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Trussell Pathways to Advice and Cash Scotland (PACS): Evaluation and Learning

10 March 2025

Evaluation questions

The evaluation sought to answer the following questions:

- Are the pilots improving access to and engagement with advice?

- Are the pilots reducing the need for repeat visits to food banks?

- What difference is the advice making to people, and what are the positive outcomes of each intervention?

- How can people's journeys be improved?

- How effective has partnership working been between local partnerships, and what aspects could be improved?

- How successful is the delivery of interventions in community settings?

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Methodology

The methodology included:

- Evaluation design and data mapping

- Analysis of monitoring data

- Literature review

- Participant interviews (n=50)

- Participant online survey (n=130)

- Stakeholder interviews (n=46)

- Partnership scorecard (n=44)

- Staff interviews and focus groups (n=38)

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Overview of the PACS projects

- **Dundee** – a Community Guider approach, providing training and ongoing support to volunteers, who support people to access money advice by providing referrals and signposting to support. Volunteers are from the local community or third sector / public sector organisations.

- **Glasgow** - a rapid response approach for people approaching Glasgow Helps who have an emergency food need, with referrals to the advice sector, via the GAIN partner network, within 24 hours.

- **North Lanarkshire -** improving access to holistic advice, assisting with SWF claims and supporting access to the online gateway portal, to apply for crisis grants. This pilot delivers intensive support for people with more complex cases, in local community hubs.

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Overview of the PACS projects

- **Orkney** –a partnership project, seeking to transform support for people who experience financial insecurity in Orkney and the ferry-linked Isles. The project brought organisations together, enabling more effective joint working, data sharing and referrals, to raise awareness of support available.

- **Perth and Kinross –** a project to develop a shared referral system, using FORT (Fast Online Referral Tracking). The system allows agencies to refer people accessing services to each other, through an online portal, and enables secure exchange of personal information.

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Summary of outputs and outcomes achieved

The projects have:

- directly supported 3,189 people

- 1,677 people have over £842,000 in financial gains

- 3,693 people received support with benefits

- 619 people (20%) were estimated to no longer need to use a food bank

- 31 Community Guiders were trained in Dundee

- 43 organisations/services, and 378 individual users signed up to use the FORT system in Perth and Kinross.

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Feedback from people accessing support

- Barriers to accessing support include:

  - A lack of awareness

  - Stigma and anxiety

  - Technological barriers and digital exclusion

  - Telephone numbers that weren't freephone

  - Long term situations make it difficult to know when to access support ('what is a crisis'?)

- Word of mouth referrals from friends, neighbours and family is the most common way to find out about support

- People were often unsure of how referrals had been made, which organisations had made them and which organisations they had received support from.
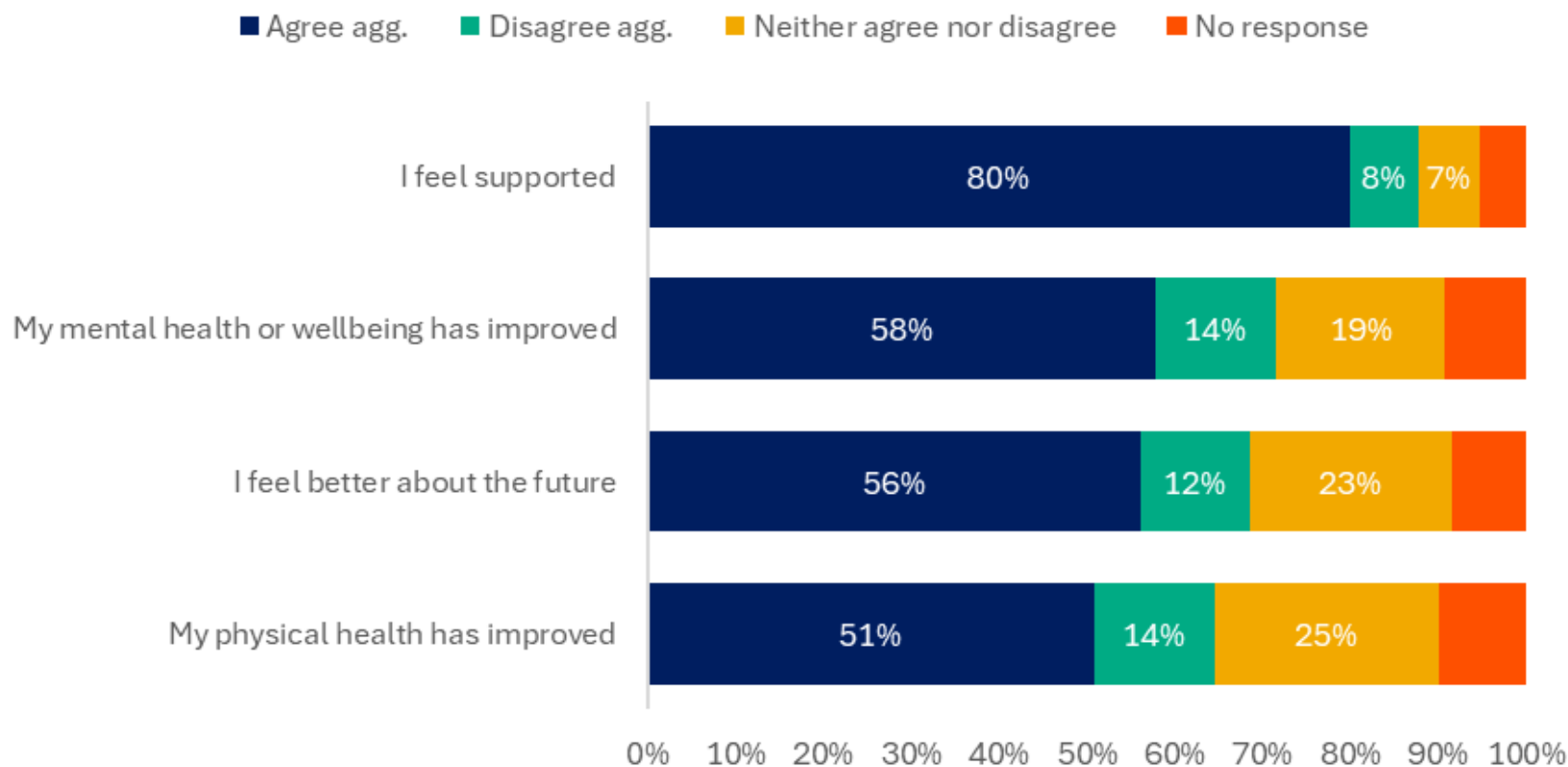
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Feedback from people accessing support

