

Readiness to work as prevention of re-trafficking: an evaluation of the Sophie Hayes Foundation Employability Programme

Research report

June 2026

Authors: Nicola Wright, Tessa Langley, Zachary Singlehurst, all University of Nottingham; Emily Death, Cilla McPaintsil, Joanne Wells, Victoria Abbott, Carly Webster, Caitlin Battersby, all Sophie Hayes Foundation; and Elizabeth Such, King's College London.



Research by:



University of
Nottingham
Rights Lab

SOPHIE HAYES
FOUNDATION
Sustainable freedom from modern slavery



Foreword

This important report reminds us that prevention must be understood as a continuous process, one that extends far beyond the point of identification and rescue. For survivors of modern slavery, vulnerability does not end when they escape exploitation. Risk can remain acute at many points throughout recovery. Survivors can be vulnerable to re-exploitation if systems fail to provide the stability, opportunity and autonomy survivors need. We see these moments immediately after leaving exploitation, whilst looking for safe accommodation, when navigating the National Referral Mechanism and when attempting to move towards greater independence.

The Sophie Hayes Foundation Employability Programme aims to reduce these risks by re-building capability, confidence, agency, social connection and hope. These are central protective factors against re-trafficking and essential foundations for long-term recovery. This is meaningful prevention in practice.

The findings of the review of this programme reinforce what many survivors themselves have consistently told us: that employment is not only a source of financial security. It can also provide routine, purpose, dignity, social connection and belonging. This is critical when other support systems can often feel disempowering, with limited autonomy, limited choice and too few opportunities for independence. Without the ability to work safely and sustainably, survivors can remain vulnerable economically and socially.

Many survivors face barriers to their ability to work. They may have gaps in their education or employment history as a result of their exploitation, they face discrimination, can live in insecure accommodation or lack the Right to Work. These factors restrict access to safe and decent employment opportunities.

This report shows that trauma-informed employability support can play a transformative role. Through volunteering, mentoring, work shadowing and practical skills development, women participating in the programme experienced meaningful improvements in emotional stability, confidence, communication, self-advocacy and future orientation. These are deeply significant outcomes that show progress can be made when accompanied by a supportive environment.

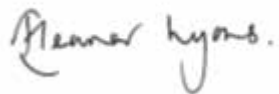
Recently, my office hosted the first Lived Experience Summit bringing together representatives from Lived Experience Advisory Panels and Groups across the UK, including participation from the Sophie Hayes Foundation. I was struck by the extraordinary talent, resilience and insight in that room. Survivors bring unique skills, experiences and perspectives that would enrich workplaces and communities across this country. The challenge before us is whether we are prepared to create the conditions in which survivors can access fair, supported and sustainable work opportunities.

This report also highlights an important truth about the UK anti-slavery response: recovery and prevention are not delivered by one system alone. While the National Referral Mechanism remains an important part of support and recovery, long-term prevention depends upon a far wider network of organisations and partnerships, including charities, businesses, universities, faith groups, law enforcement and statutory services. It is this broader ecosystem that enables survivors to move beyond immediate safety towards genuine independence and autonomy.

As the new Survivor Victim Care and Support Service develops, it is vital that the Home Office and service providers create an enabling environment in which specialist organisations can collaborate effectively to support long-term outcomes for survivors. The cost-consequence analysis within this report is particularly valuable in this regard. It demonstrates that while holistic, trauma-informed programmes may appear resource intensive, they can offer strong value by supporting survivors to achieve sustainable independence and reducing vulnerability to future harm. In a period of constrained funding, the anti-slavery sector must continue working creatively and collaboratively to sustain the specialist organisations that are so essential to survivor recovery.

I was therefore pleased that my office contributed to the Expert Advisory Group for this project alongside representatives from government, business and education, including the Department for Work and Pensions, Sainsbury's and City & Guilds. These partnerships matter. Initiatives that recognise and accredit the skills survivors develop through non-traditional routes are an important part of creating accessible pathways into decent work.

This report makes a valuable contribution to the evidence base on re-trafficking prevention and survivor recovery. Most importantly, it reminds us that prevention is not a single intervention or moment in time. It is the collective responsibility to ensure survivors are able not merely to survive exploitation, but to rebuild their lives defined by safety, autonomy, dignity and opportunity.



Eleanor Lyons
Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the contribution of colleagues at the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre who provided support with communications, policy engagement and operational assistance. Statistical expertise was provided by Andrea Venn from the School of Health Sciences at the University of Nottingham. We are also grateful to the members of our two advisory groups, the Project Advisory Group and the Lived Experience Advisory Group, whose guidance strengthened the design, delivery and interpretation of the evaluation. We additionally thank the staff at the Sophie Hayes Foundation who supported data collection and project delivery.

Finally, this project would not have been possible without the individuals with lived experience who generously gave their time to participate in the research, and we extend our sincere thanks to them.

Funding

This research is funded and supported by the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC), University of Oxford, which in turn is funded and actively supported by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre, the University of Oxford, or the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

Content note

This report does not include graphic descriptions related to the abuses individuals have experienced. However, discussion will refer to subjects related to modern slavery, human trafficking and exploitation.

Terminology

Modern Slavery, Human Trafficking and Exploitation

Modern slavery and human trafficking are crimes involving the violation of human, migrant and labour rights. Under the Modern Slavery Act (HM Government, 2015) “modern slavery” serves as an umbrella term encompassing the offences of human trafficking, as well as slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour. Although widely adopted in practice in the UK, there remains considerable scholarly and practitioner debate regarding the use of the term to describe the spectrum of human exploitation within the Act. This report has adopted the UK legislative terminology of “modern slavery” but recognises the live and legitimate debate about what is and should be included in the term. Exploitation, in this context, refers to the extreme manipulation of an individual by another for profit or personal gain (UN, 2017). It can take several forms and includes sexual exploitation, forced labour, criminal exploitation (e.g. county lines activities), home based exploitation (e.g. cuckooing) and domestic servitude. The term re-trafficking is used to refer to individuals who have been or are at risk of being exploited after initial exit (see page 11).

Victim and Survivor

Most organisations and academics in the UK anti-slavery sector refer to individuals who have experienced modern slavery and/or human trafficking as “survivors”. However, it should be noted that “victim” and “potential victim” are used within some academic papers, reports and official Government documentation, when referring to a survivor’s formal identification status. The Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy Evidence Centre (2024) framing modern slavery guide suggests that the term “lived experience” is a more inclusive term and is increasingly used across the anti-slavery sector. Whilst the preferred terminology in this report is “survivor” and/or “person with lived experience”; “victim” and/or “potential victim” may be used when referring to documentary sources or quoting individuals directly.

Executive summary

Background and aims

Modern slavery, including human trafficking, forced labour and debt bondage, remains a significant national and international issue. Survivors often face ongoing social, economic and structural vulnerabilities that increase the risk of re-trafficking. Prevention, therefore, extends beyond stopping initial exploitation to strengthening individual and community resources. Interventions that address economic, legal, social and educational needs play a critical role in supporting sustainable recovery.

Employment, when safe, meaningful and supported, can offer stability, autonomy and opportunities to rebuild lives. The Sophie Hayes Foundation (SHF) Employability Programme aims to increase pathways towards employment for adult women survivors in England, combining personal development with practical employability skills through a hybrid model of online and face-to-face delivery. Evaluating this programme provides an opportunity to explore how employability support may contribute to preventing re-trafficking and supporting longer-term recovery.

Aims

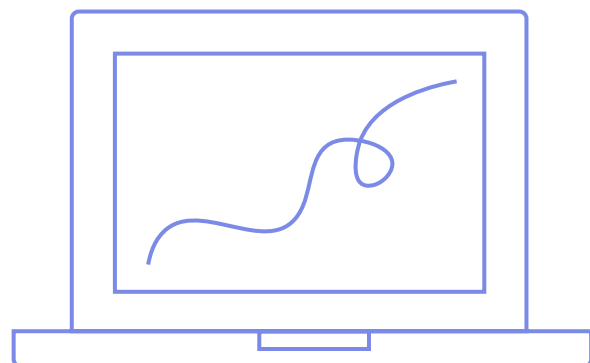
- To understand the immediate, short, medium and long-term effects of the SHF Employability Programme on vulnerability to re-trafficking.
- To undertake an exploratory analysis of the costs and consequences associated with delivering the programme.

Methods

This mixed-methods evaluation examined programme processes, outcomes and economic implications. It comprised:

- a rapid review of the literature to identify and synthesise evaluative studies of employability programmes
- a longitudinal cohort study of programme attendees to examine short- and longer-term changes in employability outcomes (as measured by the Work Star™ a structured, multi-domain outcomes framework).
- qualitative interviews with 25 previous programme attendees to assess longer- term experiences and outcomes.
- cost-consequence analysis to explore the economic implications of the programme alongside its outcomes, with findings highlighting priorities for future economic evaluation, including potential longer-term benefits for survivors, employers and public services; and
- development of a logic model as a visual representation of the programme and the pathways through which its activities are expected to lead to short- and longer-term outcomes and impact.

Lived experience was central to the evaluation. A peer researcher with lived experience was employed as part of the research team, and a Lived Experience Advisory Group contributed to study design, pilot testing of data collection tools, development of the logic model and interpretation of findings. In addition, a Project Advisory Group, including sector experts and representatives from policy, business, and academia, provided oversight and guidance.



Key findings

Employability as a capability, not just employment

Survivors in the UK often face structural barriers, including immigration restrictions, welfare rules, childcare constraints and housing instability, that make immediate entry into paid work challenging. Findings from both the rapid literature review and qualitative interviews show that, in this context, employability is best understood as a capability rather than an employment outcome, with progress typically occurring in a gradual and non-linear way. Across the dataset, the programme supported progress in:

- emotional stability
- confidence and self-worth
- English, digital and rights literacy
- communication and self-advocacy
- safe decision-making and boundary setting
- agency, motivation and hope

These capabilities are essential precursors to safe labour market participation and key protective factors against re-trafficking.

The programme activates key prevention mechanisms

Drawing on quantitative, qualitative and literature review evidence, the SHF Employability Programme functions as a multi-layered intervention, rather than a narrowly defined job readiness model. The capabilities cultivated included psychological stability, knowledge and literacy, confidence, agency and social connectedness. These map onto key prevention mechanisms and align with the wider literature on the importance of de-stigmatising services (Such et al., 2024; 2025). Reduced isolation emerged inductively as an additional protective factor. These mechanisms operate together to enable participants to engage and build capability and progress towards employment over time.

Survivors experienced meaningful progress across practical and psychosocial domains

The longitudinal cohort study demonstrated consistent improvements across all seven Work Star™ domains. Mean changes, which are measured on a scale of 1 to 10, ranged from 1.08 (Basic Skills) to 2.94 (Job Search Skills), with all 95% confidence intervals excluding zero and paired sample tests significant at $p < .001$. Improvements were also practically meaningful, with 60.4%–79.2% of participants achieving a ≥ 1 point increase across domains.

Qualitative interviews corroborated these findings, with survivors reporting:

- improved mental wellbeing and daily functioning
- increased stability, safety and routine
- strengthened social connection and peer support
- enhanced ability to navigate systems and avoid unsafe work
- clearer goals and future orientation

These changes align closely with trauma recovery theory and capability based models of employability.

Programme impacts are shaped by wider structural conditions

Despite substantial capability development, both the rapid review and qualitative interviews highlighted ongoing structural constraints, including:

- lack of Right to Work due to immigration status
- welfare conditionality
- insecure or unsuitable housing
- labour market discrimination
- immigration-related fear and uncertainty
- inadequate childcare provision

Taken together, these findings suggest that employability support alone cannot compensate for structural barriers; progress is most meaningful when embedded within a supportive statutory environment. The rapid review also identified the limited availability of robust evaluative evidence on employability interventions, representing an important evidence gap.

Cost-consequence analysis shows the programme requires substantial organisational investment to sustain its holistic, trauma-informed model

The cost-consequence analysis (CCA) summarised the resources required to deliver the programme alongside observed outcomes. In 2025:

- Direct programme delivery costs totalled £140,443, with £14,472 in non-cash inputs, equating to £968 per participant onboarded and £1,458 per participant completed.
- Full organisational costs totalled £508,726 plus non-cash inputs, reflecting SHF's holistic model and increasing costs to £3,270 per participant onboarded and £4,925 per participant completed.

Key outcomes included consistent improvements across all Work Star™ domains and qualitative evidence of increased stability, confidence, skills, agency and social connection. These costs reflect SHF's holistic, trauma-informed delivery model, in which relational safety, peer support, stabilisation, and wrap-around services are integral to participant engagement and capability development. Whilst the evaluation did not assess cost-effectiveness, the CCA offers transparency about the range of inputs required to support stabilisation, capability building and prevention.

Overall conclusions

This evaluation demonstrates the SHF Employability Programme supports meaningful progress for women survivors of modern slavery by strengthening capabilities closely associated with reduced vulnerability to re-trafficking. Rather than progressing directly into employment, participants moved along a pathway of gradual, non-linear development, experienced improvements in emotional stability, confidence, literacy, agency, social connection and future orientation; all essential precursors to safe and sustainable economic participation in structurally constrained contexts.

Although the programme was not delivered against pre-defined numeric outcome targets, expectations of change were shaped by the programme's aims and the structural constraints faced by participants. Within this context, anticipated progress centred on gradual, non-linear gains in stability, confidence and employability-related capability. The consistency and magnitude of improvements observed across outcome domains, alongside strong qualitative evidence of stabilisation, increased agency and future orientation, suggest that outcomes met, and in several respects exceeded, what could reasonably be expected for a structurally constrained survivor population.

The findings further indicate that employability support is most effective when delivered through a holistic, trauma-informed model that emphasises relational safety, peer connection and wraparound support. While individual capability development cannot fully offset structural barriers such as restricted Right to Work or housing insecurity, programmes such as SHF's play a vital role in strengthening protective factors, supporting recovery and progression towards safe and sustainable employment.

Recommendations

These recommendations reflect the finding that progression towards employment is gradual and non-linear, with programmes such as the SHF Employability Programme supporting capability building and movement along pathways rather than immediate job outcomes.

For policymakers

- Ensure employability support is integrated within modern slavery service provision, including within future commissioning arrangements such as the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract, to support progression from recovery to employment.
- Consider options to enable access to employment for survivors in the asylum system, alongside safeguards and supported, trauma-informed pathways into safe and sustainable work.
- Strengthen collaboration between the Home Office and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to support development of trauma-informed employment pathways and improve transitions from welfare to work.
- Improve national data on re-trafficking and repeat vulnerability, including mechanisms to identify and record repeat entry into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM).

For employers

- Support the development and use of guidance on inclusive and trauma-informed employment practices, led by sector bodies and informed by lived experience.
- Strengthen collaboration between employers and frontline support organisations to develop supported pathways into employment and improve job sustainability.

For organisations supporting survivors

- Strengthen co-ordination across the sector, including mapping employability provision, identifying gaps and overlaps, and developing clearer pathways between services.

For funders of organisations supporting survivors

- Provide long-term, flexible and needs-responsive funding that reflects the non-linear nature of recovery and progression towards employment.
- Ensure funding approaches reflect the diversity of survivor populations, including British nationals, and respond to varied and intersecting support needs.

For funders of organisations supporting research

- Invest in research to strengthen the evidence base on re-trafficking and repeat vulnerability.
- Support longitudinal research to understand longer-term outcomes, including progression into employment, wellbeing and safety.
- Prioritise survivor-centred, mixed-methods research approaches to improve understanding of how and why interventions contribute to reduced vulnerability.

A message for those with lived experience

Our peer researcher shared the following message for others with lived experience:

“Take up your place as active advocates for the unique skills and experiences of survivors and how significantly they can contribute to the UK economy and society. In doing so, you can strengthen pathways by sharing your insights on success, barriers and highlight the type of support needed to enable safe and sustainable work. Peer support, encouragement, and practical advice for others with similar experiences can help reduce isolation and build confidence. Be the change and don’t hold back. By sharing honest feedback with organisations about what support is helpful and what challenges remain, people with lived experience can also contribute to improving programmes and strengthening wider efforts to prevent re-exploitation.”

Background

Modern slavery encompasses “the severe exploitation of other people for personal or commercial gain, including human trafficking, forced labour and debt bondage” (Anti-Slavery International, 2021). It, therefore, constitutes a serious violation of human, labour and migrant rights. Exiting exploitation does not necessarily mark an end to vulnerability; many survivors continue to face significant structural, social and economic challenges that heighten the risk of further harm, including re-trafficking.

In the UK, the scale of this challenge has increased substantially in recent years. Referrals into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) have reached record levels, with 23,411 individuals identified as potential victims in 2025 (Home Office, 2026). Many individuals entering the NRM present with complex and intersecting needs, including barriers related to employment, immigration status, housing insecurity and trauma (After Exploitation, 2024). While the NRM and the associated support provided by the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC), plays a critical role in identification and immediate safeguarding, it is not designed to provide long-term support. This highlights a structural gap in provision and an increasing need for tailored interventions to facilitate sustainable recovery (British Red Cross, 2019).

Understanding how prevention operates beyond initial exit and how interventions such as those related to employability may reduce ongoing vulnerability and support sustainable recovery, is a critical concern for survivors, policy-makers, practitioners and researchers.

Prevention

The prevention of modern slavery, human trafficking and exploitation is a global ambition, embedded in international frameworks such as the Palermo Protocol (UN, 2000). In the UK, prevention is a core component of national and local anti-slavery strategies (Gardner, 2018). Despite this policy focus, estimates indicate that modern slavery remains widespread, with approximately 50 million people affected globally and an estimated 122,000 in the UK (Walk Free Foundation, 2023).

While prevention is often framed as *primary* prevention, intervening before exploitation occurs, this narrow interpretation has been challenged within public health traditions, which emphasise prevention as a continuum and foreground the promotion of strengths, resources and resilience alongside harm reduction (Antonovsky, 1987). Such et al. (2025) build on this broader public health lineage in proposing a cyclical and multifactorial understanding through the BETR model.

This conceptualises prevention as operating **Before** exploitation, **Early** in the trajectory of harm, and through **Treatment** interventions that seek to prevent **Re-trafficking**. Prevention therefore extends beyond harm minimisation to include the promotion of individual and community strengths and opportunities that enable survivors not only to recover but to thrive.

To operationalise this model, Such et al. (2025) identify five mechanisms underpinning preventative interventions: Access (ensuring individuals can meet fundamental needs and access essential aspects of life); Literacy (developing knowledge and understanding of exploitation, rights and harms, and using this to effect change); Power and Control (building resilience, agency and autonomy); Deterrence and Disruption (impeding perpetration); and Partnership (co-ordinated multi-agency working and resource sharing). Alongside these, the wider prevention literature, including synthesis work also led by Such, highlights the importance of de-stigmatising services as a protective factor, with reduction of stigma identified as key to strengthening safety, enabling engagement with support and promoting sustained recovery (Such et al., 2024). Despite these conceptual advances, empirical evidence on how preventative interventions operate in practice, and the extent to which they reduce vulnerability to exploitation and re-trafficking, remains limited. This underscores the need to evaluate programmes that aim to prevent re-trafficking and support long-term recovery. For this reason, the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (Modern Slavery PEC) has funded several projects, including this one, to help address this evidence gap.

Re-trafficking

The concept of re-trafficking is widely used by academics, practitioners, policymakers and survivors, yet no single definition exists. Terms such as re-victimisation, re-exploitation and re-entry have been used interchangeably (Garbers, 2021a; International Organization for Migration, 2010; Kelly, 2002). Kelly (2002) was among the first to use the term explicitly and call for further research. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2010) defines re-trafficking as a situation in which an individual has exited an initial trafficking experience and later becomes subjected to another trafficking situation. Exits may be temporary or long-term, occur independently or with support, and may involve returning to a country of origin or re-settling elsewhere. While re-trafficking is recognised as part of broader systemic patterns of exploitation, it remains poorly understood and under-researched (Jobe, 2010; Garbers, 2021a).

Reliable data on the prevalence of re-trafficking are limited. Global analysis by the IOM (2010) identified 79 cases of secondary trafficking between 1999 and 2009, with children, women and those trafficked before age 18 particularly vulnerable. Surtees (2005) reported repeat exploitation rates of up to 34% in some settings,

while UNODC (2024) estimate that around one third of trafficked people experience re-trafficking. In the UK, After Exploitation (2024) recorded 2,018 repeat referrals to the NRM in 2023, with a further 1,013 repeat referrals between January and May 2024.

