



Learning so far: Time to Talk Next Steps Scotland

2025/2026

Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our thanks to all the young people, parents, carers, and practitioners who have generously shared their experiences, and insights as part of Time to Talk Next Steps Scotland. Your openness and reflections have been central to understanding what is working well and where the programme can continue to improve.

Special thanks also go to the NDTi delivery staff who have brought dedication, creativity, and compassion to their work with young people and families across Scotland, and who have contributed their learning and feedback to shape this report.

We would also like to thank the Scottish Government's Children and Families Directorate for their continued partnership, support, and collaboration in designing and delivering this programme and its evaluation.

This *Learning So Far* report reflects the collective effort, insight, and shared commitment of everyone involved, all of whom are working towards a Scotland where every young person with additional support needs is confident, connected, and in control of their future.

About NDTi

The National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi) is a not-for-profit social change organisation working to enable people of all ages who are at risk exclusion, or who need support to live a good life, to have choice and control in their lives and communities.

For over 30 years, NDTi has worked alongside people, families, and professionals to challenge inequality, share evidence of what works, and influence policy and practice across education, health, and social care.

Our work is grounded in the belief that everyone should have the opportunity to live an ordinary, self-determined life — one that reflects their strengths, aspirations, and rights.

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Introduction

[Time to Talk Next Steps Scotland](#) (TtNS Scotland) is a one year (2025-26) national programme supporting young people aged 14 and over with additional support needs as they plan their next steps into adulthood. Funded by the Scottish Government, and delivered by the [National Development Team for Inclusion \(NDTi\)](#), it builds on learning from the [Time to Talk Next Steps pilot](#) delivered in Scotland in 2022–23, and the 3-year [Time to Talk Next Steps programme delivered in England](#) between 2021 -24.

The programme offers personalised, strengths-based support for young people, families, and practitioners to navigate the often complex and inconsistent transitions landscape for young people in Scotland (please follow this [link](#) for more details of what transitions are). Its aim is to ensure that young people with additional support needs in Scotland feel confident, connected, and in control of their futures, supported by informed families and practitioners working together to enable positive, person-centred transitions.

Programme Delivery

TtNS Scotland provides a blend of one-to-one online support, ‘Planning Live’ sessions in schools and other youth-based services/space, and family-focused information and support. The model works with young people and their families directly while also engaging schools, and local services to embed learning and strengthen good transition practice across the system.

Support includes:

For young people (aged 14+):

- Individual online support sessions with NDTi staff and associates.
- ‘Planning Live’ sessions within schools/youth-based services to support person-centred planning and goal setting.

For families:

- Online support and information-sharing webinars.
- Signposting and links to relevant resources, organisations and support.

For practitioners and the wider system:

- Shared learning and evidence to strengthen the quality, coordination, and consistency of transitions support in Scotland.

How this Programme Builds on and Differs from the Pilot

Learning from the TtNS Scotland pilot ([2022-23](#)) has directly shaped this iteration of the programme. Several key changes were made to enhance accessibility, improve engagement, and strengthen evaluation processes:

- Early triage calls ensure a personalised and timely response to everyone who requests support.
- Shorter 40-minute sessions have replaced one-hour meetings, responding to feedback that young people prefer more focused sessions online.
- Support now starts from age 14, aligning with Scottish Government Guidance and providing opportunities to engage earlier in transition planning.
- New [NDTi Associates based in Scotland](#) who bring local expertise and connections, while recruitment has offered opportunities for young people to be involved.
- ‘Planning Live’ sessions are being tested in schools as a proactive, person-centred approach to transitions planning.
- The evaluation approach now integrates session-based reflection tools and standardised outcome measures, designed in collaboration with the Scottish Government’s Children and Families Directorate.

These developments reflect a more embedded, partnership-based approach, combining national coordination with local relevance and responsiveness to young people’s voices.



Why it Matters and Policy Context

Transitions to adulthood for young people with additional support needs in Scotland remain uneven, complex, and often difficult to navigate. Families and professionals consistently report that opportunities, information, and support vary widely between local authorities and service areas (Graham & Power, 2021). This variability can leave young people feeling disconnected, uncertain, or excluded from decisions about their futures, while families often describe a system that relies too heavily on their persistence and advocacy to make progress (ARC Scotland, 2025; Mitchell & Beresford, 2014).

The Scottish Government's National Transitions to Adulthood Strategy for Young Disabled People seeks to address these inequalities by improving coordination, communication, and the quality of support available across Scotland ([Scottish Government, 2025](#)). TtNS Scotland contributes directly to this ambition by helping young people and families experience more confident, informed, and connected transitions, while generating insight to inform both local and national policy ([priorities 1, 2, 3 and 5](#)).

The programme sits firmly within Scotland's wider policy framework for children's rights, inclusion, and wellbeing, reflecting commitments such as [Getting It Right for Every Child \(GIRFEC\)](#), ['The Promise'](#), Scotland's commitment to children and young people with care experience, and the incorporation of the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (UNCRC) into Scottish law. Each of these policies emphasises that young people should be supported holistically, have meaningful influence over decisions that affect them, and experience predictable, relational continuity as they move into adult life. The National Transitions to Adulthood Strategy reinforces these principles and, through its 'Building Blocks' section, sets out the existing legislation and guidance that underpin them ([Scottish Government, 2025](#)).

In this context, TtNS Scotland brings these principles to life by directly delivering on key actions within the National Transitions to Adulthood Strategy ([Scottish Government, 2025](#)). The programme not only reflects the strategy's vision but actively supports priorities 1, 2, 3, and 5 through improving early planning, strengthening family involvement, fostering coordinated, person-centred approaches, and generating robust data to improve transitions, ([Scottish Government, 2025](#)). It is grounded in the understanding that transitions are not just administrative milestones, but relational processes. Research across education, health and social care highlights that consistent, person-centred relationships are crucial for sustaining motivation, confidence, and wellbeing during change (Morgan, 2020; Ruch, Turney & Ward, 2018; Trevithick, 2003). The programme's focus on trust, belonging, and co-production reflects this growing evidence base by recognising that positive transitions are built through small, predictable, human interactions rather than one-off plans or assessments. By combining one-to-one and group-based planning, family engagement, and systems learning, TtNS Scotland models what coordinated, inclusive transition support can look like in practice. In doing so, it responds directly to the [Additional](#)

[Support for Learning \(ASL\) Review \(Morgan, 2020\)](#), which identified persistent gaps in communication, planning, and understanding across education, health, and social care, and are still omnipresent in 2025 ([ARC Scotland, 2025](#)). The programme intends to demonstrate how these gaps can be bridged through joined-up, relational practice that brings professionals, families, and young people together around shared understanding and coordinated action.

Ultimately, TtTNS Scotland is both a practical response to the challenges that young people face and a policy exemplar showing how Scotland's ambitions for inclusion, equity, and rights can be translated into everyday practice. As such, the learning generated through the programme will play a valuable role in informing the implementation of the [Transitions to Adulthood Strategy](#) and strengthening Scotland's whole-system approach to supporting young people as they move into adult life.

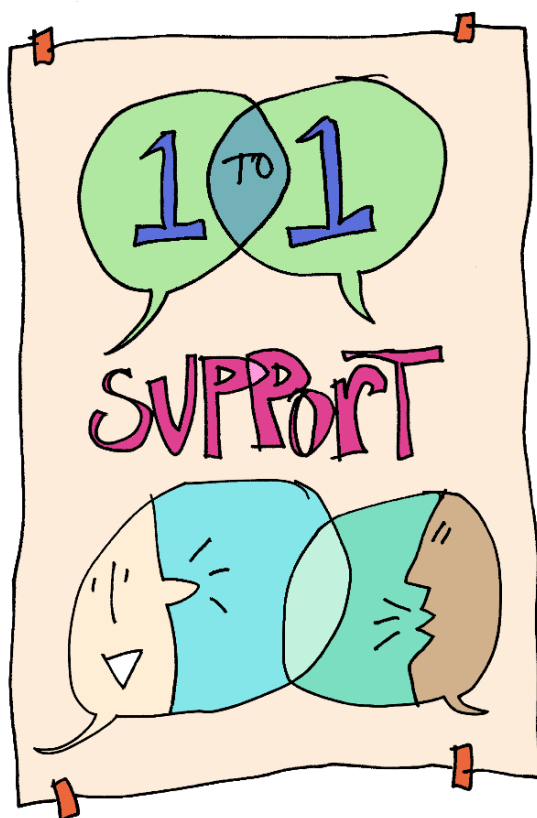
The Vision for Change

Building on this national context, TtTNS Scotland sets out a clear vision for change: a Scotland where young people with additional support needs are confident, connected, and in control of their future, supported by families and practitioners who are equally informed and empowered (Appendix 1). This aligns closely with the vision of the National Transitions to Adulthood Strategy, developed with young people, families, and stakeholders, which aspires to a Scotland where every young disabled person experiences smooth, well-supported transitions and is empowered to achieve their ambitions ([Scottish Government, 2025](#)). Together, these visions reinforce a shared commitment to inclusion, rights, and person-centred planning.

