

Private and confidential

# **An Independent Evaluation of Team Domenica**

## **Final Report**

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### Funding and collaboration

This independent evaluation was commissioned and funded by Team Domenica; the organisation being evaluated. A collaborative approach was taken in which key senior staff members of Team Domenica (here on out termed the ‘Team Domenica project leads’) supported in the logistics and development of various aspects of the evaluation process, such as reviewing intended interview questions for candidates and within surveys and supporting with the dissemination of survey links. Efforts were taken to mitigate against any potential conflicts of interest by excluding Team Domenica from viewing the raw data and inputting into the analysis and write-up phases.

### Brief glossary

We have briefly defined below some terms we refer to frequently in this report, including terms associated with Team Domenica.

#### Team Domenica:

Team Domenica is a charity that provides “innovative employment programmes to support young people with learning disabilities” based in Brighton and Hove and working across Sussex (Team Domenica Annual Report, 2023). Young people journey through a two-part programme over two years, designed to help them gain paid work. Once in paid work, the young people receive tailored ongoing support to help them sustain their employment. This is detailed below. Team Domenica also provides a day service.

#### Candidates:

The young people with learning disabilities and/or autism who access a programme, support or enrichment service through Team Domenica are called the ‘candidates’. This term was voted upon by candidates themselves.

#### Supported Employment Programme (SEP):

A candidates journey with Team Domenica begins with a one-year structured study and training programme, lasting four days per week, where all candidates complete a registered qualification and “discover their career potential” (Team Domenica website, 2023). This programme includes education in Team Domenica classrooms,

training in their cafes (to which there are three), education around relationships, sex and health (RSHE) and enrichment activities, and work experience (Team Domenica Annual Report, 2023).

The café's aim to provide a range of transferrable skills to candidates so that they are not solely qualified to work in hospitality (e.g., communication skills, time management skills etc.). [Link to more information.](#)

### **Supported Internship Programme (SIP):**

The second stage of a candidates journey with Team Domenica is to partake in the Supported Internship Programme (SIP). Candidates “move onto a supported internship in the workplace of their choosing with a view to gaining paid work with one of our partnered employers” (Annual Report, 2023). [Link to more information.](#)

Team Domenica report an employment rate of 81% from this programme since opening in 2016.

### **Wrap Around Programme (WrAP):**

When candidates progress to paid employment, Team Domenica continues to offer tailored support to both the candidate and the partnered employer, to ensure their continued journey through employment is successful and sustained. Sustaining work is one the primary objectives of the WrAP, and Team Domenica report that 95% of candidates sustain paid work for over one year or more. This is higher than the national average for people on supported internship programmes which was reported as 25% over one year by FE weekly in 2023.

All three programmes make up a candidates journey through employment, and Team Domenica emphasise the necessity of candidates partaking sequentially in every programme (particularly the SEP and SIP).

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## Purpose and aims of the project and evaluation

The overall project ran between January 2024-July 2024, with initial discussions and planning taking place in February 2023. To achieve the required outcomes as outlined by Team Domenica the entire project consisted of two different parts:

**Part 1:** A mixed-methods independent evaluation.

**Part 2:** Two training sessions for selected Team Domenica senior staff in developing surveys and collecting meaningful impact data.

This report will focus for the majority on reporting the results of **Part 1: Mixed-method independent evaluation**. This evaluation utilised both qualitative interviews for one stakeholder group (candidates) and surveys for several other stakeholder groups such as parents, employers and the wider community, to capture a range of views around the impact and experience of Team Domenica.

The **Mixed-method independent evaluation** was split into two distinct stages:

- **Stage 1:** Interviews and surveys with candidates
- **Stage 2:** Surveys to capture multiple stakeholder experiences and wider impact data (wider community group, parents and carers, staff, and employer partners).

This report will begin with an introduction to contextualise employment for people with learning disabilities and Team Domenica's work and will then split into the two stages of the mixed-methods evaluation above, with methods and findings per stage presented sequentially and an overall discussion summarising findings from both stages presented at the end of this report.

## Introduction

### Employment for people with learning disabilities and/or autism

Across the existing literature countless benefits have been documented for, and by, people with learning disabilities and/or autism regarding their lived experience of employment; including enhanced quality of life (Beyer *et al.*, 2010; Voermans *et al.*, 2019) good physical and mental health, overall emotional well-being (Robertson *et al.*, 2019), and opportunities for financial autonomy and increased social status (Jahoda *et al.*, 2007). Employment can further act as an avenue for social integration into the community and can potentially aid in the formation of friendships and wider social networks (Chadsey & Beyer, 2001).

Due to the numerous benefits to overall quality of life, physical and mental health there is an evident need to develop and sustain employment initiatives aimed at creating job opportunities and job coaching specifically for people with learning disabilities and/or autism; all of which should be of high importance for policymakers. However, sourcing the funding for existing employment initiatives and creating work-placements and job-role opportunities in community settings can still be a challenge for many local authorities.

In December 2023 it was reported that on average across England only 4.8% of adults with a learning disability known to adult social care were in paid employment (Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework; Department of Health & Social Care, 2023). Per region the Southeast of England has the second highest proportion of adults with a learning disability in paid employment at 6.6%; however this still lags greatly compared to the national employment rate of 74.4% of people aged 16-64 years currently in some form of paid employment (Office of National Statistics, 2024). In England it is known that a higher proportion of men with a learning disability are in some form of paid employment (6.2%) compared to women with a learning disability (4.7%; NHS Digital, 2021).

### Employment provision and support

There exist two main overarching types of employment provision for people with learning disabilities and/or autism: sheltered employment and open employment (Meltzer *et al.*, 2018). Sheltered employment typically offers work opportunities in segregated settings where people with learning disabilities work only, or mostly, with other people with learning disabilities; whereas open employment is defined as being in the open labour market, receiving equal wages meeting national minimum wage and where people are not employed solely due to their learning disability or because they are autistic (Meltzer *et al.*, 2018). Research looking into the quality of life of people working in either sheltered and open employment typically report better outcomes in the quality-of-life domains of self-determination, autonomy and empowerment for people working in open employment (Jahoda *et al.*, 2007).

Within the open-employment umbrella exists the provision of ‘Supported Employment’, which has consistently achieved positive employment outcomes for people with learning disabilities (Gore et al., 2013; Wehman et al., 2014; Beyer & Beyer, 2017).

There is a substantial body of academic research that demonstrates that supported employment is one of, if not the most, effective employment model for supporting individuals with learning disabilities to become successful in employment (Beyer & Beyer, 2017).

The supported employment model works by helping people with learning disabilities and/or autism to learn the skills needed for the job at hand with a job coach, who is tasked with teaching the person the skills needed for that specific job. The support offered from job coaches can range from ‘natural’ ways of supporting people to more intensive and tailored teaching methods of systematic instruction, dependent on the needs of the person receiving support.

