education or

training. A smaller proportion was unemployed (19%) or inactive (4%) compared with the proportion reporting this status immediately on exit from the programme. However, it should be noted that data are unavailable for 14% of participants so it cannot be established definitively whether results improved overall at six months (and also at 12 months) post programme completion for the whole pool of programme participants. If cases where data are missing are excluded from the analysis, the results are better at six months post programme completion compared with the period immediately on exit from the programme with some 73% achieving positive outcomes after six months: 51% into a job or self-employment (including a supported job / internship) and 22% into further education or training. However, this result of improved performance at six months assumes that there is no bias arising from the lack of data for 22 cases (i.e., that those least likely to achieve positive progression outcomes have not been tracked).

At the period of 12 months post programme completion, based on all 156 participants, 64% achieved a positive outcome and 22% were unemployed (19%) or inactive (3%). Of those who achieved a positive outcome, 45% had a job or were self-employed. The proportion that got a job, including an internship, or were self-employed increased slightly over the period from six months (44%) to 12 months (45%) post programme completion. At 12 months post programme completion, 19% were in further education or training – the same proportion with this status at six months post programme completion. Again, if the missing cases are excluded from the analysis (assuming no bias), there is a slight improvement in results achieved after 12 months with 75% achieving positive outcomes: overall 52% achieved access to employment. A further 23% were in further education or training.

Discussion

Profile of Participants

The profile of Work Winner participants were analysed and explored in order to identify if the programme was targeting and engaging those most at risk of poverty, deprivation and long-term unemployment. A key method by which to analyse this is to examine at the geographical areas that participants came from and compare them with the Haas Pratschke (HP) Relative Deprivation Index (2011). The HP Relative Deprivation Index (2011) is an area based deprivation measure for the island of Ireland based on the 2011 Census information. Designed by Trutz Haase and Dr. Jonathan Pratschke, the Index is determined by indicators across a range of categories including age dependency, lone parents, education levels, unemployment rates and how many people live per room in a house. Each small area then, within Ireland, is given a deprivation score. Scores are given to the area based on a national average of zero and ranging from approximately -35 (being the most disadvantaged) to +35 (being the most affluent). 40% of participants on the Work Winner programme were inhabitants of areas classified as 'disadvantaged' and a further 44% in an area categorised as marginally above average. This shows effective geographic targeting of the programme on spatial areas with a profile of relative disadvantage, ensuring that the young people most in need of the programme are the ones participating in it.

As previously stated, more males partook in the Work Winner programme than their female counterparts. In total, 98 (63%) males and 58 (37%) females engaged with the initiative. Analysing this figure in correlation with national unemployment trends and figures it is evident that participant profiles mirror the national situation. According to the Central Statistic Office's May 2015 unemployment report, there are 22,700 young males between the ages of 15-24 unemployed, compared with 14,400 females. Furthermore, research carried out by the Economic and Social Research Institute, entitled 'The Impact of the Great

Recession on Unemployed Youth and NEET Individuals' (2015), revealed that prior to the recession which started in 2006, young Irish females were more likely to be unemployed than young males. This can be attributed to employment for young males in industries that have typically been largely male orientated such as construction and trades. However, post 2006, this trend changed with young males outweighing young females in the unemployment arena. Again, this illustrates effective targeting of the Work Winner programme to the sectors of society where it is most needed.

Educationally, 31% of participants ceased school at or below Junior Certificate level and a further 59% at Upper Secondary level. Less than 5% had a Third level degree or qualification. Again, this illustrates effective targeting of the programme to young people who are at risk of becoming long-term unemployed. According to an OECD (2010) report, early school leavers are a group that are increasingly at risk of long-term unemployment. *“Low skilled youth, who even before the crisis faced multiple barriers in finding work, are now at risk of long-term inactivity and exclusion”* (Scarpetta, Sonnet and Manfredi, 2010:9). The report further recommends that policy makers focus on youth that are in danger of losing contact with the labour market. This danger emanates from, the report suggests, a process referred to as ‘scarring’. *“Scarring” means that the mere experience of unemployment will increase future unemployment risks and/or reduce future earnings”* (Scarpetta, Sonnet and Manfredi, 2010:15). This scarring, can take the form of a lack of skills development, lack of experience, lack of income, reduced future happiness and the development of low self-esteem. This experience can be identified in the participant’s own stories; the feeling of being stuck in a rut almost.

