

# Evaluation of the Small Supports Provision Pilot in Leeds 2022 – 2024

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Thank you.

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***“...if a fish jumped out of the pond onto land and it was struggling to breathe, would we say, right, OK, this fish needs some breathing apparatus or this fish is going to need a special wheel fitted to it to be able to get it around? Would we put all those things around it or, would we say this fish is in the wrong environment. Let's put it into the pond.”***

(Small Support Provider)



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## Executive Summary

This report evaluates the Small Supports Provision Pilot in Leeds, implemented by Leeds City Council (LCC) and the ICB in Leeds (ICC), in collaboration with the Small Supports Partnership. Designed to address gaps in traditional care models for individuals with complex needs, the Pilot prioritised personalised, community-centered support within individual tenancies. The evaluation spans the Pilot's two-year implementation, from September 2022 to September 2024, and reflects its overarching successes, challenges, and learning.

### Objectives and outcomes

The Pilot aimed to:

1. Foster an environment where Small Support providers can flourish.
2. Establish high-quality, localised Small Support services in Leeds.
3. Provide up to 10 individuals with personalised support.
4. Demonstrate cost-efficiency compared to traditional care models.

By the end of the Pilot, two new Small Support providers—Unique Support Solutions Ltd. (USS) and Mae and Mitchell Bespoke Management (*M&M*)—were successfully supporting nine individuals with additional onboarding underway.

### Key achievements

The Pilot achieved or made significant progress towards all of the outcomes and objectives stated above. Most notably, achieving a significant overall reduction on yearly direct care costs of almost **£209,000** compared to previous placement costs. In addition to these, it also led to a number of key achievements:

### Transformative impact on individuals

The Pilot delivered significant benefits for individuals:

- **Independence and control:** Personalised support empowered individuals to take charge of their lives, from managing finances to participating in meaningful activities.
- **Confidence and emotional growth:** Tailored care improved self-esteem and emotional stability, enabling individuals to reconnect with communities and lead fulfilling lives.
- **Stable living conditions:** Strategic housing partnerships ensured suitable accommodations, fostering stability and growth.
- **Community integration:** Reconnection with local communities enabled individuals to rebuild social networks and enhance their quality of life.

## Supportive service environment

LCC and the ICB in Leeds played a critical role in enabling the success of Small Supports in a number of ways:

- Streamlined procurement and commissioning processes which supported provider viability.
- Flexibility and collaboration fostered innovation and trust among stakeholders.
- Creative recruitment strategies focused on values alignment, resulting in a stable and committed workforce.

## Establishing new providers

As noted above, the Pilot nurtured the establishment of *USS Ltd.* and *M&M*, each excelling in:

- Co-produced, relationship-focused care models.
- Strategic partnerships, particularly with housing providers.
- Recruitment strategies that prioritised alignment with the ethos of Small Supports over traditional qualifications.

## Cost considerations

- Direct cost analysis undertaken by LCC and the ICB in Leeds suggests that across the two years of the Pilot, the introduction of Small Supports has reduced the overall yearly direct care costs by almost **£209,000** compared to the costs of previous placements. However, it is important to note that these reductions are primarily due to a significant reduction in two individual's care costs. The majority (5) individuals saw a slight increase in the costs of support across the lifespan of the Pilot, due to expected annual uplifts.
- Further work can be done to capture the qualitative learning garnered in the evaluation in a quantifiable way to enable a fiscal, social, and economic value of care and support systems analysis for each of the individuals supported.

## Challenges and solutions

The Pilot faced significant challenges but demonstrated resilience in addressing them:

- **Housing availability:** High demand and limited options complicated housing acquisition. Partnerships with housing associations and contingency planning mitigated these challenges.
- **Financial sustainability:** The delayed rollout strained provider finances, underscoring the need for better funding models.
- **Systemic resistance:** Cultural barriers required ongoing advocacy and education to integrate Small Supports into mainstream systems.
- **Rapid onboarding:** Providers balanced the challenges of urgent placements with maintaining personalised care.

## Recommendations

### For Leeds City Council and the ICB in Leeds

- Expand Small Supports to reach more individuals while maintaining quality.
- Strengthen housing partnerships and contingency plans to improve access and assurance.
- Advocate for systemic cultural shifts by showcasing Pilot successes.
- Gather further data to support the undertaking of a fiscal, social, and economic value of care and support systems analysis for individuals supported.

### For other Local Authorities:

- Prioritise collaborative, person-centered approaches in commissioning.
- Secure strong housing partnerships early.
- Invest in workforce stability through values-driven recruitment.

### For prospective Small Support Providers:

- Embrace a values-first ethos and foster strategic partnerships.
- Prepare for financial risks with diverse funding strategies.
- Advocate for change within traditional systems to prioritise personalised care.

## Conclusion

The Leeds Small Supports Provision Pilot demonstrates the transformative potential of personalised, community-focused care for individuals with complex needs. By fostering collaboration, innovation, and resilience, LCC, the ICB in Leeds and its partners have set a precedent for replicating this model in other local authorities. As Small Supports expand beyond Leeds, the learning from this Pilot offers a valuable roadmap for delivering meaningful change in adult social care.





## Introduction

This report draws together the learning garnered from across the two years of the Small Supports Provision Pilot in Leeds (2022 – 2024). It consolidates the insights and experiences gathered over the two years of the Pilot from people supported by the new Small Support services established in the city, those who have set-up these new services, housing providers, social workers, Leeds City Council (LCC) and the ICB in Leeds representatives. These perspectives are discussed in relation to both the Pilot's overarching objectives, and the specific outcomes identified in the evaluation ([Appendix 1](#)). This learning as related to the 'Making it Real Framework' is presented in [Appendix 2](#).

Through exploring these varied viewpoints, the report illuminates the successes, challenges, and lessons learned, offering a nuanced understanding of how Small Support services have met individual needs effectively and sustainably within the Leeds context. It is hoped that sharing this learning will not only prove valuable to LCC and the ICB in Leeds as they look forward past the end of the Pilot, but also to other Local Authority (LA) areas and ICB's who may be starting or considering starting their own Small Supports journey.

## What is the Small Supports Provision Pilot

The Small Supports Provision Pilot in Leeds (from here on known as 'the Pilot'), was initiated and delivered by LCC and the ICB in Leeds in collaboration with the [Small Supports Programme](#). Work towards the Pilot started in 2018, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the reallocation of resources the City's emergency response required, the start of the Pilot was postponed until 2022.

The Pilot ran from September 2022 to September 2024 with the aim of addressing critical gaps in traditional care models, which often rely on institutional or bed-based settings that limit individual autonomy and [are costly to maintain](#), by providing innovative, community-based support for individuals with complex needs via [Small Support services](#). Small Support services are built on a model which prioritises personalised, high-quality support within individual tenancies, promoting greater independence, choice, and connection to the community.

Key features distinguishing the Small Supports provision from traditional care models include:

1. **Small, dedicated support teams:** Each individual receives support from a dedicated team who work closely with them, often on a one-to-one basis, to meet their unique needs.
2. **Flexible, co-produced support plans:** Individuals are involved in co-producing their support plans, which can include specific lifestyle choices, social activities, and living arrangements.

3. **Community integration:** Support teams work to foster community connections for each individual, including participation in social and recreational activities.
4. **Financial flexibility:** Small Support services utilise diverse funding options, including Direct Payments, Individual Service Funds (ISFs), and Local Authority Managed Budgets, to tailor financial resources to individual needs.

Please refer to '[What are Small Supports](#)' for more detailed information.

## Leeds City Council and the ICB in Leeds' aims and vision for the Pilot

In line with LCC and the ICB in Leeds' broader strategic goals (such as the Leeds Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2016-2021), Inclusive Growth Strategy (ICG), Better Lives Strategy and national objectives from the NHS Building the Right Support Plan (2015)), the Pilot was designed to create an environment within Leeds where individuals with complex support needs can live fulfilling lives within their community.

As such, LCC and the ICB in Leeds objectives underpinning the Pilot were:

- Create an environment where Small Support providers can flourish.
- Establish a local, high-quality Small Support provision as a standard in Leeds.
- Offer personalised, community-centered support at sustainable costs.

## Evaluation and learning

In early 2022, LCC and the ICB in Leeds approached NDTi's Research and Evaluation team to undertake an independent evaluation of the Pilot during its two years. NDTi's team worked closely with LCC and the ICB in Leeds to develop a Vision for Change that aligned with LCC and the ICB in Leeds' objectives in the local context, as well as with the wider vision for Small Supports programme being delivered across England. A copy of the complete Vision for Change can be found in [Appendix 1](#), but the outcomes the evaluation of the Pilot hoped to achieve were:

- Leeds City Council and the ICB in Leeds creates an environment where Small Support providers can set up and flourish.
- A range of Small Support providers are established in Leeds to provide high quality services for people with complex support needs.
- Up to 10 individuals with high support needs are receiving personalised, quality support from Small Support providers.
- People with complex needs are supported at the same, or lower cost, within a Small Support than an alternative.

This report captures learning gathered from across the two years of the Pilot as evidence of progress towards these outcomes. By drawing on learning from the two years, the report is able to present both a holistic picture of the Pilot overall, as well as the distance travelled in these years for those delivering and receiving support.



## Methodology

The evaluation of the Pilot was conducted using qualitative data collection methods over the course of the two years. This data was primarily collected in two rounds of face-to-face fieldwork in the autumns of 2023 and 2024, with additional conversations taking place with representatives of LCC and the ICB in Leeds across the lifespan of the Pilot (2022 – 2024).

The primary data collection method involved semi-structured conversations with key individuals, providing rich, detailed insights into the lived experiences, operational challenges, and systemic impacts of the Pilot. This approach aimed to capture the diverse perspectives of individuals directly supported by the Small Support services, as well as those of social workers, housing providers, new Small Support providers, support staff, and representatives from LCC and the ICB in Leeds. Collecting data in this way allowed the evaluation to capture a longitudinal perspective by tracking changes in individual's experiences, adaptations in service delivery, and the evolution of the Pilot's impact over time.