Another form of employment provision that is gaining traction is that of a social enterprises specifically geared for people with learning disabilities and/or autism; of which would consist of an economically viable business-model providing meaningful work opportunities (Smith et al., 2018). Social enterprises can combine some of the associated benefits of sheltered and open employment and expand the employment choices available to people in their local area (Meltzer et al., 2018).

Team Domenica utilises a range of employment models, with the dominant model being that of the highly evidence supported employment model, seen within the Supported Internship Programme and Supported Employment Programme (with job coaches). Team Domenica also runs its own social enterprise-style cafes, offering opportunities for candidates to learn related skills ready for future internships and paid work.



## **Mixed-Methods Independent Evaluation**

### **Stage 1: Interviews and surveys with candidates**

## Interview Methods

### 1.1.Participants (candidates)

Fourteen candidates were interviewed in-person around their experiences of being involved in Team Domenica, including representation from candidates on the SEP, SIP and WrAP pathways to ensure a variety of perspectives were captured. Initially 15 candidates were invited to interview, with one withdrawing on the day of their scheduled slot. Table 1 provides brief demographic data on candidates interviewed, including the programme each candidate was currently partaking in.

**Table 1: Candidate demographic data**

| <i>Candidates (pseudonyms given)</i> | <i>Programme</i> |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|
| Sarah                                | SEP              |
| James                                | SEP              |
| Peter                                | SEP              |
| Amelie                               | SEP              |
| Rachel                               | SEP              |
| Richard                              | SEP              |
| Annika                               | SEP              |
| Steve                                | SEP              |
| Matt                                 | SIP              |
| Damian                               | SIP              |
| Tom                                  | WrAP             |
| Alan                                 | WrAP             |
| Finn                                 | WrAP             |
| Nick                                 | WrAP             |

To ensure anonymity is kept, age and gender of each candidate is not individually listed but summative figures are as follows:

Mean age of candidates interviewed: 22 years, range = 20-24 years

Gender of candidates interviews: Female = 4, Male = 10.

The sampling method was purposive, and Team Domenica project leads supported in identifying potential candidates who would like to be interviewed and who held capacity to provide informed consent.

## **1.2. Design and measures**

The interviews followed an exploratory qualitative design, with the use of semi-structured interviews to allow for a rich exploration into first-hand experiences of being a candidate on one of the Team Domenica programmes.

Three separate interview schedules (one for each of the SEP, SIP and WrAP groups) were devised by the authors and shared with the Team Domenica project leads, to enable them to comment on any factual errors about said programmes and ensure questions were phrased in a way that would facilitate detailed responses from candidates. The authors took care to ensure that questions remained balanced in being able to capture positive, neutral and negative experiences.

Candidates were given an easy-read version of the questions beforehand so they could discuss with a Team Domenica staff member, their job coach or whomever they wished if they had any queries, and the authors gave another copy of the questions to candidates during the interview itself to use if needed.

## **1.3. Ethical considerations**

Candidates were given an information sheet prior to the day of the interview which they were told they could ask anyone to help go through with them if needed. At the start of the interview the author went through this information sheet again briefly and ensured that candidates understood the information, and then collected their written consent. Consent forms were stored in a secure filing cabinet at the University of Kent.

## **1.4. Considerations taken when interviewing people with learning disabilities and/or autism**

Several methodological and ethical considerations were taken by the authors when interviewing the candidates, of whom all had a learning disability and/or were autistic. Authors created questions that were predominantly open-ended to limit the chance of acquiescence that may occur in yes/no question-types. Acquiescence is the tendency to say 'yes' or agree to a question regardless of the question's content, and people with learning disabilities can have a marked tendency to do this (Finlay & Lyons, 2002). Some closed-ended questions were needed to make it easier for potentially shyer candidates start talking and build-up to larger answers, by being able to start with shorter yes/no responses.

To attempt to mitigate against power imbalances between the author interviewing and candidate, authors began the interview by asking general questions about hobbies and interests to help build rapport and gave candidates chances to ask questions to the authors too. All candidates had a person known to them present during the interview.

## **1.5. Procedure**

Interviews took place across three days in January and were conducted by both authors, in which each author interviewed seven candidates each. The authors travelled to Team Domenica and on to wherever was most suitable for the candidate to conduct the interview i.e., for those on the SIP the author would travel to the employer offering said internship, and the Team Domenica project leads ensured in advance that a quiet area was available to use. Team Domenica project leads supported greatly in the logistics of the interviews, including liaising with employers and job coaches supporting said candidates and organising the timetable for interviews. At the end of each day the authors had a de-brief call with one of the senior project leads.

Interviews lasted on average for 35m 48s. The longest interview lasted 53m 12s, and the shortest 14m 20s. Candidates were told at the start of the interview, and reminded during, that they could take a break at any moment particularly at signs of fatigue. Assent was monitored throughout and if candidates showed any signs of distress the interview was stopped.

## **1.6. Analysis**

Interviews were recorded via a secure Dictaphone then transcribed by one author. The other author coded each separate transcript, devised the ten subthemes and grouped said subthemes into four overarching main themes: following the thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

## Interview Findings

The four main themes and their corresponding subthemes were:

- 1. A safe avenue for friendships and inclusivity**
  - 1.1 Feeling ‘included’
  - 1.2 New friends and extending friendships outside of Team Domenica
  - 1.3 A safe environment
  
- 2. The “freedom” of independence and increases in confidence**
  - 2.1 What it means to be independent
  - 2.2 Growing in confidence
  
- 3. Skills and employment experiences**
  - 3.1 Learning a variety of new skills
  - 3.2 Exposure to workplace opportunities
  
- 4. Navigating the world of employment**
  - 4.1 Learning how to overcome challenging situations in the workplace
  - 4.2 The importance of having paid work
  - 4.3 Overcoming societal barriers

The following section will present each main theme with its subthemes, incorporating direct quotes from interviews to amplify the candidates voices throughout.

### Theme 1: A safe avenue for friendships and inclusivity

#### 1.1. Feeling “included”

An emergent theme was the feeling of being “included” that accessing Team Domenica gave to candidates; particularly for **SEP** candidates starting their journey with Team Domenica. Three **SEP** candidates discussed themes of inclusivity when asked how accessing Team Domenica made them feel:

*“They include everybody. They include everybody with disabilities, without disabilities. They never leave anybody out” (Richard)*

*“I think they’re [Team Domenica] always welcoming people with disabilities and people growing up with disabilities, always thinking that they’re not going to be possible to get a job in the long term which, I think is brilliant for a foundation like this to do this” (James)*

*“I feel like I'm being treated fairly like, like a normal person. I used to get made fun of quite a bit at my previous colleges, so that it makes a change to know that there are people here that do support me and make me feel like, like, I'm normal” (Peter)*

No **SIP** candidate (n = 2) commented on the feeling of being included. One **WrAP** candidate commented feeling included in the sense of being able to “*be yourself*” when talking to Team Domenica staff and other candidates.

