Impact Assessment of What's It Like?
Pilot Stage February 2020

The overall impact of **What's It Like?** is to reduce isolation and improve the health and happiness of autistic people and those who live with anxiety, as they start to access places that they want to and places that they need to go.

Key elements of the project are:-

1. By using immersive technology to develop an augmented reality app, through which answers to anxiety fuelled questions related to experiencing new situations can be explored prior to actually being there, providing brand new ways to address problems of isolation caused by differing levels of anxiety.

2. Autistic people to drive the design and implementation through their own lived experience and knowledge of the anxiety and isolation issues faced, providing innovative, disruptive and fully aligned solutions to the needs of the beneficiaries.

3. To provide real work experience for young autistic people to use their talents and passions to help their peers overcome isolation.

4. By blending technology development with a clinically sound support service based around psychology and sensory integration, to develop the app in a way that allows people isolated by anxiety to try out their special interest experience to build confidence at their own time and pace with appropriate levels of support.

5. To ensure that real needs and passions drive the work and that this continues through monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure coping strategies are being learned.

6. To develop a Social Firm business model using agile development, not driven by economics, that is sustainable and that allows the applications always to be free for individuals to use.

The seeds of this project came from an idea conceived by core of 6 members of PALS and has been developed over the last 5 months. This pilot stage has actively involved 20+ individuals in terms of designing and developing a web app and its immersive content. There has been another 20+ members providing feedback, advice and testing of the materials.

Each person involved is an individual with unique working preferences and sensitivities and new ways of bringing them together to work on the project have had to be created. This has led to new ways of thinking about performance and the rules and protocols around work, so that each individual feels values to what they bring to the project.

An independent survey designed by Owl XL CIC, sought feedback from team members involved in the pilot project of **What's It Like?** and the survey analysis concentrates on outcomes 2 and 7 in **What's It Like?**'s Theory of Change.

13 members of the development team completed this survey about their experiences of the pilot project. As an inclusive team, the feedback includes responses from three project managers and one volunteer mentor.

Development team constitution

4 are still in full time education. 6 have left school and have other employment experience to relate to, 1 of which is voluntary experience and another is occasional part-time work. 2 are over 40 and **What's It Like?** project managers.

8 are male, 5 are female.

Age Range
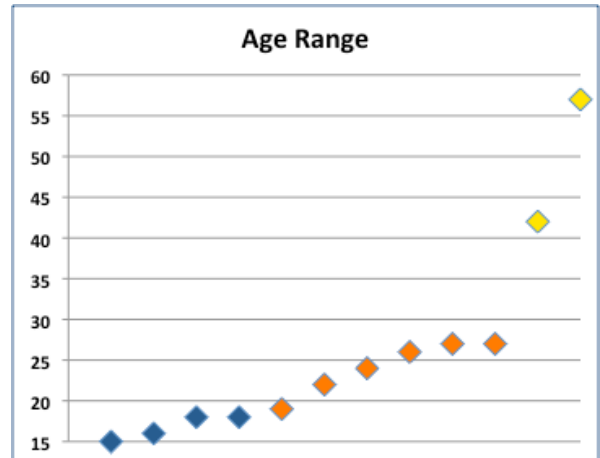
10 have at least one disability, 5 of whom listed 3 or more.

