

# Impact in our Community

Our work during COVID-19



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## Impact aims and mission

Through our work, we support local people to improve their skills, open-up new opportunities and help them into work, learning or training.

Our mission is to empower young people and adults with the skills and confidence they need to reach their potential in life and work. We want people to be Bold and Resilient so that they can handle whatever obstacles, challenges, and opportunities they face with a can-do attitude. We also want people to be Relevant, to have the necessary skills, knowledge, and experience to succeed in jobs today and in the careers of the future.



**Be** BOLD.  
RELEVANT.  
RESILIENT.

## Introduction from the Chair and Chief Executive

2020/21 has been an incredibly challenging year. Much of the year has seen the Charity operate under national lockdown restrictions with limitations on how and where we can deliver our services. Although we have seen a reduction in overall income, the trustees and management team have steered the Charity through a successful year.

Despite the challenging operating environment, we have remained resilient, and the demand for our work has been high. The uncertain labour market has meant that careers advice and employability programmes have never been more relevant. We have been flexible in how we have supported our beneficiaries; offering support digitally, across a range of platforms, as well as in-person. It has been challenging but it worked. We have worked with a range of people and employers in settings such as schools, job centres and community groups. Our personal development programmes have been popular and contributed to both individual and community resilience.

The team that makes up Inspira have been fantastic. We have been able to maintain the core staffing despite income being reduced. They have worked incredibly hard to meet the needs of the people they work with and the communities that they work in. All have embraced the “hybrid” working patterns that have been established and have helped the Charity deliver existing work and win contracts in new and existing areas.

Every year on behalf of the trustees, a full staff survey is carried out. The trustees are delighted that the most recent survey (December 2020) showed positive results, including 99% of staff taking pride in belonging to the Charity and 100% saying that the Charity’s response to COVID was good.

The trustees are proud of the activities

carried out, and the review of activities provides a detailed account of how we are meeting our charitable objectives. In 2020/21, we continued developing our delivery in Cumbria, Lancashire, Blackpool, Northumberland and Newcastle. We are delighted that 2021/22 is seeing significant growth in our delivery across these areas.

The major contracts that have contributed to our charitable objectives this year include:

- Targeted Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (Cumbria)
- National Citizen Service (Cumbria, Lancashire, Blackpool, Blackburn, Northumberland, Newcastle)
- National Career Service (Cumbria, Lancashire, Blackpool)
- Skills Support for the unemployed (Cumbria)
- Careers Hub and Enterprise Adviser Network (Lancashire, Blackpool, Blackburn)
- The Link (Cumbria)

We also continue to be funded by a host of schools, employers and community funds to deliver a range of bespoke programmes.

We will continue to be bold when looking for new work and new areas to work in. 2021/22 will see a significant expansion in the delivery of our Employability work; we are looking forward to the challenge.



George Beveridge  
Chair, Inspira



Mark Bowman  
Chief Executive, Inspira

# Bridging the employability gap

We partner with and work on behalf of organisations across the Northwest of England to manage and deliver comprehensive employability programmes which produce life changing results and positive impacts.

Our programmes enable people to get back into work, shore up skills shortages, prepare young people for life after school and connect educational institutions with employers to drive young people's aspirations.

## Our Work in Numbers:

Over **6,000** Adults have accessed our service.

Over **15,000** Young People have accessed our service.