Few studies have examined risk and protective factors associated specifically with re-trafficking. Where efforts have been made to foreground survivor-centred outcomes, such as through the development of the Modern Slavery Core Outcome Set (MS-COS) (Jannasari et al., 2024), the emphasis has been on identifying outcomes that matter to those directly affected, particularly in relation to recovery, safety and wellbeing. While this represents an important advance, less attention has been paid to the capabilities required to sustain these outcomes over time. In particular, there is limited focus on the economic, social and institutional capabilities that enable survivors to convert recovery into longer-term autonomy and reduced vulnerability. Framing employability in terms of capability (Sen, 1999) highlights the importance of not only achieving outcomes, but enabling individuals to access opportunities, exercise agency and participate meaningfully in society.

Existing evidence suggests that many factors influencing initial vulnerability, such as limited social networks, insecure housing, homelessness, mental health difficulties and substance misuse, continue to shape risk post-exit (IOM, 2010; Garbers, 2021a). Survivors are often most vulnerable immediately after leaving exploitation, during return or transition, or within the first two years. From a capabilities perspective, these conditions constrain survivors' practical freedom to make safe choices, even where formal exit from exploitation has occurred (Sen, 1999). Conversely, interventions addressing economic, social, legal and educational needs may reduce reliance on risky work, limit precarious journeys and strengthen survivors' autonomy and decision-making (Garbers, 2021a).

Role of employment in preventing re-trafficking

Within this context, employment represents a potentially important pathway through which protective factors can be strengthened. International guidance, including the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), recognises that access to safe, decent and non-exploitative work can contribute to survivor-centred re-mediation (OHCHR, 2011). The UNGPs emphasise that survivors of business-related human rights abuses, including forced labour and modern slavery, must have access to effective remedy that supports long-term recovery, restoration of autonomy and re-integration (OHCHR, 2011). Likewise, the International Labour Organization (ILO) identifies decent work, characterised by fair conditions, safety, stability and freedom from exploitation, as a protective factor that reduces vulnerability by enhancing economic security and promoting sustainable livelihoods (ILO, 2003).

However, the protective benefits of employment are not automatic. Poor-quality work can replicate aspects of exploitation, including restricted autonomy, coercion and unsafe conditions (Ottisova et al., 2016). In contrast, meaningful and healthy employment provides stability, purpose and the opportunity to regain control over one's life. High-quality work has been shown to support mental and physical health, enhance life satisfaction and promote social inclusion (Flint et al., 2013; Gebel & Voßemer, 2014; van der Noordt et al., 2014; Jannarsari et al., 2019). From a salutogenic perspective, Antonovsky (1987) argues that workplaces promote wellbeing when they foster a sense of coherence, comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. This in turn supports motivation, engagement and resilience (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Bakker et al., 2023).

In the UK, access to employment for survivors is heavily constrained by immigration status. Adult survivors within the NRM may work, study or undertake training only where their immigration status permits (Garbers, 2021b). Survivors without Leave to Remain or the Right to Work are prohibited from paid employment during the NRM process, and access to work post-conclusive grounds similarly depends on immigration status (Garbers, 2021b). Despite these restrictions, survivors and support organisations consistently highlight employment as central to recovery, independence and achieving a life free from exploitation (Wright et al., 2024). These constraints also mean that preparing for employment often needs to begin long before work becomes legally permissible, with a focus on building the broader capabilities that support safe participation in the labour market once access is granted. These conditions require a broader conceptualisation of employability than one based solely on job entry or labour market outcomes.

Within the employability literature, early definitions often focused on an individual's ability to obtain, retain and progress in employment, emphasising skills, qualifications and adaptability (Fugate et al., 2004; Yorke, 2006). More contemporary approaches, however, conceptualise employability as a dynamic, multi-dimensional capability, shaped not only by individual attributes but also by wider structural, institutional and labour market conditions (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Tomlinson, 2012; Williams et al., 2016). Drawing on the capability approach associated with Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2011), a capability is understood not simply as a skill, resource or personal attribute, but as the freedom a person has to achieve valued ways of being and acting, given the interactions between personal capacities and enabling (or constraining) social conditions.

In the context of modern slavery, this broader framing is particularly relevant. For survivors of exploitation, employability encompasses confidence, agency, resilience, rights literacy and the capacity to navigate complex systems, alongside the presence of supportive structures and safeguards. Skills and resources are, therefore, necessary but not sufficient; they only translate into capability where survivors are able, in practice, to exercise autonomy and make safe choices within constrained legal, economic and social environments (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum,

2011). These capabilities are shaped not only by skills development, but also by wellbeing, recovery needs, safety considerations and immigration-related barriers, and therefore represent more appropriate indicators of progress than job outcomes alone.

Strengthening employability capabilities requires forms of preparation and support that extend beyond immediate job placement. Within capability-based approaches, employability interventions are understood to involve not only the development of technical skills, but also the cultivation of broader psychosocial and practical capacities that enable individuals to access, sustain and progress within work. This may include life-skills development, supported work-related activity, ongoing assistance from frontline services, and structured employability provision. Such approaches aim to develop a broad range of capabilities associated with employability, including confidence, communication, agency, boundary setting, technical skills, workplace knowledge and career planning, rather than focusing solely on securing a job (Fugate et al., 2004; Yorke, 2006). In practice, these interventions often combine soft skills development, technical training, CV and interview preparation, careers advice, coaching and access to qualifications. By supporting the development of these interrelated capabilities, employability interventions can create the conditions for safe and sustainable participation in work over time, particularly in contexts where individuals face structural barriers to labour market entry. In this way, they are increasingly understood as an important component of broader strategies to reduce vulnerability and support long-term recovery.

The Sophie Hayes Foundation Employability Programme

The Sophie Hayes Foundation (SHF) was established in the UK in 2011 by Sophie Hayes,¹ a British survivor of modern slavery who was trafficked overseas for the purpose of sexual exploitation. In her autobiography *Trafficked*, Hayes (2012: 307) explains that she founded the organisation to

“increase awareness and raise funds to assist the NGOs that work so hard to combat human trafficking and to support the survivors of this terrible crime.”

Following publication, survivors began contacting SHF directly, and in 2013 SHF started providing informal support to a small number of women.

1. Sophie Hayes is a pseudonym

After a re-structuring process in 2013, SHF identified three areas of focus: raising awareness, long-term survivor support and research. From 2015, long-term survivor support became the primary organisational priority, leading to the development of the Day 46 programme, piloted in February 2016. Initially designed to provide support during the transition period after statutory assistance ended, the programme evolved into a structured employability intervention by 2019, with the current model delivered since 2021.

SHF's mission has consistently centred on supporting survivors to rebuild their lives and move towards independence. The organisation provides practical, survivor-centred assistance grounded in skills development, confidence building and pathways into meaningful work. Therefore, since its inception, SHF has supported adult women survivors through a combination of structured employability provision and wrap-around support. In addition to the core employability programme, SHF offers CEFI (a 6 week Conversational English For Independence course), digital skills training and the CREW (Creative, Resilient, Empowered Women) network, a lived experience peer group providing connection and ongoing support before, during and after participation in the Employability Programme.

The Employability Programme comprises three modules delivered over 8–12 months. All participants who complete the programme are invited to an annual graduation ceremony. Facilitated by trained employability co-ordinators, the programme is delivered in English through a hybrid model of online and in-person sessions. The curriculum integrates personal development, including confidence building and group-based self-belief work, with practical employability components such as CV writing, interview preparation and career planning. The final module adopts an individualised approach, offering participants the opportunity to choose their pathway depending on their future goals. Current pathways include further learning on digital skills, further education, entrepreneurship and building your experience. This module is conducted in collaboration with other organisations and supports the next step transition into education, volunteering or employment. Participants need to attend at least 50% of sessions to progress to the next module. Figure 1 summarises the structure of the programme.



Module 1

10 sessions focusing on personal growth including: emotional resilience, building confidence and sense of purpose, identifying strengths and self-care. Alongside this goal-setting, rights and understanding work in the UK is introduced.



Module 2

8 sessions developing the themes of Module 1 with greater focus on 'traditional' employability skills such as CVs, job applications, interview preparation and financial literacy. One to one coaching sessions are also available for participants to develop employability plans, prepare for their next steps or receive other tailored employability support as needed.



Module 3

Pathways' are chosen by participants. Each pathway includes seminars and workshops online and in-person, focused on deeper learning and skills development. Current pathways to choose from include digital skills, further education, entrepreneurship and 'building your experience'. Some pathways are delivered in collaboration with other organisations to provide specialised input. Module 3 was co-produced and intended as a bridge to next steps.

Figure 1: SHF Employability Programme Structure

Access to the SHF Employability Programme is via referral from case or support workers. Referral is followed by an introductory conversation between the participant and an SHF employability facilitator, designed to explain the programme, answer questions, assess readiness to engage and identify any practical barriers to participation. This includes discussion of English language confidence, access to digital devices or data, and availability to attend sessions. Where required, SHF provides practical support such as devices, data or connectivity, and participants assessed as needing additional language preparation can access CEFI prior to joining the programme.

Safeguarding considerations identified at referral are reviewed in consultation with the referring practitioner before enrolment, ensuring that participation is appropriate and timed to maximise benefit. The programme is designed to be flexible and trauma-informed; participants are supported to engage at a pace that reflects their circumstances, may pause participation if needed, and are encouraged to view employability as a progressive journey rather than a linear transition. From the point of enrolment, participants are also members of the CREW network, enabling peer connection and ongoing support alongside programme participation (further details Appendix 1).

Between 2022 and 2025, a total of 546 individuals enrolled onto the SHF Employability Programme, with approximately 20–30 participants joining each quarterly cohort. In summer 2024, SHF conducted a follow-up survey with prior participants. Of the 120 respondents, 94% reported that the programme had a significant impact on their lives, 77% found the practical support valuable in sustaining their freedom, and 72% reported improvements in

wellbeing, confidence, social connection and mental health. Earlier data from an evaluation of the precursor programme, *Day 46* (Clark & Partridge, 2018), similarly highlighted perceived benefits for survivors and identified that partner organisations viewed SHF as helping to reduce workload pressures and filling a gap in longer-term support that statutory or other voluntary-sector services were not resourced to provide.

While these self-reported outcomes indicate that survivors value SHF's support and perceive benefits across multiple domains, they provide limited insight into *how* or *why* these changes occur, and they do not establish whether such changes reduce vulnerability to re-trafficking. As such, there remains a need for a more systematic and theory-informed examination of programme mechanisms, outcomes and potential preventive impacts.

Against this backdrop, the SHF Employability Programme can be understood as an intervention designed to address several factors associated with re-trafficking risk. Through structured skills development, readiness for employment, mentoring and supportive peer environments, the programme seeks to enhance survivors' capabilities, autonomy and stability, all factors implicated in longer-term recovery and reduced vulnerability. Evaluating this programme provided an opportunity to explore whether, and in what ways, employability support may contribute to the prevention of re-trafficking and foster safer, more sustainable futures for survivors.

In line with these objectives, the evaluation aimed to:

- Understand the short-, medium- and longer-term effects of the SHF Employability Programme on re-trafficking vulnerability; and
- Undertake an exploratory cost-consequence analysis of the programme's delivery, outputs and outcomes.

Methods

This study used a mixed-methods evaluation to examine the processes, outcomes, and economic implications of the SHF Employability Programme. The methods included a rapid literature review, a longitudinal cohort study of programme attendees, qualitative interviews with prior participants, a cost-consequence analysis, and the development of a logic model (Figure 2). Lived experience involvement and stakeholder advisory input ensured the operationalisation of the research design was participatory, ethical and aligned with sector priorities.

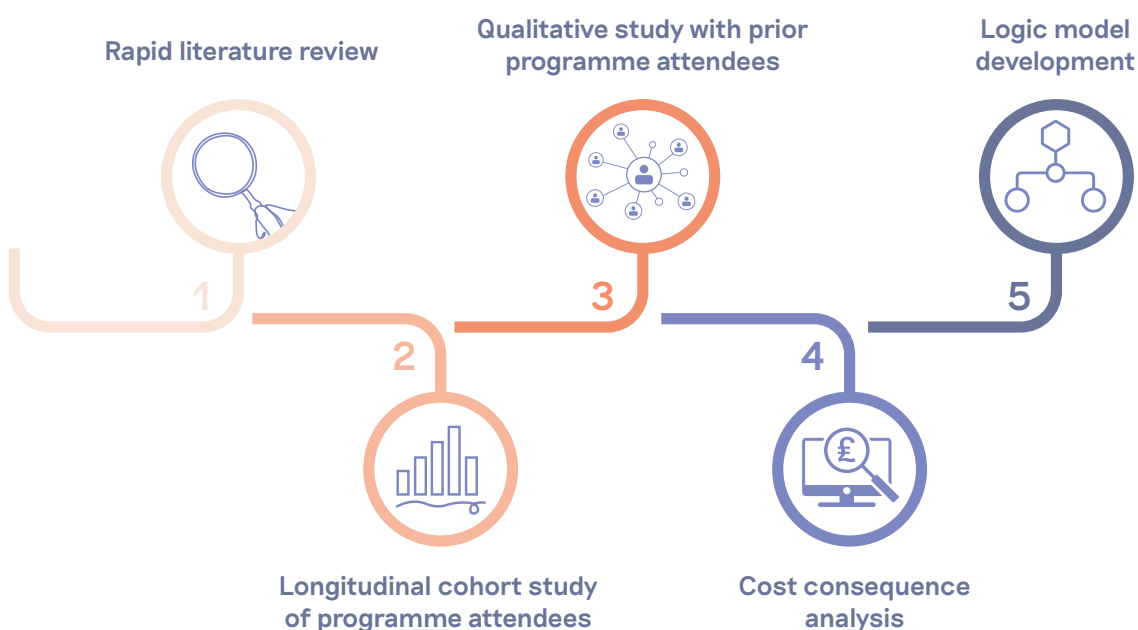


Figure 2: Summary of the research methods used in the evaluation.

Ethics and participant safeguarding

Approval for the study was obtained from the University of Nottingham Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences Ethics Committee (Application Number: FMHS 215-0725). The study was conducted in accordance with approved University of Nottingham and SHF safeguarding procedures and was underpinned by a trauma-informed approach. Participants were provided with accessible information about the study and informed of their right to withdraw at any time without affecting their involvement with SHF. Data collection activities were designed to minimise the risk of distress and established organisational support pathways were available should participation raise any concerns. To support researcher wellbeing regular supervisory check-ins, structured debrief sessions, and access to ongoing support from the research team were available both at SHF and via

the University of Nottingham. These measures were intended to promote both participant safety and researcher wellbeing throughout the project.

Approach to lived experience involvement

Lived experience was central to the design and conduct of the evaluation, and two complementary strategies were employed to ensure meaningful involvement: (1) employing a peer researcher as part of the research team; and (2) establishing a Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG). Peer researchers are individuals with lived experience relevant to the study topic who contribute actively to the design, management and delivery of the project as a member of the research team. In this instance, the peer researcher attended all project management meetings, engaged in data collection and analysis and co-ordinated and facilitated the LEAG. The LEAG met four times during the project and comprised of six prior attendees of the SHF Employability Programme. Members of the LEAG were recruited following a call for participation distributed by SHF to the CREW network. Potential members were asked to submit an expression of interest in the role and had a discussion with either the peer researcher or another member of the SHF team. The LEAG were involved in development of the logic model, refining study materials, participating in pilot interviews and producing a survivor-informed research summary and recommendations.

Project Advisory Group

A Project Advisory Group was established to provide strategic input and guidance. The group comprised a mix of stakeholders with an interest in employability, including representatives from policy, the anti-slavery sector, business, and academia, and was independently chaired. The group met twice during the project to advise on study design, methods, and interpretation of findings, helping to ensure the evaluation remained aligned with sector priorities and good practice standards.

Rapid literature review

A rapid literature review was undertaken to identify and synthesise evaluative studies of employability programmes and interventions within the modern slavery sector. Although there is no standard definition of a rapid review, it is commonly described as a form of knowledge synthesis that uses streamlined systematic review methods to generate timely findings (Tricco et al., 2017). In this instance, the number of electronic databases searched was limited and no quality assessment was undertaken.

A preliminary search of the evidence base using Google Scholar revealed a wide variety of approaches aimed at promoting employability and broader economic empowerment within the antislavery sector. For the purposes of this rapid review, employability was defined in an intentionally broad manner to capture the diverse ways economic re-integration is understood and implemented across modern slavery initiatives. Consequently, alongside programmes explicitly described as employability interventions, the review also included initiatives focused on economic empowerment, financial independence, income generation, vocational training, work readiness, access to employment, and other forms of economic participation. This inclusive approach was adopted to avoid excluding relevant studies simply due to variations in terminology.

A multi-stage search strategy was used to identify relevant literature for inclusion:

1. An electronic search of four bibliographic databases (PsycINFO, MEDLINE, ASSIA and Scopus).
2. Screening reference lists of included studies.
3. Forward citation tracking in Google Scholar; and
4. A call for evidence distributed via the social media accounts of SHF, University of Nottingham Rights Lab and the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre.

A combination of index and free-text terms were used to search the electronic databases (Appendix 2). No date or geographical limits were applied. The reference management software Mendeley and Excel were used to manage the citations generated. Table 1 summarises the review inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Adult population (over 18 years) or contain extractable data related to adults.	Child population only (under 18 years).
Extractable data related to survivors of modern slavery, human trafficking or severe exploitation.	No extractable data related to survivors of modern slavery, human trafficking or severe exploitation.
Empirical studies using quantitative, qualitative or mixed-methods designs evaluating employability related interventions and services delivered within either community or residential (i.e. shelters) settings.	Reported intervention development and/or implementation with no evaluative component.
Written in English.	Not written in English.
	Theses, editorials and opinion articles.

Table 1: Rapid Literature Review Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

As outlined in the inclusion criteria, evaluation was defined broadly. The review included empirical studies using quantitative, qualitative or mixed-methods designs that assessed the outcomes or effectiveness of an intervention or service. Studies were not restricted to randomised controlled trials; any empirical design examining whether an intervention achieved its intended outcomes (or not) was considered eligible. Programmes and interventions could be delivered within community or residential settings. However, to be included, employability or economic empowerment support had to constitute a primary focus of the evaluated intervention. Studies examining broader services (e.g., safehouse or residential recovery programmes) were excluded where vocational or employment support was only described as one component of a wider model and was not independently evaluated. This criterion was applied to ensure that the review specifically examined evidence relating to employability-focused interventions.

After the removal of duplicates, titles and abstracts of all identified citations were screened for relevance against the inclusion criteria by two reviewers. Full-text articles were single screened, with data extracted by one reviewer and 20% checked by a second reviewer. Data were extracted using a structured form. Due to heterogeneity in the data and outcomes reported, a narrative approach to synthesis was adopted.

Longitudinal cohort study of employability programme attendees

A longitudinal cohort study was conducted to examine short- to medium-term changes in employability outcomes among programme attendees. SHF delivers the Employability Programme 4 times per year, with each cohort running for approximately 8 to 12 months. Two cohorts were included in this study; May 2025 and September 2025 (n = 82). The two cohorts were analysed together because they undertook the same programme during comparable time periods and delivery was consistent across cohorts, with the same facilitators using the same programme structure and content. Baseline comparability between cohorts was examined to confirm that combining them for analysis was appropriate.

As part of routine programme monitoring, SHF administers the Work Star™, a structured outcomes measurement tool within the Outcomes Star™ family widely used in employability, health and social care settings (MacKeith, 2011; Sweet et al., 2020). Longitudinal Work Star™ data were collected at baseline, midpoint (after completion of the first module), and at the end of the second module when formal teaching has finished. The Work Star™ measures progress across seven domains: job skills and experience; aspiration and motivation; job search skills; stability; basic skills; workplace and social skills; and health and wellbeing. Scores range from 1 to 10, with higher values indicating greater confidence, capability or stability. The tool is completed collaboratively by

participants and programme staff using a trauma-informed approach to support safe reflection and goal-setting. To support interpretation of the quantitative findings, Table 2 provides a high-level description of each Work Star™ domain as applied within this evaluation.

Work Star™ domain	Indicative description
Job Skills and Experience	Experience and skills gained through work, volunteering, placements or other structured activity, including familiarity with workplace expectations and environments.
Aspiration and Motivation	Motivation to work or learn, confidence in future possibilities, clarity of goals and readiness to pursue employment-related opportunities.
Job Search Skills	Skills and knowledge related to accessing employment, including CV development, understanding job opportunities, interview preparation and application processes.
Stability	Stability across key areas of life, such as housing, safety, routine and the ability to manage day-to-day responsibilities that support engagement with work or learning.
Basic Skills	Foundational skills required for employability, including English Language proficiency and digital skills needed to navigate everyday systems and programme participation.
Workplace and Social Skills	Skills required to engage safely and effectively in work and learning environments, including communication, teamwork, boundary-setting and interaction with others.
Health and Wellbeing	Physical and mental wellbeing as it affects daily functioning, including emotional regulation, coping with stress and capacity to engage in programme activities or future plans.