Types of Disabilities
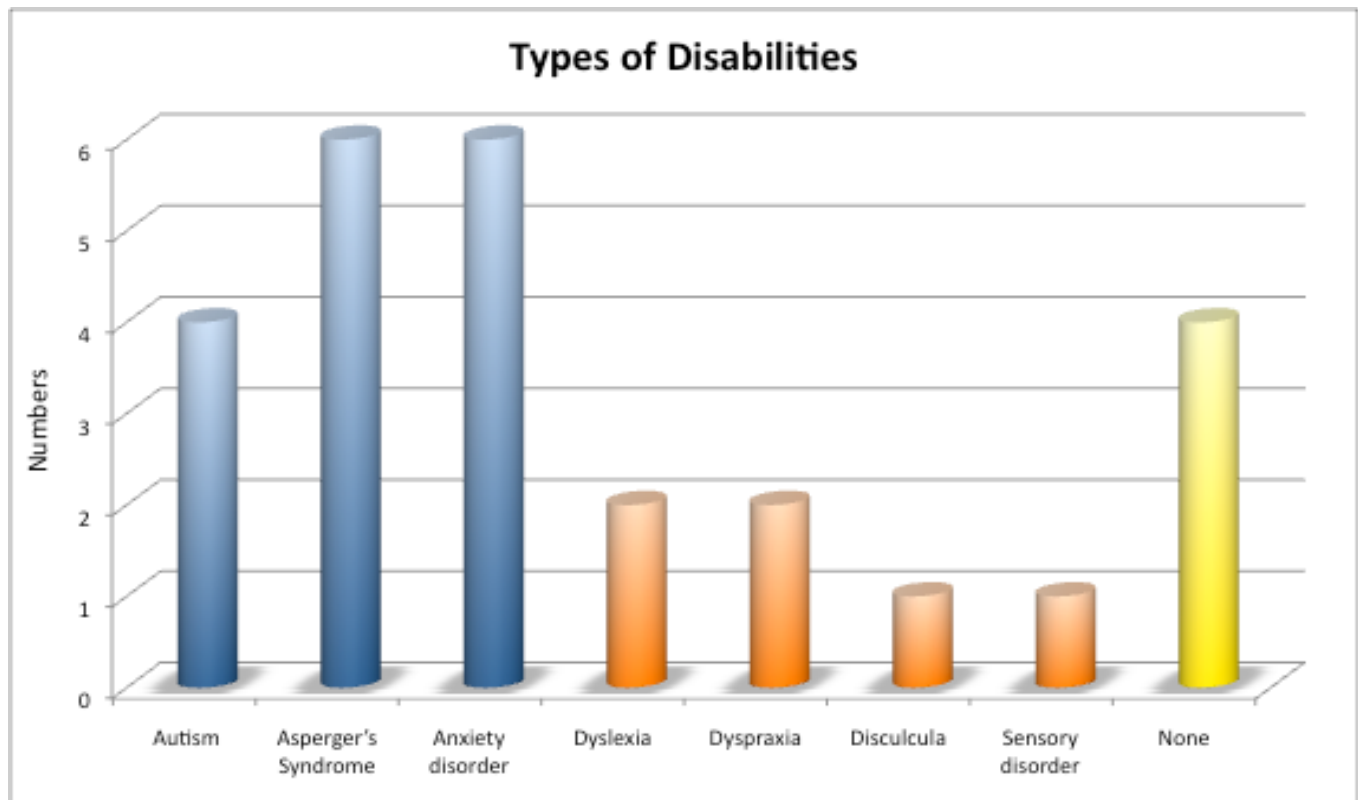
All, except one of the managers, said they have suffered from anxiety that has prevented them from going places.

Practical skills used and developed

Four questions were asked covering the skills used so far:-
- What work have you done for **What's It Like?**
- What skills have you used that you knew before?
- Have you been able to develop any of these skills?
- What new skills have you learnt?