**1,765** Number of Adults who have moved into a job or learning.

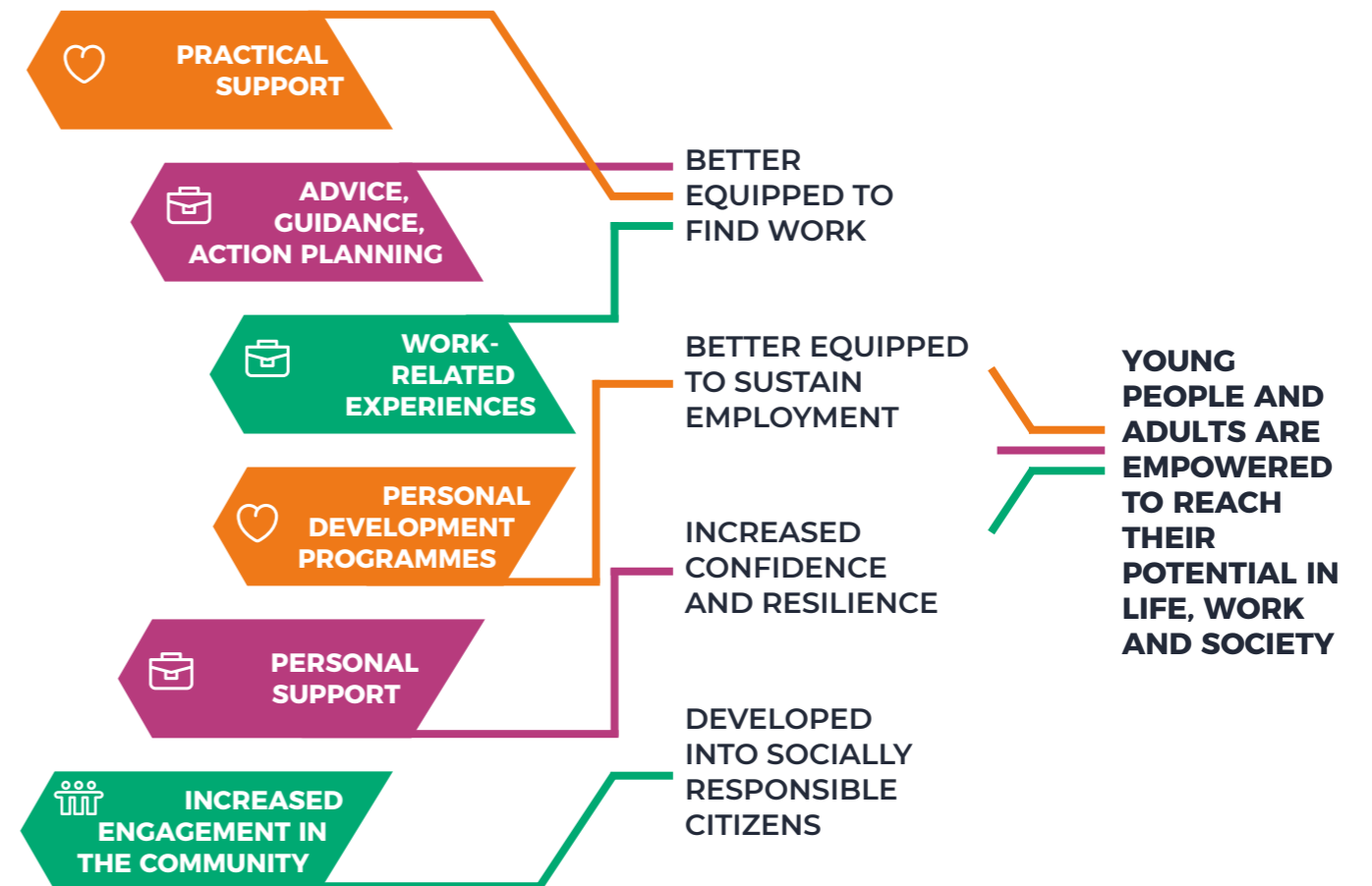
**362** Number of employers engaged with.

# How we work

Inspira's model is customer centric and encompasses a six pronged approach, with support adjusted depending on an individual's need or community-led initiative.

We ensure young people and adults have access to and experience of the working world and the knowledge and skills to succeed in it.

Helping to build stronger local communities.



- ♥ Life
- 📁 Work
- 👥 Society

## Our impact

### THE KEY

**600** customers joined The Key pre-employment programme.

**160** people achieved a progression into learning or employment.

### THE LINK

**200** employers engaged with.

LEADING TO **4880** interventions with young people

### TARGETED CIAG

Over **10,000** young people from year 11 and 12 made a transition into education, training and employment.

Over **600** young people both pre and post 16 who were at risk of NEET or NEET were supported into provision.

Young people with SEN (15- 25yrs), over **400** were supported with career decision making and next steps.

We supported over **120** young people from

## Our impact

### LANCASHIRE ENTERPRISE ADVISER NETWORK

**162** employers engaged with.

### NATIONAL CAREERS SERVICE

**4,874** people accessed the service delivered by Inspira.

**1,605** people moved into a job or learning.

### NATIONAL CITIZEN SERVICE

**1,013** young people took part in NCS during 2020.

**13,672** hours of Social Action were delivered.

OVER **10%**

of the young people engaged in further NCS activities.



## Personal support

### Katy's experience



When Katy Gladwinfield contacted her local Jobcentre Plus, her work coach told her that Inspira could help and support recent graduates, just like her, with their career search.

