

# NOW

## Social Return on Investment N.Ireland | 2024 - 2025

NOW Group is an award-winning social enterprise based in Dublin and Belfast. We work with people and businesses to unlock potential and transform lives across the island of Ireland. We help people who are neurodiverse, autistic or have a learning difficulty by supporting them into jobs with a future.

[www.nowgroup.org](http://www.nowgroup.org)

We're a **JAM Card**  
**Friendly** **Business**

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**Abbreviations Used**

- Belfast Health and Social Care Trust – BHSCT
- Corporate Social Responsibility – CSR
- Department for Communities – DfC
- Department for the Economy - DFE
- Education Office - EO
- Education Other Than At School - EOTAS
- European Social Fund – ESF
- Family Service – FS
- Further Education - FE
- Health & Social Care – HSC
- Health & Social Care Trust – HSCT
- Housing Associations' Charitable Trust - HACT
- Net Promoter Score – NPS
- Northern Health & Social Care Trust – NHSCT
- Northern Ireland – NI
- Review of Public Administration – RPA
- Social Return on Investment – SROI
- South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust – SEHSCT
- Southern Health & Social Care Trust – SHSCT
- Together Building United Communities - TBUC
- Ulster University - UU
- Western Health & Social Care Trust - WHSCT

# OBA Card - Northern Ireland

## HOW MUCH DID WE DO?

- ❖ 2044 participants supported across all services.
- ❖ 352 new jobs secured.
- ❖ 14 digital jobs secured.
- ❖ 46 employment academies completed.
- ❖ 140 families supported.
- ❖ 292 participants supported across 13 social activity groups.
- ❖ 76 participants supported across Now Connects programmes.
- ❖ 82 participant placements in Loaf
- ❖ 26 volunteers delivered 2307 hours.
- ❖ 1068 participants received Safeguarding awareness training.
- ❖ 82 employees supported the Workable contract.
- ❖ 18 new JAM Card and 5 new strategic partners.

## HOW WELL DID WE DO IT?

- ❖ 82% (n=289) of jobs sustained for more than six months.
- ❖ 1768 accreditations achieved by participants.
- ❖ 3165 soft skills courses completed.
- ❖ 26% progression from Now Connects to Employment.
- ❖ 1349 Family Support hours purchased by HSCT's.
- ❖ 90% of employment programme participants are making progress in at least one outcome area.
- ❖ 100% of employers feel that working with NOW Group improved staff attitudes to people with a disability.
- ❖ 99% of participants rated NOW Group support as very good or good.

## WHAT DIFFERENCE DID WE MAKE?

- ❖ 1942 participants had improved life and career opportunities.
- ❖ 1595 participants experienced improved health and well-being.
- ❖ 1737 participants reported feeling more independent.
- ❖ 1471 participants felt more motivated and ambitious.
- ❖ Over £2 million disposable income for the 352 participants in paid employment.
- ❖ 1962 parents/carers had reduced anxiety and more respite for self-care.
- ❖ 140 parents with a disability became more resilient to the pressures of parenting.
- ❖ Staff in 3022 JAM Card Friendly businesses improved their workplace attitudes to employees with learning difficulties.
- ❖ Health and Social Care Trusts saved over £1 million through reduced day care, family support and crisis interventions.
- ❖ £700,000 saved in reduced benefit payments.
- ❖ For every £1 invested in NOW Group services, £23 was generated in social value.
- ❖ 42% of the social value generated was for NOW Group participants with 24% for their families.
- ❖ 22 outcomes across six stakeholder groups (NOW Group Participants, Families, JAM Card Users, Employers, Health & Social Care Trusts, & Department for Communities)
- ❖ The average number of outcome areas in which participants made progress was 3.4

# Section 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

This report sets out a Social Return on Investment (SROI) Study of NOW Group’s work in Northern Ireland for the 2024-25 financial year.

## 1.2 Report Structure

This report is framed around the stages of SROI methodology.

- Section 1: Introduction
- Section 2: Methodology
- Section 3: NOW Group Stakeholders
- Section 4: Mapping & Evidencing Outcomes
- Section 5: Calculating the SROI
- Section 6: Discussion & Learning

The report is supplemented by a ‘value map,’ which is an Excel spreadsheet containing all the calculations necessary to determine the social return which has been shared with NOW Group.

## 1.3 About NOW Group

NOW Group’s mission is to support people with learning difficulties and autism into jobs with a future. It engages with participants to identify hurdles and co-design innovative solutions to maximise opportunities for employment while challenging societal perceptions and prejudices. NOW Group has developed a service continuum offering provision to any participant who wants to secure a job regardless of their ability or background. Their employment teams are focused on progression for all to meet their work aspirations. Employer engagement, relationship building, workplace training and mediation with employers have been key to success. Their Career Progression Model consists of 5 components, encompassing Potential, Proficiency, Professionalism, Practical Experience, and Positions secured and sustained.

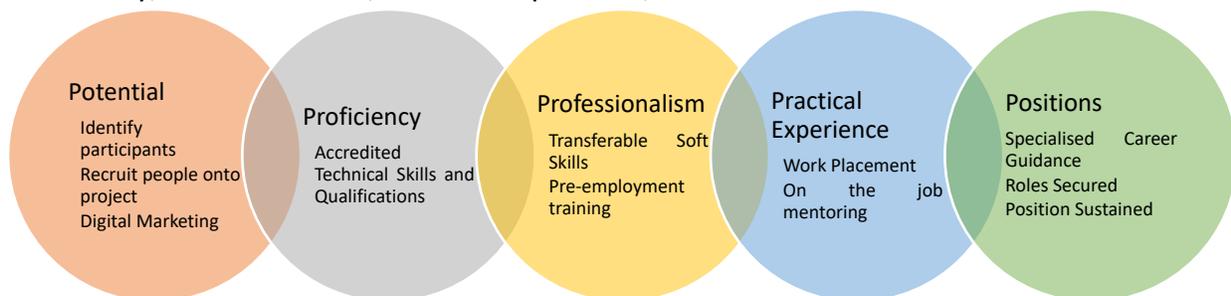


Figure 1: NOW Group Participant Career Progression Model

### 1.3.1 NOW Group Northern Ireland Sites

NOW Group Northern Ireland (NI) services are delivered across several sites including the Hive which is the organisation's headquarters in Belfast City Centre and premises in Omagh, Enniskillen and L/Derry. It manages Loaf Catering, an outside catering business serving the Belfast area and has three physical outlets at The Bobbin in Belfast City Hall, Loaf Café, and Bakery on Grosvenor Road in Belfast. Handmade pottery is created at Loaf Pottery in Crawfordsburn, and this site also holds events. NOW Group is responsible for the JAM Card – a physical card or app that allows people with a hidden disability to tell others that they need a little time and patience in a simple and discreet way.

### 1.3.2 Funders

NOW Group's core mission is achieved through key programme initiatives and co-produced services which are sustained through contracts, government programmes and charitable funding enhanced by revenue generated through social enterprise activity. Funders of NOW Group NI services include: the United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), Department for the Economy (DfE), Department for Communities (DfC), the National Lottery Community Fund, Arts Council NI, Public Health Agency, Education Authority, Henry Smith Charity, Ards & North Down Borough Council, Derry & Strabane District Council, Fermanagh & Omagh District Council, Mid & East Antrim Borough Council, and the Belfast, Northern and Western Health and Social Care Trusts.

### 1.3.3 User Involvement

The people that NOW Group support have barriers to employment and learning including all levels of learning difficulty and learning disability, autism, and neurodiverse conditions. They help the organisation plan and shape its work to meet their needs and keep NOW Group focused on making a real difference to the lives of those who use their services. User involvement in service design and delivery has facilitated the development of pathways from volunteering through to training and employment and on-going supports to ensure such progression can be sustained.

### 1.3.4 Continuous Improvement

Commitment to continuous improvement within the framework of the balanced business scorecard underpins all NOW Group activities. The Board members agree the high-level organisational scorecard which is then cascaded to individual services who devise their own scorecards. Scorecard pillars are participant, employer, customer, and operational excellence with key performance indicators identified and tracked for each pillar. In 2024, NOW Group transitioned to a new strategic scorecard cycle up to 2027.

### 1.3.5 Sustainable Development Goals

NOW Group's 2024-27 scorecard includes an objective to audit their work against SDG Goals 4, 8, 10 and 12 within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Framework.



Figure 2: UN Sustainable Goals

In addition to the hybrid working model for staff to reduce travel and associated emissions, NOW Group is committed to other environmental initiatives namely:

- Maintaining a 'no single use' plastic policy across social enterprise businesses.
- Measuring and reducing Carbon Footprint through an annual Carbon reduction plan.
- Implementation of a food waste policy across all catering sites.