All responses have been listed as described in the answers.
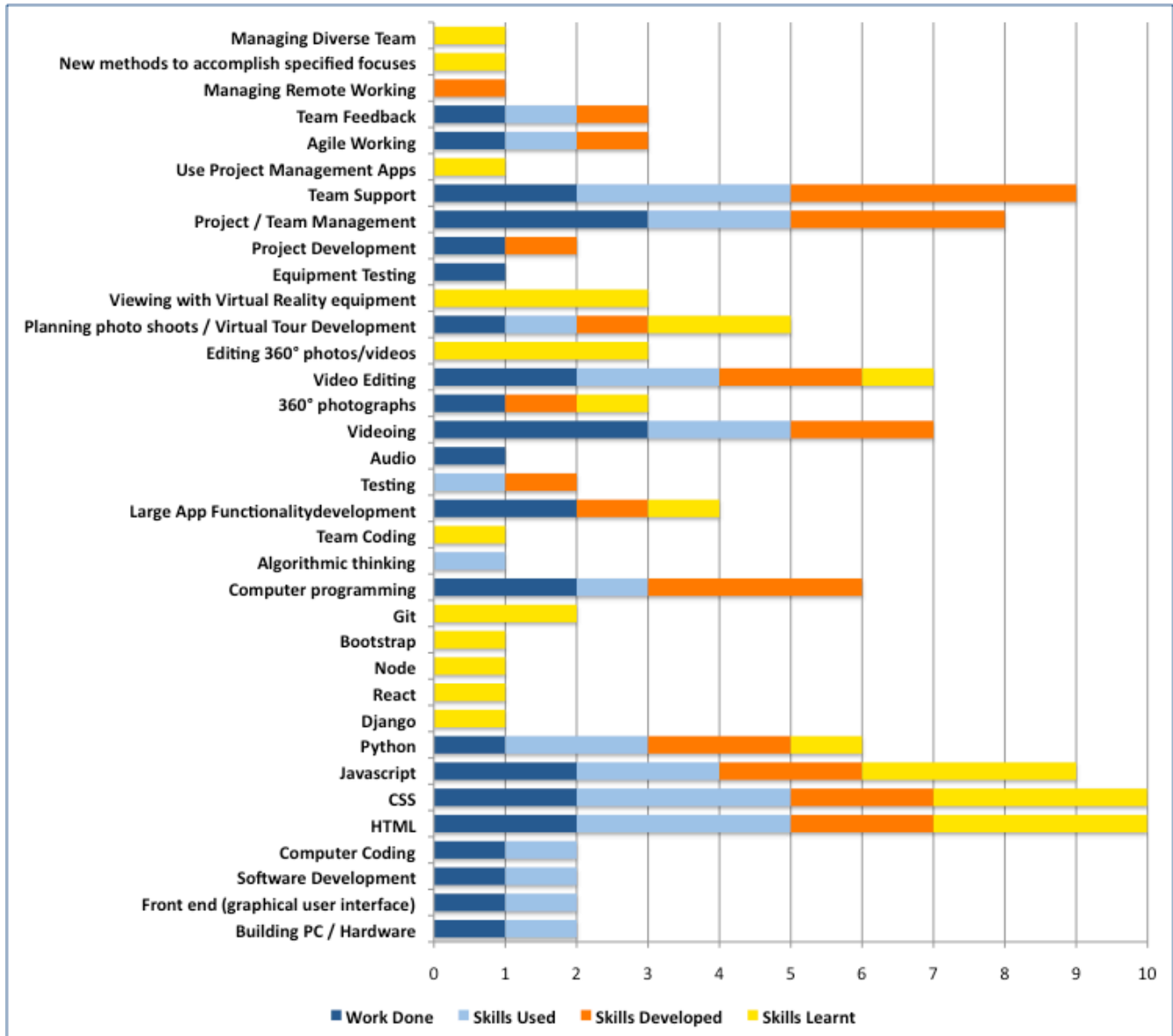
The majority of the team were working on the IT technology development and there is a good range of existing knowledge developed along with new skills learnt.
3 mentioned the videoing/photography and 3 mentioned project management aspects.

In response to the third question, one team member wrote 'Yes, due to the different and unique nature of this work compared to what I have done before.'

Working with Others

Four questions were asked about working with others in the team:
- How many people do you work with or come into contact with through **What's It Like?**
- How easy have you found it to work with other people on **What's It Like?**
- What have you learnt from these people?
- Do you feel you are helping other people to learn new things in the work place?

The majority of the team had worked with between 4 to 12 people. 1 had worked remotely.

11 said they had found it easy working with others, 1 of whom specifically said they had had to work at it but it had been made easy because of the nature of this team.

2 said they had struggled to work with others, specifically concerning socialising with others and finding ways to interact.

Number of people worked with
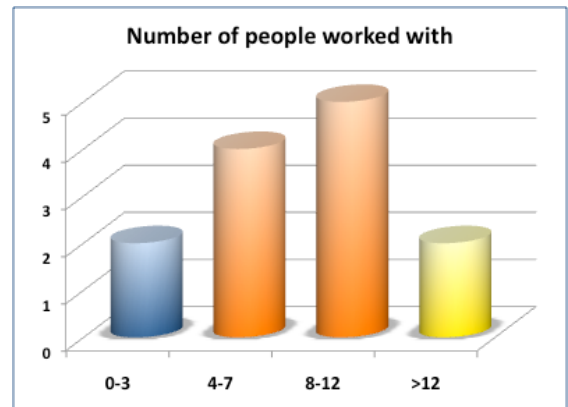
1 who had said they found it easy to work with others, did add "I found it relatively easy to work with people on my team but I do find it hard to talk about anything other than the work."

2 members of the team without disabilities, who had found it easy to work with the others, commented "others probably found working with me a challenge" and "autistic people are usually very clear in their communication, but it was difficult to understand what was expected of me at the start."

