



**Unlocking skills and
employment opportunities**
– our future approach

 **BARCLAYS** | LifeSkills

Foreword

For a decade now, at Barclays we feel incredibly proud of our LifeSkills Programme, its scale and the impact that has been delivered in schools and communities. With its continuous expansion, LifeSkills has given millions of participants across the UK and beyond the support to build vital employability and financial skills with tangible results seen in people's personal motivation and self-confidence.

This remarkable journey would not have been possible alone. It has been built on the foundations of partnerships and collaboration with respected charities, the education sector, the business community, and Barclays colleagues who give their time, skills and expertise to volunteer to help others. The success of LifeSkills is a true testament to the power of collective effort driven by a shared purpose.

Over the past ten years, LifeSkills has grown and evolved, reflecting the changes in society. From its roots supporting young people in secondary school in the UK, it has developed to reach both younger and older people. We focused the programme on overcoming the barriers to place people into work, and introduced specific interventions for young people at school from a lower socio-economic background.

As the programme's tenth anniversary approached, we have taken a moment to pause and reflect on what has been learnt and where we can make the greatest positive impact in communities. We recognise that there is still much to do. Social inequalities, which were exacerbated during the pandemic, have continued to increase. The rising cost of living has placed even greater pressure on underserved communities, with 1 in 5 people living in poverty, rising to more than a quarter (27%) among children under the age of 18¹.

The centre of our mission is to ensure we create a lasting, positive impact in the communities where we live and work to build a stronger and more inclusive economy that's better for everyone. We do this by helping individuals unlock the skills and employment opportunities they need to progress now and in the future.

As we look ahead to the future of LifeSkills, our core objective remains to drive change through individual empowerment and economic vitality. Going forward, we are pivoting our strategy – we are putting socio-economic inclusion at the heart of it to help those that would otherwise get left behind.

This report sets out the future direction of the LifeSkills programme. Learning from all the data and insights we have gained from our journey so far, we are excited to see the positive impact this new approach will make across communities in the UK, and believe that by simultaneously supporting these audiences we can more effectively help address social inequalities.



Kirstie Mackey OBE
Head of Barclays LifeSkills

Kirstie Mackey

¹ UK Poverty Statistics, 2020-21, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

What is LifeSkills?

Barclays LifeSkills aims to give people the skills and confidence necessary for today's rapidly changing work environment. The programme has supported some of the UK's most underserved and underrepresented communities to tackle barriers they face getting into and staying in work.

Launched in 2013, when youth unemployment rates were high, and research showed that young people lacked job-related abilities, Barclays sought to find a solution to ensure that young people were better equipped for work. Although youth unemployment rates have seen an improvement in ten years, the programme has continued to focus on how best to support people to thrive.

LifeSkills, designed for all ages from young people aged 7+ to adults and families, has supported millions of participants and placed thousands into work through collaboration with the education sector, respected charities, and the business community.



¹ Online survey conducted by The Work Foundation, 2015.

² Chrysalis Research Evaluation of LifeSkills 2020 and 2023.

Young people

Providing free tools and lesson resources to develop employability and money skills through a website, educators working with young people have 150+ hours of curriculum-linked content for use in the classroom, and anyone over the age of 14 has tailored content to use independently or together as a family.

LifeSkills is centred around core transferable skills such as problem-solving and communication which can transfer across to any job or industry, as well as the practical elements of applying for jobs from CV writing and interview techniques to networking, enterprise and managing money.

LifeSkills extends the reach of the programme into schools and colleges that meet specific socio-economic deprivation criteria through facilitated sessions delivered by our charity partners The Talent Foundry and Business in the Community.

We are used in over **90% of schools in the UK**, and with **90% of educators rating LifeSkills resources** very highly, teachers are confident that these meet current curriculum requirements.

Students have improved their awareness of their own strengths and skills (**91%**), feel more motivated (**87%**), have higher aspirations (**82%**) and feel more positive about the future (**88%**)².