Determined to find a job, Katy was keen to understand the career opportunities for graduates and how best to promote herself in the competitive and declining job market.

Like many young graduates, Katy had been travelling in Australia when COVID-19 became a global concern. Hurrying home due to the ever-changing situation, Katy found herself in a national lockdown and a very challenging time to search for employment opportunities.

"Searching for jobs became a challenge," Katy said, "which was due to the restricted number of vacancies and the uncertainty that the future held."

"I also didn't know the exact role I wanted, so I lacked confidence in deciding which vacancies were right for me and then sending the applications."

When Katy approached Inspira, an online appointment was booked with a knowledgeable and experienced adviser. Following an assessment, Katy was encouraged to join the pre-employment programme designed specifically for graduates.

Focusing on the person, Inspira's pre-employment programme encourages participants to concentrate on 'self', building confidence, looking after

wellbeing and really understanding the motivations and drivers to want to succeed in life and a career.

For Katy, she was glad to be connecting with people who were in a similar situation and unsure about the future.

As the programme progressed, Katy was surprised that she already had some tools under her belt, such as her ability to complete applications to a high standard and a strong CV; what she lacked was confidence in herself.

"I had been doing other sessions with career companies that help you break into the Graduate Job Market, and these sessions focused on Q&As about CVs and interviews. Not once was confidence or self-belief touched on. But Inspira make it a central part of their programme, which helped me massively, and I can't commend it enough!" said Katy.

"The staff were amazing! They really listened to everyone. Deb was also amazing in helping me prepare for my assessment centre for Think Ahead. She really believed in me and helped give me a much-needed boost after weeks of preparing. She thoroughly understood the company, each section of the Assessment Centre and what techniques would work best throughout the day."

Following the pre-employment programme, Katy began a two-year training programme with a company called Think Ahead, to train on the job to be a Mental Health Social Worker, whilst gaining a Master's in Social Work from Middlesex University.



## Personal support

### Deb Thompson, Inspira Adviser

As COVID-19 spread across the globe, it was clear the way Inspira worked had to change. Within weeks the face-to-face workshop delivery model shifted to online delivery and learning methods.

For Deb, this was a pivotal moment for her.

"We soon overcame initial challenges to delivering online learning and online collaboration with other team members. Learners and colleagues alike responded well, and we all learned about different delivery platforms from Google Classrooms, Zoom to MS Teams.

From my professional point of view, by testing different digital platforms, I understood and ascertained how we could use technology to foster deeper customer learning and improve and maintain engagement.

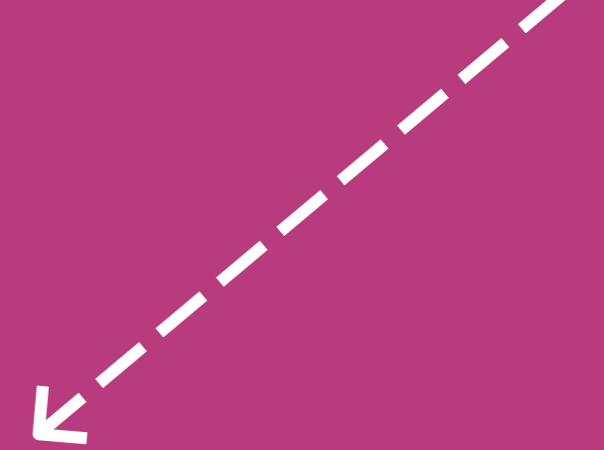
Feedback from our learners was overwhelmingly positive. They found the learning experiences, which included the opportunity to use the online discussion forum and chat boxes to share ideas with others were great, especially for those who were more introverted and tended to sit back during face-to-face workshops. Users liked that they could complete assignments at their own pace and around family commitments and that they also had the social space to interact with other people to share their experiences. The interactive quizzes were also popular.

I believe, in a year that brought change and growth, digital delivery gave me a way to expand my support, connect in new ways, and interact with my learners more than ever before.

Reflecting on my learning, I became more aware of my delivery style and how to become a better facilitator to enable learning and growth. It has given me the confidence to experiment and envision new ways of delivering workshops, as well as the courage to explore other options that once may not have seemed possible.

A significant benefit of working digitally has been collaborative working between Inspira teams across Cumbria. Building relationships with colleagues in different parts of the County, collaborating and sharing ideas has been a great outcome from a difficult time.