Through its work, the programme aims to help young people develop greater confidence, stronger self-advocacy skills, improved life satisfaction, and practical plans for their future. It supports families to feel heard and valued, and to be better equipped to guide their young person through transition. For practitioners, the programme seeks to build confidence, provide access to tools and guidance, and strengthen networks that enable person-centred practice.

Key Learning

- ➔ **Confidence:** 83% of young people attending Planning Live sessions feel more confident about their future.
- ➔ **Voice & Control:** Young people report feeling listened to and able to express what matters to them.
- ➔ **Connection:** Around 80% feel more connected to someone who can help them plan ahead.
- ➔ **Families:** 90% of parents/carers feel more informed and better able to support their young person.
- ➔ **Practice:** Delivery staff report increased confidence in adapting to communication needs and using reflective tools.



Evaluation and Learning Approach

The evaluation of TtTNS Scotland has been designed to understand not only what difference the programme is making, but also how it achieves change for young people and families. As noted in the previous chapter, it builds directly on the learning from the TtTNS Scotland pilot ([2022-23](#)), with refinements to improve accessibility, reduce burden, and strengthen the quality of data collected. Please see Appendix 1: Vision for Change.

Purpose of the Evaluation

The evaluation aims to:

- Capture outcomes for young people, families, and practitioners, particularly around confidence, connection, and control over transitions.
- Understand what works well in supporting young people with additional support needs to plan their futures in Scotland's policy and practice landscape.
- Identify barriers and enablers to effective delivery, including contextual, organisational, and relational factors.
- Generate learning to inform future delivery of transitions support across Scotland, contributing to the implementation of the National [Transitions to Adulthood Strategy for Young Disabled People](#).

Evaluation Design

The evaluation adopts a mixed-method approach, combining structured reflection tools, embedded outcome measures, and continuous feedback gathered throughout delivery. This design builds on learning from the [2022-23](#) pilot and ongoing discussions with both the NDTi delivery team and the Scottish Government's Children's Services Reform Unit. Regular discussions between delivery staff, associates, and the evaluation team ensure that insights are captured and acted on quickly, enabling the evaluation to play an active role in shaping delivery by identifying patterns, highlighting successes, and surfacing challenges that require attention.

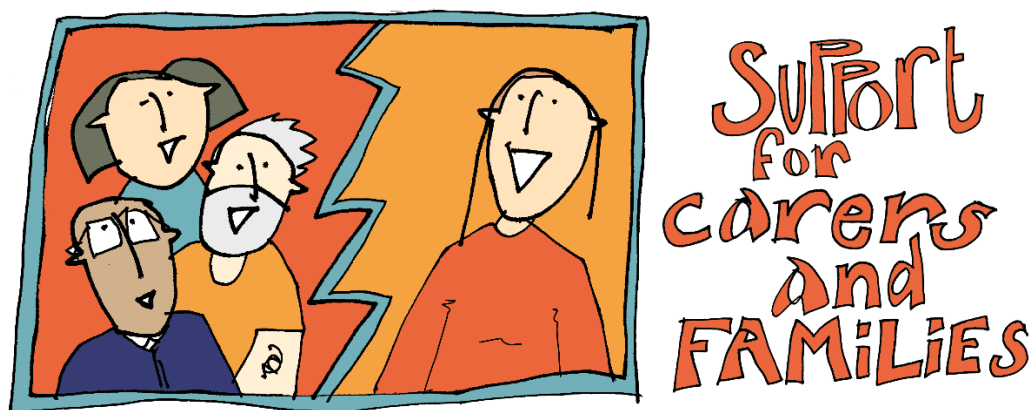
During the pilot, young people reported that formal interviews felt difficult or intrusive, so the evaluation has shifted towards integrated, in-session tools instead. Supporters now record outcomes and insights as part of their regular work with young people and families, making the evaluation process more natural, relevant, and minimally burdensome.

The evaluation incorporates several core elements:

- **Session-based reflection tools** – capturing changes in confidence, self-belief, and connection after each session.

- **Standardised outcome measures** – embedded within online surveys, designed with input from the Scottish Government’s Children’s Services Reform Unit.
- **Monitoring data** – including referral sources, participant demographics, and engagement levels.
- **Feedback loops** – regular reflection sessions with delivery staff and associates to explore emerging themes, challenges, and examples of good practice.

Together, these approaches provide a rounded picture of the programme’s reach, experience, and early impact, while ensuring the evaluation remains responsive to the needs of both the delivery team and participants.



The Purpose of this Report

This *Learning So Far* report marks the midpoint of the TtNS Scotland 2025-26 programme. It is intended as a reflective learning summary, capturing early insights, experiences, and emerging outcomes from the first half of delivery.

Rather than offering final judgements, this report aims to:

- Share what has been learned so far about what works, and what needs further exploration, in supporting young people with additional support needs to move confidently into adulthood.
- Inform ongoing delivery and improvement, ensuring that the programme continues to adapt to young people’s experiences and to local contexts across Scotland.
- Provide feedback to partners and stakeholders, including the Scottish Government’s Children’s Services Reform Unit, to shape future policy and practice around transitions.
- Celebrate the progress made by young people, families, and practitioners who are already seeing change through small, relational, and person-centred work.

The findings presented here draw on a blend of quantitative feedback and qualitative stories, illustrating not only what difference the programme is making but how that difference happens in practice.

A final evaluation report will follow at the end of the delivery period (March 2026), consolidating learning from the full dataset and exploring longer-term outcomes and system-level impact.

Data Used to Write this Report

Table 1 (below) outlines the data sources analysed for this report. This data includes all responses received up to and including 16 October 2025.

As this report represents a midpoint in delivery, these sources are currently being considered as individual data points rather than longitudinal stories tracking young people or families across multiple stages (for example, from initial request for support through to final session). This approach ensures the findings are not overinterpreted or presented as representing the full cohort or complete journeys at this early stage. Instead, the analysis focuses on emerging patterns, experiences, and insights within and across each data source to inform ongoing learning and programme development.

Table 1. Data used to inform this report

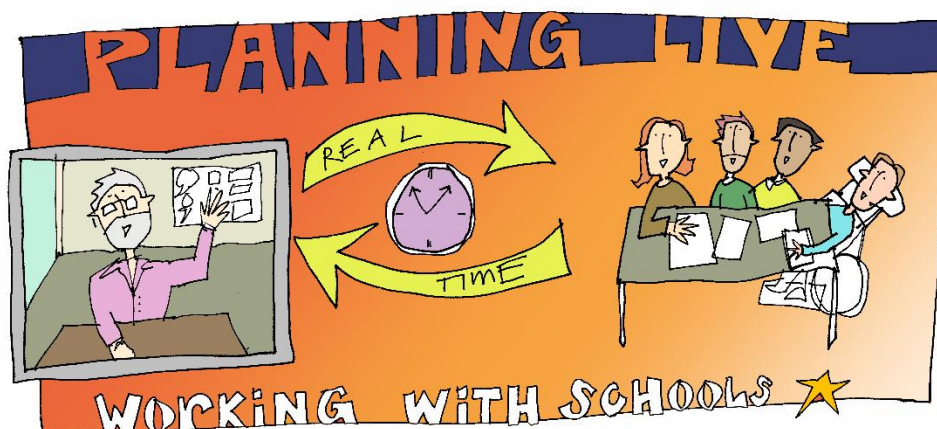
Data source	No. of responses
Monitoring Data	82
Request for Support Form Data	31
Planning Live survey: young people	6
Planning Live survey: practitioner	1
First session survey: young people	9
Session by session survey: young people	7
Parent/carer survey	1
Goal based outcomes survey: parent/carer	1
Post webinar survey: parent/carer	2
Change stories	8
Delivery staff survey	5

Limitations

In addition to the points noted above, readers should be aware of the additional limitations that affect the interpretation of these data sources and the emerging, indicative insights discussed in the following chapters.