Things listed as being learnt from others on the team:-

Concerning others	**Concerning technology and equipment**
• Sensory concerns and Issues	• Program Development challenges
• Socialising concerns and Issues	• CSS
• Different learning styles within a team	• Java script
• Needs within a diverse team	• HTML
• Exposure Therapy to treat Anxiety Disorder	• General web development
• Creating safe environments for people not neurotypical	• Big O Notation (algorithms)
• Teaching others	• Bootstrap
	• Python
Concerning partners	• Computer coding generally
• The 3rd Sector ecosystem	• Efficient task accomplishment
• Interest in customers to become more inclusive	• Operation of 360° filming equipment
	• New editing features
	• Using different camera
	• Technical skills

8 believed they had been able to help others learn new things, 2 were unsure and 2 did not believe they had been able to help anyone else.

Experience of Anxiety

A key objective of **What's It Like?** is for autistic people or those suffering with chronic anxiety, to be able to use their lived experience of anxiety to build technology solutions that support the needs of others who live with anxiety.

The team were asked whether this had been the case and if so, how.


Specific answers as to how:-

"Able to contribute to the design/functionality of the system by making suggestions in the planning stages."

"I tried to help make the design as simplistic as possible whilst keeping in mind that some people may be against brighter and louder images and sounds."

"I know firsthand all the different aspects that can come together to cause anxiety, and why they cause anxiety. With this knowledge I can suggest things and design virtual tours with all of these aspects in mind."

"Some people are not as organised or meticulous as I am."

"Knowing how to capture first person angles at Fratton Park when feeling overwhelmed by crowded spaces, such as looking around a lot and capturing what you would see if you were present."
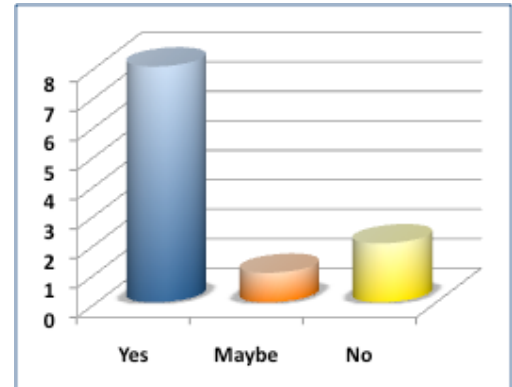
Team Ambitions

The team were asked what their ambitions were when they first joined **What's It Like?**, compared to their ambitions now they had experience of what the project has to offer.
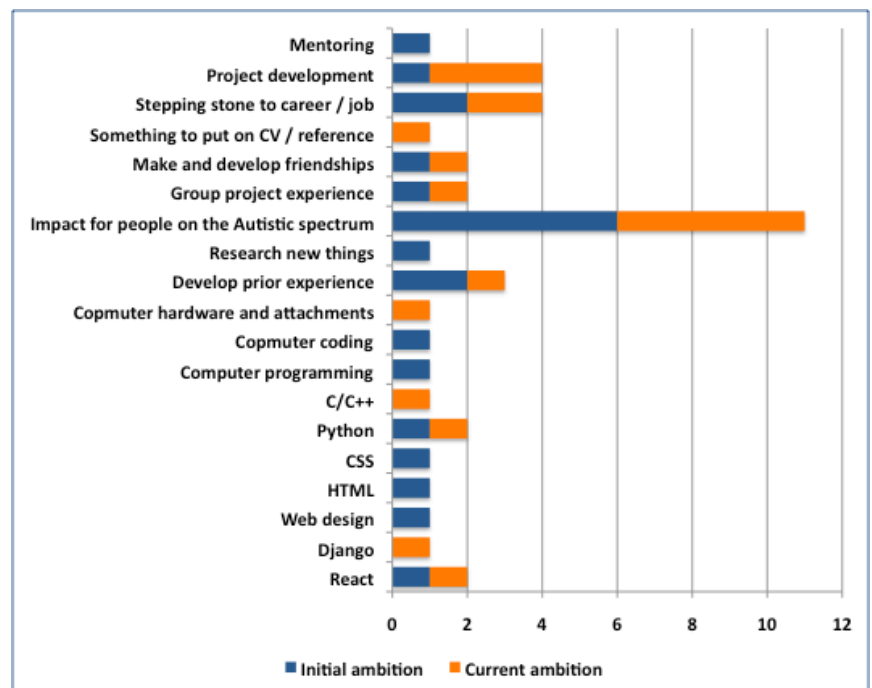
Where the ambitions relate to specific IT languages ambitions have moved on, whereas ambitions in other areas remain a priority.

