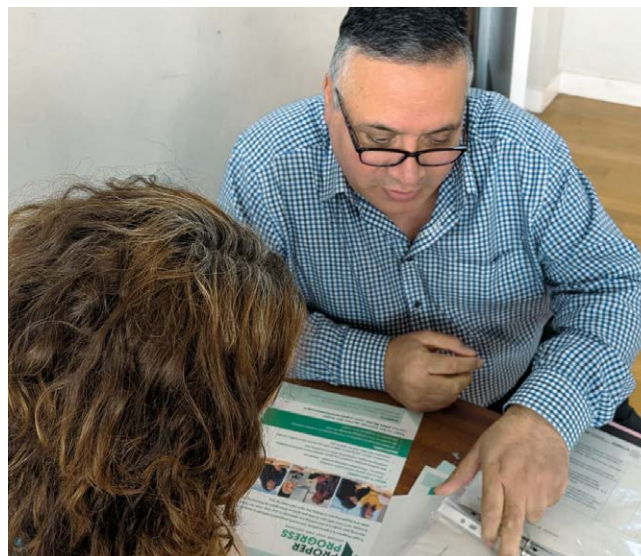


# PROPER PROGRESS

choose your own outcome

## REPORT



## INTRODUCTION

Established in 1985, Proper Job Theatre Company is based in the North of England creating work that uses the arts and theatre to help individuals connect to their communities, develop their creativity, and express themselves in ways that feel authentic and empowering. In 2005 we founded our community learning and development programme, the LAB (Learn Achieve Believe) Project.

The LAB Project delivers courses, workshops and creative interventions that support people to build confidence, improve wellbeing, develop employability skills, and strengthen their connection to their local community.

In August 2025, we launched **Proper Progress**, a personalised one-to-one programme supporting participants to reach their individual goals. Proper Progress was funded through The Growth Company's Working Well: Support to Succeed programme. It provided tailored guidance and structured support, whilst incorporating our relational, creative and participatory approaches.. This engaged individuals who may have experienced barriers in traditional learning environments. We balanced a structured and responsive approach to ensure key developmental topics were covered whilst supporting individuals' needs. This balance enabled meaningful, person-centred progression.

Diverse referral pathways were established with both existing and new partner organisations at the outset of the programme. As participants' needs evolved, we continued to develop additional pathways when new and different needs presented.

We recruited in September 2025 and spaces filled quickly, demonstrating a clear demand for personalised, guided support within Greater Manchester. The first cohort of 20 participants all completed the full 9-session programme with positive outcomes. Due to the project's success, funding was secured for a second cohort, bringing the total number of participants supported to 40.

Participants could attend all nine sessions as one-to-one appointments or combine these with relevant LAB workshops and courses aligned to their goals. Participants were also offered a dedicated National Careers Service interview skills workshop which we hosted specifically for Proper Progress participants.

This report outlines the recruitment and delivery model, outcomes and key learnings, and the future potential of the programme.

## **RECRUITMENT METHODS**

The LAB Project is well embedded within Greater Manchester, with strong partnerships across statutory services, VCSE organisations and grassroots groups. These relationships supported successful recruitment and ensured participants could access wider support where needed through referrals and signposting.

Participants were recruited through:

- › **Partner organisations including DWP, The Bread and Butter Thing, and Jigsaw Housing**
- › **Contact with previous and current LAB learners**
- › **Outreach at community events, libraries, low-cost food projects, and other community settings**

# PROJECT BREAKDOWN

Once enrolled, participants engaged in a structured nine-session programme designed to provide tailored support, practical guidance, and clear progression pathways.

## SESSION 1: INITIAL PLANNING

- › Participants met with their keyworker to explore the programme, ask questions, and clarify available opportunities and support.
- › An Individual Learning Plan was completed and the participant was supported to map their personal goals by using structured goal-setting models such as SMART, GROW, and WOOP. This allowed them to break objectives down into achievable steps, and provided a space to discuss barriers they were facing.