Table 2: Indicative Description of Work Star™ Domains used in the Evaluation.

Although Work Star™ ratings use a 1–10 ordinal response scale, the 10-point format provides sufficient granularity for the data to approximate interval-level measurement. In line with established practice in applied social research (e.g., Joshi et al., 2015), Likert-type scales with 7 or more response categories are commonly treated as continuous, enabling the calculation of means, standard deviations, confidence intervals and change scores.

Data were anonymised prior to analysis and checked for completeness and consistency. Statistical analysis was conducted in SPSS version 29. For each Work Star™ domain, descriptive statistics were calculated at baseline and endpoint to summarise score distributions. For variables with approximately normal distributions, means and standard deviations were reported; for skewed distributions, medians and interquartile ranges (IQRs) were used. Baseline and endpoint values were reported descriptively and were not used for inferential testing. A pre–post change variable was calculated for each domain by subtracting the baseline score from the endpoint score. The distribution of each change variable was assessed using descriptive indicators and visual inspection

of histograms; in line with Kirkwood and Sterne (2003), formal statistical testing of normality was not undertaken.

Given the paired design, inferential analysis focused on the change variables. As the change scores were approximately normally distributed, paired samples t-tests were used to evaluate pre-post differences at the $p < .05$ level. To assess the robustness of results to potential non-normality, Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were also conducted as a non-parametric sensitivity analysis. Only participants with complete baseline and end point data for a given domain were included in that domain's analysis, resulting in varying sample sizes. Subgroup analyses were not undertaken because the overall sample size ($n = 82$) and the paired sample sizes within each domain ($n \approx 49-53$) were insufficient to support reliable or meaningful disaggregation. Any further subdivision into demographic or experiential subgroups would have resulted in groups too small for robust statistical comparison, producing unstable estimates.

To assess the practical significance of change, a meaningful improvement analysis was undertaken for each domain. A meaningful improvement was defined as an increase of ≥ 1 point between baseline and endpoint, consistent with the behaviourally anchored structure of the Work Star™ in which a one point shift reflects movement to a higher level of capability or stability. For each domain, a binary indicator ($1 = \geq 1$ point improvement; $0 = \leq 0$ change) was created. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to determine the proportion of participants achieving meaningful improvement among those with complete pre-post data. Binomial exact 95% confidence intervals for these proportions were calculated in Stata (version 19) to quantify precision.

To explore the potential impact of attrition on the pre-post findings, analyses were conducted using only participants with paired baseline and endpoint data for each Work Star™ domain. Participants without follow-up data were not assumed to have experienced no change and were therefore excluded from the pre-post analyses.

Baseline Work Star™ scores were compared descriptively between completers (those with both baseline and endpoint data for a given domain) and non-completers (those with baseline data only). Baseline means and standard deviations, or medians and interquartile ranges for skewed distributions, were examined side-by-side to identify any substantial differences in baseline functioning that might indicate systematic attrition bias. As this assessment was exploratory, no formal hypothesis testing was conducted; emphasis was placed on the magnitude and direction of any baseline differences.

Finally, baseline Work Star™ scores were compared descriptively between Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 to assess baseline comparability and support the decision to pool the cohorts for analysis. Means and standard deviations (or medians and IQRs for skewed variables) were examined for each domain, with the comparison focusing on identifying any meaningful differences that might influence interpretation of the overall findings.

Qualitative study with prior attendees of the employability programme

To explore longer-term outcomes of the Employability Programme and to understand how it could potentially act to prevent re-trafficking, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with prior attendees. The interviews explored participants' experiences of the programme, aspects they found most helpful, barriers to participation, and the perceived impact of the programme on their lives since completion. Participants were also invited to reflect on how they believed their circumstances may have differed had they not participated in the programme. In line with a trauma-informed approach, participants were not directly asked about their experiences of exploitation, modern slavery, or human trafficking. Where such experiences were voluntarily disclosed, they were discussed sensitively, and participants were reminded that they were not required to provide any information beyond what they felt comfortable discussing.

Prior to the main interviews, two pilot interviews were conducted with members of the LEAG to review the interview questions and ensure they were clear, appropriate, and sensitive. Feedback from the pilots were used to refine the study's interview guide.

Participants were recruited from a database of former programme attendees who had consented to contact from SHF regarding future opportunities. To be eligible, individuals were required to have completed the Employability Programme since 2018. This timeframe was selected to ensure the inclusion of contemporary programme experiences and to avoid duplication of participants involved in the previous evaluation conducted in 2018. An invitation email outlining the study was distributed, asking interested individuals to contact the peer researcher at SHF. Those who expressed interest were provided with a participant information sheet and consent form. Following receipt of written consent, an online interview was arranged at a mutually convenient time.

All interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams by the peer researcher. In addition to written consent, verbal consent was re-confirmed at the start of each interview. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed using the automated transcription function within the University of Nottingham managed Microsoft Teams system. Transcripts were manually checked for accuracy and fully anonymised prior to analysis.

Interview transcripts were analysed using Framework Analysis, which allowed for both inductive and deductive exploration of the data (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994; Gale et al., 2013). An initial coding framework was developed based on the interview topic guide, key evaluation questions, and relevant literature on the prevention of re-trafficking (e.g. Such et al., 2024; 2025) (deductive), while additional codes were generated directly from the data (inductive) to capture unanticipated insights. Transcripts were read repeatedly to ensure familiarity,

and all data were systematically coded and charted into the framework matrix. This approach facilitated comparison across participants and enabled the identification of key patterns, themes, and illustrative quotes.

Coding was conducted by one researcher and subsequently reviewed by a second researcher, with regular discussions held to ensure consistency, reflexivity, and transparency in interpretation. Five interview transcripts were double coded by two members of the research team.

Cost-consequence analysis

A cost-consequence analysis (CCA) was undertaken to examine the economic implications of delivering the SHF Employability Programme alongside its observed outcomes. CCA presents costs and consequences in a disaggregated format, enabling a transparent overview of resource use in interventions where outcomes are diverse and not easily expressed in monetary terms (Drummond et al., 2015). This approach is recommended for the evaluation of complex public health and social care interventions where effects span multiple domains and stakeholders and where decision-makers may wish to consider different costs and outcomes separately rather than rely on a single summary metric (Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2020; Hartfiel & Edwards, 2019). CCA has been applied in practice across a range of complex community and service-level interventions, including advance care planning (Jeong et al., 2021).

The cost-consequence analysis included SHF's full annual expenditure as well as the costs of discrete employability programme sessions alone. This broader organisational expenditure captures the wrap-around activities and supportive functions that, while not part of the structured programme sessions themselves, likely contribute to participants' overall engagement and progress, and therefore to the longer-term impact of the SHF programme. SHF expenditure and direct employability programme costs for 2025 were extracted from organisational financial records and included staff time, programme materials (such as laptops and workbooks), and other direct expenditures.

In-kind and non-cash contributions, including volunteer time and donated resources, were also identified and valued using organisational records. These were reported separately to distinguish between actual budgetary expenditure and the full economic cost of programme delivery. Volunteer time was valued using a modified replacement cost approach. Under a full replacement cost method, volunteer hours would be valued at 100% of the hourly cost of hiring paid staff to perform the same tasks. In the SHF programme, however, volunteers support and enhance activities rather than carrying out tasks that would otherwise require paid staff time. Because their input supplements rather than replaces staff work, valuing their time at the full co-ordinator wage would overstate the cost. Volunteer time was therefore valued at 50% of a SHF project co-ordinator's hourly rate.

Cost per participant and cost per completed participant were calculated using the number of individuals onboarded in 2025 and the most recent available completion rate from 2024. Completion data for 2025 were unavailable. This was due to all 2025 participants not yet finishing the programme at the time of analysis.

Consequences were defined as changes in participants' employability related outcomes, as measured by the Work Star™ tool, alongside additional outcomes emerging from the qualitative strands of the evaluation. These consequences were presented alongside programme costs to provide a consolidated view of resource use and programme value.

While the scope of this evaluation did not extend to estimating cost-effectiveness or cost-benefit, due to the absence of long-term follow-up, sustained outcome data and a comparison group, CCA provides a foundation for future economic evaluation. Approaches such as cost-benefit analysis could be used to assess the longer-term economic value of employability interventions by examining how intermediate outcomes, such as increased capability, stability and reduced vulnerability, translate into outcomes relevant to public services, employers and wider society. Longitudinal research would be required to support such analysis, including tracking sustained employment, wellbeing and service use over time.

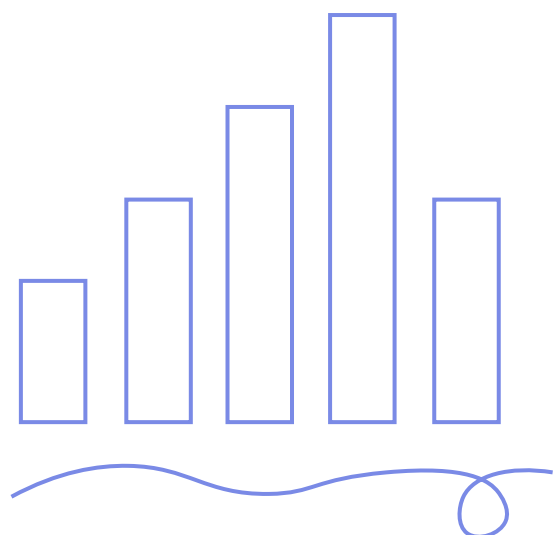
Logic model development

A logic model was developed to provide a clear visual representation of the Employability Programme and the pathways through which its activities are expected to lead to outcomes and longer-term impact. The model served both as an evaluative tool, with early iterations informing components such as the development of interview guides, and as an output. Logic models illustrate the relationships between a programme's resources, activities, outputs, and intended outcomes (McLaughlin & Jordan, 1999), and are commonly used in evaluation to articulate programme theory and clarify how change is expected to occur. The logic model for this study mapped programme inputs (e.g., staff, resources), activities (e.g., training sessions, mentoring), outputs (e.g., participation and completion of modules), and short, medium and long-term outcomes (e.g., improvements in employability skills, engagement in employment or training, and reduced risk of re-trafficking).

The development of the logic model followed a collaborative, theory-informed and evidence-driven approach, drawing on guidance from Langley et al. (2020), who emphasise the value of co-producing logic models through iterative engagement with stakeholders and the integration of multiple evidence sources. Consistent with this approach, an initial workshop was held with staff who work at SHF (n=12). This provided detailed insights into programme delivery, operational processes, resourcing requirements, perceived mechanisms of change and expected

outcomes. An initial logic model was developed based on this workshop and developed further throughout the project. To ensure survivor-centred relevance, two meetings were held with the project LEAG (n = 6), whose perspectives shaped the articulation of causal pathways and outcomes based on their lived experience of the programme, and the contextual factors affecting employability and vulnerability to re-trafficking. The logic model was revised following each meeting.

The logic model was further developed and refined based on findings from the literature review, which identified evidence-based employability and economic empowerment interventions for survivors, and from the quantitative cohort study and qualitative interviews, which provided empirical data on participants' experiences, patterns of change, and emerging outcomes within the SHF programme. Integrating these three sources of evidence with stakeholder engagement ensured that the final logic model was grounded in both empirical evaluation findings on shorter-term outcomes and informed by stakeholder perspectives on expected future impacts. This process aligns with best practice recommendations for logic model development, which advocate combining practitioner knowledge, lived experience insights and research evidence to build a robust and credible programme theory (Langley et al., 2020).



Findings

The findings draw on five strands of evidence: a rapid literature review, longitudinal cohort study analysing Work Star™ data, qualitative interviews with participants, a cost-consequence analysis, and the development of a programme logic model. The sections that follow present the results of each strand in turn.

Rapid literature review

The search strategy identified 4,490 citations. Following the removal of duplicates and completion of title and abstract screening, nine full-text articles were assessed for eligibility, of which six met the inclusion criteria (Figure 3). This small body of evaluative evidence highlights the limited formal assessment of employability interventions within the modern slavery sector. It does not represent an absence of programme activity, nor does it diminish the importance of employability-related initiatives in promoting survivor recovery. For example, Garbers (2021b) identifies 11 organisations within the United Kingdom providing employment support to survivors of modern slavery, while Vollinger et al. (2023) identified 131 “economic empowerment” programmes in the United States through horizon-scanning methods. In addition, organisations such as the ILO (2017) and IOM (2019) consistently highlight that economic insecurity, including poverty, debt, and exclusion from decent work, is a key driver of human trafficking and continues to shape risk after exiting exploitation. Cordisco-Tsai et al. (2020) highlight that survivors leaving shelter accommodation often felt unprepared for labour market realities and experienced significant economic pressures from family members. Securing employment was associated with autonomy, identity re-construction, and social inclusion, whereas unstable income heightened vulnerability to re-victimisation (Cordisco-Tsai et al., 2020). Employment and economic stability are therefore widely acknowledged within the evidence base as both protective factors against exploitation and central components of re-integration. Despite this clear conceptual and practical emphasis, systematic evaluation of employment and economic initiatives remains rare. Collectively, the literature reflects a field characterised by active programme delivery but limited consolidation of rigorous evaluative evidence.

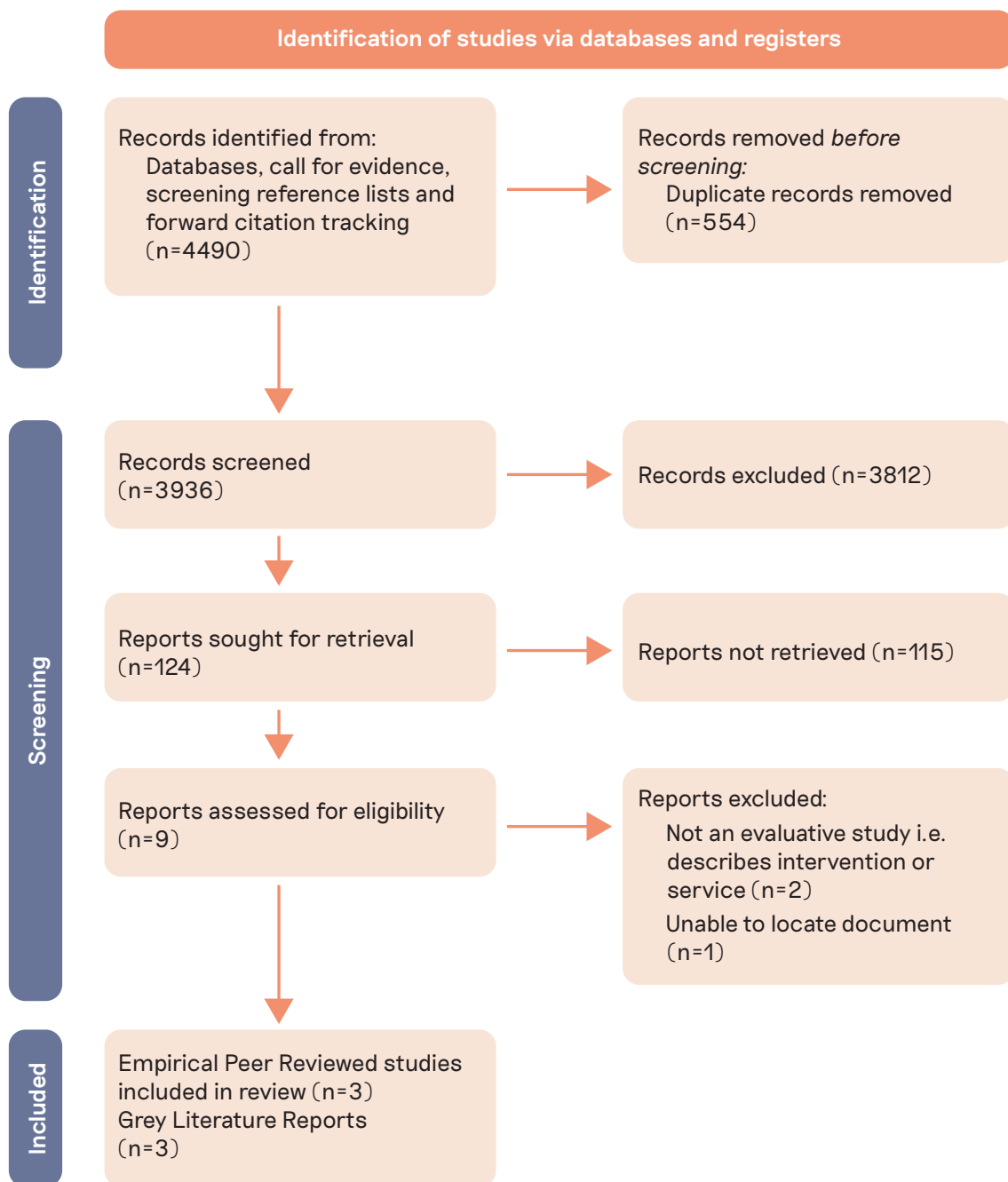


Figure 3: Adapted PRISMA Flowchart for rapid Literature Review.

Study characteristics

A total of six studies met the final inclusion criteria (Appendix 3), comprising three peer-reviewed articles (Cordisco Tsai et al., 2017, 2022; Corple, 2024) and three grey literature service evaluation reports (Balch et al., 2017, 2019; Clark & Partridge, 2017). Published between 2017 and 2024, the studies were conducted in the United Kingdom (Balch et al., 2017, 2019; Clark & Partridge, 2017), the Philippines (Cordisco Tsai et al., 2017, 2022), and the United States (Corple,

2024). All employed non-experimental, largely exploratory designs, reflecting early-stage programme development. Three used a mixed-methods approach (Balch et al., 2019; Clark & Partridge, 2017; Cordisco Tsai et al., 2022), whilst three were qualitative (Balch et al., 2017; Cordisco Tsai et al., 2017; Corple, 2024).

Sample sizes were small, ranging from ten to 39 survivors. Where additional stakeholders were also included samples ranged from 18–39. Three studies incorporated perspectives from both survivors and other stakeholders. Cordisco Tsai et al. (2017, 2022) focused exclusively on survivors, while Corple (2024) examined staff perspectives within survivor-employing organisations, including four participants with lived experience. Participant demographics varied: Corple (2024) examined services for survivors of commercial sexual exploitation; Cordisco Tsai et al. (2017) included male and female participants who had experienced trafficking for domestic work, sex work, or labour exploitation; and the later study included a female-only sample of survivors of human trafficking and gender-based violence (Cordisco Tsai et al., 2022). Balch et al. (2017, 2019) and Clark and Partridge (2017) provided no details in relation to the demographics of their samples.

Interventions varied in structure, but all aimed to enhance employability through one or a combination of work placements, skills development, financial capability, savings initiatives, psychosocial support, and employer engagement. In the UK, three studies (Balch et al., 2017, 2019; Clark & Partridge, 2017) examined employment pathway programmes combining structured placements, workshops and one-to-one coaching. Two focused on the Co-op's Bright Future programme, offering paid placements linked to non-competitive job interviews (Balch et al., 2017, 2019), while Clark & Partridge (2017) described the SHF Day 46 programme, which integrated workshops, coaching, and volunteer or work opportunities to support employability, confidence, and independence. Matched savings interventions (Cordisco Tsai et al., 2017, 2022) combined financial literacy education, peer support, and incentivised/matched savings to strengthen long-term economic stability in the Philippines. Finally, Corple (2024) examined organisational approaches to employment-based economic empowerment using ethnographic methods within US commercial sexual exploitation support organisations which also employed survivors.

Across all studies outcomes extended beyond employment attainment and reflected multi-dimensional understandings of employability and economic empowerment. Reported outcomes included improved employability skills and work readiness; increased confidence, resilience, and future orientation; enhanced financial literacy and savings behaviours; psychosocial wellbeing and social connectedness; identity reconstruction and agency; and organisational learning outcomes. Implementation challenges included geographical mismatches between placements and participants, programme delays, sustainability concerns (Balch et al., 2017, 2019), and tensions between organisational support practices and workplace expectations (Corple, 2024).

Themes

Given the heterogeneity of study designs, intervention models, and outcome measures, findings were synthesised using a thematic approach. Three overarching themes were identified: economic stability as a foundation of safety and protection; trauma-informed, relationship-centred and empowered employment; and structural and systemic barriers shaping survivors' employment trajectories.

