Money Made Sense

A Programme Evaluation for TASC

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Northside Partnership

tasc

J.P.Morgan

TASC

TASC is an independent think-tank whose mission is to address inequality and sustain democracy by translating analysis into action. TASC's main objectives are:

- Promoting education for the public benefit
- Encouraging a more participative and inclusive society
- Promoting and publishing research for public benefit

As a public education charity, TASC engages in research and public outreach concerning inequality, democracy, social inclusion, and climate justice in the current political, economic, and social environment. Through its work, TASC seeks to increase knowledge of public policy, improve working conditions, facilitate a just transition to advance climate action and protect livelihoods and communities, and more generally, contribute to positive social change in Ireland and the EU.

Northside Partnership

The Northside Partnership ('NSP') is a local development company working with local people, representatives from communities, the state, employers, trade unions and elected representatives. They work to improve the opportunities for people and communities in Northeast Dublin to bring about positive changes in their own lives and in their community.

NSP offer a range of programmes and services to support individuals, local organisations, groups and communities in the areas they work. They support all people and groups in the community including people looking for work, students, people starting their own business, children and families, young people, older people, parents and guardians, and childcare providers.

MABS

The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) is a free, independent, confidential, and non- judgmental money advice and budgeting service for all members of the public. MABS primarily works with people experiencing over-indebtedness. MABS money advisers work with clients who may have difficulties with a wide range of personal debts including personal loans, mortgages, credit card debt, catalogue debts, debts to legal moneylenders and hire purchases. MABS is governed by eight regional companies. North Dublin MABS is one of these companies and a core partner in the pilot phase of the MMS programme by providing staff support across each of the three cycles.

MABS has a remit in Money Management Education by advising clients about budgeting and debt management and facilitating group talks in schools and the community in relation to money management, good saving and spending habits, sources of credit and the avoidance of over-indebtedness.

Northside Partnership tasc mabs Money Advice & Budgeting Service

About "Money Made Sense"

The Money Made Sense training is based on research on household over-indebtedness https://www.tasc.ie/assets/files/pdf/household_dept_report_final_3320.pdf in Ireland conducted by TASC and published in March 2020. Problem debt or over-indebtedness occurs when households are over-burdened by debt repayments and do not have the means to meet essential living costs and debt repayments as they fall due. The research found that in Ireland single-parent households, low-paid workers and unemployed persons have consistently higher rates of over-indebtedness and lower rates of financial capability than other household types.

The goal of Money Made Sense has been to have an overall lasting and positive impact on the financial health of participants. Participants in the programme have taken part in a series of weekly group workshops on various topics related to personal financial wellbeing and money management – in addition to receiving one-on-one bespoke financial coaching sessions with a North Dublin MABS financial coach.

The ultimate desired impact is both to reduce the debt burden experienced by participants and to help them develop the skills for financial resilience and long-term financial capability.

The purpose of the programme was to design, deliver and evaluate a group training course combined with individual support sessions that will enhance financial capability and financial resilience. There has been a continuous internal evaluation throughout the programme that deployed a multi-layered theory of change approach that combined building confidence through developing existing skills and capacity to learn with financial education and knowledge of rights and services. The aim of this approach was to build greater financial capability and resilience with a contextual analysis or understanding of structural constraints on effective financial management amongst the two target populations.

In January 2022, TASC contracted Sarah Sheridan and Mary Higgins as independent, external consultants to evaluate the programme.

About the Authors

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Executive Summary

This report evaluates TASC's Money Made Sense Financial Capability Programme, delivered in partnership with North Dublin Money Advice and Budgeting Service ('MABS') and Northside Partnership ('NSP').

Context and Background:

The Money Made Sense ('MMS') programme is a pilot financial educational and training initiative for low-income households in the Northeast suburbs of Dublin. The pilot phase of this programme took place between October 2020 and December 2021 (noting COVID-19 pandemic and public health restrictions during this time). The training initiative emerges from a study published by TASC in 2020 entitled 'Exploring Household Debt in Ireland' (Lajoie, 2020).

The MMS programme consisted of:

- weekly group workshops covering core topics related to personal financial capability themes and money management.
- one-to-one bespoke financial coaching sessions with a MABS financial coach.

TASC led the design of the group training while North Dublin MABS provided the financial coach support for weekly one-to-one sessions. NSP led the recruitment and initial assessment process.

The training programme (and the 2020 research study) were both funded by JP Morgan and delivered across three separate cycles containing 11 cohorts. The duration of the programme ranged between 5 and 12 weeks but averaged 8.3 weeks. In total, 71 participants started the course, while 54 completed the course, yielding a 76% completion rate. Due to the pandemic, 10 of the 11 courses were delivered online, while one course in Cycle 3 was delivered in-person.

The ultimate desired impact, or theory of change, of the MMS programme is to have an overall lasting and positive impact on the financial health of participants, reduce the debt burden experienced by participants and enhance long-term financial resilience.

Aim of evaluation:

The purpose this evaluation is to appraise the relevance, coherency, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of MMS pilot phase and from this analysis, to draw out key recommendations for future iterations of the programme. This evaluation was funded by TASC (via the core funding received by JP Morgan).

Methodology:

The research design for this evaluation was mixed methods and sought to incorporate the views of participants and all three partner organisations involved in the project. It drew on the following primary and secondary data sources:

- *Primary data:* Preliminary interviews with key staff across the three organisations involved in MMS (n= 4)
- *Primary data*: Two Focus Groups with relevant staff across three organisations:
  - Focus group No. 1 (n=3) – senior management staff involved in origins and design of MMS;
  - Focus group No. 2 (n=5) – staff involved in day-to-day delivery of MMS.
- *Secondary analysis:* TASC survey data (MMS participants):
  - Baseline survey – n=60
  - Follow up surveys – n=24
- *Secondary analysis*: TASC qualitative interviews with MMS participants (n=8)

It was not possible to carry out primary data collection with participants of the programme due to the previous consultation activities completed by service partners there was a concern of overburdening participants with further research requests. This meant that secondary data analysis was relied upon for participant data. While this presented some research limitations, the evaluators were satisfied by the quality of data in terms of the robust interviewing techniques employed by TASC in gathering this data.

FINDINGS 1 - PROGRAMME INPUTS

1. MMS programme was evidence-based but content was also flexible to change.

The design and delivery of the MMS programme was strongly influenced by TASC's 2020 research study (Lajoie, 2020) and is a commendable example of translating evidence into practice. The programme was adapted for different cohorts and the content was continuously updated to incorporate wider economic and budgetary change. Furthermore, financial coaching was provided on a more regular basis while it was established what level of support participants needed. After Cycle 1, it was evident that not all participants required weekly sessions, so this was adapted accordingly. This tailoring of content according to the needs of particular cohorts, together with a flexible approach to delivery of that content, was regarded as a key strength to the programme. This required sufficient staff resources to be built into the design and delivery of the programme.

2. Profile of participants fit the intended target group.

The MMS programme succeeded in accessing individuals from the target catchment area and the sample of participants reflected the intended target profile with respect to gender, family status, employment status and income band (see Appendix 2 for full profile of participants). The participants' educational level was higher than the intended target, but despite 31% having higher education qualifications among the participants, they were still in the low-income range and therefore satisfied the intended target group. According to baseline surveys, problems in 'making ends meet' were commonplace for the participants: 60% were overspending their monthly income while an additional 18% were overspending 5-6 times per year. Further, there were relatively low levels of confidence in managing budgets when starting the course.

3. MMS provides added value to the existing service landscape as a debt prevention service, particularly if it is pitched clearly as a debt prevention service.

The Council of Europe (2007)[1] recommends three main pillars of action to address over-indebtedness in member states:

1) *prevention* of over-indebtedness.

2) *alleviation* of the effects of the recovery of debts; and

3) *rehabilitation* of over-indebted individuals and families.

The MMS programme fits under the *prevention* pillar (i.e. targeting individuals and households before they access credit or enter into problem debt) and to an extent *rehabilitation* (i.e. to restore good financial health after a debt crisis, or learning to live 'in a new financial way'). As the main debt support service in Ireland is MABS, which operates primarily under the 'alleviation' pillar, the MMS focus on prevention therefore adds value to the existing service landscape.

1. https://rm.coe.int/16807096bb

4. The partnership approach in the design and delivery of the MMS programme was particularly impactful.

The partnership approach between TASC, NSP and North Dublin MABS across all stages of the pilot programme was considered unique in the space and it drew out the respective strengths and expertise of each of the partners. It also allowed for each partner to venture into new spaces relating to debt prevention initiatives which had not been done previously.

5. Online format which characterized most of the pilot delivery due to Covid 19 works best for most participants, but in-person courses can be particularly helpful for those with low digital/IT skills or who do not have broadband.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated public health restrictions and national lockdowns during this period, Money Made Sense programme was delivered primarily online, with only one of the eleven courses delivered in person. The consensus among staff and participants was that online format was most convenient for participants to integrate into their daily routines, particularly for parents and those in employment. However, some staff recognised that the online format may exclude those who do not have IT skills or broadband. Furthermore, for the staff who led the in-person event, they reported being able to develop rapport, engage with participants who were quiet, and they were able to provide hard-copy material on a weekly basis. The provision of childcare for the in-person course is very important and should continue to be offered to future iterations. To summarise, it would be beneficial to offer both online and in-person, with a view to offering the course to those without IT skills or equipment to attend the in-person course.

FINDINGS 2 – PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES

6. Recruitment and Assessment of Participants.

NSP successfully recruited a total of 71 participants into the programme which is a satisfactory result given the pandemic. Channels of recruitment included local community initiatives, statutory agencies, employers, childcare facilities, existing community programmes, schools, local media and over time, word-of-mouth.

There was an informal assessment process built into the programme to screen out participants who were looking for investment opportunities or investment advice. There were no criteria for inclusion/exclusion to the programme vis-à-vis 'level of debt' for prospective participants to the programme (noting the true scale of indebtedness typically emerged over time when trust was built up with trainers or financial coaches). However, as is described in this evaluation, there were sometimes challenges for trainers and coaches in delivering a group-based programme and coaching support to those who may be in more serious debt or complex personal problems. Referrals to other services were made by NSP as and when was required but a clear referral protocol would be particularly useful for financial coaches or staff who are engaging on a one-to-one basis, in which participants may be more likely to disclose additional support needs.

7. Effectiveness of combining group work with one-to-one coaching.

According to both the staff and the participants, the combination of group course format and one-to-one financial coaching was highly effective. Financial coaches provided a 'bridge' between receiving information and how to act on that information – central to the financial capabilities approach. The financial coaching model operated via an 'Advantaged Thinking ethos', which holds that all individuals have abilities in the form of talents, gifts and strengths; and that by identifying and investing in them we can promote personal growth and development. The model combined coaching and mentoring to build on existing skills. It also offered participants a space for privacy and confidentiality to discuss their financial situations.