The support from my colleagues was a vital lifeline in keeping up morale during this difficult time and pivotal in developing and evaluating new ways of working."





## Work related experiences

### Chris's Story

Work-related experiences are an essential step in the process to help people get ready for work and be successful at the interview stage.

It was difficult for clients to gain on-the-ground experience during the pandemic, but Inspira's pre-employment programmes helped mitigate the risk and prepare people for the workplace.

Chris was one such learner, joining a pre-employment programme for care workers in November.

Focusing on participants from the Kickstart scheme, announced by the Government, Chris joined a cohort of learners to prepare for working in the care sector.

The programme aimed to ensure that Chris and his fellow learners gained appropriate care-related qualifications, support with personal development and interview techniques.

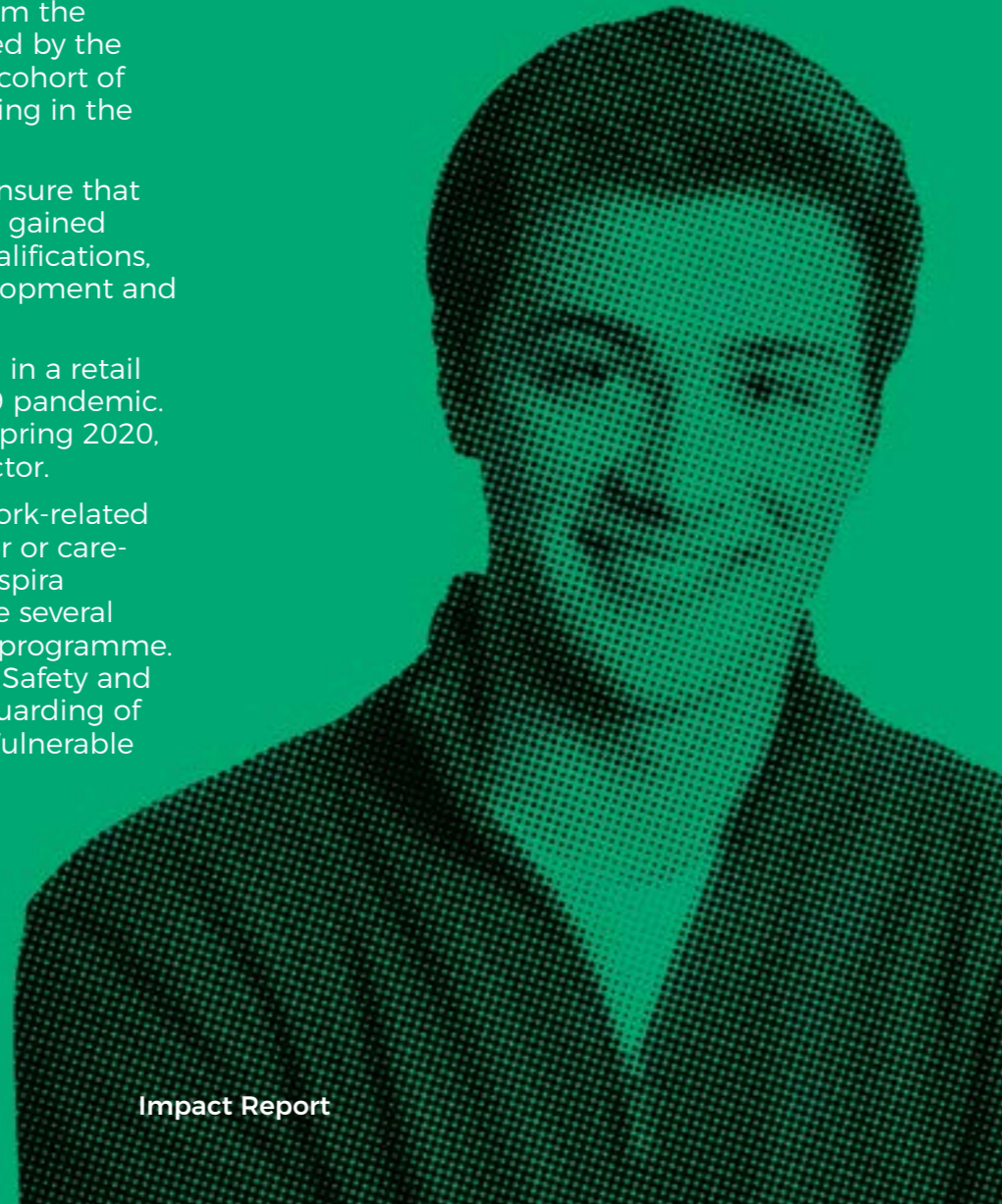
Chris had previously worked in a retail setting before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, he lost his job in Spring 2020, like many people in that sector.