- **Small and uneven samples:** Current datasets are relatively small and vary across participant groups and settings. This reflects both the staged rollout of delivery and the midpoint nature of the analysis.
- **Tool completion:** As support sessions are bespoke and tailored to individual needs and circumstances, not all evaluation tools are compulsory for all participants, resulting in varying completion rates across the data set. To mitigate this, all tools have been designed to be as accessible and user-friendly as possible for young people, using clear language, visual prompts, and flexible formats that can be adapted to individual communication preferences. This approach aims to maximise engagement while respecting choice and reducing burden. **Changes to data collection:** Family data collection tools were adapted during the first half of the programme in response to delivery team feedback. Consequently, completion rates and comparability across different data collection periods are limited.
- **Response bias:** Those who engage most actively with evaluation activities may be individuals or families who have had more positive experiences of the programme, meaning their views could be overrepresented in the data. To mitigate this, at least one evaluation tool is offered to every individual who receives support. These tools are designed to be as accessible and user-friendly as possible, using clear language, visual prompts, and flexible formats to encourage participation and enable as many young people and families as possible to contribute to the evaluation.

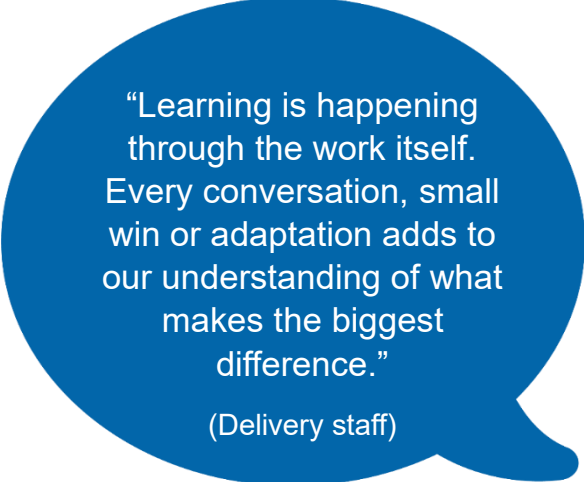
Despite these limitations, the learning so far provides robust, credible insights into how young people, families and practitioners are experiencing the programme and offers a strong foundation for deeper analysis in the final phase of evaluation.



Learning So Far

This chapter brings together learning from the delivery of TtTNS Scotland between May and October 2025. Drawing on the voices of young people, families, practitioners, and delivery staff, it explores who is engaging with the programme and why, the circumstances that bring them to TtTNS Scotland, and their early experiences and progress towards the Vision for Change outcomes (Appendix 1).

At this stage, the evaluation focuses on learning in motion; understanding what is happening on the ground as the programme builds momentum. Rather than judging success too early, it highlights what is emerging, why it matters, and how delivery is evolving in response. The analysis draws on all data sources outlined in Table 1 (page 9) to build a real-time picture of experience and impact, showing how ongoing adaptation is shaping outcomes. As one delivery team member reflected.



“Learning is happening through the work itself. Every conversation, small win or adaptation adds to our understanding of what makes the biggest difference.”

(Delivery staff)

Uptake and Reach

At the midpoint of delivery (October 2025), TtTNS Scotland has engaged a diverse group of 82 young people within the one-to-one support stream of the work. Of these, 77 have agreed to have their demographic details from their Request for Support Forms shared with the evaluation for analysis. As such, the details presented in this section are based on the information provided by these 77 young people/their families and not the whole cohort. Please note, no demographic data has been captured for analysis within the Planning Live stream of the work.

The majority of young people requesting support, or having support requested on their behalf, from TtTNS, are aged between 14 and 18 years old (N=48), reflecting the programme’s focus on early transition planning. Most requests have been made by parents or carers (N=67), with a smaller number coming directly from young people (N=9) and practitioners (N=1). Although it is too early to draw firm conclusions, this pattern suggests that families are playing an active role in seeking support for their young people. The younger age profile also reinforces learning from the pilot that introducing the programme from age 14 onwards meets a widespread and previously unmet need across Scotland. Early indications therefore suggest that this iteration of TtTNS is effectively reaching its intended audience and responding to that need.

Across those who provided demographic information, just over half (N=39) of young people identified their pronouns as *he/him*, with 31 identifying as *she/her*, and a small number selecting *they/them* (N=1) or *not sure* (N=4). This broadly balanced gender profile reflects the inclusive nature of the programme, with engagement across a range of identities.

In terms of ethnicity, the majority of young people (N=69) identified as *White*, with very small numbers from *Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups* (N=3) and *Other Ethnic Groups* (N=1), and two participants preferring not to say. This pattern is consistent with the wider demographic profile of the areas from which participants are drawn (Figure 1, below), many of which are less ethnically diverse. However, it also highlights the importance of continued attention to inclusion and representation as the programme expands.

Taken together, these early demographic patterns indicate that TtTNS Scotland is reaching a broad mix of young people in terms of gender and age, while also suggesting potential areas for targeted outreach to ensure accessibility and equity across all communities in future phases.

Geographic Reach

Requests for support have been received from young people across several local authorities in Scotland (Figure 1, below). As in the [2022–23 pilot](#), offering TtTNS support online or by phone has enabled participation from those in remote and rural areas who might otherwise struggle to access help.

However, when mapped against the [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#) (Table 2), it appears that young people from more deprived areas are currently more likely to engage with TtTNS. This suggests that the programme is successfully reaching those who may benefit most from targeted support. However, there is also evidence that deprivation can limit participation, particularly where access to technology or private space is restricted. The vignette below, shared by a supporter about one young person's experience, illustrates how these digital and social factors can shape engagement.

James

James lives in a household where money is tight. The family shares a single mobile phone with very little data, which makes even basic communication a challenge. When we first tried to set up meetings, his mum had to hand over the phone so he could connect. There wasn't enough storage space to download Zoom, but somehow, between them, they managed to clear just enough room to make it work.

Now, every Friday, we meet online. In the middle of what often feels like chaos, James always shows up. He doesn't have his own phone, and he doesn't even have a key to his front door; a small detail that says so much about the instability around him. Yet despite all that, he keeps turning up, ready to talk and try.

Understanding this relationship between access, geography, and deprivation will be an important focus for the next phase of evaluation, helping to inform future delivery and recommendations.

