

Interim Evaluation Report

SSJ Academy

July 2025

1 Introduction

The Society of St James (SSJ) delivers person-centred services to vulnerable individuals across the South of England. The SSJ Academy is one of their programs supporting and upskilling participants through three areas: Re-Fit, Re-Connect, and Re-Set. These programs offer fitness, educational, and volunteering opportunities. Although Re-Fit, Re-Connect, and Re-Set individually have existed for a number of years, 2024 is the first year of the SSJ Academy, where all three programs operate as a unit. With the support of National Community Lottery Fund (NCLF) funding, the SSJ Academy offers a cohesive program and works to implement their Theory of Change (ToC). The following pages outline an interim evaluation for the SSJ Academy from April 2024 to January 2025 conducted in partnership between the University of Southampton (UoS) and SSJ. This interim evaluation explores the evaluation methodology used, the Theory of Change and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and preliminary results. The preliminary results show progress towards yearly targets. It also offers reflections on SSJ Academy programming and UoS and SSJ Partnership, indicating strengths, challenges, changes made, and future directions. Conducting subsequent yearly evaluations will provide important reflections on KPIs that help indicate whether SSJ Academy is progressing toward the ToC.

1.1 About SSJ and SSJ Academy

For over 52 years, the Society of St James (SSJ) has delivered high-impact, evidence-based, and person-centred services to vulnerable individuals. Each year, SSJ supports over 3,000 people through structured interventions and specialist support in accommodation, substance misuse, and mental health. SSJ is uniquely positioned with extensive knowledge, skills, and experience to deliver integrated treatment, harm reduction, and housing solutions to those most in need.

The SSJ Academy was established to support Service Users (SUs) on their journey of recovery, independence, and improved wellbeing. SSJ Academy provides a holistic programme of meaningful activities, educational opportunities, and volunteering pathways, empowering participants to address their physical, mental, and social needs as they work towards transforming their lives.

The SSJ Academy has three pillars:

- **Re-Fit:** A sport programme designed to reduce social isolation, build trust, and enhance self-esteem through sport, hobbies, and volunteering.

- **Re-Set:** Offers accredited educational courses to help participant's develop key life skills, confidence, and future aspirations
- **Re-Connect:** Focuses on supporting individuals to access volunteering placements that enhance employability and community integration

The Academy also aims to:

- Encourage the development of new life skills.
- Promote healthier lifestyles.
- Build confidence, discipline, and resilience.
- Reduce substance use and reoffending.
- Alleviate stress and boredom.
- Foster tolerance, inclusion, and positive social networks.
- Improve family, peer, and community relationships.
- Provide access to educational and vocational pathways.
- Support transitions into volunteering, mentoring, and employment.
- Combat loneliness and enhance social integration.

1.2 SSJ and UoS Partnership

SSJ utilizes several partnerships, including Revolution Boxing, Change Grow Life (CGL), Cycling UK, and the University of Southampton among others. The University of Southampton (UoS) partnership provided a research assistant for 20 hours a month from October 2024 to July 2025 to assist on revising evidence sources as well as building methods and processes for conducting an evaluation of SSJ Academy for the NCLF funding. This report is an outcome of this partnership.

2 Methodology

This evaluation relies on formative and summative methodologies to gather evidence to support the SSJ Academy ToC and improve programming. The following section explains the ToC, the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) used to provide evidence for the ToC, and how this evidence is gathered.

2.1 Theory of Change

The SSJ Academy Theory of Change (ToC) showcases a SU's pathway through the SSJ Academy on their road to recovery and independent living (Figure 1). Along the SU pathway, there are several milestones and three long-term outcome points: 1) service users engage with services, 2) service users commit to long term positive behaviours, and 3) service users are in recovery/living independently.