### Data collection process

Semi-structured conversations were undertaken with:

- **Individuals supported by Small Support services:** Conversations were held with six individuals who received support from the newly developed Small Support services in Leeds. Each individual shared their experiences regarding their housing, community integration, daily life, and personal autonomy. These conversations were designed to prioritise the individual's perspectives, allowing them to freely express the aspects of support that contributed to their wellbeing and any challenges they faced. Two of the individuals had conversations with the evaluation in both years one and two. This enabled the distance travelled in their lives, since receiving support, to be captured and shared in this report.
- **Social Workers:** Six Social Workers involved in the Pilot were consulted during the evaluation to understand their role in supporting individuals within the Pilot. Their feedback provided insights into the operational integration of this new support model and its alignment with social care standards and expectations. One Social Worker engaged with the evaluation in both years one and two, which enabled the distance travelled for the Pilot overall and the individual they supported to be captured.
- **Housing providers:** Two housing providers were engaged in conversations to assess the impact of the program on housing access, affordability, and long-term

sustainability because the availability of suitable housing had emerged as a critical component of the Pilot's success.

- **Small Support providers:** Direct feedback from both new Small Support providers was gathered in years one and two. The feedback captured their experiences in setting up and managing services, including staffing, financial viability, and the flexibility required to adapt support to individual needs.
- **Support staff:** Five support staff engaged in the evaluation as part of the conversations held with the six individuals supported within this Pilot. Capturing support staff's views has offered an invaluable perspective on the daily operations of the Pilot, highlighting both the successes and areas needing improvement from those delivering support services on the front lines.
- **Leeds City Council and the ICB in Leeds commissioning team:** Regular meetings with LCC's commissioning team provided an overarching view of the Pilot's progress and alignment with strategic goals. The team offered insights into the broader context, including policy, procurement, and administrative changes essential to supporting Small Support providers.

## Data collection methods

As noted above, the primary data collection in this evaluation was via a series of semi-structured online or face-to-face conversations undertaken in two rounds: the autumn of 2023 (end of year 1) and the autumn of 2024 (end of year 2).

Undertaking a mix of both online and face-to-face conversations allowed for the needs of those taking part and the evaluation to be met. Online conversations allowed flexible scheduling which enabled ongoing engagement despite geographical constraints, whilst face-to-face conversations, offered a more personal, in-depth approach, fostering rapport and a deeper understanding of individuals' experiences.

## Data analysis

Where possible, conversations were audio recorded and transcribed, before being thematically analysed using MAXQDA. Themes were identified based on the Vision for Change outcomes ([Appendix 1](#)), including the effectiveness of support in promoting independence, the integration of individuals within their communities, and cost-efficiency. Data was aggregated and anonymised to ensure confidentiality, and key themes were drawn from repeated patterns and unique insights provided by different stakeholders.

## Limitations

Whilst the approach used in this evaluation has garnered valuable learning and evidence of progress towards outcomes, certain limitations should be noted. Firstly, the participant sample size does not fully reflect the diversity of experiences of all those engaged in the provision of Small Supports in Leeds, now or in the future. Given the specific nature of the Pilot, the number of individuals directly supported by Small Supports services is limited, and while data from six individuals does offer meaningful insights, it should not be taken to be representative of all potential users of these services. Additionally, the reliance on self-

reported data does introduce the possibility of subjective bias to the learning captured. That is, those contributing to the evaluation may have emphasised particular aspects of their experiences based on personal perspectives, their current circumstances, and/or investment in the Pilot, which could have shaped the findings.

Despite these challenges, the data gathered during the evaluation remains a rich source of information. It provides a meaningful understanding of the experiences, challenges, and successes associated with the Small Supports Provision Pilot over its two-year duration. This data offers a foundation for assessing the impact, and guiding future iterations, of the initiative.



## The Small Support Services

Before exploring how the Pilot progressed towards the outcomes being evaluated, this chapter presents details of both the new Small Support Services that have been set up in Leeds as a result of the Pilot. These services are

- *Unique Support Service (USS) Ltd.* For more information, please visit <https://USS-ltd.co.uk/>
- *Mae and Mitchell Bespoke Management (M&M).* For more information, please visit <https://www.mmbm.co.uk/>

Please note, the information presented here was provided by the services themselves, so the presentation style differs slightly for each organisation.

### Pilot structure and operational framework

The Pilot was governed by a structured framework developed and overseen by LCC and the ICB in Leeds. This framework outlined a set of terms and conditions to ensure accountability, quality, and adaptability. Service providers were expected to uphold stringent standards of care, operating under a contract that specified roles, responsibilities, and expectations, including health and safety compliance, safeguarding, and data protection. Small Support providers also had to adhere to an outcome-focused model, where success was defined by measurable improvements in individuals' independence, quality of life, and ability to remain integrated in the community.

### Unique Support Solutions Ltd.

*Unique Support Solutions (USS) Ltd.* is a Small Support Service Provider that offers tailored, person-centered support to individuals with complex needs, enabling them to live independently within their community. This service emphasises the importance of stability, familiarity, and dedicated support staff, aiming to create a supportive environment that promotes wellbeing and community integration.

### Staffing and structure

*USS* is run and overseen by a Board comprising the Managing Director (co-founder of *USS*), an Operational Director (co-founder of *USS*), a Finance Director and two non-executive members.

The following staff are employed by *USS*:

- **3 Lead Wellbeing Workers** who oversee the quality of support and provide guidance to the team.

- **17 Wellbeing Workers** who work directly with individuals to deliver daily support tailored to each person's unique needs.
- **4 Relief/Bank Staff** available to ensure continuity of care during staff absences or increased service needs.

In 2024, *USS* recorded 26 days lost to sickness, a low number of absence reviews, and no disciplinary actions, indicating a stable workforce. The team also achieved a significant reduction in agency staff usage, bringing it down to an average of 5% over the last three months (October 2024), which aligns closely with the organisation's key performance indicator (KPI) of zero agency use. This reduction was achieved by recruiting additional bank/relief staff, minimising the reliance on temporary external workers and furthering the goal of stable, consistent support relationships.

## Accommodation

The *USS* service currently operates across multiple accommodations tailored to meet the needs of the four individuals it supports, including:

- **Existing properties:**
  - A house purchased with National Health Service England (NHSE) funding and managed by Golden Lane Housing.
  - A house managed by Home Group.
  - A house provided by Find Me a Home.
  - A temporary flat provided by the mental health service, used for transitional placements.
- **Planned expansion:**
  - Two additional properties are being purchased, with *One Home* as the investor and Lets for Life as the property manager.
  - A grant from NHSE has been approved for another property, to be managed by CARE Housing Association.
  - This blend of existing and future properties reflects *USS's* commitment to expanding access to quality accommodations, providing stable housing as an essential component of successful support. By working with a range of housing organisations, *USS* ensures individuals can live in environments that feel safe, comfortable, and supportive.

## Person-centered approach and key achievements

*USS* focuses on co-production with the people they support, involving them in setting organisational values and creating support plans that reflect their personal preferences. In 2024 *USS* held a 'values day', where everyone involved with the service, from those supported to Board members, came together to review and rewrite the service values. This approach fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment in the organisation.

## Challenges and achievements in service delivery

USS has managed to create a consistent support structure while addressing staffing challenges and balancing agency reliance. By achieving a 95% direct staffing model, the service has successfully fostered stable, long-term support relationships, crucial for individuals requiring familiarity and trust in their support team.

## Mae and Mitchell Bespoke Management Support Service

*Mae and Mitchell Bespoke Management Support Service (M&M)* is a non-profit Community Interest Company (CIC). The service provides individualised support for people with complex needs, emphasising stability, trust, and community integration. *M&M's* approach is deeply rooted in consistency and relationship-building, enabling people to lead fulfilling lives in their own tenancies. The service currently supports five individuals, with two additional clients in the onboarding process.

### Staffing and structure

*M&M* is structured to prioritise continuity in support, with an emphasis on minimising the use of agency staff to maintain consistent, familiar care for clients. The organisation employs:

- **28 staff members**, including core and relief staff.
- **Specialised core teams**: Each individual has a dedicated core team, supported by trained bank staff who are integrated into their routine to ensure familiarity and trust.
- **Two team leaders**: Each team leader oversees multiple clients to provide guidance and ensure quality in service delivery.

*M&M's* commitment to avoiding agency staff is a defining feature. Since its inception, *M&M* has never used agency workers, and the founders often step in to cover shifts when needed, underscoring their dedication to maintaining stability and continuity. This strategy supports *M&M's* goal of providing individuals with consistent relationships, which *M&M* believes are instrumental in nurturing clients' progress and wellbeing.

### Housing and partnership development

Housing stability has been a core component of *M&M's* model, and *M&M* has developed strong partnerships with dedicated housing providers. These relationships have enabled *M&M* to quickly source housing for individuals, ensuring they have suitable, long-term accommodations tailored to their needs. While the processing time for housing transactions remains a challenge, *M&M* has successfully secured appropriate housing for individuals, including homes with unique features to accommodate specific needs, such as private gardens and dedicated staff quarters for those requiring overnight support.



## Approach to care and key achievements

*M&M*'s support is individualised and co-produced with each individual, focusing on creating positive relationships, building trust, and fostering autonomy. They have seen great successes in these areas, as is evidenced later in this report.

## Challenges and ongoing development

*M&M* have navigated various challenges in the two years of the Pilot, including initial housing availability issues. They acknowledge the need for additional leadership support as the organisation grows. *M&M* is addressing this by:

- **Hiring additional leaders:** Plans are in place to recruit a team leader for the most complex support package and to hire a service coordinator to provide oversight and ensure consistency across teams.
- **Expanding internal capacity:** *M&M* aims to develop its own "internal agency" to meet staffing needs without relying on external agencies. This will allow *M&M* to maintain its commitment to stability, training, and long-term relationships with clients.

*M&M*'s plans for growth include hiring another registered manager and investing in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training for staff. *M&M*'s goal is to create a sustainable support model that provides quality care and stability, while remaining adaptable to the evolving needs of their clients. This proactive approach will ensure *M&M* can continue delivering high-quality, community-centered support.



## Progress towards outcomes

This chapter shares evidence of progress towards each outcome individually, with short vignettes and/or quotes from those we spoke to across the two years to emphasise the impact of these achievements in peoples' own words.