As Chris did not have any work-related experience in the care sector or care-related qualifications, the Inspira team helped Chris complete several qualifications as part of the programme. These including Health and Safety and a Level 3 Principles in Safeguarding of Children, Young People or Vulnerable Adults.

As well as the regulated learning, Inspira supported Chris to identify his skills, experience, update his CV and practice his interview techniques to explain his transferable skills to help him change his career path.

By the end of the programme, Chris had gained relevant qualifications and started working with a local care provider as a Care Assistant.

Chris is looking to develop his skills and experience in the care environment.



## Work related experiences

### Gareth Clayton, Inspira Adviser



"I like the human element of my job and interacting with clients face to face. Consequently, working during the pandemic was interesting as it posed challenges for how I could continue to build trusting relationships with my clients and help them achieve their career goals.

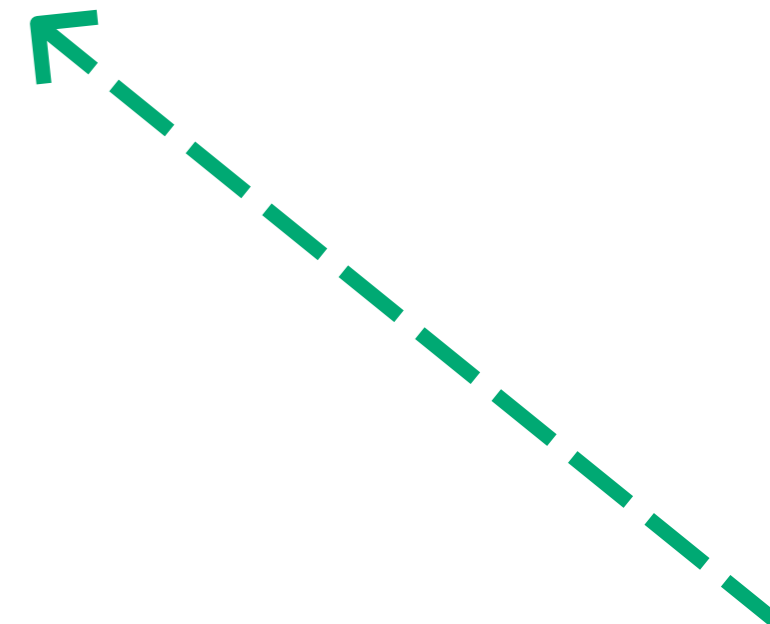
Like everyone, we had to deal with login issues and the internet dropping out and help each other learn new IT skills. But it was really nice to see my workshop groups come together to help each other and offer suggestions in a way that wasn't as common pre-pandemic.

For some people though, they didn't have the necessary IT equipment to join our digital courses. To solve this barrier, we worked closely with the local Jobcentre Plus team to ensure that all learners had suitable IT equipment and did not miss out on qualifications or sector-based work academies.

Adapting and delivering our workshops digitally required a completely different style. While it limited some activities, it also led to better group-based discussions as learners engaged with information before, during and after sessions. It was easier to share resources via Google Classroom and emails before and during sessions. Sharing my screen to show and explain information was beneficial, especially local labour market information, as I could highlight critical details and show what I was describing.

Offering digital delivery enabled Inspira to deliver to a broader range of people who ordinarily wouldn't have engaged due to travel. Digital delivery also meant we could provide our expertise to more people.

Working through the lockdowns and via a hybrid of office and home-based working was an unprecedented challenge. However, Inspira adapted quickly and kept innovating as we gained new knowledge and experience. On a personal level, it developed my skills as an adviser. As things return more to normal, aspects of my delivery will remain, such as increased resilience and better all-around communication with team members in other business areas."





## Advice, guidance and planning

### Telling their own story

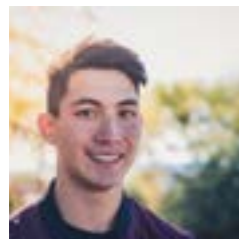
Getting your life on track after a setback or a change can be challenging; here, five young people describe the impact getting help from Inspira has had on their lives and their plans for the future.