8. There was a very positive relationship between staff delivering the programme and participants.

The trainer and coach were described as highly competent, non-judgemental and affable which yielded an open, lively and "safe space". Staff involved also reported professional learning through these group discussions, which in turn enhanced confidence among participants. While this open atmosphere enabled quieter members of the group to open up in the group setting, some participants reflected that quieter members of the group could be engaged more directly to promote equal engagement across all participants.

FINDINGS 3 – PROGRAMME OUTCOMES

9. Programme positively impacted financial skills including ability to save, curbing spending, and increased confidence.

Overall, there is evidence that the MMS programme made an impact on the financial capabilities, financial resilience, and self-confidence of the participants. In particular, participants had an increase in their spending habits and were employing strategies to reduce unnecessary spending. However, the impact of financial health with regards to a tangible increase in savings or reduction of debt appeared to be more moderate "one of the most resounding findings which came through in the data was the increased awareness". This is likely due to the high cost of living and overall housing cost burden, as well as the fact that the long-term impact of the MMS programme is not yet known (and requires time before saving patterns, for example, are apparent. From the perspective of staff involved, there was a view that the programme had the most impact on those who had a certain level of financial competency to begin with. This chimes with the concept that MMS is arguably most effective as a debt-prevention service as opposed to a debt rehabilitation service.

10. The peer-to-peer learning component was beneficial for participants and staff alike.

According to the participants, the peer-to-peer learning model integrated into the programme was particularly beneficial. This approach led to often lively discussions and permitted an open atmosphere to share ideas, promote cross-cultural interactions and enhance confidence. Staff also reported professional learning through these open discussions.

FINDINGS 4 – MONITORING, DATA COLLECTION AND KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

11. There is a commitment to monitoring the programme but coordination is needed.

There was a strong commitment among partners of the MMS programme to data collection, and in timely consultation activities which led to improvements and updates being made to subsequent cycles of the course. Both TASC and NSP reported separately to funders, as their KPIs were distinct but the findings were shared with one another for additional insights on the impact of the programme. While tracking the impact of the programme is fundamental, capturing impact across multiple reporting structures runs the risk of overburdening those participating in the programme and is an important consideration for future partnership initiatives. This is to avoid duplication of effort and perhaps confusing participants.

12. The long-term impact of the programme is not yet known.

The long-term impact of the MMS programme is not known in terms of whether it made a tangible change to household finances or a reduced debt burden, therefore a follow-up survey carried out at least six months later could be considered. Furthermore, given the exceptionally high cost of living at present, the amount of savings and reduction of debt are arguably insufficient markers of success for a financial capability programme. Supplementary measures which capture, for example, particular actions taken by the participant to save or reduce their debt or changes in confidence level would be insightful. It is also recommended that key measures are repeated at baseline and at follow-up to capture tangible change on an individual level over time. Possible scales or measures could include, awareness of spending, confidence measures and taking control of spending, areas where savings have been made, and offering an opportunity to capture 'feelings' via a qualitative comment box.

Conclusion

This evaluation found that the MMS programme has made an impact for most of the participants. While there were no major financial savings evidenced so soon after the course was completed, there was considerable evidence of enhanced awareness of spending and strategies to save – all of which is likely to benefit participants in the short to medium-term at least. According to staff, the course is most impactful for those who already have some level of financial skills before starting the programme and those with only small to moderate levels of debt, in other words, those who are not (yet) in a crisis debt situation. This meant that they were able to benefit from the 'advantage thinking ethos' that is built in the course content and financial coaching approach. Further, having similar competencies and personal situations to begin with, it facilitated group discussions and peer-to-peer learning where participants could open and share their views and perhaps similar experiences.

Evaluation of Money Made Sense

Full Report

1. Introduction

This document sets out the findings from an independent evaluation of the Money Makes Sense Financial Capability Programme which was conceived by TASC and delivered in North Dublin by TASC, in conjunction with the local Northside Partnership (hereafter 'NSP') and the Money Advice and Budgeting Service ('MABS') during 2021.

1.1 CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

The Money Made Sense ('Money Made Sense') programme arose directly from a TASC report 'Exploring Household Debt in Ireland' which set out to gain a deeper understanding of the policy and social context of household debt in Ireland, focusing in particular on the situation for low-income households with non-mortgage debt (Lajoie, 2020). Drawing on the 2017 European Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) data, Lajoie found that private rented tenants and single parent families were at greater risk of being overburdened by debt in Ireland than other households.

The report also highlights personal and household debt are often understood as a consequence of poor decision-making even though over-indebtedness is intricately connected to structural issues such as income adequacy, housing costs and cost of living and inflation, as well as access to financial resources, assistance and support in managing money when that resource is limited (Lajoie, 2020). Furthermore, there is a recognised poverty premium in Ireland – or additional administrative charges which are more likely to extract profits from low-income consumers with fewer options, through measures such as electricity meter top-ups, high interest on retail purchases and credit agreements, including those from money lenders (see Stamp, 2017:10). People on lower incomes are also more likely to be dependent on short-term, high-cost money-lenders.

While the Lajoie (2020) report recommends a range of macro-level policy actions including increased regulation of money lenders and the need to address underlying causes of household debt such as housing cost burden, it also proposes the introduction of a financial capability training programme, consisting of both group and individual training in numeracy skills financial capability concepts.

1.2 ORIGINS OF MONEY MADE SENSE PROGRAMME (MMS)

In 2020, TASC in partnership with Northside Partnership (NSP) successfully secured funding from JP Morgan to set up a financial capability programme in North Dublin, entitled 'Money Made Sense' which, following discussions, was joined by local North Dublin Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) and together they delivered three cycles of the pilot MMS programme.

The MMS programme aimed to reduce the debt burden experienced by participants and to help participants develop the skills for long-term financial resilience, while acknowledging the context of income inadequacy, inflation, economic flux and severe housing scarcity and affordability.

It was intended that MMS would have a lasting positive impact on the financial health of participants. The proposed programme was designed to combine weekly group workshops and bespoke individual financial coaching sessions. It was intended that these inputs would help participants to develop the skills for long-term financial resilience and reductions in debt burden.

1.3 THE EVALUATION AND REPORT STRUCTURE

Following completion of the third cycle of MMS, in December 2021, TASC commissioned an external evaluation to assess the programme in terms of its operation, outputs, and outcomes - and to capture any lessons arising from the three cycles of the pilot. This report sets out the findings from the evaluation.

Section 2 describes in detail the *MMS programme*, including the role of partners, core activities and service throughput. Section 3 describes the *evaluation approach, methodology and questions.* This is followed in Section 4 with the *evaluation findi*ngs and the final sections presents *conclusions and recommendations*.

2. The Money Made Sense Programme

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This section provides a detailed description of the MMS programme in terms of its participants, course components, activities, and the respective roles of the partner organisations. The pilot programme ran from January to December 2021. There were three separate cycles of the programme during this time, each containing 11 separate cohorts. The duration of the courses ranged from 5 to 12 weeks (average 8.3 weeks), and the length of the course was adapted based on the needs and characteristics of each group.

2.2 LOCATION, TARGET GROUPS AND RECRUITMENT

The location, target group and approach to recruitment was rooted in the findings of Lajoie's report. Dublin was agreed to be the most appropriate setting for the programme, due to its "soaring cost of living in recent years and rising deprivation levels (Lajoie, 2020:80). Targeting low wage earners and single parent families, particularly if they were renting, was considered important given that these groups were found to be disproportionately at risk of indebtedness. TASC was also interested in targeting individuals 'in transition' such as parents looking to return to work. The target criteria were later expanded to also include long-term unemployed people.

2.3 PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

The MMS programme consisted of two key activities:

- Weekly group workshops: on core topics related to personal financial well-being and money management (TASC).
- One-to-one bespoke financial coaching with a MABS Financial coach (MABS).

2.4 GROUP TRAINING SESSIONS

Group training was designed and delivered by TASC, with input from other service partners and was based on core financial capabilities themes and concepts and applied to an Irish context (see Appendix 1 for structure and overview of course content). The content was aimed at ensuring that participants had the necessary numeracy and financial literacy skills to be confident in managing their financial affairs and to be aware of their consumer choice in achieving cost savings.

The programme also aimed to recognise and build on each participant's own capabilities and experiences. In particular, it aimed to nurture and encourage peer-to-peer learning to assist in confidence-building and applying learned skills into practice.

2.5 FINANCIAL COACH

North Dublin MABS staff did not operate as individual 'money advisors' in the MMS programme (i.e. the primary service delivery offered by MABS[2]), but rather they provided 'financial coaching' support. The role of financial coach within the MMS service offering was to support participants, through one-to-one communication, in applying newly-learned financial capability skills to their own personal finances.

2.6 ROLE OF PARTNERS

Therefore, the three partners each took on responsibility for the core areas of the programme:

- TASC led on original research, designed group training, delivered group training, and engaged in follow-up consultation with participants about their experience and the value of the programme
- Northside Partnership led the recruitment of participants to the training programme and carried out initial assessments of potential MMS participants. They also carried out demographic profile data collection and follow-up consultation with participants.
- MABS provided weekly one-to-one financial coaching sessions, through its Financial Coaches which supported and facilitated each participant to apply the learning from the group sessions to their own personal situation and circumstances.

While North Dublin MABS were not in receipt of any funding for the MMS programme, they provided free staff resources to support the first three cycles of the programme.

2. As already outlined, MABS also has an educational remit and therefore Money Advisors also work on education-related activities however the majority of their work would be to help alleviate personal debts through the reviewing of budgets, negotiating with creditors and seeking to maximise incomes for clients.

2.7 PROGRAMME PARTICIPANTS

As already outlined, there were three cycles of the programme during this time, containing 11 separate cohorts. The duration of the courses ranged from 5 to 12 weeks, depending on the needs and characteristics of each group (average of 8.3 weeks). A total of 71 individuals started the course, with 54 finishing, yielding a completion rate of 76%.

Table 1 offers a descriptive overview of participation and their referral routes across three cycles.

Cycle	Cohort	Dates	Duration of course (weeks)	Online/ Virtual	No. of participants started	No. of participants completed	Recruitment Channel
1	1	Oct 2020 – Jan 2021	12	Online	5	5	NP participants
	2	Oct 2020 – Jan 2021	12	Online	8	6	NP participants
	3	Jan – March 2021	10	Online	9	7	Local schools and social media
	4	Oct 2020 – Jan 2021	8	Online	7	2	Doras Buí
2	1	April – June 2021	8	Online	4	3	Self-referrals
	2	April – June 2021	7	Online	7	6	Employer and self-referral
	3	April – June 2021	5	Online	4	4	Local authority tenants in arrears
	4	June – July 2021	6	Online	6	4	Self-referral and CE Scheme
3	1	Sep – Nov 2021	8	Virtual	8	6	Self-referral
	2	Oct - Nov 2021	8	In-person	8	6	CE Scheme
	3	Nov – Dec 2021	8	Virtual	5	5	Employer
TOTAL					71	54 (76%)	

Table 1 – Descriptive Overview of MMS

3. Evaluation Approach and Methodology

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Section 3 describes the approach to the evaluation, evaluation objectives and core research questions, methodology, sources of data and limitations. The evaluation focuses on the first three cycles of the MMS programme which formed the pilot phase in 2021.