## SESSIONS 2–8: GUIDED INTERVENTIONS

- › One-to-one coaching and structured learning activities were delivered, focusing on communication, confidence, social skills, wellbeing, motivation, and employability.
- › Participants were signposted and referred to specialist support tailored to their individual needs.
- › Optional attendance at LAB courses, including: LAB Wellbeing, LAB Life, LAB Volunteering, LAB taster workshops, as well as National Careers Service workshops
- › Keyworker provided session summaries after each intervention, via email, WhatsApp or print outs. This ensured participants had a clear record of progress and follow-up actions.

## SESSION 9 – REVIEW AND PROGRESSION

- › Participants reflected on achievements and identified next steps with their keyworker.
- › A clear, actionable onward journey was mapped out, including visual summaries of progression and follow-up recommendations to support continued learning, employment, or wellbeing outcomes.

The programme's structured yet flexible approach ensured participants received personalised guidance while maintaining a clear progression framework, maximising both engagement and outcomes.



*“It has been very very good for me. It was what I needed at this moment of my life – organising my thoughts, the activities, the reminders for my confidence. It was what I needed to go through a difficult time. I felt supported during the programme. I felt like the activities were very tailored to my needs and what I was struggling with.”*

## DEMOGRAPHICS

Through our ongoing work at the LAB Project, we have proactively embedded ourselves within Greater Manchester’s diverse communities, building strong and trusted partnerships and continuously refining our engagement methods to maximise accessibility. This enabled us to recruit Proper Progress participants from a wide range of backgrounds and with varied needs. We also conducted targeted outreach, directly contacting previous learners who had expressed a need for one-to-one support or who would particularly benefit from a personalised conversation about the programme.

Across two cohorts (40 participants):

### AGE BREAKDOWN

- › **19 - 24:** 3 participants (7.5%)
- › **25 - 34:** 11 participants (27.5%)
- › **35 - 44:** 12 participants (30%)
- › **45 - 54:** 10 participants (25%)
- › **55 - 64:** 3 participants (7.5%)
- › **65+:** 1 participant (2.5%)

### OTHER

- › **67%** identified as being from global majority communities
- › **78%** had a long-term health condition
- › **50%** were ESOL speakers
- › **77%** were economically inactive

These figures demonstrate the programme’s reach to individuals facing multiple and intersecting barriers.

### RECRUITED BY:

- › **33%** were new to the LAB Project and were either referred from partners or via visits to other organisations
- › **77%** were currently or previous LAB Project learners when enrolling

## INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

To ensure accessibility and inclusion, Proper Progress implemented a range of flexible and supportive measures:

- › **FLEXIBLE DELIVERY:** Participants could attend appointments over the phone, online, or in person.
- › **ADVANCE MATERIALS:** Worksheets and visual resources were sent ahead for remote sessions, via email or Whatsapp
- › **ADAPTABLE SESSION LENGTH:** One-to-one appointments were usually 1 hour but there was flexibility on the length for those who found a shorter time period more accessible
- › **BESPOKE ACTIVITIES:** Learning activities were personalised to support diverse needs.
- › **FOLLOW-UP COMMUNICATION:** Summary emails or WhatsApp messages were sent after each session to provide structure, highlight key learnings, and provide information such as signposting details.
- › **TAILORED REFERRAL PATHWAYS:** Participants were connected to specialist and culturally appropriate services and activities.
- › **TRAVEL SUPPORT:** Up to £5 was reimbursed for in-person attendance.
- › **PARTICIPATION RECOGNITION:** A £50 gift voucher was provided at the end of the programme to honour participants' commitment and time, usable for essential costs such as supermarket shopping.

This flexible and adaptable approach was particularly important for participants facing health or mental health challenges, caring responsibilities, ESOL needs, neurodiversity, or anxiety about formal learning environments.


By removing barriers and providing personalised support, we enabled participants to fully engage, achieve their goals, and feel valued throughout the programme.

## DIGITAL EXCLUSION SUPPORT

We provided 10 free refurbished laptops and 3 smartphones to participants who were facing digital exclusion.