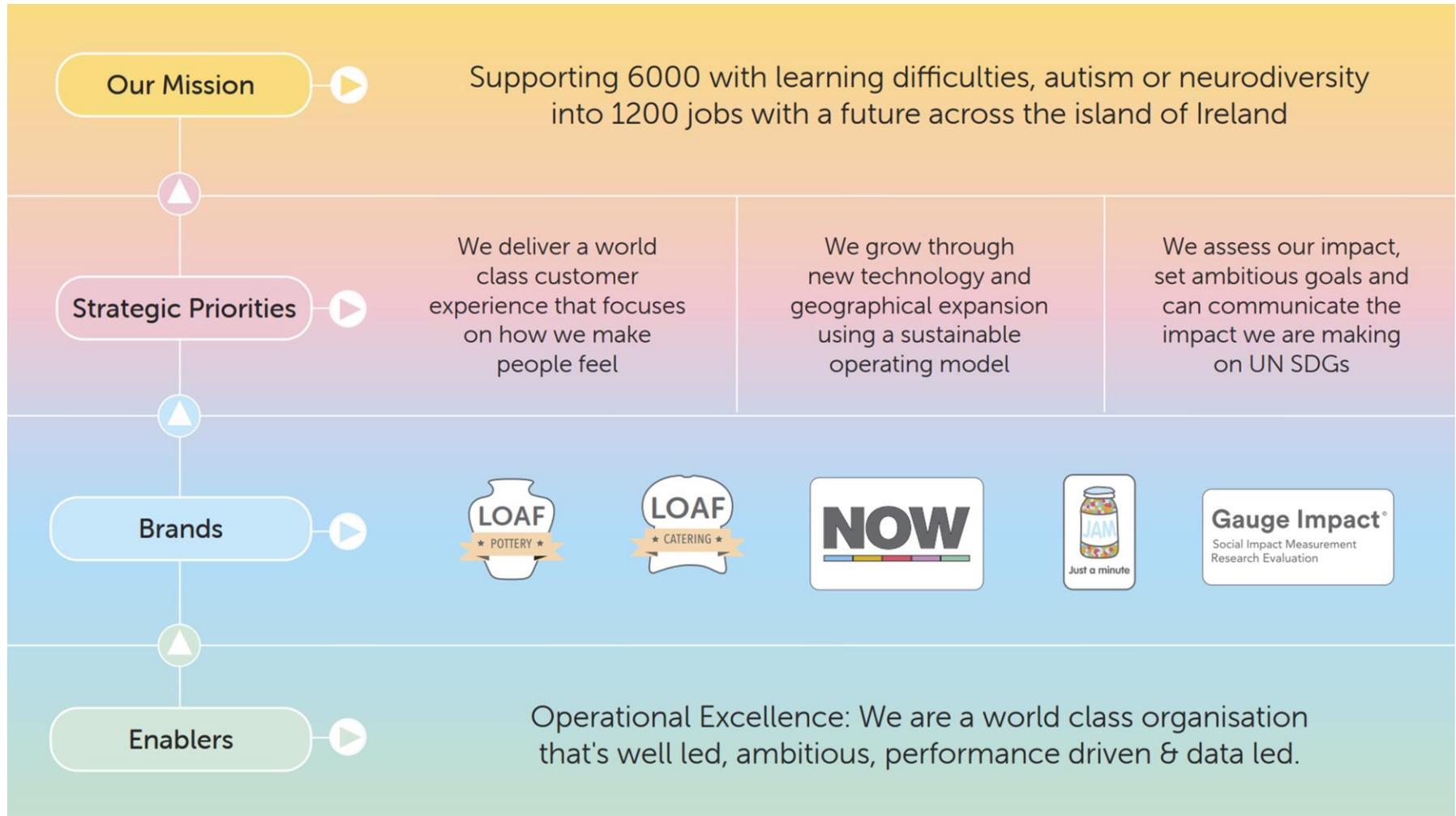


Figure 3: NOW Group Mission & Values

## Section 2: Methodology

### 2.1 Introduction

This section sets out the methodology to deliver the terms of reference for the study actioned in the period May to August 2025.

### 2.2 Data Collection

A mixed method approach was adopted for data collection, capturing both quantitative and qualitative and included.

- The Outcome Star measurement tools results for 418 people who accessed NOW Group's services in 2024-25. (SkillSET 268, Family Service 80, NOW Connects 70)
- Survey completed by 293 participants and by a further 50 participants upon exiting the training and employment service.
- Survey completed by 74 Social Group participants.
- Survey completed by 31 families supported by the NOW Family Service.
- Survey completed by 27 Parents/Carers.
- Survey completed by 757 JAM card users.
- Survey completed by 11 JAM card businesses/organisations.
- Surveys from 21 organisations/businesses who employ people that are supported by NOW Group.
- Focus group discussions with three organisations/businesses who employ people that are supported by NOW Group.
- Semi-structured 1-1 discussions with three senior teachers in EOTAS<sup>1</sup>.

### 2.3 Limitations for Data Collection & Analysis

The study had limitations. It lacks verification from clinical professionals of changes in the outcome areas of wellbeing. The study did not have a control group to validate the attribution rate which may have reduced its ability to clearly establish how much of the outcome was due to interventions other than those delivered by NOW Group. The surveys used are part of the NOW Group suite disseminated annually to stakeholders and major on measuring customer satisfaction and retention with some focus on outcomes and impact.

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<sup>1</sup> Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) makes educational provision for children with social, emotional behavioural, medical, or other issues who, without its provision, cannot access suitable education.

## 2.4 Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis was conducted using thematic approaches<sup>2</sup>. Categories were developed, coded, and reduced. Survey data, researchers' observations and thematic data from interviews was cross referenced to identify emergent themes. The Ethical Guidelines of the Social Research Association were also followed throughout<sup>3</sup>.

## 2.5 Stages of SROI

The methodology for this study is underpinned by the six stages of SROI evaluation.

Stage	Details
<b>Establishing scope and stakeholders</b>	It is important to have clear boundaries about what the SROI analysis will cover, who will be involved in the process and how.
<b>Mapping outcomes</b>	Through engaging with stakeholders, an impact map is developed or theory of change, which shows the relationship between inputs, outputs, and outcomes.
<b>Evidencing outcomes and giving them a value</b>	This stage involves finding data to show whether outcomes have happened and then valuing them.
<b>Establishing impact</b>	Having collected evidence on outcomes and monetised them, those aspects of change that would have happened anyway or are a result of other factors are eliminated from consideration.
<b>Calculating the SROI</b>	This stage involves adding up all the benefits, subtracting any negatives, and comparing the result to the investment. This is also where the sensitivity of the results can be tested.
<b>Reporting, using, and embedding</b>	Easily forgotten, this vital last step involves sharing findings with stakeholders and responding to them, embedding good outcomes processes, and verifying the report.

Table 1: Stages of SROI

<sup>2</sup> Lewis-Beck, M. S., Bryman, A. & Liao, T. F. (Eds.) (2004). *The SAGE encyclopaedia of social science research methods (Vols. 1-3)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications

<sup>3</sup> <https://the-sra.org.uk/SRA/About/SRA/About/About.aspx?hkey=3094d216-f6ea-412b-8a28-42087d2929b5>

## Section 3: NOW Group Stakeholders

### 3.1 Introduction

This section will establish the scope of NOW Group's SROI study and identify the stakeholders who are material<sup>4</sup> to the analysis.

### 3.2 Scope of Study

The scope of the study (what is covered) includes the entirety of the activities delivered by NOW Group in Northern Ireland in the period April 2024 to March 2025. This includes training, employment, family, and community services in addition to volunteer, social and community support. During this period, a total of 2044 participants were supported by all NOW Group services across Northern Ireland an increase of 25% from the 2023-24 year.

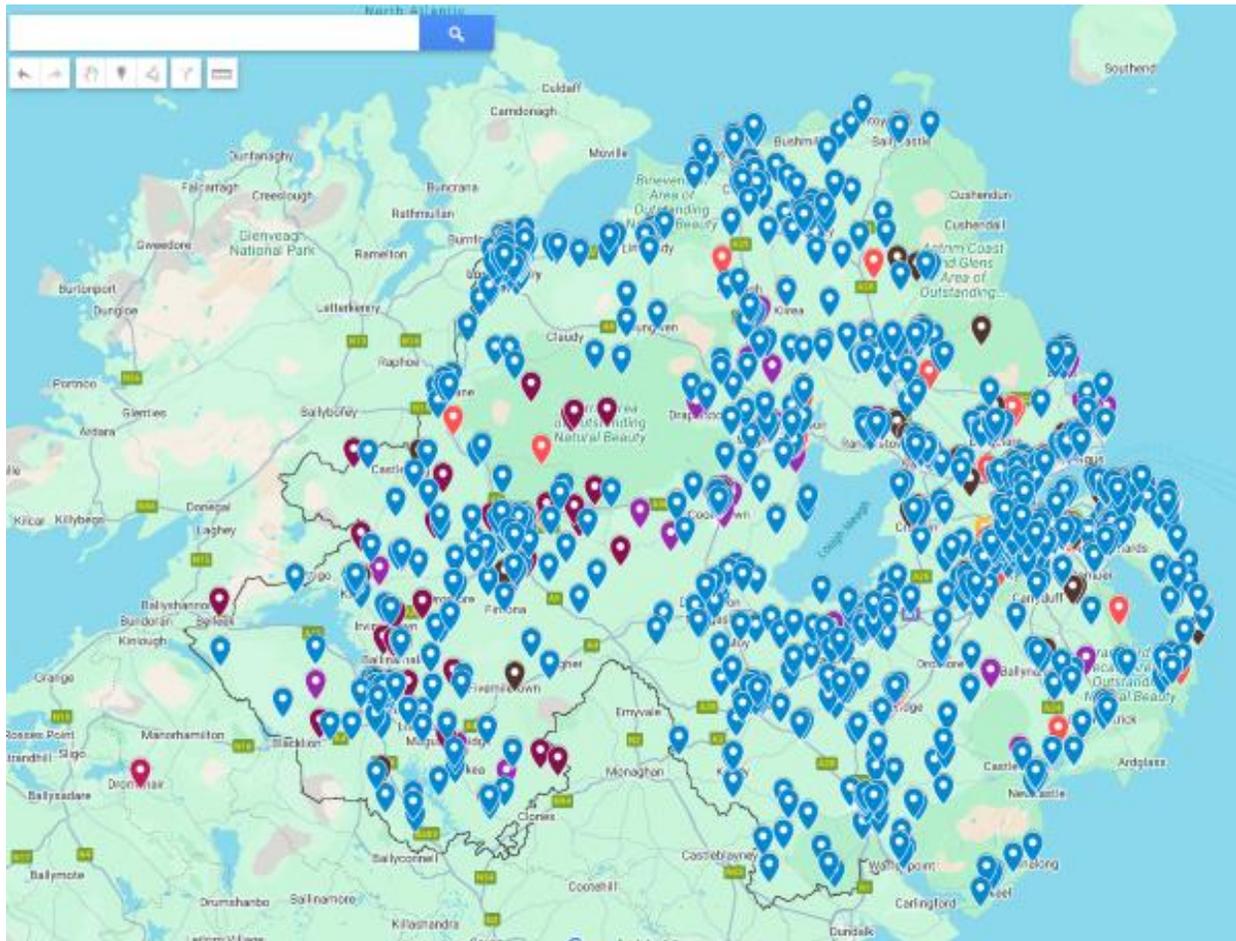


Figure 4: NOW Group Participant location 2024-25

<sup>4</sup> Materiality in SROI relates to the importance/significance of the change experienced by an individual or organisation resulting from a service or intervention.