3.2 EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this evaluation was to capture information to assess how well the MMS pilot programme achieved what it set out to achieve, and what lessons arose from the implementation of the pilot. With regards to appraising relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of MMS (OECD, 2021), the evaluation set out to answer the following key questions:

Evaluation Pillar	Key questions
Relevance	■ How well does the project respond to the needs of the target group? ■ How well does it fit with the needs and circumstances of the participants? ■ Is the programme, as designed, capable of delivering the desired outcomes? ■ How thorough and reliable is the needs assessment?
Coherence	■ Does it add value to existing services? ■ Does it duplicate the remit of other services?
Effectiveness	■ Has the programme been well-researched, conceptualised and designed (i.e. likely to provide intended results)? ■ Do the processes, systems and operations fit well with the programme concept and design? ■ Is the data being collected relevant, fit-for-purpose?
Efficiency	■ Are project activities logical and sensible in the context of what is known about the needs being addressed, the aims of the project and good practice elsewhere? ■ What are the inputs in terms of administration, management, training, evaluation and other activities? What are the costs of these?
Impact	■ Have there been any changes in knowledge, understanding, attitude, skills or other areas among the individuals involved in the delivery of the project? ■ Do participants report any changes or developments in terms or skills, confidence or practice?
Sustainability	■ Taking into account the findings from previous stages, is the programme sustainable? ■ What are the key learnings from the project?

3.3 APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The evaluation sought to include the perspective of all three partners involved in the MMS programme to consider the design and delivery of the services, whilst also carrying out analysis on the interviews with participants to the programme to determine impact. It combined the analysis of primary data collection and secondary data collection.

Primary Data:

- Informal interviews with key staff of the three partner organisations, TASC, MABS and NSP (n=4).
- Two focus groups with relevant staff from the partner organisations as follows:
  - Focus Group 1 (n=3) - senior management staff involved in the origins and design of MMS (all three service partners)
  - Focus Group 2 (n=5) - staff involved in day to day delivery of the programme (all three service partners)

Secondary data:

- Survey data of participants:
  - Baseline, pre-programme (n=60)
  - Follow-up, post-programme (n=24)
- Secondary analysis of qualitative interviews of participants (n=8), carried out by TASC and anonymised data shared with researchers

Other:

- TASC funding application to JP Morgan
- Presentation slides of MMS programme sessions.

Thematic analysis was carried out on all focus group data with staff and interview data and on the interview data with participants. This was to identify repeated patterns emerging across the two datasets. Themes were then reviewed a second time to identify sub-themes. This informed the write up of the findings in Section 4.

3.4 LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

There were some limitations and challenges in the evaluation, particularly in relation to participant data. Under the funding application to JP Morgan, TASC committed to evaluate the MMS programme, both internally and externally. As part of their internal evaluation, TASC set about carrying out interviews with participants of the MMS programme after Phases 1 and 2. This was to inform and refine the content of the programme as it evolved. Further, as part of the reporting requirements to the funder, both TASC and NSP carried out surveys and consultation with participants. An unintended consequence of these efforts was that, for this external evaluation, the researchers were unable to directly interview any participants of the programme as they had already fed back on the programme as part of the internal evaluation efforts. This potentially weakens the objectivity of the findings of the evaluation. However, the researchers were satisfied that the data shared from the internal evaluation were derived from high quality research interviews containing non-leading, open-ended questions.

Another limitation of the data provided to the researchers was that in the 'before and after' surveys administered by TASC, there were 60 respondents to the initial survey but only 24 follow-up surveys, which limited the scope and insight into participants and their views.

Finally, the secondary qualitative data that was shared with the researchers were derived from cycle 2 and 3 of the programme only, so that there is no data on the first cycle, reducing the scope to make comparisons across the cycles.

4. Evaluation Findings

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 presents the main findings of the evaluation with consideration to relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability (OECD, 2021). In Section 4.7., the monitoring, data collection and relevancy of KPIs for the programme are also considered.

4.2 PROGRAMME PARTICIPANTS

i) Profile of MMS participants

Northside Partnership ('NSP') led the collection of demographic profile data. The NSP works in the Northeast suburbs of Dublin (Priorwsood, Darndale, Kilbarrack, Kilmore West). In 2016, the population of this catchment area was 137,364 persons. The Pobal Deprivation Index 2016 shows that life chances and wellbeing for people in these neighbourhoods are significantly lower than the general population. All participants were recruited through this catchment area.

Appendix 2 outlines the demographic profile data that was available for the participants of MMS (data was collected by NSP). As outlined in Appendix 2, 83% of the MMS participants were women (original target in funding application was 90%) while most of the participants were in some form of employment (72%), a total of 51% of the participants were either unemployed or on a CE Scheme (the original target for the programme was 50% unemployed). Data provided to the researchers did not include whether the participants were of migrant origin but 90% of the participants were of White ethnicity. There were 18 lone parents enrolled in the programme, which is broadly in keeping with the original target of 32%. According to Social Justice Ireland, the poverty threshold for a family of two adults and two children is 30,520e. The fact that the majority of the participants had incomes of less than 31K per year suggests that the programme recruited individuals from appropriate income bands.

The original funding application sought to target those without third level education, however, according to the demographic profile data, 31% had some form of higher educational certificate while 33% vocational/post-leaving cert qualification. With regards to employment status, the programme aimed to target cohorts who were either unemployed (targeting 50%) and low wage work/underemployment. Underemployment was not recorded but 46% were in part time work and 28% of the participants were unemployed.

Therefore, the MMS programme appeared to access its intended target group in terms of catchment area, gender, family status, employment status and income band. However, it was less aligned to education level which was at a higher level than the intended target, but their income band highlights that despite qualifications, many of the participants were either unemployed or in low-paid employment.

ii) Debt and savings status at baseline

According to baseline survey data, the most common cause of debt for this cohort included: the need to pay for utility bills, food, car costs, and school expenses. Five participants had never gone into debt. The most common source of borrowing is from family or friends, followed by the credit union and bank. The top three reasons participants selected as their reasons for enrolling in the course included:

1. To attain skills to better manage finances;
2. To develop the capacity to save;
3. To be able to better prioritise expenses.

Just over half (52%, n=31) of the participants were either 'unconfident' or 'very unconfident' around managing their budget compared to 40% (n=24) were 'confident' or 'very confident'. All but one participant had a bank account when joining the programme, 32% (n=19) had both credit and debit card, 56% had a debit card only (n=34), 5% had a credit card only (n=3), while 7% (n=4) had neither.

The participants spent more than their income on a regular basis. Upon starting the programme, 60% of the sample reported overspending their monthly income (n=36), a further 18% overspends 5-6 times a year (n=11), while only 17% never overspent (n=10). 26% reported (n=16) that they are never able to save from their monthly income. Conversely 40% (n=24) were able to save before starting the programme.

Therefore, problems in 'making ends meet' were commonplace for this cohort, with a majority of the participants spending more than their means on a monthly basis. This strongly suggests that the MMS programme targeted an appropriate cohort of individuals (however, inclusion of participants with excessive levels of debt is returned to later in report as it was flagged by staff in the focus group discussion).

4.3 PROGRAMME DESIGN AND RELEVANCE

i) Evidence-Based Programme

The design and delivery of the MMS programme was strongly influenced by TASC's 2020 research study (Lajoie, 2020) and is a commendable example of translating evidence into practice. Furthermore, the evidence base provided both clarity of direction and confidence in approach.

> *"Clearly the research shows the need for financial education. Without TASC's research, we might not have done it... and without the funding, we might not have had the confidence to proceed."*
> – Staff member

The course content was structured around twelve financial capability themes, offering distinct and pre-determined learning objectives (see Appendix 1). This content was also adapted over time by TASC staff trainers, following feedback from participants and tailoring course content relevant to the particular needs of a group. This agility and flexibility in the course delivery were considered by staff members to be a key strength of the programme.

“It’s a strength of the programme to individually teach each cohort… so it gives you flexibility to update the content to reflect these changes.”
– MMS Staff

“That local authority group we had to completely change the content of the training delivery, the schedule, we were flexible to adapt that to because they were very unique in their needs versus the other cohorts.”
– MMS Staff

“For some [in that group], there were barriers to using IT so we had to ensure all the information had telephone numbers, or print outs, or adjustment depending on the needs for particular cohorts.”
– MMS Staff

Assessing the particular needs and expectations of groups during an initial session can help MMS trainers map out particular topics that are deemed to be important – such as pensions, social welfare entitlements, and other forms of debt.

“[Certain group] said they were more interested in pensions, and an interest in mortgages… Or if you’re a lone parent you might be more likely to be living in social housing or HAP or you might want to talk about other things, so it depends on the cohort.” – MMS Staff

Adaptations were also made on the delivery of the course, for example the timing and duration of the course.

“We found certain times suited if they had young children who came home from school. One of the evening groups were timed for when the kids go to bed so we had to be flexible with the times. No one set of criteria will suit. Someone has to do filtering to capture what groups require different approaches.” – MMS Staff

“[Employee group] course length was shorter – because they ‘got it’ quickly and the course could be wrapped up.” – MMS Staff

There were changes also made to the relevance and accuracy of the content, in light of the rapidly changing economic context. This is particularly relevant given current economic inflation and soaring utility costs.

“It’s a flexible course anyway especially over the last year and from now on, the financial situation of for example utilities is changing quite rapidly and it was something I would have reviewed the seminar material on a weekly basis to see if there was anything to include, especially around budget time maybe to include information on carbon tax, when the changes will come in, when it will start to affect people, things like that.” – MMS Staff

"From the onset we had COVID, we were able to adapt, be flexible in the delivery – that was really important - and making sure that everything we delivered and did was embedded in the context of where people are, and knowing that it is impossible to make good financial decisions in certain situations, especially in areas of income inadequacy, COVID, increase in utilities..." – MMS Staff

The participant data suggests that the course material was appropriately pitched to each cohort. Though, as can be seen in the quote below, it was not always possible to execute this successfully in cases where a group contains varying levels of knowledge.

"Like, there were some very smart girls in that group. And I just think it was a bit basic." – MMS Participant

It is possible that groups who were recruited across multiple channels may have been more likely to present with various levels of background knowledge, as opposed to groups recruited through single sites.

ii) MMS as a Debt Prevention Service

The Council of Europe (2007)[3] recommends three main pillars of action to address over-indebtedness in European member states:

- *prevention* of over-indebtedness.
  a. *alleviation* of the effects of the recovery of debts; and
  b. *rehabilitation* of over-indebted individuals and families.

The Council also recommends financial literacy and budget management as part of national education structures to support people to make informed choices and other money management strategies to prevent over-indebtedness.

According to a senior staff member involved in the programme, the MMS programme fits under the first and third pillars - prevention (i.e. targeting individuals and households before they access credit or enter into problem debt) and rehabilitation (i.e. to restore good financial health after a debt crisis, or learning to live 'in a new financial way'). MABS' financial support services across the country operate primarily under the second pillar – alleviation. Therefore, MMS does not appear to duplicate existing services but rather adds value to the service landscape.