- People appreciated have a choice in how to access support - either by phone, email or in person – this removes barriers to accessing support

- Mental health challenges were frequently mentioned as both a cause and effect

- A rapid response is an important enabler to maximise engagement

- Many people needed more intensive support

- People appreciated being contacted with a follow-up call or appointment

- People appreciated having one named adviser that they could build a relationship with

- Following initial support, 70% (n=91) of people who completed the online survey were connected to further services.

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Feedback from people accessing support

Levels of agreement with statements around support and wellbeing:

Legend: ■ Agree agg. ■ Disagree agg. ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ No response

Statement	Agree agg.	Disagree agg.	Neither agree nor disagree
I feel supported	80%	8%	7%
My mental health or wellbeing has improved	58%	14%	19%
I feel better about the future	56%	12%	23%
My physical health has improved	51%	14%	25%

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Feedback from people accessing support

"They gave you every possible chance, to have a look through everything and make sure you have a choice. They supplied me with contact numbers, websites and they offered support with what to expect."

"The fact that it was planned out well, rather than endlessly looking and wondering is this going to help me... they gave you trusted numbers and websites."

"I think people don't know what help is out there. If I hadn't been involved in the first place, I wouldn't have known anything."

"Was so nice to not need to contact multiple different organisations and teams. I only went through the advice pilot to get through to others so it's easy. I like that I don't have to contact them directly."

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Feedback from people accessing support

"I feel like to be honest with you the support has been second to none. There is such a stigma attached to {organisation], it's classed as a place of embarrassment to be going to. It's just made such a difference to my life anyway."

"She [the adviser] was a lifeline to me. Sometimes she phones to see if I'm alright."

"I could do it over the phone, I didn't have to go into the office and have the fear of being seen."

"The only thing I would say is I didn't know anything about them until I was struggling, I didn't know anything about them until I got to that point."

"Well so if you're struggling with money, you're snappy or more miserable. If you're happier in yourself, not snappy with kids, things look brighter."

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Feedback from people accessing support

"I suffer from stress and anxiety. I'm quite used to it, so it wasn't considered a crisis. But it feels like a crisis when you're living it. What is a crisis?"

"I was at my lowest point, I was about to end my life, if it was not for CAB, I am not sure what would have happened to me. They were so patient, full of empathy and understanding. Truly a life changing service!"

"It was timely. Everyone I met showed compassion and they were very willing to help me. I remain grateful"

"I feel very comfortable. Even after I've paid rent and groceries, I still feel like there's a little bit left for entertainment or something I want to."

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Feedback from staff

- The importance of anchor institutions, as entry points to support

- Connectivity between support organisations is critical

- Warm handovers work better than signposting

- Choice in how to access services ('phone, email, in-person) removes barriers to access

- Building trust with one named adviser and relational support are important elements of the model

- Community based support is needed

- Improving the experiences of people accessing services is at the heart of the PACS projects.

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Learning points – design and mobilisation

- **Existing partnerships and relationships** are a key enabler for effective project delivery to improve pathways to cash and advice.

- The pilots have shown collaboration and **strong partnerships, based on trust**, between local advice organisations, food banks, community groups, other agencies and local authorities.

- These partnerships are essential to enable a more comprehensive support system, to facilitate resource sharing and develop referral pathways.