“I was sitting at home every day not doing a thing. I had handed in so many CV’s to different places and I was getting absolutely no replies back. I applied for so many jobs, so really there is nothing more to it only I was sitting at home not doing anything. So I felt really worthless until I came here to be honest” (Aine, Participant)

“I didn’t think I’d get anywhere until he came along. I had a bit of bad luck getting jobs and I was still only young as well” (John, Participant)

Examining the profile of participants, the average duration they had all been receiving social welfare was 23 months, although one individual had been out of work for 72 months. This

demonstrates again, that the programme is effectively targeting populations who are most effected by unemployment, deprivation and are at-risk of becoming permanently removed from the labour market.

A Youth Work Model

The Work Winner programme is very much positioned within a youth work model and operated from a youth work perspective. Using the National Quality Standards Framework's (2010) core principles it is evident to see that the programme utilises youth work methods and values. The NQSF (2010) states that youth work should be "*young person-centred*", and this principle is paramount in the Work Winner programme. Countless times, throughout the qualitative data, participants and workers spoke of how the young people are the creators of their own path.

"We show them a blank piece of paper and tell them they will have to fill it in and decide what kind of a programme that they want it to be. Whereas all other existing programmes are decided by trainers or funders before the young person comes into the room. That is the big difference...it is focused on the participant...they are not told where they should go or what they have to do. You ask them to participate straight away". (Donal, Project Worker)

The process is led and designed by young people themselves, as is familiar within youth work practice. Voluntary participation is also very much a practice that is linked to the principle of youth led work. Again, the Work Winner programme is a voluntary initiative and there are no financial or social welfare related benefits or sanctions associated with it. The young participants chose to embark upon this path themselves.

The NQSF (2010) also states that youth work should be "*educational and developmental*". As is previously stated, the Work Winner programme is not singularly concerned with formal learning structures but rather on the lessons learned by young people as they progress through the programme. Youth work practitioners often evaluate programmes or initiatives in terms of 'process' rather than 'task'. This means that youth work is concerned, not solely with the endpoint of a project, but rather with the journey from the start to finish and the

things learned and gained through the entire process. In relation to Work Winner, staff viewed the success of the programme in a developmental rather than technical sense. Progression and success was then viewed not only in terms of gaining employment but also in terms of personal development and growth.

“It means they are no longer sitting at home doing nothing. It doesn’t matter if they are in education, part time work or volunteering as long as they are not stuck in a rut” (Laura, Project Worker).

In essence, this is informal education in action. Spence (2007) defines informal education as *“non-structured and takes place in daily life activities within peer groups”*. This method of informality underpinned the programme and is a key reason why workers believe the programme was a success. Workers spoke of how participants could call them up, or drop in to see them. They also spoke of supporting them through personal issues that had impacted on their previous employment opportunities. This is youth work, finding educational and developmental opportunities wherever opportunity arose.

“At an earlier point, FAS suggested the programme to be more standardised and classroom based. But we didn’t go down that route and refused. We went back and asked participants if the programme had of been like this would you have done it – they said no”. (Donal, Staff)

It appears evidentially clear that the structure of the programme and informality championed by workers is a key consideration in the programme’s success.

The esteem with which participants held the two project workers Donal and Laura was something that was undeniably evident from the qualitative interviews. Participants spoke of the support received from the pair at all times throughout their engagement.