### Outcome 1: Leeds City Council creates an environment for Small Support providers to flourish

Throughout the duration of the Pilot, LCC and the ICB in Leeds has demonstrated its commitment towards this outcome, which is also its own objective for the Pilot, by taking proactive steps to foster an environment where Small Support providers can succeed. By addressing systemic barriers, adapting processes, and demonstrating a commitment to flexibility and collaboration, LCC and the ICB in Leeds has established a strong foundation for Small Supports to deliver personalised, high-quality services in the City. The rest of this section provides evidence of how LCC and the ICB in Leeds have achieved this outcome, via a series of key strategies:

#### Consistent management and oversight

Across the two years, we heard how the unwavering consistency of LCC and the ICB in Leeds commissioners and managers since 2018, was an anchor for the Pilot's success. Participants emphasised that having steady points of contact who deeply understood the project and its values provided both stability and trust:

***"The commissioners are absolutely the making of it. If they had left, I don't think we would have got it over the line. The consistency, and the fact that they get it, means it worked."*** (Small Support Provider)

This continuity enabled LCC and the ICB in Leeds to develop strong, collaborative relationships with providers. Regular support, practical advice, and the availability of experienced mentors ensured that challenges were navigated efficiently and with confidence. Providers also highlighted how LCC and the ICB in Leeds staff's commitment through difficult periods, such as the disruptions caused by COVID-19, helped sustain the pilot:

***"Leeds City Council [sic] have shown their conviction and commitment to this project, always being there for support despite the struggles."***  
(Small Support Provider)

The consistent presence of LCC and the ICB in Leeds staff reinforced a shared vision, cultivated trust, and allowed providers to build a robust foundation for Small Supports. This approach not only strengthened the pilot but also fostered a sense of shared purpose across all stakeholders.

### Flexible and supportive commissioning

As well as the consistency of the commissioning team overseeing the Pilot, LCC and the ICB in Leeds' willingness to adapt its commissioning and procurement processes to accommodate Small Supports' unique needs, was also highlighted as a cornerstone of its success. This was critical in overcoming the systemic rigidity that often hinders smaller providers. For instance, LCC and the ICB in Leeds created simplified frameworks and reduced administrative burdens, enabling providers to focus on delivering personalised support;

***"We felt heard. The council really listened to our concerns about the procurement process and adjusted things to make it work for smaller organisations like us."*** (Small Support Provider)

By making these changes, LCC and the ICB in Leeds has enabled the embedding of the Small Supports ethos into its structures, ensuring providers can thrive, without being overwhelmed by bureaucracy.

### Policy and procedure development for long-term sustainability

As part of the Pilot, LCC and the ICB in Leeds introduced a framework for developing minimum standards and procedures, setting a foundation for consistent quality across providers. Policies around training, safeguarding, and regular auditing ensured that providers met baseline requirements while adapting flexibly to clients' changing needs.

***"We have a copy of the guidance and procedures for each of the providers that we reference when discussing training, recruitment, and development. These are the base for all plans and decisions around development. We have reviewed these, and each of the providers has a schedule to review every 12 months as a minimum and whenever required if there is a change identified in the needs of any individual service user."*** (Contract Manager)

This contractual structure has supported the Pilot's ability to provide sustained, high-quality support and will be instrumental in its future integration with broader Leeds support services.

### Partnership and collaboration

During the two years of the Pilot, LCC and the ICB in Leeds actively engaged with providers, fostering a collaborative relationship that helped shape the initiative. Regular forums, open dialogue, and feedback loops were used to ensure providers could raise challenges and share their experiences.

***"They didn't just tell us what to do; they worked with us. If something wasn't working, we could talk about it, and they'd help us find a solution."***

(Small Support Provider)

This partnership-based approach encouraged innovation and supported the development of tailored services aligned with individuals' needs.

### **Addressing housing challenges**

Recognising that housing availability was a major barrier, LCC and the ICB in Leeds worked to both facilitate access to suitable properties for Small Support providers and introduce a 'Contingency Plan' to cover rent should someone need to be away from their home for an extended period. This Plan has been described as the '*golden ticket*' (Small Support Provider) for the future of housing for Small Support services in the city as it provides the much-needed reassurance and insurances for all parties to ensure success.

Although challenges remain, the council's efforts to prioritise housing for Small Supports and engage with housing associations and private landlords have set a positive precedent.

***"Housing is always the hardest part, but the council stepped in where they could—whether it was connecting us to landlords or helping us navigate their systems."*** (Small Support Provider)

***"... is a lovely golden ticket that when you go into an investor, it kind of this is what we've got in place. This is a Contingency Plan."*** (Small Support Provider)

This approach shows LCC and the ICB in Leeds' understanding of the fundamental link between housing and successful support delivery.

### **Encouraging a culture of learning**

From the outset, LCC and the ICB in Leeds created opportunities for providers to learn from each other, the wider Small Supports Network, and from the Pilot experience itself. Training sessions, knowledge-sharing events, and collaborative problem-solving sessions were key to building capacity and spreading good practices across the network.

***"The pilot felt like a space where we could learn and grow together, not just compete for contracts. That made a huge difference."*** (Small Support Provider)

This learning culture helped providers adapt and innovate, ensuring the sustainability of Small Supports beyond the pilot.

### **Advocating for Small Supports**

Since the beginning, LCC and the ICB in Leeds has played a crucial role in advocating for the Small Supports model, both internally and externally. By presenting evidence of its impact and value, LCC and the ICB in Leeds helped to build buy-in among stakeholders and address initial scepticism.

***"There was resistance at first—it's a big cultural shift. But the council provided the data and stories that made it hard to argue against the model's success."*** (Commissioner)

This advocacy helped solidify Small Supports as a viable and effective option within the council's broader service framework.

### Supporting alternative recruitment

LCC and the ICB in Leeds structured contracts to encourage non-traditional recruitment pathways to enable providers to employ staff that met the needs of individuals, not just the needs of the service. Doing this led to providers successfully recruiting staff from non-traditional backgrounds, avoiding the use of agency staff and minimising turnover rates, which contributed to a stable workforce, crucial for building trust and continuity in support.

***"...we don't look for qualifications, its about values, we try to get people to share with us in their own words, without prompting...it's good to be able to use this alternative approach and it be, you know, OK...We've never had a problem with recruitment, we're fully staffed."*** (Small Support Provider)

By taking this approach, LCC and the ICB in Leeds created an environment where relationships between staff and clients could flourish, enabling a higher quality of care and a stronger sense of stability for clients.

## Outcome 2: Establish a range of Small Support Providers in Leeds to provide quality services

As the learning shared for Outcome 1 (above) suggests, LCC and the ICB in Leeds has worked hard to ensure that the LA, ICB and local area became an environment where Small Supports could thrive. This work enabled the successful establishment of two Small Support providers, thus achieving this outcome and the Pilots own objective to establish a local, high-quality Small Support provision as a standard in Leeds.

The following sections highlight how the growth of these providers was fostered during the two years of the Pilot, offering valuable insights for commissioners and other local authorities aiming to replicate this success.

### Building a diverse provider network

From the beginning, LCC and the ICB in Leeds prioritised recruiting providers with diverse approaches and values aligned with the ethos of Small Supports. This focus allowed the pilot to develop services tailored to individuals' unique needs, rather than adopting a "one-size-fits-all" approach.

***"It wasn't about ticking boxes or meeting quotas—it was about finding people who genuinely wanted to create better lives for the individuals they support."***  
(Small Support Provider)

This approach has enabled two providers to be established, which are capable of addressing different needs and preferences, ensuring service quality across the City. It also sets a precedent for additional services in the city.

### Focus on personalised and flexible services

The Pilot emphasised the importance of personalisation and flexibility in service delivery. Providers were encouraged to adapt their support to fit the lives of individuals, enabling greater independence and autonomy.

***"My support isn't just about the hours they give me; it's about what works for me. They help me work, go to my hobbies, and save for holidays—it's life-changing."***

(Individual)

***"They have turned something that used to be a problem into something that he can do constructively...they've made it a hobby and something useful...you can see how much he is getting from it, he is really proud...and there aren't any more complaints!"*** (Social Worker)

This commitment to personalisation has been a cornerstone of the Pilot's success in delivering high-quality services.

### Supporting new and emerging providers

LCC and the ICB in Leeds recognised the challenges faced by new providers entering the sector and offered tailored support to help them establish and grow. This included guidance on navigating procurement systems, training, and mentoring opportunities.

***"Starting out was daunting, but the council helped us every step of the way. From paperwork to understanding what was expected, they were there."***

(Small Support Provider)

By reducing barriers to entry, LCC and the ICB in Leeds created a fertile environment for new providers to thrive.

### Promoting innovation and collaboration

The Pilot created a culture of innovation by encouraging providers to test new approaches and learn from one another. Regular forums and feedback sessions provided opportunities to share best practices and address challenges collaboratively.

***"The best part of the pilot was the space to try new ideas and learn from others. It wasn't competitive; it was about working together to make things better."*** (Small Support Provider)

This culture has been instrumental in ensuring that services remain dynamic, responsive, and high quality.

## Quality assurance and monitoring

From the start, LCC and the ICB in Leeds implemented robust quality assurance processes to ensure that new Small Support services met the highest standards. Rather than relying solely on compliance checks and performance metrics, the council focused on outcomes, within a 'light touch' framework, working closely with providers to identify areas for improvement.

*"It wasn't about catching people out—it was about making sure services were working well for individuals and helping providers improve where needed."*

(Commissioner)

Monthly meetings and consistent communication between the Contract Manager and providers facilitated ongoing dialogue, fostering an adaptable and collaborative partnership. The implementation of a shared HR package for recruitment also supported this outcome by enabling providers to focus on values-based hiring that matched client needs

This supportive approach to quality assurance fostered trust and collaboration, ensuring continuous improvement across the provider network.

### Outcome 3: Up to 10 Individuals with high support needs are receiving personalised, quality support

Through the successful embedding of two new Small Support services in Leeds (outcome 2), at the end of the Pilot (autumn 2024), nine individuals were receiving support from one of the new Small Support services (5 from *M&M*, 4 from *USS*) with a further six individuals working through the onboarding process (3 *M&M*, 3 *USS*). There were also three individuals referred from the Nominations panels, being considered for Small Supports.

Those being supported at the end of the Pilot (autumn 2024) (9 individuals) were accessing personalised, quality support that has transformed their lives. A core strength of the pilot was its focus on learning directly from individuals about their needs, preferences, and aspirations. The following sections highlight how their voices shaped the approach via their own reflections. An in-depth discussion relating to the transformative impact of the Pilot on individual lives is presented in the next chapter.

## Tailored support plans

The Pilot put individuals at the centre of their support planning, ensuring services were built around their goals. Many individuals expressed appreciation for being asked what they wanted from life rather than simply being told what support they would receive.