"There's no programme like this in Ireland. I think there's very few programmes like this anywhere. In terms of the approach we took, a part of me thinks that it was a magical unicorn that we can't replicate... And that 'trifecta' if you will, was very important so if it was to continue, I don't see how it would happen without a similar structure." – MMS Staff

3. As already outlined, MABS also has an educational remit and therefore Money A

4.4 PROGRAMME INPUTS

i) Partnership Approach

One of the most innovative features of the MMS programme was the close partnership between TASC, NSP and MABS across all stages of the process. This partnership dimension of the programme was consistently described by both staff and MMS participants alike as being highly positive and productive. While the partnership approach *"took a lot of coordination",* it was described by the staff involved as *"exciting", "a great experience"* and that they engaged in *"lots of learning".* It was also acknowledged that "*the triangulation is unique in this space*" of service provision.

The three partners had some previous experience of working together on community-based projects but these collaborations were characterised as more *"ad-hoc",* for example information-sharing, promoting each other's services, community networks, or one-off education sessions. However, the MMS programme marked the first time that the partners had worked together in a structured and "*pro-active"* manner, and in a way that was *"thinking more longer-term".*

The partnership with NSP contributed significantly in two aspects, namely the ability to successfully recruit participants, together with the capacity and know-how to offer supports and pathways relevant to the individual. Research demonstrates the benefit of engaging participants through trusted service providers, who are already engaged and embedded in their communities. Research has also identified the benefit of each point of participant contact being familiar with the programme in this case the Programme Co-ordinator.

The success of this partnership was linked to the distinct offering, or role, of each of the three stakeholder organisations, in a way which drew on the respective strengths and areas of expertise.

> *"Each partner brought unique qualities and characteristics to the programme: NSP as hosting partner with access to the target communities; TASC with their body of research; and MABS with their practical experience. So, three very important ingredients that contributed to the success of the programme."* – Staff member

The benefits of this partnership also featured in some of the participants' accounts:

> *"[Name of MABS Coach] and [Name of TASC Staff] were a great team because they would approach it from different perspectives. [Name of MABS Coach] had that on-the-ground experience of dealing with clients every day so she would be a mine of information. Having her available on a one-to-one basis during the course was great."*
> – MMS Participant

Staff also emphasised the mutual learning involved in the partnership. Several described the design and delivery of MMS as a professionally-stimulating experience: "*It was exciting for us to be a part of something innovative*" (the positive impact the MMS programme on staff delivering the programme will also be returned to later).

Further, the partnership approach seen in MMS represents cross-cutting networks to specifically target non-mortgage debt. In this way, the MMS programme had the capacity to bring service partners into new spaces of work. For example, it provided an opportunity for MABS to plug into preventative work and engage with groups (due to public awareness campaigns, MABS is widely regarded as a mortgage debt support service and their core services are delivered at an individual level).

> "*For a couple of years MABS dealt with mortgage debt due to effective 'Abhaile' campaign [targeting those in mortgage debt] which took the attention away from non-mortgage households.*" – Staff member

> "*By partnering with community development actors, it can be a good vehicle to get into the community.*" – Staff member

There was also evidence of participants being introduced to supports that they may not have had known about previously.

> "*I always knew MABS was there because I work in finance but I always thought you had to be on the verge of losing your home to be able to get it... I thought you had to be in severe difficulties but they offer their supports. But I know now I don't need to get into dire straits before I reach out to MABS for help.*" – MMS Participant

ii) Virtual/online format

Due to the pandemic, only one of the eleven MMS courses was delivered in-person. This in-person course took place in a local community resource centre (containing also a creche facility and community café). The remaining ten MMS courses were delivered online.

The consensus was that the online format was preferable for participants and staff as it enhanced efficiency, reached more participants, and it was easier for participants to integrate into their daily routines, particularly for parents of young children and low-income employees (i.e. key target groups of MMS).

> "*It was great to be able to do it from home. There was no shifting around. It did make it easy to just log on and you were there. I don't think it detracted from it at all.*" – MMS Participant

> "*You don't need to run somewhere, travel far away, they can just do it on their own.*" – MMS Participant

> "*And super, super handy that its virtual. It's accessible for everybody. I mean, pretty much all of the people in that group had children. So, for us to get babysitters, go to another location, come back, instead of it being an hour, it'd be two hours. It may not then be accessible to those who actually need it, which is the mother of the household.*"
> – MMS Participant

"Zoom suited as have young family."
– MMS Participant (post-programme survey)

"The online format meant I could easily join for one hour whereas if I had to attend in person, I might not have been able to take the time off." – MMS Participant (post-programme survey)

However, some staff members recognised the online MMS programmes may exclude those who do not have IT skills, equipment, or broadband. For the in-person group in Cycle 3, staff reflected on the benefits of face-to-face contact, including developing rapport, engaging with those who were quieter, and providing hard copies of material. It also enabled NSP – who were more involved in recruitment and assessment – to engage directly with participants, which was not possible via the virtual format.

"There was something about seeing someone in person is better, physically being able to give paperwork, being able to have an informal chat, it was very relaxed, especially for people not familiar with IT, and using computers, they are not as comfortable. The in-person contact helped financial coach to connect in personally with people." – MMS Staff

A small number of participants at the follow-up survey reported that they would have preferred the training in person, but there was a recognition that online was necessary due to the public health emergency at that time.

"I would have preferred training in person, but of course due to the situation with Covid this was not possible. Totally understand that this was the only way the training could be done. Found group discussion was made more difficult in the online situation, but, in my opinion, this is the norm at the moment." – MMS Participant (survey post-programme)

"I did enjoy it, the trainers were both so lovely and supportive but I do think a group session would have been better but I know that is not possible at the moment due to Covid-19." – MMS Participant (survey post-programme)

One participant alluded to not being able to always follow the content via online format.

"Sometimes I did [like online sessions]. But other times it was a bit over my head." – MMS Participant (survey post-programme)

While none of the face-to-face participants were interviewed for this evaluation, staff considered the in-person delivery to be well suited to those with low IT skills, or older people without child dependents. Provision of childcare for the in-person course offering was commendable and should ideally be offered in future iterations of in-person programmes.

iii) Staff resources

MMS was considered by staff as relatively labour-intensive, but recognised that the preparation and adaption of content in the early period of the pilot was the most time-consuming phase. Course trainers and coaches require a high degree of skill, knowledge, flexibility, and capacity for coordination. Even as the course progressed, the course had to be modified and updated continuously, according to the needs and competencies of particular cohorts as well as the changing economic and political context. The staff time required on the financial coach side was also noted.

> *"More labour intensive than we had anticipated and it had a big demand on the financial coaches than we had anticipated."* – MMS Staff

> *"It required attention to what was happening in the broader sphere. More intense at certain points like budget day, but it was a case of being on top of a small amount all the time."* – MMS Staff

Therefore, for future iterations of the programme, the need for sufficient staff time and resources are important considerations in both the design and delivery of the programme.

4.5 PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES

i) Recruitment of Participants

As already outlined, NSP led the recruitment process due to their substantial networks in North Dublin, including access to stakeholders, employers, support agencies, local area partnerships and existing community programmes. NSP also promoted the course through social media, local adverts and media channels.

Recruitment involved a process of "*learning as we went*", characterised by unanticipated challenges and opportunities, often related to the wider uncertainty of the pandemic. Challenges were viewed by the staff as being more pronounced in the first cycle of the programme when it was not known in the community.

> *"It was brand new programme, we didn't have a track record."* – MMS Staff

> *"We didn't understand how it was going to work."* – MMS Staff

Further, service partners were grappling with their own challenges. For example, one staff member reflected on how community childcare centres, as sites of recruitment, *"weren't as keen to jump on the programme; people had more pressing or crisis-related issues".* Similarly, there was lower than anticipated engagement from employers initially (the original intention being that employers might promote and/or facilitate employee engagement in the programme).

Over time, and with the benefit of word-of-mouth, the recruitment process became gradually easier. For example, in later cycles of the programme some local agencies or employers approached MMS requesting that training (e.g. to local authority tenants in rent arrears; employees; CE scheme participants). Unanticipated productive recruitment channels included approaching local schools to engage with parents; this yielded key target groups of both low income and one parent households.

MMS recruited both individuals and groups. The group cohorts, for example, were typically recruited through employers or CE schemes, etc. The benefit of recruiting an already-established group was that there was often an existing rapport, which in turn enhanced peer-to-peer learning (which will be returned to in Section 4.6.).

However, during busy periods in a workplace - for example in the lead up to Christmas or when lockdown restrictions eased – group cohorts were susceptible to drop offs from the course, due to changes to work hours. For instance, one MMS cohort consisted of care workers being requested by the employer to carry out extra shifts due to COVID-19-reated staff shortages, which negatively impacted on their capacity to complete the course. It is worth noting however that in the case of one cohort who was recruited via a CE Scheme, the MMS training was integrated into their work hours facilitating sustained engagement among this group.

In summary, NSP adopted an agile and flexible approach to recruitment. This evidently worked well - in total, there were, 71 initial enrolments across the three cycles of the programme, which is substantial in light of the major public health emergency and associated lockdown measures during this exceptional and unpredictable period.

ii) Initial Assessment

Enrolment into the MMS programme was on a case-by-case basis, assessed via an informal conversation led by NSP. In a small number of cases, potential participants were screened out (due to, for example, those who were looking for investment opportunities or private product advice). The remainder were considered to satisfy the target group criteria, as set out in the programme's project plan, and were therefore accepted onto the programme.

Some MMS participants presented with additional support needs that went beyond their debt, including experiences of domestic violence, health, or mental health issues, etc. Where appropriate, extra supports and referrals were provided by NSP (or in one case, an initial referral to MABS prior to engaging with MMS). NSP provided supports to participants outside of the programme where issues were raised. Over the course of an intervention such as Money Made Sense, participants may well reveal other risks of social exclusion especially in a coaching situation where trust and rapport are built up through one-to-one interactions. Support was given in practice to participants by NSP or other agencies such as MABS, local counselling services or lone parent supports, where issues were disclosed or referred. However, data protection restrictions would have prevented follow-up with MMS staff. It is recognised that there is rarely one dimension of social exclusion and furthermore, issues or additional support needs may only be disclosed when trust and rapport is built up through one-to-one interactions. An example of this is below:

> "*One lady had so much going on, there was abuse, drug debts – but it opened up a space for her… to talk about it… boundaries became blurred – do I make a referral? Who do I put this back to?… But it came a point where I was thinking, who is following up with you on this?*" – MMS Staff

Therefore, a formalised proactive and reactive referral protocol is recommended so participants can access necessary supports and that trainers and coaches are comfortable in how to act when disclosures are made. Further, in Cycle 2 of the programme, a local authority requested the MMS programme be delivered to a cohort of local authority tenants who were in critical rent arrears. Even though this was considered initially to be an effective recruitment channel to target a socioeconomically disadvantaged group, their particular rent arrears (and in some cases parallel crises) were so considerable that the MMS programme was, in the view of some staff, inappropriate as an intervention.