“With the FAS programme, I was on my own. I was just given the form to sign and then I was on my own, I got no support what so ever... I got good experience from the FAS but I just got so much more support and even hope by the end of the Work Winner”. (Aine, Participant)

“Donal was very good to us. He’s a good connection even after the course” (John, Participant)

“She still drops in here now and again for advice. We helped her find an accountant for her business”. (Laura, Project Worker)

The development of a positive and constructive relationship with staff is a crucial consideration of youth work. *“The relationship between the practitioner and the young person has been, and continues to be, a unique and defining feature of youth work practice”* (Henry, Morgan and Hammond, 2010: 26). It appears; through participants own words that these relationships, forged between staff and individual young people could be the defining feature of Work Winner as well. It is summed up best in the words of one female participant;

“So the idea was put to me about opening up my own beauty room and I laughed at him the first day and I said there is no way I’m going to something like that, because I said I wouldn’t be able to, or I mightn’t have the money to do it and I would be too scared. And he said to me don’t ever let fear stop your dreams or something like that. And he kept saying that and to be honest I gave out about him once or twice, because I was saying you know is he pushing me or what. But when I look back on it now he only wanted the best for me, he was absolutely fantastic and constantly he was drilling it into me the whole time that “I believe in you, you should believe in yourself”. (Aine, Participant)

Training, Qualifications and Work Placement

According to the Journey to Employment (JET) Framework (2013) there are a number of factors that affect young people’s journey to employment. Two of these factors are qualifications/training and experience i.e. relevant work experience. Both of these factors are addressed by the Work Winner programme. In terms of qualifications and training, all participants on the programme complete an initial set of common modules before undertaking training directly related to their area of job interest. The most subscribed to courses were driving equipment and safety (22%), followed by personal care at 14%. These

courses allowed the young people the opportunity to develop new skills and competencies but also to gain information and achievements for their curriculum vitae.

“God I don’t know I would be afraid to answer. You just don’t know, just hoping you’d get another place or job but before at the time there was nothing there. I had nothing on my CV only very little 3 months’ work experience.” (Paul, Participant)

“Yes we did first aid, health and safety and others every Monday. Yes I definitely think they were good. We got some CV work too”. (Angela, Participant)

According to JET (2013) achieving qualifications is heavily linked to gaining employment and earning potential. *“Research has shown that the majority of large employers think that qualifications are a good indicator of the skills they require when recruiting”* (JET, 2010:11). Furthermore, a 2010 report commissioned by the National Youth Council of Ireland stressed that there are a large cohort of unqualified young people in Ireland that will be long-term unemployable unless they *“acquire skills in the short to medium term that are relevant to the future workplace”*. Work Winner addresses these concerns by combining informal learning processes with the opportunity to gain concrete training and qualifications in their chosen career path.

Work experience is also a core component of the Work Winner programme. Participants readily recognised that securing and carrying out their work experience was an essential part of their employment journey.

“It was to get some work experience because before that I had no experience at all. Something to put on the CV” (Sean, Participant)

The JET (2013) Framework also stresses the necessity of undertaking relevant work experience in order to secure employment. *“Work experience gives young people a valuable understanding of the workplace and the conduct expected of them...can also help them make career choices, set realistic aspirations, and develop employability skills”* (2013:12). Similarly, the National Youth Council of Ireland (2010) echo the view that work experience is instrumental. Young people interviewed for the Youth Council’s (2010) study identified ‘a lack of workplace experience’ as the *“most significant barrier to entry to the jobs market in*

Ireland". Work Winner participants echoed this sentiment and revealed that both the work experience and formal courses assisted them in gaining future employment.

"Do the course. It will improve your chances in getting a job and improve your confidence when looking for work" (Sean, Participant)

The JET (2013) Framework also discusses how the quality of work experience is also important, that *"a poor quality experience can reinforce low aspirations, particularly for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds"*. This issue also arose during the Work Winner process.

"There are a number of cases where I have taken a young person out of employment due to the fact they were not getting what they were promised and there was no learning there for them" (Donal, Project Coordinator)

This again, correlates with the idea that the programme is young person-centred. For the staff, the focus was on the young people on them gaining the best possible outcomes from their engagement with the programme.