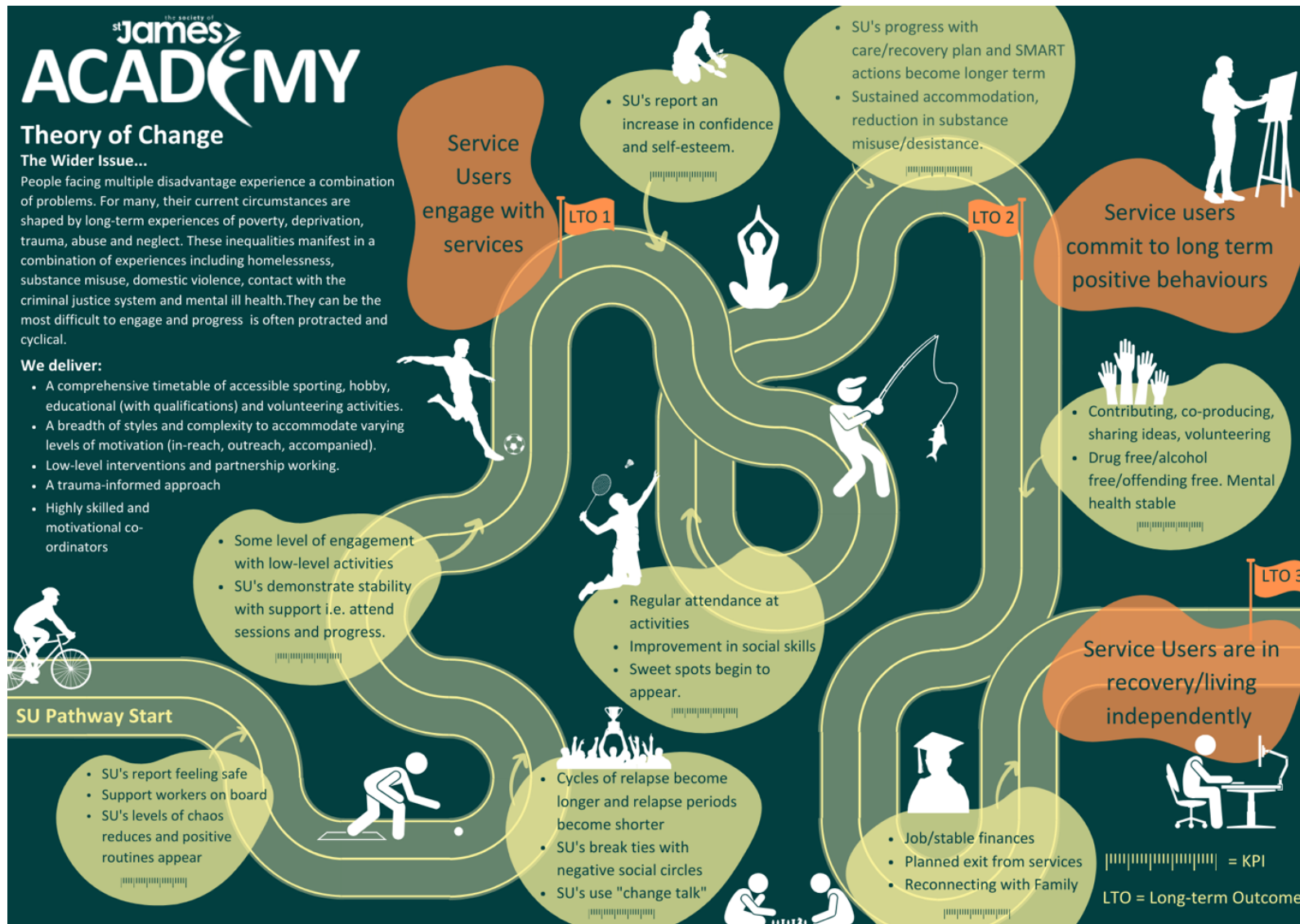


Figure 1: SSJ Academy Theory of Change (SSJ Academy).

2.1.1 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Evidencing the SSJ Academy ToC is marked through several KPIs. The KPIs help track an individual SU's journey, evidence outcomes of the SSJ Academy, and indicate how programming can be improved or where needs additional support on a SU's pathway. The overall KPIs are listed in Table 1 alongside SSJ's goal per year as pertains to each KPI.

Table 1: Overall SSJ Academy KPIs.

No.	KPI Description	Target/Year
1	Total Individual Academy beneficiaries (direct) in any year	750
2	Number of beneficiaries attending Re-Fit (unique people using Re-Fit)	500
3	Total number of Re-fit Attendances	Establish Baseline
4	Numbers attending Re-Fit who report feeling more connected to their community	100%
5	Number attending Re-Fit who report becoming more physically active	100%
6	Number of Beneficiaries attending Re-Set	200
7	Total number of Re-Set Attendances	Establish Baseline
8	Number of qualifications achieved	400
9	Number of beneficiaries volunteering through Re-Connect	50
10	Number of individuals completed volunteer training	50
11	Number of volunteer hours delivered by beneficiaries	6000
12	Number of individuals moving into employment or education	5
13	Beneficiaries report feeling safe	100%
14	Beneficiaries report increased confidence/self-esteem	90%
15	Beneficiaries report improved mental health	90%
16	Beneficiaries in or who have had substance misuse support who are achieving their reduction in/abstinence from substance misuse.	70%
17	Beneficiaries in homelessness pathways who report stable accommodation	100%
18	Beneficiaries who report an improvement in essential life skills (practical and social)	100%
19	Beneficiaries identified as Academy Champions	50
20	Beneficiaries referred to community activities/study/volunteering	Establish Baseline

The overall NCLF KPIs are divided into short-term, medium-term, and long-term outcomes for SUs. Each KPI represents a milestone in an individual's journey. These KPIs relate and overlap with SSJ Academy's staged Theory of Change outcomes.

Short-term Outcomes

- SUs report feeling safe
- SUs level of chaos reduces and positive routines appear
- Cycles of relapse become longer and relapse period becomes shorter
- SUs break ties with negative social circles
- SUs use change talk
- SUs engage with low-level activities
- SUs demonstrate stability with support
- Referring support workers provide feedback on progress of individuals attending academy activities

Medium-term Outcomes

- SUs report an increase in confidence and self-esteem
- SUs demonstrate regular attendance at activities
- SUs demonstrate an improvement in social skills
- Positive engagement with keyworker
- SUs progress with care/recovery plan and SMART actions become longer-term
- Sustained accommodation
- Reduction in Substance misuse/desistance

Long-term Outcomes

- SUs are contributing, co-producing, sharing ideas, volunteering
- Drug free/alcohol free/offending free
- Stable mental health
- Job/stable finances
- Reconnecting with family
- Planned exit from services

2.2 Evidence Sources for KPI Monitoring

Evidencing these KPIs comes from several sources, including attendance logs, self-reported data from the SU themselves, observations from SSJ Academy Staff, and information from keyworkers. These datapoints strive to understand the SSJ Academy's impact on the SU and their outcomes. KPI evidence is gathered through the following ways: referral form, first session form, attendance data, monitoring forms, case studies, keyworker feedback, observations, and exit surveys.

Referral Forms are either filled out by the SU themselves or a keyworker when they are referred into SSJ's programme. These forms provide equality and diversity information (i.e. ethnicity, nationality, disabilities, sexual orientation). When a SU begins attending Re-Fit and Re-Set, the SU completes a First Session form. This offers additional equality and diversity information. For Re-Connect, this information is gathered through SUs' application form. Each Re-Fit, Re-Set, or Re-Connect session gathers attendance data to catalogue who comes to

which programming. Attendance data provides information on the quantity of individual SSJ Academy beneficiaries as well as for each programme. Attendance data also provides an understanding of which SUs are engaging in low-level activities and, over time, the frequency of attendance.

Monthly monitoring forms provide one of the most important data sources for evidencing the ToC. Re-Fit and Re-Set SUs complete monitoring forms that inquire about the impacts the program has had on their lives, substance use, confidence, happiness, reconnecting with friends and family, hobbies, physical fitness, and other key aspects. Re-Connect gathers similar information through the SSJ Volunteer Feedback forms.

SSJ Academy staff gather case studies to provide additional insight into the SSJ Academy's impacts on individuals. This qualitative data source provides rich, personal descriptions of the program's effects. Case studies can include observations from SSJ Academy staff or a written reflection from a SU themselves.

SSJ Academy staff send a survey to keyworkers to gather feedback on what they think the SSJ Academy's affects are on SUs they work with. This complements data reported through monitoring forms, providing another perspective on SSJ Academy programming.

Although the exit survey is listed on the SSJ Academy ToC KPI sheet it is not currently in use. It is hard to determine when an SU 'exits' services. Some SUs may relapse and not reach out or answer calls for several reasons. Other SUs may be living independently and in recovery but continue to attend aspects of the SSJ Academy due to the community it brings. Others still may, for example, obtain employment elsewhere for a year before returning to the area and attending SSJ Academy once more. Therefore, implementing an 'exit survey' at the end of a SU's time with SSJ proves difficult. The KPIs reliant on this form of evidence gathering may need additional thought, see below for further thoughts.

3 Evidencing the Theory of Change

3.1 Overall KPIs

Table 2 showcases the overall KPI targets for the SSJ Academy as a whole, as well as the metrics for Re-Fit, Re-Set, and Re-Connect where relevant from April 2024 to January 2025. This does not show a full year of the SSJ Academy, but the first ten months. The SSJ Academy Annual Report shows these totals for the full year. The grey highlights indicate where a number is not gathered. KPI numbers highlighted yellow show where these numbers are repeated in the short-term, medium-term, and long-term KPIs.