### 3.3 Stakeholder Analysis

Appendix 1 lists all the stakeholders considered, the potential changes they might undergo as a result of NOW Group services and supports and the reasons for including or excluding them in the study. This list was co-produced with NOW Group staff and refined as new information, context and perspectives emerged during the course of the assignment. Stakeholders were selected for inclusion on the basis of level of engagement with services and materiality<sup>5</sup>. Considerations in respect of access to outcome data and potential social value were also made for stakeholder inclusion.

It is evident that service users are the primary stakeholder of NOW Group. The stakeholder analysis references a range of desired outcomes for service users encompassing personal development, employability, participation in society and health and well-being. Family outcomes are also included both from the perspective of the parents whose children are accessing services and for those families engaging directly with NOW Group Family Service. Employer outcomes such as changes in workplace attitudes and practice in relation to employees with learning difficulties are prominent, as are the benefits of being JAM Card Friendly such as enhanced Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and improved customer engagement.

The savings in welfare costs for the Department for Communities through more people with a disability sustaining in employment merit inclusion and calculation. Schools and colleges and local councils are stakeholders deemed to be material but challenges remain in terms of accessing data. The contribution of NOW Group services to reduced costs for Health & Social Care Trusts in terms of reduced daycare, residential and crisis interventions is included in the calculations and explored in subsequent sections. Among the stakeholders not included due to a combination of the potential for double counting and absence of impact data are NOW Group Strategic Partners, Volunteers and Local Council.

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<sup>5</sup> The extent to which the change is relevant or significant

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## Section 4: Evidencing & Valuing Outcomes

### 4.1 Introduction

This section explores the available data to evidence the outcomes that occurred for which stakeholder group as per Appendix 1.

### 4.2 NOW Group Participants

NOW Group supported 2044 participants through the services listed in Appendix 2. The following subsections provide further insights into the outputs and outcomes achieved by these services in 2024-25.

#### 4.2.1 Employment and Training

SkillSET<sup>6</sup> is NOW Group's main Employment & Training programme delivering specialised pre-employment training and academies; matching participants to job aspirations; supporting on-job mentoring; and creating sustainable employment opportunities for people disengaged from traditional learning or job seeking approaches. NOW Group has an established regional team working with an array of referral agents, including government Job & Benefits Offices, community organisations, FE Colleges, and parent networks to identify potential participants and recruit them to their programme. NOW Group can target specific profile groups including people from areas of high deprivation, low employment rates and those who are economically inactive.

In 2024-25, 352 jobs were secured (256 in 2023-24) for NOW Group participants with 82% of these sustained for 6 months or more. 1768 internal accreditations were achieved with 3165 soft skills modules completed. 46 Employment Academies in Tourism, ICT, Data Analytics & Cyber Security were delivered. Workable (NI), administered by Department for Communities (DfC), is a flexible programme which assists people with disabilities to return to work or remain in their current job of at least 10 hours/week or more. In 2024-25 NOW Group's Employment Team supported 82 employees to sustain their respective employment through funding from the Workable (NI) contract.

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<sup>6</sup> Funded by the United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)

This study was able to access data from the Outcome Star measurement tool for a sample of 268 SkillSET participants in 2024-25. This tool enables service users to input data with guidance from their key worker capturing progression or regression in seven outcome areas (see below) that are critical in building capacity to access and sustain the labour market.

1. Job Skills and Experience
2. Aspiration and Motivation
3. Job Search Skills
4. Stability
5. Basic Skills
6. Workplace and Social Skills
7. Health and Well Being

Our analysis of the Outcome Star data from the Skillset sample of 268 found that:

- 90% of participants made progress in at least one of the above outcome areas
- 64% of participants made progress in at least two of the above outcome areas
- 48% of participants made progress in at least three of the above outcome areas
- The average number of outcome areas in which participants made progress was 2.7

#### 4.2.2 NOW Connects

NOW Connects are individualised pre-employment learning sessions for participants who are furthest from the labour market but who have the aspiration to work. The programmes focus primarily on independence and confidence building with health and well-being interventions also included. Service provision is determined by participant need, which can range from intensive daily support to attendance at specific sessions which map to individual progression.

The programmes are delivered at NOW Group's Hives based in Belfast, Fermanagh, and Omagh. They provide a varied and engaging curriculum, and the Community Team has developed resources that maintain engagement with participants while encouraging progression into employment programmes. The Community Team also engages with the participants' parents and carers providing information sessions and reassurance at times of change for the people they care for.

NOW Group's community-based provision includes NOW Connects programmes in Belfast Health & Social Care Trust (BHSCT) and Western Health & Social Care Trust (WHSC), volunteering and student placement and social groups across Northern Ireland. NOW Group's community projects supported participants to develop life skills, make new friends, and build connections. 292 people took part in the social groups, 76 people availed of community day opportunities in BHSCT and WHSC. 73 participant placement sessions took place at Loaf. NOW Group engaged 26 volunteers in 2024-25 who delivered 2307 volunteer hours. An additional 761 hours of voluntary work was delivered by participants in roles outside the NOW Group.

The annual progression rate from NOW Connects to NOW Employment in 2024-25 of 26% (22% in 2023-24) is notable, demonstrating the impact of NOW Connects in building the skills and capacity of participants to become job ready. The impact of NOW Group community programmes is captured through the Life Outcome Star tool which tracks progression in ten areas (see below) that contribute to building independence and life skills.

1. Health
2. How participants spend their time
3. Being Responsible
4. Being Safe
5. Money and Letters
6. Living Skills
7. Communicating
8. Feeling Good
9. People You Know
10. Mental Health and Other Conditions

Our analysis of the Life Outcome Star data from the NOW Community sample of 70 found that:

- 83% of participants made progress in at least one of the above outcome areas
- 61% of participants made progress in at least two of the above outcome areas
- 44% of participants made progress in at least three of the above outcome areas
- The average number of outcome areas in which participants made progress was 2.9

#### 4.2.3 Family Service (FS)

NOW Group's Family Service is a unique provision in Northern Ireland which supports the emerging population of families where there is a new or expectant parent with a learning difficulty or autism. This service supports individuals to take control of their family life, increases their parenting skills, and provides them with accessible information to make informed decisions. This service provides support through all aspects of parenting from play, communication, and learning to supporting participants to navigate statutory or medical services. The Family Service offers support which is valued by the parents and allows them the freedom to explore their potential without the fear of being judged. Building resilience and confidence increases their integration within their community as a family.

In 2024-25 the FS supported 140 families across Northern Ireland with practical advice and support on a range of parenting skills. The Family Service team delivered 2940 (1964 in 2023-24) one to one sessions with families. 30 parents were also referred to NOW Group's employment and training programmes. The FS team facilitated 424 hours of group support including weekly kids' groups, monthly parent evenings, and day trips with 160 attendances in total. 23 families completed parenting programmes with 9 families completing more than one. The impact of NOW FS is tracked through the Outcome Star Family Plus which captures progression in 10 outcome areas (see below) that assist towards positive and cohesive family life.

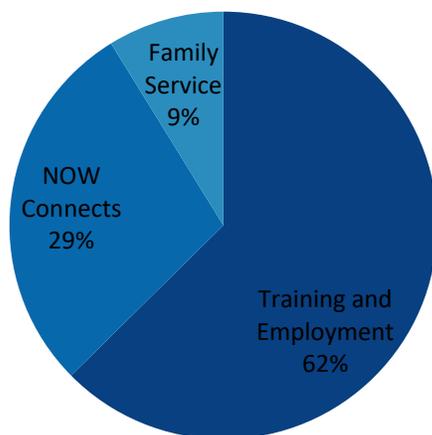
1. Children's Health
2. How I feel
3. My Child's Emotions
4. Keeping My Children Safe
5. Friends and Community
6. My Children Learning
7. My Children's Behaviour
8. Family Routine
9. Home & Money
10. Work

Our analysis of the Outcome Star Family Plus data from a sample of 80 FS participants found that:

- 95% of participants made progress in at least one outcome area
- 90% of participants made progress in at least two outcome areas
- 76% of participants made progress in at least three outcome areas
- Average number of Outcome Star areas in which participants made progress was - 4.5

Progression by 61% of the Outcome Star sample in home and money is noteworthy. Parents reported an increased understanding of parental rights and entitlements citing improvements in managing housing issues, financial affairs, and benefit entitlements. There was also progression for parents in understanding their children's behaviour, emotions, and learning. The cumulative benefit of progression in the 10 Family Star areas is best illustrated for the four families (one in 2023-24) supported by NOW Group who were de-registered from child protection services in 2024-25. This enhances family relationships and cohesion, keeping families together where possible and achieves a significant cost saving for the HSCTs through reduced foster and residential care costs.