Employability Skills

According to the Internal Labour Organisation (2013) there are a number of core employability skills that employers look for when hiring. Employability skills are distinct from the technical skills and qualifications needed to secure employment. Rather, there are the 'soft' skills such as communication, teamwork and problem solving that are essential to progression and job retention in the workplace. A person can essentially have all the qualifications needed for the position but without common skills they are not 'job' ready and cannot function appropriately in the workplace. The Internal Labour Organisation (2013) further asserts that these skills can be divided into four main categories; *"learning to learn, communication, teamwork and problem-solving"*. While there were few examples of participants directly speaking of employability skills through the qualitative data, it is still evident that navigating through the Work Winner programme ensured the development, however subconscious, of skills directly related to employability.

We had a case lately where the participant was answering the phone and speaking too quickly...the employer gave that feedback...so we started calling her from different numbers every day and trying to get her to slow down...it is a type of supervision...very irritating from her point of view ...but we were in touch with her 4 or 5 times a day". (Donal, Project Coordinator)

In the above example, it is evident that despite gaining work experience, this particular young person needed additional support to develop her communication based employability skills. Analysing the qualitative data, it can also be seen that project workers committed to ensuring that some participants got out of bed in the morning and arrived punctually to work. This took the form of providing participants with wake up calls and sometimes, providing lifts to work. Workers also spoke of participants having to learn how to appropriately present themselves and take acceptable time for things such as cigarette breaks. These are all essential employability skills; the management of yourself in the workplace environment.

Brewer (2013), writing for the International Labour Organisation, states that one aspect of employability skills relates to lifelong learning and developing a motivation to learn. *"Youth cannot develop positive attitudes towards lifelong learning or become self-directed learners if they do not perceive themselves of succeeding in learning tasks"* (Brewer, 2013:8). This relates to a theme that emerged frequently throughout the qualitative interviews; the idea that once people believe they are capable of something, they will then pursue it.

"Yes, confidence for participants is an enormous part of the programme because nobody will ever chase anything unless they have the confidence to chase it. If the programme does anything ...that is the biggest thing that it does. It is hard to measure at times...but I see it and Laura sees it...from the day you meet those people at the start ...they are unrecognisable when you meet them in 6 months' time".
(Donal, Project Coordinator)

The JET Framework (2013) further cements this argument by asserting that 'self-management' is an essential employability skill required by employer organisations. Again, the development of self-management skills can be linked to the development of self-belief.

Once a young person's vision of themselves has been realigned, once they see themselves as an employable person, there begins to be noticeable behaviour and attitude changes.

"You just have to stay at it because they are the ones that need to be convinced...you are fairly sure they can do it, but they don't believe they can do it, so bit by bit...all the parts of the programme... it transforms somebody...because they are at such a low base...they are afraid to leave the town...afraid to try something new". (Donal, Project Coordinator)

The Work Winner programme therefore, operates to get participants to that point where the manner in which they view themselves change. Once, they can view themselves as someone who can succeed, who can manage themselves, this shows in how they exhibit themselves.

"The best solution is if the young person can handle it themselves...you teach them how to do that...and if they can do that, their confidence will be better but you need to teach them to communicate better to do that" (Donal, Project Coordinator)

The support offered through the Work Winner programme is second to none but workers are wholeheartedly aware that this support is not intended to be **everlasting**. The development of self-management skills is crucial for a future as an employed person and the above quotation illustrates this. The Work Winner programme teaches young people how to take the reins of their employment journey themselves, to self-manage and to embed employability skills into their workplace practice.

Emotional Capabilities

The development and strengthening of emotional capabilities featured frequently during qualitative interviews and was referenced by employers, staff and participants. Most commonly mentioned was the idea that participants often began the programme at an emotional low, in terms of confidence and self-belief, and flourished in these emotional areas through engagement with the programme.