## **1.2. New friends and extending friendships outside of Team Domenica**

An evident shared theme across all candidates was the enjoyment and appreciation of the new friendships made whilst being involved with Team Domenica (including within the classrooms, on internships and in paid work). All **SEP** candidates stated they had made new friends since starting, with many classing other candidates as “*close friends*”. Candidates across all programmes shared that “*being with friends*”, Team Domenica staff and other colleagues (if on an internship or in paid work) was one the aspects they liked most.

There was an evident desire across four **SEP** candidates to socialise more with other candidates outside of Team Domenica:

*“Like, we are sort of friends, like, here. But I would like to know them more out of the café”  
(Sarah)*

One **WrAP** candidate spoke about the wider benefits of their time involved on the internship with Team Domenica (when on the **SIP** route previously), such as a “*broader social life*”, and another spoke of how being “*in the same boat*” as other candidates had strengthened their friendship.

## **1.3. A safe environment**

Several **SEP** candidates commented on feeling “*safe*” when attending the Team Domenica classroom and placements. This feeling was shared by both **SIP** candidates, who mentioned feeling safe when asked how they felt in internship and when interacting with Team Domenica staff. One **WrAP** candidate said they felt they could “*fully trust*” the staff from Team Domenica to whom they still had wrap-around support and contact with.

## **Theme 2: The “freedom” of independence and increases in confidence**

### **2.1. What it means to be independent**

All candidates across the programmes shared the theme of describing independence as being able to do “*things by yourself*”, with many going on to say that it was about completing tasks

without support or help from others. Two **WrAP** candidates went further and acknowledged that sometimes you'll still need support for new things:

*“And it's absolutely fine as well to still have that kind of support because even myself, I wouldn't class myself as fully independent as I still have parents who help me figure things out when I don't know something” (Nick)*

One **SEP**, one **SIP** and two **WrAP** candidates discussed how they now felt more independent in other areas of life, such as transferring skills learnt in the training cafes or work to their own personal cooking at home.

One **SEP** candidate commented on how independence also means being able to care for others:

*“Independence means being able to own a house by yourself. And look after every everyone and everything in your house, depending on who's living with you. Buy food for yourself and support your job” (Richard).*

One **WrAP** candidate stated how being independent made them experience a feeling of “freedom”, which was echoed by other candidates who discussed feeling like they didn't have to “rely on others”. Another **WrAP** candidate stated that independence meant doing “what you want to do in life”. All **WrAP** candidates expressed that through attending Team Domenica their independence skills had developed, and they now felt more independent than before:

*“Oh I love that question. I think through coming to Team Domenica which, like, bridges the gap between adulthood and early 20s, I think I've learned to be more independent. It's helped me kind of like adapt my thinking to what's required in a workplace” (Alan).*

## 2.2 Growing in confidence

A second subtheme shared amongst the majority of candidates was experiencing an increase in confidence since starting at Team Domenica. Three **SEP** candidates and one **SIP** candidate said they felt more confident. Two **WrAP** candidates discussed how working in a paid role and having the on-going support from Team Domenica made them feel more confident and supported. One went on to say that through securing a paid job they now felt they had the confidence to aspire for a higher paid role regardless of their learning disability:

*“I now think definitely I'd like to push myself, eventually get into much more higher role. Because I have a [learning] disability and I just got one job it doesn't mean I can't, I can't move into the next thing” (Nick).*

## Theme 3: Skills and employment opportunities

### 3.1 Learning a variety of new skills

A shared theme consistent amongst all candidates was the variety of new skills they had learnt as part of their programme experience, particularly skills grouped into “*communication skills*”, “*independence skills*”, money-handling skills and social and interpersonal skills. One **WrAP** candidate stated how their time on the SEP and SIP taught them “*real life social skills which aren't covered in school*”. One **SIP** candidate discussed how job coaches will helpfully break down complex job tasks into manageable steps.

### 3.2. Exposure to workplace opportunities

It was evident candidates accessed a range of different workplace opportunities (internships and placements), that mostly fell within the hospitality sector. One **WrAP** candidate discussed how a wider variety of internships available at Team Domenica would help finishing candidates to enter other streams of employment:

*“I would like to see more internships in other areas and, like, ways of bridging that gap to other workplaces” (Alan)*

Aspects that candidates liked about their programmes centred around job-specific tasks, such as serving customers. Three **SEP** candidates, one **SIP** candidate and two **WrAP** candidates spoke about liking meeting new people, having a “*consistent routine*” and, for one candidate, feeling as if they were “*doing things for others*”.

For those who gave a specific answer to the question around aspects they disliked (5 out of 14), the aspects candidates disliked centred around job-specific tasks, such as taking out rubbish bins, cleaning dishes and handling money. All other candidates stated they disliked “*nothing*” about Team Domenica and their internship, placement or paid work. One **SIP** candidate spoke about how the social aspect of their internship was difficult at times but that their job coach and employer were helpful in identifying this and “*changing the role you're doing for that day, such as going in the quieter back of house*”.

One **WrAP** candidate discussed how internships/workplace opportunities can help everyone, including the candidate, to better understand the job and in turn be useful for a wider diversity of candidates:

*“I think like internships are like the way forward in that you can kind of work out what, what people's needs are and expectations of the job and how, like, demanding it is on people with learning disabilities, right? But yeah, I just think, I think that's what can be done for a lot wider audience” (Alan)*

Another discussed how their Team Domenica internship acted as a useful “stepping stone” into paid work:



*“And obviously being prepared for the long term and being jumped into a real job. So yeah, it’s a good stepping stone, if I want to put it that way” (James)*

## **Theme 4: Navigating the world of employment**

### **4.1 Learning how to overcome challenging situations in the workplace**

Many of the candidates spoke about how they felt nervous when first starting placements and internships, but that this lessened over time and exposure:

*“Well, um, I feel a lot of pressure on like, first day, and feel anxious and probably worrying. But then, again, after a few weeks, I feel confident, and more happy and then, this is something that I, like” (Sarah)*

*“I found the job a little tough at first due to being shy, then opened up” (Matt)*

A few candidates also spoke of having to learn to interact with “difficult customers” and learning to be “patient” and “calm” in such situations.