Table 2: Overall KPIs for April 2024 to January 2025.

No.	KPI Description	Target/Year	SSJ Academy Overall	Re-Fit	Re-Set	Re-Connect
1	Total Individual Academy beneficiaries (direct) in any year	750	1036	715	278	43
2	Number of beneficiaries attending Re-Fit (unique people using Re-Fit)	500		715	n/a	n/a
3	Total number of Re-fit Attendances	Establish Baseline		6686	n/a	n/a
4	Numbers attending Re-Fit who report feeling more connected to their community	100%		87%	n/a	n/a
5	Number attending Re-Fit who report becoming more physically active	100%		95%	n/a	n/a
6	Number of Beneficiaries attending Re-Set	200		n/a	278	n/a
7	Total number of Re-Set Attendances	Establish Baseline		n/a	1215	n/a
8	Number of qualifications achieved	400		n/a	198	n/a
9	Number of beneficiaries volunteering through Re-Connect	50		n/a	n/a	49
10	Number of individuals completed volunteer training	50		n/a	n/a	43
11	Number of volunteer hours delivered by beneficiaries	6000		n/a	n/a	10226.5
12	Number of individuals moving into employment or education	5*	124	88	21	15
13	Beneficiaries report feeling safe	100%	89%	94%	83.13%	
14	Beneficiaries report increased confidence/self-esteem	90%	94%	93%	95%	
15	Beneficiaries report improved mental health	90%	93%	95%	90%	

16	Beneficiaries in or who have had substance misuse support who are achieving their reduction in/abstinence from substance misuse.	70%	57%	70%	43.75%	
17	Beneficiaries in homelessness pathways who report stable accommodation	100%	65%	63%	67.50%	
18	Beneficiaries who report an improvement in essential life skills (practical and social)	100%	97%	99%	95%	
19	Beneficiaries identified as Academy Champions	50	64			
20	Beneficiaries referred to community activities/study/volunteering	Establish Baseline	65%	82%	48.44%	

*Originally KPI 12 measured the number of individuals moving into full-time employment or education. This would disregard any individuals in part-time employment or education, and ignores any context that may make part-time occupation the best choice for the SU. Achieving part-time employment or education is as valid as full-time and shows progression on the ToC. As such KPI 12 now includes all employment or educational roles, including both part-time and full-time. This is not reflected in the goal target/year, but in the values presented in the table above.

The SSJ Academy exceeded KPI targets in several areas: total individual Academy beneficiaries in any year (KPI 1), number of beneficiaries attending Re-Fit (KPI 2), number of beneficiaries attending Re-Set (KPI 6), number of volunteer hours delivered (KPI 11), number of individuals moving into education or employment (KPI 12), beneficiaries reporting improved mental health (KPI 15), and beneficiaries identified as Academy champions (KPI 20). The metrics to date established baselines for total number of Re-Fit attendances (KPI 3) and Re-Set Attendances (KPI 7) as well as beneficiaries referred to community activities/study/volunteering (KPI 20).

The evidence indicates slightly lower than goals in attendees of Re-Fit reporting feeling more connected to their community (KPI 4), Re-Fit attendees who report becoming more physically active (KPI 5), number of Re-Set qualifications achieved (KPI 8), quantity of beneficiaries volunteering through Re-Connect (KPI 9), individuals who completed volunteer training (KPI 10), beneficiaries reporting feeling safe (KPI 13), and beneficiaries reporting an improvement in essential life skills (KPI 18). Two KPIs are moderately lower than target: beneficiaries who have had substance misuses support who are achieving their reduction in or abstinence from substance misuses (KPI 16) and beneficiaries in homelessness pathways who report stable accommodation (KPI 17). Despite being lower than the target, these KPIs are still demonstrating the ToC and at a substantial rate. These rates will be monitored in subsequent

evaluations and investigated to see how they could be improved, taking into consideration contextual factors.

Table 3 shows the short, medium, and long-term outcome KPIs for the SSJ Academy. Similarly to Table 2, yellow highlights are repeating KPIs from the list in Table 2. Orange highlights are areas that may need further attention as discussed in section 5. Grey are areas where data is not collected.

Table 3: Short-term, medium-term, and long-term outcome KPIs for SSJ Academy.

	No.	KPI Description	SSJ Academy Overall	Re-Fit	Re-Set	Re-Connect
Short-term Outcomes	13	SU's report feeling safe	89%	94%	83.13%	
	3/7	SU's level of chaos reduce and positive routines appear	These are evidenced through attendance			
	16	Cycles of relapse become longer and relapse period becomes shorter	See KPI 16 above and note in Section 5			
	29	SU's break ties with negative social circles	74%	75%	72.19%	
	30	SU's use change talk	See Section 5			
	3/7	SU's engage with low-level activities	These are evidenced through attendance			
	31	SU's demonstrate stability with support	See section 5			
		Referring support workers provide feedback on progress of individuals attending academy activities	See Section 5			
Medium Term outcomes	14	SU's Report an increase in confidence and self-esteem	94%	93%	95%	
	2/6	SU's demonstrate regular attendance at activities	See attendance data			
	18	SU's demonstrate an improvement in social skills	97%	99%	95%	
	32	Positive engagement with key worker	See Section 5			
	33	SU's progress with care/recovery plan and SMART actions become longer-term	See Section 5			
	17	Sustained accommodation	65%	63%	67.50%	
	16	Reduction in Substance Misuse/desistance	57%	70%	43.75%	
Long-term Outcomes	34	SU's are contributing, co-producing, sharing ideas, volunteering	20%	27%	12%	
	16	Drug free/alcohol/offending free	60.10%	68.00%	52.19%	
	15	Stable mental health	See Section 5			
	35	Job/stable finances	61%	71%	50.31%	
	36	Reconnecting with family	55%	61%	48.75%	
	37	Planned exit from services	See Section 5			

3.2 Program Feedback

Alongside metrics for KPIs, the evidence sources also offer points on reflection for the overall delivery of SSJ Academy programming. Two specific questions on Re-Fit and Re-Set monitoring forms provide this: 1) overall, what impact (or difference) has attending Re-Fit or Re-Set made to you? 2) What would you like to see improved about Re-Fit or Re-Set? Responses to the first question commonly discuss the programs' impact on SUs' fitness, overall wellbeing, positivity, and sense of community. Several participants stated "attending sessions has helped my recovery" and "it made me feel better about myself and the future" (Re-Fit Southampton). Others describe feeling "more confident" and "able to do more for myself" (Re-Set Portsmouth). Many of these qualitative answers highlight impacts for individuals along the ToC, including some of those difficult to evidence through other metrics. These alongside responses to the second question, such as 'it is perfect how it is' (Re-Fit Southampton) demonstrate how well SUs receive and appreciate SSJ Academy.