Figure 1. Requests for support by Local Authority Area

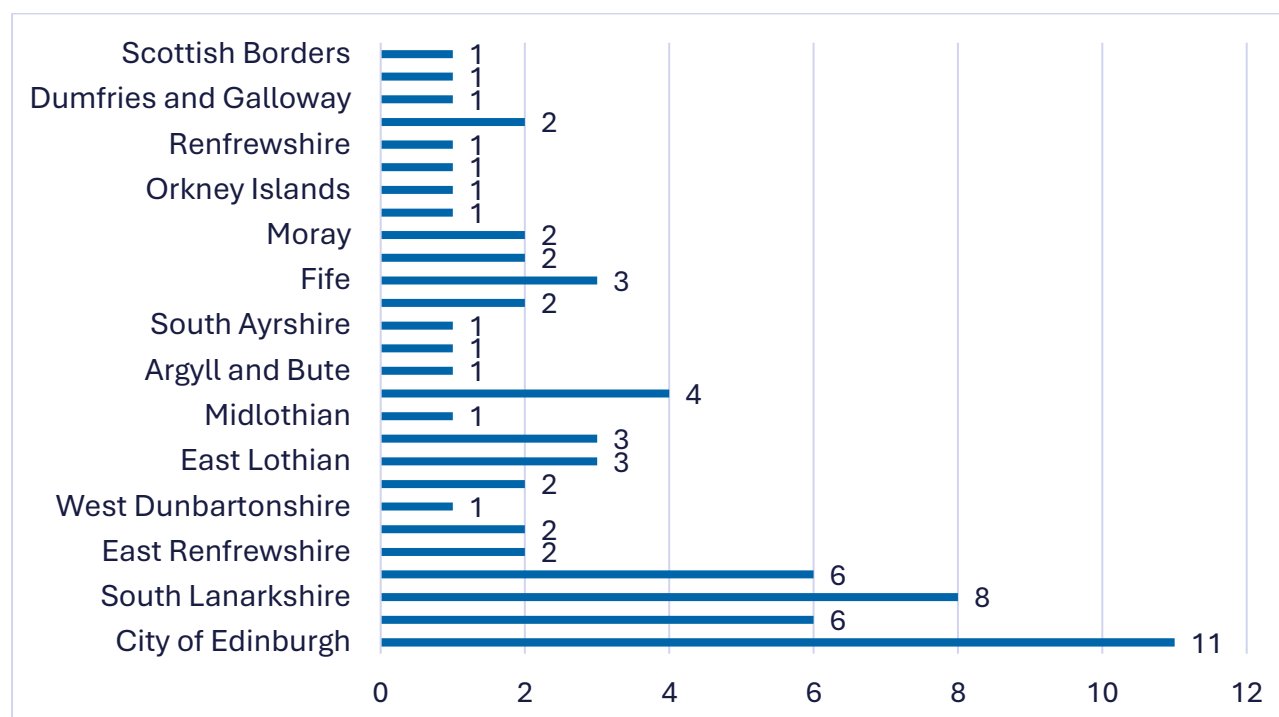


Table 2. Requests for support by level of deprivation

Level of deprivation	No. of requests	Percentage of requests
Most deprived (1 -3)	20	26%
Moderately deprived (4 -7)	30	39%
Least deprived (8-10)	16	21%
Not recognised	11	14%

Source: <https://simd.scot/#/simd2020/BTTFTT/9/-4.0000/55.9000/>

Note: Eleven postcodes could not be recognised, likely due to postcodes that have been terminated or created since the 2020 dataset. The matched postcodes provide a reliable indication of the overall deprivation profile of participants, while the small number of unmatched records is unlikely to materially affect the interpretation of results.

Moving on from the demographic data provided in the Request for Support Forms, the analysis in the following section draws on information provided in the Request for Support forms that focusses on the personal circumstances of young people and their

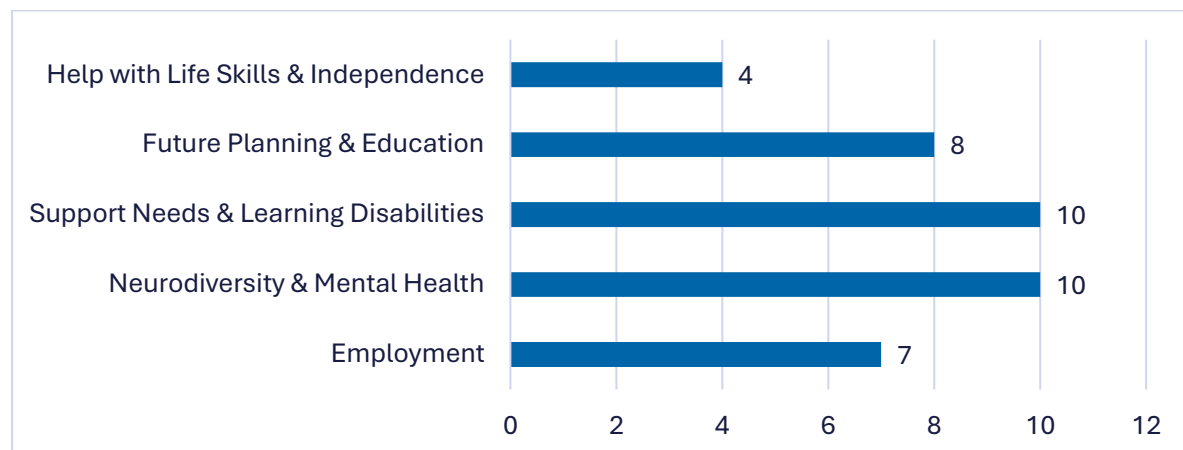
families, and their reasons for seeking support. Because these sections of the form include personal and potentially sensitive details, young people were asked to give explicit consent for this information to be included in the evaluation (see Appendix 2 for further details). Thirty-one young people provided this consent. The findings presented here are therefore based on the information shared by these 31 young people and their families, rather than the full cohort of 82 young people who have engaged with TtTNS to date.

Reasons for Requesting Support

As noted above, while only a subset of young people consented to share their information, the Request for Support forms nonetheless offer valuable insight into the intersecting circumstances and perceived needs of those engaging with TtTNS Scotland. In most cases, the forms were completed by someone other than the young person themselves (N=26), and it is not known to what extent young people were directly involved in describing their needs or views.

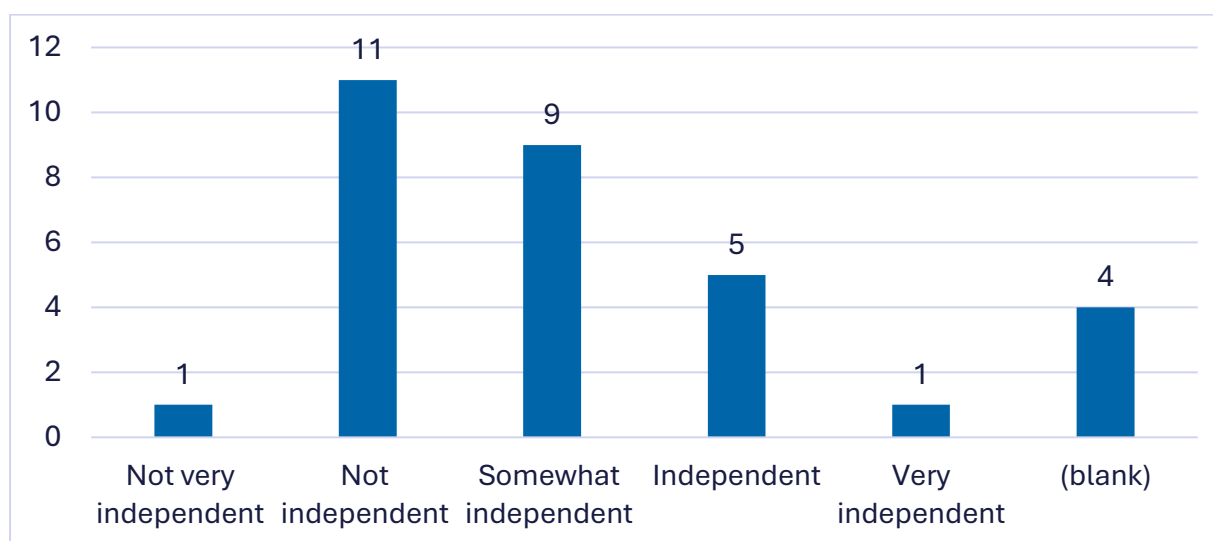
Figure 2 (below) summarises the reasons given for requesting support. Respondents were able to select more than one area of need, and many did so, highlighting the complex and interconnected nature of the challenges young people face. Rather than presenting with a single, isolated issue, many appear to be navigating multiple and overlapping barriers that influence their wellbeing, participation, and future planning. The most common areas of support requested related to help with support needs, learning disability, neurodiversity, and mental health.