These were used to support job searching and applying, attending interviews, attending courses, and accessing resources to support wellbeing.





*“It has helped me improve. It has helped me to come out from being comfortable and to do different types of experiences such as meetings online, in-person sessions and workshops, and practising speaking in a group as I find this difficult. From doing the programme I have attended LAB courses, an employment support programme locally to me, and gone on to go to to do a 20 hour a week paid placement at Manchester Art Gallery.”*



## OUTCOMES

Participants reported:

- › **Increased confidence and interpersonal skills**
- › **Improved communication skills**
- › **Greater motivation and clarity around goals**
- › **Improved digital skills**
- › **Reduced fear around job applications and interviews**
- › **Increased engagement in community activities**
- › **Improved budgeting and life skills**
- › **Feeling supported and listened to**
- › **Reduced structural barriers to employment and progression**

**100%** felt supported to engage in life skills following completed interventions.

**90%** felt interpersonal skills had developed and increased employability.

**100%** felt they had had sufficient support from their keyworker.

**81%** felt structural barriers in relation to employment and skills had been reduced.

## REFERRAL PATHWAYS

Having and continuously developing referral pathways throughout the programme ensured support was holistic and responsive. This approach enabled individuals to access specialist support and targeted opportunities alongside their one-to-one sessions.

Collectively, **61 direct referrals** were made, and participants were **signposted to additional support or activities 169 times**. This played a crucial role in addressing structural and systemic barriers, supporting participants to overcome challenges related to health, wellbeing, employment, and social inclusion, and ensuring meaningful progression throughout the programme.

**Referral partners included services providing:**

- › **Carers support** (Carers Manchester, Manchester Parent Carers Forum, African Caribbean Carers Group, Local Offer)
- › **Digital inclusion support** (Local councils digital inclusion teams, MAES digital skills courses, Digital skills clubs in participants localities)
- › **Domestic abuse services** (Independent Choices helpline, Pankhurst Centre advice drop in, Caribbean African Health Network domestic abuse service, Women's Aid, Indigo Programme)
- › **Employment guidance and job support** (National Careers Service, local job clubs)
- › **Family and early years support** (Sure Start, Family Hubs, Home Start)
- › **Legal advice** (Manchester University free Legal advice service, Greater Manchester Law Centre)
- › **Mental Health support** (NHS Talking Therapies, Caribbean African Health Network counselling service, Rethink mental health support group, Manchester Mind wellbeing activities)
- › **Physical health support** (Expert Patient Care programme, Nuffield Health programme)
- › **Trauma-informed programmes** (Thrive - Understanding Your Trauma Course)
- › **Welfare and benefits advice** (Citizens Advice, Ethnic Health Forum)



## Pathway to Attending LAB Courses and Workshops

Proper Progress acted as a stepping stone into wider learning opportunities at the LAB Project. Collectively, participants attended 66 LAB courses and workshops either during or after their time on the programme. This engagement complemented their personalised progression journey and provided a positive, motivational next step upon completing their one-to-one sessions.

Notably, **83% of participants who had not previously engaged with the LAB Project signed up for at least one course or workshop, with some progressing to attend up to five.** This demonstrates the programme's effectiveness in inspiring continued learning and engagement.

The relational and consistent keyworker model was repeatedly cited by participants as central to their success, providing the support, guidance, specific referrals and sign-postings, and encouragement needed to confidently progress into new opportunities.

## The Future of Proper Progress

Proper Progress provides an effective, adaptable and scalable model of progression support for individuals facing complex barriers, including long-term health conditions, ESOL needs, economic inactivity, trauma, caring responsibilities and social isolation.