### **4.2 The importance of having paid work**

Several candidates across programmes stated earning money was one of the most important aspects of paid work. One **WrAP** candidate spoke about how, although money was important, what matters more is the personal fulfilment gained from work:

*“It’s nice to be able to have that financial freedom, you know? I wouldn’t say it matters massively because I’m more fulfilled in other areas, you know, like getting the work placement, learning these transferable skills, in turn, like, they gave me that fulfilment, you know?” (Alan)*

One **SEP** candidate and one **WrAP** candidate spoke of the benefits to wellbeing that work can bring:

*“It keeps my mind busy, so I always feel like I have a routine. I don’t like being in the house all day. I don’t feel good” (Sarah; SEP)*

*“When I’m in work mode, ‘cause when I’m not at work, I get so, what’s the word? I don’t want to say depressed but I get so fed up of not being at work, so I love being at work constantly. I don’t mind it at all. I actually love it” (Peter; WrAP)*

### **4.3 Overcoming societal barriers**

A few candidates commented on the difficulties of obtaining work for people with learning disabilities and/or autism and the limited opportunities or chance available in comparison to people without learning disabilities and/or autism:

*“If it wasn't for the internship and things like that, I don't know, I just don't know, People with learning disabilities don't always get the chance [to work] and I just think it's more important that those people get that chance” (Alan)*

*“And how does it make you feel when people don't always get that chance to work?”  
(Interviewer)*

*“It's quite demoralising, you know, it's just unfortunate” (Alan)*

Another **WrAP** candidate discussed how they joined Team Domenica to help give them more chance of obtaining work due to existing barriers:

*“I've actually signed up for this because I wouldn't think I'd be able to have a higher chance to have a job if I didn't, because of learning difficulties” (James)*

## Survey Methods

The survey aimed to collect experiences of candidates attending Team Domenica on either the SEP, SIP or WrAP pathways. As with the interviews, three versions of the candidate questionnaire were created for each programme. Survey questions for each programme were created by one author (CE) and reviewed by the Team Domenica project leads.

Questions were then inputted into the survey software programme Qualtrics<sup>XM</sup> to enable the survey to be in an online format. This was intended to lessen the response effort for respondents, strengthen anonymity, and generate QR codes and webpage links that could be easily disseminated. Qualtrics<sup>XM</sup> enabled the authors to create one umbrella candidate survey that split into the three pathways dependent on the answer you gave e.g., if a candidate selected the ‘SEP’ as the programme they were currently partaking in then they would only see questions designed specifically for the SEP.

Following the same topics as the interview schedule, questions in the survey asked about candidates feelings around Team Domenica/their programme, future career aspirations, what ‘independence’ meant to them and so forth. This was done to attempt to generate more perspectives around the topics covered in the interview, from a wider sample.

Methodological considerations were again considered such as providing a balance between text-based, free writing responses and multiple-choice style questions. All multiple-choice style questions contained a mid-point value (such as ‘unsure’, ‘neither yes or no’) so that candidates were not forced into answering either yes or no. The formatting of the survey ensured all font was in Size 14, following easy-read recommendations, and candidates were informed they could have support to complete the survey from a teacher or job coach.

## Survey Findings

A total of **34** responses were collected. Data shared by Team Domenica notes 68 candidates were sent the survey (32 on either the SEP or SIP, and 36 on the WrAP). Out of the 32 SEP/SIP candidates, 29 were emailed the survey (3 did not have an email). All candidates on the WrAP were emailed the surveys and the WrAP lead went through the surveys with candidates 1:1 if needed.

The overall response rate therefore was **50%**; broken down into a 63% (n= 13 SEP; n= 7 SIP) response rate for those sent the survey on the SEP/SIP routes and a 39% response rate for those on the WrAP (n= 14).

### Demographic information of candidate respondents

The mean age of candidate who completed the survey was 23 years, with a range of between 20 years to 29 years. Nineteen respondents selected their gender as female and 16 as male. Thirty-one (91%) of respondents stated their ethnicity as ‘White’, three respondents (9%) as ‘Asian’ and one as ‘other ethnic group’, who did not specify further.

### Variety of placements and internships

The **SEP** and **SIP** candidates stated they attended a variety of placements and internships with roles that incorporated several different tasks and responsibilities. These included working in housekeeping in hotels, waitering roles (mostly in breakfast serving), in supermarket bakeries and other work such as in children’s play groups. Paid work for **WrAP** candidates included working in a theatre in an ushering role, waitering roles (mostly in breakfast serving or cafes), in a housekeeper role or as a hotel porter, a cleaner at a local sea-life centre and in a role which involved delivering post “around the office”.

The majority of **SEP**, **SIP** and **WrAP** candidates (71%) answered that they enjoyed interacting with their colleagues and customers, and “meeting new people”, in relation to the best aspects of their placement/internship/paid work. One **WrAP** candidate commented that they liked to see their work friends and another that their colleagues were “*lovely*”. Two other **WrAP** candidates centred on feeling like they were helping others as part of their role, being part of a team:

*“Meeting interesting people and helping out as best I can” (WrAP candidate 12)*

*“Getting to talk to people and helping my team in the restaurant” (WrAP candidate 7).*

Most **SEP**, **SIP** and **WrAP** candidates (57%) stated there was nothing they disliked about their placement, internship or paid work, with others answering they didn’t like specific aspects of the job such as cleaning bathrooms or having to take large food orders if working in a waitering role. Two **WrAP** candidates stated they found interactions with “*rude*” or “*difficult*” customers challenging:

*“Challenging situations like difficult customers” (WrAP candidate 6).*

### **New skills, confidence and friends**

Most **SEP** and **SIP** candidates (93%) stated they had learnt new skills since starting their placement or internship, with one **SEP** candidate selecting they were ‘unsure’. 100% of all candidates felt more confident since starting, 100% stated they get on well with the people they work with, 86% answered ‘yes’ to whether they got on well with staff from Team Domenica (with one **SEP** candidate answering ‘no’), and 100% answered ‘yes’ to whether they got on well with other candidates.

90% of **SEP** and 86% of **SIP** candidates had made new friends since starting their internship/placement, with one answering ‘no’. All **WrAP** candidates selected that they had made new friends in their workplace.

### **How does going to Team Domenica/your internship/work make you feel?**

All **SEP** candidates were positive in their answer, with shared themes centring around feeling “happy”, “calm” and “safe”. One commented on feeling more confident:

*“It has made me feel more confidence in myself than I have ever felt before and happier that I have made some new friends to chat to and associate with people who have been through the same thing as me”.*

Most **SIP** candidates were positive in their responses to this question, with one answering a neutral response of “it’s hard work but I’m doing fine”. Shared themes consisted of feeling more confident, feeling “good” and feeling “safe and part of a team”. All **WrAP** candidates were positive in their responses to this question. The majority (64%) wrote the word “happy”, with one going further and stating it made them feel “over the moon”. Other shared themes consisted of feeling more adult and prouder of themselves. One candidate stated they felt they now “have a purpose in life”.

### **Future placement, internship or job roles**

Out of the **SIP** candidates who answered the question of ‘where would you like to work in the future?’ (71%), two answered they would like to stay in their current internship, one that they would like to transition into a nursery or café work, one in a botanical gardens and another in a toyshop.

Most **WrAP** candidates (93%) answered ‘yes’ when asked whether they find the wrap around support from Team Domenica helpful; with only one answering ‘no’. Candidates reported they kept in touch with Team Domenica through a number of modes; face-to-face contact with their mentor with frequent visits from their mentor in their place of work, texts, emails and Instagram.