Young adults

We support young adults through tailored training with charity partners such as Street League and Springboard to develop the skills, connections, and opportunities to help them into work. We source participants who have the aptitude and attitude to get into work, but who face challenges such as a lack of experience, confidence, qualifications, or have care responsibilities or disabilities. We connect them with employers in different industries who are actively recruiting for motivated and skilled workers.

These charities or other organisations working with young adults or older adults also have free LifeSkills modules they can download to use one-to-one or in a group setting.

Where possible participants are placed in high-growth sectors of retail and customer service, construction and manufacturing, and healthcare.

73% of young people said our financial tips helped them save money.¹

Adults and families

LifeSkills recognises the intrinsic importance of family wellbeing and support to successful outcomes at school and work for young people. There are a range of resources created for skills content to be delivered in a home setting. This became especially vital during the COVID-19 pandemic and additional resources were designed to support home schooling.

The programme also has a suite of content aimed at addressing the range of employability needs adults have, designed to be delivered by frontline workers or in small group settings. A number of charity partnerships complemented this direction too, in parts using LifeSkills resources, but also delivering bespoke support programming to particular groups, including, individuals affected by cancer, carers, individuals impacted by redundancy aged over 50, and second earners.

In 2020 we began partnering with Family Action to deliver LifeSkills in a small number of holiday club settings.

78% thought the resources covered topics and situations they can relate to².

The issues

The ongoing period of economic recovery following COVID-19 and the rising cost of living have exacerbated the challenges faced by people from underserved communities across the UK.

Those from lower socio-economic backgrounds in disadvantaged circumstances, including young people and children living in poverty, were hit hardest by the pandemic, and more likely to experience a combination of interlinked challenges, such as unemployment, poor skills, lower income, and a lack of access to the digital economy and society.

In 2021, more than a quarter of children were living in poverty – with poverty rates highest among families with three or more children, and lone-parent families. When the pandemic hit, families' livelihoods were increasingly put at risk with parents losing their employment. Despite the furlough schemes allowing many people to keep their jobs, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds were more likely to be engaged in precarious work and were therefore particularly exposed to job loss.

The harsh economic climate in the past few years has deepened disparities across the UK, with areas including London, the North East, the North West, West Midlands, and Yorkshire and the Humber experiencing the highest levels of poverty.

Socio-economic disadvantage is also highly intersectional with other diversity characteristics. There are different communities in various parts of the country that may experience poorer outcomes due to other issues that compound the disadvantages they face.

Meanwhile, businesses across the country have been grappling with the dual burden of rising costs and workforce shortages. In November 2022, over 13% of businesses in the UK were experiencing a shortage of workers, with those in the hospitality (35.5%) and construction (20.7%) sectors most likely to report this. Small businesses in particular are struggling to recruit employees with the relevant skills, with 80% of small firms reporting that they face difficulties hiring applicants with the suitable skill set.

In this critical context, the need to build a skilled workforce is more pressing than ever. Empowering individuals to develop their aspirations and core employability skills is not only essential for their personal advancement, but also for the growth of our economy and businesses. This is coupled with the pace of change in the working world; automation, AI and ambitions for net-zero which accelerate the growing need to equip everyone with the core transferable skills to navigate working life and ensure the social inequality gap does not widen.

We recognise the challenges faced by people in underserved communities, and understand that their journey to secure quality employment may not be linear. We understand the complexity of families' financial circumstances, and believe that financial inclusion is an essential part of the support needed.



Lessons learnt

Over the last ten years of running the LifeSkills programme, we have learnt a great deal through independent research and evaluation and by measuring impact. Against this backdrop of learns and the issues facing society, there are three areas that stand out which will inform the way the programme develops:



1. Early intervention with the right skills development can improve aspirations, especially where these might be limited or poorly defined.