The model is:

**FLEXIBLE** Delivered in-person, online or by phone

**RELATION** Grounded in consistent, trauma-informed keyworker support

**HOLISTIC** Integrating wellbeing, employability, life skills and community connection

**CONNECTED** Embedded within a strong Greater Manchester partnership network

**PROVEN** Achieving high completion rates and measurable progression outcomes

Investment in Proper Progress delivers:

- › Increased employability and progression outcomes
- › Reduced demand on crisis and statutory services through early intervention
- › Improved mental health and wellbeing
- › Increased community participation and volunteering
- › Stronger pathways into training, employment and further learning

With additional funding, Proper Progress can be expanded to:

- › **Support specific demographics such as domestic abuse survivors, NEET young people, carers, and ESOL communities**
- › **Increase cohort size and geographic reach**
- › **Extend progression tracking to evidence longer-term employment outcomes**
- › **Develop specialist themed cohorts aligned to local priorities**

Here are some examples of how Proper Progress can be shaped to support specific groups:

### **Domestic Abuse Survivors**

We have extensive experience supporting domestic abuse survivors and have developed strong, trusted partnerships with specialist domestic violence organisations across Greater Manchester. Building on this expertise, Proper Progress can be adapted into a bespoke progression support programme specifically designed to meet the complex and often intersecting needs of survivors.

Through trauma-informed, one-to-one support, we work with participants to rebuild confidence, strengthen communication skills, and develop strategies for managing wellbeing. Alongside this relational support, we facilitate direct referrals to appropriate specialist services, including counselling, domestic abuse advocacy, financial advice, housing support and legal guidance, along with referrals to culturally specific services. This ensures survivors can access the practical assistance required as a result of their experiences.

The structured “stepping stone” model, moving from individual one-to-one sessions into LAB Taster workshops and then onto longer courses provides a gradual and supported pathway back into group settings, learning environments and community participation. This staged approach is particularly effective for survivors who may experience anxiety, isolation or reduced confidence following abuse. It enables participants to re-engage at a pace that feels safe, empowering and sustainable.

This model could be further developed into a specialist survivor-focused pathway, aligned with local domestic abuse strategies and designed to deliver measurable outcomes in confidence, wellbeing, employability and long-term independence.

### **Young People Not In Education, Employment, or Training (NEET)**

We have significant experience supporting young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), alongside established referral pathways with organisations providing specialist support, training opportunities and employment guidance to young people. These partnerships enable us to offer coordinated and targeted progression routes.

The option to attend one-to-one sessions remotely makes Proper Progress particularly accessible for this demographic, many of whom may experience anxiety, low confidence, transport barriers or unstable circumstances, as well as finding digital spaces more approachable. Remote engagement provides a safe and manageable starting point, allowing young people to build trust, clarify goals and develop confidence before progressing further.

From there, participants can transition onto in-person LAB Taster sessions and then longer courses, gradually strengthening their communication skills, resilience and ability to engage in structured group environments. Additionally, our courses are multi-generational, offering young participants the unique benefit of peer learning alongside adults with greater workplace and life experience, helping them develop practical skills, confidence, and insight into social and professional settings

*“It’s been an incredible experience. Really flexible, adaptable, personal, thoughtful, great resources, great signposting, wonderful keyworker who was relatable and personable. I felt I learnt a lot about myself and the incredibly none-judgemental and incredibly safe sessions helped that.”*

*“I feel the keyworker has gone above and beyond and has tapped into things, and was very flexible and understanding. And there’s been a lot of signposting. I’m glad I entered the programme.”*



# CASE STUDIES


Here are some case studies of Proper Progress participants to demonstrate the peoples journeys on the programme.

## Melissa

Melissa joined Proper Progress after attending taster workshops delivered in partnership with **The Bread and Butter Thing**. At the time of joining, she was experiencing domestic abuse, physical and mental health challenges, complex family difficulties, isolation, and unemployment.

Through weekly sessions with her keyworker, Melissa...

- + Developed confidence and wellbeing strategies.
- + Attended a domestic abuse legal advice consultation, with her keyworker in attendance for emotional support .
- + Started counselling.
- + Accessed an Understanding Your Trauma 8 week course.
- + Joined a local women's group.
- + Attended LAB Taster workshops, LAB Wellbeing and LAB Project employability course, and the Living Libraries Empowering conversations for women workshops.
- + Attended a Smartworks interview coaching appointment where she was also provided with an outfit for attending an interview.