#### \*Milly's story

"Initially, I was apprehensive about the help on offer as I suffer from anxiety. My dad encouraged me, and I am so glad he did.

Being part of the group has boosted my confidence; before this, I rarely left the house independently. Being part of the group gave me a break from the routine of being at home all the time. Now I have moved into my own house with my little boy."



#### \*Darren's story

"I joined because I wanted to improve my employability skills, but I have really enjoyed being part of the group. They have helped me

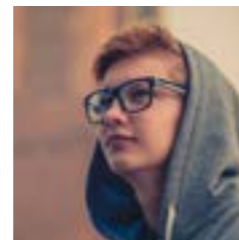
with job search and interview skills. I now have a CV and know how to put together a good job application. If I don't get a job, I have applied to college, which I will do."



#### \*Laura's story

"I joined because my Inspira Adviser in school said that I would enjoy it. I now know what I need to do in September. Inspira has helped

me apply for college in September to do Health and Social Care; I hope to do a placement in a junior school. Others in the group tell me that I am very determined. My confidence has really improved."



#### \*Sam's story

"I rarely left the house after leaving college. My mum pushed me to come to the group, telling me to 'at least give it a go'.

I was surprised when I enjoyed it. It has improved my confidence, and I have made new friends. Since joining the group, I have done some volunteering, and when lockdowns allowed, I worked in a charity shop part-time. I decided that I wanted to work in retail, and the group has motivated me to apply for other retail jobs that will suit me better. Inspira is helping me with job search and applications."



#### \*Maisie's story

"I was pleased to be asked to join. I had just moved to the area from South Africa and wanted to get to know young people my age.

I joined the Zoom sessions and then the one-to-one sessions. Working with Inspira improved my confidence; I can also communicate better in English. I am now studying for GCSEs online and hope to continue studying so that I can eventually get to university."

*\* names have been changed for confidentiality*



## Advice, guidance and planning

### Lynn Johnston, Inspira Adviser

Inspira is well known for its work with young people. Their patience and diligence are highly regarded, and the relationships the advisers' build can turn a young person's life around.

For Lynn, her role as a Skills and Development Adviser changed dramatically when the first lockdown began.

"I was used to seeing young people on a one-to-one basis - supporting, encouraging, and motivating them to return to education, employment or training. It wasn't easy to make contact at times, but as lockdown continued, I found young people were keen to hear from me, answering my calls, eager to talk to someone different.

For young people already disengaging from school, the lockdowns just worsened the situation; it was difficult for others trying to build their employability skills or make friends. But living in a tight community, word soon spread about the help on offer.

For instance, Sam\* was encouraged by his Mum to get involved as he wasn't leaving the house. Maisie\* joined as she had just moved to the area and wanted to meet people her age. For Milly\*, a young mum, it was a way to deal with the panic she felt at leaving her baby. Laura\*, was encouraged by another adviser to join, while Darren\* knew that he wanted to develop his employability skills, so his youth worker signposted him to the group.

I soon had a small group of young people who were willing to meet via Zoom. Together with my colleague, we put together a short programme of

*\* names have been changed for confidentiality*



development activities, including guest speakers, which could be delivered digitally and keep the young people engaged with the service.

The group quickly expanded, and membership became much more fluid as young people moved into employment or training, and new young people joined.

From the group:

- three have secured employment,
- one has gained an apprenticeship,
- two are applying for employment opportunities,
- two are applying for apprenticeships,
- five are returning to education in September,
- one has caring responsibilities.

I am really proud of how young people adapted to our online sessions and how open they were to join in, support each other and encourage others to do their best."



## Practical support

### Stuart's story

When people face challenging times in their lives, sometimes they need a combination of help, including practical support.

During the pandemic, a lot of people lost their job; Stuart was one of those people.

Stuart had had a varied but consistent working history during his working life, but he never felt that he had a long-term plan in place and had just taken jobs as and when they came up.

When Stuart called Inspira, they connected him with an adviser who worked with adults on the National Careers Service.

Being able to reflect on his current situation and think about what he would like his future to look like, Stuart decided that he would like to move away from getting jobs that came along and instead start a course and work towards a career.

Working with his adviser, Stuart started to analyse the jobs he had undertaken, and he found he enjoyed working as a Teaching Assistant the most. Deciding to focus on the fact that he was keen to work in education, the next step was to understand his qualification routes.