Figure 2. Reason for requesting support



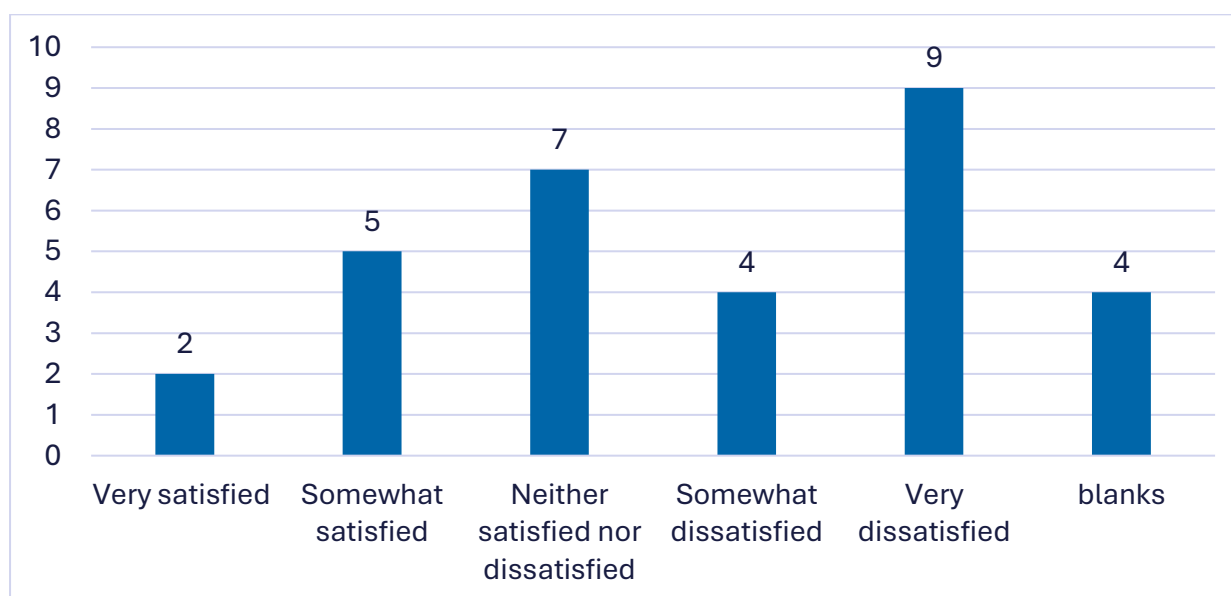
In addition to these specific reasons for support being sought from TtTNS Scotland, it appears that support to become more independent is also a factor, with a significant proportion of young people needing support with daily living and decision-making (Figure 3, below).

Figure 3. Level of independence at time of requesting support



Finally, the ‘Request for Support’ form invited respondents to rate the young person’s overall life satisfaction at the point of making the request. As illustrated in Figure 4 (below), reported levels of life satisfaction were generally low to moderate at this time point. This pattern is consistent with the expectation that families are more likely to seek support when wellbeing is diminished (Handa, *et al.*, 2023, Gallagher *et al.*, 2022), suggesting that lower perceived life satisfaction may act as a key driver for engagement with the TtNS programme.

Figure 4. Overall life satisfaction at the time of requesting support



This Request for Support form data provides a valuable snapshot of young people’s circumstances and perceived needs at the point of seeking support from the programme. They help to contextualise the challenges faced by young people and their families and offer an early indication of the areas where support is most often required. However, it is important to recognise that families often feel compelled to emphasise or

present needs in a heightened way in order to access statutory or specialist support (Bennett et al., 2006). As a result, some descriptions may reflect how parents or carers believed the situation needed to be represented, rather than fully capturing the young person's own perspective or everyday experience.

The data presented in the following section goes some way to addressing this limitation by presenting details of the challenges faced and factors that shape young people's engagement with the programme as understood at this midway point of delivery. However, this limitation will be fully addressed in the final evaluation report (March 2026), when the complete dataset from one-to-one support sessions is available. At that stage, these initial data will be mapped against young people's self-reported responses from their start and end support surveys to examine changes in wellbeing, independence, and perceived areas of need over time.

Starting Points: What the Early Data Tells Us

Building on the previous section, the feedback gathered at this midway point (please see Table 1, p. 9 for sources) has been particularly useful in deepening our understanding of the young people engaging with the programme and the context of their lives. Drawing on all feedback received (Table, 1. p.9), a consistent picture emerges of young people and families seeking direction, reassurance, and practical support at the time of engaging with TtTNS Scotland. Many describe feeling uncertain about what comes next, or weary from navigating complex systems and trying to find the right help on their own. Rather than beginning a neatly planned journey, most are connecting with the programme at a point of transition, wanting things to be different, but not yet sure how to make that change happen.

Young People: Confidence and Self-Belief

Early analysis suggests that when young people first engage with the programme, the greatest challenge they face is uncertainty about their own abilities and potential. This often reflects past experiences, such as struggling in education, periods of ill health, or difficult transitions in care, which have affected their confidence and sense of direction. For some, disengaging from education or support has left them feeling disconnected from opportunities, while others are in the process of rebuilding trust in themselves and the systems around them.

“He didn’t think anyone would listen — or that it was worth trying again.”

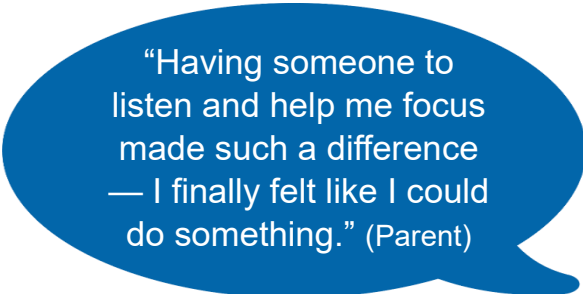
(Delivery staff)

Baseline surveys within one-to-one sessions show that fewer than half felt optimistic about their future at the start of their one-to-one support (N=4). Yet feedback captured from the delivery team reveal this is rarely about lack of ability, but not yet having a space where strengths are recognised, and progress feels achievable.

Parents/Carers: Clarity and Connection

As previously highlighted, most requests for support are made by parents/carers of young people in Scotland (N=24). For many of these parent/carers, the triage conversation they have with NDTi staff before support is allocated to the young person in their family, becomes a source of help in its own right. During these initial discussions, parents and carers frequently describe feeling overwhelmed and unsure where to turn next, having often spent months or even years navigating complex systems alone.

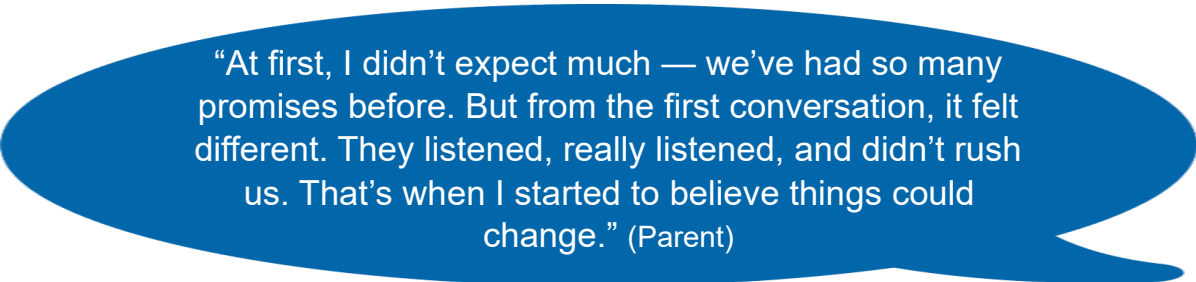
Feedback from family surveys highlights that parents value being listened to, reassured, and provided with clear, achievable next steps. Rather than feeling excluded from planning, they begin to experience a sense of partnership and shared direction. As one parent reflected:



“Having someone to listen and help me focus made such a difference — I finally felt like I could do something.” (Parent)

Young People and Parent/Carers: Learning to Trust

Based on previous experiences with support services (noted previously), both young people and parent/carers report approaching the TtTNS programme with understandable scepticism, unsure whether this support will be any different from other services they have experienced. However, early feedback suggests that this initial doubt is quickly replaced by a sense of relief and trust once they encounter a calm, respectful approach that moves at their pace.



“At first, I didn’t expect much — we’ve had so many promises before. But from the first conversation, it felt different. They listened, really listened, and didn’t rush us. That’s when I started to believe things could change.” (Parent)

Despite this uncertainty at the outset, most participants demonstrate strong motivation to move forward once they feel genuinely supported. Small but meaningful successes, such as obtaining an ID card, enrolling on a course, or mapping out practical next steps, help build momentum and make change feel achievable.