Economic stability as a foundation of safety and protection

Whilst only one study (Clark & Partridge, 2017) explicitly aimed to explore the relationship between employability and re-trafficking, all studies identified economic insecurity as a primary driver of vulnerability and significant predictor of returning to exploitative work. Survivors commonly exited exploitation into situations characterised by debt, unstable or informal work, lack of savings and intense pressure to provide financially for extended family. The evaluations of the BARUG matched finance programme in the Philippines demonstrate this particularly strongly. Cordisco Tsai et al. (2017; 2022) report that financial instability was experienced as the "greatest concern" upon community re-entry, surpassing even trauma-related distress. Survivors described persistent concerns about debt, inability to support dependents, unpaid bills and the stigma of "returning home with nothing" (Cordisco Tsai et al., 2022). These findings highlight the profound and enduring nature of economic precarity post-exploitation and demonstrate how closely this precarity is tied to the risk of re-exploitation.

The BARUG studies demonstrate that not all programmes that promote economic stability are equally empowering or protective. Many initiatives targeting marginalised populations rely on micro-finance or credit-based models, which require individuals to take on loans (albeit small) to generate income. Cordisco Tsai et al. (2017; 2022) argue that such models can unintentionally reinforce cycles of indebtedness, compelling survivors to prioritise loan repayments over meeting basic needs, thereby increasing the risk of re-exploitation. Instead, asset-based approaches such as BARUG, combine matched savings, financial capability training and psychosocial support to enable participants to accrue financial reserves without incurring debt. This strengthens resilience to economic shocks and fosters a more secure foundation from which to rebuild lives. By taking this stance, Cordisco Tsai et al. (2017; 2022) frame financial stability not as the by-product of employment but as an essential protective asset.

This is further reinforced by Corple's (2024) study looking at US based NGOs and social enterprises that employed survivors of commercial sexual exploitation within their services. Corple (2024) argues that "empowering work" is defined not only by stable wages but by opportunities for survivors to exercise autonomy,

contribute to decision-making and pursue goals that reflect their own aspirations and strengths. Survivors are therefore positioned as active agents capable of shaping their own vocational trajectories, rather than as passive recipients of support (Corple, 2024). This strengths-based approach complements the BARUG model (Cordisco Tsai et al 2017; 2020) by highlighting that sustainable economic empowerment involves both building assets and enhancing survivors' sense of control and identity. Participants in Corple's (2024) study reported increases in pride, capability and future orientation as they engaged in meaningful and valued work, suggesting that agency itself is an important protective factor.

The findings from the SHF Day 46 evaluation (Clark & Partridge, 2017) also reinforce this broader protective function of economic empowerment. Although Day 46 did not provide direct financial support the programme generated significant improvements in resilience, self-confidence, sense of purpose and social support all of which underpin survivors' capacity to pursue and sustain economic stability via employment. Participants reported feeling more able to imagine future possibilities and articulate meaningful goals, aligning with the strengths and asset-based approaches outlined by Cordisco Tsai et al (2017; 2022) and Corple (2024). Day 46 contributes to the early stages of economic stability by building the psychological resources necessary for survivors to engage effectively with asset building or employment pathways later in their recovery (Clark & Partridge, 2017).

In summary, these studies identify that debt-avoidant savings mechanisms, agency-enhancing opportunities and strengthened psychological readiness are foundational to long term safety and independence. Programmes that support survivors to build assets, develop financial capability and a sense of control over their lives, therefore, contribute to reducing vulnerabilities and therefore the risk of re-trafficking.

Trauma-informed, relationship-centred and empowered employment

Across the evaluated programmes, employability for survivors of modern slavery emerges not simply as the acquisition of job skills, but as a process grounded in emotional safety, relational support, and opportunities for empowerment and identity reconstruction. Survivors' capacity to engage with employment is shaped by trauma histories, their relationships with staff and peers, and the extent to which interventions create environments where they feel valued, connected and capable. The evidence highlights that employment support must be trauma-informed, relationship-centred and empowerment focused if it is to lay meaningful and sustainable foundations for long-term employability.

Findings from the SHF's Day 46 evaluation (Clark & Partridge, 2017) underscore the importance of psychosocial stabilisation as a precursor to employability. Day 46 participants reported substantial improvements in self-confidence, resilience, social support and sense of purpose, describing the programme as a space where they could re-connect with their strengths, develop trust in others and begin forming realistic future aspirations (Clark & Partridge, 2017). These emotional and relational shifts were viewed by participants as essential building blocks prior to engaging in more formal employability activities, illustrating the foundational role of psychological readiness in survivors' progression toward work.

The relational and community-centred nature of empowering employment is further illuminated in Corple's (2024) analysis of US based NGOs and social enterprises employing survivors of commercial sexual exploitation. Corple (2024) argues that "empowering work" arises not only from job tasks or skill development, but from the creation of community-based workplaces defined by mutual support, relational consistency and shared purpose. Survivors described how working alongside others with similar experiences, receiving encouragement from peers, and contributing to collective goals fostered a re-newed sense of belonging, dignity and self-worth (Corple, 2024). Importantly, empowerment was also linked to experiences of "giving back": survivors took pride in knowing that the products they created or services they delivered were valued by others, contributing to broader social good (Corple, 2024). These opportunities for meaningful contribution helped counter isolation and affirmed survivors' identities as capable, valuable and connected individuals. Corple's (2024) findings demonstrate that empowerment is a relational and communal process, enacted through everyday interactions that rebuild trust, affirm identity and enable survivors to imagine new futures through work.

Across the studies, the evidence converges on the importance of relational safety, belonging and identity reconstruction as mechanisms through which survivors move closer to sustained employment. Trauma-informed practice emphasises emotional attunement and predictability; relationship-centred approaches highlight trust, connection and collaborative problem-solving; and empowerment-focused models foreground dignity, contribution and community. Together, these insights demonstrate that when employment is embedded within relational ecosystems that acknowledge trauma, foster connection and encourage meaningful participation, it can become a powerful site of healing as well as economic advancement.

Structural and systemic barriers shaping survivors' employability trajectories

Despite the positive benefits employment and economic independence can bring, all six studies demonstrated that survivors' employability pathways were constrained by structural and system-level barriers that operate irrespective of individual motivation or preparedness. The Bright Futures evaluations (Balch et al. 2017; 2019) offer the clearest account of these constraints, showing how institutional processes, welfare policies and programme design can intersect to hinder positive progress.

Bright Future is a UK based employability initiative originally developed by the Co-op in partnership with the NGO City Hearts (since renamed Causeway Charitable Services). It was designed to provide survivors of modern slavery with paid work placements leading to a guaranteed non-competitive job interview creating one of the first co-ordinated pathways into mainstream employment. Both evaluations noted that for survivors who were able to access the programme, Bright Future offered many benefits including: increased confidence, opportunities to gain work experience in supportive environments and in some cases progression to permanent employment (Balch et al., 2017; 2019). Employers also described shifts in awareness, improved understanding of survivors' needs and a strong commitment to the model's ethos (Balch et al., 2017; 2019).

However, these positive outcomes were only achievable for a relatively narrow subset of survivors in the UK: those who have Right to Work, who are ready and able to work, are proficient in English and have emotional stability (Balch et al., 2017). In addition, the 2019 final evaluation highlighted that limited access to childcare and transport, unstable housing and competing legal demands also hindered survivors' ability to engage with the programme (Balch et al., 2019). As a result, Bright Future tended to serve survivors already close to labour-market readiness, while those facing more complex or acute needs were excluded from participation.

Even those who met eligibility criteria encountered structural, bureaucratic and administrative barriers and delays. These included the "benefits cliff edge" whereby starting work placements triggered disruptions to welfare payments before wages were received, meaning survivors were temporarily worse off (Balch et al., 2017; 2019). Administrative delays such as obtaining National Insurance numbers, difficulties opening bank accounts and tax code errors caused problems with expected wage payments. One placement manager reported how wage uncertainty led to a trauma response for one participant as non-payment echoed experiences in exploitation (Balch et al., 2019). These disruptions show that financial instability and trauma are deeply interconnected, as interruptions to income flow can trigger trauma responses that compound vulnerability and jeopardise survivors continued engagement in employability programmes.

Structural factors also constrained Bright Future labour-market offer. Placements were concentrated in a small number of sectors (retail and

warehousing), therefore offering limited choice of roles and restricting opportunities to align available work with survivors' aspirations or existing skills. Geographic disparities further reduced access. For example, within the Midlands high referral volumes coincided with very few available placements (Balch et al., 2019). This stands in contrast to the strengths and empowerment-based models (e.g., Corple, 2024) which emphasise meaningful goal setting and survivor choice. Within Bright Future, disengagement often reflected structural misalignment between survivor goals and the limited scope of placements, rather than a lack of motivation on the part of either survivors or the staff supporting them.

Overall, this theme illustrates that survivors' progress into employment is shaped as much by structural constraints as by individual readiness. Programme eligibility rules, welfare systems, administrative delays and un-even labour market opportunities combine to create points of vulnerability that can disrupt or derail engagement. These barriers show that structural instability can itself act as a risk factor, limiting survivors' ability to access or sustain safe employment even when they are otherwise motivated and prepared. The Bright Future evaluations (Balch et al., 2017; 2019) highlight that continued engagement from survivors often depended on intensive and responsive support from staff informally mitigating system failures, managing crises arising from administrative and financial disruption and sustaining participation at moments where individuals were at risk of disengaging. This highlights the extent to which employability pathways for survivors frequently rely on additional, largely unrecognised organisational labour to function in practice, raising important questions about the sustainability and scalability of models that depend on charitable capacity to absorb systemic risk.

Summary

Employability and re-trafficking risk are closely interconnected across the available literature, with survivors' ability to access and sustain safe work shaped by economic stability, psychosocial readiness and the structural conditions in which programmes operate. Economic insecurity consistently emerges as a key driver of re-exploitation, highlighting the importance of interventions that support survivors to build financial resilience rather than incur further debt. At the same time, trauma-informed, relationship-centred and empowerment-focused approaches are shown to be essential for fostering the confidence, sense of belonging and identity reconstruction that underpin survivors' readiness for work. Yet even when survivors are motivated and emotionally prepared, structural barriers, including restrictive eligibility criteria, limited job options, geographic inequities and misalignments with welfare and administrative systems, can impede or de-stabilise their engagement with employment pathways. Together, these themes suggest that improving employability can reduce the risk of re-trafficking only when economic, relational and structural factors are addressed in tandem.

Longitudinal cohort study

This section reports findings from the longitudinal cohort study, which assessed change over time in employability-related outcomes among participants in the SHF Employability Programme using the Work Star™. Participant characteristics are presented first to provide context for the outcome analyses that follow.

Participant demographics

Aligned with SHF's remit, all participants were women or identified as female. Participants represented a wide range of ages and countries of origin and had experienced diverse forms of exploitation. Just under half of the participants had the legal Right to Work in the UK (yes: n = 40; no: n = 42). Demographic variables are presented in separate tables (Tables 3 – 5), covering age, country of origin, and type of exploitation experienced, to support clear presentation of the diverse and multi-categorical characteristics of the sample.

Age group	Number of Participants
20-25	19
26-30	13
31-35	13
36-40	20
41-45	8
46-50	5
51-55	3
56-60	0
61-65	1

Table 3: Age demographics of participants

Country of origin	Total number of participants	Country of origin	Total number of participants
Afghanistan	1	Namibia	2
Albania	9	Nigeria	7
Antigua	1	Pakistan	8
Bangladesh	6	Philippines	9
Botswana	2	Romania	1
Cameroon	1	Sierra Leone	2
China	1	Sri Lanka	2
Eritrea	3	Thailand	1
Estonia	1	Uganda	4
Ethiopia	1	UK	1
Ghana	3	Ukraine	1
Guinea	1	Vietnam	1
India	5	Zimbabwe	2
Indonesia	1	Morocco	1
Kenya	1	Unknown	2

Table 4: Participants country of origin

Exploitation type	Total number of participants
Domestic Servitude	15
Domestic Servitude + Forced Labour	8
Domestic Servitude + Sexual Exploitation	3
Domestic Servitude + Forced Labour + Sexual Exploitation	3
Domestic Servitude + Forced Marriage	1
Forced Crime	1
Forced Labour	14
Forced Labour + Sexual Exploitation	1
Forced Labour + Sexual Exploitation + Forced Crime	1
Forced Marriage	1
Sexual Exploitation	21
Unknown	14

Table 5: Type of exploitation experienced

Pre-post analysis of Work Star™ scores

Baseline and endpoint summary descriptive statistics, including median, interquartile range (IQR) and range, are presented in Table 6 to accurately reflect the skewed distributions observed at these time points. These baseline and endpoint summaries are provided for descriptive context only and were not used for inferential testing, which focused on the change between baseline and endpoint. As the pre-post change scores were approximately normally distributed, mean change and standard deviation are reported alongside 95% confidence intervals (CI) for the mean change and corresponding *p* values from paired samples *t*-tests. In addition, the number and proportion of participants achieving meaningful improvement (≥ 1 point increase on the WorkStar™), together with 95% CIs for these proportions calculated using the binomial exact method, are included.

Domain	Median, Interquartile Range (IQR) and Range	Pre - Post Mean Change and Standard Deviation (in brackets)	95% Confidence Interval around the Mean Change	P Value ²	Number (%) of People with a Meaningful Improvement ³	95% Confidence Interval around Meaningful Improvement ⁴
Job Skills and Experience						
Pre (n = 75)	Median: 6 IQR: 3 Range: 1-10					
Post (n = 57)	Median: 8 IQR: 3 Range: 4-10					
Pre-post (n = 52)		1.94 (2.52)	1.24 - 2.64	<.001	41 (78.8%)	65.3% - 88.9%
Aspiration and Motivation						
Pre (n = 76)	Median: 7 IQR:4 Range: 2-8					
Post (n = 57)	Median: 8 IQR: 2 Range: 5-10					
Pre-post (n = 53)		1.60 (2.48)	0.92 - 2.29	<.001	36 (67.9%)	53.7% - 80%

2. P-value was assessed using paired *t*-tests.

3. Meaningful change was defined as at least a one-point increase between baseline and endpoint scores.

4. Calculated using binomial exact method.

Domain	Median, Interquartile Range (IQR) and Range	Pre - Post Mean Change and Standard Deviation (in brackets)	95% Confidence Interval around the Mean Change	P Value ²	Number (%) of People with a Meaningful Improvement ³	95% Confidence Interval around Meaningful Improvement ⁴
Job Search Skills						
Pre (n = 76)	Median: 5 IQR: 3 Range: 1-10					
Post (n = 56)	Median: 8 IQR: 2 Range: 5-10					
Pre-post (n = 52)		2.94 (2.47)	2.26 - 3.63	<.001	41 (78.8%)	65.3% - 88.9%
Stability						
Pre (n = 75)	Median: 5 IQR: 3 Range: 1-10					
Post (n = 54)	Median: 7 IQR: 4 Range: 2-10					
Pre-post (n = 49)		1.76 (2.14)	1.14 - 2.37	<.001	37 (75.5%)	61.1% - 86.7%
Basic Skills						
Pre (n = 76)	Median: 6.5 IQR: 3 Range: 2-10					
Post (n = 57)	Median: 8 IQR: 3 Range: 3-10					
Pre-post (n = 53)		1.08 (2.08)	0.50 - 1.65	<.001	32 (60.4%)	46% - 73.5%
Workplace and Social Skills						
Pre (n = 75)	Median: 7 IQR: 4 Range: 1-10					
Post (n = 57)	Median: 8 IQR: 3 Range: 3-10					
Pre-post (n = 53)		2.28 (2.54)	1.58 - 2.98	<.001	42 (79.2%)	65.9% - 89.2%
Health and Wellbeing						
Pre (n = 76)	Median: 7 IQR: 3 Range: 2-10					
Post (n = 57)	Median: 8 IQR: 4 Range: 1-10					
Pre-post (n = 53)		1.58 (2.24)	0.97 - 2.20	<.001	37 (69.8%)	55.7% - 81.7%

Table 6: Summary results from pre-post analysis of WorkStar™ scores

Midpoint analyses

Although the primary analyses focused on endpoint outcomes, midpoint analyses are summarised briefly here, with full results presented in Appendix 4. For five domains, Job Skills and Experience, Job Search Skills, Stability, Basic Skills, and Workplace and Social Skills, smaller but statistically significant improvements were already evident by midpoint, with three domains demonstrating mean changes of at least one point. In contrast, Aspiration and Motivation and Health and Wellbeing showed only weak evidence of midpoint improvement (mean changes of +0.54 and +0.47 respectively; $p \approx .10$), with confidence intervals spanning zero. This indicates insufficient evidence of true change at this earlier stage. These patterns are consistent with the expectation that gains in wellbeing and motivation may take longer to consolidate, and both domains demonstrated strong, statistically significant improvement by endpoint.

Attrition and completeness

Of the 82 enrolled participants, 75–76 completed a baseline assessment across domains. Endpoint completion ranged from 54 to 57 participants (≈ 72 – 76% of those with baseline; ≈ 24 – 28% non-completion). The number contributing paired pre–post data ranged from 49 to 53 participants (≈ 65 – 71% of those with baseline; ≈ 29 – 35% noncompletion). Given the 8–12month programme duration and the complex and often unstable circumstances experienced by participants, some variability in follow-up completion is expected. All inferential analyses were conducted on complete pre–post pairs for each domain.

A descriptive comparison of baseline Work Star™ scores for completers and non-completers showed no substantial differences across domains, with any observed differences small relative to within-group variability, suggesting that attrition is unlikely to have materially biased the pre–post findings. Baseline scores were also broadly similar across the two cohorts, supporting the decision to analyse them together. These comparability checks and the consistent cross-domain improvements observed in the paired t -tests indicate that the findings are unlikely to be attributable to selective retention alone.

Overall change

Across all seven Work Star™ domains, the p-values from paired t-tests were very small (all < .001), providing strong statistical evidence of pre-post change. Estimated mean changes ranged from 1.08 (Basic Skills) to 2.94 (Job Search Skills), and all 95% CIs for mean change excluded zero. Improvements were also practically meaningful, with 60.4%–79.2% of participants achieving a ≥1point improvement in each domain. The largest mean improvement was observed in Job Search Skills, while Workplace and Social Skills showed the highest proportion achieving meaningful improvement. However, the magnitude and timing of improvement varied across domains, indicating that some areas of employability responded more strongly and consistently than others.

Aspiration and Motivation showed a mean change of 1.60, but the lower bound of the 95% CI (0.92) indicates that the true average improvement may fall below a full one point shift; this domain-level estimate should therefore be interpreted with some caution regarding practical significance. Basic Skills demonstrated the smallest mean change (1.08), and although the point estimate exceeded one point, the lower bound of the 95% CI (0.50) similarly suggests that the true average improvement may fall below the threshold for a full stage shift on the Work Star™ scale. This domain should also be interpreted with caution. These more modest and uncertain domain-level effects suggest that additional or differently targeted support may be required to strengthen progress in foundational skills and sustained motivation. Despite these caveats, both domains demonstrated statistically significant improvements, with most participants showing positive change at the individual level.

As a sensitivity analysis, Wilcoxon signed rank tests were conducted to assess whether findings were robust to non-parametric assumptions; all domains remained statistically significant at $p < .001$, indicating that the observed improvements were not dependent on the assumption of normally distributed change scores. Nevertheless, statistical robustness does not in itself address longer-term sustainability or differential impact across participant groups, which remain important considerations for programme development and future evaluation.

Summary

Taken together, the findings indicate consistent, statistically significant and practically meaningful improvements across all seven domains for participants with complete pre-post data. The pattern of results shows progress across both job-specific competencies (e.g., Job Search Skills; Job Skills and Experience) and broader psychosocial or functional areas (e.g., Stability; Health and Wellbeing), demonstrating a multi-dimensional profile of improvement.

Within the context of a behaviourally anchored 1–10 scale, mean changes of 1.08–2.94 points, alongside high proportions achieving a ≥ 1 point improvement, reflect movement between defined stages of capability or stability rather than minor numerical fluctuation. Gains in Job Search Skills and Workplace and Social Skills suggest enhanced readiness for employment-related activities, while improvements in Stability and Health and Wellbeing highlight progress in foundational areas supporting sustained engagement. For Aspiration and Motivation and Basic Skills, where the lower bounds of the confidence intervals fell below one point, the domain-level mean changes should be interpreted with caution in terms of practical significance. Nevertheless, both domains showed statistically significant gains, and most participants achieved meaningful improvement at the individual level.

Overall, the results suggest that the programme was associated with broad-based improvements across key areas of employability, enabling participants to strengthen both the practical and psychosocial resources required for progression towards the labour market.