To the question as to how **What's It Like?** compared to other experiences:
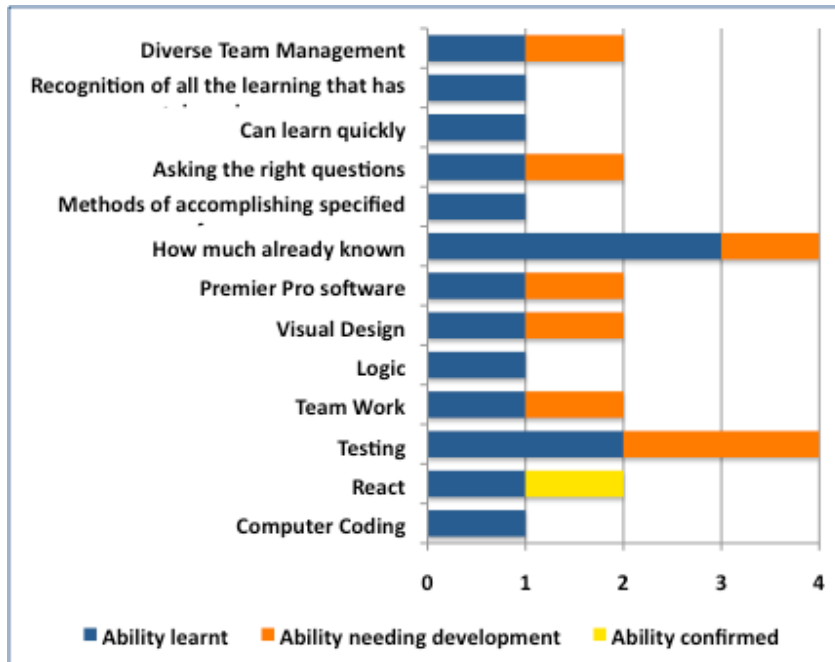6 said it was similar
7 different
4 had no experience to compare with.

Individual Abilities

Two questions were asked about their abilities:-
• What have you learnt about your abilities since working at **What's It Like?** compared to other experiences
• Has your belief in your own abilities changed since working on **What's It Like?** compared to other experiences If so, how?

From the responses given to the first question it can be seen that team members believe that there are some abilities that they have learnt or become newly aware of, and other abilities that they have discovered they need to develop more. 1 response showed pleasure in finding out that this experience has been able to confirm his confidence in a known ability.

"I have learnt that there will always be new and innovative ways to develop my skills that I may not have thought about or considered before What's It Like?."

Specific answers to the second question include:

"I thought I was the guru of code before I started (still not too far from total accuracy :P) But now, I know I have A LOT to learn. And this makes me happy to know I can spend more time on growing in something I love!"
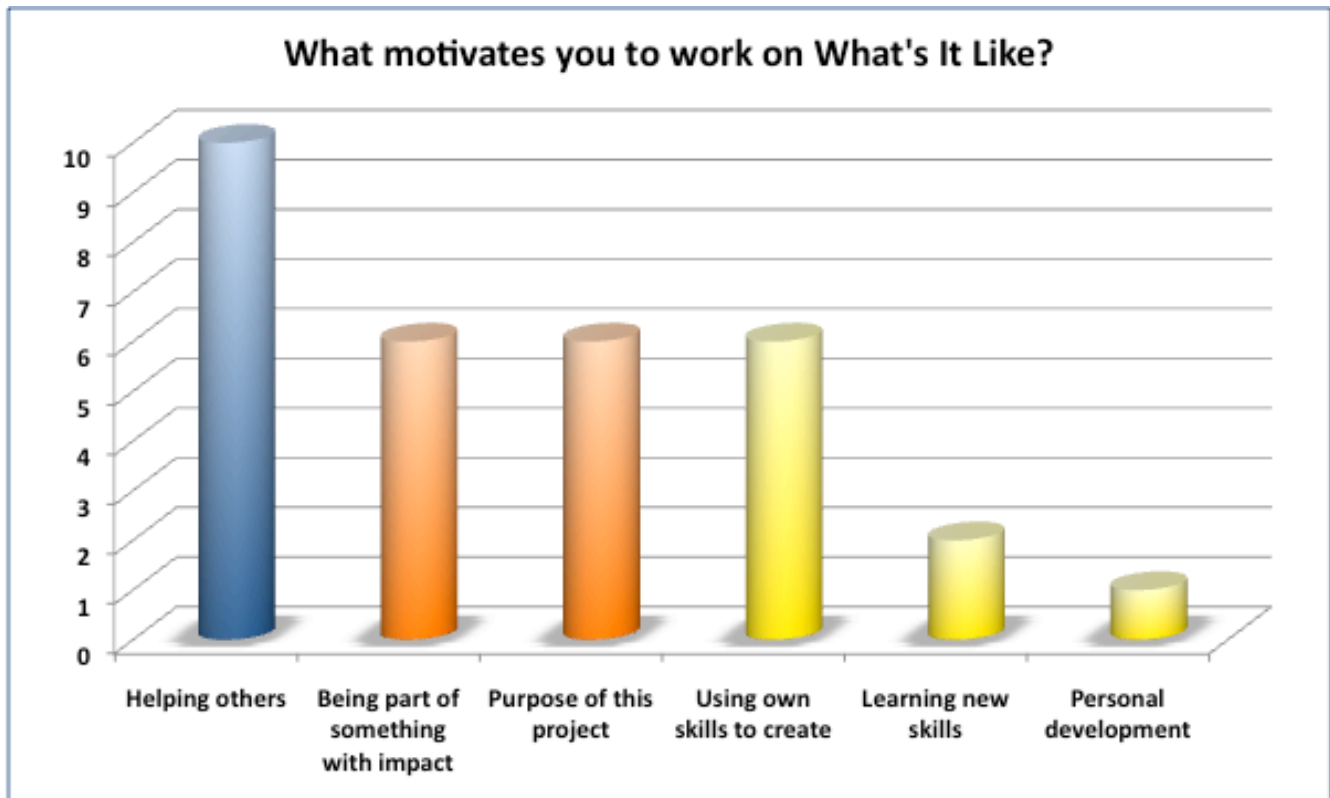
"I have realised there are ways to further my understanding of my skills and to prove that I have done so."