#### 4.2.4 Participant Feedback



To further evidence the difference made by NOW Group, this section will discuss the findings from a survey completed by 293 participants from across all NOW Group services. 62% (n=182) participated in training and employment programmes with 29% (n=85) from NOW Connects and 9% (26) from the Family Service

- 98% (n=287) said they were 'happy' or 'very happy' with the support they received from the NOW Group.
- 99% (n=292) said the support they received from their key worker was 'good' or 'very good'
- 89% (n=260) would recommend NOW Group to others

Quotations directly from the survey respondents articulating how NOW Group had made a difference to their lives are presented below.

“Before starting with the Now Group, I had really poor mental health and lacked confidence. During my time with them both of those have improved greatly. I've been highly appreciative of every opportunity the Now Group has given me.”

Now Group has provided me with opportunities to develop new skills in IT and computing such as cybersecurity, data analysis, programming, digital media, and social media. These skills build upon my existing skills and experience and are relevant in the modern world. I have had opportunities to challenge myself which have made me realise that I can do more than I previously thought. This in turn has helped boost my confidence ”.

“NOW group has opened a new chapter in my life and a fresh start of my Journey to getting a job and help and support. It's allowed me to get more experience and preparation for going into a work place, it's also allowed me to expand and improve my skills that could be beneficial in the workplace ”

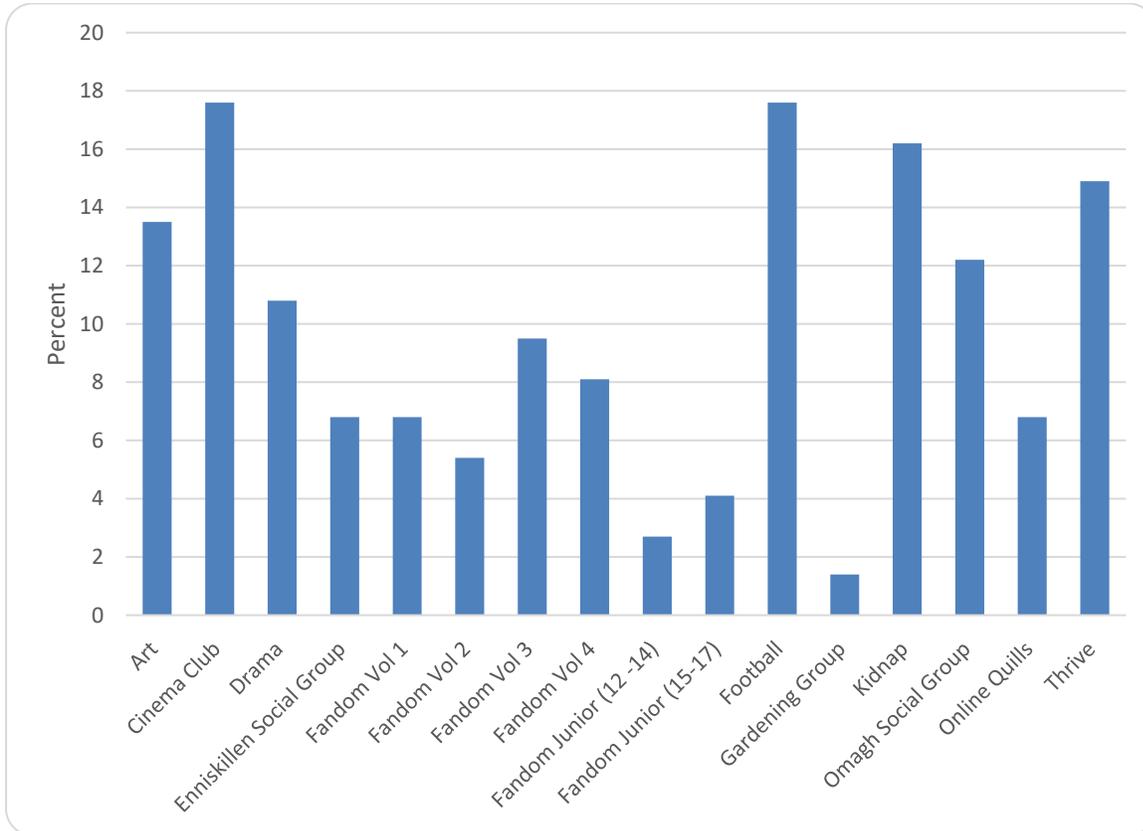
“NOW Group has given me opportunities to develop skills and earn certifications that would otherwise be difficult to access without prior employment, and given me a space to socialise with similarly neurodivergent people to better understand our struggles with and motivations towards finding work”

“The NOW group helped me find an opportunity over summer to volunteer in the ARC HLC, Irvinestown, which has now turned into part time cover work in a childcare position and hopefully paid fulltime work in the future”

“My daughter has made a lot of new friends and actually involves herself in conversations with others, she enjoys everything about thrive, the staff r fabulous and have great way with the young adults just great all round I feel very secure as a parent leaving my daughter, she love the activities that r planned the game nights the quizzes, she looks forward to it every week”

### 4.3 Social Group

74 attendees at the various NOW Social Groups listed below completed a survey.



- 97% (n=72) were happy or very happy with the support they received from the NOW Group, with 98% (n=73) rating the support as good or very good.
- 96% (n=71) felt that the social activities improved their confidence.
- 96% (n=71) felt that the social activities enhanced their communication skills.
- 95% (n=70) felt that the social activities enhanced their social skills

” Every Monday, attending the drama sessions at NOW Group is an absolute joy. The vibrant atmosphere and the friendly faces I encounter make it a highlight of my week. The warmth and welcoming nature of the staff have truly made me feel like part of a community, and I always look forward to being a part of this wonderful group.”

#### 4.4 Parents/Carers & Siblings

Reduced stress and anxiety (96%), improved communication with family members (88%), the benefit of peer support (57%) and having more free time (72%) were among the main outcomes to emerge from the questionnaire survey completed by 27 parents/carers of those who access supports from NOW Group. 73% of respondents felt that their son/daughter was more independent through support from the NOW Group such as, managing money, making decisions, travelling more independently, and making healthy choices.

84% and 73% respectively identified improved social skills and health and wellbeing as evident benefits to their son/daughter from participation at NOW Group. 96% would recommend NOW Group. The corollary of such positive outcomes for both the parent and their son/daughter includes improved relationships within the family and greater resilience as a family unit.

“The NOW Group has had such a positive impact on my son and therefore the family as a whole. My son has become more confident in his every day life, he has become more independent and likes to use the new skills he has acquired around the home and when out and about. It has also had a positive impact on his mental health, and he looks forward to attending every week”

“Since starting in September The NOW staff have made great efforts in managing my daughter’s needs easing the anxieties of settling into new environment. She is becoming more comfortable and confident, and we appreciate their care and understanding of the importance of this. My daughter is much more confident less anxious and enjoying everything on offer to her ”

Other themes emerging from the consultations with parents included:

- High level of satisfaction with NOW Group services and staff – ‘exceptional’ and ‘very, very good.’ Staff described as ‘special people with a person-centred approach.’
- Recognisable progression for their young adults – securing and sustaining employment, increased confidence in social settings, asking for things in shops, using public transport, enhanced social engagement and improved money management. More progress than many parents ‘would have thought possible.’

Ideas for improvements included extension of the social enterprise model to provide employment opportunities for participants in Omagh.

*“We would really like to see the NOW Group be able to extend the social enterprise model. We feel that the staff through their present provision have good knowledge of the capabilities and interests of our young people, and it would be great if they were in a funding position to provide ventures for them in to be able to work in areas like social cafe, gardening, craft etc. . We as a community of parents know that this needs substantial commitment of funding but at present such opportunities in Omagh are very limited.”*

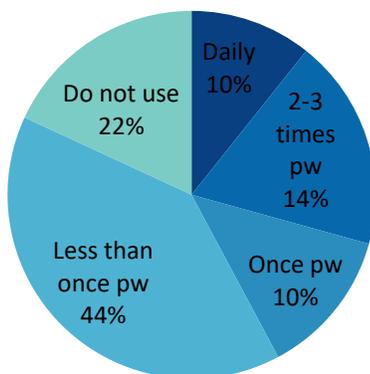
### 4.5 JAM Card

The Just A Minute (JAM) card and app developed by NOW Group participants in 2012 is an inclusion and accessibility tool that allows people to ask for a minute of patience in any social situation. Those with a communication barrier are often reluctant or unable to tell others about their condition. JAM Card allows this to happen in a simple, effective non-verbal manner. As of April 2025, there were 168,000 Jam Cards in circulation and 15,939 Apps worldwide. Table 2 documents the key JAM Card NI outputs for the 2024-25 year which demonstrates continued growth in terms of both end user and organisational interface.

Total JAM Cards provided in NI	2,384
Total JAM Cards provided in other parts of the UK	3,337
New Strategic Partners	5
New JAM Card Partners	18

Table 2: JAM Card 2024-25

#### 4.5.1 Feedback from JAM Card Users



A survey distributed to Jam Card users generated 757 responses. 85% (n=639) preferred the plastic JAM Card with 15% (n=111) preferring the App. 10% (n=76) used it every day while 14% (n= 107) said that they were using their JAM Card 2-3 times per week with 10% (n=76) using it weekly. Therefore 34% (n=257) use the JAM Card or App at least once per week.

22% of the sample (n=166) have not used the JAM Card in the past year. Further segmentation of this provides a rationale as to why this was the case.

- 19% indicated that they haven't seen any JAM Card friendly places where they could use it, while 13% had tried to use it but the staff in the shop/venue did not recognize it.
- 17% reported that they have just not had the reason or need to use the JAM card.
- 11% had forgotten they had the JAM Card or kept forgetting to bring it out with them.
- 10% highlighted that they are still not sure how it works or how it can help them.
- 9% had applied for a JAM Card for someone else and therefore were never intending to use it themselves.