*“Proper Progress has opened up possible opportunities such as volunteering to help people. It’s helped me to connect with humans and feel connected. It’s had a really positive impact on me, and I’ve encouraged other people to go and see if it would be good for them. Being energised helps me focus on what needs to be done.*

*Whenever I get active and around people treating others with respect, it makes you feel different about things, about work, and about possibilities. I have most definitely exceeded my goals. I found it really really helpful and was shocked at what is available for people. I think the LAB Project is very empowering for women especially when we are middle aged women who are often overlooked and still have a lot to offer. I’m not finished yet either! It has given me a glimmer of hope.”*

# Isa

Isa joined after attending an online LAB course. In the last few years she had developed a long-term health condition and experienced a difficult trauma, which had led to unemployment, wellbeing difficulties, and low confidence.

Through Proper Progress, Isa...

- + Attended a digital skills course in her local area.
- + Attended a Pause To Power course. The course was specifically for women from global majority communities and focused on confidence, wellbeing, and employability.
- + Accessed culturally appropriate counselling through the Caribbean African Health Network.
- + Obtained a low-cost refurbished laptop from a referral to her council's digital inclusion team, removing a major barrier to job applications and attending online courses.
- + Improved her confidence, public speaking, and communication skills both through activities in her one-to-ones and attending LAB workshops.
- + Accessed exercise classes in her local area.
- + Accessed a free careers advice appointment and attend an interview skills workshop with National Careers Service.



*“My communication has gotten better through doing different courses. The classes helped me to interact with people from different backgrounds and know how to present yourself and to practice public speaking. Proper Progress helped to speak about things in a 1-to-1 which I would not be able to speak about otherwise.”*

# Chelsea

Chelsea is 19 and joined Proper Progress after attending the LAB Wellbeing course. She has GCSEs but had left college last year due to a difficult life event. Chelsea had been feeling uncertain about the future and didn't know what options were available to her. She was working to build her confidence and get back into education. Damika has since attended two other LAB courses and become a LAB Volunteer. This has involved further training, and getting involved in supporting new learners.



*“My wellbeing and self confidence has improved since the programme as I no longer doubt myself as much. I can apply for volunteering positions without doubting my ability. I have achieved my goal of building my confidence and I now have a clearer idea of my educational route. The sessions were helpful as they were catered to my specific goals. Thank you to the keyworker for being friendly and supportive!”*

# Richard

Richard joined the programme whilst experiencing mental health challenges, isolation, health difficulties, and financial challenges. Richard speaks English as a second language and wanted to be more social both for his wellbeing and to continue to develop his language skills.

Through weekly sessions and referrals Richard...

- + Developed budgeting skills through one-to-one sessions and attending the LAB Life cost of living course.
- + Started swimming after being referred for a low-cost leisure pass.
- + Started cycling.
- + Joined social and support groups locally - through being signposted to activities specific to his tastes from the keyworker.
- + Attended LAB taster workshops and the LAB Life, LAB Wellbeing, LAB Volunteering course.



*“I achieved my goals and things are getting better. I have been able to save money to pay for tools to do gardening at my local allotment which helps with my health and wellbeing. It’s helped me with self-confidence and perspective. I liked the environment and the support I’ve received. I have attended the LAB Life course, LAB Taster sessions, will be doing LAB Wellbeing and LAB Volunteering, have been referred to an ‘Understanding Your Trauma’ course and have been referred to get a discount leisure pass which lasts for a year – this means I can afford to go to the gym and swimming which significantly helps with my health and mental health.”*

# Sahira

Sahira was 24 years old when she was referred to Proper Progress. At the time, she was experiencing severe anxiety and found it extremely difficult to leave the house. She had previously left education due to her mental health and had not yet entered employment. Sahira described feeling unmotivated and unsure how to take her next steps forward.