***"It was the first time someone asked me, 'What do you want to do?' I said I wanted to get a job and save for a holiday, and they helped me make a plan for that."*** (Individual)

This personalised approach enabled individuals to take ownership of their lives and strive for meaningful goals.

### Supporting independence and confidence

A key learning from individuals was that even small steps toward independence made a big difference. People spoke about how managing their own money, planning their days, and traveling independently gave them a sense of control over their lives.

***"I didn't think I could do it, but they taught me how to budget, and now I'm saving for my first holiday. I feel proud of myself."*** (Individual)

***"I can go to work on my own now. It feels amazing to know I don't have to rely on someone for everything."*** (Individual)

These examples show how the Pilot supported individuals to gain confidence and independence, creating a lasting impact on their lives.

### Flexibility that fits individual lives

Flexibility was highlighted as a vital aspect of support. Many individuals valued the ability to adjust their support hours and focus areas to suit their evolving needs, whether for work, hobbies, or social activities.

***"I decide when I need help now—it fits around my life, not the other way around. That's how it should be."*** (Individual)

This flexibility allows individuals to live more fulfilling lives, with support seamlessly integrated into their daily routines.

### Building trust through strong relationships

Individuals repeatedly emphasised the importance of having support workers who understood them and shared their interests. This relationship-based approach fostered trust, making people feel valued and respected.

***"My support worker really gets me. They're not just doing a job—they care about what I want and who I am."*** (Individual)

***"We have a laugh together, and that makes it easier to ask for help when I need it. It feels like a partnership, not a service."*** (Individual)

The value of these strong relationships cannot be overstated; they were central to the success of the Pilot in delivering quality, personalised care.



## Transformative outcomes for individuals

The Pilot led to measurable improvements in individuals' quality of life, with people reporting feeling more in control, confident, and optimistic about their futures.

***"Before this, my life was about what I couldn't do. Now it's about what I can do, and I've realised I can do so much more than I thought."*** (Individual)

***"This is the first time I feel like I'm living my own life. It's what I've always wanted."*** (Individual)

***"It's nice to see [him] be him again...he doesn't have to hide who he is"***  
(Social Worker)

These outcomes underscore the transformative power of personalised, flexible support in helping individuals achieve their potential. Further details about these outcomes and the impact on individuals are explored in depth in the following chapter.

### Outcome 4: Support costs at the same or lower levels compared to traditional models

Evidence regarding the cost-efficiency of Small Supports in Leeds, compared to traditional models, is limited due to the early stage of implementation. However, learning garnered during the Pilot does provide evidence of progress towards this outcome, which is shared in the remainder of this section.

#### Evidence of cost savings

Direct care cost analysis undertaken by LCC and the ICB in Leeds suggests that across the two years of the Pilot, the introduction of Small Supports has reduced the overall yearly direct care costs for those supported by almost **£209,000** compared to the costs of previous placements. However, it is important to note that these reductions are primarily due to a significant reduction in two individual's care costs. The majority (5) individuals saw a slight increase in the costs of support across the lifespan of the Pilot, due to expected annual uplifts. Please refer to the LCC and ICB in Leeds' own report for more detailed analysis of this data.

This data needs to continue to be captured to provide a longitudinal picture of the changing nature of direct costs within Leeds.

In addition to the quantifiable data from LCC and the ICB in Leeds, the insights garnered by the evaluation during the two years, suggest that the personalised and flexible approach of Small Supports can deliver meaningful outcomes without increasing costs.

***"The providers have done an excellent job in delivering personalised support without incurring unnecessary expenses. The focus has always been on***

***making every part of the service meaningful and impactful for individuals."***

(Contract Manager)

### **Maintaining placement stability**

A significant achievement of the Pilot was the maintenance of all placements from the outset, which helped avoid costly disruptions, such as re-housing or crisis interventions. Providers worked closely with individuals and their families to ensure stability and continuity in care.

***"All placements have been sustained, which is testament to the commitment of the providers and the individuals involved. This kind of stability inherently reduces additional costs associated with placement breakdowns."***

(Contract Manager)

### **Promoting independence to reduce long-term costs**

The Pilot focused on empowering individuals to manage aspects of their lives independently, such as budgeting and daily activities. This approach not only improved quality of life but also reduced the need for intensive, long-term support.

***"I'm managing my own money now and don't need as much help. It's saved me from feeling dependent and has probably saved money too."*** (Individual)

### **Workforce stability**

The providers' innovative approach to recruitment—focusing on values rather than traditional care experience or qualifications—resulted in a stable workforce with low turnover. This reduced the costs typically associated with frequent staff changes and retraining.

***"Recruitment has been a real success story, with low turnover and effective matching of staff to individuals. This stability ensures consistency in support while also keeping recruitment costs down."*** (Contract Manager)

As evidence in each of these sub-sections' highlights, the Pilot has made significant progress towards this outcome. Whilst direct cost data analysis suggests that across the two years of the Pilot, the introduction of Small Supports has reduced the yearly direct care costs for those supported by almost **£209,000** compared to the costs of previous placements, this data is based primarily on the significant reduction in two individual's care costs. The majority of individuals (5) saw a slight increase in the costs of support across the lifespan of the Pilot, due to expected annual uplifts. As such, direct care costs data should not be viewed as the only data available to provide evidence of progress towards this outcome or as the only measure of financial success for Small Supports in Leeds. If the qualitative data captured across the two years could be captured in a quantifiable format, a fiscal, social, and economic value of care and support systems analysis could be undertaken. This would enable Leeds to share its story in a similar way to that told in NDTi's recent report, ["A Deep Dive into the Small Supports Experience in Plymouth,"](#).

## Summary

The evidence explored in this chapter, illustrates that the two-year Small Supports Provision Pilot in Leeds has both achieved, and made significant progress towards, the outcomes set out in the Vision for Change ([Appendix 1](#)) and the objectives it set itself. Through the fostering of a supportive environment for providers, the Pilot has established two innovative services, both delivering personalised, quality care to individuals with high support needs. Leeds City Council's flexibility in commissioning, collaborative partnerships, and focus on policy development enabled providers to thrive, while minimising administrative burdens.

As a result, nine individuals now receive transformative support, gaining independence and confidence, with tailored services fitting their unique needs. Direct care cost analysis demonstrates the significant reduction in overall yearly costs to LCC and the ICB in Leeds, whilst the qualitative data captured suggests that sustained placements and a focus on independence are likely to add further economic, fiscal and social value in the region compared to traditional models. As such, the Pilot sets a strong precedent for expanding Small Supports and offers valuable insights for other local authorities.



## Additional Learning

Over the two years of the evaluation, we heard details of the profound impact the Pilot has had on individuals supported and heard, in greater detail than already presented, **how** the new Small Support services have achieved these outcomes with people, which we feel it is imperative to share.

This chapter draws this learning together in a bid to underscore how the Pilot has created meaningful change for individuals and ensured a stable, values-driven workforce to sustain high-quality, personalised support. It is also hoped that this learning will prove a valuable resource for other LAs and individuals considering setting up their own Small Support Service.

### The impact on individuals: Transforming lives

As highlighted in the previous chapter, the Pilot has had a transformative impact on the lives of the individuals now supported by a Small Support service in Leeds. Each told us how they have grown in confidence and independence, have experienced better mental and emotional health and are now connected, and in some instances reconnected, with people and communities that are important to them.

The following sections share in more detail the transformative impact of the Pilot on individuals' lives in their own words and those of the new Small Support providers. In addition to the information presented here, Mark, one of the individuals supported by USS, has created a short film for NHS England, which shares his story in his own words in a way that this report cannot. Please follow this link to view Mark's film-

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OcGJ\\_UW-7dg&t=1s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OcGJ_UW-7dg&t=1s)

### Independence and control

Across the two years, individuals repeatedly emphasised how being supported by a Small Support Service has given them control over their lives, enabling them to make decisions about their schedules, finances, and goals. For everyone we spoke to, this was significantly different to the lives they had lived before.

From something as seemingly simple as having their own key to their front door to being able to choose the paint on the walls, to interviewing staff and deciding how to spend their time, being able to take control of their own lives has led to people now living the lives they want, in the places they choose with the support they need to do so. The impact of this cannot be emphasised strongly enough; it has been transformative for all the individuals we spoke to.

***"For the first time, I'm in charge of my own life. I decide what I want to do, and my support fits around me."*** (Individual)

## Confidence

By supporting individuals to have control in their lives, Small Support services have had an acute impact on the confidence of the individuals we spoke to for the evaluation. By placing them at the centre and providing consistent, tailored support, Small Supports foster a sense of self-belief, which bolsters confidence and continual growth.

As already highlighted, many individuals described how the stability and personalisation of their support gave them the courage to try new things. Whilst for others, the shift to feeling valued and listened to was transformative. One individual, who had previously struggled with self-doubt and social isolation, explained:

***"They made me feel like I matter, like my choices are important. It's changed how I see myself—I'm more confident now."*** (Individual)

This newfound confidence extended to daily life and long-term aspirations, with individuals gaining the self-assurance to work, socialise, develop personal relationships and make independent decisions.

***"I never thought I'd be able to go to the charity shop on my own, but now I do it every week. It's my favourite part of the week—I feel like I'm helping, and it makes me proud."*** (Individual)

Through consistent, values-driven support, the Pilot has shown that investing in personalised support can unlock individuals' potential and instil lasting confidence, enabling them to lead fuller, more autonomous lives.

## Emotional growth

By placing people at the centre of their support and enabling individuals to develop confidence and become more independent, Small Support services are fostering an environment where individuals can also grow emotionally and experience better mental health. As the vignette below illustrates this has enabled individuals to do much more than they previously had.

### **Anna's journey to emotional stability**

Anna, a young woman with a history of trauma and self-harming behaviours, had spent much of her life cycling through foster care and institutional settings. After receiving tailored support through her provider, she has seen a significant reduction in self-harm and has become more socially engaged. Anna now describes feeling confident and secure for the first time in years. Reflecting on her progress, she shared: ***"They made me feel like I belong. I've stopped doubting myself, and I feel like I can do so much more."***

## Stable living situations

Part of the ability of Small Support services in Leeds to enable individuals to experience the increase in confidence, improved emotional and mental health and greater independence, is due to their provision of consistent, stable living situations for individuals. Even with the challenges faced in the Pilot around housing, both new services have provided individuals with homes that overwhelmingly meet their needs, even if only on a temporary basis.