Regarding improvements to the programming in response to the second question, several SUs advocate for additional funding to enable the programming to continue and more sessions to occur, evidencing their enjoyment and appreciation of their programming. Similarly, SUs advocate for better conditions and pay for staff. Across Re-Fit and Re-Set, several SUs mention they would like less on the monitoring forms or not filling them out altogether. The balance between evidencing the ToC for funders and the ask on SUs is difficult. Further considering how questions could be reduced, double counted, or otherwise streamlined may help (see section 5). The tables below outline common suggestions for Re-Fit and Re-Set. Where a suggestion is mentioned several times, the quantity is listed in parenthesis. Re-Fit activity suggestions include canoeing, bench ball, dodgeball, boxing, rock climbing, kayaking, forest visits, yoga, and more football.

Table 4: Common suggested changes in Re-Fit.

Re-Fit Southampton	Re-Fit Portsmouth	Re-Fit Hampshire West	Re-Fit Hampshire North
Additional evening and weekend activities (17 mentions)	Consultation with service users over forms	More inclusive Badminton and training	Additional sessions (7 mentions)
Team luncheons, achievement awards	More football		
Improved session advertisement and descriptions			

Table 5: Common suggestions to Re-Set.

Re-Set Southampton	Re-Set Portsmouth
More sessions (12 mentions)	More courses
Fishing (3 mentions)	Higher levels of courses

4 Case Studies: Tracing a SU through SSJ Academy

Looking at all evidence forms together for a person provides the opportunity to trace their journey through SSJ Academy. This level of analysis will be more successful with time as there is more data, particularly monitoring forms, to highlight how a SU progresses through SSJ Academy. The stories presented below therefore should be taken as a glimpse of what the data could show. The paragraphs below compile as many evidence forms as possible for four people. These include first session forms, monitoring forms, and written case studies. All data has been anonymized, with any confidential information removed. The client's names have been changed to Client 1, 2, 3, and 4.

4.1 Client 1

Client 1's journey through SSJ Academy can be evidenced through the following evidence forms: Re-Connect application form (2023), written feedback (February 2024), Re-Set first Session form (June 2024), Re-Connect and Re-Set attendance data, and a Re-Set Monitoring (August 2024). An older first session form for Re-Set may exist based on the written feedback they provided, however this is immaterial for this analysis. Client 1 has completed 37 hours worth of volunteering and attended three Re-Set sessions in the period from April 2024 to January 2025. Their monitoring form information shows the SSJ programming, particularly the SSJ Academy has had a significant impact on their life, particularly their self-confidence and self-motivation, and provides evidence for the overarching SSJ Academy ToC.

Client 1 lived at Jordan House for a few months and had already started on their learning journey with CGL through the Level 1 Health and Social Care course when they started Re-Set. Client 1 stated "I noticed that SSJ were offering the chance to gain further qualifications at Jordan House under the Re-Set Academy, at first I wasn't sure I wanted to gain any further qualifications, however Becky and Raechel kept on a weekly basis knocking on my door and after two weeks or so I thought I would go down to the resource room and take a look at what was on offer. At first I didn't feel I had the confidence to join the girls in the resource room as it meant being in a group and my anxiety was not great with this, however both Becky and Raechel both put me at ease and I soon found the confidence to start a work booklet, at first I started to take the booklets away with me and I would study them at my pace then I felt more confident to actually be able to sit in the resource room and work through the booklets with the support of Becky and Raechel, I started with Re-Set Academy in October by the time the end of the year came along I was being offered to volunteer with the Re-set Academy. I had my first day of volunteering with the Re-set Academy on the 4th January 2024 since then I have volunteered with Re-Set on a weekly basis, since being with Re-Set my confidence has grown a lot and I feel I am able to better manage on a daily basis due to Re-set giving me some structure and motivation" (Client 1 – Written Response).

Client 1 shared SSJ Academy has provided more than education: "When I first started with Re-Set at Jordan house I was very unsure what I wanted to do with myself and my life, I had started a health and social care course and thought Re-Set could help me with that but Re-

Set gave me a lot more, they helped me build up my confidence to be myself and to be with others, I am now more socially confident, I am better with money and feel more focused, Becky and Raechel have really shown me that I can achieve anything I want if I put my mind to it" (Client 1 – Written Response). "Re-Set have helped me with my mental health, my confidence and just my life in general just by given me the time and effort that they have, I am now a volunteer for Re-Set and I love being part of a team and giving back to a charity that has helped me" (Client 1 – Written Response).

The monitoring form data, gathered five months after the written feedback further provides evidence for the impact SSJ Academy has had. Client 1 reported in their Re-Set Monitoring Form in August 2024, Re-Set has had "a large positive impact" on confidence, mental-wellbeing, and quality of life. They "strongly agree" they feel more a part of the community around them, have re-connected with friends and family, moved away from negative social circles, are contributing and sharing ideas, have secured stable accommodation and feel stable in their finances. Client 1's comments on the previous areas are the highest acclaim they could give in the form. The only area they selected less than "strongly agree" is on happiness. They "agree" since attending Re-Set they feel happier. They previously had substance misuse issues but have remained abstinent since attending Re-Set. Since attending Re-Set, Client 1 reported gained the following life skills: increased self-awareness, increased feelings of empathy for others, improved critical & creative thinking, improved decision making, improved problem solving, better at communicating, coping better in stressful & emotional situations. They "strongly agree" Re-Fit staff inspire them to do their best, could speak to staff if there was a problem, can be themselves at sessions, and feel safe during sessions. Re-Set has "given me more confidence to be myself around others" (Client 1 – Monitoring Form).

Client 1's story highlights two important successes of SSJ Academy. Firstly, the staff's care and attention to individual people are instrumental for the success of the program. Client 1 participated in Re-Set after encouragement from Staff as well as beginning to volunteer with Re-Connect. Academic literature highlight the importance of the staff-SU relationship for building rapport and crafting a supportive environment where SUs can build community and forge social bonds (i.e. Sofija et al 2018:11). These bonds help lead to successful programming. Secondly, Client 1's story showcases the SSJ Academy's ability to increase confidence and self-esteem, which have knock on effects for other areas of a SU's life. This evidences the SSJ Academy's ToC. Following Client 1's journey in coming years will provide further evidence, particularly for the longer-term KPIs.