Qualitative study with prior attendees of the employability programme

A total of 25 participants took part in qualitative interviews. Individuals who have experienced severe exploitation often have highly distinctive personal histories, meaning that even broad demographic descriptors can risk identification and deductive disclosure (Pascale et al., 2022). To protect participant anonymity, and in line with ethical guidance discouraging the collection of information not essential to the research aims, demographic data were not collected. Participants were invited to choose a pseudonym for use in reporting. In addition, any potentially identifying details, including references to specific locations, service providers or geographical areas, were removed from interview transcripts prior to analysis.

The presentation of qualitative findings reflects both inductive insights from participants' accounts and the deductive mechanisms identified in the literature on preventing re-trafficking, which were used as sensitising concepts during analysis. Four themes (Access, Literacy, Power and Control, and Stigma) mapped onto four of the five preventative mechanisms outlined by Such et al. (2025, 2024), while an additional theme of Isolation arose inductively from the data. Together, these themes illuminate the factors that supported participants' safety, stability, agency and progression following programme completion.

Access: Building stability through wellbeing, learning and safety

Participants described gaining access to a range of supports and opportunities that had previously felt out of reach. Many women spoke about the programme creating space to focus on physical and mental wellbeing, often for the first time in years. For individuals living with the cumulative effects of trauma, exploitation, uncertainty or prolonged isolation, the ability to prioritise their health and emotional needs was deeply meaningful. As Tanya explained:

"I loved the whole lesson about taking care of yourself.. you don't have to feel guilty when you treat yourself.. it's a necessity.. you have to be a little bit kind to yourself if you want to be healthy."

Tanya

Others reflected on gaining hope and motivation through this re-newed sense of wellbeing, describing improvements in mood, self-care and outlook on life:

“I don’t feel the depression I used to feel since coming into Sophie Hayes... having the hope... made me remember that you need to be healthy to have a good life.”

Paris

Access also extended to learning and knowledge, which played an important role in broadening participants’ horizons and fostering confidence in their ability to grow. Several women described re-discovering curiosity and seeking out further opportunities, something they felt unable to do before joining the programme. For example, Tanya shared:

“I started... looking for other courses I could go to... it kind of opened my world... it made me want to learn more.”

Tanya

For others, learning stimulated new interests in policy, rights, or civic life, and fostered a sense of independence:

“I intend to go back into school... I’ve been more interested in the policy of the United Kingdom... now I try to go and learn more for myself.”

Paris

“I feel independent learning on my own... I can go online, search for things I want to learn... even without a tutor.”

Paris

Participants also described gaining access to safe, validating environments where they felt understood, respected and able to participate without judgement. While the word “safety” was not always used explicitly, it was evident in the ease with which women spoke openly during sessions, asked questions, and connected with peers who shared similar experiences. This sense of psychological and relational safety, created through consistent programme structure, supportive facilitators and a community of individuals with lived experience, stood in contrast to the precarity and exclusion many had previously endured.

Taken together these forms of access, whether to wellbeing, knowledge or safety, enabled participants to re-engage with their lives more confidently and independently. By nurturing stability, fostering curiosity and providing emotionally secure environments, the programme strengthened protective factors identified in prevention frameworks. These shifts represent critical steps to reducing vulnerability to further exploitation and supporting longer-term recovery.

Literacy: Developing knowledge, skills and confidence

Participants described developing a wide range of literacies that enabled them to navigate work, services and everyday life with greater confidence and safety. Literacy in this context encompassed knowledge of workplace rights, English Language development, digital navigation skills and practical employability competencies. Together, these literacies equipped participants with the tools needed to make informed decisions, recognise risks and engage actively in opportunities.

A central strand involved understanding workplace rights and employment documentation. Several participants described gaining clearer knowledge of contracts, pay, tax, leave entitlement and the practicalities of how employment operates in the UK, areas that had previously felt confusing or inaccessible. For many, this knowledge reduced vulnerability and increased their capacity to advocate for themselves. As Anna reflected:

“When I am in work, how can I best understand what’s my contract and what does the leave on... how the taxes [are] paying... these things and these skills I gain from Sophie Hayes Foundation.”

Anna

Others emphasised the importance of learning how to interpret payslips or understand employment processes:

“The payslip... the contract... now I need to know about that.”

Em

Participants also described gains in English Language literacy, which for some was essential in enabling communication, participation and confidence in group spaces:

“I joined this programme... I was practise and I was talking too much and the practise was really helping me to build my confidence.”

Rini

The development of digital literacy further supported participants’ independence and safety. Women described learning about online risks, navigating digital platforms and using everyday tools such as mapping applications:

“Another thing I got interested in was teaching about the internet... the cookies, which cookies are bad, which cookies are good.”

Ginger

“If you know how to use Google or Google Maps... the map will direct you straight to where you are going, which I didn’t know how to do before.”

Blessing

Participants also reflected on gaining employability literacy, practical knowledge about workplace expectations, communication and jobseeking. This included learning interview skills, CV writing, and appropriate workplace behaviours:

“They were helping us with the things and teaching us skills... very practical.”

Kiki

“There were some things I never knew... like working in the UK... you have to inform your employer that you are late or you are not coming to work today.”

Pauline

“There were so many things that I did not know... interview skills, how to write a cover letter, how to write a CV, the UK workplace, how to manage your finance... I learned a lot.”

Pauline

Across these areas, literacy functioned not only as skill-building but as a foundation for increased autonomy, awareness and safety. By strengthening the ability to navigate systems, assert rights and manage everyday challenges, literacy played a critical role in reducing vulnerability to re-trafficking and supporting participants’ long-term empowerment.

Power and control: Reclaiming agency and future direction

Participants described a gradual but meaningful re-building of agency, autonomy and personal power, areas commonly eroded by experiences of coercion, fear and chronic self-suppression. Many entered the programme feeling unable to assert themselves or unsure how to set boundaries in everyday situations. For some, the lasting effects of exploitation manifested in patterns of compliance, self-doubt or hesitancy to express personal preferences. Several women described themselves as “people pleasers,” accustomed to prioritising others’ needs over their own. Alongside these challenges, many also spoke of feeling disconnected from their identities or from any sense of future possibility. The programme helped participants re-connect with who they were and who they wanted to become, creating space for identity re-building and forward movement. As Carolina explained, the programme supported her to:

“Rebrand myself and say which part I have to play to move forward... to envision myself for the better.”

Carolina

A central dimension of increased power and control was the emergence of assertiveness and boundary-setting. Participants described developing the confidence to decline unreasonable demands, articulate their needs and feel entitled to express their preferences, changes that marked a significant departure from earlier patterns of silence or compliance. For Kiki, this shift was transformative:

“I was struggling to say no to any... hard work or any extra chores... and I was also struggling to present myself or my skills... Now I am stronger, more confident. I can say what I want to say, I can say no easily in a respectful way.”

Kiki

Others echoed this sense of growing interpersonal confidence and emotional openness. Carolina reflected on this change in her daily life:

“Before I wasn’t confident enough to talk to people... Now I can say no to people... And I am feeling confident to say no. It has changed a lot day to day.”

Carolina

Em also described the programme helping her approach challenging situations with greater calm and self-belief:

“It’s like talking to people now... I feel comfortable and no fear anymore... I have confidence to talk to other people and dealing with some problems or obstacles that come in my way. I will just deal with it calmly without feeling nervous.”

Em

These reflections illustrate how the ability to set boundaries and communicate confidently was experienced as a tangible marker of regained autonomy, foundational steps in re-building control after exploitation. This assertiveness was accompanied by a broader shift in self-perception, as participants described changes in how they thought about themselves, their decisions and their capacity to act in the world. Rather than an abrupt transformation, this was experienced as gradual internal growth that made everyday challenges feel more manageable:

“Growth is always very slow and quiet... but I really appreciate what changes have been made in myself by this programme in my way of thinking. Things are a lot easier.”

Kiki

As confidence and self-belief strengthened, many women began to re-connect with a sense of hope, not as abstract optimism, but as a grounded belief that progress, particularly around employment and stability, was achievable. Hope became an important marker of restored direction and possibility:

“It gave me hope that I could probably work again.”

Alex

“Being in the programme made me feel like I can do things and I can move on... before, even though I was safe, I felt stagnant.”

Michelle

The re-building of power and control also occurred in relation to how participants felt seen, valued and recognised within the programme. Several women described the profound impact of being treated with dignity, listened to and given space to

speak, experiences that contrasted sharply with earlier experiences of dismissal or invisibility:

“I felt safe... I was seen, I was given space... I was respected, I felt heard and I met people I will never forget.”

Alex

This recognition led many to experience increased engagement with others and with life more generally. Some women described moving away from emotional numbness or withdrawal towards a sense of connection and motivation:

“Before I just felt what’s the point... dead but breathing. Whereas now I get excited to see the girls on the chat.”

Alex

Alongside these emotional and relational changes, participants also described developing greater situational awareness, including an improved ability to identify warning signs or unsafe behaviours. This awareness was understood as an important dimension of personal power, enabling participants to navigate environments with more confidence and caution:

“I start to feel more aware... to avoid any scammer or human trafficker. I start to open my eyes more than before.”

Sarah

Taken together, these interlinked shifts from changes in thinking and emotional wellbeing, to re-newed hope, recognition, connection and strengthened risk awareness, illustrate a holistic re-building of power and control across internal, relational and practical domains. Collectively, these accounts show how the programme fostered a re-newed sense of agency, self-advocacy, awareness and future orientation. These capacities are central to preventing re-trafficking: survivors who regain confidence in their choices, strengthen their boundaries and re-establish personal power are better positioned to navigate challenges and reduce vulnerability to future exploitation.

Stigma: Reducing shame and strengthening self-worth

Stigma emerged as a significant barrier shaping participants' experiences prior to joining the programme. Several women described carrying feelings of shame, blame and the belief that what had happened to them reflected personal failure. These internalised narratives reinforced isolation and undermined confidence, echoing wider evidence that stigma can inhibit recovery and increase vulnerability to exploitation. For many, the programme created one of the first spaces in which these beliefs were openly challenged.

Encountering others with similar experiences played a crucial role in re-shaping participants' sense of self. Fanta articulated this most clearly, describing the profound relief of realising that she was not alone, and that her experiences were neither unique nor her fault:

"I was thinking it was only me and blaming myself but knowing that... there are other women who went through the same thing. I knew that it was not me. It was not my fault. You know something could happen to anybody."

Fanta

Another participant explained how recognising the shared nature of trauma helped dismantle shame and opened the possibility for self-acceptance:

"So there's nothing to be ashamed of just because you went through something terrifying or traumatic and you feel like it was your fault. It's not your fault to go through something. Sometimes you don't have a choice. You're put in certain situations not because you want to, but because someone decided that's what they want to do to you".

Tanya

This recognition, that exploitation results from external circumstances and coercive conditions not individual weakness, helped participants reframe their pasts within a broader context of structural harm rather than personal responsibility. Fanta reflected on how this shift created comfort and solidarity:

"I realised I was not alone... it gives me comfort knowing that whatever I have been through, I'm not alone... there are still people... who have passed through almost the same thing... and they are still trying to stand on their feet."

Fanta

For some, the reduction of stigma was intertwined with self-compassion. Participants described learning to treat themselves with more kindness and to reject long-standing narratives of selfblame:

“I was not caring about myself.. the programme taught me selflove, like I have to stop hating myself. Stop saying that everything that happened is my fault.”

Fanta

Across these accounts, connection with peers and validation from staff helped dismantle shame and cultivate self-worth. These relational and emotional shifts reflect the wider prevention literature, which identifies de-stigmatising services as a critical protective factor for adult survivors, enhancing safety, promoting engagement with support and laying the foundation for long-term recovery. By reframing exploitation as something that “could happen to anybody,” the Employability Programme supported participants to move from selfblame to selfrecognition, a key mechanism in reducing vulnerability to re-trafficking.

Isolation: Re-connecting through shared experience and belonging

Experiences of isolation featured prominently in participants’ accounts. Many described long periods spent at home, limited social networks and the emotional withdrawal that often follows trauma, uncertainty or restrictive immigration conditions. Daily routines characterised by caring responsibilities, lack of employment and minimal external contact contributed to loneliness, low mood and a sense of stagnation. As Rini explained:

“Before the programme I was staying at home all the time.. all my time with my children... no work. It was depression for me... and now I am going outside. I talk to other people... I meet new people, and I try to connect with them.”

Rini

Participants consistently emphasised the importance of being among people who understood their experiences, something they felt was rarely available in wider society. Several women described mainstream communities as difficult to integrate into not due to hostility, but because others lacked the context or understanding to relate to their histories. In contrast, the programme provided a space where shared experience created immediate trust, ease and belonging:

“Being with someone who understands you... you know you’re surrounded by people that have the same experiences as you. If you integrate in that community, that’s what integration is... If you are with people that understand you, you feel peace and connection.”

Ginger

For many, this sense of belonging was deeply meaningful, a counterpoint to years of feeling invisible or disconnected. Friendships formed within the Employability Programme helped reduce loneliness and provided emotional grounding at moments of uncertainty.

Graduation events were particularly powerful in strengthening this re-connection. Several participants described graduation as a moment of reunion, celebration and shared pride. Carolina explained:

“The day of graduation I saw so many people I know... it was very nice to see them again and re-connect.”

Carolina

The opportunity to meet peers face-to-face, after connecting online, further deepened the sense of community:

“I have so many friends right now... when I went for the graduation, that was the first time seeing them face-to-face. But hearing their voices made me feel like... these people are just like family.”

Michelle

Across these accounts, the programme countered isolation by fostering environments grounded in understanding, recognition and shared experience. These relational shifts supported participants to re-engage socially, rebuild trust and feel less alone; protective factors that play a critical role in reducing vulnerability to re-trafficking.

Cross-cutting reflections and areas for strengthening

While participants consistently described positive shifts across the identified themes, these accounts also highlight the evolving and sometimes fragile nature of recovery and progression. Improvements in confidence, agency, knowledge and wellbeing were often described alongside ongoing insecurity linked to

immigration status, financial precarity, housing instability and mental health. For many participants, progress was experienced as non-linear, with periods of doubt, emotional vulnerability or re-newed anxiety occurring alongside positive change.

Several participants implied that gains were contingent on continued access to supportive, understanding environments, rather than representing a complete transition to independence. This suggests that while the programme effectively strengthens protective factors associated with re-trafficking, participants may benefit from sustained or phased support to consolidate these gains over time. These reflections point to opportunities for strengthening continuity, pacing and follow-on provision, particularly for those facing ongoing structural constraints beyond the programmes scope.

It is also notable that at the time of the interview, only a small number of participants had progressed into paid employment. This should not be interpreted as a lack of programme effectiveness, but the role of the programme as a “distance-travelled” intervention focussed on re-building capability, readiness and protective factors following exploitation. Participants accounts indicate that the programme supported critical stages of recovery and preparation, such as stabilisation, confidence building, skills development and re-connection with others, that are necessary precursors to safe and sustainable labour-market participation. For many women, continued structural barriers, including immigration status, financial insecurity, caring responsibilities or health needs meant that progression towards employment remained a longer-term goal beyond the timeframe of programme completion, underscoring the importance of co-ordinated, longer-term pathways alongside employability support.

Summary

Across the five themes, participants described changes that supported greater stability, confidence and connection in their lives. Through enhanced access to wellbeing, learning opportunities and safe relational environments, participants experienced practical and emotional foundations that reduced isolation and strengthened protective factors. Literacy development, spanning rights awareness, English Language proficiency and digital skills, as well as employability knowledge, enabled participants to navigate work and everyday life with increased independence and safety. The programme also helped participants rebuild a sense of power and control, supporting the development of agency, self-advocacy, and hope for the future. Experiences of stigma and isolation were addressed through connection with peers who shared similar histories, fostering solidarity, self-acceptance and belonging. Taken together, the qualitative findings highlight how the programme nurtured recovery, supported a re-newed sense of identity and direction, and helped reduce vulnerability to re-trafficking through the strengthening of multiple protective mechanisms.

Cost-consequence analysis

The cost-consequence analysis (CCA) provides an overview of the resources required to deliver the SHF Employability Programme and summarises these alongside key quantitative and qualitative outcomes (Table 7). Direct Employability Programme expenditure for 2025 totalled £140,443, with an estimated additional £14,472 in non-cash resource inputs, including volunteer time and donated equipment. Based on 160 participants onboarded in 2025 and the most recent available completion rate from 2024 (66.4%), the cost per onboarded participant was £968 and the cost per completed participant was £1,458. Total Direct SHF expenditure for 2025 totalled £508,726, with an estimated additional £14,472 in non-cash resource inputs, including volunteer time and donated equipment. Based on 160 participants onboarded in 2025 and the most recent available completion rate from 2024 (66.4%), the cost per onboarded participant was £3,270 and the cost per completed participant was £4,925.

It is important to note that the latter set of figures reflect the organisation's full annual expenditure, rather than the costs of discrete programme sessions alone. The Employability Programme is SHF's flagship service, and the remainder of the organisation's activity includes English language support, digital skills sessions, and the CREW network. The CREW network functions primarily as wraparound support. For example, by providing an alumnae space offering social connection, skills sessions and ongoing peer support. Participants in the qualitative interviews frequently described CREW as an important element of their positive journey through the programme, and a mechanism that helped sustain their progress over time. Of value were CREW events which allowed participants to meet face-to-face and engage in social and learning activities. While the present evaluation did not include long term follow up, CREW may contribute to maintaining outcomes beyond programme completion.

The latter set of reported costs also include SHF's fundraising expenditure. These are not direct delivery costs; however, they represent essential organisational functions that enable the Employability Programme to exist. For transparency, they have been included in the analysis, which results in higher cost per participant estimates than would be produced by a narrower calculation focused solely on frontline delivery.

As outlined in the cohort study above, Work Star™ assessments indicated improvements across all seven domains, with mean change scores ranging from 1.08 in Basic Skills to 2.94 in Job Search Skills. Most participants achieved at least a one point increase in every domain, reflecting consistent progression across practical and psychosocial aspects of employability.

Qualitative interviews corroborated and expanded these findings, identifying broader shifts in participants' wellbeing, skills and capabilities. Survivors

described increased stability, safety and confidence, often linked to improved literacies, including digital, linguistic, workplace and rights-related, which supported more informed decision-making and greater engagement in daily life. Participants also reported re-building a sense of agency, autonomy and future orientation, characterised by strengthened self-worth, reduced shame and clearer personal goals.

A further theme concerned social connectedness, with participants noting that shared experience and peer support helped counter isolation, foster belonging and rebuild trust. These psychosocial developments are highly relevant to recovery trajectories and may contribute to reduced vulnerability to re-trafficking, although this evaluation did not directly measure long-term outcomes.

Taken together, the cost and outcome data provide a descriptive picture of the resources required to deliver the programme and the range of changes experienced by participants. While the evaluation does not quantify longer-term economic benefits, such as sustained employment or reduced service use, it offers a transparent account of programme costs alongside a broad set of observed consequences, consistent with the aims of a cost-consequence approach.

Cost category (2025)	SHF Cost ¹ (£)	Employability Programme Cost ² (£)
Staff (including on-costs)	411,032	126,682
Volunteer expenses	1,886	1,886
CREW network	11,241	-
Hard costs	9,375	9,375
Operations	75,192	2,500
Total direct costs	508,726	140,443
Staff, volunteers, CREW network, hard costs, operations costs		
Value of volunteering		
Based on 1000 hours	6972	6972
Estimated value of in-kind contributions		
Meeting venues and donated technical equipment	7500	7500
Total cost	523,198	154,915
Cost per participant onboarded	3,270	968
Cost per participant completed	4,925	1458

Consequences	
Outcome category	Outcome
Participants onboarded (2025)	160
Completion rate (2024)	66.4%
Changes in Work Star™ scores	Increased scores across all domains, with estimated mean changes from 1.08 (Basic Skills) to 2.94 (Job Search Skills)
	Majority of participants achieved a ≥1-point improvement in each domain.
	Progress across job specific competencies psychosocial or functional areas
Building Stability Through Wellbeing, Learning and Safety	Participants reported increased access to wellbeing, knowledge or safety, enabling them to re-engage with their lives more confidently and independently
Developing Knowledge, Skills and Confidence	Participants reported developing a range of literacies, including workplace rights, English language skills, digital navigation, and practical employability competencies. These strengthened their confidence and ability to navigate work, services, and everyday life.
Reclaiming Agency and Future Direction	Participants reported a rebuilding of agency, autonomy and personal power, accompanied by changes in thinking and emotional wellbeing, to renewed hope, recognition, connection and strengthened risk awareness.
Reducing Shame and Strengthening Self Worth	Participants reported that connection with peers and validation from staff helped dismantle shame and cultivate self-worth. The programme supported participants to move from self-blame to self-recognition, reframing exploitation as something that "could happen to anybody".
Reconnecting Through Shared Experience and Belonging	Participants reported that the programme countered isolation by fostering environments grounded in understanding, recognition and shared experience, supporting participants to re-engage socially, rebuild trust and feel less alone.