“I think my last student was the best because it’s where he came from, his different background, and he so lacked confidence but he was so genuine...He has changed and it’s all down to self-confidence, I think he felt he was accepted and encouraged”.
(Jane, Employer)

The JET (2013) Framework suggests that the development of confidence is essential to gain employment and progress in the workplace and this view is supported by further research in the field. Impetus – The Private Equity Foundation (2014) also states that young people need to be ‘self-assured’ to increase their employability chances. *“Quietly confident, displays self-belief, believes they can reach goals, independent thinker, has good eye contact, firm handshake, willing to ask questions and seek more information, able to work alone without clear-direction”* (Impetus, 2014:22). This sentiment was echoed by Work Winner staff and they displayed a clear awareness of the importance of building confidence through engagement with the programme.

“You just have to stay at it because they are the ones that need to be convinced...you are fairly sure they can do it, but they don’t believe they can do it, so bit by bit...all the parts of the programme... it transforms somebody...because they are at such a low base...they are afraid to leave the town...afraid to try something new”. (Donal, Project Coordinator)

“Probably didn’t achieve high marks in school so will have left school early, in and out of court ...now they can’t get a job, they are on the dole...these same people don’t feel great about themselves ...so confidence is the big big thing”. (Donal, Staff)

NYCI’s research on Youth Employment also reveals that the process of being unemployed and searching unsuccessfully for jobs can actually lead to young people’s self-esteem lowering. *“ For the majority of the young jobseekers the ‘real time’ experience of job searching is one of repeated rejection where there are no partial victories, only rejections or job offers”* (National Youth Council ,2010:11). In fact, 65% of those young people interviewed by NYCI for the purpose of their research reported that being unemployed had a negative impact on their sense of wellbeing. The Work Winner programme takes the issue of confidence building seriously and realises that it is a key factor in participants working in the future. Sometimes participants can be emotionally fractured, are in a particularly low

place. At times like this, courses and work experience need to bridge with confidence building in order to ensure that young people complete the programme work ready and essentially, with the belief that they can succeed and that they are deserving candidates for the workplace.

Furthermore, engagement with TRYS affords participants with the pathway to receive support in areas such as substance use, youth justice and personal and family problems. Although there is no quantitative data to explore on this issue, it is something that workers spoke of in qualitative interviews. For those who need extra emotional support and assistance, TRYS is undoubtedly an opportunity and avenue they can avail of.

Programme results

Based on available data, Work Winner showed positive results in terms of progression. At the end of the programme, approximately 70% of participants achieved a positive progression outcome. Some 40% (62 participants) got a job with 17% (26 participants) accessing a job or becoming self-employed and 23% retained by the employer where they undertook the placement (36 participants). An additional 10% entered a supported job (such as JobBridge, the national internship scheme). As such, half of all participants achieved a positive result in terms of access to employment. A further 20% (31 participants) progressed to further education or training. The remaining 30% re-entered unemployment (27%) or inactivity (3%) at the end of the programme.

Table 10: Status of participants at programme end, after 6 months and after 12 months

Status	At programme end		After 6 months		After 12 months	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Job	23	14.7	18	11.5	29	18.6
Supported job (e.g. JobBridge)	15	9.6	15	9.6	0	0
Job (retained by employer from placement)	36	23.1	33	21.2	39	25.0
Self-employed	3	1.9	2	1.3	2	1.3
Education	8	5.1	6	3.8	7	4.5

Training	23	14.7	24	15.4	23	14.7
Unemployed	42	26.9	30	19.2	29	18.6
Inactive	5	3.2	6	3.8	5	3.2
Unavailable	1	.6	22	14.1	22	14.1
Total	156	100.0	156	100.0	156	100.0

At the period of six months post-programme completion, 63% of all participants achieved a positive outcome and 23% were unemployed (19%) or inactive (4%). Of those who achieved a positive outcome, 13% got a job or were self-employed, an additional 21% were in a job with the employer where they undertook their placement and a further 10% in a supported job (e.g., JobBridge internship). Just under one-fifth (19%) were in further education or training. A smaller proportion was unemployed (19%) or inactive (4%) compared with the proportion reporting this status immediately on exit from the programme. However, it should be noted that data are unavailable for 14% of participants so it cannot be established definitively whether results improved overall at six months (and also at 12 months) post programme completion for the whole pool of programme participants. If cases where data are missing are excluded from the analysis, the results are better at six months post programme completion compared with the period immediately on exit from the programme with some 73% achieving positive outcomes after six months: 51% into a job or self-employment (including a supported job / internship) and 22% into further education or training. However, this result of improved performance at six months assumes that there is no bias arising from the lack of data for 22 cases (i.e., that those least likely to achieve positive progression outcomes have not been tracked).