Many individuals described how their stable, nurturing support allowed them to build confidence and overcome past challenges. For example, for Jason, who had spent much of his life in institutional care, has experienced his longest period of independent living thanks to the Pilot. His team tailored support to his needs, ensuring his stability and growth:

*"I feel comfortable and like myself again."*

Similarly, whilst Natalie stayed living in her home when she began being supported by a Small Support provider, the stability of the support provided here has changed her life significantly.

### **From isolation to stability and connection**

Natalie's life has transformed under the Small Support model of support, moving from isolation and distrust to a sense of empowerment and belonging. Previously, larger, impersonal service providers left her feeling disregarded and hopeless, perpetuating cycles of poor mental health and disengagement. Her support was inconsistent, and the lack of personal understanding led to devastating outcomes, including an amputation. These experiences deepened her mistrust and anxiety, making it difficult for her to believe in a new system.

With Small Supports, Natalie found a smaller, relationship-focused model that truly listened to her needs. The consistent staffing, personalised care, and respect for her voice made her feel valued and supported. For the first time, she engaged in activities like attending concerts and theatre shows, experiencing a new level of independence and community inclusion. The Small Support approach, centered on trust and genuine connection, helped Natalie regain control over her life, showing how a human-centered support system can profoundly improve well-being and quality of life.

## Community belonging

We heard from several people we spoke to in the evaluation how important connection and reconnection to local communities in Leeds was to them. Once isolated and struggling to connect with others, Mark moved into a home he chose, in a community he loves, and reconnected with people he knew and cared about:

***"They didn't just help me find a house—they helped me build a life."***

For others like Luke, who experienced significant procedural and logistical challenges in finding suitable housing, his Small Support provider worked persistently to secure an accessible home in his former community, helping him reconnect with his surroundings and social networks. Now, he is reintegrating into his community and rebuilding his life in a familiar and supportive environment.

## Successful Small Support Services

As introduced in the previous chapter ('Progress towards outcomes') at the heart of the Pilot's success is the innovative work both new Small Support providers have done during the two years. Both new providers shared valuable insights into what this has been like for them, what it has taken for them to get to where they are as the Pilot comes to an end and their key achievements. The following sections share this learning, where possible, in the Small Support providers' own words.

### Taking a leap of faith

Both Small Support providers spoke about the uncertainties and challenges of starting a Small Support service. Even with their wealth of experience from their previous careers, motivation to do something different and the values to drive their new businesses forward, each told us how at the start of the process the thought of supporting complex individuals felt overwhelming:

***"We would read the support plans and think, can we support someone with that many challenges?"*** (Small Support Provider)

However, over time, their confidence grew as they witnessed positive outcomes and realised that the sense of overwhelm, they had experienced at the outset was rooted in cultural systems and ways of thinking within the adult social care sector which reinforce risk aversion and support by reputation, rather than meeting people where they are. These experiences emphasise the importance of being values driven and perseverance, despite initial doubts.

### Personal and financial risk

The financial risks associated with setting up and running Small Support service were significant and a recurring theme throughout the evaluation of the Pilot. Both providers described the profound personal sacrifices they made to establish their services.

***“We had to beg, borrow, and scrape together what we could from other jobs... We did very poorly financially in our personal lives for a few years.”***

(Small Support Provider)

With limited funding at the outset, the founders of the new services told us that they often worked long hours unpaid to build their services while simultaneously managing other employment to make ends meet.

The uncertainty around the timing of referrals exacerbated this risk. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, one service went years without becoming operational, despite having left previous jobs in anticipation of a quicker launch.

***“We established at the end of 2019 and were not able to become operational with our first referral until 2022... If we had known how long it would take, we might have prepared differently.”*** (Small Support Provider)

Whilst this situation was in many ways unusual, with the Pandemic diverting attention and funding to emergency responses rather than the Pilot, it is felt important to highlight that for those wanting to set up and commission Small Support services, the financial position required to develop such a service should not be underestimated.

For those in the Pilot, some funding in the form of NHSE capital grants and blended finance packages was eventually made available in 2022. However, it was noted that these only came after significant hardship.

***“We received proper wages starting in December 2022, after years of working unpaid.”*** (Small Support Provider)

For non-profit organisations, accessing such funding required meeting specific criteria and navigating a complex process, which added additional strain.

Providers emphasised that financial risk is a major deterrent for others considering entering the Small Supports sector. They suggested that the model could attract more interest if there were greater financial incentives or initial support.

***“Doing hundreds of hours of work for free is not enticing to people.”***

(Small Support Provider)

Despite the challenges, providers remained committed, due to their passion for the model and its ability to transform lives, demonstrating a remarkable level of resilience and determination in the face of financial uncertainty.

## Being values driven

The foundational ethos of Small Supports was frequently emphasised by providers as a critical driver of theirs and the Pilot’s success.

***“The big organisations have lost their way; it's all about the pounds and pence. We wanted to focus on delivering a good service.”***

(Small Support Provider)



It is felt that both providers' belief and commitment to these values is what has led to their commitment to the Pilot, even when they felt overwhelmed and were in difficult financial situations.

Providers have also emphasised that aligning with housing providers and other services who share similar values is vital to maintaining integrity and commitment to person-centered support within any Small Support service.

## Peer support

Collaboration and mentorship among providers were viewed as key facilitators to both of the new services' successes. Both shared how they had benefited from the guidance offered by experienced mentors from the Small Supports Programme. These mentors were described as

***"...an invaluable source of information and emotional support"***  
(Small Support Provider)

Sharing experiences with each other and other providers in the Small Support network was also pivotal to both services, as each felt supported and less isolated, which are factors which can often lead to smaller organisations failing in their early days.

Both providers noted that they hope to continue connecting with one another and others in the network past the end of the Pilot, but that this is harder now they are busier, although, they do share learning with each other, especially about good local resources when they find them:

***"...we try to meet up twice a year, but its harder now we're busy. In the early days we would be in touch a lot more...now we share information, like for training, we use the same provider so if we have spaces, we get in touch to see if anyone from their side needs it."*** (Small Support Provider)

## Developing partnerships

As noted above, developing strategic partnerships, particularly in housing, was both a challenging and rewarding element of the Pilot for providers. The shift from working with larger housing providers to smaller, values-driven partners significantly improved outcomes but was challenging to establish. One participant shared:

***"Having a housing provider focused solely on our needs relieved a lot of fear and allowed us to move faster. But it has taken a while to get here...before, the process took so long with so many people having to say 'yes' or fill out forms, that by the time we could put an offer in, it was gone..."***  
(Small Support Provider)

Building these partnerships was critical for ensuring that supported individuals had access to suitable housing environments.

The housing providers who engaged with the evaluation told us that the partnerships they have developed with the Small Support providers has also been beneficial to them. Not only has it allowed them to develop their service in locations they have not previously worked, they have also been able to develop relationships with their tenants in a way they have not previously done. They shared examples of where single tenancy schemes have worked well:

***“...we haven’t done lots of them, but we are seeing more and more of them, and they are met with a degree of scepticism, as they are a lot of work, these schemes, the big ones anyway, for not a lot of return, but when they work...you read that report and its like ‘wow’ the difference it makes, it’s the feel good factor, you know?”*** (Housing Provider)

## Challenging the status quo

As mentioned in the first part of this section, part of the success of Small Support providers is rooted in the challenging of the status quo of the adult social care sector: to meet people where they are and support them for the lives they want to live, not the ones they have had. This approach does not mean ignoring people’s pasts, but rather supporting them to live the lives they want to live whilst ensuring they are supported to process and live with their past experiences. The status quo of much of the adult social care sector does not do this, it tries to commission future services based on past need underpinned by balancing ‘risk’.

For Small Support services they have to meet this head on in Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) meetings, advocating for something different. Providers noted that this is challenging at first as other professionals often met their attendance at these meetings with ‘*a sense of ‘what are you doing here?’*” (Small Support Provider), but as time went on and providers grew in confidence with the successes, they were seeing for the people they supported, this began to change. Providers were able to hold their space in the MDT meetings and other professionals, especially those who had witnessed the impact of Small Supports on individual’s lives, shifted their opinions

***“...at first I wasn’t at all sure, I didn’t know what it was, I didn’t know how it all worked, but now, seeing the difference, how it works. I would definitely put it to panel for the right person in the future.”*** (Social Worker)

One provider noted that they hope the cultural shift they have witnessed emerge as a result of the Pilot in Leeds, will go further and lead to earlier intervention, stating

***“Why are we letting them fail before they come to us? We could prevent so much trauma by intervening sooner”*** (Provider)

This forward-thinking approach, coupled with advocating for tenant control and personalised choices, highlighted the transformative potential of the pilot.

## Building a happy and retained workforce

Finally, both providers, as well as the people supported and commissioners, emphasise that at the heart of the day-to-day success of the Small Support services in Leeds, has been the ability of the service to recruit and retain a stable, motivated workforce.

Both providers have developed thoughtful and values-driven approaches to recruitment which go beyond the Small Support approach and has ensured that staff are not only equipped to deliver high-quality care but are also happy and fulfilled in their roles. The following sub-sections detail what they have done to achieve this.

- **Values-based recruitment**

Staff are selected based on shared interests and alignment with the ethos of Small Supports. As one staff member said:

*"I was hired because of who I am, not just what's on my CV."*

- **Thoughtful welcomes**

New staff are welcomed with personalised touches, such as coffee gift cards and sleep-in packs with bedding, toiletries, and treats. These gestures create a positive first impression and create a sense of belonging from day one.

- **Wellbeing initiatives**

Staff mental health and happiness are prioritised by both services, through initiatives such as wellbeing packs, daily mental health tips, and personalised support plans. One staff member reflected:

*"I've never felt so valued—not just for my work, but for who I am as a person."*

These efforts have resulted in high levels of staff satisfaction and retention. Stability within the workforce has strengthened relationships with individuals, improving the quality of care.

*"We're a team, and that makes all the difference to the people we support."*  
(Staff member)

## Summary

The information presented in this chapter highlights the profound impact of the Small Support Pilot in Leeds on both the individuals supported and the providers delivering the services. It illustrates how the Pilot has fostered transformative changes, such as increased independence, confidence, emotional growth, and stronger community connections for individuals.