Practitioners: Making Sense of the System

Beyond the individual circumstances of young people and their families, practitioners highlight systemic challenges in the planning processes that precede TtTNS involvement. These plans are often disjointed, shaped by service boundaries and policy priorities that focus primarily on education or employment outcomes, rather than offering a cohesive, person-centred approach across school, health, and social care.

TtTNS Scotland helps connect fragmented experiences into a shared story, where practical next steps can be agreed collectively. Early learning suggests that working within the setting where young people, families, and practitioners naturally interact, creates the conditions for shared understanding and joint ownership to develop. As one delivery staff member noted:

“We’re often the first space where everything is brought together — school, family, hopes and fears — in one conversation.”

(Delivery staff)

Progress Towards Outcomes

Building on the previous section, this section focuses on how the TtTNS Scotland programme is beginning to deliver change for young people, families, practitioners, and the wider systems around them. The findings highlight both tangible outcomes (such as increased confidence and clearer plans) and relational outcomes (such as greater trust, belonging, and collaboration).

Each outcome area is illustrated with data and stories that show not only *what* is changing, but *how* and *why* these changes occur.

Outcomes for Young People



Confidence and Self-Belief (Outcome 1)

Across all data sources, young people describe feeling more confident, hopeful, and able to plan when support is consistent, paced, and genuinely person-centred. The vignette below, shared with the evaluation by a member of the programme’s delivery staff, demonstrates how this is achieved in practice.

Building confidence through small steps

When the first call was arranged, everyone doubted it would happen. The young person, who had complex additional support needs, had spent years avoiding contact with professionals and new people.

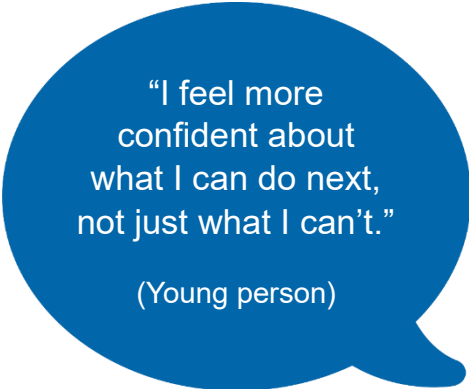
The sessions began gently — half-hour online chats on Saturday mornings, starting with shared interests in theatre, art and Disney. For weeks, there were no “goals,” just connection. Gradually, trust grew. The young person began managing the session themselves — initiating the call, keeping time, and even closing the meeting confidently.

Over time, they started talking about the future and shared a dream of becoming a paramedic, firefighter or police officer. Together, they explored how a short college first-aid course could be a first step.

“They now proudly call it ‘my meeting.’ Mum says she’s never seen them engage like this before.”

Early indicators also suggest that small, practical wins, like securing travel support or breaking down an application process, which young people described as “*helpful*”, “*encouraging*”, or “*motivating*” sessions, act as catalysts for confidence.

Furthermore, pre and post Planning Live session surveys show that 83% of young people who attended the session now feel “*more confident about their future*” as a result of the session attended.



“I feel more confident about what I can do next, not just what I can’t.”

(Young person)

Voice, Choice and Control (Outcomes 2 and 4)

Data captured from young people who are being supported one-to-one, suggests they are feel better able to express what matters to them when support is designed around their communication preferences. For example, the evaluation has heard that NDTi delivery staff/supporters.

- adapting structure and pace, for instance, using clear session plans and visual tools, supports deeper engagement and ownership. And,
- using reflective tools such as [4 + 1](#) and the [Head, Heart and Hands](#) model

helps young people articulate goals without becoming overwhelmed. Session-by-session survey responses (N=7) further add to this learning, with young people consistently reporting that they felt listened to in the sessions they have done, that they liked what they talked about and what they talked about was important to them.

Connection and Belonging (Outcome 5 and 6)

As noted in the introduction to this report, the literature suggests that progress towards change is frequently unlocked through the development of consistent, trusting relationships built around shared interests and meaningful conversation, rather than through major interventions (Morgan, 2020; Ruch, Turney & Ward, 2018; Trevithick, 2003). Reflecting on enacting this in the TtTNS provision, the NDTi delivery team describe how engagement often begins tentatively, with young people offering short or guarded responses, until a genuine point of connection is found. In one case, a shared Warhammer hobby transformed a cautious, question-and-answer interaction into an open discussion about school, friendships, and future goals. These moments of authentic connection appear to be critical in helping young people relax, express themselves, and begin to think differently about what comes next.

Survey data supports this pattern. Around 80% of young people who took part in a Planning Live session, report feeling more connected to someone who can help them plan ahead after engaging with TtTNS Scotland. This suggests that the programme’s relational approach, which prioritises trust, consistency, and pacing support around the

individual, plays a central role in helping young people move from uncertainty towards proactive planning and decision-making.

In addition, Planning Live sessions are also showing early signs of strengthening peer connection and collaboration. Practitioners in the setting, report that as students share their aspirations and challenges in a supportive environment, awareness of one another's goals increases, and mutual encouragement begins to emerge. These collective experiences appear to reinforce individual progress, showing how personal and social confidence can grow together when relationships form the foundation of support.

"...the session was great...watching the young people learning together, there was a real sense of support."

(Practitioner)

Outcomes for Parent/carers



Empowering Families Through Understanding and Support (Outcome 7 and 8)

Alongside progress made by young people, parent/carers describe feeling more informed, confident, and capable as a result of their involvement with TtTNS Scotland.

Empowering a parent to take the next step

When I first spoke to the parent, they were anxious and exhausted. Their son's education placement had broken down, and they didn't know what to do next. Together, we broke the situation into manageable pieces: applying for travel passes, ID, and exploring college taster sessions.

After a few weeks, the parent reported feeling calmer and clearer, describing a renewed sense of direction and belief that positive change was possible. They began taking proactive steps, using the confidence gained through these practical successes to advocate for their son's needs.

For many parents and carers, this support represents the first time they have felt truly listened to and equipped with clear, practical information about how to help their young person move forward. As one parent reflected, *"For the first time, I felt we had someone walking alongside us."* The vignette below, shared with the evaluation by a member of the programme's delivery staff, demonstrates how this is achieved in practice.

Survey feedback reinforces this sense of empowerment. Nine in ten parents/carers reported feeling more informed and better able to support their young person after engaging with the programme, with 84% reporting that the information provided was

useful and easy to understand. Families particularly valued reassurance, clear signposting, and practical guidance, such as understanding funding routes, identifying local opportunities, or arranging travel support.

These findings suggest that TtTNS Scotland's relational and strengths-based approach not only benefits young people directly but also builds the capacity and confidence of those around them. By involving families as partners in planning, the programme is helping to reduce isolation and uncertainty, replacing them with shared understanding and practical direction.

Practitioner Learning and Emerging Practice Insights (Outcome 12)

Although practitioner data beyond that received from the NDTi delivery team remains limited at this stage, the insights gathered from those directly involved in delivering TtTNS Scotland provide valuable early learning. These reflections are already shaping how the programme adapts its methods to better meet young people's needs, and they offer important lessons that are useful to share.

NDTi delivery staff report increasing confidence in adapting to neurodivergent communication styles and using reflection tools more intentionally within sessions, with 88% saying they now feel better able to tailor their approach to different communication preferences. The evidence provided by young people and families (discussed in the previous sections) suggests these adaptations are working well in practice with both groups feeling listened to and supported in sessions.

NDTi delivery staff also mostly agreed that shorter, more structured sessions have improved focus and encouraged reflective practice, from the longer sessions offered during the pilot ([2022-23](#)). These adjustments appear to support stronger engagement and more meaningful progress for young people, particularly those who benefit from clear boundaries and predictability.

Practitioners involved in 'Planning Live' sessions also described positive experiences and expressed willingness to recommend the approach to other schools and youth services. They note that it promotes more open communication and stronger collaboration between education staff, families, and young people themselves.