4.2 Client 2

Client 2 filled out two first session forms for Re-Set Southampton (June and July 2024), a first session form for Re-Fit Hampshire North (June 2024), a monitoring form for Re-Set Southampton (August 2024), and a monitoring form for Re-Fit Hampshire (September 2024). SSJ Academy staff provided observations around Client 2's use of services and Client 2 themselves offered written feedback on their experience in January 2025. Client 2 attended 21 Re-Fit sessions and three Re-Set sessions from April 2024 to January 2025.

Client 2's monitoring forms for Re-Fit and Re-Set are similar and report positive outcomes from both programs. Client 2 reports attending Re-Fit and Re-Set have had a "large positive" impact on their self-esteem and confidence and a "small positive impact" on their quality of life. In the Re-Set monitoring form, they reported the program as having a "small positive impact" on their mental well-being while Re-Fit had "large positive impact". Client 2 "agrees" Re-Fit and Re-Set have made them feel more part of a community and feel happier. They "strongly agree" the programs have helped them connect with family and friends. They "strongly agree" since coming to Re-Set they have moved away from negative social circles and that they are contributing and sharing ideas, while they "agree" the same since coming to Re-Fit. In the time from the Re-Set to the Re-Fit monitoring form their self-reported ranking on securing stable accommodation and feeling in control of their money since coming to the program increased to "strongly agree". Client 2 reported their physical fitness has improved since coming to Re-Fit and they have abstained from any substances. Since beginning the programs, they have increased self-awareness, improved decision making, improved problem solving, stronger communication skills, coping better in stressful and emotional situations, improved critical and creative thinking, and increased feelings of empathy for others. Client 2 reported taking up art and gardening since starting the programs and are generally more active. They "strongly agree" the Re-Fit and Re-Set staff inspire them to do their best and feel safe at the sessions. They "agree" they could talk to staff if they have a problem and feel like they can be themselves at sessions. Client 2 suggested more sessions so they can learn more with the Re-Set program and an extra session each week in the Re-Fit program. They "look forward to the [Re-Fit] sessions and have learnt valuable stuff. Honestly can't thank Craig and Rachel enough" (Client 2 – Re-Fit Monitoring Form). Since coming to Re-Set, Client 2 has learnt more than they thought they would at their age and is "now applying for other courses at the wellbeing centre" (Client 2 – Re-Set Monitoring Form).

The observations from an SSJ Academy staff member provide helpful insights into Client 2's use of the program. They wrote "it was clear that the initial interventions needed to be focused around building [Client 2's] confidence and self-esteem. These were done in therapeutic settings of the IOM Houses through engagement with Re-Set and Re-Fit. This allowed [Client 2] to learn and progress at a level which ensured he felt in control of his development. The aim in developing [Client 2's] confidence and self-esteem was so that he felt comfortable talking to new people (staff and other service users) about his experience...Over the coming months [Client 2] found a new-found confidence and had organically formed into a positive peer in the supported accommodation he was living in, helping others by liaising with support services for the benefit of all residents". Client 2 was "consistently completing a [Re-Set] module every 2-3 weeks, over a period of 6 plus months", completing 10 modules and earning certificates for each. Client 2 "has now been engaged with our project for 14 months and has successfully enrolled in another Volunteer Project". "During his time with our project [Client 2] has always been a positive peer for other service users & has consistently demonstrated a high level of motivation & dedication towards a brighter future for himself. From a support workers point of view, it has been refreshing and encouraging to see how [Client 2] has grasped any potential learning and development opportunities & fully utilised all support on offer". Together with the monitoring forms, this clearly evidences short, medium, and the start of long-term outcomes for Client 2, particularly with them starting to volunteer with another project.

Client 2 is also invested in helping others as well as contributing to this and other projects, another long-term KPI. Client 2 feels “more should be done to enable other people in these projects to pass on their experiences, hopefully stopping others having to make the same mistakes that we have. Even if it stops one person going to prison, it is worth it” (Client 2 – Written Feedback). “Without sounding too cliché, it does feel good helping other people, especially ones that I can relate too & are going through some of what I went through. I always felt staff were keen to listen and wanted me to progress, constantly being positive & pushing me to be the best I can be. Thanks for all the help & support” (Client 2 – Written Feedback). Client 2 also offers a case study hitting many of the main KPI milestones. Their story further provides evidence for the strong relationships between staff and SUs as well as between SUs themselves that helps enable the program’s success. The importance of peer support in this type of program has been evidenced throughout academic literature. SSJ Academy creates community and enables peer support to form organically. Following up on Client 2’s success next year will add additional evidence.

4.3 Client 3

Client 3 has a first session form (June 2024), two Re-Fit monitoring forms (August and December 2024), and written feedback from a staff member (January 2025). This provides eight months of information on Client 3’s experience of SSJ Academy during which time they attended 14 Re-Fit sessions. In both monitoring forms, Client 3 reported Re-Fit has had a “large positive impact” on their confidence, mental wellbeing, and quality of life. Since coming to Re-Fit, they “strongly agree” they feel more a part of the community around them, happier more often, have re-connected with friends and family, and moved away from negative social circles. Between the first and second monitoring forms, their response to two questions moved from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘agree’. These questions asked about contributing and sharing ideas and feeling secure and in control of their money. This shows a slight decrease in those two KPIs for this Client. While this could be just reflective of their feelings on the day they filled out the monitoring form and still is a positive association, it will be something to look at in their future monitoring forms.

Client 3 reported in the first monitoring form their substance misuse issues decreased since coming to Re-Fit. In their second monitoring form, they reported remaining abstinent from substances. Since starting Re-Fit they reported developing the following skills in both monitoring forms: increased self-awareness, increased feelings of empathy for others, improved critical & creative thinking, improved decision making, improved problem solving, better at communicating, coping better in stressful & emotional situations. In the first monitoring form, Client 3 stated they are participating in more fitness activities on the weekends in their own time. In the second, they shared they are training for the Southampton marathon. Client 3 “agrees” the staff inspire them to do their best, could speak with staff if they had a problem, can be themselves at Re-Fit, and feel safe at the sessions. In the second monitoring form, they shared they have started volunteering and training. Progress from one monitoring form to the next is best showed through Client 3’s comments in the last open-ended question regarding the impact the program had on them. In the first, Client 3 shared

Re-Fit has helped them get “so much fitter and improved [their] diet”. In the second, they stated “I feel stronger, both mentally and physically. I have better contact with people and am learning better English”. Client 3 shows movement in the monitoring forms mostly towards stronger answers. Their open-ended responses also showcase their personal investment in their fitness journey.