When asked how they would like to develop their career in the future, **WrAP** candidates had a range of responses including wanting to take on “more responsibility”, “work more shifts” and “improve communication skills”. Two candidates stated they were happy “the way things are”/“happy what I’m doing now”. One candidate stated they wanted to move on to another job once they had built up their confidence and ambition and another would like to move into

a career of office work. One candidate went further to recognise their desire for a higher paid and competitive role:

*“Gradually get more confident and move up to a more high-profile job”.*

### **The meaning of *independence* for SEP, SIP and WrAP candidates**

As developing independence can be seen as a core objective of Team Domenica’s work, it was of interest to the Team Domenica project leads and authors to explore what independence meant to the candidates and their interpretation of the word.

94% of all candidates (32 out of 34) answered that being independent means being able to do things/complete tasks on your own, with three candidates stating this also included having no support or help from adults. Three candidates stated that it also meant travelling independently.

*“Independence means to me to do tasks by myself and looking after yourself without any help” (WrAP candidate).*

*“Independence for me is making money and being independent and working for yourself” (SIP candidate).*

*“Doing things by yourself without anyone being their doing it for you” (SEP candidate)*

## **Mixed-Methods Independent Evaluation**

### **Stage 2: Surveys for other stakeholder groups**

## Wider Community Survey

A total of **44** responses were collected for the Community survey. Surveys were disseminated to 19 community partner organisations by Team Domenica, 22 employer partners displayed the community survey as a poster, and posters were displayed in the Team Domenica cafes (with easy-to-access QR codes included on all posters).

Results, for all following surveys, were analysed via content analysis and presented in a textual summary.

### Age and engagement with Team Domenica

The mean age of respondents was 46 years, with a range of between 23 years to 72 years.

When asked about ways in which respondents had ‘encountered or interacted with Team Domenica’ many selected several different options, such as being a customer at the Preston Road café (55%), Jubilee Library café (21%) and/or at Plus C café (10%). Others were colleagues of candidates (3%), an employer partner (7%) or an enrichment provider working with Team Domenica (14%). Two respondents were graduates from the candidate programme and three respondents were parents of current candidates.

**Table 2.** Frequency of visits to a Team Domenica Cafe:

*Frequency of visits to a Team Domenica café*

|                               |     |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| Everyday                      | 3%  |
| Once or twice a week          | 15% |
| Once every two or three weeks | 15% |
| Once a month                  | 15% |
| Once every two to six months  | 33% |
| Once a year                   | 19% |

### Interactions with and perceptions of people with learning disabilities and/or autism

When asked whether they had changed the way in which they interacted with people with learning disabilities and/or autism since engaging with Team Domenica, respondents gave a mix of answers. 19% answered ‘definitely not’, 33% ‘probably not’, 29% ‘unsure’, 10% ‘probably yes’, and 19% ‘definitely yes’. For those who answered ‘probably yes’ or ‘definitely yes’ examples were given such as becoming “*more relaxed*” and being “*more hopeful and optimistic about what they can achieve*”. One respondent answered that:

*“My patience and empathy have improved. And the interaction makes me a happier (and hopefully a better) person”.*



Respondents were asked whether engaging with Team Domenica had changed their perception of people with learning disabilities and/or autism. 9% answered ‘definitely not’, 36% ‘probably not’, 14% ‘unsure’, 23% ‘probably yes’, and 18% ‘definitely yes’. Examples of how perceptions may have changed included realisations of the barriers to employment faced e.g., “*made me think about the additional barriers for this community*” and that communication difficulties are not “*indicative of intelligence*”.

One respondent detailed in length how people with learning disabilities had faced a “*lifelong battle*” with the way they are perceived by others and that Team Domenica “*works to breakdown these barriers and make bridges to unforeseen possibilities*”.

### **Impact on the local community**

When asked how Team Domenica might have helped or impacted upon the local community 20 respondents answered. Responses centred around Team Domenica helping to facilitate a stronger sense of community and inclusion, making contributions to the “*health and wellbeing of the wider community*”, and facilitating employment opportunities for young people with learning disabilities:

*“Providing job opportunities for those who wouldn’t always get the opportunity. Employers are levelling the field through working with Team Domenica to give people in the local community more accessibility to jobs”.*

One respondent noted that Team Domenica helped to increase awareness and challenge preconceptions of people with learning disabilities in employment:

*“It increases the visibility of people with learning disabilities in the local community. It has helped people see the strengths of pwld and that they are capable and deserving of paid work and have much to offer their local community”.*

Another commented on Team Domenica’s ability to promote a potential philanthropic attitude in others:

*“I think they have such a strong sense of community and need to help people which is amazing. That is contagious which makes you want to engage with them and support the young people. They create future for people with learning disabilities by engaging the community in multiple ways that are hugely successful”.*

### **Other comments about experiences of Team Domenica**

The community survey ended by asking respondent if they’d like to share anything else about their experience of Team Domenica. All responses were positive, with no negative or neutral response detected. A selection of direct quotes are as follows:

*“I always find delivering sessions at Team Domenica a positive experience. Communication to arrange enrichment visits is easy. The team are always very welcoming and positive and both the staff and members are a delight to interact with”.*

*“TD has changed our lives. Not only is it such a warm and welcoming place, it is also very professional with incredible staff working at every level to support the candidates. I feel so lucky to have found TD at the very challenging time as our sons were transitioning away from the education sector into adult life. It is simply amazing in every way. Which has to be a very rare thing in any organisation”!*

*“A big thank you for providing such a great service to people in Brighton, we love collaborating with team Dominica”.*

## Employer survey

This survey aimed to collect experiences and perspectives of employers who had partnered with Team Domenica and offered, or had offered, paid work, internships and/or placements for candidates. A total of 14 responses were collected for the Employer survey. Data shared by Team Domenica stated that 33 employer partners were sent the survey, meaning this survey received a 42% response rate.

### Information about the employer

No information was collected on the demographics of each respondent as factors such as age, gender etc. were not deemed needed to achieve the aim of this survey.

Businesses included hotels (12.5%), cafes and restaurants (37.5%), music and dance studios (25%), a charity and a financial business.

Programmes offered by the employer covered all three programmes, with employers currently supporting on average 1-2 candidates. The time employers had been offering programmes ranged between 4 months to 5 years.

### Satisfaction with information received about candidates

When asked how satisfied employers respondents were with the information received about candidates before their start date, 13% answered 'very dissatisfied', 0% 'somewhat dissatisfied', 13% 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied', 13% 'somewhat satisfied' and 63% 'very satisfied'. When asked what other information respondents would like to receive about candidates before their start date one respondent stated that more detailed information about behaviour and existing competencies would be helpful to "*plan accordingly*" and two requested more detailed description of the learning disability of the candidate.