51% (n=384) of the sample agreed that the JAM Card or app has made it easier for them to speak to staff in shops or other businesses. This figure increases when asked if using a JAM Card has made them more confident (53% n= 395) and had a positive impact on their life (59% n=435).

"I use the JAM Card for my son, he is 12 but it's great to have as people see it and have a bit more understanding and patience and I also feel confident when he has it on every time we go out"

"Made transactions at the tills easier I'm more confident using cash now. Helps assistants understand my needs, easing my fears of getting tongue tied and anxious. It's just so discreet. no fuss, staff have patience and happy to show kindness"

74% of respondents (n=551) agree with the statement 'I am more likely to use a shop or service if I know it is JAM Card friendly'.

#### 4.5.2 Feedback from JAM Card Friendly Businesses

11 businesses/organisations completed a survey designed to capture the impact of being JAM Card friendly. Responses were drawn from the public, private and third sector ranging from financial services, hospitality, local authorities, construction, and energy.

- 73% (n=8) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *“Becoming a JAM Card Friendly business has improved our services to people with hidden disabilities and communication barriers”*
- 91% (n=10) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *“Our staff are now more confident and knowledgeable in how to support customers with hidden disabilities and communication barriers”*
- 91% (n=10) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *“Becoming a JAM Card Friendly business has helped us meet our Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) goals”*
- 73% (n=8) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *“As a result of becoming a JAM Card Friendly business we feel better equipped to employ more people with disabilities”*
- 64% (n=7) would recommend becoming JAM Card friendly to other businesses.

The outcomes in relation to being more disability aware and culturally more inclusive of people with a learning disability should also be considered in the context of the size of the employee base of the JAM Card friendly organisations. The changed attitudes and increased knowledge are being taken by employees back into their own communities thus contributing to a greater societal awareness of disability and inclusivity.

*“Becoming JAM trained has really helped our team understand the needs of others and the impact of showing understanding and patience when serving customers It has also helped team member's confidence with knowing how to cater to individuals The teams are really proud to be part of JAM.”*

Appendix 3 includes a case study of JAM friendly organisation.

In the past year, the NOW Group successfully launched a new eLearning platform—an engaging, accessible way for organisations to upskill their teams in under 20 minutes. The

platform features a series of short, tailored videos paired with interactive questions, making learning quick, practical, and impactful. Key topics covered include:

- Who uses a JAM Card and understanding non-visible disabilities
- Providing inclusive customer service
- Communication skills to break down barriers
- How the work environment impacts people with hidden disabilities
- Real-life examples of delivering excellent service in challenging scenarios

This innovative approach ensures teams gain essential knowledge and confidence to create more inclusive, supportive customer experiences.

## 4.6 Employers

Ensuring that NOW Group participants gain and sustain employment would not be possible without employers understanding their responsibilities and the support requirements of employees with learning difficulty. It is vital for social growth and inclusion that employers have access to a diverse workforce where everyone is equipped with the training and experience needed to feel empowered to achieve their potential. Through this process employers can build on their reputation by creating an inclusive work force for all.

While NOW Group has established relationships with employers for many years, their staff continually seek out new opportunities for participants in high growth areas such as ICT, Data Analytics & Cyber Security. 15 of the new jobs secured for NOW Group participants in 2024-25 were digital roles with 180 qualifications achieved in ICT, representing a 21% increase from 2023-24.

As part of their employer engagement strategy, NOW Group consults annually with employers by questionnaire. In a survey completed by 21 employers in May 2025:

- 86% (n=18) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *“Working with NOW Group has improved Management attitudes in our company towards employing people with learning disability and/or autism”*.
- 81% (n=17) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *“Working with NOW Group has improved colleague’s attitudes towards working with people with autism and/or learning disability”*.
- 95% (n=20) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *“Working with NOW Group has increased our knowledge of how to support employees with disabilities e.g., making reasonable adjustments”*.
- 80% (n=16) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *“Working with NOW Group has helped us meet some of our Corporate Social Responsibility goals”*.
- 76% (n=16) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *“Working with NOW Group has helped us meet some of our Diversity goals”*.
- 90% (n=19) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *“We would consider employing more people with learning disability and/or autism as a result of working with NOW Group”*.
- 65% (n=13) would recommend NOW Group to colleagues or other employers.

Focus group discussions with three employers provided further insights into the outcomes derived from working with the NOW Group and reinforced many of the findings from the employer survey in relation to benefits derived from working with NOW Group which included.

- Access to trained, competent, and motivated staff. One of the employers highlighted that a staff member in a junior management position has been supported in the workplace by the NOW Group for the past two years.
- To cater for exceptional demand from students during summer examinations, one of the employers who are a very well know restaurant/fast food outlet were able to recruit temporary contract staff through the NOW Group.
- Makes the employer more diverse and aligns with Corporate Social Responsibility.
- A greater awareness of learning difficulties, autism, and neurodiversity across the staff team which they then take out into their communities. Employers would regularly contact the NOW Group with queries on equality and diversity in the workplace.
- All the focus group employers are JAM Card friendly organisations and they felt that the mark strengthened their branding. In the case of one of the employers who are a very well know restaurant/fast food outlet which high footfall, they regularly see customers using the JAM Card in their outlets.

Contributors had experience of other training and employment services, but such providers did not have the expertise and experience in disability and neurodiversity which they (the employers) had identified as key planks of their inclusion strategy. Working with the NOW Group enabled them to meet these objectives. The relationship with NOW Group has developed organically through trust and communication. The collaboration with the NOW Group has enriched organisational culture and values and expedited a change in workplace attitudes among both management and staff towards employing people with a disability.

“NOW Group provide trained and competent staff to meet our needs and we have five staff supported by them currently on fixed hours contracts. It is a well-established two way relationship and they are always available to respond to any query we have. The NOW Group really care about diversity and equality in the workplace as we do and that is the great strength of the collaboration.

NOW Group is addressing skills gaps in the local economy through provision of relevant training and placement opportunities enabling employers to fill roles that otherwise they may struggle to do. Consequently, the rate of employment among people with a disability is at a record high. NOW Group leads from the front as an employer in providing opportunities for people with disabilities, in 2024-25, 17% of its workforce declared a disability.

## 4.7 Strategic Partners

NOW Group has an ambitious 3-year plan to support 6000 people with learning difficulties and Autism by providing a range of services and training programmes that will lead to 600 participants getting paid jobs. To achieve this they partner with businesses in Northern Ireland who share their values and understand that becoming inclusive and diverse is not only the right thing to do but it also makes good business sense. To become a Strategic Partner, businesses must agree to work with NOW Group for a minimum of 36 months across three areas, JAM Card Partner, Jobs Partner, and Supply Chain Partner. There were five new Strategic Partners confirmed in 2025.

## 4.8 Health & Social Care Trusts (HSCTs)

Participants on NOW Group's community programmes are the cohort most likely to attend day centres in the absence of NOW Group services. In 2024-25 the NOW Group provided 24,285 hours of support to participants negating the need to attend alternative HSCT day care provision. Though there are family and childcare social work teams in the referring HSCT's there is often a lack of expertise and experience within the team of supporting families where the parent has a learning difficulty.

Family Service staff contribute positively to case conferences where their innate knowledge of the support needs of parents with learning disabilities enhances awareness and knowledge across multi-disciplinary teams. While deregistration of children in families where a parent has a learning difficulty (four in 2024-25) is a strong indicator of the service's effectiveness, the early intervention work mitigates crisis interventions for families and children in the formative years. Where safeguarding issues are present, the NOW Group staff frequently work with the family as part of the wider child protection intervention.

The play and educational opportunities for children aged 0-5 facilitated by the Family Service is a crucial enabler for meeting early years growth and development milestones for children in vulnerable families. Parental capacity is increased through programmes, peer support groups and guidance on navigating statutory services. Testament to the impact and value of the Family Service was the spot purchase by HSCTs of 1394 hours from the Family Service in financial year 2024-25 for key working, parenting supports, group work and assistance with independent living tasks.

## 4.9 Department for Communities

DfC is responsible for the administration and payment of benefits and pensions in Northern Ireland. 352 new jobs were created for NOW participants in 2024-25 with 82% of these retained for more than 6 months. In addition to the economic multiplier effect of people having more disposable income, progression to paid employment for this cohort of 352 represents a saving for DfC through no longer having to pay benefits to these individuals.

## 4.10 Education Settings

In 2024-25, NOW Group engaged with 43 schools and FE colleges through, facilitated employability workshops, freshers open days, exam results fairs, onward referrals, and provision of educational support. NOW Group delivered accredited training qualifications to young people aged 14-15 years old in eleven EOTAS<sup>7</sup> Centres in the academic year 2024-25 (Groomsport EOTAS, Castlereagh Alternative Education Provision, Castlereagh Support Unit, Hollywood EOTAS, Lurgan EOTAS, Redburn EOTAS, Park School, Drumard EOTAS, Omagh EOTAS, Newry EOTAS, Maydown EOTAS ).

Courses included, catering, beauty therapy, retail business, employability, horticulture, hairdressing, and digital media. 30 young people achieved an OCN NI level 2 qualification, 25 achieved an OCN NI level 2 Certificate (equivalent to grade A-C at GCSE) and 5 achieved an OCN NI level 2 Award. Most young people in EOTAS environment have been statemented with a learning difficulty or neurodivergence,. Senior teachers in three EOTAS Centres highlighted that students previously had to attend external training centres to achieve accredited qualifications. Some students found this very challenging due to anxiety, and difficulties with social interaction.