> *"Some of that cohort were in savage rent arrears. Huge concern. I have never seen rent arrears get to that chronic level so the focus became, well what can you do? [Local Authority] was open to Debt Settle Arrangement but arrears continued."* – MMS Staff

However, it was precisely *because* of their tenants' lack of engagement with services that prompted the Local Authority to reach out to NSP who felt that the positive perception of the latter in the community made it more likely that their tenant community in the area would be more likely to access NSP supports in helping to tackle their debt problems. Their participation in MMS may have marked the first time they have taken steps to address their critical arrears debt and ideally support them on a path to tackle their debt. Delivering MMS to this cohort of tenants – which was agreed initially by all partners – was also described as a 'pilot within a pilot', and therefore yielded learnings.

One of these learnings is that for persons or households with more serious debt levels, alternative interventions or agencies which focus on remedies as opposed to prevention, may be preferable. There was an example also whereby an individual who, at assessment stage, was considered to be in acute debt, and was referred to a MABS money advisor and advised to re-enrol at a later cycle of MMS. Therefore, some preliminary work in addressing acute debt problems *before* embarking on the MMS programme can be considered again in the future.

> *"They were presenting issues that, in my opinion, needed to be addressed before you even start looking at money management. For example, if you have conflict in your life, you can't see the wood from the trees – it's impossible."* – MMS Staff

Therefore, it is recommended that any future iteration of MMS, a clear assessment protocol is established which takes into consideration the following:

- To refer those in crisis debt to MABS money advisor service, with option of enrolling in MMS programme at a later point;
- To identify who might require additional supports, for example IT or digital skills, or an initial session with the financial coach;
- To establish an appropriate referral protocol should a specialist or more intensive service support be required.

"It's important to filter or assess people more before they come on [the MMS programme]. That does not mean to say the course is not for them but they might need a little bit of grounding in something before they come on board – maybe a one to one engagement with someone from MABS - because then they get a lot more clarity because they have a plan in place for paying the arrears etc. and then your mind is open to engage in the 'fun elements' of it [MMS] because there was laughs and craic and people were sharing in things around recycling apps, but when you are entrenched in 20 grand of debt, you don't care about recycling..."

– MMS Staff

Finally, an introduction discussion containing an assessment protocol can also offer clarity to a potential participant around the structure of the programme, the role of the money advisor, and the required time commitment. The role of the one-to-one MABS coach, in particular, was not always understood by participants at the outset.

"At first I wasn't aware I had to engage in MABS coach once a week. But actually, it was good." – MMS Participant

This issue was identified primarily in Cycle 1 and according to staff, steps were made to strengthen the introduction discussion in Cycles 2 and 3. Indeed, during Cycle 1, lockdown presented considerable challenges which had to be resolved and overcome such as transitioning to remote work and assessing people online.

iii) Combining Group Course Work and One-to-One Coaching

According to both the staff and the participants, the combination of group courses and one-to-one financial coaching was highly effective. MABS staff did not operate as 'money advisors' in the MMS programme (i.e. the normal service delivery offered by MABS) but rather a 'financial coach' which helped participants apply learnings to their own personal situation. This provided a 'bridge' between receiving information and how to act on that information – central to the financial capabilities approach. The financial coaching model operated via an 'advantage thinking ethos', combining coaching and mentoring to build on existing skills. It also offered participants a space for privacy and confidentiality to discuss their financial situations.

"Sometimes people can't see how they can apply their learning. The assumption is that 'we gave you the information' so now it's up to you to educate yourself and the application to learning versus the understanding of learning are two different things. How do I apply those learnings to my life?" – MMS Staff member

"The one-on-one with [MABS Coach] was great if you didn't want to share something in front of the group." – MMS Participant

"The conversations with the lady was super good because you could be one to one and tell your specific problems." – MMS Participant

iv) Relationship between Staff and Participants

Trainers and coaches were described by participants as competent, non-judgemental, knowledgeable, warm, "*authentic*" and respectful, to all members of the group. This created *"an open atmosphere*" and "*an open environment*." This sentiment came to the fore across multiple interviews.

> "*They both had that ability to make you think your idea was good and explore it a bit more for the sake of the class... and they knew the material really, really well.*" – MMS Participant

> "*I couldn't have imagined doing that course without those two facilitators. They encouraged us to come back each week. ...I looked forward to every one of those courses. There was a comradery.*" – MMS Participant

> "*They [the facilitators] were full of information and chat. There was no lulls.*" – MMS Participant

> "*They kind of normalise – well not normalise, but they say, 'You are where you are; let's work on where you are and not worry about how you got here'. The coach said there's no judgment, you can change, you don't have to go 100 miles an hour, just take baby steps and you'll get there.*" – MMS Participant

> "*They just came across as genuine, there was a natural rapport between the two of them too. You can tell they have a genuine interest in helping and not judging. I can't put my finger on it...*" – MMS Participant

This relaxed atmosphere was described by some members of the group as being able to draw out quieter members of the group, in their own time.

4.6 PROGRAMME OUTCOMES

This section focuses on the impact of the programme on participants, either directly or indirectly, intended or unintended. The goal of MMS was to have an overall lasting and positive impact on the financial health of participants. Specifically, it set out to both reduce the debt burden experienced and to help develop skills for financial resilience and long-term financial capability. The programme also aimed to recognise the participants' own personal capabilities and knowledge and to encourage, and nurture, peer-to-peer learning and confidence-building.

The survey data and qualitative data suggest that the MMS programme had an impact on many levels. Firstly, there was evidence of actions taken towards actively saving or establishing more systematic saving habits. Secondly, there was an increase in awareness around spending and ways to cut back. Thirdly there were improvement in confidence levels related to financial capabilities. This also helped reduce anxiety while feeling more in control of personal finances.

The long-term impact of financial savings and reduction of debt is not fully known but there was evidence of short-term improvements:

> *“I haven’t missed a mortgage payment since the training.”*
> – MMS Participant

i) Summary of Participants’ Views of What Worked and What Could be Improved

With regards to appraising the programme’s effectiveness, some of the participants offered feedback in terms of ‘what worked’, and areas for improvement. Many of these have been integrated thematically across the evaluation report, but for ease of reference, a full suite of recommendations is provided below:

What worked particularly well:

- The combination of group work and one-to-one coaching.
- The extensive knowledge of the course trainers and coaches.
- The peer-to-peer learning approach.
- Cost-comparison websites were referenced by almost all of the interviewed participants as being key resources which they use on a regular basis. These sites have been shared with friends /family.
- Daily diary of spending to identify areas of cutbacks and ‘emotional spending’.
- Learning more about consumer power in the context of climate change.
- Buying Irish or local.
- Tips for online shopping.
- The provision of notes of the course after completion – “I still have those notes and I still refer to them” (MMS Participant).

What could be improved upon:

- For greater moderation of members of the group who may be regarded as dominating the discussion with long-winded accounts of their situation.
- More sessions / alternative times – option of having some content pre-recorded to afford participants greater flexibility.
- To consider different levels of knowledge and to ensure that material is appropriately ‘pitched’.
- Tailor content for different age groups – “I wonder if a young person was on our course, would they be interested in our discussions on grocery shopping?” – MMS Participant.
- Some participants who had more time in their daily lives would have liked longer sessions or further weekly exercises to engage further in the material.

Ideas for future content:

- A 'refresher session' six months after the course ends.
- More focus / specific course on pensions.
- More focus on digital skills and money management for those who required it.
- A dedicated session on 'how to budget' (i.e. moving beyond 'how to track' spending).
- More information for people in shared housing (and who may not be in a position to change utility providers).

The 'refresher session' which was suggested by one participant could also provide a potential opportunity for former participants to re-engage and ask for any advice in relation to changes in the economic context. It also could be a useful data collection point for TASC to capture longer-term impact on the programme.

> *"It would be good to have a Zoom session check in after six months to see 'where are you now?' Because, you know yourself, you fall out of good habits…"* – MMS Participants

ii) Impact on Financial Capabilities

Staff believed that "*everyone came away having learned about money*" after completing MMS, and that they had, in a broad sense, "*more capacity and agency*" than previously. There was also a view that, for some participants, the programme led to *"transformation",* and that the programme appeared to be most impactful for those who had a certain level of money management skills to begin with.

> *"MMS was a bit effective for the majority, and very effective for maybe 25 per cent of the group… it was very effective for those with a tiny little bit of structure on their money and then it really improved things for them."* – MMS Staff

> *"You'd think for this course we would be struggling or are in more debt or whatever, but even though there was only 3 or 4 of us, I was surprised by the level of awareness already and we were encouraged to share examples of how to curtain our spend, while being mindful of the environment and climate change."* – MMS Participant

However, the impact of financial health in terms of tangible increase in savings or reduction of debt appeared to be more moderate, likely due to the high cost of living or lack of savings to support with unexpected expenses.

As already referenced, it is not known whether the MMS participants were able to report long-term improvements but according to staff, *"the learning is there".*

> *"I think the programme is leading to transformation. In some cases, it wasn't possible for people – something massive came up in their lives and they weren't able to put the changes into place but the learning is there."* – MMS Staff

iii) Impact on Financial Health and Ability to Save

Of the 24 participants who completed the follow-up survey after completing the programme, 17 (71%) reported that they were able to save money, while 7 (29%) had not been able to save money since the course. By far the most commonly cited reason for this saving was 'better management of expenses'. An improved capacity to save also featured strongly in the qualitative data.

> "*I have started to save in a Credit Union account that was dormant. So that's one thing. I had it on the long finger to do but the training inspired me to move along.*" – MMS Participant

> "*I saved previously but now I think I'm saving a bit more. I think twice. We talked about how we are shopping. Because then we know how lots of the businesses are working, they are talking about sales and special offers but we were taught it's not always a special offer.*" – MMS Participant

> "*I am now deliberately saving in an envelope to physically see - gee, there's 50, 60 or 70 euro that I wouldn't have had before. Whereas if I was saving it in the bank, it's just not visible. It's almost like it's tactile now. And to use that for something as oppose to just aimlessly save. It's going back to that child-like thing in a piggy bank but if it works, it works.*" – MMS Participant

> "*I have been able to save during the programme [Was that related to the programme or were you doing it anyway?] No, I was never doing it. It was a suggestion by the coach. It doesn't matter the amount, I just started doing it.*" – MMS Participant

> "*I feel like I have some breathing room if something happens.*" – MMS Participant

Even when savings have not increased significantly (or some participants were already saving before engaging in MMS), there was evidence of saving in a more systematic way.