¹SHF full annual expenditure ²Costs of Employability Programme sessions.

Table 7: Cost consequence analysis summary of findings.

Logic model

Context and need

Survivors of modern slavery often face significant structural and systemic barriers to employment, including restrictions on the right to work, insecure housing, limited access to childcare, and ongoing trauma-related needs. These factors mean that progression into employment is rarely immediate and instead requires sustained, supported pathways. In this context, employability is best understood as a process of capability-building, encompassing confidence, agency, skills and stability, rather than a simple transition into work. Interventions such as the SHF employability programme aim to address these challenges by supporting survivors to develop the capabilities and conditions required for safe and sustainable participation in the labour market over time.

The logic model synthesises evidence from across the evaluation to illustrate how the SHF employability programme operates, the mechanisms through which change occurs, and the outcomes experienced by participants. It integrates quantitative findings from the Work Star™ assessments included in the longitudinal cohort study with the qualitative insights generated through participant interviews, providing a holistic account of programme processes and effects. In response to these challenges, the model illustrates how programme inputs and activities operate through a set of interlinked mechanisms to generate progressive capability gains, which in turn support longer-term outcomes. Figure 4 presents a pictorial representation of the logic model.

Underlying assumptions

The logic model is based on several key assumptions supported by the evaluation findings:

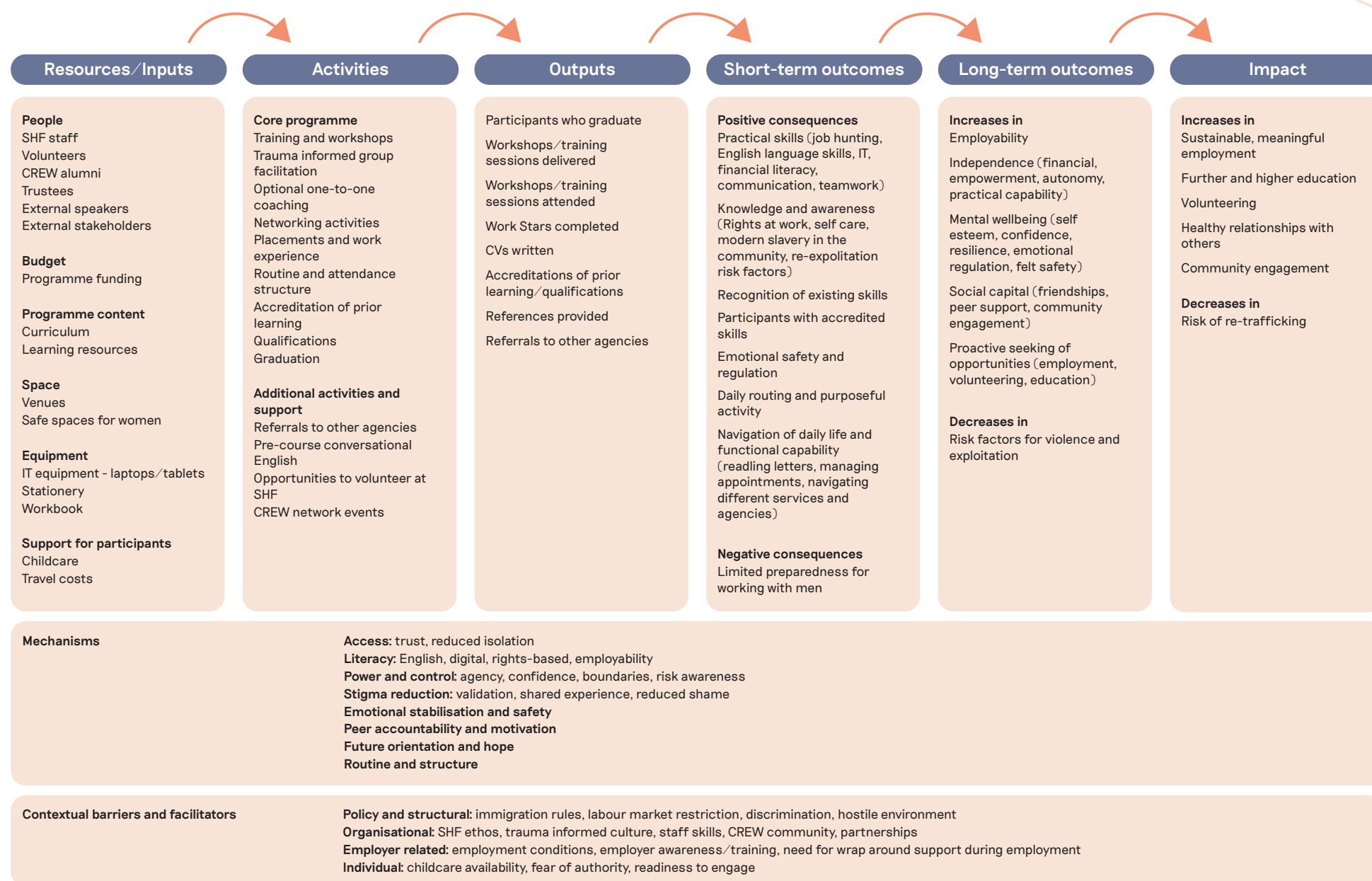
- Participants require psychological safety and trust to engage meaningfully with employability support.
- Progress towards employment is gradual and non-linear, requiring sustained engagement over time.
- Capability-building (including confidence, skills and agency) is a necessary precursor to labour market participation.
- Survivors face structural barriers that cannot be addressed by employability interventions alone.
- Ongoing organisational support plays a critical role in maintaining engagement and navigating system constraints.

Programme inputs and activities

The model shows that programme inputs extend beyond curriculum materials, funding and staffing. In the qualitative interviews, participants consistently described SHF's trauma-informed relational approach, characterised by warmth, consistency and a strong ethos of psychological safety, as foundational to their ability to engage. Practical supports such as childcare, digital access and system navigation assistance were also critical in enabling attendance, reducing stress and facilitating learning. These conditions allowed participants to feel safe enough to participate, regulate emotions and benefit from the programme's content.

Although the formal programme consists of structured workshops and taught sessions, the evaluation highlighted that a much wider set of activities played a foundational role in participants' recovery. These included referrals to other agencies, the creation of predictable weekly routines and opportunities to volunteer within SHF itself. Participants consistently emphasised the value of having a structured rhythm to their day or week and purposeful activity, as well as group environments that fostered connection, belonging and motivation.

There are clear links between specific programme activities and outcomes. For example, structured workshops and facilitated group discussions contribute directly to improved communication skills and confidence; peer-based activities foster social connection and reduce isolation; and practical supports such as childcare and digital access enable sustained attendance, which in turn supports skill development and routine formation. Graduation ceremonies were also described as meaningful milestones, reinforcing progress and creating opportunities for recognition and re-connection



Mechanisms of change

The mechanisms of change presented in the model reflect both established prevention pathways and additional processes identified in the qualitative analysis. These mechanisms represent the processes through which programme activities translate into outcomes:

- Access mechanisms include the creation of safe, trusted spaces and reductions in isolation.
- Literacy mechanisms extend beyond employability to include English language, digital skills, rights literacy and practical everyday competencies.
- Power and control mechanisms include strengthened agency, improved confidence, boundary setting and enhanced risk awareness.
- Stigma reduction mechanisms arise through validation, shared experience and reductions in shame.

Additional cross-cutting mechanisms identified through the analysis include emotional stabilisation and safety, peer accountability and motivation, and the development of future orientation and hope.

Together, these mechanisms enable participants to engage with the programme, build capability, and begin to imagine and pursue new possibilities. For example, trauma-informed relational support and structured group activity create conditions of safety and trust (access), which enable participants to engage more fully, build confidence and agency (power and control), develop skills (literacy), and reduce stigma. These combined processes support progression towards employability and longer-term outcomes.

Short-term outcomes (capability gains)

Through these mechanisms, participants experienced a range of short-term outcomes. They described improvements in emotional regulation and feelings of safety, greater structure and purpose in daily life, and increased ability to navigate services and everyday tasks. Participants also reported gaining practical and psychosocial skills, including job search competencies, English language literacy, digital skills, communication, financial literacy and workplace knowledge, as well as an enhanced awareness of rights and re-exploitation risks.

Many participants noted increased recognition of their existing strengths and skills and felt more capable, confident and connected. These outcomes represent key capability gains, forming a foundation for progression rather than immediate labour market outcomes.

Intermediate and longer-term outcomes (progression and impact)

These short-term gains supported longer-term outcomes, including enhanced employability, greater independence and autonomy, strengthened emotional resilience and improved mental wellbeing. Participants described beginning to proactively seek opportunities in volunteering, education and employment, supported by increased social capital and a re-newed sense of identity and hope.

This evaluation highlights that progress towards employment is often gradual and non-linear, with participants moving along a pathway rather than directly into work. While the evaluation did not track long-term employment outcomes, the logic model illustrates how SHF's programme contributes to capability-building and progression processes associated with reduced vulnerability to re-trafficking.

Contextual factors and dependencies

The model also highlights contextual factors that influence programme delivery and outcomes. Policy and structural barriers, such as immigration restrictions and labour market constraints, directly impact survivors' opportunities. Organisational enablers, including SHF's ethos, staff expertise, trauma-informed culture and the wider, wrap-around CREW network, help buffer some of these constraints. Employer-level factors and individual circumstances, such as childcare availability, readiness to engage and fear of authority, further influence participant trajectories.

The achievement of outcomes is contingent on these contextual factors. For example, progression into employment depends not only on capability gains developed through the programme, but also on access to the legal Right to Work, available job opportunities, and broader stability in areas such as housing, finances and wellbeing.

Overall contribution and transferability

Together, the logic model provides a comprehensive description of how the SHF Employability Programme supports recovery, capability development and reduces vulnerability to re-trafficking through an integrated combination of structured skills development, relational safety, peer connection and sustained trauma-informed support.

Importantly, the model highlights key mechanisms that may be transferable to other programmes, including the central role of relational safety, structured activity, and co-ordinated support in enabling engagement, building capability, and supporting progression towards safe and sustainable employment over time.

Discussion

This mixed-methods evaluation provides new evidence on how employability support may contribute to reducing vulnerabilities to re-trafficking. For survivors of modern slavery, employability cannot be understood in traditional terms as the immediate ability to access and sustain employment. Structural constraints, including immigration restrictions, welfare interactions, administrative delays, limited childcare availability and housing instability, mean that many survivors are legally or practically unable to enter the labour market, regardless of their skills or motivation. In this context, employability represents a broader capability encompassing confidence, rights literacy, psychosocial readiness, boundary-setting, agency and the ability to navigate complex systems with progress typically occurring in a gradual and non-linear way. These intermediate capacities, rather than employment outcomes alone, are the most relevant to the prevention of re-trafficking.

The findings of this evaluation indicate that the SHF Employability Programme supports meaningful “distance-travelled” along a gradual pathway of progression towards safe economic participation. Survivors described shifting from isolation, low confidence and limited digital, language and employment related literacy towards greater emotional stability, improved understanding of workplace rights, enhanced communication skills and a strengthened sense of agency and hope. Such progress reflects the wider trauma-recovery literature, which emphasises the importance of stabilisation, agency and re-connection as early stages in re-building a sense of safety and possibility (Herman, 2015). It also aligns with contemporary employability research showing that, for survivors facing structural barriers to work, movement towards opportunity, rather than immediate labour-market entry, is both realistic and meaningful. This was evident in the rapid review, where evaluations of programmes such as Bright Future (Balch et al., 2017, 2019) highlighted that even well designed and supported employment programmes are constrained by welfare entitlements, immigration rules and administrative delays which limit survivors’ ability to take up or sustain placements. The co-designed logic model helps clarify how these capability shifts occur. It makes explicit that programme activities operate through a set of interlinked mechanisms, such as relational safety, literacy development and agency building, which together enable capability development and progression towards longer-term outcomes. It shows that changes were not driven solely by employability content, but by a wider constellation of trauma-informed and relational processes, including predictable routines, emotional safety, referrals, practical support and peer connection, that participants consistently described as central to their progress. These elements, although not traditionally categorised as employability activities, formed the conditions in which learning, confidence-building and agency restoration could take place.

The SHF Employability Programme was not designed or commissioned with pre-defined numeric outcome targets. Instead, expectations were shaped by the programme's aims and the legal and structural constraints faced by participants. Within this context, anticipated progress centred on gradual, non-linear gains in stability, confidence, literacy and readiness for safe economic participation. Interpreted through the logic model, the consistency and magnitude of improvements observed across outcome domains, alongside robust qualitative evidence of stabilisation, agency and future orientation, indicate that the programme achieved outcomes that were at least in line with, and in some domains exceeded, what could be expected for a structurally constrained survivor population.

Interpreted through contemporary prevention frameworks, the findings suggest the SHF Employability Programme functions as a multi-layered intervention, rather than a narrowly defined job-readiness model. The capabilities cultivated, psychological stability, knowledge and literacy, confidence, agency and social connectedness, map onto the prevention mechanisms proposed by Such et al.'s (2025) BETR framework (Access, Literacy, Power & Control) and align with wider evidence on the importance of de-stigmatising services (Such et al., 2024) and reducing isolation as protective factors. These capabilities strengthen survivors' ability to assess risk, make informed decisions, seek support and pursue opportunities safely. The logic model situates these capabilities within a coherent pathway of change, illustrating how stabilisation, literacy and agency build cumulatively and why interventions that foster belonging, identity re-building and emotional regulation are particularly protective for survivors navigating unsafe environments.

Interpreting findings through the prevention frameworks

Rather than mapping neatly onto all five BETR mechanisms, the SHF Employability Programme's strongest contributions relate to Access, Literacy and Power and Control, with participants describing increased stability, confidence, knowledge and agency. These mechanisms reflect the programme's emphasis on capability-building and psychological readiness rather than direct labour-market placement, which is consistent with prevention frameworks where early stage change focuses on strengthening decision-making, autonomy and resilience (Such et al., 2025). The emergence of stigma reduction and peer connection as additional mechanisms is notable: although not included within the BETR model, both are recognised within trauma-recovery literature as essential foundations for safety, agency and re-connection (Herman, 2015) and therefore function as protective factors within a prevention context. In contrast, mechanisms such as Deterrence and Disruption and Partnership (Such et al., 2025), which operate at structural, system and organisational levels, were less visible within survivor accounts, thereby highlighting that the programme primarily strengthens individual and relational capabilities rather than wider systemic levers.

Mechanisms of change: how employability support reduces vulnerability to re-trafficking

1. Building emotional and psychological readiness

Participants described reductions in depression, increased hope and improved capacity to manage daily pressures, as reflected in qualitative accounts and supported by improvements in Stability and Health and Wellbeing Work Star™ domains. These shifts are consistent with salutogenic theory, where wellbeing is supported through comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness (Antonovsky, 1987). They also reflect the first stage of trauma recovery, establishing safety and stabilisation (Herman, 2015). Emotional readiness supports safer decision-making and reduces susceptibility to coercion.

2. Enhancing capacity to navigate systems (literacy)

Strengthened rights literacy, workplace knowledge, English proficiency and digital skills were consistently described in interviews and complemented by quantitative improvements in literacy-related Work Star™ domains, for example Job Search Skills and Basic Skills. These capabilities reduce reliance on informal or exploitative networks and support safer navigation of labour-market systems. These findings align with employability understood as a multi-dimensional capability incorporating adaptability, knowledge and system navigation (Yorke, 2006; Fugate et al., 2004).

3. Re-building agency, autonomy and boundary-setting (power & control)

Participants described a newfound ability to say “no,” set boundaries and make choices, findings strongly grounded in the qualitative evidence. These capabilities reflect the restoration of agency, a central element of empowerment theory (Zimmerman, 2000) and the second stage of trauma recovery as outlined by Herman (2015). The emergence of hope aligns with Snyder’s Hope Theory (Snyder, 2022), which conceptualises hope as a cognitive process combining agency (goal directed determination) and pathways thinking (the ability to generate multiple routes to desired goals) both central to motivation and goal pursuit. Hope in this sense represents not optimism, but a re-newed belief in one’s capacity to act and to identify possibilities even in restrictive or uncertain circumstances.

4. Reducing stigma and reframing selfblame

Stigma reduction and the development of self-compassion emerged strongly in participants’ accounts. Many women described long-standing feelings of shame and personal responsibility for their exploitation, responses widely recognised as barriers to safety, identity and healing (Herman, 2015). Through hearing others’ experiences and receiving validation from staff, participants reframed exploitation as externally caused rather than personally attributable. This process aligns with shame resilience approaches, which emphasise connection, shared humanity and the reclamation of personal worth as antidotes to internalised stigma (Brown, 2006). In the context of prevention, de-stigmatisation strengthens emotional resilience, supports helpseeking and reduces vulnerability by enabling survivors to engage more safely and confidently with support and opportunities (Such et al., 2024).

5. Countering isolation through peer connection

Isolation was a prominent theme in interviews, with survivors describing long periods of social withdrawal due to trauma, instability or immigration barriers. Peer connection within the programme helped counter this, offering relational consistency, shared understanding and a sense of belonging. Participants frequently described feeling recognised and understood, experiences that reflect Herman’s (2015) third stage of recovery, where re-connection with others supports identity re-building and confidence. The Sanctuary Model similarly emphasises the centrality of community, mutual support and emotional safety in trauma healing (Bloom & Farragher, 2013). By strengthening connection and reducing isolation, peer support enhanced access to information, emotional grounding and safe networks, reducing vulnerability to re-trafficking.

Strengths of the study

A key strength of this evaluation lies in its mixed-methods design, which enabled a multi-dimensional understanding of how and why the SHF Employability Programme could reduce vulnerability to re-trafficking. The integration of a rapid review, quantitative cohort study, qualitative interviews, cost-consequence analysis and development of a logic model ensured analytical triangulation across data sources and facilitated the interpretation of outcomes within the context of a robust evidence base.

The active involvement of individuals with lived experience within the project ensured it was delivered in a sensitive and trauma-informed manner appropriate for this client group. This participatory approach also enabled the findings and contribution of the project to remain grounded in survivor perspectives. In addition, the evaluation benefitted from the input of a Project Advisory Group comprising representatives from policy, the anti-slavery sector, academia and business. This group met at key stages to provide critical oversight, challenge assumptions and strengthen methodological and interpretive decisions. Their involvement ensured that the evaluation remained aligned with sector priorities, incorporated external expertise, and maintained conceptual and ethical rigour. The breadth of perspectives within the advisory group enhances the credibility of the findings and supports the relevance of the logic model and emergent mechanisms beyond the SHF context.

Within the quantitative cohort study the use of the multi-domain outcome tool the Work Star™ enabled systematic measurement across practical, psychosocial and relational areas. Its behaviourally anchored scale captures change across practical, psychosocial and relational areas, which aligns well with the programme's holistic aims. Consistent patterns of improvement across domains, despite variation in magnitude, strengthen confidence in the credibility of the findings.

The theory-informed, co-designed logic model was developed collaboratively with survivors, SHF staff and external stakeholders, and offers a clear explanation of the programme's mechanisms and anticipated pathways of change. As it integrates multiple evidence strands and reflects broader prevention principles, the model has potential application beyond this evaluation, supporting other organisations seeking to understand or design prevention-focused employability interventions.

Finally, the evaluation is conceptually grounded, drawing on contemporary prevention frameworks, trauma-recovery literature, empowerment theory, employability capability models and hope theory. This enabled the interpretation of findings not only in relation to programme outcomes but within broader understandings of what constitutes meaningful, sustainable progress for survivors.

Limitations of the study

Despite these strengths, several methodological limitations must be acknowledged. The cohort study did not include a comparison group, limiting the ability to attribute observed changes solely to programme participation. Attrition reduced the number of matched baseline-to-endpoint pairs, although baseline comparability analyses suggested that this was unlikely to have introduced substantial bias. The Work Star™, while well established, remains a practitioner facilitated measure and may therefore be subject to response shift or social desirability effects. It was also not possible to conduct subgroup analyses (e.g. by exploitation type), as the paired sample sizes for each domain were too small to support reliable disaggregation. Attempting such analyses would have produced unstable or misleading estimates, limiting insights into differential effects across groups.

For the qualitative interviews, demographic characteristics were intentionally not collected to prevent deductive disclosure within a small and highly identifiable population. While ethically necessary and consistent with trauma-informed research practice, this decision limits the ability to examine whether experiences or mechanisms of change varied across different groups of survivors. The qualitative sample was self-selecting and may have consisted of individuals who have had more stable post-programme trajectories or more positive experiences, potentially under-representing those who disengaged or faced ongoing instability.