NOW Group delivers the courses on site in EOTAS Centres where students feel more comfortable. Senior teachers emphasised the importance of having NOW Group staff available should any issues emerge and the quality of support available for what can be a challenging group. This has been an enabler for progression and accreditation and is not available to the same extent in external training centres. Those finishing in the summer of 2025 supported in year by the NOW Group in the three centres where the teachers are based will be progressing to a Further Education College in September 2025 to start apprenticeships or AS level studies.

“NOW Group tutors have enabled us to focus on vocational subjects which opens the students minds to how they can use the subjects to secure employment further down the line. We have seen an increase in the number of our students opting to do apprenticeships after they leave here ”

NOW Group also worked with 10 schools in the Western area, supporting transition pupils and providing career advice and progression options for students with a disability.

<sup>7</sup> EOTAS is educational provision for children with social, behavioural, emotional wellbeing issues who, without its provision, cannot sustain access to suitable education.

## Section 5: Calculating the SROI

### 5.1 Introduction

Having identified and categorised the stakeholders and the outcomes most relevant for each, this section will calculate the SROI through the application of materiality, estimation of proxy costs and consideration of deadweight, displacement, attribution and drop off.

### 5.2 Materiality

In line with guidelines for conducting SROI analysis, an outcome was defined as material when it was relevant to and consistent with the scope of the study. The outcome needed also to be significant in that it could influence decisions and inform good practice and, critically, when it could be evidenced. Throughout the stakeholder engagement, we have sought to collate evidence for the desired outcomes as per NOW Group stakeholder analysis in Appendix 1.

### 5.3 Monetisation

The total amount invested by the funders of the programme in 2024-25 was £3,511,473 (£3,219,000 in 2023-24) which was agreed as the final input figure. For each stakeholder outcome the cost of an alternative activity that would have led to the same outcome, (a proxy cost), was selected through discussion between the evaluation teams and stakeholders and with reference to research evidence. The objective in proxy selection was to identify the best available alternative approach to achieving a similar outcome.

A robust proxy requires evidence of effectiveness and of cost and must be recognised as a realistic activity for stakeholders to undertake. We used a combination of data sources for the proxy estimation including primary research, the HACT Social Value Bank and the costs associated with services and interventions to achieve similar outcomes sourced from desk review and experiential learning. This SROI-evaluation has been produced following the SROI Network's guidance and adheres to the SROI principles. In preparing the analysis we have adopted realistic transparent assumptions. Table 3 sets out an explanation of the financial proxies used extracted from the social value map accompanying this report.

Stakeholder	Outcome	Qty	Proxy	Value £	Proxy Value & Source
Participants	Improved life and career opportunities	1942	Value of participating in vocational training	1,124	£2,182,808 HACT Social Value Bank
Participants	Improved Health & Wellbeing	1595	Equivalent health & well-being achieved through frequent mild exercise (Gym Membership £480) & community counselling (12 sessions £40 per session)	960	£1,531,200 BCC Leisure & Aurora Counselling
Participants	Increased independence	1737	Housing services to provide assistance to secure or maintain housing	293	£508,941 HACT Social Value Bank
Participants	Improved confidence	1942	Cost of a confidence and self-esteem course	272	£528,224 <a href="https://www.findcourses.co.uk/">https://www.findcourses.co.uk/</a>
Participants	Improved communication	1655	Cost of attending a communication skills course	299	£494,845 <a href="https://www.revolutionlearning.co.uk/">https://www.revolutionlearning.co.uk/</a>
Participants	Improved social interaction	1635	Value of social interaction – Member of a social group	1,850	£3,024,750 HACT Social Value Bank
Participants	Increased income through gaining employment	289	Value of full-time employment	19,048	£5,504,872 30 x £12,21 x52
Parents/Carers	Reduction stress & anxiety	1962	Cost of treating someone with anxiety in UK based on NICE statistics	1,565	£3,070,530 <a href="https://www.nice.org.uk">https://www.nice.org.uk</a>
Parents/Carers	Improved Respite	1471	Annual value of respite care for people with low functioning ASD	1,617	£2,378,607 Unit Costs of Health and Social Care <a href="https://www.pssru.ac.uk/project-pages/unit-costs/unit-costs-2017/">https://www.pssru.ac.uk/project-pages/unit-costs/unit-costs-2017/</a>
Families	Stronger Family Unit	1530	The cost of 24 family therapy sessions (£100 per family session)	2,400	£3,672,000 Family Support Network
Families (FS)	Improved parental capacity	140	The cost of a parenting programme	1,244	£174,160 Parenting NI

Families (FS)	Greater Independence	126	Annual support of a care worker for 5 hours per week (hourly rate £13.00)	3,380	£425,880 <a href="#">Care Worker Hourly Pay in United Kingdom   PayScale</a>
Families (FS)	Improved Health & Wellbeing	119	Equivalent health & well-being achieved through frequent mild exercise (Gym Membership £480) & community counselling (12 sessions £40 per session)	720	£85,860 BCC Leisure & Aurora Counselling
Families (FS)	Improved confidence & self esteem	126	Cost of a life coaching (20 weeks x 1 hour per week@£40)	800	£100,800 <a href="http://www.itsgoodtotalk.org.uk/">http://www.itsgoodtotalk.org.uk/</a>
JAM Card Users	Increased capacity to manage stressful situations	16796	Cost of a confidence and self-esteem course	345	£5,794,620 <a href="https://www.revolutionlearning.co.uk/">https://www.revolutionlearning.co.uk/</a>
Employers	Changes in workplace attitudes to employees with learning difficulties	30220	Cost of a disability awareness training course	120	£3,703,200 Global Health Professionals UK
Health & Social Care Trusts (HSCT)	Reduced day care costs	24285	Participants are engaged in employment and other NOW training activities (otherwise could be requiring of day-care provision) Cost of day care hours	55	£1,335,675 <a href="https://www.elder.org/">https://www.elder.org/</a>
Health & Social Care Trusts (HSCT)	Reduced spend on family services	3366	Resilient and empowered families require less crisis interventions from HSCT's	30	£100,980 Hourly rate paid by HSCT as part of existing SLA
Health & Social Care Trusts (HSCT)	Reduced foster/residential care costs	4	Due to the intervention of the family support service one child has come off the child protection register	40,000	£160,000 <a href="https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Children-in-care1.pdf">https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Children-in-care1.pdf</a>
Department for Communities	Reduced welfare payments	289	Unemployment benefit savings because of 256 participants gaining full time employment.	4,212	£1,217,268 DWP

Table 3: Application of Financial Proxies

## 5.4 Discounting

To calculate the SROI ratio, the deadweight, displacement, attribution and drop off were considered for each of the outcomes achieved.

### 5.4.1 Deadweight

The assessment of deadweight is framed around the question: “What would have happened anyway?” To estimate the percentage of the outcome that would be achieved in the absence of NOW Group services, discussions on alternative activities available to participating stakeholders were facilitated. With due consideration to alternative activities available, deadweight at a rate in the range of 10-20% was applied to the calculations.

### 5.4.2 Displacement

Displacement relates to the question: “Were there any activities with the same outcome displaced by the interventions of NOW Group?” Contributors felt that due to the innovation of NOW Group services, there was limited displacement of other activities in the community and highlighted the value of having NOW Group services to refer their clients to.

### 5.4.3 Attribution

Attribution speaks to the question: “Who else contributed to the achievement of the outcome?” There was some evidence that NOW Group clients have positive family support and social networks in place, and we therefore attributed values in the range of 10-20% to the contribution of others to the achievement of participant outcomes.

### 5.4.4 Drop Off

Drop off responds to the question: “How much of the outcome is lost in the years post involvement?” Given the intensive nature of the support over periods beyond one year and the level of transition between NOW Group services, we have calculated the outcomes will sustain for three to five years. By extrapolating over a 3-5 year period the total value of the intervention is captured and more than £17 million in social value is added.

## 5.5 SROI Results

We multiplied the cost of the financial proxy by the number of stakeholders experiencing the outcome and subtracted where deemed necessary a percentage of deadweight, attribution, and displacement. We repeated this for each stakeholder group and added up all the impacts to derive the total impact of the outcomes.



Figure 5: Calculating the SROI

NOW Group services over the one-year period April 2024 to March 2025 generated a social value of **1:23**. This is based on a Total Present Value of £80,810,605 created against the input of £3,511,473<sup>8</sup>. The calculations applied financial proxies to 22 outcomes across six<sup>9</sup> stakeholder groups. Value accrued per stakeholder is presented in Figure 6.