> "*I would have saved, say sporadically. Now after the course I save the same amount regularly. Do you get me? So, I'll save [X amount] biweekly, as opposed to random [Y amount] every four weeks... So, when I am going for the mortgage, I have a better track history of saving.*" – MMS Participant

> "*Every month I am saving something. I was thinking about the savings account but I didn't do this... yet. It's hard to say why. I'm still looking for a good account but the percentage, what I can get from the savings, it's nothing special. It's a really small amount. It's almost nothing. That's why I am thinking to invest money but I don't know what to invest.*" – MMS Participant

"I realise 10 euro a week make a difference over time. I actually can save. I don't have much surplus income but I can still save. I haven't been able to save much but it's more than I would have previously... now I am saving smaller amounts [and more often]. And I had an issue last week and I was able to use that money instead of putting it on my credit card, which I would have done before." – MMS Participant

The long-term impact around financial health of the MMS Programme is not fully known, nor is it possible to know whether positive changes were sustained over time. Some participants had opened a savings account but had not been able to save yet. However, the importance of savings was a strong message from the programme and one which was clearly taken on board by participants.

"I have no savings, I'm getting back on my feet but I have no savings. And I was lucky to work through lockdown. [Financial coach] said that ideally, we should have three months mortgage on standby. That made me think - I had to do it [to start saving]! It would give me that bit of security going forward." – MMS Participant

Similarly, other participants wanted to have available cash on standby to be in a position to help others if required.

"I don't want to freeze my money in case my friends or parents needs helps so I can lend money to them if they need... Even to invest some money is risky." – MMS Participant

iv) Increased Awareness around Reducing Spending

One of the most resounding findings which came through in the data was the increased awareness participants had in their spending habits and were employing strategies to reduce unnecessary spending. This was referenced by all participants interviewed.

"I ask myself, is this food good for me? It's cheaper for me to bake cookies and it's better for me than buying. I prefer to bring my lunch to my workplace instead of buying something every day. If I spend 10 euro for a lunch, I can use that saving to make two meals for myself at home." – MMS Participant

"Definitely has made me more conscious and aware. One hundred percent. So, I'm way more conscious of my outgoings. I definitely learned stuff about you know, how to pay off stuff and avoid getting loans." – MMS Participant

"Has my financial situation changed? No. I mean, I am unemployed still. But has it helped me curtail my spend? Yes." – MMS Participant

All participants referenced that they had changed, or were planning to change, their utility or insurance provider. This also applied to negotiating current contracts.

“And even though I haven’t done it, but, the seed is planted for me to look at changing my utility bills. And to shop around for them. I haven’t done it yet, but definitely… anytime I get a bill now I remember [trainer] saying shop around for this, change. You know. So that’s good. I will eventually do that, I just haven’t done it yet.” – MMS Participant

“I also am more aware of charges from my bank. So, I looked into that and I am happy with my debit card. Things like that I wouldn’t have been aware of, the different fees and so on…” – MMS Participant

A small number of participants referenced the learnings from the MMS programme relating to financial savings and climate change.

“I buy my main things in the supermarket, not fruit and veg, and then I go to local shop or back to supermarket for fresh fruit and veg. There’s less waste if I buy smaller portions of fresh food.” – MMS Participant

“I’m genuinely excited to see impact of our carbon footprint and it added a different dimension to it. It brought that consciousness to our spending behaviours. Even the coffee, so for example, so I only try to buy fair trade coffee. Or only buy in season or Irish produce. I would keep that it was really interesting. There’s no class barriers with climate.” – MMS Participant

Participants also reported having better knowledge about available supports if needed in the future. This featured significantly in the open-ended survey responses at the post-programme follow-up:

Q. What was the most useful aspect of the group training in your opinion?

- “There were a number of organisations that I wasn’t aware of”
- “The various websites you can compare”
- “Gathering information on websites, maps and comparison sites…”
- “There is help out there and if you run into trouble to not be afraid to ask for help.”
- “Learning about where you can go off and you need help with debt and also the different sites and budgeting tools…”
- “The detailed knowledge regarding supports for people on low incomes”
- “Ireland specific advice groups/agencies”

v) Increased Confidence

Both participants and staff described increased confidence in managing finances for many who engaged in the programme. This confidence instilled a greater sense of control around household budgets and finances, which in turn reduces anxiety and feeling "overwhelmed".

> "*It grounded me a bit. I was a little bit all over the place [before MMS]. I feel a bit more in control and I can become more in control as time goes on and savings increase, hopefully. For example, the MABS website has a budget planner...*" – MMS Participant

> "*I still get overwhelmed – I'm a single parent – but not as overwhelmed [emphasis added]. I just have to break it down into smaller pieces. It has a knock-on effect on other spending.*" – MMS Participant

> "*It [MMS] did raise things I didn't think about, like shopping around for a bank account.*" – MMS Participant

There was also evidence of participants managing their debt better, for example paying off debt as well as saving. This enabled the participant to avoid slipping further into debt.

> "*Before I was solely focused on paying off debt but that was causing me more debt because I had no money put aside so like I decided, your debt is manageable, get some savings together so I guess that's one thing I've decided to do... I learned that yes, I have to pay off my debt but to stop the debt, you need to have savings so that's really worked for me. So, I now I put 10 euro aside for Christmas.*"
> – MMS Participant

vi) Peer-to-Peer Learning

The peer-to-peer learning – where participants were encouraged to share experiences and strategies with one another in the group – was regarded by both staff and participants as a very positive aspect of the programme. This approach led to lively discussions, permitted an open atmosphere to share ideas, and helped instil a feeling that "*you're not doing it alone*" (MMS participant). It empowered participants and led to an increase in confidence. It also fostered cross-cultural dialogue and respect.

> "*We had a mix in our group of Irish and foreign nationals. It was good to get their perspective too.*" – MMS Participant

> "*It was also very nice and helpful to speak to other people who have different issues with finance. And then it makes you realise, you know, I'm not that bad after all, or I'm not the only one that does that, or it's OK to talk about that. So, it was very nice and actually... I probably took away one nugget of information each week. Which, let's face it, are eight nuggets of information I wouldn't have had if I was on the course... The best part was the coming together of the group, it was a very nice experience.*" – MMS Participant

"You didn't just get ideas from the group leader, but you got ideas from everyone in the group. So, you came out with a lot more than hearing from one person." – MMS Participant

Many of the participants offered positive feedback on how the trainers facilitated the discussion in a way that was respectful and "*comfortable*", creating "*a safe space*" where *"everyone could be honest"* and share their experiences. The TASC and MABS facilitators in the group sessions were also found to keep the group discussions open but well structured.

"The girls [trainers] controlled it well, it never wandered off into the wilderness." – MMS Participant

"The facilitators were very good about opening up in a safe environment about ideas... they were really good." – MMS Participant

The staff involved in MMS also report learning from the peer-to-peer sharing. This enhanced the confidence of the participants in terms of staff endorsement of their contributions.

"I would say the level of learning for us was huge as deliverers, I hope the participants felt the same. But also, being able to bring the people from diverse backgrounds together – and zoom allowed for that, in a way that was not done if we were in person." – MMS Staff

"[TASC Staff member] and [MABS Staff member] said they got ideas from us, and that was really great to hear." – MMS Participant

A small number of participants would have liked more engagement from their group sessions and sometimes long silences in response to the questions or prompts of the facilitators. As one participant reflected, *"money is not always easy to talk about".* Another participant suggested more direct questioning from the group facilitators directed to participants who might be less forthcoming in the group discussion.

"I was disappointed that the group weren't more engaging. Me and one other woman I feel did all the talking. Forced interaction would be good." – MMS Participant

4.7 MONITORING AND KPIS

In terms of the data collection responsibilities in the pilot programme, NSP collected demographic profile information at assessment stage. This included age, gender, ethnicity, disability status, income band, employment status, family status, tenure type and education level. TASC carried out qualitative interviews after each cycle to determine possible improvements. TASC also carried out baseline and post-programme questionnaires (internal data drawn on in this report). Both TASC and NSP reported separately to funders and KPIs were distinct for each organisation.

Both NSP and TASC focused primarily on increase in savings and reduction of debt. NSP KPIs specifically sought to track

- No. of participants increased their savings
- No. of participants who saved for three consecutive months
- No. of individuals reduced their debt

TASC also tracked a range of KPIs which included:

- Average increase in savings
- Average debt reduction
- Average credit score improvement
- Average increase in wealth
- Number of wealth-building assets (e.g. home) or income building assets (e.g. care or education) acquired
- Average value of wealth-building assets (e.g. home improvements) or income-building assets (e.g. care or education)
- % of people accessing affordable products
- No. of new products that increase the savings, credit or asset ownership for underserved individuals
- No. of other providers, replicating the innovation.

Therefore, there was a strong commitment among the partners and funders of the MMS programme to robust data collection and monitoring impact. Furthermore, there was also a clear commitment among TASC and NSP to consult with participants of the programme in a timely way, so as to apply any changes and learnings to subsequent cycles of the programme.

> "*There were three or four different iterations of the course based on feedback.*" – MMS Staff

> "*I was able to apply my behaviour to the second cycle and I learned from Cycle 1. I definitely approached it differently… that was a benefit.*" – MMS Staff

While data collection was necessary for both organisations to report back to funders, separate and parallel data collection activities may run the risk of overburdening participants as well as possible confusion and this should be taken into account in planning for future initiatives. Therefore, continued cross-organisation coordination of data collection activities – and possibly data sharing where appropriate – is recommended.

The baseline/post-intervention questionnaires carried out by TASC aimed to capture impact and change over time. While the surveys offered interesting cross-sectional analysis at two points in time, in order to capture individual-level change among participants, it is recommended that the same measures be repeated at baseline and at follow-up to determine change over time. This can be achieved by using either verified scales or bespoke measures to capture tangible change over time (for example a collection of statements around confidence of money management scored through a Likert scale). Possible areas of focus include, awareness of spending, confidence measures and taking control of spending, areas where savings have been made, and offering an opportunity to capture 'feelings' via a qualitative comment box.

Equally, it is recommended that the follow-up survey in particular be reviewed to remove questions which lack specificity or are ambiguous such as, whether financial situations had 'changed' since starting the programme, or whether or not participants had made any 'new decisions about managing your finances' (see Appendix 3 for survey questions and results).

The question of effective KPI monitoring was discussed in the staff focus groups. It was acknowledged by some staff members that the ability to save and pay off debt is an important marker of improvement to a personal financial situation, but this ability to save may be adversely affected if an individual faces unplanned financial challenges (including during or soon after participating in the MMS programme). Therefore, if a person is faced with a particularly large utility bill, or an unexpected medical or household cost, for example, the focus on tangible savings or debt reduction alone may be limited.

> *"In some ways I am worse off than when I started the course but I am hoping to get back on track again. But that wasn't planned... You could have a plan but things could go pear shaped. In recent months, I have had a washing machine, dryer and fridge that needed replacing. So, my spending went skew ways."* – MMS Participant

Moreover, the collection of KPIs or markers of success which are not *solely* based on savings or reduced debt is particularly important in the context of current inflation and rising living costs. A staff member from one of the focus groups suggested KPI data which captured *actions* MMS participants have taken to make savings could be a more appropriate, rather than whether they opened a savings account for example:

> *"We have seen it throughout the programme – people started making savings on utilities, WIFI, TV packages – and these savings are brought down quickly."* – MMS Staff Member

Staff in the MMS programme roundly recognised that it was important to capture or measure the success or the programme but that – as one focus group participant reflected - *"often people don't view success as a number, it's a feeling, it's confidence, it's an 'advantage thinking ethos'".* Capturing confidence levels, self-efficacy, personal sense of control and positive action-oriented feelings towards money management is also important to monitor both before and after the programme.