### Confidence of candidates

Since starting at the employer, all apart from one respondent answered that candidates had improved in confidence either 'a lot' or a 'great deal'. Examples of confidence increasing included working with "*larger groups of people*" and with tasks associated with the job. One respondent noted a story of a WrAP candidate:

*"I can see how much [they have] changed and how much [their] confidence and interpersonal skills improved as well as time management. [They] feel much more confident to speak to supervisors and guests, [they are] very friendly to [their] colleagues".*

### Confidence of staff and employing people with learning disabilities

When asked whether respondents had observed any changes in the confidence of staff working alongside a candidate 14% responded 'definitely yes' and 86% responded 'yes'. When asked the same question in regard to their own confidence when employing and/or working alongside a candidate 38% of employers answered 'definitely yes', 37% 'yes' and 25% 'neither no nor yes'.

When asked whether they could describe any changes they'd observed in staff, themselves and potentially customers since candidates had started at their business, four employers stated staff and themselves were now more confident at interacting with a person with learning disabilities, with one stating they now had "*more confidence in working with neurodiverse people*" and "*less worry about doing/saying the wrong thing*". Another employer said that:

*"Colleagues have a more accurate understanding of what the candidate is able to do (more than perhaps was previously assumed) and a better awareness of how we can adapt our level of support and ways that we share information in order to be more inclusive".*

### **Responding to concerns and improvements**

In respond to how well Team Domenica responded to any concerns employers may have all answers were positive (57% 'extremely well' and 29% 'well') with 1 respondent choosing not to answer.

## Parent and carer survey

This survey aimed to collect experiences and perspectives of parents and carers of candidates attending one of the Team Domenica programmes, including candidates that had previously been involved with a Team Domenica programme within the last 2 years.

A total of **13** responses were collected for the Parent and carer survey. Data shared by Team Domenica notes that 79 parent and carers were sent the survey, meaning that this survey received a 16% response rate.

### Demographic information about parent and carer respondents

The mean age of respondents was 59 years, with a range of between 53 years to 68 years. Ten respondents were female, and two male; 11 respondents shared their ethnicity as ‘White’, with one respondent selecting ‘Other ethnic group (please specify)’ without specifying.

When asked which programme the candidate, to which they were a parent or carer for, attended (or the last programme they had attended), four selected the SEP, one the SIP, six selected the WAP and one selected ‘other’ but did not specify.

### Impact on the day-to-day lifestyle of the candidate in question

When asked how Team Domenica might have impacted upon the day-to-day lifestyle of the candidate, four respondents noted increases in confidence and three noted increases in feelings of self-worth and higher self-esteem. Four respondents noted better daily structure and routine which for one respondent gave “*our son more of a focus*”. One respondent noted that:

*“It gave her structure, purpose, life and work skills, increased independence and confidence, as well as a friendship group”.*

### Emotional wellbeing, material wellbeing and interpersonal relationships.

Respondents were asked a series of closed-ended questions around whether candidates, in their opinion, had experienced any changes in a range of quality-of-life domains. When asked about potential changes in emotional wellbeing, 67% answered ‘definitely yes’, 8% ‘probably yes’, 8% ‘neither yes or no’ and 17% ‘definitely not’. Examples of how emotional wellbeing may have changed included being more able to cope with stress and more able to “*tackle difficult situations or able to ask for help when overwhelmed*”. Another respondent echoed this and stated:

*“He's more confident to say no to things he will find difficult and can explain why. He is also more likely to ask for help, so he isn't so anxious”.*

For material wellbeing 58% answered ‘definitely yes’, 8% ‘probably yes’, 17% ‘neither yes or no’, 8% ‘probably not’ and 8% ‘definitely not’. One respondent answered that:

*“The significance of having earned his money and having the choice on what he spends it on has been empowering for him”.*

For changes in interpersonal relationships 42% of parent and carer respondents stated ‘definitely yes’, 25% ‘probably yes’, 17% ‘neither yes or no’, 8% ‘probably not’ and 8% ‘definitely not’. Two respondents stated that candidates had made friends through Team Domenica, and another stated that the candidate was more confident to attend social events outside of Team Domenica since starting.

### **Social skills and independence skills**

Similar to the above respondents were asked whether they had observed any changes in the development of social or independence skills. For social skills, 67% answered ‘definitely yes’, 17% ‘probably yes’, 8% ‘neither yes or no’ and 8% ‘definitely not’. All answers indicated changes to independent skills, with 67% answered ‘definitely yes’ and 33% answered ‘probably yes’. Examples to changes in social skills include being able to communicate better and express emotions and being able to *“listen to others instead of dominating a conversation”*.

For independence skills the ability of use public transport independently was a predominant theme, with six respondents noting changes in this area. One respondent stated that the candidate *“understands better when he can be totally independent in his decisions, and when to ask for help”*.

### **Positives and areas for improvement**

When asked if there were ‘best things’ to come out of attending Team Domenica were for the candidate, themes centred around greater independence, new friendships, getting paid employment (three respondents stated this), and feelings of pride. One respondent discussed the mutual benefits for all involved with Team Domenica:

*“Without the employment programme I cannot see how she would have gained employment. Not only has she got a job she loves, and her own money, but the employers have a better understanding of the needs and strengths of people with learning disabilities. It’s a win-win. She works in a customer facing role so the general public are experiencing interacting with folk with LD’s too”.*

For areas that could be improved, six respondents stated that they had nothing to raise. One respondent requested more staff and another stated that some of the work undertaken during the internships can be a little repetitive. One respondent stated that Team Domenica needs to *“Listen to parents at reviews when we express serious concerns that our issues are not being addressed and these turn out to be correct in the end”*.

When asked how well Team Domenica responds to any concerns that parents or carers have 75% answered ‘very well’, 8% ‘neither well nor not well’ and 17% (2 out of 11) ‘not very well’. When respondents were asked to elaborate on responses given for ‘not very well’, answers were that there was *“no response to email, no communication now that [candidate*

*is] in employment”* and that concerns had been ‘brushed aside in the past’. It is important to note here that Team Domenica state they intentionally choose to communicate primarily with candidates to treat them as young adults and provide them with more agency and control of their lives; following guidance from the Mental Capacity Act (2005).

### **Final comments on experiences of Team Domenica**

The majority of responses were positive, with two negatively phrased responses stating that parents and carer could be excluded from communication and communication fed solely to candidates.