Written feedback from a staff member on Client 3 in January 2025, further reflects on Client 3’s progress and supports the ToC. The referral information indicated Client 3 “only spoke minimal English [and] this was immediately identified as a potential barrier to participation. To navigate this, [Client 3] was contacted by a member of Re-Fit staff who had arranged for a current Polish speaking volunteer to meet [Client 3] at the gym and would be a mentor & extra source of support moving forward”. “This no doubt had a huge positive impact on the initial first few weeks of [Client 3] attending sessions. It became clear to see that [Client 3] was gradually building confidence, demonstrating motivation and slowly but surely began to have more conversations with Re-fit staff, whilst improving his English speaking.” At sessions, Client 3 “has also been observed providing support to other new attendees”. Client 3 “has expressed he is feeling so much healthier & hasn’t been as fit as he is now for a long time. [Client 3] has also gone onto secure accommodation in shared housing”.

Client 3 shows the ToC in action, particularly highlighting outcomes of stable accommodation, increased fitness, and increased mental and physical health. In addition, Client 3’s story showcases the importance of community and peer support in implementing this type of programming. It also highlights SSJ’s staff commitment to meeting clients where they are and enabling them to succeed, whether that’s through ensuring inclusivity in language or offering additional support. Client 3’s interest in lending support to other SUs shows the community the SSJ Academy builds between staff and SUs alike. Following up in subsequent evaluations will help indicate the longevity of these outcomes for Client 3. Their story might also provide a case study of a SU becoming a SSJ Academy Champion.

4.4 Client 4

Client 4 also has several data points to track their journey: Re-Fit first session form (June 2024), two monitoring forms (June and September 2024), and written feedback from a staff member (January 2025). From initial sign up in June 2024 to 23 January 2025, Client 4 attended 26 Re-Fit sessions. The two monitoring forms, taken three months apart, help illustrate changes resulting from Re-Fit. In both monitoring forms, Client 4 indicated Re-Fit has had a “large positive impact” on their self-esteem and overall quality of life. From the first to the second monitoring form, Re-Fit’s reported impact on their mental health increased from “a small positive impact” to “a large positive impact”. Similarly, their response increased from “agree” to “strongly agree” on the effect Re-Fit has had on their sense of community, feeling happier more often, moving away from negative social circles, contributing and sharing ideas, and feeling secure and in control of their finances. They reported “strongly agree” in both monitoring forms to reconnecting with friends and family and have secured stable accommodation since starting Re-Fit. Client 4 reported in both monitoring forms decreasing use of substances since starting Re-Fit. Since coming to Re-Fit they reported gaining the following life skills: increased self-awareness, increased feelings of empathy for

others, improved critical & creative thinking, improved decision making, improved problem solving, better at communicating, coping better in stressful & emotional situations. They “strongly agree” Re-Fit staff inspire them to do their best, they can talk to staff if they have a problem, they can be themselves at Re-Fit, and feel safe in the sessions. In their own time, they now exercise more on their own and have started volunteering, training, and education. They requested more sessions, including evening sessions on the monitoring forms. The monitoring forms show positive progression in a number of KPIs.

Staff written feedback supports these improvements. The staff member wrote Client 4 has been in and out of prison over the last 10 years as a drug user and often relapsed within a few days after being released. Upon release the last time in March 2024, Client 4 was recommended into the IOM Supported Accommodation Housing, demonstrated a willingness to engage with services, and provided negative drug tests for class A substances. Since moving into the IOM Housing, Client 4 “has fully embraced our wider Hampshire Re-fit project”. The “IOM House Basingstoke was brand new at [the time Client 4 started] with [Client 4] taking the lead in promoting our project to fellow housemates & other professionals during the opening stages of the project. It was clear from the outset [Client 4] had an inner determination to progress and had a real desire to want to learn new skills, especially around further education. [Client 4] would often ask for extra to work to complete as he wanted to maximise every opportunity available. So far to date [Client 4] has completed over 30 sessions, having gained 8 certificates so far. During this period [Client 4] has continued to provide negative drug tests, something which he had previously not done consistently for over 15 years. [Client 4] has communicated that having our project to attend weekly, which wasn’t available prior to Re-Fit being commissioned to work in wider Hampshire & the mentoring role he took on, have all played a huge part in him maintaining his accommodation, remaining drug free and allowing him to see a brighter future ahead”. This comment draws direct parallels to the ToC and provides evidence for this individuals’ journey through the program. Similarly to the other case studies, subsequent evaluations will help indicate longevity. The Staff member’s comment also showcases the impact of accessible and regular SSJ Academy programming for people across Hampshire as well as the need for its continuation.

Pulling together these data sources offer a richer insight into these SUs’ experiences of SSJ Academy. The four clients clearly have achieved several milestones on their road to recovery. These, and the achievements of each SU in this program, must be celebrated in their own right. Their stories also provide evidence for progression in their individual journey as well as the short and medium-term outcomes for the SSJ Academy ToC as a whole. Following their stories, and other SUs with several complete data sources particularly monitoring forms, over the next few years may provide evidence for the SSJ Academy’s long-term outcomes.

5 Reflections

The first year of the SSJ Academy and its evaluation offers the opportunity to reflect on the strengths of the program, changes SSJ staff have implemented to improve, current challenges, and future directions. The evaluation and reflective process also extends into the

SSJ and UoS partnership. In addition to reflecting on the SSJ Academy, the following paragraphs outline the strengths, challenges, and future directions of the SSJ and UoS partnership.

5.1 SSJ Academy Evaluation

5.1.1 Strengths

The start of building the SSJ Academy evaluation showed how much SSJ already gathers on SUs and their stories. Existing forms only needed slight tweaks to more fully speak to the KPIs and evidence the ToC. In addition, SSJ has a healthy self-reflective perspective built into their day-to-day operations. Rather than bedded into routines, the team continually looks for avenues for streamlining, efficiency, and improvement without compromising on delivery or increasing the ask on staff. This provides a continual form of evaluation and improvement, which can be difficult to build as it needs to be embedded into the culture of the organization. This is an excellent strength. Pausing and quickly documenting changes SSJ makes and including them in evaluations or reports returned to funders is a useful exercise. It helps demonstrate SSJ's attitude of continual improvement to achieve more positive outcomes for more SUs.

5.1.2 Changes Made

Over the course of the last several months, SSJ have implemented a number of changes to the evidence gathering forms, data collection processes, and more to help streamline the process and more clearly speak to the KPIs. Firstly, Jon has made changes to the backend data collection process. Jon created a unique identifier system for each SU. This took a significant amount of work and enables tracing individual SUs through all forms, while keeping the data anonymous. After Polly's suggestion, SSJ implemented a 'leave a review' system. At the end of an activity, SUs can scan a QR code with the option to give a star review (one to five stars) and a text box for them to elaborate. This helps gather immediate feedback, both in qualitative and quantitative forms, that SUs may not think to include in their monitoring forms. This data helps evaluate which activities are most popular and those that could use improvement with immediate suggestions.