Realising that he didn't have the required Maths qualification he needed to train as a teacher, Stuart and his adviser investigated online Level 2 Maths courses and a free online training course for a Special Educational Needs Teaching qualification.

Stuart enrolled on both courses and is well on his way to achieving his career goals.

## Practical support

### Barclay's donation

Inspira successfully obtained funding through the Barclays 100x100 programme. The grant enabled the Charity to accelerate employment support across its client base.

Inspira supported 600 individuals through group delivery made possible by PPE equipment and further modifications to their delivery centres to make them COVID secure, with online courses delivered via a virtual training room.

Focusing on recruitment demand, Inspira worked with companies supplying security personnel at COVID-19 testing sites, secure sites and Covid Marshalls at hospitals around Cumbria, ensuring participants had SIA qualifications and were ready for the workplace.

While vacancies in the care sector, supermarkets, food manufacturing, distribution, and logistics, were helped to be filled through people attending online courses and workshops.

To ensure people without broadband at home weren't disadvantaged, Inspira also created digital pods in each delivery centre so that they could access online training where necessary. Inspira also developed and delivered two pilot programmes - one for people looking to move into self-employment and another for graduates who found themselves unemployed after finishing university due to the impact of COVID on usual graduate recruitment.

Through the Barclays' donation, we were able to respond quickly and be flexible to accommodate the immediate situation.





## Engagement in the community

### Blackpool Opportunity Area

Inspira is heavily engaged in the local communities where the Charity operates. Working to improve opportunities for young people and adults, such as in the Blackpool Opportunity Area. Inspira focuses on understanding the issues and connecting the players who can make a difference.

As part of the Charity's employer engagement work during the pandemic, Inspira held a Blackpool Innovation and Impact Event to connect Cornerstone Employers and local Careers Leaders.

Cornerstone Employers work with networks of schools and colleges to improve careers education. They make certain key skills for their sector are understood by teachers and education leaders, inspire students, champion jobs in their local area, and have a direct route into potential new employees living on their doorstep.

The event aimed to connect partners to strengthen relationships and understanding, hoping this would lead to innovative thinking on how best to help prepare young people for the world of work.

During COVID-19, Cornerstone Employer prioritised supporting Benchmarks 5 and 6, developing virtual employer encounters and virtual workplace experiences. The meeting gave each Cornerstone representative five minutes to talk about their offer as an employer and reason for being a Cornerstone.

The offer was well received by Careers Leaders. It is hoped the long-term impact will be the development of a careers programme utilising the local offer from Cornerstone Employers to drive and sustain benchmark achievements.



## Engagement in the community

### Donating laptops

When the UK went into lockdown, it became apparent that some young people were falling behind in their studies. Consequently, schools were appealing to local people and businesses to donate laptops for school pupils who were learning from home.

In Cumbria, the Cumbria Alliance of System Leaders (CASL) which brings together senior school leaders from around the County, issued an appeal. Research by schools showed that around 1500 children and young people in Cumbria did not have access to the IT equipment they needed to participate in home learning fully.

The research found that some young people were working on a smartphone or tablet; some shared one computer between siblings, while others had no access.

Inspira's IT Manager Chris Latta thought it would be good to respond to the appeal and donate the Charity's unwanted laptops.

Working with his team, the IT Department ensured the donated laptops were fully functional, met the minimum specification, and wiped all the data before donation.

In total, Inspira donated thirteen laptops to Skelton Primary School in Penrith.



## Personal development programmes

### Joe Philipson, Inspira Adviser

The National Citizen Service, NCS, has been regarded as *the* youth movement in England, seeing thousands of young people depart on outdoor adventures each summer to learn new skills and things about themselves they never knew.

However, the pandemic changed the playing field; with new rules in place, such as the rule of six, social distancing, and wearing masks, NCS had to adapt.

For Joe Philipson, who had been within the NCS world for many years and knew the programme inside and out, delivering NCS during the pandemic became a very different experience.

"I found delivering NCS in the middle of a pandemic challenged me in ways I never imagined; it was like I was back on the programme all those years ago.

In between lockdowns, we delivered the programme face-to-face, with additional safety measures. Still, we also did some online delivery, which, again, was a brand-new challenge. I certainly learned a lot which I will take forward in my future work.