The chapter also delved into the successes and experiences of the Small Support providers. Their commitment to values-driven service, despite significant financial and personal challenges, underscores the transformative potential of smaller, personalised support

models. Providers leveraged strategic partnerships, developed a supportive peer network, and prioritised building a happy, stable workforce to deliver high-quality care.

This learning not only celebrates the Pilot's achievements but also serves as a resource for other local authorities and individuals considering similar models. The next chapter will focus on exploring the challenges encountered during the Pilot and the lessons learned from overcoming these obstacles, providing critical insights for future implementations.



## Challenges and areas for continued improvement

Whilst the Small Support Provision Pilot in Leeds has been overwhelmingly successful, as evidenced in the previous chapters, it has not been without its challenges during its two-year implementation. This chapter outlines the key challenges and the ways in which they were addressed, offering valuable insights for both LCC and the ICB in Leeds, in relation to their commitment to continual improvement, and other LAs considering similar initiatives. Some of these challenges have been acknowledged in previous chapters of this report, but it is felt important to ensure they are given the attention needed to be understood fully. Quotes from individuals, providers, and commissioners are included to illustrate the real-world experiences of navigating these difficulties.

### Housing availability and suitability

The lack of suitable, affordable housing was consistently cited as the Pilot's biggest challenge. Providers struggled to find homes that met individuals' needs due to high demand, rising costs, and limited availability.

***"Housing is always the hardest part. The market moves so quickly, and there just aren't enough accessible options available."*** (Small Support Provider)

Despite this, the Pilot leveraged local networks and creative problem-solving to secure housing. Providers worked with landlords and housing associations, advocating persistently for individuals. LCC and the ICB and Leeds also worked tirelessly to put in place a Contingency Plan to provide the assurance needed for housing providers and investors alike. This contingency fund is based on the core Housing Benefit rent level and is intended to be accessed via invoice from the Small Supports provider to LCC at the end of the period of void, such as due to a hospital admission, up to a maximum of 12 weeks. This approach has ensured that individuals in the Pilot are overwhelmingly housed in settings that met their needs, even if on a temporary basis. Working in this way has led to there never being a vacancy in any of the Small Support packages across the two years of the Pilot, which must be viewed as one of its great successes.

The partnerships fostered with housing providers has also led to improved understanding of the needs of this group of people who could potentially be supported by Small Support services in the future and a willingness to consider provision.

For more information, please follow this [link](#) to watch or listen to a podcast with Steve Bardsley, Joint Commissioning Manager Learning Disabilities in Leeds discussing housing and property with Lisa Brown.

## Recruitment and staff retention

Finding and retaining staff who aligned with the ethos of Small Supports proved challenging, particularly due to the non-traditional recruitment focus on shared values and interests rather than qualifications.

***"It's not about just filling vacancies. We look for people who genuinely care and share interests with the individuals they'll support—it takes time, but it's worth it."*** (Small Support Provider)

To overcome this, the Pilot implemented creative recruitment strategies, such as crafting personalised job adverts and offering thoughtful onboarding practices (as detailed in the previous two chapters). These efforts resulted in a stable workforce with low turnover, ensuring continuity of care.

## Referral delays and rapid onboarding

Referrals to the Leeds Small Support services come from the already established Learning Disability and Mental Health Nominations panels. The panels forward details of individuals to both Small Support Services (USS and M&M), when they have met the criteria that there is no suitable accommodation vacancy from the already commissioned services in the City.

Delays in securing housing caused frustration for individuals awaiting services. Conversely, when crises led to unexpected placement breakdowns, providers often had to onboard individuals quickly, with little time to build relationships or prepare.

***"We've had times where we've had to step in with almost no notice. It's not ideal because you want time to really get to know someone before starting support."*** (Small Support Provider)

Providers addressed this by developing flexible processes and maintaining open communication with LCC and the ICB in Leeds to manage expectations during transitions.

## Financial sustainability

The long-term financial viability of the Small Supports model raised questions, particularly concerning individuals whose income might exceed Housing Benefit thresholds, resulting in higher housing costs.

***"We need to think about what happens when someone starts working full-time. How do we make sure the costs remain manageable?"*** (Social Worker)

To address this, the Pilot began exploring shared funding models and cost-saving opportunities, such as reduced reliance on other statutory services and increased individual contributions through employment.

## Navigating systemic and cultural barriers

Resistance to the Small Supports model from some professionals within traditional systems presented both an initial, and ongoing, hurdle. Providers often faced scepticism about the viability and value of the approach.

***"It's a big cultural shift, and not everyone was on board at first. But the data and success stories made it hard to argue with the results."*** (Contract Manager)

Advocacy, education, and strong leadership from LCC and the ICB in Leeds helped overcome this resistance, fostering broader acceptance of the model. Furthermore, as the Pilot has gone on and the model has been embedded into the 'business as usual' commissioning landscape in Leeds, the successes seen for individuals supported speak for themselves and are changing cultures by their example.

However, it was noted by some professionals who engaged with the evaluation that more work could be done across the LCC and ICB in Leeds landscape to share details of Small Supports, what they are, who they are for, how they work and how individuals can be referred to them.

## Summary

The challenges faced by the Leeds Small Supports Provision Pilot reflect the complexities of implementing innovative, person-centered approaches within existing systems. Through persistence, creativity, and collaboration, the Pilot not only overcame these obstacles but also generated valuable lessons for future initiatives. These experiences highlight the importance of flexibility, advocacy, and partnership in ensuring the success and sustainability of Small Supports.



## Discussion and recommendations

The Leeds Small Supports Provision Pilot (2022–2024) has been an overwhelming success, demonstrating the transformative effects of personalised, community-centered support models for individuals with complex needs. The Pilot has succeeded in achieving its outcomes and objectives, leading to nine individuals having greater independence, confidence, and control over their lives in placements that align with their unique aspirations at an overall significantly lower cost than their previous placements. Furthermore, participants in the evaluation reported meaningful progress, such as learning to budget, reintegrating into communities, and achieving emotional stability. Stable housing and consistent relationships with support workers were pivotal, fostering trust and long-term wellbeing.

Leeds City Council (LCC) and the ICB in Leeds played a vital role in creating an environment where Small Supports could thrive. By adapting commissioning frameworks, reducing administrative burdens, and prioritising housing, LCC and the ICB in Leeds enabled providers to focus on delivering high-quality care. Two providers, Unique Support Solutions Ltd. (*USS*) and Mae and Mitchell Bespoke Management (*M&M*), exemplified effective implementation, recruiting staff based on values rather than qualifications and ensuring continuity of care by avoiding agency reliance. This approach led to stronger relationships between staff and individuals, enhancing the quality of support and outcomes.

Despite its successes, the Pilot faced challenges that offer valuable lessons. Housing availability was a significant obstacle, highlighting the need for stronger partnerships with housing associations and landlords. Financial sustainability also emerged as an area requiring attention, particularly for individuals transitioning to employment, as this can impact benefit eligibility. Systemic barriers and resistance to change within traditional models further underscored the importance of advocacy and cultural transformation to embed Small Supports into mainstream care.

## Recommendations

The learning garnered in the evaluation of the Pilot, and the lessons shared in this report, help inform a series of recommendations for LCC, the ICB in Leeds and key takeaways for other Local Authorities, ICBs and individuals who may be considering, or are in the throes of, setting up their own Small Support services. The final sections of this report draw these recommendations and takeaways together in a bid to help drive the Small Supports model forward in the UK.



## For Leeds City Council and the ICB in Leeds

Looking beyond the Pilot, LCC and the ICB in Leeds should consider the following to harness the learning garnered and integrate Small Supports into its commissioning landscape:

- Continue fostering an ecosystem conducive to new providers, promoting diversity in service delivery.
- Strengthen collaborations with housing associations and developers to address availability challenges.
- Continue capturing long-term cost-efficiency data to build a stronger business case for Small Supports.
- Gather further data to support the undertaking of a fiscal, social, and economic value of care and support systems analysis for individuals supported.
- Use success stories and data from the pilot to advocate for cultural change within traditional systems.
- Facilitate ongoing training and support for staff across all levels to sustain the model's ethos.
- Scale up the initiative to reach more individuals while maintaining quality and personalisation.
- Continue to collaborate with other LAs and ICB's within the Small Supports Network to share learning and position Leeds as a leader in innovative care models.

## For other Local Authorities

For LAs looking at, or in the midst of, introducing Small Supports to their commissioning landscape:

- **Cultural change takes time:** Be prepared to challenge traditional care paradigms and invest in advocacy and education.
- **Housing is fundamental:** Secure partnerships with housing stakeholders early and develop your own LA contingency plans to cover rent payments if needed. This really is the '*golden ticket*' for investors in housing as it helps balance risk between partners.
- **Prioritise collaboration:** Regular engagement with providers fosters trust, innovation, and problem-solving.
- **Invest in workforce stability:** Focus on values-based recruitment and staff wellbeing to ensure continuity of care.