Regarding the SSJ Academy forms themselves, the following two suggestions were made to add to all forms: 1) a progress bar to online surveys to help people know how much they have completed and 2) an estimated time to complete each form on the first page. These changes may help the rate of return on some forms, such as Keyworker Feedback Forms, because people will understand the ask on their time before they start (i.e. expectation for a quick 5-minute survey vs an open-ended amount of time) and in the midst of filling it out, how much they have left.

There are two additional suggestions on staff feedback from Re-Connect, current volunteer feedback forms, and former volunteer feedback forms: 1) reducing Likert style questions from ten options down to five and 2) add questions mirroring those in Re-Set and Re-Connect

monitoring forms about happiness, self-esteem, mental health, finances, accommodation etc. The second of these suggestions were also recommended to include in the keyworker feedback form. The reduction of options helps prevent decision fatigue from having too many options and simplifies a SU's selection process. Adding in the additional questions, although it is a larger ask on SUs, helps to demonstrate KPIs across the SSJ Academy. In addition to the above, it was suggested to include on the Current Volunteer SSJ Feedback Form a question around what they hoped to gain from the experience and if the experience has met their expectations.

5.1.3 Current Data and Evaluation Challenges

Although changes were made to help ensure all KPIs were addressed and streamline data collection, there are a few lingering challenges as outlined below:

- **Data quality:** Not all forms are filled out in the same format. For example, some use paper forms with staff transcribing answers into the SSJ Academy database and others use online forms. This can create discrepancies in the data due to illegible handwriting or copying errors. Furthermore, spelling mistakes or different birthdates may look like two people when in fact they are the same person (i.e. Jon Smithe and John Smith).
- **Keyworker feedback forms:** Keyworker feedback forms do not have a high rate of response. This could be due to several reasons including their significant time constraints and perhaps not recognizing the information's value to SSJ. For most KPIs, keyworker feedback forms complement other evidence sources, such as monitoring forms and case studies, reducing the potential gaps in evidence. However, there are two KPIs where keyworker feedback is the only evidence point: 1) referring support workers provide feedback on progress of individuals attending academy activities and 2) planned exit from services. There are a few other KPIs where the only evidence forms are keyworker feedback and case studies: 1) SU's demonstrate stability with support, 2) positive engagement with keyworker, 3) SU's progress with care/recovery plan and SMART actions become longer-term, and 4) SU's in stable mental health. The significance of these KPIs on the wider ToC needs to be considered to decide whether these two points are redundant or required, particularly in regard to further reflections on SUs exiting from services below.
- There are three KPIs with weaker evidence sources and correlations. As indicated below, these are not issues right now but should be looked at again in subsequent interim evaluations to ensure they are being captured.
 - **Cycles of relapse become longer, and relapse period becomes shorter:** The monitoring form questions inquire about whether an SU has struggled with substance misuse and if so, whether their misuse has increased, decreased, stayed the same, or abstained. Over time, this would be a mechanism to infer about an SU's cycles of relapse. It does not inquire about relapse period. However, the keyworker feedback form does. These two data sources together feel adequate to evidence this ToC.

- **Change talk** is something difficult to capture without observations directly with or from the SU themselves. The sampling of case studies and keyworker forms helps provide this evidence. Paired with the rest of the data, it adequately evidences this ToC.
- The KPI '**planned exit from services**' was initially planned to be evidenced through keyworker feedback forms and an exit survey. In practice, exit surveys were not implemented and keyworker feedback forms, when returned, do help indicate this. However, the best way to understand whether someone is ready to move on is through anecdotal conversations at SSJ programming. When this occurs, a member of the team usually gathers a case study from them, which provides helpful information on their journey through SSJ Academy and their next steps. Additionally, as mentioned in section 2.2, although a SU is in a stable place, they may not fully exit from SSJ Academy's services due to the community and comradery it brings.

5.1.4 Future Directions

Below are a few recommendations for continuing to evidence for the ToC while ensuring ease of data collection and processing. Most of these recommendations are already ongoing conversations with the team:

- **Ensure continuity of data across SSJ programming** to ease evaluation and data tracking. For example, using the same attendance sheet format for all activities in Re-Fit would ease comparing and compiling attendance data.
- **Keep data consistent:** Although it feels pedantic, consistency is key to minimizing additional work to clean and process data. This consistency starts at the point of data collection. Ensuring data gatherers understand the tasks of the data processors is helpful for showing the reasons why consistency and clarity from the point of collection matters. Eventually, gathering forms in the same way, preferably online, would considerably help keep data consistent while reducing workload on SSJ staff.
- **Join up thinking across SSJ Academy and SSJ:** The three components of SSJ Academy were separate entities prior to their union into SSJ Academy. The ToC evaluation takes all three parts together. Continuing to align evidence gathering forms (i.e. monitoring or feedback forms from all three reflecting the SSJ Academy KPIs) will help. However, the cost-benefit of doing this must be taken into consideration. This evaluation is for NLCF funding – the existing evidence bases successfully show the ToC in action. More could be done, however only if it will be worth the implementation time and will not need to be deconstructed for other funding KPIs.
- **Consider tracking particular case studies beyond the time bounds:** For case studies with written feedback, their records could be gathered from beyond the starting point of the evaluation (i.e. 5 April 2024) to more fully trace their story.

- **Gather and incorporate the additional forms into the evaluation:** This is an interim evaluation, as such over the next several years, more data points from other sources (i.e. keyworker feedback and staff feedback) will be included. Adding these into the evaluation will help showcase the impact of SSJ Academy as a whole.
- **Continue to streamline data collection:** Jon has been working hard on streamlining the data collection process, from making online forms to building unique identifiers. While this takes a lot of time, the investment reduces the time requirements on other staff (i.e. preventing the need to transcribe written forms) and data processing time. Jon's idea of using the unique identifier as a drop-down selection option for all forms or for a bespoke interface would be a worthwhile addition.
- **Streamline the evaluation and annual SSJ Academy report:** The annual report produced for SSJ Academy overlaps with the project evaluation. To streamline and ease workload, the 'evaluator' could either expand upon the created SSJ Academy annual report to include points about how it speaks to the ToC or the evaluator (whether that is an internal SSJ person or someone from the UoS) could produce both documents for SSJ Academy.
- **Consultation with service users over forms:** Workshop(s) or focus group(s) with SUs on what they think of the forms, how they would like them to be changed, while communicating their importance to reporting for funding would address comments in monitoring forms regarding form length. Workshops or focus groups would also provide transparency on why these forms are important and could offer creative solutions on evidencing KPIs while reducing the ask on SUs.
- **Write down changes made:** SSJ's healthy self-reflexive attitude towards continual improvement is excellent and should be continued. Keeping a log of changes made and including them in the SSJ Academy evaluation will helpfully indicate points of learning and changes made to funders. These are useful points that demonstrate SSJ's investment in achieving the best outcomes possible for the SSJ Academy, and value for funding received.