A further limitation is the absence of long-term follow-up data. Although the evaluation captured short- and medium-term changes during and after programme participation, it was not possible to track outcomes such as sustained employment, continued engagement in training, or vulnerability to re-exploitation over longer periods. In addition, the qualitative interviews were conducted with participants who had completed the programme, meaning that the findings primarily reflect the experiences of those who remained engaged through to completion. As a result, perspectives of individuals who disengaged earlier, or whose post-programme trajectories were more unstable, may be under-represented. Together, these factors restrict the ability to assess the durability of observed improvements or to fully understand how intermediate capability gains translate into longer-term economic or safety outcomes.

The findings apply specifically to women and those identifying as female, reflecting SHF's remit, and therefore cannot be generalised across all gender identities. However, this composition is representative of the population served by the programme and mirrors broader global and national patterns related to exploitation, where women and girls are disproportionately affected. The focus on women also aligns with the wider UK policy context which has placed increased emphasis on the Violence Against Women and Girls agenda. While this limits

opportunities to explore gendered differences, it remains appropriate for the aims of this evaluation, and the sample reflects the gendered realities of exploitation rather than an artefact of the study design.

Although the evaluation incorporated a CCA and a co-designed logic model, these components provide an illumination of mechanisms and resource use rather than causal estimates and routes to impact. The CCA offers a transparent account of organisational and programme inputs and a descriptive portrayal of outcomes, but it cannot determine cost-effectiveness or compare value relative to alternative interventions. Similarly, the logic model reflects evidence informed articulation of how change is expected to occur, but it represents a theorised pathway rather than a tested causal chain. Together, these components strengthen understanding of the programme's workings and potential value, but they do not allow attribution of observed changes specifically to programme activities.

Structural and system-level considerations

Interpreting the programme's effects necessitates situating them within the broader structural conditions that shape survivors' opportunities and decisions. Right to Work restrictions, welfare interactions and labour-market opportunities profoundly affect survivors' capacity to access employment, training or stable income streams. These constraints limit the feasibility of immediate job outcomes and help explain why capability-building, stabilisation and psychosocial growth constitute meaningful progress in this context but do not by themselves determine employment outcomes, which remain contingent on structural conditions.

The rapid review and the qualitative interview data both highlighted how these system level barriers create vulnerability, limit agency and increase the risk of unsafe work or coercive relationships. The fact that SHF participants reported increased confidence, literacy and connection suggests that employability support can strengthen protective mechanisms even in the absence of structural change. Yet the findings also underline that individual level capability building cannot substitute for unmet structural needs and outcomes therefore depend on the interaction between programme-driven capability gains and wider system conditions. It is also important to recognise that organisations such as SHF cannot be expected to compensate for the gaps and constraints within statutory systems. While the Employability Programme can strengthen individual and relational capabilities, many of the structural barriers identified, fall firmly within

the remit of statutory and other agencies. As such, the programme operates most effectively when situated within a functioning system of statutory support, rather than as a substitute for it. Effective prevention therefore requires a dual approach: strengthening survivors' resources, while recognising the need for systemwide actions to reduce barriers, clarify entitlements and create safer, more accessible pathways to work and stability.

The CCA provides further context for these findings by showing that delivering this constellation of inputs and mechanisms requires substantial organisational infrastructure. The programme's annual costs reflect not only frontline employability activities but also the trauma-informed relational work, staff consistency, CREW community support, and digital and linguistic scaffolding that the logic model identifies as pre-requisites for engagement and recovery. These are resource intensive but essential components of prevention oriented employability support and help explain the higher cost per participant estimate when organisational functions are included for transparency.

From a policy perspective, these findings also help clarify the types of economic benefits that may accrue over time from prevention oriented employability support. While this evaluation did not estimate longer-term economic returns, the combination of increased employability capability, improved stability, reduced isolation and strengthened agency points to potential benefits extending beyond individual participants to employers and public services. These may include safer transitions into work, reduced reliance on crisis or statutory support, and lower exposure to re-exploitation related harms. Future longitudinal economic evaluation would be well placed to examine whether these intermediate gains translate into sustained employment, improved wellbeing and longer-term system level benefits.

Conceptual implications for prevention

The findings contribute important insights to contemporary modern slavery prevention debates. First, they reinforce the argument that prevention extends beyond deterrence or early intervention, encompassing the recovery and capability-building processes that reduce vulnerability after exploitation. The SHF Employability Programme activates mechanisms identified in prevention frameworks, access, literacy and power and control, while also demonstrating the significance of stigma reduction and social connection as protective factors not fully captured within existing models.

Second, the evaluation highlights employability as a capability-based construct. Survivors' progress occurred not simply through skills acquisition but through increased confidence, knowledge, emotional regulation, communication, self-advocacy and hope. This supports broader conceptualisations of employability that emphasise agency, adaptability and system navigation rather than narrow job readiness. In contexts marked by structural barriers, such an approach provides a more realistic and meaningful lens for interpreting change.

Third, the evaluation underscores the importance of trauma-informed, relationally anchored employability support. Mechanisms such as emotional stabilisation, boundary-setting, re-connection and shared understanding are not incidental; they are central to cultivating the conditions for safety, decision-making and future orientation. Prevention initiatives that overlook these dimensions may risk reinforcing vulnerability rather than supporting recovery.

Summary

This evaluation demonstrates that the SHF Employability Programme strengthens several key protective mechanisms associated with reducing vulnerability to re-trafficking. By fostering emotional stability, confidence, knowledge, agency and social connection, the programme cultivates the capabilities survivors need to navigate complex environments and pursue safer futures. These changes are meaningful and reflect progress along capability pathways that precede and support progression towards safe and sustainable economic participation. While structural barriers continue to shape survivors' realworld opportunities, the findings show that holistic, trauma-informed employability support can play a vital role within broader prevention efforts by enhancing resilience, autonomy and relational safety.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are informed by the findings of this mixed-methods evaluation, with additional input from the Project Advisory Group and Lived Experience Advisory Group. They are intended to support policymakers, businesses, survivor support organisations and funders to strengthen prevention of re-trafficking responses and improve pathways towards safety, stability and meaningful economic participation for survivors of modern slavery.

The findings show that progress towards employment is often gradual and non-linear, with organisations such as SHF playing an important role in building capability, confidence and protective factors that enable longer-term progression. Whilst the evaluation does not provide causal evidence for specific policy actions, the recommendations set out practical implications from the findings and highlight opportunities to strengthen policy, practice and investment in ways that support sustainable pathways to employment and long-term recovery.

For policymakers

Enable access to employment for survivors within the asylum system

Findings from this evaluation indicate that limited access to the labour market remains a significant structural barrier to progression for survivors of modern slavery. Less than half of participants in the longitudinal cohort study had the legal Right To Work, constraining their ability to translate gains in skills, confidence and readiness into sustainable economic outcomes.

The UK Government, particularly the Home Office in collaboration with the Department for Work and Pensions, should consider options to enable access to employment for survivors with positive reasonable or conclusive grounds decisions, including through changes to relevant legislation or statutory guidance governing Right To Work entitlements. Any such changes should be accompanied by safeguards and support to ensure access to safe, stable and non-exploitative employment pathways.

Embed employability support within modern slavery service provision

Findings from this evaluation demonstrate that employability support plays an important role in strengthening protective factors associated with reduced vulnerability to re-trafficking, including confidence, stability, skills and social connection. However, access to such support is not consistently embedded within statutory modern slavery provision.

The Home Office, particularly teams responsible for commissioning and overseeing the provision of survivor support should ensure that employability and employment support is integrated within future service specifications, including through:

- commissioning requirements that incorporate employability provision as a core component of support.
- pathways to specialist providers delivering employability-focused programmes.
- mechanisms to support progression from capability-building to employment over time.

Embedding employability support within the wider system would support more coherent pathways from recovery to economic participation and help maximise the impact of existing investment in survivor support services.

Strengthen the role of the Department for Work and Pensions in supporting progression towards safe employment

Findings from this evaluation indicate that survivors' progression towards employment is shaped not only by employability support, but also by interactions with welfare systems and work-related services. This suggests that the Department for Work and Pensions has an important role to play in reducing vulnerability to re-exploitation and supporting sustainable pathways to work.

The Department for Work and Pensions, at both national policy and regional delivery levels, should work in partnership with the antislavery sector to develop and implement trauma-informed approaches to employment support for survivors, including:

- guidance for Jobcentre staff on supporting survivors with complex needs.
- collaboration between Regional Modern Slavery Leads and frontline services to align support pathways.
- pilot schemes or targeted programmes that support progression for survivors from benefits into safe and sustainable employment.

These approaches should be informed by lived experience and designed to support gradual, supported transitions into employment, reflecting the non-linear nature of recovery and progression identified in this study.

Strengthen data collection on re-trafficking and repeat vulnerability

Findings from this evaluation highlight a significant gap in available data on the scale and nature of re-trafficking in the UK, limiting the ability to design effective prevention responses and assess long-term outcomes for survivors.

The Home Office should strengthen data collection and reporting on re-trafficking, including:

- introducing mechanisms to identify individuals re-entering the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), for example through linking new referrals to existing records.
- capturing information on prior NRM engagement within referral processes (such as through updates to referral forms or case management systems).
- developing systems to track repeat vulnerability and re-engagement over time.

Improving the quality and transparency of data in this area would support more effective policy design, enable better targeting of resources, and strengthen the evidence base for prevention of re-exploitation.

For employers

Develop and promote guidance on inclusive and trauma-informed employment practices for survivors

Findings from this evaluation indicate that participants' progression towards employment is closely linked to their ability to navigate workplace expectations, feel safe and respected, and build confidence in social and professional environments. Participants described the importance of non-judgemental spaces, clear communication, and supportive relationships in enabling their engagement and development.

Business membership organisations, sector bodies and standard setting organisations (e.g., City & Guilds) should develop and disseminate guidance

for employers on inclusive and trauma-informed recruitment and employment practices, drawing on lived experience and existing good practice. This guidance could include:

- approaches to recruitment that recognise non-linear employment histories.
- structured and supportive onboarding processes.
- workplace practices that promote psychological safety, flexibility and clear communication – identifying, collating and sharing examples of inclusive and trauma-informed employment practices across sectors.

Existing resources, including the City & Guilds Recognising Strengths Engagement Toolkit, provide a foundation for this work and could be further developed or adapted to support broader implementation.

Strengthen partnerships between employers and frontline support organisations

Findings from this evaluation indicate that participants' engagement and progression are strongly supported by structured, relational environments (i.e. settings that provide consistent support, clear routines, and trusted relationships with staff and peers), and that transitions into employment are most effective when individuals receive ongoing guidance and support. Participants described increased confidence and readiness, but often within supported settings rather than in independent employment contexts.

Employers seeking to develop inclusive employment pathways should work in partnership with frontline support organisations, including specialist anti-slavery charities, to support safe and sustained transitions into work. This could include:

- co-developing pathways that transition participants from employability programmes into work placements or employment.
- co-ordinating support during recruitment and onboarding to ensure participants are prepared and supported.
- creating mechanisms for feedback and shared learning between employers and support providers.

Strengthening collaboration in this way can help ensure that employment opportunities are aligned with participants' capabilities and support needs, improving both job sustainability and progression over time.

For organisations supporting survivors

Strengthen co-ordination and collaboration across organisations supporting survivors

Findings from this evaluation, including the rapid evidence review indicate that survivors' progression towards employment is often shaped by fragmented service provision, with multiple organisations offering complementary but not always connected forms of support. This can create gaps in pathways and place additional demands on individuals to navigate complex systems.

Organisations supporting survivors of modern slavery, including charities, statutory services and community organisations, should strengthen co-ordination to support more coherent pathways into employment and recovery. This could include:

- collaboratively mapping existing services, particularly employability and employment support provision, to identify gaps and areas of overlap.
- developing clearer referral pathways between organisations to support progression across stages (e.g. from stabilisation to employability to employment).
- sharing learning and examples of effective practice, including approaches that support engagement, retention and progression.
- working together to avoid duplication and strengthen complementary provision.

Improving co-ordination in this way would support more joined up service delivery, reduce navigation burdens on survivors, and enable organisations to collectively respond more effectively to the complex and evolving needs identified in this study.

For funders of organisations supporting survivors

Provide long-term, flexible and needs responsive funding for survivor support services

Findings from this evaluation indicate that participants' progress towards stability, confidence and employability is typically gradual, non-linear and dependent on sustained support over time. Organisations delivering support often play a critical role in maintaining engagement, adapting to changing needs, and supporting progression across different stages.

Funders of organisations supporting survivors of modern slavery should ensure that funding models enable long-term, flexible and needs responsive provision, recognising the importance of sustained engagement in achieving meaningful outcomes. This could include:

- providing multi-year funding arrangements that reflect the extended timeframes required for recovery and progression.
- allowing flexibility in delivery models to respond to participants' evolving needs.
- supporting programmes that focus on intermediate "distance-travelled" outcomes, rather than short-term employment metrics alone.
- recognising and resourcing the co-ordination and support functions required to sustain engagement and progression.

Funding approaches aligned in this way would better reflect the realities of survivor recovery and support services in delivering more sustainable outcomes over time.

Ensure funding approaches reflect the diversity of survivor needs, including British nationals

The evaluation highlights the diversity of survivor experiences and the complex, intersecting vulnerabilities that shape pathways into and out of exploitation. While this study does not specifically examine outcomes by nationality, the data is clear that British nationals represent a significant proportion of individuals referred into the NRM and wider evidence indicates that they often have distinct and overlapping support needs (Murphy et al., 2022).

Funders should ensure that funding strategies reflect the full diversity of survivor populations, including British nationals, and are responsive to the different pathways and support needs associated with re-exploitation risk.

This could include:

- ensuring that funding allocations reflect the scale and profile of need across different groups within the NRM.
- supporting services that address intersecting vulnerabilities, such as those related to care experience, criminal justice involvement or domestic abuse.
- enabling flexible provision that can respond to varied and complex pathways into exploitation and recovery.
- taking a responsive and inclusive approach to funding would help ensure that support provision is aligned with the full range of needs across the survivor population.

For funders of and organisations undertaking research

Strengthen the evidence base on re-trafficking and repeat vulnerability

Findings from this evaluation highlight significant gaps in available evidence on the scale, nature and drivers of re-trafficking, limiting the ability to design effective prevention strategies and assess long-term outcomes.

Funders of research, including research councils, charitable foundations and statutory bodies, should prioritise investment in research that improves understanding of re-trafficking and repeat vulnerability, including prevalence, risk factors and pathways back into exploitation.

Strengthening the evidence base in this area would support more informed policy design and enable services to better identify and respond to risk.

Invest in longitudinal research to understand longer-term outcomes

This evaluation demonstrates that progress in employability, wellbeing and stability is often gradual and non-linear, with many outcomes emerging beyond the timeframe of programme delivery.

Funders and research organisations should prioritise longitudinal research designs that track outcomes over time to strengthen the evidence base on long-term impact, particularly in relation to sustained employment, training engagement, wellbeing and safety.

This could include:

- follow-up studies that examine outcomes beyond programme completion.
- research linking intermediate “distance-travelled” outcomes to longer-term trajectories.
- collaboration with service providers to track participant journeys over extended periods.

Such approaches would strengthen understanding of how capability-building interventions contribute to long-term outcomes.

Support survivor-centred, mixed-methods research approaches

Findings from this evaluation illustrate the value of combining quantitative outcome data with in-depth qualitative insights to understand how and why change occurs, particularly in complex, trauma-informed contexts.

Funders and organisations undertaking research should continue to prioritise survivor-centred, mixed-methods and theory-informed approaches, ensuring that lived experience informs research design, interpretation and application.

Supporting these approaches would deepen understanding of how prevention focused interventions operate in practice and strengthen the design and delivery of future programmes.

A message for those with lived experience

The following recommendation was written by our peer researcher. It is included here to recognise the active leadership role that survivors play in shaping safer futures for themselves and others. It is directed towards other survivors and reflects a call to collective voice and leadership:

“Take up your place as active advocates for the unique skills and experiences of survivors and how significantly they can contribute to the UK economy and society. In doing so, you can strengthen pathways by sharing your insights on success, barriers and highlight the type of support needed to enable safe and sustainable work. Peer support, encouragement, and practical advice for others with similar experiences can help reduce isolation and build confidence. Be the change and don’t hold back. By sharing honest feedback with organisations about what support is helpful and what challenges remain, people with lived experience can also contribute to improving programmes and strengthening wider efforts to prevent re-exploitation.”

References

- After Exploitation (2024) **Repeat Referrals to the National Referral Mechanism: Data Briefing 2024**. After Exploitation. London.
- AntiSlavery International, 2021. **What is Modern Slavery?** AntiSlavery International: London. Available at: <https://www.antislavery.org/slavery-today/modern-slavery/> [Accessed 13/02/2026]
- Antonovsky A. (1987) **Unravelling the Mystery of Health: How People Manage Stress and Stay Well**. Jossey-Bass. San Francisco.
- Bakker AB, van Wingerden J. & ten Brummelhuis LL. (2023) The Job Demands–Resources model 20 years on: Lessons for the future of work. **European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology** 32 (4) 579–593.
- Bakker AB. & Demerouti E. (2017) Job Demands–Resources theory: Taking stock and looking forward. **Journal of Occupational Health Psychology** 22 (3) 273–285.
- Balch A, Craig G, Roberts K & Williams–Wood A. (2017) **The Co-Op’s Bright Future Programme: An Independent Interim Review**. University of Liverpool: Liverpool.
- Balch A, Williams–Wood A, Williams A, Roberts K & Craig G. (2019) **Bright Future: An Independent Review**. University of Liverpool: Liverpool.
- Bloom SL. & Farragher B. (2013) **Restoring Sanctuary: A New Operating System for Trauma-Informed Systems of Care**. Oxford University Press: New York.
- British Red Cross (2019) **Hope for the Future: Support for Survivors of Trafficking after the National Referral Mechanism. UK Integration Pilot – Evaluation and Policy Report**. Available at: <https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/we-speak-up-for-change/human-trafficking-and-slavery/after-the-national-referral-mechanism-report>. Accessed on: 05/05/2026.
- Brown B. (2006) Shame resilience theory: A grounded theory study on women and shame. **Families in Society** 87(1) 43–52.
- Clark H & Partridge N (2017) **The Sophie Hayes Foundation Day 46 Programme. Empowering Survivors of Trafficking to Build Hope Filled Futures. Evaluation and Report**. The Sophie Hayes Foundation: London.
- Cordisco Tsai L, Seballos–Llena IF & Castellano–Datta RA (2017) Participatory assessment of a matched savings program for human trafficking survivors and their family members in the Philippines. **Forum: Qualitative Social Research** 18 (2) Art. 11.
- Cordisco Tsai L, Domingo CCG, Hentschel E, Hu R & Gill M. (2022) Impact of a matched savins program on survivors of human trafficking and gender-based violence in the Philippines. **Nitel Sosyal Bilimler/ Qualitative Social Sciences** 5(1) 1–22.
- Corple DJ. (2024) Empowerment at work? Examining employment–based economic empowerment initiatives for survivors of commercial sexual exploitation. **Violence Against Women** 30 (6–7) 1407–1430.
- Drummond MF, Sculper MJ, Claxton K, Stoddard GL. & Torence GW. (2015) **Methods for the Economic Evaluation of Health Care Programmes**. 4th Edition. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Flint E, Bartley M, Shelton N. & Sacker A. (2013) Do labour market status transitions predict changes in psychological wellbeing? **Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health** 67(9) 796–802.
- Fugate M, Kinicki AJ & Ashforth BE. (2004) Employability: A psycho-social construct, its dimensions and applications. **Journal of Vocational Behaviour** 65 (1) 14–38.
- Gale NK, Heath G, Cameron E, Rashid S, & Redwood S. (2013) Using the framework method for the analysis of qualitative data in multi-disciplinary health research. **BMC Medical Research Methodology** 13 117.
- Garbers K. (2021a) **Re-trafficking: The Current State of Play**. Office of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner. London.
- Garber K. (2021b) **The Benefits and the Barriers to Accessing Employment: Considerations for Survivors of Modern Slavery**. University of Nottingham Rights Lab. Nottingham.