At the period of 12 months post programme completion, based on all 156 participants, 64% achieved a positive outcome and 22% were unemployed (19%) or inactive (3%). Of those who achieved a positive outcome, 45% had a job or were self-employed. The proportion that got a job, including an internship, or were self-employed increased slightly over the period from six months (44%) to 12 months (45%) post programme completion. At 12 months post programme completion, 19% were in further education or training – the same

proportion with this status at six months post programme completion. Again, if the missing cases are excluded from the analysis (assuming no bias), there is a slight improvement in results achieved after 12 months with 75% achieving positive outcomes: overall 52% achieved access to employment. A further 23% were in further education or training.

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Trends

As previously stated, the Work Winner programme cultivated extremely positive outcomes for the majority of participants, with 64% having achieved a positive outcome a year after completing the programme. Of this 64%, 45% had secured employment or become self-employed and a further 19% had enrolled in further education or training. This clearly illustrates the strength and success of the Work Winner initiative.

GAP

However, there have been trends emerging as the data and results of the Work Winner programme are explored. These are important messages to consider as the programme continues into the future. In terms of educational attainment and its linkage to acquiring employment, an interesting tendency was revealed. In general, the higher the level of education reached by the participant, the more likelihood there was of positive progression results. Those with upper secondary level education, which was the largest grouping to undertake the programme, revealed significantly better post-programme results than participants who had ceased education at a lower level. Of those who completed upper secondary level schooling, 18% received a job, 34% accessed a work placement and 24% progressed to further education and training. Similarly, the results for those with a Third Level qualification were also extremely agreeable, with this entire cohort performing in the labour market a year after programme finish. This is in stark contrast to those young people who ceased education at lower secondary level. 43 participants fitted this description and 12 months after programme conclusion, 47% were inactive or unemployed. This trajectory is generally accepted by other research in the field and demonstrates that it is a widespread trend. *“Such differences persist into adult life, with higher rates of overall and*

long-term unemployment among early leavers across all age groups” (Byrne and Smith, 2010:17). Barnardos’s 2009 research entitled ‘Written Out, Written Off’, also echoes this view arguing that early school leaver “are three to four times more likely to be unemployed than their more highly educated peers”.

Despite support and the opportunity to build skills and workplace experience, the question as to why early school leavers continually fare less well than their educated counterparts remains. ‘No Way Back – The Dynamics of Early School Leaving’ (Byrne and Smith, 2010) suggests that there is a typical profile to fit early school leavers; much higher levels among working class backgrounds and particularly working class young males. Interesting, with the Work Winner programme, female participants fared better than their male counterparts following completion of the programme. The research (2010) goes further to state that *“early school leaving has its roots in early experiences of educational failure and struggle with schoolwork, often as far back as primary level”*. A climate then of low expectations can become ingrained in people from as early as childhood and no doubt, this negative sense of self-worth is harder for some to overcome than others. Perhaps the ‘scarring’ process referred to by NYCI’s (2010) research can provide an answer here also. Some participants have faced years of low expectations and this struggle continues following the Work Winner programme. If working class men are more likely to be categorised as NEET individuals, could this explain why 6 months following project completion 22% of females had secured employment compared to 13% of males.

Overall, in terms of quantitative outcomes the Work Winner programme is a provable success. The programme overall has a progression rate of 70% and this figure is difficult to argue with. However, in qualitative terms, it is evident that the programme can also be viewed as a proactive and positive initiative. The vast majority of participants, despite whether they are received a job offer or a place on further education or training, spoke of how the programme had given them back confidence and a sense of self-worth. This is a core area of emotional capability required to be viewed as work ready and in this lies the ultimate success of the Work Winner programme.

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