5. Conclusion

The Money Made Sense Programme provided an evidence-based intervention which enhanced the financial capability skills of participants who are known to be at higher risk of over-indebtedness. It provides a service offering that is not available elsewhere and it focuses on tangible actions participants can immediately take with a view to reduce or prevent further debt. While debt is mostly caused by inter-connected macro-level forces, and not by individual action and behaviour, the programme seeks to equip participants to negotiate and navigate these structural pressures more effectively.

This evaluation found that the MMS programme had a broadly positive impact on participants' financial capabilities. While there were no major financial savings evidenced so soon after the course was completed, there was considerable evidence of enhanced awareness of spending and strategies to save – all of which is likely to benefit participants in the short to medium-term. According to staff, the course is most impactful for those who already have some financial skills before starting the programme and those with small to moderate levels of debt, in other words, those who are not (yet) in a crisis debt situation. This meant that they were able to benefit from the 'advantage thinking ethos' that is built in the course content and financial coaching approach. Further, it facilitated group discussions and peer-to-peer learning where participants could open and share their views and own personal strategies.

The partnership approach to the MMS programme allowed for three service partners to come together and offer complementary expertise through distinct and clear roles and responsibilities. The added value of MABS in delivering a tailored, one-to-one financial coaching service was a particularly effective component of the programme. TASC were able to build on their robust study published in 2020 to target and tailor the programme most effectively. While the existing networks available to NSP, and the productive relationships that were already present in the North Dublin area, meant that recruitment was possible even at the height of a public health emergency.

Since completion of the MMS pilot phase, momentum has been maintained by both TASC and NSP in financial capability initiatives. At time of writing, TASC are designing the delivery of different iterations or packages of the programme including training front-line domestic violence support workers with a view to improve the financial health and resilience of people (mostly women) fleeing abusive situations. Likewise, NSP (in collaboration with TASC) are in the process of developing a financial capabilities framework, or a 'Best Practice Manual' to apply to different contexts. They are also aiming to deliver a financial capabilities programme linked to QQI Level 3 under SICAP 2022 funding. To support this work, they have hired a Service Development Officer for Financial Capabilities. These resources can support future iterations of the programme and can be applied to various community contexts, with a possibility of perhaps folding MABS back into activities and work in this area.

6. Learnings and Observations

1. **The inclusion of a MABS financial coach in** equipping participants to apply their skills to their personal situations was regarded as highly impactful. Future iterations of the programme should give consideration to the provision or resourcing of a financial coach or tailored one-to-one support, similar to what was provided by MABS in MMS.

2. It is important to strive to deliver clarity to participants at the outset such as **the level of involvement and commitment required** to participate in the programme, including explanation of the role of the financial coach if applicable. This will help to determine whether the programme is an appropriate intervention for the participant.

3. The MMS programme **is labour intensive for staff involved in MMS**, given the need for agility and flexibility in tailoring content to particular cohorts and the changing context. Sufficient staff resources and time needs to be built into the design of programmes so that content can be tailored and updated, as required.

4. There are benefits and drawbacks to delivering the MMS programme online, but on balance, it was considered **the most effective** way to reach participants in periods of prolonged lockdown due to Covid 19. It was seen that online courses can be integrated easily into daily lives of the target groups. However, in-person MMS programmes could be offered to those **who require additional supports** around IT or digital skills.

5. It was considered important by some of the MMS Participants that trainers should **develop strategies to enhance participation** across quieter members of the group. Having cameras kept on in online sessions if possible, promote cross-group engagement.

7. Recommendations

As detailed in the conclusion, there are many aspects of the MMS programme that worked well. The following recommendations could be incorporated into future iterations of the programme.

MMS was a pilot programme which was set up, delivered, and adapted, over time in response to ongoing consultation and regular discussions between partners. Some of the key recommendations emerging from the pilot phase include the following:

1. To situate future iterations of **MMS is in the 'prevention'** area of tackling indebtedness, as opposed to the 'rehabilitation' of debt. This means that the programme adds particular value to the existing service landscape.
2. In the initial assessment discussion carried out at the outset of the programme, it is recommended that more attention is given on the current levels of debt and a structured discussion with the participant on whether the MMS programme is the most appropriate intervention. This process could also consider the following:
   - To refer those in crisis debt to a small number of sessions with a MABS money advisor, with option of enrolling in the MMS programme at a later point;
   - To identify who might require additional supports, for example IT or digital skills, or an initial session with the financial coach;
   - To establish an appropriate referral protocol should another service support be required that goes beyond finances;
   - To operate clear referral channels for financial coaches should they need to signpost participants to other services.
3. In modifying or updating course content, it is important for MMS trainers to be cognisant that there may **be varying levels of knowledge** in a particular subgroup and to ensure that content is appropriately 'pitched' to all members of the group.
4. **Consider additional learning or reading materials** for participants who have more time in their daily lives to engage in the content.
5. If recruiting through employers, it is recommended that business owners or management allow for MMS be ideally **incorporated into the paid working day** to facilitate participants in finishing the programme (whilst noting the challenges around shift work, unanticipated work requests, or staff in public-facing roles).
6. Consider organising a **one-off 'refresher session'** for those who completed the MMS programme, six months after completion of the programme.
7. It is recommended that all **data collection activities are coordinated** between service partners and to continue to share data findings to avoid duplication of effort or potential confusion among participants.

8. **Baseline and follow-up surveys** have the potential to track individual-level change over the duration of the programme and can contain specific measures to determine impact of the programme. Improvements can be made to the follow-up survey instrument to gain further insight into the impact of the programme, for example by repeating scales or bespoke survey items at baseline and post-programme.

9. **To capture the long-term impact** of the MMS programme, and whether it made a tangible change to household finances or a reduced debt burden, it is recommended that a follow-up survey be administered to those who completed the programme at least six months later. This could be **'twinned' with a potential refresher session** for participants who completed the programme six months earlier.

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Appendix 1 – Structure of Money Made Sense Programme

Financial Capability Theme	Main objective of the session
INTRODUCTION – "How do you engage with money/do you feel in control of your personal finances"? **Sharing attitudes and personal** *experiences/opinions – exploring confidence levels in terms of financial health*	■ Gain an increased awareness and knowledge of own financial behaviours and habits ■ Critically reflect on own emotions around money/spending ■ Discuss and think critically on how changes in the way we live and spend money have been affected by COVID-19
FINANCIAL WELL-BEING IN IRELAND – "How external factors shape our financial options" *Understanding how our surroundings shape our financial behaviours*	■ Gain an increased understanding the Irish context and the structural issues (such as COVID-19) that surround people and shape the financial choices they can/have the capacity to make ■ Explore how this impacts our ability to cope in the face of sudden, unexpected changes in circumstances ■ Increased understanding of the Irish context (cost of living, housing, health, childcare costs and so on) in comparison to other countries in Europe in particular
SAVINGS AND BUDGETING – "How the reality of everyday life shapes/determines your ability to save" *Sharing and thinking critically about our long- and short-term financial goals in light of the structural limitations*	■ Reflect on own emotional understanding of saving, and share long and short-term saving goals ■ Provide space for sharing about the stress of managing finances and the impact on our lives, in particular in the context of COVID-19 ■ Introduction to some useful money saving strategies and budgeting – the most important aspect is to "be conscious" of spending ■ Increased understanding of how someone's ability to save is linked to wider structural issues and necessary life expenditures, as well as unforeseen/unexpected events (such as COVID-19)

Financial Capability Theme	Main objective of the session
FAMILY FINANCES – "How to 'do' money matters with children and other family members" *Integrating savings and budgeting outcomes into the family*	■ Gain awareness of ideas on how to speak about spending, money matters and saving with family members (especially children) and why this is important ■ Increased understanding of how "money matters" has changed in recent years with the transition to digital financial products (children no longer seeing paper money for example, just "tap" with cards) and how this influences their relationship with money
DEBT – "Debt is normal – but unmanageable debt levels are not" *Contradicting stigma and shame around household debt*	■ Gain understanding of how *normal* or common debt is in the Irish context ■ Gain practical knowledge of how debt grows and impacts other household expenses ■ Gain knowledge and awareness concerning "personal debt", including basic financial terms such as "interest" and "APR" ■ Gain knowledge of the *types of debt* (insecure/consumer vs. secure) and where you can borrow money
UTILITIES – "The invisible costs of running a home" *Understanding the cost of our utilities and potential savings options available*	■ Gain knowledge of how to compare and contrast utilities and insurance providers and payment options, as well as how to engage with providers and assess different utilities options ■ Discuss how common it is for people to not pay utility bills in Ireland, what happens when bills go unpaid and how to avoid
BUYING ON CREDIT – "What is the difference between choice and necessity" *Understanding the concept of "credit" and how it works, and what options are available to us as consumers*	■ Gain knowledge on three types of common ways people in Ireland buy on credit (consumer credit): using credit cards, hire purchase agreements and moneylenders ■ Gain experience comparing real consumer purchase agreements/personal loan advertisements in order to determine the one that is the most beneficial (short and long-term) to participants' own financial situation

Financial Capability Theme	Main objective of the session
ENERGY CONSUMPTION IN HOUSEHOLDS – "What are the benefits of taking action to reduce energy use?" *Exploring what it means to be energy conscious in 2020 – impact on society and individuals*	■ Gain knowledge of how certain behaviours can help reduce household energy costs, and why this is important in our current global climate ■ Gain understanding of how "using less energy" can also result in "spending less money"
SHOPPING ONLINE AND USING ONLINE PERSONAL FINANCIAL TOOLS – "What platforms are available, how do they work, and what are the risks?" *Understanding the risks and benefits of shopping online and using select online financial tools and services*	■ Think critically about shopping online, the pros and cons and how it can impact overall spending ■ Discuss how changes in the way we shop have been impacted by COVID-19 ■ Gain experience weighing the pros and cons of using online resources and available technologies, like mobile banking and so on, including the risks involved in using such services
MAXIMISING ENTITLEMENTS AND BENEFITS – "How do we maximise our income"? *Integrating the ways, we engage with social benefits/other entitlements*	■ Gain knowledge of what benefits they are entitled to and the ways that this may change over time (emphasis on current supports/ways these supports changed during COVID-19) *Introductory information on pensions may be included for low-paid workers group
AVAILABLE NATIONAL SUPPORTS – "Where do I turn if I am in trouble in the future"? *Understanding the way preventative, remedial and curative financial supports work in Ireland*	■ Gain knowledge of what is available in terms of financial services, support and assistance if facing a future situation of financial uncertainty or precarity
CONCLUSION – "Where are we now"? *Conclusion of group workshop – gauging confidence levels and whether or not the workshop was helpful in terms of gaining control/ confidence over personal finances*	■ Final evaluation and overview of main learning outcomes from the group training ■ Discuss moving forward and being more conscious of finances in the future – in particular during a period of recession/ uncertainty due to COVID-19 ■ Sharing attitudes and reflecting critically on the main themes/outcomes of the training and how to maximise their time with the one-on-one financial coach

Appendix 2 – Profile of MMS Participants

The table below outlines the demographic profile breakdown of participants in the MMS programme. For ethnicity, family status, age, and income band, data was available for only 57 participants. Where relevant, the original target as set in the original TASC/NSP funding application to JP Morgan is included.