## For individuals setting up Small Supports

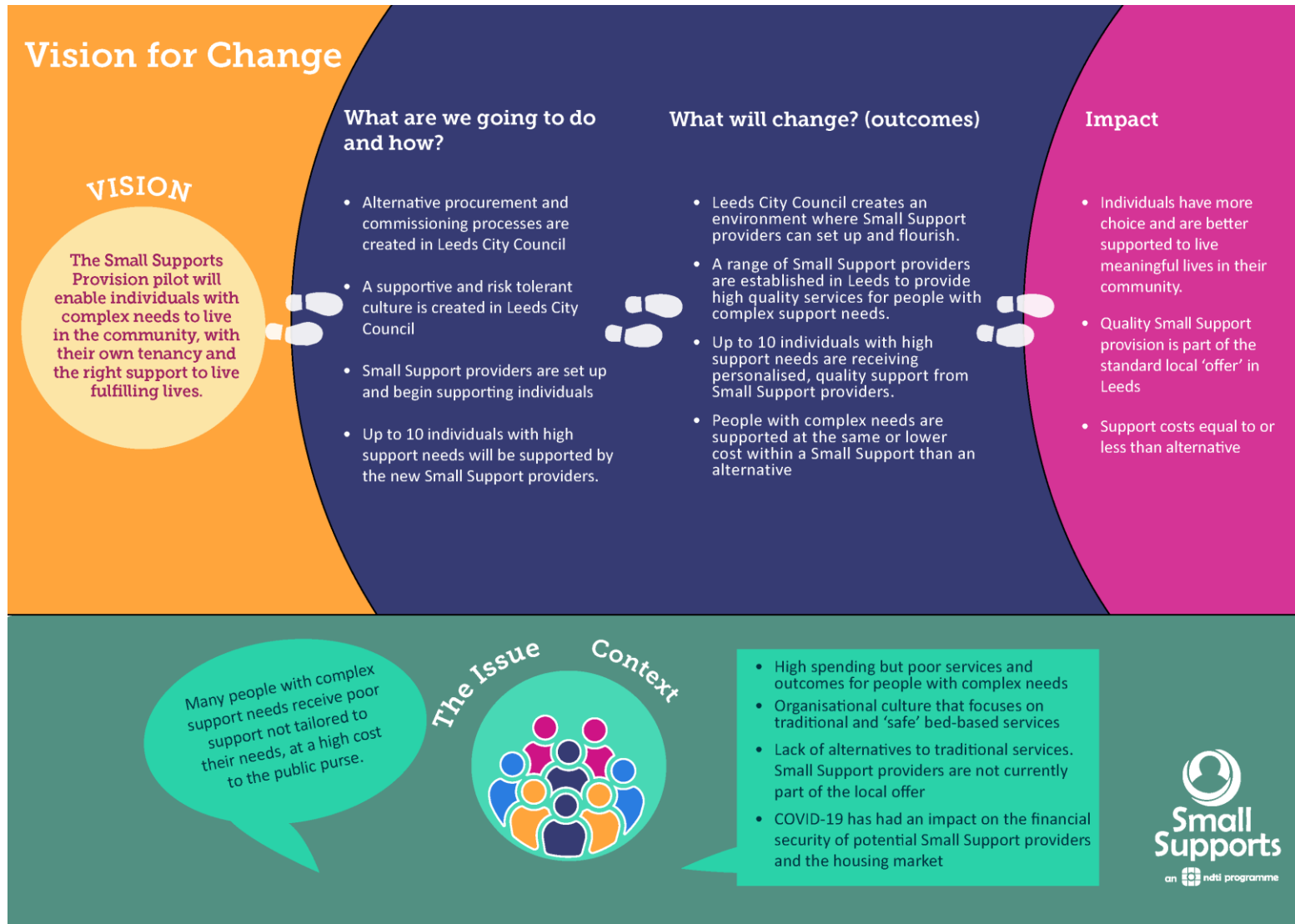
For individuals looking at, or in the midst of, setting up their own Small Supports service:

- **Understand personal risk:** Setting up a Small Support service involves personal and financial risks, from securing funding to navigating regulatory challenges. Be prepared, build a support network, and stay focused on the life-changing impact your service can have, taking calculated steps to manage and mitigate these risks.

- **Values first:** Build a team whose ethos aligns with personalised care and relationship-building.
- **Secure housing partnerships:** Reliable access to suitable housing is a cornerstone of success. Foster relationships with housing providers and potential investors early on. Take the learning from Leeds and work with your LA to put in place a Contingency Plan for rent payments. This will be your '*golden ticket*' to housing in the future.
- **Flexibility and creativity:** Tailor support models to fit individual needs and adapt to challenges as they arise.
- **Emphasise financial planning:** Ensure the long-term sustainability of services with diverse funding approaches.
- **Meet people where they are:** When you have people referred to you, meet them where they are, rather than where their histories or legacies advise you to meet them.
- **Challenge the status quo:** Don't shy away from questioning traditional service models. Small Supports succeed by breaking away from institutional approaches and championing personalised support. Stand firm, advocate for change, and use examples of successes from areas like Leeds to inspire and reshape the system.



## Appendix 1. Vision for Change





## Appendix 2. Overarching slides from whole report

# Small Supports Leads

Capturing the learning from the Small Supports Provision Pilot in Leeds (2022 – 2024)



## Aim:

To hear from those involved with the delivery of the Small Supports Provision Pilot in Leeds, as well as those who are now supported by the new Small Support services.

## Who took part?

**6** individuals supported by new Small Support Providers

**6** Social Workers

**5** members of staff

**2** Small Support Providers

**2** Housing provider

**Key people** within Leeds City Council (LCC)



# About these slides



This slide deck captures the key learning and impact from the two years of the Pilot, presented through the lens of the *Making it Real* framework.

While the comprehensive evaluation report offers a detailed analysis of outcomes and objectives, this deck aims to provide accessible, actionable insights.

By aligning the findings with the *Making it Real* framework, the slides focus on the principles of personalised, person-centered support, ensuring the learning from the Pilot is practical and adaptable for those seeking to apply it.

Whether you are a Commissioner, Small Support provider, practitioner, policymaker, or housing provider, these slides are designed to highlight what has worked, what challenges remain, and how the Pilot has contributed to better outcomes for individuals and communities.

We hope this approach ensures the learning is both useful and usable, inspiring continued innovation and collaboration in delivering meaningful support.



# Small Supports What did we do?

Across the two years, we asked questions connected to the 'Making it Real' framework.

-  Wellbeing & independence
-  Information & advice
-  Active & supportive communities.
-  Flexible & integrated care & support.
-  When things need to change.
-  Workforce



# Key Learning



Workforce

1

## Having the right people in place from the beginning is key.

We heard from across the Small Supports Provision Pilot that having the right people in place has been key to ***‘making it work.’***

The right people includes those working in LCC and the ICB in Leeds, mentors, those setting up the Small Support services as well as the staff employed within them.

Their **practice must be driven by human rights and the principles of person-centred care, with a willingness to take educated risks for individuals.**



*“...it’s important to me that they’re about rights...that they are progressive...that they will support me to fight for mine and other disabled people’s rights.”*  
(Individual).

*“It’s important that the people are right, that they are interested in the same things...we have shared things...woodwork, magnet fishing, golf balls, car boots...”* (Individual).



# Key Learning



Workforce

2

## Long-term commitment is essential.



Reflecting on their involvement in the Pilot and the work done before it started (since 2019), the new Small Support Providers in Leeds expressed how pivotal the long-term commitment from LCC and the ICB in Leeds to this new support model, has been to their success.

In particular, they asserted that without the commitment and consistency of the Commissioners who drove the Pilot, they wouldn't be as established as they are today.

“...they've been pivotal. Without their commitment we wouldn't be here...they always make time for us, we never feel like a burden.”

(Small Support Service Provider)

“...without their continuous involvement *since before COVID [2018]...we doubt it would have got across the line. We didn't know when COVID hit if it would continue...we thought that was it, but they stuck with it, with us, and here we are*”

(Small Support Service Provider)





# Key Learning

↔ When things need to change.

3

## Changes to policies and procedures are a must.

The policies and procedures that surround the provision of care and support have to change for Small Support provision to be successful.

In particular, the ability of LCC and the ICB in Leeds to:

- change their finance systems to pay Small Support services in advance, rather than in arrears
- broaden the definition of care in the City, and
- implement a Contingency Plan for rent payments

are felt to have made **the difference between being able to run the business and not.**



*“I don’t think we have got it all sussed yet. But we have learnt a lot as we go and have ironed out lots of teething problems...the key thing is to find the right people to talk to, who get it, once you explain it to them, they help, and it starts to work.”*  
(Social Worker).



# Key Learning



Flexible & integrated care & support

4

## Regular clear and honest communication is needed.

Everyone involved in Small Supports needs to communicate clearly with one another.

Small Support providers told us they felt **respected by the regular clear communication** from LCC and the ICB in Leeds which **“made setting up a new type of support easier to navigate”**, whilst Social Workers told us the honest communication from Small Support providers was **“refreshing”**.

People themselves also told us how important being **included in communication about their home and support was to them feeling valued and at the centre of their lives.**



*“It has been really easy; the communication has been really honest. Very honest actually...For example, they reviewed someone’s care needs and worked out what it would cost, did a detailed costing and told me what they could do and what they needed to get it to work.”*  
(Social Worker).



# Key Learning



Flexible & integrated care & support

## 5 Flexibility and a willingness to learn is vital.

The success of the Small Support Provision Pilot in Leeds lies in its **flexibility**—adapting to the needs of individuals, addressing operational challenges, and navigating systemic constraints. This adaptability is complemented by a strong emphasis on **continuous learning** within Small Support Providers.



Staff and organisations were encouraged to grow and improve through feedback and evaluation, ensuring the delivery of high-quality, person-centered support.

This culture of learning has not only strengthened services but also drives innovation for broader systemic change.

*“We’ve learned a lot as we go..we’ve ironed out teething problems and made the system work better... We do a staff survey each year...it’s important to have a ‘you said, we did’ section so staff know we heard what they said.”*  
(Small Support Provider).



# Key Learning



Flexible & integrated care & support

6

## Its about people, not packages of care.

Small Support services are by definition, small. In practice this means that conversations between Social Workers, Commissioners and Support Providers are about the support an individual requires and **“not a financial transaction.”**

This leads to an **investment in the individual and the creation of a bespoke package of support** in a home they have chosen in a location that matters to them.



*“When you talk to the bigger service providers it’s not always so personal. They are interested in them, but it is about the package of care, the risk and the cost. With Small Support providers they are invested in the person. They talk about what the person wants and how they can meet it. It is not a financial transaction, it’s a person.” (Social Worker).*



# Key Learning



When things  
need to  
change.



Flexible &  
integrated care &  
support

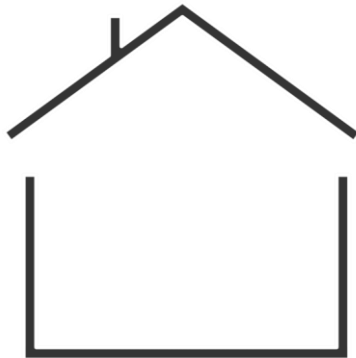
7

## Housing as a cornerstone of success.

Housing is an integral part of Small Support provision and has been a continuous challenge in Leeds throughout the Pilot.

However, both Small Support providers have worked closely with LCC and the ICB in Leeds and various housing providers to find dynamic solutions, such as utilising available temporary housing, to ensure success for individuals.

This has led to both Small Support providers now having dedicated housing providers and investors, which, in addition to LCC's and the ICB in Leeds introduction of a Contingency Plan to cover rent payments if someone needs time away from their tenancy for an extended period, should enable some of the initial challenges with housing to be overcome.



*“They [Housing Provider] have been brilliant. They’re devoted to us and bring in new investors to work with us directly.”  
(Small Support Provider).*



# Key Learning



Flexible &  
integrated care &  
support

8

## Transforming risk perception.

The introduction of Small Supports in Leeds has shifted the perception of risk, focusing on potential and capability rather than limitations.