- Gardner A. (2018) An idea whose time has come? Modern slavery, multiple streams approach and multilayer policy implementation, **Journal of Human Rights Practice** 10(3) 461–481.
- Geber M. & Vossemmer J. (2014) The impact of employment transitions on health in Germany. A difference in differences propensity score matching approach. **Social Science and Medicine** 108 541-556.
- Hartfiel N. & Edwards RT. (2019) Cost-consequence analysis of public health interventions. In Edwards RT, McIntosh E. & Hulme C. (eds) **Applied Health Economics for Public Health Practice and Research**. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Hayes S. (2012) **Trafficked: The Terrifying True Story of a British Girl Forced into the Sex Trade**. Harper Collins. London.
- Herman JL. (2015) **Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror**. Basic Books: New York.
- Home Office (2026) **Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify Statistics UK, End of Year Summary 2025**. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-nrm-and-dtn-statistics-end-of-year-summary-2025/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-end-of-year-summary-2025>. Accessed on: 05/05/2026.
- International Labour Organisation (2003) Decent work: Concept and indicators. **International Labour Review** 142 (2).
- International Labour Organisation (2017) **Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage**. International Labour Organisation: Geneva.
- International Organization for Migration (2010) **Guidelines for the Collection of Data on Trafficking in Human Beings, Including Comparable Indicators**. International Organization for Migration. Geneva.
- International Organisation for Migration (2019) **Economic Empowerment and Trafficking Prevention: Emerging Lessons and Guidance**. International Organisation for Migration: Geneva.
- Jannesari S, Molyneaux EFL. & Lawrence VC. (2019) What affects the mental health of people seeking asylum in the UK? A narrative analysis of migration stories. **Qualitative Research in Psychology** 19 (2) 295-315.
- Jeong S, Ohr SO, Cleasby P, Barrett T, Davey R. & Deeming S. (2021) A cost-consequence analysis of normalised advance care planning practices among people with chronic diseases in hospital and community settings. **BMC Health Services Research** 21 729.
- Jobe A. (2010) **The Causes and Consequences of Re-trafficking: Evidence from the IOM Human Trafficking Database**. IOM. Geneva
- Joshi A, Kales S, Chandel S. & Pal DK. (2015) Likert scale: Explored and explained. **British Journal of Applied Science and Technology** 7(4) 396 – 403.
- Kelly, L. (2002) **Journeys of Jeopardy: A Review of Research on Trafficking in Women and Children in Europe**. International Organization for Migration. Geneva.
- Langley T, Gillespie D, Lewis S, Eminson K, Brennan A, Docherty G. & Young, B. (2020) Developing logic models to inform public health policy outcome evaluation: An example from tobacco control. **Journal of Public Health** 43 (3) 639-646.
- Kirkwood BR. & Sterne JAC. (2003) **Essential Medical Statistics**. 2nd Edition. Blackwell Publishing: Oxford.
- MacKeith J. (2011) The development of the Outcomes Star: A participatory approach to assessment and outcome measurement. **Housing, Care and Support** 14(3) 98-106.
- McLaughlin JA. & Jordan GB. (1999) Logic models: A tool for telling your program's performance story. **Evaluation and Program Planning** 22 (1) 65-72.
- McQuaid RW. & Lindsay C. (2005) The concept of employability. **Urban Studies** 42(2) 197-219.
- Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (2024) **Framing Modern Slavery: A Messaging Guide**. Modern Slavery and human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre. Oxford.
- Murphy C, Heys A, Barlow C, Gleich L. & Wilkinson S. (2022) **Protecting British Nationals from Modern Slavery**. Available at: <https://www.modernslaverypec.org/latest/support-british-nationals> Accessed on: 14/05/2026.
- Nussbaum MC. (2011) **Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach**. Harvard University Press: Cambridge Massachusetts.

- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights (2011) **Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the UN Protect, Respect and Remedy Framework**. United Nations (HR/PUB/11/04).
- Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (2020) **Cost Consequence Analysis: Health Economic Studies**. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/cost-consequence-analysis-health-economic-studies>. Accessed on: 05/05/2026.
- Ottisova L, Hemmings S. & Howard LM. (2016) Prevalence and risk of violence and the mental health impact among survivors of human trafficking: A systematic review. **PLOS Medicine** 13 (11) e1002437.
- Pascale J, Fineback JF, Bates N & Beaty P. (2022) Protecting the identity of participants in qualitative research. **Journal of Survey Statistics and Methodology** 10(3) 549-567.
- Ritchie J. & Spencer L. (1994) Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research. In: A. Bryman & RG. Burgess (eds.) **Analyzing Qualitative Data**. Routledge. London.
- Sen A. (1999) **Development as Freedom**. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Snyder CR. (2002) Hope theory: Rainbows in the mind. **Psychological Inquiry** 13(4): 249-275.
- Such E. & Aminu H. (2024) **The Prevention of Adult Exploitation and Trafficking. A Synthesis of Research Commissioned by the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre. Research Report**. Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre: Oxford.
- Such E, Aminu H, Ariyo MD, Barnes A, Brierley R. & Hayes K. (2025). Preventing Adult Sexual and Labor Exploitation in the UK: Findings from a Participatory Evidence Synthesis of What Does or Could Work. **Journal of Human Trafficking** 1-30.
- Surtees R. (2005) **Second Annual Report on Victims of Trafficking in SouthEastern Europe**. International Organization for Migration. Geneva.
- Sweet D, Winter K, Neeson L. & Connolly P. (2020) Assessing the reliability and validity of an outcomes star. **Journal of Children's Services** 15(3) 109-122.
- Tomlinson M. (2012) Graduate employability: A review of conceptual and empirical themes. **Higher Education Policy** 25(4) 407-431.
- Tricco AC, Langlois EV. & Strauss SE. (eds) (2017) **Rapid Reviews to Strengthen Health Policy and Systems: A Practical Guide**. World Health Organization Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research. Geneva.
- United Nations (2000) **Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime**. United Nations: New York.
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2024) **Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2024**. UNODC: Vienna.
- Van der Noordt M, Ijzelenbery H, Droomers M. & Proper KI. (2014) Health effects of employment: A systematic review of prospective studies. **Occupational Environmental Medicine** 71 (10) 730-736.
- Vollinger L, D'Arcangelo B, Weinstein L, Charm S, Melander C, Pfeffer R, Coleman L, Hang U. & Roseborough D (2023) **Economic Empowerment for People who have Experienced Human Trafficking: Programs Identified in an Environmental Scan. OPRE Report #2023-288**. Office of Planning Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services. Washington DC.
- Walk Free Foundation (2023) **Global Slavery Index 2023. Walk Free: Perth**. Available at: <https://www.walkfree.org/global-slavery-index/> [Accessed: 31/03/2026].
- Williams S, Dodd LJ, Steele C. & Randall R. (2016) A systematic review of current understandings of employability. **Journal of Education and Work** 29 (8) 877-901.
- Yorke M. (2006) **Employability in Higher Education: What it is - What it is not**. The Higher Education Academy: York.
- Wright N, Brown RC, Phillips R, Brotherton V, Garbers K. & Singlehurst Z. (2024) **Ten Years of the Slavery and Trafficking Care Standards**. University of Nottingham Rights Lab. Nottingham.
- Zimmerman MA. (2000) Empowerment theory: Psychological, organisational and community levels of analysis. In J. Rappaport & E. Seidman (eds) **Handbook of Community Psychology**^{9y}. Kluwer Academic: New York.

Appendix 1: Participant flow through the SHF Employability Programme

The following diagram provides a high level overview of participant flow through the SHF Employability Programme, from referral and onboarding through to completion and ongoing peer support.

1. Referral

- Referral form submitted by a case or support worker.

2. Initial Contact and Readiness Conversation

- SHF programme co-ordinator contacts the participant.
- Programme explained and questions addressed.
- Informal assessment of readiness, including:
 - English Language confidence
 - access to digital devices, data and reliable internet
 - availability to attend sessions

3. Accessibility and Practical Support

- Information recorded internally.
- Devices, data or connectivity support provided where needed.
- Optional invitation to a technical support session.

4. English Language Preparation (if required)

- Where English is assessed as below the level needed to engage fully, participants are supported to:
 - access SHF's CEFL course or
 - engage in external English language provision.
- Participants may be re-referred at a later point; this is framed as postponement rather than exclusion.

5. Safeguarding Review

- Any safeguarding concerns identified in referral are discussed with the referring practitioner.
- Decisions regarding enrolment or deferral are made collaboratively to maximise benefit and minimise risk.

6. Acceptance and Enrolment

- Acceptance confirmed by phone and email.
- Referring worker notified of acceptance and next steps.

7. Group Allocation and Onboarding

- Participants allocated to a cohort based on availability.
- Programme journal provided (session outlines, activities, tech guidance).
- Required devices supplied.

8. Programme Commencement

- First session delivered in person (with optional online alternative if needed).
- Weekly reminders sent with session links and WhatsApp messages.

9. Modular Participation and Progression

- Programme delivered across three modules.
- Participants must attend at least 50% of sessions in a module to progress.
- Catchup and repeat sessions available.

10. Flexibility and Pausing

- Participants may pause participation at any point.
- Re-entry arrangements depend on module stage:
 - Module 1: re-referral required
 - Modules 2–3: supported re-entry in future cohorts

11. Completion and Graduation

- Participants completing all three modules are eligible to graduate.

12. Ongoing Peer Support (CREW)

- Participants join the CREW network at enrolment.
- CREW membership continues for as long as participants choose, offering ongoing peer support and activities.

Appendix 2: Literature search terms

1. Modern Slavery/ Human Trafficking Terms

traffick* AND (human OR sex* OR people OR child* OR victim* OR survivor* OR person* OR men OR women OR labour OR labor) OR forced AND (labour OR labor OR prostitution OR marriage OR crim*) OR "domestic servitude" OR "exploit*" AND (crim* OR sex* OR financ* OR labour OR labor) "sex* slav*" OR "modern AND slav*" OR "modern adj2 slave*" OR "child* soldier*" OR "sex work*" OR "prostitut*" OR "grooming" OR "cuckoo*" OR "home based exploitation" OR "home-based exploitation" OR "county lin*" OR "mate crime"

Combined using the Boolean Operator AND with

2. Employability Terms

employ* OR job OR vocation* OR "vocational training" OR occupation* OR work* OR "work readiness" OR "financial empower*" OR "financial independence" OR "financial freedom" OR "economic empower" OR "economic independence" OR "economic freedom" OR "economic reintegrate*" OR "economic participation" OR "income generation" OR "life skill*"

Appendix 3: Summary matrix of rapid review included studies

Full Citation	Country	Intervention Type	Study Design/Methods	Sample Size and Characteristics	Main Findings
Balch A, Craig G, Roberts K & Williams-Wood A. (2017) The Co-Op's Bright Future Programme: An Independent Interim Review. University of Liverpool: Liverpool.	UK	Collaborative initiative created by the Co-Op to offer paid work placements leading to a non-competitive job interview.	Interviews	35 key informants: internal Co-Op staff; internal Co-Op placement staff in the field; external stakeholders; external charity partners; and placement candidates.	Bright Future is relevant to the needs of stakeholders and develops a clear pathway for those with right to work; effective in matching survivors to placements but areas where further efficiencies could be made; questions regarding model sustainability due to focus on staff "going above and beyond"; and positive impact found on survivors as well as other stakeholders.
Balch A, Williams-Wood A, Williams A, Roberts K & Craig G. (2019) Bright Future: An Independent Review. University of Liverpool: Liverpool.	UK.	Collaborative initiative between the Co-Op and CityHearts to offer paid work placements leading to a non-competitive job interview. Comprised of 20 business and 28 charity partners at the time of the evaluation.	Semi-structured interviews (internal and external stakeholders). Analysis of pre and post placement questionnaires (13 pre and 12, completed by candidates). Observation of 3 regional training events. Review of key documents.	18 internal and external stakeholders: Co-Op/CityHearts staff directly involved in Bright Future (n=4); Bright Future business partners (n=4); Bright Future charity partners (n=6); Bright Future placement candidates (n=2) and external stakeholders (n=2). 12 placement candidates.	Questionnaire: 7/12 increase in positive feelings for the future and more connected to the community. 11/12 no change in self-confidence. Barriers to finding work: qualifications, lack of job history and ability to speak English. Interviews: disappointment re how many referrals led to placements; lack of placements in the right geographical areas; delays between referrals and placement; benefits to employers in terms of understanding of modern slavery and working with vulnerable people; charity partners identified clarity around what work readiness means; need to manage expectations.

Full Citation	Country	Intervention Type	Study Design/Methods	Sample Size and Characteristics	Main Findings
Clark H & Partridge N (2017) The Sophie Hayes Foundation Day 46 Programme. Empowering Survivors of Trafficking to Build Hope Filled Futures. Evaluation and Report. The Sophie Hayes Foundation: London.	UK	A series of workshops, 1:1 coaching sessions, volunteer/work placements designed to support survivors to establish a newfound purpose by nurturing self-confidence and increasing independence. This is achieved through focusing on increasing employability, resilience and social support to reduce the vulnerabilities that contribute to re-trafficking.	Pre-post survey completion (programme participants). 2-hour feedback session with programme facilitators. Online survey to partner organisations	39 programme participants 7 programme facilitators 3 partner organisations (survey distributed to 8)	Programme contributed to an increase in resilience (13% to 96%), employability (37% to 96%) and social support (23% to 97%) in agreement to affirmative statements. Partner organisations identified that the programme helps to reduce their workload and fills care provision gaps. Facilitators require increased training in emotional and psychological topics.
Cordisco Tsai L, Seballos-Llena IF & Castellano-Datta RA (2017) Participatory assessment of a matched savings program for human trafficking survivors and their family members in the Phillipines. Forum: Qualitative Social Research 18 (2) Art. 11.	Philippines	2-year matched savings, financial literacy education and individual peer support sessions. Participants receive a 1:1 match for their savings that can be used for pre-approved purposes.	Photovoice	15 participants, split across 2 cohorts: survivor of trafficking into domestic work (n=5), survivor of trafficking into sex work (n=6), physical abuse and labour exploitation survivor (n=1; and intimate partner of survivor (n=3). Female (n=10) and Male (n=5)	Cohort A themes: positive emotional impact of financial wellness; receiving guidance and enlightenment; overcoming the challenges of saving; applying financial management skills in daily decision making; and change process. Cohort B themes: developing a habit of savings; building a future orientated mindset; learning process; and applying financial management skills in daily decision making.

Full Citation	Country	Intervention Type	Study Design/ Methods	Sample Size and Characteristics	Main Findings
Cordisco Tsai L, Domingo CCG, Hentschel E, Hu R & Gill M. (2022) Impact of a matched savins program on survivors of human trafficking and gender-based violence in the Philippines. Nitel Sosyal Bilimler/Qualitative Social Sciences 5(1) 1-22.	Philippines	2-year matched savings, financial literacy education and individual peer support sessions. Participants receive a 1:1 match for their savings that can be used for pre-approved purposes.	Financial data collected pre and post programme attendance. In depth individual interviews and focus group discussion.	10 participants. All identified as female. Victims of human trafficking (n =3), victims of gender-based violence (n = 4) and victims of both (n=3).	Quantitative findings: increases in participants savings after the completion of the programme. Qualitative themes: prioritising asset development, enhanced budgeting skills, escaping a cycle of debt, psychosocial impact and improved family relationships. Multifaceted benefits including financial, social and psychological.
Corple DJ. (2024) Empowerment at work? Examining employment-based economic empowerment initiatives for survivors of commercial sexual exploitation. Violence Against Women 30 (6-7) 1407-1430.	USA	US based organisations that both provide economic empowerment support and employ survivors of commercial sexual exploitation.	Passing organisational ethnography including: Individual interviews. Observation. Documentary analysis.	39 staff participants working across 15 organisations of which 4 identified as survivors of domestic commercial sexual exploitation.	Employment is an essential part of the economic empowerment process if the work is itself empowering. Themes identified: work that gives to self and others; having a voice in decision making; agency to explore one's interests; and work that is communal. Highlighted tensions: authority-autonomy and compassion-accountability.

Appendix 4: Baseline to mid-point summary analysis

Domain	Median, Interquartile Range (IQR) and Range	Pre - Post Mean Change and Standard Deviation (in brackets)	95% Confidence Interval around the Mean Change	P Value ⁵	Number (%) of People with a Meaningful Improvement ⁶	95% Confidence Interval around Meaningful Improvement ⁷
Job Skills and Experience						
Pre (n = 75)	Median: 6 IQR: 3 Range: 1-10					
Mid (n = 74)	Median: 7 IQR:2 Range: 2-10					
Pre-mid (n = 67)		1.22 (2.6)	0.59 - 1.86	<.001	41 (61.2%)	48.5% - 72.9%
Aspiration and Motivation						
Pre (n = 76)	Median: 7 IQR:4 Range: 2-8					
Mid (n = 74)	Median: 7 IQR: 3 Range: 2-10					
Pre-mid (n = 68)		0.54 (2.67)	-0.10 - 1.19	.098	40 (58.8%)	55.2% - 78.5%

5. P-value was assessed using paired t-tests.

6. Meaningful change was defined as at least a one-point increase between baseline and midpoint scores.

7. Calculated using binomial exact method.

Domain	Median, Interquartile Range (IQR) and Range	Pre - Post Mean Change and Standard Deviation (in brackets)	95% Confidence Interval around the Mean Change	P Value ⁵	Number (%) of People with a Meaningful Improvement ⁶	95% Confidence Interval around Meaningful Improvement ⁷
Job Search Skills						
Pre (n = 76)	Median: 5 IQR: 3 Range: 1-10					
Mid (n = 74)	Median: 7 IQR: 3 Range: 1-10					
Pre-mid (n = 68)		1.69 (2.66)	1.04 - 2.33	<.001	46 (67.6%)	55.2% - 78.5%
Stability						
Pre (n = 75)	Median: 5 IQR: 3 Range: 1-10					
Mid (n = 74)	Median: 6 IQR: 3 Range: 1-10					
Pre-mid (n = 67)		0.94 (2.68)	0.29 - 1.6	.006	39 (58.2%)	45.5% - 70.2%
Basic Skills						
Pre (n = 76)	Median: 6.5 IQR: 3 Range: 2-10					

Domain	Median, Interquartile Range (IQR) and Range	Pre - Post Mean Change and Standard Deviation (in brackets)	95% Confidence Interval around the Mean Change	P Value ⁵	Number (%) of People with a Meaningful Improvement ⁶	95% Confidence Interval around Meaningful Improvement ⁷
Mid (n = 74)	Median: 7 IQR: 4 Range: 1-10					
Pre-mid (n = 68)		0,69 (2.13)	0.18 - 1.2	.009	38 (55.9%)	43.3% - 67.9%
Workplace and Social Skills						
Pre (n = 75)	Median:7 IQR: 4 Range: 1-10					
Mid (n = 74)	Median: 8 IQR: 3 Range: 1-10					
Pre-mid (n = 68)		1 (2.75)	0.33 - 1.67	.004	39 (57.4%)	44.8% - 69.2%
Health and Wellbeing						
Pre (n = 76)	Median: 7 IQR: 3 Range: 2-10					
Mid (n = 74)	Median: 8 IQR: 3 Range: 1-10					
Pre-mid (n = 68)		0.47 (2.37)	-0.10 - 1.04	.107	34 (50%)	37.6% - 62.4%

MODERN SLAVERY & HUMAN RIGHTS

POLICY & EVIDENCE CENTRE

Led by the University of Oxford



HUMANITIES DIVISION

The Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (Modern Slavery PEC) at the University of Oxford exists to enhance understanding of modern slavery and transform the effectiveness of laws and policies designed to address it. The Centre funds and co-produces high quality research with a focus on policy impact, and brings together academics, policymakers, businesses, civil society and survivors to collaborate on solving this global challenge.

The Centre is a consortium of three Universities of Oxford, Liverpool and Hull, and is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) on behalf of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

pec.office@humanities.ox.ac.uk

www.modernslaverypec.org

Authors: Nicola Wright, Tessa Langley, Zachary Singlehurst, all University of Nottingham; Emily Death, Cilla McPaintsil, Joanne Wells, Victoria Abbott, Carly Webster, Caitlin Battersby, all Sophie Hayes Foundation; and Elizabeth Such, King's College London.

Published by: Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre, University of Oxford.

Publication date: 2026

©2026, Nicola Wright, Tessa Langley, Zachary Singlehurst, Emily Death, Cilla McPaintsil, Joanne Wells, Victoria Abbott, Carly Webster, Caitlin Battersby and Elizabeth Such.

This work is openly licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

This work was supported by Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre, University of Oxford [reference number: R90817/CNO09] from its grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council [grant number AH/T012412/2].

Identification number of the publication: PEC/2026/06

Our partners:



UNIVERSITY of HULL

Wilberforce Institute



UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

Bonavero Institute of Human Rights



Funded by:



Arts and Humanities Research Council