	No. of participants	Original Target*		No. of participants	Original Target
Gender			**Housing**		
Male	12 (17%)	10%	Home owner	27 (38%)	Not stated
Female	60 (83%)	90%	Renting	32 (44%)	
Other	0		Neither	13 (18%)	
Total	**72**		Total	72	
Employment Status			**Education**		
Part-time worker (CE Scheme)	33 (46%) (17 (24%))	-	Primary only	1 (1.3%)	35%
Full-time worker	19 (26%)	-	Secondary completion	25 (35%)	53%
Unemployed	20 (28%)	60%	Post-secondary vocational qualification	24 (33%)	-
Total	**72**		Higher education	22 (31%)	12%
			Total	**72**	
Ethnicity			**Age**		
White/Caucasian	53	90%	25-34	10	100% of original target was 25-64 years old
Asian	0		35-44	21	
Black	0	5%	45-54	12	
Other	4	5%	55-64	9	
Total	**57**		65+	3	
Family Status			Not disclosed	2	
Lone parents	18	32%	Total	57	
Income band (n=57)					
Not earning	13 (23%)	Thresholds based on SJI (2019)[4]	31-33K per year	2 (3%)	
<28K per year	30 (53%)		>33K per year	4 (7%)	
28-31K per year	8 (14%)		**Total**	**57**	

4. Population group experience poverty. Within this group, workers totalled 14.3% of that population experiencing poverty, Unemployed people 13.5% and 13.1% are those with parenting or care duties. According to the original funding application, TASC and NSP drew from Social Justice Ireland's poverty thresholds in targeting participants for MMS. See: https://www.socialjustice.ie/content/publications/poverty-focus-2019

Appendix 3 – Survey Results

Baseline Survey (n=60)

Total number of pre-baseline surveys: 60

Date range: Oct 2020 – Nov 2021

Q1. Do you have a bank account?

	Number of participants
Yes	59
No	1
Missing	0

Q2. If yes, where do you bank?

	Frequency
Bank	59
Credit Union	16
An Post	4
Other	3
Missing	0
N/A (no bank account)	1

Q3. Do you have a credit and/or debit card(s)?

	Number of Participants	% of sample
Yes, debit card only	34	57
Yes, both credit and debit card	19	32
Yes, credit card only	3	5
Neither	4	6

Q4. How comfortable are you comparing energy and phone providers?

	Number of Participants	% of sample
Extremely comfortable	9	15
Comfortable	18	30
Not comfortable	11	18
Extremely uncomfortable	3	5
Not sure	18	30
Missing data	1	2

Q5. If you rent your home, how comfortable are you talking to your landlord about rent payments?

	Number of Participants	% of sample
Extremely comfortable	1	1.6
Comfortable	10	16
Not comfortable	6	10
Extremely uncomfortable	3	5
Not sure or N/A**	32	53
Missing data	8	13

*** Conflation of data between ‘Not sure’ or ‘N/A’– i.e. high number likely to be linked to those not in rental accommodation.*

Q6. How confident are you in managing your monthly budget?

	Number of Participants	% of sample
Very confident	1	1.6
Confident	23	38
Unconfident	23	38
Very unconfident	8	13
Not sure	5	8

Q7. How often do you overspend your monthly income?

	Number of Participants	% of sample
Every month	22	36
5 – 6 times a year	11	18
1 – 2 times a year	17	28
Never	10	16

Q8. How often are you able to save from your monthly income?

	Number of Participants	% of sample
Every month	24	
5 – 6 times a year	9	15
1 – 2 times a year	11	18
Never	16	26
Missing	0	-

Q9. If you go into debt, what are the causes? (check all that apply)

	Frequency
Utility Bills	32
Food	26
Car costs	22
School expenses	20
Rent	14
Clothes	13
Gifts	10
Entertainment	8
Mortgage	7
Travel	7
Unexpected emergencies/repairs	3
Health	2
Drug debt	2
Credit card debt	1

NEVER GONE INTO DEBT	5 cases
MISSING DATA	8 cases

Q10. Do you ever borrow money to pay bills?

	Number of participants	%
YES	22	37
NO	36	60
Missing	2	3

Q11. If yes, where do you borrow money from? (check all that apply)

	Frequency
Family/friends	22
Credit union	14
Bank	9
Door-to-door money lenders	4
Online money lenders	1
Spouse works extra hours	1
Pay expenses with credit card	1

Q12. What would you like to gain from the Money Made Sense course? (check all that apply)

	Frequency
Skills to better manage finances	50
Capacity to save	39
Able to better prioritise expenses	28
More confidence seeking financial help	26
More confidence as a consumer	25
Decrease debt	16
Other - unknown	4
Other - Learn about applying for mortgage	3
Other - Confidence with handling money	2
Other - Investing savings	1
Other - How to appeal to lenders	1

Follow up Survey – Cross Sectional Analysis

Total number of follow-up surveys completed: 24

Q1. Has your financial situation changes over the past four months?

	No. of Participants	% of sample
Yes	8	33
No	15	63
Missing	1	4

Q2. If yes, how so? (tick all that apply)

	Frequency
Reduced costs from working at home and/or change in circumstances	4
Greater costs due to a family member at home and/or change in circumstances	4
Less income	2
More income	1

Q3. Have you been able to save money during the group training programme?

	No. of Participants	% of sample
Yes	17	71
No	7	29

Q4. If yes, how so? (tick all that apply)

	Frequency
Better management of expenses	13
Fewer costs	5
Reducing debts (e.g. reducing credit card debt)	3
Apply for loan with lower rate of interest	1
Read info carefully and thinking twice what I'm saying	1

Q5. Have you gone into more debt during the group training?

	No. of Participants	% of sample
Yes	1	4
No	22	92
Missing	1	4

Q6. If yes, why? (tick all that apply)

One participant who reported 'yes' to more debt replied to this:

- Overspending monthly
- Unforeseen expenses
- Illness
- Christmas/holiday spending

Q7. Have you made/are you planning on making any new decisions about managing your finances because of the group training?

	No. of Participants	% of sample
Yes	24	100%
No	0	-

Q8. If yes, what were they? (tick all that apply)

	Frequency
Regularly build savings	15
Regularly tracking incoming and outgoing expenses	14
Change utilities provider	13
Reduce household expenses	11
Reducing household energy costs and household waste	9
Enrol in a pension or increase pension contribution	7
Apply for additional social welfare supports and entitlements as necessary	6
Look into renewable energy options for your home	6
Keeping a long-term financial plan	5
Comparing interests and costs of loans	4
Eliminate or reduce unsecure debt (such as credit cards, money lenders and so on)	4
Changing banking provider	3
Seeking out opportunities for investing	3
Changing housing	1

Q9. What has the group training taught you? (tick all that apply)

	Frequency
Where to access specific financial resources and information	23
The importance of having a budgeting and savings plan	20
Where to turn if you face financial difficulties in the future	19
Increased confidence in my ability to take control of my finances	19
What is happening in Ireland concerning financial well-being and Irish households	16
Understanding different costs of credit	13
The value of speaking about finances with your family and/or wider community	11
Impact of Brexit on costs of online shopping in the UK	11
Ways to potentially maximise your income	10

Q10. What was the most useful aspect of the group training in your opinion?

Missing data: 2

Self-reported responses included in table below.

Responses:
There were a number of organisations that I wasn't aware of
Answering questions for my specific situation
The various websites you can compare
The guys were so informative
It gave me the push to live off credit and in the now
Value of speaking about finances with family and friends
Gathering information on websites, maps and comparison sites, etc.
How to use online comparisons
There is help out there if you run into trouble and not be afraid to ask for help
Tutors shared knowledge in an easy way, they let us know about some very helpful websites.
Learning about where you can go off and you need help with debt and also all the different sites you can access for budgeting tools, etc.
Being given the tools to be more confident and knowledgeable with my money
The detailed knowledge regarding supports for people on low incomes
Ireland specific advice groups/agencies
I found the course very interesting and informative. I have learned a lot about the different websites for comparing your utilities, something I would never have done before and also looking for the lower rate of interest on a loan. A little saving each week can add up to a lot of the course of a year.
Everything was very helpful. Content was organised, well prepared and easy to follow.

Q11. Did you enjoy the Zoom/online format of the trainings? Why? Why not?

In total, 19 participants described that they were happier with session being online.
Those who supported it included feedback such as:

“No need to travel or arrange childcare”

“Zoom suited as have young family”

“It meant that I could attend all classes without having to travel”

“Yes, great to be able to do it from home”

“The online format meant I could easily join for one hour whereas if I had to attend in person, I might not have been able to take the time off”

“I really liked this method”

“It was good to be able see people during the pandemic, and stay safe at the same time”

“Being able to do the zoom saves on travel and is becoming the new norm”

Some believed in person would be better but given the circumstances, they agreed with online format:
Online worked but because of engaging tutors: “No doubt in person is ‘King’. Facilitators were among the best I’ve ever had on Zoom. That’s what makes the difference, they were engaging and delivery methods were excellent”

Some felt they would have preferred in person:

“I would have preferred training in person, but of course due to the situation with Covid this was not possible. Totally understand that this was the only way the training could be done. Found group discussion was made more difficult in the online situation, but, in my opinion, this is the norm at the moment.”

“I did enjoy it; the trainers were both so lovely and supportive but I do think a group session would have been better but I know that is not possible at the moment due to Covid-19.”

“Sometimes I did [like online sessions], But other times it was a bit over my head.”

Some offered positive feedback on trainers which made the online format engaging:

“X and X are brilliant trainers, very engaging and the group of women on the course were friendly and funny. The hour flew in every week”

“Very enjoyable”

“We had fun!”

“Yeah both trainers made the topic easy to talk about”

Q12. Is there a subject area you think needs to be added to the group training?

Number of participants who thought there was enough content and course expectations were fulfilled: 7

Missing data: 7

Other responses included:

- Pensions (5 respondents cited this)
- More work on budgeting (2 cited this)
- Payslips
- Saving options
- Health insurance
- More info on investments in Irish market
- Mortgage information

Q13. Would you be interested in being contacted directly to share more about your experience of the group training and one-on-one financial coaching sessions in the form of a testimonial (to receive 20 EURO One4All gift voucher)

	No. of Participants	% of sample
Yes	16	67
No	8	33

Q14. Feel free to provide any additional comments or concerns regarding the group training in the space provided below?

(data incorporated into analysis)

Northside Partnership

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J.P.Morgan