5.2 Reflections on Partnership Working

5.2.1 Strengths

The UoS and SSJ partnership offered the opportunity for UoS to support a local charity positively impacting Southampton and the surrounding area. This partnership brought in additional advice on ToC and evaluation, providing a different perspective to SSJ staff. This helped in offering different ideas for solutions to challenges SSJ faces. UoS also offered networking opportunities. For example, UoS invited SSJ to a networking event in Winchester with charities and similar organisations. This provided SSJ the opportunity to share about their own programming and the UoS/SSJ partnership as well as learn about other charities in the area. These networks, access to funders, and academics can be potential resources for SSJ

(i.e. how do others gather, collate, and analyse SU or similar data? How do similar organisations integrate clients into evaluation?). Similarly SSJ provides the opportunity for UoS to utilize academic skillsets to local initiatives, addressing their civic agenda.

5.2.2 Challenges

The UoS and SSJ partnership encountered a few challenges that could be addressed in future iterations of this partnership and kept in mind for other UoS partnerships. Data sharing presented one of the biggest challenges. Due to GDPR, safeguarding, and confidentiality issues, the data needed to be anonymized with information (i.e. names, birthdates) removed. This created significant additional work for SSJ staff to collage, anonymize, and send over data beyond their already full work schedule. Additionally, due to this the data is not live, but instead everything gathered to the date of download. This is not a problem, but something to consider with timing when the final NCLF evaluation is due.

While a third-party evaluator is important for helping to remove potential bias, bringing different expertise, and offering different opinions, it can create complications. A third-party evaluator can have unknown gaps in understanding of the project as a whole and may be unaware of changes to the project or forms that need to be implemented in real time. Additionally, the third-party evaluator creates an additional burden on SSJ staff to communicate relevant information to the evaluator, increasing the ask on staff time and capacity.

5.2.3 Future Directions

Revisiting how someone from UoS can add value to the SSJ team, without duplicating or adding work onto the SSJ staff may be beneficial (i.e. year-end reports being combined with evaluation, data sharing burden). There are several ways this could operate. For example, further integrating the UoS person into the SSJ Academy team may help with offering up-to-date support, such as one day a month in the office to be on hand, ask questions, and catch up on what has changed. To date, the biggest additional ask on SSJ time is the data anonymizing and sharing burden. If there is a way to either share the fully analysed data (i.e. when the annual SSJ report is written) or enable a UoS person to integrate into the team to process the data for SSJ as a whole or help create and implement automated systems may help reduce this additional ask on SSJ staff. Jon is future proofing many of the sheets to automatically collate data, which would also reduce this workload for the SSJ team. These are just a few ideas and need further thought on how UoS can add value, without adding to workload.

UoS has a wealth of academics, researchers, and students learning about or specialising in focus groups and workshops. Leaning on these resources to conduct workshop(s) or focus group(s) with SUs or SURA on various forms would help bring SUs into the evaluation, make the need for the forms transparent to SUs, and creatively think with SUs on how the forms can be improved while addressing the required KPIs. Partnering with UoS resources to deliver this would limit the additional ask of SSJ staff and harness UoS's world class expertise.

Additionally, this expertise could be harnessed to investigate the real or hypothetical 'system savings' from the work SSJ are delivering. However, further UoS/SSJ partnership work would require additional funding to pay UoS staff (i.e. post-graduates, researchers, academics) for their time. This funding could come from a variety of sources, such as UoS internal funding or external grants. UoS continuing to create and invite SSJ, as well as other local organisations, to networking and workshop events would be beneficial to SSJ and contribute to UoS's civic agenda.

6 Conclusion and Future Steps

The National Lottery Community Fund funding is for five years with an evaluation required at the end. Conducting yearly interim evaluations, such as this one and in alignment with the annual SSJ Academy report, will help evidence the ToC, ensure SSJ Academy is on track with evidencing each outcome, and achieving the intended goals. This evaluation should address each KPI outlined in the NLCF Funding, using as many existing evidence sources as reasonably possible. The evaluations should also include a selection of case studies that trace the SU across several evidence forms to help showcase the ToC in action. This initial evaluation highlights four case studies (section 4). Adding in subsequent additional years' worth of data for these SUs, and adding in others, will more fully tell the story of these SUs and potentially demonstrate the ToC.

Continuing SSJ's excellent self-reflective workflow will help SSJ Academy continue to improve. Writing down changes made as they happen will help these them be documented (and remembered) for the evaluation. Highlighting change points in the evaluation itself, particularly those delivered to funders, will help show how SSJ responds to challenges, issues, or feedback and improves programming accordingly to achieve KPIs (aka do the job even better). Funders appreciate seeing these internal progress points as it demonstrates continued engagement with improving the program, rather than becoming stagnant or complacent. If a KPI is redundant or will not be achieved (unlikely given this evaluation), keeping open communication with funders as this occurs and communicating what will happen instead, prevents funders being surprised at the end of the project and continues to demonstrate SSJ proactive engagement.

The SSJ and UoS partnership should consider using UoS resources to help conduct focus group(s) or workshop(s) with SUs or the SURA on the forms, explaining their importance and brainstorming how they can be improved to address the required KPIs while reducing burden on the SU (if possible). Additional funding will be required to compensate UoS staff for their time. The next steps in this partnership is for SSJ to discuss and determine their needs for the next phase. This will help start the conversations, determine potential funding sources, and key people for achieving the next steps. Beyond the UoS partnership, while SSJ is looking and applying for additional pots of funding for their regular programming, it should be considered how existing forms and monitoring data can be repurposed to achieve additional funding requirements without needing significant additional work for SSJ staff.

In conclusion, the SSJ Academy impacts a high number of people each year. The metrics gathered and presented in this report evidence the ToC. The case studies help unpick this data further, showing the program's life-changing impact on four people and their journey along the ToC. Additional worth of data, analysed on a yearly basis, will further provide evidence for this and indicate areas for improvement. While the evaluation focuses on data's ability to evidence the 'final outcome' on the ToC, it is important to remember and reiterate the significance of each milestone along the ToC. Each one for each person needs to be celebrated and valued in their own right.

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