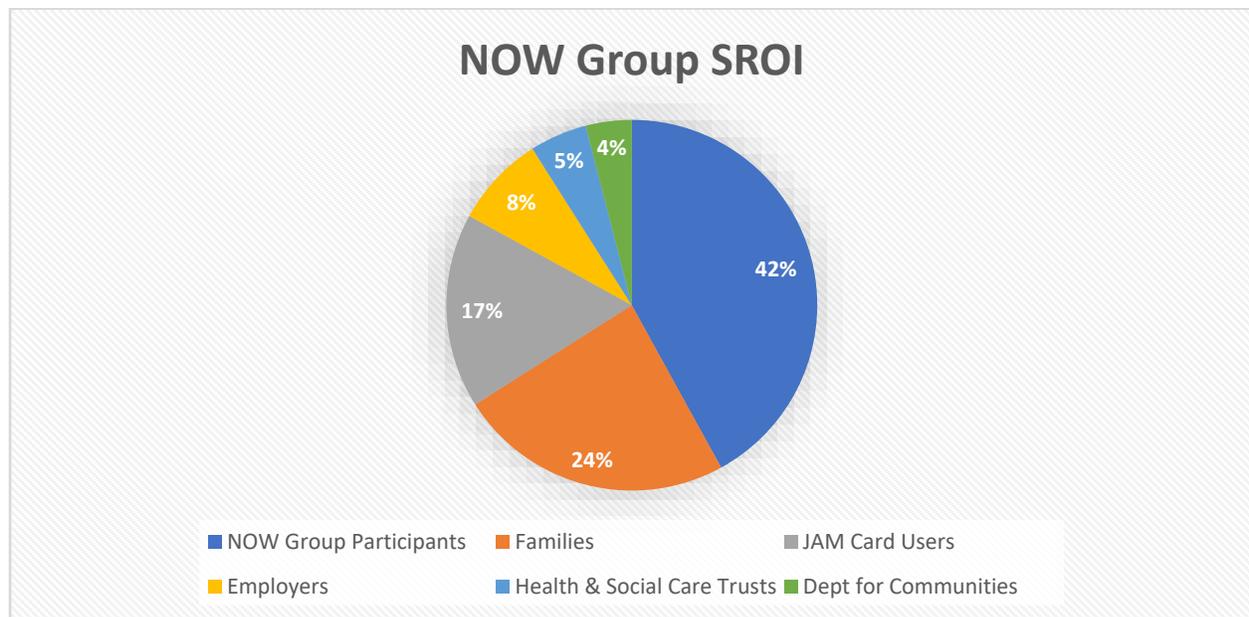


Figure 6: Value per Stakeholder Group

<sup>8</sup> In 2023-24, the input figure was ££3,219,050.

<sup>9</sup> Parents/Carers were combined in the families stakeholder group for social value calculation

The SROI ratio is calculated over 5 years to reflect the longer-term impacts that the service has on stakeholders. A discount value of 3.5% was applied over the 5-year period. This is in line with the Government's Green Book, which requires that public money be discounted at this rate per annum. Given that the analysis contains estimations and assumptions, it is prudent to review where these decisions have had a significant effect on the overall calculation and to consider, therefore, the assurance that can be placed on such figures. The research makes extrapolated assumptions on the numbers affected based on the data collated through the desk top review process and the mixed method consultations with participants, parents, and stakeholders.

## 5.6 Sensitivity Analysis

After establishing the ratio of 1:23, it was tested for sensitivity, assessing the extent to which it would change if assumptions made earlier in the process were different. The results provide assurance in relation to the initial calculations made.

### 5.6.1 Duration of Outcomes

If the length of each outcome was shortened to one year, the ratio did not drop below 1:16. This is not unduly concerning, because it can be claimed with relative confidence that the outcomes relating to NOW Group participants are indeed long-term impacts.

### 5.6.2 Proxy Values

There was little sensitivity found when changing the four highest proxy values (foster care, full time employment, respite and belonging to a social group). We used a combination of data sources for the proxy estimation such the HACT Social Value Bank and the costs associated with services and interventions to achieve similar outcomes sourced from desk review and experiential learning.

### 5.6.3 Discounting

Most of the percentage rates for deadweight, displacement, attribution, and drop-off were based on assumption and it was particularly important, therefore, that these be stress-tested. Each outcome was assessed, to 50% deadweight value. In this scenario, the most sensitive values were for JAM Card users where the ratio fell to below 1:16. The same process was applied for displacement, attribution and drop off. Where there were reductions in the ratio, it reduced to between 1:16 and 1: 18.

## Section 6: Discussion & Learning

### 6.1 Introduction

This section will discuss and summarise the SROI study and reflect on some key learnings.

### 6.2 Summary of SROI Results

We have found that NOW Group services in Northern Ireland returned **23**<sup>10</sup> times the initial investment through the outcomes that it delivered for its stakeholders in 2024-25.. This SROI study was enhanced by the work of the NOW Group staff led by the Head of Quality & Impact in the preparation and implementation of the project plan.

Data from 893 participants<sup>11</sup> (43% of total) in addition to tailored consultations with employers, and teachers provided the evidence base for this study. From this, we were able to evidence that 42% of the social value created was accrued by participants of whom 356 gained employment with 289 sustaining it for more than six months. This resulted in increased disposable income and goes some way to addressing the persistent systematic inequalities in employment between those with and without disabilities.

At a macro level, this helps to reduce the pressure on government support and welfare systems and contributes to consistently low unemployment rates in Northern Ireland. It demonstrates that NOW Group has a pivotal role in continuing to shape future employability support for those furthest from the labour market. This combined with NOW Group's province wide reach and priorities around the environment strongly aligns with DfE's four priorities of: Good Jobs, Regional Balance, Productivity and Carbon Emissions.

Participants gained 1768 accreditations to improve their life and career options. Outcomes in relation to improved, health and wellbeing, motivation, independence, safety and security, communication and social interaction were evidenced and valued in the SROI calculations. Families (inclusive of parents, carers, siblings, and those families supported by the FS) account for 24% of the social value generated. This can be attributed to the outcomes that were evident from the data analysis. (Increased parental capacity, reduced stress and anxiety, stronger family unit, increased respite, improved health and wellbeing and a greater sense of independence).

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<sup>10</sup> An increase from 21 in 2023-24

<sup>11</sup> From Outcome Star and survey

JAM Card users accounted for 17% while employers account for 8% of the social value. Data collated from a sample of employers confirmed that the primary outcome accrued is increased disability awareness which has facilitated a more inclusive culture for staff with learning difficulties. Employees are taking this back into their own communities thus contributing to a greater societal awareness and inclusivity. Health & Social Care Trusts have benefitted through savings resulting from the deregistration of children in families where a parent has a learning difficulty and the 24,285 hours of support to NOW Group participants negating the need for them to attend alternative HSCT day care provision.

## Appendix 1 - NOW Group Stakeholder Analysis

Stakeholder	Desired Outcomes	Included
Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Improved life opportunities.</li> <li>-Improved Health &amp; Well-Being.</li> <li>-Increased Independence.</li> <li>-Improved Communication Skills.</li> <li>-Increased Digital Skills</li> <li>-Reduced Isolation &amp; Loneliness</li> <li>-Increased Disposable Income</li> <li>-Enhanced Money Management Skills</li> </ul>	Yes – These are primary stakeholders and the group that will experience the most change because of NOW Group services
Parents and Carers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Reduced Stress &amp; Anxiety.</li> <li>-Improved Family Relationships.</li> <li>-Improved Self-care through increased time &amp; respite.</li> <li>-Improved Safety.</li> </ul>	Yes – These are primary stakeholders
Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Increased access to universal services such as Health Visiting</li> <li>-Increased engagement with GP and Family Planning services.</li> <li>-Improved parenting skills based.</li> <li>-Support for parents in diagnostic stages/assessment of learning disability and/or ASC.</li> <li>-Improved information for expectant and new parents on child development.</li> <li>-Improved joint working with Schools and increase in attendance at nursery/primary schools.</li> <li>-Improved Health and Wellbeing for Parents and Children</li> </ul>	Yes – These are primary stakeholders and are categorized separately to the families of those who are in receipt of NOW adult-based services.

Health & Social Care Trusts (HSCT's)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Reduction in daycare costs</li> <li>-Reduced foster/residential care costs.</li> <li>-Increased uptake of ante –natal and peri-natal education and midwifery services.</li> <li>-Reduced crisis interventions.</li> </ul>	Yes - This is a material stakeholder due to the scale of savings accrued
Employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Changes in workplace attitudes to working with employees with learning difficulties.</li> <li>-Improved knowledge of employer 'best practice' and legal obligations for employing staff with disabilities.</li> <li>-Savings in Recruitment &amp; Training Costs.</li> </ul>	Yes - These are a primary stakeholder due to the day-to-day engagement with NOW Group
Jam Card Friendly Businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Enhanced Corporate Social Responsibility.</li> <li>-Improved Customer Engagement.</li> <li>-Improved Staff customer service skills and disability awareness.</li> </ul>	Yes- These are material stakeholders.
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Increased awareness of disability issues and services.</li> <li>-Increased Volunteering Opportunities.</li> <li>-Enhanced resilience and reduced poverty.</li> </ul>	Challenges remain in capturing impact, hence no social value was calculated in 2024-25.
Volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Increased employability, confidence, and communication skills</li> <li>-Reduced social isolation</li> </ul>	No – Volunteers are deemed part of the overall NOW participant cohort
Department for Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-More participants find paid employment resulting in lower job-related benefit payments.</li> </ul>	Yes – This is a material stakeholder
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Increased levels of support and knowledge in areas such as career advice and progression options for students with a learning disability.</li> </ul>	Challenges remain in capturing impact, hence no social value was calculated in 2024-25.
FE Colleges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Increased levels of support and knowledge in career advice and progression options for students with a learning disability.</li> <li>- Enhanced curriculum to support employability.</li> </ul>	Challenges remain in capturing impact, hence no social value was calculated in 2024-25.
EOTAS Centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- NOW Group facilitating positive education outcomes for students not suited to mainstream education.</li> </ul>	Yes – This is a material stakeholder
Strategic Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Enhanced CSR &amp; customer engagement</li> </ul>	No – Not deemed material as many are JAM Card Friendly, hence risk of double counting.