- Different organisations have very different approaches, systems and governance processes. If introducing a new system or data sharing or referral procedure, it is important that there is a **robust mobilisation plan** with realistic timescales.

- Ensuring that people with **lived experience** voices are heard and that services are designed to be user-centred and responsive to feedback is critical.

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Learning points – delivery

- People **are often not aware of the support that is available**, which may be due to the complexity of the landscape and changes as a result of short-term funding. This is an important point when considering the 'public facing' brand for services.

- Outreach strategies (community events, social media) can enhance visibility.

- **Rapid referral pathways** for people with complex cases are valuable. This streamlined process, designed to quickly connect people with the appropriate services is particularly important for cases at crisis point, such as a release from prison, or homelessness. Key features include clear criteria, efficient communication, triage systems, and feedback loops.

- Simplified referral systems can reduce confusion and improve engagement.

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Learning points - delivery

- Some people told us how crises had become a normal part of their lives, making it **challenging for them to recognise when they needed support**. Others told us they routinely used food banks, making this a complex picture.

- Often people felt overwhelmed and stressed if receiving calls from multiple different organisations. People were often **unsure about which organisations had provided support** and were unsure how referrals had been made.

- People with more complex cases or multiple barriers to support may need **more intensive support**. This is only possible if experienced advisers have lower caseloads.

- Flexible service delivery and **multi-method delivery**, including in-person, online, or via phone – **within a case** - ensures that support is accessible and gives people choice.

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Learning points – delivery

- Support that is **relational, and trust based, with one named case worker** is successful in maximising ongoing engagement, minimising disengagement and improving outcomes.

- One-off interventions may not lead to lasting solutions. Vulnerable people often need holistic, long-term guidance and ongoing support to achieve stability. Dedicated case workers with lower caseloads can provide intensive, personalised support.

- People with chaotic lifestyles might engage in support for their immediate needs, but not then proceed with a referral for ongoing support. There is a need for **funding models that support sustained engagement**, rather than short-term interventions.

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Learning points – summary

- People in crisis struggle to navigate support systems, so simplifying access and reducing barriers is a priority.

- Stigma and past negative experiences are barriers to people seeking support.

- Multi-channel support (in-person, phone, online) improves accessibility.

- Digital referral tools (e.g., FORT) can streamline processes. Data sharing agreements must be in place to enable effective use of technology.

- Community-led initiatives can be cost-effective and scalable. Empowering local volunteers and front-line staff builds trust in services and supports onward referrals.

- Involving people with lived experience is critical to ensure services meet real needs.

- Short term funding cycles create instability in the system. Long term investment is needed.

- Wider, systemic changes are required to end the need for food banks.

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Conclusions

- The five pilot projects have tested approaches to improve access to, and engagement, with advice.
- The barriers to accessing advice and support include physical, structural, and psychological barriers (stigma, fear, language, digital exclusion) as well as a low awareness of the services available.
- Visibility and promotion of services is important. Word-of-mouth referrals are important, but people accessing services also feel they need better advertising.
- Technical jargon can be a barrier to engagement (e.g., "income maximisation").
- Multi-channel access (phone, email, in-person) increases engagement.
- Rapid response times are critical in crisis situations.

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Conclusions

- In the pilots, there has been increased capacity, reduced waiting times, and streamlined crisis support.

- Community-based models and community-based delivery have enhanced delivery.

- Financial gains and reduced debt have reduced reliance on food banks but there is a need for more data on the reductions in long-term use.

- In improving the user journey, the importance of warm handovers, rather than signposting, were important, as well as long term support with a named case worker, and giving people choice in how to access support.

- Non-attendance at appointments due to stigma and anxiety is a key barrier, highlighting the need for trauma-informed, person-centred approaches.

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Recommendations

Integrating services:

- Co-location and warm handovers

- Additional training for food bank staff and volunteers

- Using reachable and teachable moments

Future service design principles:

- Improving access – including simple, accessible branding and a 'no wrong door' approach

- Rapid referral pathways for those most in need of support

- Support that is relational, and trust based, with one named case worker, to minimise disengagement

- Some staff with lower caseloads, enabling an intensive case managed approach, with dedicated case workers and proactive follow ups

- Multi-method delivery (in-person, online, phone) within a single case

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Recommendations

Trauma-informed approaches:

- Adopting a standard trauma-informed approach across the sector

  - Calm, safe and secure environment which is non-judgemental

  - Gives people choice and control, taking a cash-first and strengths-based approach

  - Builds trust and transparency (e.g. avoids changing the rules, is consistent)

  - Builds trust, connections and community, and avoids a transactional approach

  - Culturally aware and inclusive.

Early intervention and avoiding escalation:

  - Identifying individuals at risk

  - Building financial resilience in communities

  - Rapid response for people in crisis.

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Recommendations

Policy and influence:

- An important role for Trussell in ongoing policy and influencing work to address the systemic root causes of food insecurity and poverty and structural inequalities, both locally and nationally.

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Any questions?

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