One respondent acknowledged the difficulties currently faced by the learning disability sector, particularly the limited resources:

*“Since our son has been there since the beginning TD has changed, grown, evolved and survived. It is hard to be critical as it is a charity with limited resources. I am very unhappy with the decreased adult services budget of the council, the lack of choice of activities and options, the lack of support outside of TD, not being able to plan his independence. We think because we do a good job and he is happy we are lowest priority. We would like more contact with TD about planning the future, but largely because they are there and no one else comes forward. We have failed to get any significant support from the council or the Carers centre”.*

Positive responses included the following quotes:

*“I cannot praise them highly enough. For us, it totally changed my daughter’s path and life chances. Without TD I really don’t think she would be working”.*

*“Our son is still being supported by Team Domenica with weekly zoom calls - this means he knows he still has support and that is helping his confidence in his ability to handle the world”.*

## Team Domenica Staff Survey

This survey aimed to collect experiences of staff working at Team Domenica in a paid role. A total of **39** responses were collected for the staff survey. Data shared by Team Domenica notes there are 63 staff members currently employed in a paid role, meaning this survey received a 62% response rate.

Questions were adapted from an existing questionnaire that has been heavily used in similar evaluations by Tizard Centre academics, called the ‘Staff Experience and Satisfaction Questionnaire’ (Beadle-Brown, 2016). The questionnaire sources data amongst a range of variables such as satisfaction with role, management, prior training of staff, and satisfaction with supervisions etc. for staff working in the learning disability sector.

### Demographic information for staff respondents

#### *Age, gender and ethnicity*

The mean age of respondents was 39 years, with a range of between 23 years to 62 years. Twenty-seven respondents selected their gender as female, seven as male, one as non-binary and one selected ‘prefer not to say’.

38 respondents stated their ethnicity as ‘White’, with 1 respondent selecting ‘Mixed or multiple ethnic groups’.

**Table 3.** Highest level of education for staff.

| <i>Highest level of education</i>    |     |
|--------------------------------------|-----|
| GCSE or equivalent                   | 3%  |
| A-levels or equivalent               | 14% |
| Btech/NVQ level 5 or equivalent      | 3%  |
| Undergraduate degree (e.g., BA, BSc) | 50% |
| Postgraduate degree (e.g., MA, MSc)  | 22% |
| Doctoral-level qualification         | 0%  |
| None of the above                    | 3%  |
| Other (please specify)               | 5%  |

#### *Job role, length of service and type of contract*

To protect and maintain anonymity specific job titles noted by respondents will not be shared. However, it can be noted that a wide representation of staff occurred with jobs roles ranging from those in more managerial roles to those in more direct support roles; alongside a variety



of staff across different departments including education, administration, job coaches and several standalone roles.

The length of time staff had worked at Team Domenica varied greatly, with a mean of 3 years and a range of 6 months to 8 years.

59% of staff respondents were employed in a full-time role and 41% in a part-time role.

### ***Education, training and prior experience***

**Table 4.** Training in areas relevant to supporting people with learning disabilities and/or autism.

*Percentage of respondents who report being trained in the following areas*

---

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Autism (e.g., understanding autism, supporting autistic people etc.).  | 71% |
| Behaviours of concern/challenging behaviour  | 28% |
| Positive Behavioural Support   | 15% |
| Communication (e.g., augmentative and alternative communication, intensive interaction, Makaton, British Sign Language). | 15% |
| Person Centred Approaches  | 33% |
| Restraint Reduction or similar   | 0%  |
| Training in Systemic Instruction   | 48% |
| Mental Capacity  | 41% |
| Other (please specify)   | 7%  |

One respondent stated that ‘other training’ received whilst working at Team Domenica, that was not listed in the options, included training in risk assessments, food hygiene, accessible technology and allergen training. Two respondents noted training in first aid, emotional coaching and epilepsy, and a further two noted training in safeguarding.

When asked what training they had not received but feel would benefit from, respondents listed:

- Makaton/British sign language (5 respondents)
- Systematic training (1 respondent)
- Person centred approach (1 respondent)
- Challenging behaviour/Positive Behavioural Support (3 respondents)
- Managerial/leadership courses inc. management for staff and candidates (2 respondents)

- Assistive technology (1 respondent)
- SEND law (1 respondent)
- Mental health training (2 respondents)
- Wider disability training (2 respondents)

Prior employment types before working at Team Domenica centred for many staff around working in the health and social care sector (21%); to which 12% worked specifically with adults with learning disabilities, and/or the education sector (36%); to which 18% worked in special education. Other common prior employment included hospitality, retail and financial or administrative services.

### **Main purpose of Team Domenica and any differences made to the lives of candidates**

Main themes around the purpose of Team Domenica centred on the aim to improve the quality of life for young adults with learning disabilities and their support network, to support them into paid work and to develop their empowerment and interpersonal skills. A few staff commented on the purpose of building confidence, independence and community for the candidates for them to *“live more fulfilled, less isolated and happier lives”*. One staff commented that achieving paid work wasn’t necessarily an outcome to fulfil Team Domenica’s aims, and that growth in other areas such as confidence and self-esteem were just as important.

Many staff commented on the positive difference Team Domenica made across multiple areas of a candidates life (relationships, social circles, financial independence etc.). Many staff discussed the wider social networks that attending Team Domenica creates for candidates, a larger involvement in their local community and support for transition into adult life:

*“Widening of their interests and horizons as they discover what is out there. Team Domenica supports candidates to mature as they bridge the school-work transition and treat them like adults”*.

### **Continuing to work for Team Domenica and supervision**

46% of staff rated their likelihood of continuing to work for Team Domenica over the next 12 months as ‘very likely’, 36% as ‘somewhat likely’, 7% as ‘neither likely nor unlikely’, 11% as ‘somewhat unlikely’ and 0% as ‘very unlikely’. Reasons given for those unsure of continuing were due to contracts having a fixed-term end, low rate of pay in contrast with an expensive area to live and work and some difficulties with management.

67% of respondents stated they felt they could talk to their line manager or supervisor regarding their work ‘very easily’, 25% ‘fairly easily’, 4% ‘neither easily or not so easily’, 4% ‘not so easily’ and 0% ‘not easily at all’. 39% stated that their supervision was ‘always’ meaningful and useful to them, 29% ‘most of the time’, 7% ‘about half of the time’, 25% ‘sometimes’ and 0% ‘never’.

## Best aspects of the job

For best aspects of the job respondents listed a range of answers, themed for the majority around working with the candidates themselves and other staff; 80% of responses named working with or supporting candidates as one of their favourite aspects. Respondents discussed aspects such supporting candidates to experience the workplace, developing relationships with candidates and their “*support network*” and having the opportunity to watch candidates grow and develop (79%):

*“I enjoy watching the young people develop relationships with their colleagues and become part of the work place team. I like seeing the positive impact our young people have on their workplace colleagues developing positive attitudes to people with learning disabilities and enlightening people on what our young adults are capable of achieving.”*

Many respondents talked about their colleagues and teams; words to describe the staff workforce included:

*“Supportive” “Passionate” “Enthusied” “Dedicated” “Open-minded” “Caring”*

One respondent stated that working with colleagues that “*believe in what we do*” was a strong positive aspect of their role.