## Appendix 2 - NOW Group Services 2024-25

Name of Project	Theme	Funder
SkillSET	Employment and Training Programme	United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF – Housing & Communities Department)
EOTAS Training Provision (Education Other Than At School)	Training Academies within school setting	Education Authority (EA)
Workable NI	In Work Support Programme	Department for Communities (DfC)
NOW Connects Belfast area	Pre-employment Community Opportunities Programme	Belfast Health & Social Care Trust
Bank of America Digital Academies	Digital Academy, delivered	Belfast Met
NOW Connects Western area	Pre-employment Community Opportunities Programme	Western Health & Social Care Trust
Family Service – Western Trust	Building parent resilience	Nationwide
Family Service	Building parent resilience	Henry Smith
Healthy Eating	Health and Well-Bring	Public Health Agency
Fandom Junior	Social Group	NHSCT
Fandom Junior – Awards for All	Social Group	The National Lottery Community Fund
People with Disability Jobs Academy	Employment & Training programme	Ards & North Down LMP
Access for All	Hospitality Employment Academy (Disability Specific)	Derry & Strabane District Council LMP
Employer-Led Disability Inclusion Programme	Employment & Training programme	Fermanagh & Omagh District Council

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Work Connections	Employment & Training Academy	Mid & East Antrim Borough Council
Graduate Academy for those with a Disability	Graduate Academy	Mid & East Antrim Borough Council
Twinning Project	Real Farming Trust Provision	National Lottery Community Fund
Step Up	DARE Provision (Disability Access Route to Education and Employment)	Department for Economy (DfE)
Park School	Training Academies	Park School

## Appendix 3 - Case Studies & Testimonials

### Lynn's Journey & Betty's Café & Bistro

Lynn's story is one of determination, resilience, and guidance. For Lynn, who has been a participant with NOW Group for a number of years, the road to employment wasn't always easy. She faced personal struggles that made it difficult to stay focused on her career goals, but she knew that with the right help, she could get back on track.

That's where her Employment Officer, came in. Lynn's Employment Officer helped support Lynn in building upon her confidence and believing in her abilities. From application assistance to interview preparation, Lynn grew increasingly comfortable and confident in an interview setting. In turn increasing her chances of gaining employment.

Lynn applied to a number of positions, each time growing more confident in her abilities. When the opportunity arose for a kitchen porter role at Betty's Café and Bistro, Lynn felt ready. She had prepared thoroughly with her Employment Officer and was excited about the chance to begin a new chapter in her life.

Today, Lynn is thriving in her role at Betty's. She is not only proud of her work, but she has also found a sense of purpose and fulfillment. The team at Betty's has made Lynn right at home and Lynn could not be happier. The journey hasn't been easy due to personal struggles, but with the support of NOW Group, Lynn has proven that anything is possible.

"I couldn't have done this without Conor my Employment Officer, Liz my Family Services Officer and NOW Group," says Lynn. "They believed in me when I wasn't sure I could believe in myself. Now, I'm doing something I enjoy, and I feel I am making a positive change in my life."

As Lynn continues to thrive in her new role, Lynn hopes her journey will inspire others facing similar challenges to reach out for help and take that first step toward a brighter future.



## Kayla's Journey & Killeavy Castle

Kayla's path to employment has been anything but straightforward, but with perseverance and the right support, she's now thriving in her new role as a housekeeper at Killeavy Castle. Her journey is a testament to the power of support, adaptability, and the belief that everyone deserves the chance to succeed in their chosen career.

After leaving school at the age of 16, Kayla tried a course in Southern Regional College, but soon realised it wasn't the right fit for her. Feeling uncertain and unsure of her next steps, Kayla's mum reached out to the NOW Group for support, setting the stage for a fresh start.

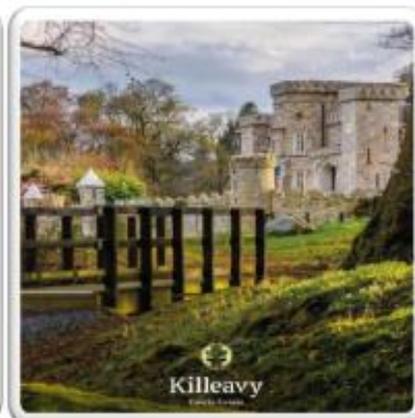
A suitability meeting was arranged, and although Kayla was initially nervous and hesitant to engage with the program, the team at NOW Group – led by her dedicated Employment Officer, Conor – worked closely with her to help her gain confidence. Together, they focused on building a professional CV and explored various sectors where Kayla might feel more comfortable and find meaningful work. Weekly job clubs became a valuable tool for Kayla, providing a safe and supportive space to practice applications and gain insights into different roles.

Through the process of applying to various jobs, Kayla's confidence began to grow. She expanded her horizons and started to consider positions in industries she hadn't thought of before. One opportunity that stood out was a housekeeping role at Killeavy Castle. Kayla decided to apply, and with her Employment Officers continued support, they worked together to tailor her application and prepare for the next steps.

Recognising the importance of ensuring a supportive work environment, Kayla's Employment Officer contacted the Accommodation Manager, Margaret Heaney at Killeavy Castle to discuss the possibility of making reasonable adjustments to accommodate Kayla's autism. The team at Killeavy Castle was receptive and keen to provide the support needed for Kayla.

Kayla attended several preparatory meetings with her Employment Officer to ensure she was fully prepared for the interview. On the day of the interview, she was accompanied by her Employment Officer for added support. Her hard work and determination paid off – she delivered an outstanding interview, impressing the Accommodation Manager so much that she was offered the job on the spot!

Since starting at Killeavy Castle, Kayla has come into her own. She is enjoying the new challenges her job brings and has developed her skills with every task. Kayla is already showing potential for growth within the company and is excited about the opportunities ahead. With ongoing support from NOW Group and her new Employment Liaison Officer, Ann-Marie, Kayla is confident that she has the guidance needed to continue progressing in her career.



## Padraic's Journey & St. Vincent de Paul, SVP

Padraic was signposted from another organisation what initially sparked Padraic's interest in NOW Group was the courses on offer with the additional guidance and support from a dedicated Employment Officer. Padraic has been a part of the NOW Group for several years, completing multiple courses through our Skills Academy. These courses helped him build the skills and confidence to take on new challenges.

Padraic's hard work and commitment paid off when he secured a placement at the Marie Curie charity shop after completing a retail academy course. Here, Padraic learned a wide range of transferable skills, from customer service and cash handling to stock management.

Inspired by his experience, Padraic decided to give back and began volunteering at Marie Curie two days a week. This role gave him further experience and deepened his understanding of the business sector and the day to day running's of a charity shop.

With ongoing support from his Employment Officer and participation in weekly job clubs, Padraic applied for numerous job opportunities. His perseverance led to a breakthrough where he secured a role as a Sales Assistant at the St. Vincent de Paul (SVP) charity shop, Dundalk. The SVP team has been so welcoming and could not do enough to welcome their new team member.

Padraic is now excelling in his new position at SVP, where his skills are valued, and he's making a meaningful impact. His journey is a testament to the power of support, determination, and the belief that everyone deserves the chance to thrive in the workplace.

Padraic's story shows that with the right guidance and opportunities, individuals with learning disabilities can achieve their goals and create a fulfilling, independent future.





GOOD NEWS

## From Day Opportunities to Placement Success

Leo joined NOW Group Employment and Training Services in 2020 after leaving school. He completed an array of courses and received various OCN awards during this time.

When opportunity arose Leo then joined Day Opportunities in 2022, quickly progressing from Day Opportunities 1 to Day Opportunities 2.

Recently Leo completed a business admin course with one of our specialised trainers. Following this he completed his first CV and applied for a job via our SkillSET programme. He attended his first interview with support from one of our EOs which went well. Leo received great news, he was successful and was offered a 12 week placement and has been getting on great!

**Congratulations Leo!**

www.nowgroup.org



**Shauna-Marie Maguire**

My name is Shauna Marie Maguire; I am one of the Co-chairs of the UK disability neuro diversity network here at Citibank.

**Why did Citi choose to become JAM card friendly?**

Citi chose to become JAM Card friendly because as one of the leading financial institutions both here in Belfast and across the world we're committed to diversity equity and inclusion in the workplace. As a Co-chair of one of Citi's wonderful diversity and inclusion networks I understand that there are barriers here in the workplace and not everybody feels that they can bring their best selves to work so JAM Card was our way of helping to raise awareness because with awareness comes understanding and with understanding comes acceptance, and I think JAM card is a really wonderful way to help people create the conversation around all things disability and neurodiversity.

**What was the JAM card friendly training like?**

Seeing the impact that the Jam Card training has had across the retail space here in Northern Ireland, we wanted to roll it out organisational wide. Working for one of the world's largest financial institutions it's very difficult to roll out training to thousands of people, so bringing the e-learning series to Citi here in Belfast was a huge success because it was instantly accessible and because it was virtual we were able to roll out then from Belfast and beyond onto the UK and now hopefully onto the US as well.

**What has the feedback been like from those who took part in the training?**

Feedback from those who've taken part in the JAM Card training here at Citi has been brilliant. I think the brand recognition is huge here in the north of Ireland and now moving on to the UK and JAM is very much on the rise and I think that it's such a wonderful, simplistic, visual tool to encourage people to talk about disability which is sometimes a taboo subject. Sometimes people don't know what to say so they tend to say nothing and that only creates the wider barrier. So it's been brilliant at creating the brand recognition here and, we've had JAM card users present their JAM Card and say to me I didn't know I could use this in a corporate environment. This is brilliant and it's just a really simple way to self ID and say I have a diversity needs.

**What would you say to any business considering introducing the JAM Card in their workplace?**

I would say to any business considering becoming JAM Card friendly that you absolutely must do it. It is such an accessible easy e-learning training it's for institutions that are big and have lots of employees. You can roll it to anyone and everyone and the impact here for Citi has been massive.

**Why do you believe that initiatives like the JAM Card are important?**

Initiatives like the Jam Card are so important especially to huge corporates businesses or corporate work environments, it's really difficult to talk about diversity it's not necessarily top of mind especially when we have many invisible disabilities and diversities. There can be a lot of fear and stigma around talking about it and being considered lesser or not being able to do as much whereas I think that JAM Card is a wonderful way to kind of change the narrative and create the conversation around well because of my diversity I'm better at creative problem solving you know, I'm better at creative thinking, that is a skill that should be leveraged not something to be thought of as lesser.