To ensure the support felt accessible and manageable, Sahira began attending her 1:1 sessions online, choosing to keep her camera off. This provided a safe and comfortable starting point for her engagement. During her initial session, Sahira identified her goals: to socialise more confidently, increase her motivation, improve her mental health, and secure a volunteering role to support her journey towards employment.

Sahira and her keyworker worked together on tailored activities focused on managing wellbeing, building confidence, and developing communication skills. Sessions were adapted to meet her individual needs and delivered at a pace that felt right for her, ensuring the support was truly person-centred.

After her sixth session, Sahira felt ready to take a significant step forward by enrolling in the LAB Wellbeing online course. Although participation required her camera to be on, the trust and confidence she had gradually built through her 1:1 sessions enabled her to do this. Sahira thrived on the course, sharing that she found the tutors calm, friendly, and welcoming. This supportive environment allowed her to engage fully and successfully complete the programme.

Following this positive experience, Sahira made another significant progression by signing up for the in-person two-week LAB Project. Attending face-to-face sessions marked a major milestone in her journey. Within this inclusive and encouraging environment, she was able to socialise with peers, further strengthen her confidence and communication skills, and even perform in a play at a local school as part of the project.

Sahira has since reported feeling less depressed and more positive about her future. Her journey demonstrates how accessible, tailored support delivered at the right pace can empower young people to overcome barriers, build resilience, and take meaningful steps towards employment and independence.



*“I feel like having the 1-to-1s, Wellbeing online course, then the in-person course as a combination really helped. It was easier to make those steps and be present in those sessions. If it was done in a different way, it would have been really difficult for me to log on to a session online, or go in person, and I would be less dedicated and present if I did go.’*

*In the 1-to-1s we were having conversations that were relaxed and they made my day. In the courses, I really liked the structure. It was really nice getting positive feedback on the speech I did in the school performance - it really changed the way I was thinking. I felt less concerned about my mistakes and stuttering.’*

*I have exceeded my original goal. I feel proud and I’m starting to put myself out there, I’m learning new things and meeting new people I’m really proud of myself!”*

**Participants described the programme as flexible and adaptable, none-judgemental and safe, relational and supportive, motivating and empowering, and practical and informative.**

# CONCLUSION

Proper Progress has demonstrated that there is significant demand within Greater Manchester for personalised, relational support that addresses both practical and emotional barriers to progression.

By offering flexible, inclusive one-to-one sessions over a sustained period, participants were able to build trusting relationships with their keyworker. This enabled meaningful conversations and in-depth exploration of barriers, targeted Information, Advice and Guidance, and referrals specific to participants needs and localities.

The creative, participatory approach embedded within The LAB Project allowed participants, particularly those who struggle with traditional services, to engage more fully, build confidence, and take tangible steps toward employment, wellbeing, and community connection.

The programme has proven to be both necessary and highly effective, and we strongly recommend continued investment in this model of personalised, creative support.





# LAB

LEARN | ACHIEVE | BELIEVE

## Our other programmes at the LAB Project include:



**LAB TASTERS** These are 3 hour workshops with an introduction in LAB and the courses we do, with some small activities for learners to get a taste of the content and style of our courses.



**LAB PROJECT** A 2 week course combining team working, confidence building and communication skills, working towards participants delivering a drama workshops in a school during the second week.



**LAB WELLBEING** Aimed at adults who can self identify mild to moderate mental health and wellbeing problems. The course is based on NEF's five ways to well being: Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning and Give. Supported by their peers and experienced LAB Project staff, it helps participants take the first steps to a more positive future that they have chosen for themselves.



**LAB LIFE** From shopping, to heating, to travel, to feeling more comfortable with your budget, LAB LIFE promotes easy, practical and useful ways to help you with the rising cost-of-living.



**LAB VOLUNTEERING** At Proper Job we recognise the value of volunteering as a positive step towards employment as well as developing self esteem, helping individuals progress. LAB Volunteering learners are given the skills they need to be assertive, valuable and move forward in a volunteering role. The course also gives learners the opportunity to find a volunteer placement which best suits their needs and interests.



**LAB Project and LAB Wellbeing courses also take place online several times during the year.**