These early systems learning points demonstrate how the programme is putting into practice the growing body of research across education, health, and social care that shows consistent, person-centred relationships are crucial for sustaining motivation, confidence, and wellbeing during times of change (ARC Scotland,, 2025; Morgan, 2020; Ruch, Turney & Ward, 2018; Trevithick, 2003). TtTNS Scotland's emphasis on trust, belonging, and co-production reflects this evidence base, recognising that positive transitions are built through small, predictable, human interactions rather than one-off plans or assessments.

In doing so, TtTNS Scotland helps foster a shared understanding and collective ownership of transition planning, which not only strengthens individual outcomes but

also contributes to a more connected system of practice across agencies and sectors. As the programme progresses into the next six months of delivery, it is hoped the evaluation will begin to see this breadth of learning in this area begin to garner evidence towards outcomes 10 and 11 (Appendix 1).

Challenges and Areas to Focus on

While delivery staff report growing confidence in their practice and strong early outcomes for young people and families, their reflections also point to a number of practical and developmental challenges to address in the next phase of delivery. These insights provide valuable direction for ongoing refinement and shared learning across the NDTi delivery and evaluation teams.



Balancing Flexibility with Structure

Delivery staff consistently value the flexibility to tailor sessions to each young person's needs but note that this can sometimes make it harder to maintain consistency in recording, reflection, and evaluation. Several commented that finding the balance between responsiveness and structure particularly when using new in-session tools, remains a live area for learning.

"It works best when I can be creative, but I still want to know I'm gathering what we need for learning."

(Delivery staff)



Embedding Evaluation Meaningfully

Although there is strong commitment to reflective practice, staff noted that some tools still feel too long or repetitive for the flow of short, person-centred sessions. A few described feeling uncertain about when and how to capture change without disrupting engagement.

"Care should be taking when commencing the initial evaluation. It can be difficult for the YP to answer the questions and may open up some negative feelings that reduce their ability to go on to engage." (Delivery staff).

This reinforces the importance of light-touch, embedded evaluation methods to maintain both quality and relational connection, but the evaluation acknowledges that the standardised data collection tools may be reminiscent of statutory services documentation that is both lengthy and triggering for young people.



Managing Emotional Load and Sustainability

Supporting young people and parent/carers at points of uncertainty, crisis, or transition can be emotionally demanding. Delivery staff reflections indicate a need to sustain wellbeing and reflective supervision, particularly as the programme scales up.

“Some sessions are really intense. Having time to debrief or reflect together helps keep the work sustainable.” (Delivery staff)

This learning suggests that as the programme enters the final six months of delivery, regular opportunities for peer reflection and shared learning are vital to protect both quality and staff resilience.



Time and Resource Pressures

In addition to the emotional demands of supporting young people and parent/carers at points of uncertainty, crisis, or transition, several delivery staff highlighted challenges with capacity and scheduling, especially where data entry or follow-up activities extend beyond session time. The new 40-minute session model is predominantly viewed positively, but can feel tight when supporting young people with more complex needs.

“45 minutes [sic] is not enough time for delivery. 15 minutes is not enough time for follow up and prep.”
(Delivery staff)

It has also been suggested that being able to offer *“more time to young people depending on their starting point”* (delivery staff) would be beneficial.

Finally, delivery staff note that it would be useful to have *“a bank of resources to use initially would be good”* (delivery staff), as a significant amount of staff time is noted to be taken up with finding resources at the start of their supporting journey. This was something that was embedded in the pilot of the programme ([2022-23](#)), and it is felt this iteration of the programme would do well to take heed of this feedback and develop a resource bank for delivery staff to easily access.



Strengthening Cross-Team Communication and Consistency

Building on the need for a bank of shared resources, delivery staff also emphasised the importance of staying connected across the team to share learning, maintain consistent practice, and avoid duplication, as the programme expands. Again, this was a key success of the pilot of the programme ([2022-23](#)), and this iteration would do well to take this learning on board and embed regular reflective sessions, and clear documentation processes.

Summary

The learning presented in this chapter presents a clear and encouraging picture of TtNS Scotland as a programme that is successfully engaging its intended audience and beginning to deliver meaningful change. Most young people accessing support are aged 14–18, arriving at key transition points often following disrupted education, ill health, or care experiences. Many reach out to the programme having faced overlapping

challenges and low confidence, while families frequently describe feeling overwhelmed and unsure how to navigate available services.

Despite this, feedback shows that once engaged, young people and families quickly develop trust and motivation through the programme's calm, strengths-based and relational approach. Early, practical successes, such as reconnecting with education or identifying achievable goals, help rebuild confidence, purpose, and belonging. Young people report feeling more hopeful and capable, with 83% saying they feel more confident about their future as a result of the support received. Families feel better informed and equipped to support their child, while NDTi delivery staff are becoming more confident in adapting their communication, using reflective tools, and committed to sharing their learning across education, health, and social care.

Across all data sources, a consistent theme emerges; change begins with trust. The programme's early impact lies not in large-scale interventions but in steady, person-centred work that meets people where they are, nurtures relationships, and builds confidence through small, achievable steps. These everyday interactions, marked by empathy, consistency, and collaboration, are proving central to enabling progress for young people and families alike. These findings not only reinforce existing evidence on how trust-based relationships sustain motivation, confidence, and wellbeing during times of change (ARC Scotland, 2025; Morgan, 2020; Ruch, Turney & Ward, 2018; Trevithick, 2003), but also contribute new, practice-based insights into how these principles can be enacted within contemporary transition support.

While evidence is strong for outcomes linked to confidence, connection, and collaboration, it is too early at this stage to evidence measurable progress towards Outcome 3 (greater life satisfaction for young people), Outcome 9 (greater life satisfaction for family members and carers), and Outcomes 10 and 11 (practitioners' increased confidence in person-centred support and improved access to tools, information, and guidance) (Appendix 1). It is anticipated that these longer-term outcomes will be evidenced in the final evaluation report (March 2026), once the sustained effects of support and practice development can be more fully assessed.

The evaluation also highlights areas for ongoing development, including simplifying evaluation tools, maintaining reflective practice, ensuring clear communication as delivery expands, and balancing flexibility with structure. These represent opportunities to refine and strengthen an already adaptive and responsive model.

Overall, TtTNS Scotland is demonstrating steady, relational progress: building confidence, voice, and connection while beginning to join up fragmented systems of support. The next chapter translates these insights into a set of practical recommendations for sustaining and scaling impact, ensuring the programme continues to grow in inclusivity, coherence, and long-term effectiveness.

Recommendations

As outlined in the previous chapter, this mid-point evaluation highlights both the strengths and areas for further development within TtTNS Scotland. The programme is already delivering tangible benefits for young people and families, yet the evidence also points to opportunities to refine practice, enhance learning, and strengthen long-term sustainability. The recommendations that follow are therefore developmental rather than corrective, intended to build on what is working well and to support continuous improvement as the programme enters its next phase.

Delivery and Practice

-  **Keep sessions structured but flexible:** The new 40-minute format is working well overall. Retain this model but allow flexibility where complexity or communication needs require it. Ensure supporters feel confident in adapting structure while maintaining consistency in content and evaluation touchpoints.
-  **Invest in staff wellbeing and reflection:** Delivery staff emphasised the emotional intensity of the work. Establish regular peer reflection spaces, group supervision and wellbeing check-ins to help staff process challenging sessions, share learning, and maintain reflective capacity.
-  **Build a repository of resources:** Introduce and maintain a central resource bank to support delivery staff. This would save time currently spent sourcing materials, promote consistency, and enable staff to focus more on supporting participant.

Evaluation and Learning

-  **Simplify evaluation tools:** Staff and young people both noted that some tools remain too long or repetitive. Where practicable, streamline these into short, lighter-touch versions embedded naturally into sessions.
-  **Protect learning time:** Embed structured time for reflection and learning reviews within delivery staff schedules to support evaluation data collection.