Through our intervention programmes designed to support specific groups of young people, we have learnt that undefined or poorly defined aspirations, coupled with a lack of core transferable skills, are at the centre of a young person not making a successful transition from school to work. This can lead to a wide range of short and long-term issues including becoming disengaged at school because they cannot see the relevance of their studies, and feeling like they have failed, leading to a greater likelihood of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Aspirations are a starting point and a driver in developing a young person's employability

Developing aspirations helps improve young people's self-esteem and gives them a more positive view of their future, whilst developing core transferable skills means that their career aspirations are right for them, rather than being influenced by stereotypes or people around them.

The challenge around aspirations is more prevalent in young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, as their aspirations are often low not only because they lack self-belief and motivation to pursue a particular career path, but also because they lack awareness of the range and variety of careers. Particularly for households with generational unemployment, young people face difficulties finding and settling on something that interests them. The LifeSkills programme's interventions aimed at elevating young people's aspirations can serve to compensate for a lack of social capital, supporting social mobility and helping create long-term change.



This student was 14 years old when his teachers selected him to take part in a LifeSkills intervention. Staff felt that, whilst very capable, he was easily distracted and would often lose focus when studying. He had little clarity about his next steps, after school. Despite the programme delivery being disrupted by the pandemic, he attended all the sessions and LifeSkills learning, supported by Barclays colleagues acting as mentors. His personal development, aspirations, understanding of own strengths, transferable and money skills was noted as often considerable and supported the student in feeling a lot more confident and positive about his future. Staff at school noticed improvements in his studies too with him being very focused and doing all his work.



2. The importance of working with organisations who are right in the heart of the communities that they serve, enabling them to work closely with referral organisations and local employers.

We have learnt that to deliver the greatest impact, our partners need to have excellent relationships with employers that are recruiting in that community, whilst simultaneously focussing on how they show up in the community to engage with young adults. This dual approach addresses both the demand and supply side of the market in specific communities, and has helped us to deliver greater impact.



Nathan was unfortunately homeless and had recently been released from prison. His Job Centre Work Coach, referral partner and Barclays' charity partner collaborated to help Nathan find employment. He was supported with CV and interview preparation, training courses as well as a voucher for interview clothes. Nathan settled in well to his new employment and was subsequently promoted.

With a lack of work experience being a frequent barrier, the importance of our partners' good quality links with local employers and referral organisations is critical in order to help beneficiaries engage meaningfully, and set them on the path to success.


By working with organisations in the heart of the communities that we are supporting means that partnerships are designed with the individuals in mind, their specific challenges, experiences and barriers are at the centre of the approach we take.



3. A mixture of grants and training is crucial to improve wellbeing, confidence and positivity towards the future.

Programming and partnerships to support adults aged over 25 improve their employability skills has been a part of the LifeSkills programme since 2019. Through the resources created and sessions delivered by frontline workers and others, we have adapted not only the materials used, but the settings and focus of interventions.

Existing, long-standing socio-economic inequalities in the UK were exacerbated due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Barclays COVID-19 Community Aid Package supported a large number of charities across the country to address urgent needs and to test new models of partnership delivery. Insight from this time, as well as considering areas of particular need, informed a shift to place additional support in our programming for families.



This grant has been a saving grace and I can't believe we had this level of support. I genuinely feel like I can breathe again and focus. I want to go back into employment as I feel like I can do it and give back. For the longest time I felt lonely, invisible, depressed and didn't know where to turn. I couldn't even think about my own goals but this grant allowed me to do just that. It gave me hope and it gave me a break. Thank you.

We learnt that a mixture of grants and training is a critical component for families to have a more positive future, that work outcomes and measures of success are not one-size-fits-all, and that improving household wellbeing is essential to enable progression.

Available reports demonstrate the compounding impact that increases in energy and food costs have had upon the lowest income households. Those who are Black or ethnically diverse, with disabilities or in ill-health, families with more children and those on insecure work are being disproportionately disadvantaged. Intersectionality between these characteristics raises the likelihood of someone requiring support. As such, our partnerships focus delivery within these groups and in selected locations across the UK.