Other respondents commented on working for an “*ambitious organisation*” that is well “*respected in the SIP community*”. One respondent described further the positives of this:

*“The fact that I work for an organisation that does inherent good and improves the lives of people with learning disabilities.”*

## Aspects that could be improved for staff, and for candidates to ensure success

Respondents listed various aspects of their work that could be improved. Two respondents stated heavy workloads. Six respondents stated the need for better communication across teams/departments. Three stated the need for more dedicated workspaces and staff rooms. Four asked for more training opportunities, particularly for those who had missed important training before starting their role. Three stated they felt disconnected to candidates at times and wished for more interaction as part of their role, which would in turn support their own understanding of the work of Team Domenica and help when needing to write or speak about the work with external organisations.

Two main themes to emerge were the need for higher pay due to rising costs of living in an area such as Brighton and Hove, and the need to bring all staff together more to lessen any feelings of disconnect between various teams.

When asked about anything that Team Domenica could do differently to ensure the success of internships and placements for candidates, as well as securing paid work at the end, for staff that gave an answer to this question (20 out of 39) the main themes centred around the need

to be “more ambitious” and try to capture a wider diversity of internship opportunities and placements; although some staff did comment on how the employment team are trying hard to do this and were doing “*amazing jobs at securing placements*”.

Three staff commented on the need for internships and placements for candidates to be better matched to their skillset and aspirations, but that this was always a “*tricky task*” to accomplish for all. Another discussed the need to personalise the length of an internship to suit a candidates progress, such as shortening internships if they are doing very well and wish to pursue paid work sooner, or longer if they need more time to adjust and develop.

Two staff commented on the rare occasions where parents or carers will create a barrier to paid work for the candidate, with one suggesting that to overcome this parents, as well as candidates, need to be better informed of what their involvement with Team Domenica will include from the start:

*“To continue the more refined admissions process to ensure that candidates who join (and their parents!) are committed to wanting them to get a job. This is mainly the case, but a very small minority have been found jobs and have then dropped out. Perhaps at the very beginning of the interviewing/admissions process it might be a good idea to explain/show a short film or presentation about what a typical day might look like once they have found a paid job. We currently focus on what happens during the 2 years at TD, but it might be helpful to continue into what the 3rd year and beyond is like for a young person who is already successfully holding down a job.”*

Other ideas included having more staff employed to cover staff absence, more training to ensure “*all staff involved are invested and know about our purpose from the offset*”, better use of technology to support relationships with candidates and employers and the use of job coaches to coach first year SEP placements.

### **Success stories of candidates and anything else about the job**

*“A candidate who joined this year has elective mutism, they didn't speak at all in their previous placement but now speak all of the time at Team Domenica”.*

*“I think almost all candidates make amazing progress across the two years and grow in confidence and independence (more so than they did in previous settings). Some stand out success stories: A previously very anxious candidate who grew in confidence to the point of being able to travel independently. Their parents were also extremely anxious. A few candidates have actually taken on second jobs, including one who is a Quality Checker for a learning disability charity”.*

*“[Name redacted] was initially offered an internship where it became clear that there would not be a suitable role and so was offered another one at the [Hotel]. Initially he struggled with this, but overcame his lack of confidence and self belief and was offered the role. It was difficult for him to learn all the aspects of the job and to keep up the required standard and*

*he needed a lot of time to do this and Team Domenica was able to offer him all the support he needed”.*

*“By far the impact the SIP has and the progress they make. Being part of the meetings where they are offered paid work is by far the best experience and very emotional, knowing how far they have come not only in the SIP but also throughout life”.*

*“Every candidate completing the programme, work experience and internship should be celebrated as they are working hard every day - every story is a success story”.*

*“It's by far the best job I have ever had. It's a privilege to be part of the charity. I have grown in confidence both personally and professionally since being here and I am grateful for having been given the opportunity to grow in my role over the years”.*

*“The staff are all incredible knowledgeable and supportive which helps during the high peaks of my workload which is very often”*

## Summary of evaluation findings

This independent evaluation set out to work with Team Domenica to uncover what is working well within the organisation, what could be improved, the impact of the organisation for a number of key stakeholders, and the potential impact upon the wider local community. Following is a summary of many of the main take-home findings and recommendations for next steps.

### Summary of key findings

- Candidates appear highly positive about their experiences of being involved with Team Domenica and many report making great gains in their confidence and independence since starting.
- A main theme across candidate interviews was the feeling of being included in Team Domenica. The formation and importance of new friendships was also a dominant theme across the interviews and surveys with candidates, as well as the parent carer survey. It is evident that Team Domenica creates an environment where friendships can form and social and interpersonal skills can be developed.
- Some staff and candidates commented on the need for a wider range and variety of placements and internships that would better match candidates' competencies and aspirations outside of the hospitality sector; with some staff acknowledging that many barriers exist to fully achieving this and that teams are already attempting to diversify placements and internships on offer.
- For the meaning of **independence**, main themes centred around explaining independence as being able to do “lots of things on my own and learn how to do things better” and “without any help”. Some comments centred on how support at times will always be needed and one comment highlighted the need to develop independence to support others too. Findings from staff, parent/carers and candidates reported that Team Domenica supports the development of independence for its candidates.
- Staff commented on working with candidates and their colleagues as some of the best aspects of their job, as well as commenting on aspects that could be improved. Staff described the Team Domenica workforce in several positive ways, focusing on the passion, support and dedication of staff.
- Many parents and carers reported observing several positive differences in various quality of life domains for candidates since starting with Team Domenica, such as gains in emotional wellbeing and interpersonal relationships.
- Some employers discussed positive changes to their own perceptions, and those of their staff, around employing people with learning disabilities and/or autism.
- For the wider local community responses centred around Team Domenica helping to facilitate a stronger sense of community and inclusion.

## Next steps and future evaluation

- It is recommended that Team Domenica reviews and incorporates suggestions made by respondents featured in this report, where feasible, into their future goals.
- It is further recommended that Team Domenica utilise the knowledge gained from the training to senior managers to amend and improve upon existing surveys, for future internal evaluations.
- The final recommendation is to continue to collaborate with stakeholders and continue to collect and disseminate data on the impact of Team Domenica and the satisfaction of all stakeholder groups.

## Conclusion

Results obtained from this evaluation indicate Team Domenica is making a meaningful difference to lives of many young adults with learning disabilities and/or autism, with reported positive knock-on effects for parent carers, staff, employers and the wider local community.

The findings for the majority align with findings Team Domenica has reported in their internal interviews and surveys with candidate, employer and parent groups. There are areas for potential growth evident in the findings, including need for a wider variety of workplace opportunities for candidates and some changes for the staff workforce.

The experience and growth of candidates is reported to be central to the work of Team Domenica and it is evident that staff believe this is a central aim and purpose of the organisation and their own role within it.

The authors of this report call for more support to promote Team Domenica from partnering organisations, the local authorities and wider networks; as well as more investment in the organisation so that it can broaden its reach and scope to enable more young people to access meaningful and potentially life-changing employment opportunities.

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