System Influence

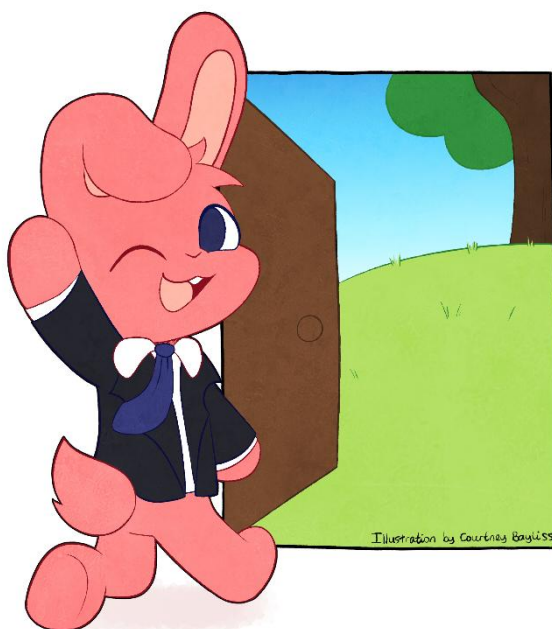
-  **Deepen links with local transition pathways:** Use insights from Planning Live and one-to-one sessions to inform local transition planning groups, contributing real-world examples of inclusive, person-centred practice. This could help shape emerging models under the [Scottish Government's Transitions to Adulthood Strategy \(2025\)](#).

- + Share evidence of “what works” across the system:** Develop brief learning digests or practice notes for schools, health partners and third-sector organisations, summarising key insights such as the value of interests-led engagement, relational continuity, and early planning.
- + Strengthen partnership with education and employment pathways:** Continue building relationships with Skills Development Scotland, local colleges, and employability networks to ensure young people’s transition goals are embedded in real opportunities, not isolated plans.

Final thoughts

As TtNS Scotland enters the next stage of delivery, the focus should be on consolidation, deepening, and sharing; consolidating what works in direct support, deepening understanding through refined evaluation, and sharing learning to influence wider systems.

By continuing to invest in relationships, reflection and rigour, the programme can not only sustain the positive changes already seen, but also demonstrate what an inclusive, relational and evidence-informed transition system looks like in practice; helping to shape Scotland’s collective journey toward better outcomes for all young people.



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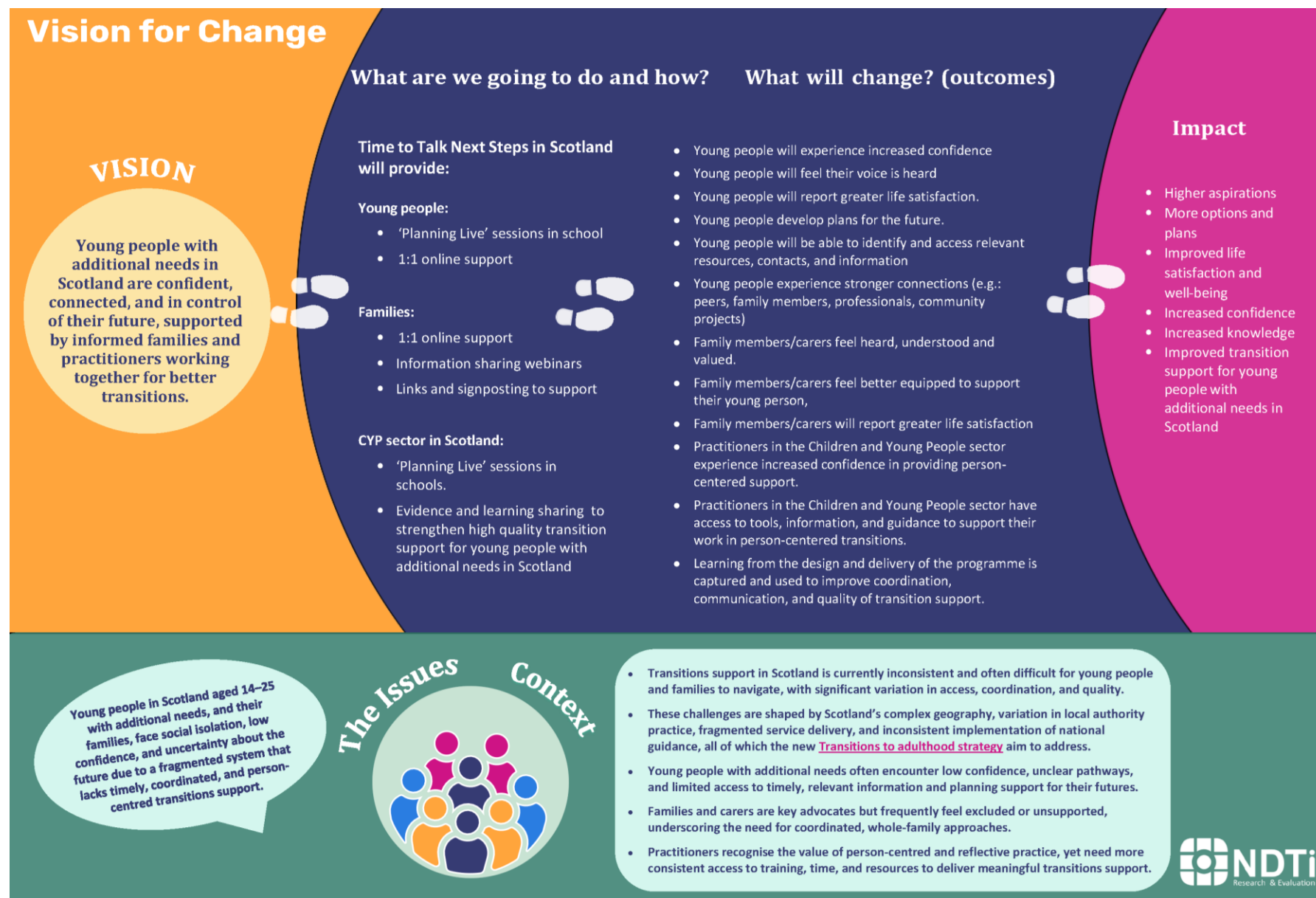
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Appendix 1: Vision for Change



Appendix 2: Consent Process and Young People's Rights

The Time to Talk Next Steps Scotland project operates a multi-stage consent process to ensure that young people retain genuine agency and control over their personal information. This approach reflects both our legal responsibilities under the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018, and our ethical commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), in particular:

- Article 12, affirming every child's right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them; and
- Article 16, protecting their right to privacy and personal data.

The Request for Support form used in programme delivery, captures information about each young person's circumstances, including details that are considered special category data under GDPR (for example, ethnicity, health, or learning disability), as well as information that, while not legally special category, may still feel sensitive or private (such as personal experiences of school, mental health, or family life).

To respect these sensitivities, TtTNS Scotland has implemented a three-stage consent process, allowing young people and their families to make clear, informed decisions about how their data is used:

- **Consent to participate in support:** Young people (or their parent/carer, where appropriate) provide consent for their personal details to be used for the purpose of delivering support. This includes the collection of basic demographic and contact information needed to confirm eligibility and tailor support.
- **Consent for use of demographic data in monitoring and reporting:** A separate, specific consent is sought for the inclusion of non-identifiable demographic data (such as age, gender, postcode, and ethnicity) in the project's internal monitoring and statistical reporting. This data helps NDTi and funders understand who is accessing the programme, ensuring equity of reach and representation across Scotland.
- **Consent for inclusion of personal information in evaluation:** A further, distinct consent is requested for the use of personal and narrative information, such as details about the young person's needs, experiences, or reasons for seeking support, within the evaluation. This ensures that only young people who are comfortable sharing these personal reflections have their stories or circumstances included in evaluation analysis.

This multi-stage structure ensures that consent is freely given, specific, informed, and unambiguous, consistent with Articles 6(1)(a) and 9(2)(a) of the UK GDPR. It also

enables young people to benefit from support without feeling pressured to share information they consider private or sensitive.

While this process results in smaller datasets for analysis, as reflected in this interim report, it strengthens the ethical integrity of the evaluation by prioritising young people's rights, autonomy, and trust.

NDTi is currently reviewing and refining the consent materials to clarify these distinctions further and ensure that young people continue to have meaningful control over their personal information, while allowing robust, anonymised analysis of reach and equity in future reporting.