Looking forward – our future strategy

Interventions

From running interventions over the past decade, we have learnt a lot about the knock-on effect that poorly defined aspirations, a lack of core employability skills and the added pressure of household income can have on people's employment prospects. Our forward-looking strategy brings together these learns and issues to inform our future.

Going forward, we want to help those that would otherwise get left behind, and provide support where we can make the greatest positive impact in communities.

While LifeSkills remains accessible to all through our website, we are pivoting our focus for new investment for those people in the UK's most underserved communities and underrepresented groups.

Our goal is to tackle the barriers preventing these groups from entering and sustaining employment across various industries



Targeting underserved communities and addressing geographic disparities

We are working with organisations who have relationships with communities that have historically been underserved and underrepresented, with a particular focus on socio-economic disadvantage. Our aspiration is to enable progression and reduce identified inequality gaps.

Recognising the regional disparities that underscore socio-economic inequalities, we are making sure LifeSkills' charity partners are present in the most deprived areas of the UK.

We will deliver the programme across the UK, but with additional investment in areas with higher levels of inequality including London, the North East, the North West, West Midlands, and Yorkshire and the Humber.

Our partnerships are designed to reach people from low-income families and ethnically diverse people, we will target three audiences – young people (aged 7+), young adults and families.

All of our interventions will seek to reduce inequality gaps and improve the wellbeing of individuals through supporting their aspirations for employment and opening up new opportunities.

We believe that by simultaneously supporting these three audiences – young people 7+, young adults and families – we can more effectively help address social inequalities. Insight tells us that a child's life chances are intrinsically shaped by their home lives. So, by creating interventions to boost family income and reduce financial stress, our aim is to create a more optimistic future.

Working in partnership

We work with a variety of leading charities to support the UK's most disadvantaged communities. Here are three examples of some of our charities we are working with to support our three key audiences.

Young people



We will continue to work with educators and will further our support for young people who lack experience, are financially vulnerable or are marginalised due to their ethnicity, disability, gender or other characteristics.

In partnership with charities like The Talent Foundry, we will focus support on schools that meet specific socio-economic deprivation criteria, to ensure young people receive support through the LifeSkills programme at least four times to give them the confidence, skills, and knowledge they need to succeed.

These sessions will build on the evidence and insight gained to deliver content aimed at improving aspirations and core transferable skills, ensuring young people feel ready to take charge of shaping their future.

Over three years, The Talent Foundry will support more than 43,000 young people across England.

Young adults



LifeSkills will work with partners who have relationships with communities and can work closely with referral organisations and local employers, to help young adults enter or re-enter the workforce. This will provide them with tailored skills training for those who face barriers getting into work and connect them with employers who are recruiting, in sectors with skills shortages. One example is our partnership with Street League, an organisation Barclays has worked with for nearly a decade.

Together we are helping 16 to 30-year-olds living in some of the UK's most disadvantaged communities using sport and education. The partnership includes one-to-one coaching, as well as group sessions to explore job preferences and employability skills to help them overcome barriers that exclude them from securing a job. In 2023, our partnership has helped over 500 people into work.

Families



For families, access to assistance with household income, alongside support to boost confidence and positivity towards the future, are crucial to improving overall wellbeing. Through delivering Barclays LifeSkills workshops and the provision of Learning Support Grants, we are helping families to meet basic household needs, build confidence and develop the practical employability, digital and financial skills needed to access jobs now and in the future. Financial inclusion is an essential part of our support, recognising the complexity of families' financial circumstances.

We've had a relationship with the charity Family Action since 2020, supporting thousands of people through the pandemic and beyond. Our new, three-year partnership will reach a further 5,000 people and help families to thrive. It will give people the opportunity to unlock their potential and to gain the skills and confidence they need to increase their employability.



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