Throughout the Pilot, professionals have embraced educated risks as part of enabling individuals to thrive.

This cultural shift, has enabled those supported as a result of the Pilot to thrive. The impact of this is detailed on the following slides.

*"...What's on paper rarely matches reality...we need to meet people where they are..." (Social Worker ).*

*"...They trusted me to make decisions...that's what's different. It's changed everything for me..." (Individual).*



# Key Learning



When things  
need to  
change.



Flexible &  
integrated care  
& support

9

## A model for wider change.

The Small Supports Provision Pilot in Leeds has shown how individualised care can exceed traditional Care Act standards, providing a blueprint for broader systemic change.

Further, the success of the Pilot, has prompted discussions about expanding the model to other groups, particularly those with mental health support needs .



*“When you talk to bigger providers, it’s about packages of care and costs. With Small Supports, it’s about the person.” (Social Worker).*

*“It’s so much more than Care Act minimum standards.” (Small Support Provider).*



# Impact: *“it’s the little things”*



People supported by the new Small Support services in Leeds shared that it’s the **“little things”** that make the biggest difference in their lives. Being asked about their “wish list” for a home and having their preferences taken seriously, newbeing involved in choosing their home, overseeing building works, selecting paint colours and carpets, and having their own key were all highlighted as transformative experiences.

Over the two years of the pilot, people reported living more independent and autonomous lives. They are now managing their own money to cover daily expenses and save for trips and holidays, adjusting support hours to suit their work and hobbies, and travelling to and from work without assistance. For everyone we spoke to, this way of living is a dramatic improvement from their previous experiences.

*“I manage my weekly spends now...the old me wouldn’t have had money for holidays or activities.” (Individual).*

*“...nothing is locked, just the front door and I have the key!....no one saying ‘no’...it’s my space, more independent.” (Individual).*





# Impact: *“We are people we want the same things as you”*



Wellbeing & independence

In addition to the specific *“little things”* people told us about, they also emphasised that being supported by a Small Support service has given them a **chance to have a life like everyone else.**

For some this means being able to **“ come and going as I want”** and **“going to the kitchen and everything is where I have left it. I don’t have to clean for 30 minutes before having a cup of tea.”**

Being able to do these seemingly simple things has changed some people’s lives immeasurably, as the challenges they faced when living with others have been eliminated.



*It used to make me really anxious...I’d fall out with people having to share the space, especially the kitchen. It’s so much better...I am calmer here.”*  
(Individual).



# Impact: Improved Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing



Wellbeing & independence



Being able to live more independent and autonomous lives, has improved the mental and emotional wellbeing of those we spoke to.

We heard that the shift from living in shared or restrictive environments to their own homes, personalised to their choices and needs, with support they have chosen supporting them on days and times that work for them, has reduced stress and anxiety for many of those we spoke to.

This bespoke approach has prevented placement failures, allowing individuals to thrive in stable environments of their choosing.

*“Baking helps me destress. Having my own kitchen has been good...I can go in and cook when I want.”*  
(Individual).



# Impact: “...it’s so much more than Care Act minimum standards”



Flexible & integrated care & support



Both Small Support Providers established in Leeds as part of the Pilot, have developed person-led recruitment strategies which has led to long-term staff consistency.

Neither Provider uses agency staff, relying instead on their own ability to cover any absences when needed.

This approach to recruitment has not only ensured that individuals feel confident and comfortable expressing their needs and desires in relation to their support but has also built trust and stronger relationships between individuals and their support teams.

*“The support [they] have now...well they haven’t had it like this before...doing the recruitment means they now have people for different things they want to do in life... things that wouldn’t have been picked up...it’s so much more than Care Act minimum standards...” (Social Worker).*

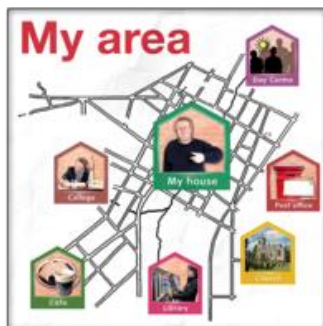
*“we can think no, we want better than this...You know, they're OK, but they're standard and we're looking for that the same as us drive and passion.” (Small Support Provider).*



# Impact: “*The feeling of connecting...and reconnecting*”



Active & supportive communities.



Most people we spoke to were living in an area that was close to people that matter to them. They also told us that they felt connected to their local communities with **most people knowing their neighbours and involved in their communities**.

Several people have also been able to reconnect with friends and family members that they had lost touch with because of previous placements and support.

*“I didn’t want to tell her on the phone, so I surprised her [step-mum]...I am on the bus route, so it was easy enough to get there...”*  
(Individual).

*“My neighbours are nice...introduced myself. People keep themselves to themselves...just how I like it. Quiet.”*  
(Individual).



# Impact: Routine, structure and meaning everyday



Flexible & integrated care & support



Wellbeing & independence



Many people now have busy days and structured weeks filled with things that they need and want to do.

We heard that people value the everyday tasks of having your own home such as planning and cooking meals, shopping, cleaning and looking after the garden.

They also value being able to pursue work and volunteering opportunities and pick up hobbies and interests.

For most people, their lives now look significantly different to how they did before .

*“We have been able to take things that were causing challenges before and channel that into hobbies....the woodwork and litter picking have worked really well.” (Support Staff).*

*“Having my own kitchen has been good...I can go in and cook when I want. No one interrupts...I love to bake; it helps me destress....I like to cook as well, but I need to learn to cook more than pasta though...my staff are helping me with that.” (Individual).*



# Impact: Achieving personal goals and aspirations



Wellbeing & independence

Everyone we spoke to told us about the hobbies, interests, volunteering and educational opportunities they are now actively pursuing thanks to the support they now get.

We heard about:

- people's volunteering work, whether as a first entry to the workforce or progressing to a position of training other volunteers.
- people learning new skills like making and selling their own crafts, learning to drive, and doing courses at college.
- people being able to go on holiday and weekends away.



*"I've started making candles and wax melts... I'm planning to sell them and use the money for driving lessons."*  
(Individual)

*"I've been to Scotland five times... I've made beer tables, a shoe rack, and other projects in my workshop"*  
(Individual)



# Impact: Hopes, aspirations and plans



Flexible & integrated care & support



Wellbeing & independence



In addition to having busy weeks filled with things people want and need to do, people also feel they **are able to make plans for their future and have their hopes and aspirations taken seriously and supported.**

Again, this is something new for many people, as they feel previous support hasn't taken this element of their lives seriously.

*“I have so many plans, I am always thinking about the future...I want to use the money I make from making things for driving lessons and then, eventually, to buy a car....I know I can do that here....” (Individual).*



# Challenges (1)

Everyone who contributed to this piece of work over the two years told us about different challenges the Pilot has faced. Despite their different positions and perspectives, the majority raised the same points and shared this learning in a bid to ensure ongoing backing for Small Supports in Leeds is mindful of this context whilst also ensuring other areas introducing Small Supports have this knowledge to support their endeavors.



- **Housing availability and suitability:** Securing appropriate housing was identified as the primary challenge in the Pilot, due to limited availability of accessible and affordable properties, high market demand, and a lack of Housing Associations willing or able to accommodate tenants.
- **Referral delays:** Delays in starting services often stemmed from housing issues, causing longer-than-expected waits for individuals. Conversely, when placements broke down unexpectedly, Small Support providers were required to initiate support quickly, leaving insufficient time to build rapport with individuals before service delivery.





# Challenges (2)



- **Financial sustainability:** Questions arose around the long-term financial viability of the approach throughout the Pilot. Concerns included the potential impact of individuals' income surpassing Housing Benefit thresholds, leading to unaffordable rent and whether the approach leads to cost saving from reduced service usage.
- **Recruitment and retention of staff:** Finding and retaining staff who align with the ethos of Small Supports proved challenging. Staff are often recruited based on shared interests with individuals rather than traditional qualifications, complicating and slowing the process. The demanding nature of the roles highlighted the importance of maintaining staff commitment to the model.
- **Systemic and cultural barriers:** Adapting to local authority commissioning and procurement processes presented challenges, particularly as systemic resistance to the Small Supports model required significant advocacy. There were concerns that future responsiveness to the model may decline as the initiative becomes embedded within existing systems.
- **Sustaining the Pilot's momentum post-completion:** Participants reflected on the need for continued support and knowledge-sharing to ensure Small Supports thrive beyond the Pilot and are successfully adopted in other areas.



# Overcoming challenges



We heard the following suggestions of how some of the challenges detailed in the previous slides could be overcome and enable Small Supports to thrive both in Leeds and across the UK:



- Develop recruitment pipelines and explore creative solutions to staff retention.
- Strengthen partnerships with housing providers and investors to secure suitable properties faster.
- Investigate long-term financial models that support individuals transitioning into employment.
- Continue advocating for systemic flexibility, particularly in payment systems and referral processes.



# A look to the future

The Small Supports Provision Pilot in Leeds has demonstrated the transformative impact of person-centered, community-based care. Through long-term commitment from Leeds City Council and the ICB in Leeds, and collaboration among stakeholders, individuals have experienced significant improvements in independence, mental health, and quality of life.



Flexible systems, innovative solutions, and a focus on human rights enabled the Pilot to overcome challenges such as housing availability, staff recruitment, and systemic barriers.

The Pilot highlights the importance of adaptability, clear communication, and a shared ethos in creating personalised, high-quality care. As a blueprint for systemic change, it offers a sustainable model with potential for broader application, supporting diverse groups and fostering autonomy and inclusion.

Moving forward, the integration of Small Supports into commissioning processes in Leeds is set to make the model part of the "business as usual" service landscape, while the successes in the City should serve as evidence and motivation for the model's roll out more broadly across the UK, paving the way for a more inclusive and individualised approach to support.





# Thank you



Thank you to everyone who took part in conversations and shared information with NDTi as part of this work.

And thank you to the staff for helping facilitate and support the in-person visits.

## More Information

NDTi are working with other Local Authority areas in England to capture learning from the Small Supports programmes they develop. This information will be shared via our website and across the Small Supports Network.

For more information visit:

<https://www.ndti.org.uk/resources/publication/small-supports-evaluation-reports>

or contact Dr. Victoria Mason -Angelow:

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