NCS during COVID brought people together at a dark time in our history and gave them a common purpose. It was fantastic to be a part of that, and I really enjoyed supporting young people to engage in social action and take a little bit of control in a world that was, well, out of control."



## Personal development programmes

### Keep Doing Good, an overview

Between July and December, approximately 1000 young people in Cumbria, Lancashire and Northumberland were inspired into action by the challenges faced in our communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a fantastic effort, the young people contributed towards a total of over 8,000 hours of voluntary work and social action projects. Nation-wide there was a target of one million hours of volunteering and social action.

When lockdown came into effect, many young people in Cumbria, Lancashire and Northumbria were looking for ways to step up and support their local communities. However, research from the National Citizen Service (NCS) showed that nearly half (44%) of 16-17-year-olds didn't know how to get involved to help.

Due to COVID-19, the usual structure of NCS was changed to being COVID safe,

but still enabling young people to come together and do good in the summer and autumn.

Getting involved in a huge variety of sustainable and meaningful projects, the young people cleaned up parks and community gardens, picked up litter on beaches and in woodland, helped charity shops with their post-COVID donations and raised money for local causes across the Inspira delivery areas.

When schools returned in September, Inspira continued to offer support through NCS as part of the School Support Programme delivering programmes and activities for 16 - 17-year-olds directly through their schools and colleges.

The initiative enabled schools and colleges to pick thematic sessions which helped young people with well-being, employability and post COVID socialisation.



## Our people

With a large percentage of Inspira staff delivering face-to-face individual and group work, COVID-19 and the lockdown presented a challenge the Charity had not experienced before.

Noting the direction of travel, the senior leadership team took a proactive approach to establishing plans to meet staff and clients' needs.

Establishing a robust internal communication process was paramount to ensure the entire Inspira team were kept informed and felt included as circumstances rapidly changed.

When the stay-at-home notice was issued, IT equipment was dispatched, and the Inspira team become mobile, shifting their delivery online and working collaboratively across the two counties.

To support the team in their interactions with clients and their own mental health and personal circumstances at home, Inspira reinforced their well-being strategy with weekly Chief Exec video updates and regular guides to working from home – delivered through the internal communications platform Yammer.

Regular check-ins occurred with furloughed staff, and many took the opportunity to undertake training opportunities such as gaining their Level 4 and 6 in CIAG.

Adapting to digital was a step-change for the Inspira team, but they met the challenge head-on and successfully.

While the pandemic was a difficult time, there were positive impacts, collaboration, and a real sense of community and support.

In our staff survey (December 2020) 100% of respondents said that the Charity had responded well to the challenges presented by COVID-19.

## Our partnerships

We collaborate and work in partnership to deliver a range of services to help people develop their employability skills.

We have partnerships to deliver contracts such as the National Citizen Service with the National Citizen Service Trust and the National Careers Service with The Growth Company and The Education Development Trust.

The Charity works hard to develop and sustain productive partnerships. We work closely with both County Councils, unitary authorities and district councils across both the Cumbria and Lancashire Local Enterprise Partnership footprints. This involves both contractual and non-contractual work.

We work with schools and colleges, Pupil Referral Units and Multi Academy Trusts to deliver outcomes to young people in varied educational settings.

The trustees regularly review the Charity's approach to stakeholder engagement and to deliver maximum impact to its beneficiaries.

**Cumbria County Council**

**Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership**

**NCS Trust**

**The Growth Company**

**Careers and Enterprise Co**

**Lancashire County Council**

**Education Development Trust**

**DWP**

**Education & Skills Funding Agency**

**Lancashire Local Enterprise Partnership**

**Barclays Bank**

**Re:Vision**

**Copeland Community Fund**

**Copeland Borough Council**

# Our financial sustainability



Despite the complex funding and operating environment, Inspira is able to grow and deliver increased public benefit. We will expand our reach across the Northwest, building on the opportunities and the focus to 'build back better'.

The impact of COVID-19 on turnover during 2020/21 was significant with revenue lost. However through very close management and growth of other income streams, a healthy operating profit was achieved.

The trustees will ensure that the Charity continues to benefit the public by providing strong governance, they meet at least six times a year and the Chair is a non-executive chosen by the trustees. As well as overseeing the financial sustainability, the trustees scrutinise key elements of the Charity's operations including Health and Safety, Safeguarding, workforce and social value. The Senior Management Team will continue to provide strong management to deliver much needed services.