"Yes, I've realised I have so much more to learn about development and that will likely never change! It's an industry that is constantly evolving."
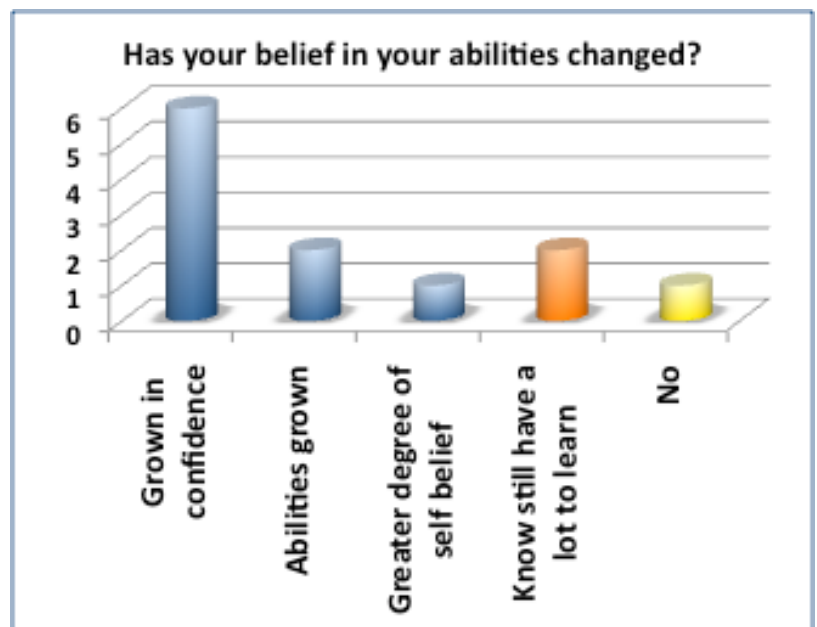
Motivation

The team were asked what motivates them to work on **What's It Like?**

What motivates you to work on What's It Like?

	Helping others	Being part of something with impact	Purpose of this project	Using own skills to create	Learning new skills	Personal development
Value	10	6	6	6	2	1

Almost universal agreement that helping others is the most important thing.
A total of 8 team members are motivated by the project itself.
A total of 7 team members are motivated by the opportunities it gives to them.

Individual responses include:-

"A sense of accomplishment in being able to see something that I've helped make and know it will help people."

"The fact I'm becoming better due to this work is enough motivation for me. After all, my goal in life is to become the best at what I love."

"I love helping people, especially people who maybe at a disadvantage due to no fault of their own and so, because What's It Like? is an app to help people overcome sensory overload, I feel like I am really helping a lot of people."

"It is an interesting, unique project and I like to be part of something that makes things more accessible to other people."

"To help our beneficiaries lead an inclusive life whilst helping our local economy."

"I enjoy filming and editing and feel that it is a very positive company. I would like to help create media to help others."

Personal Development

3 questions were asked about their own personal development:-
- How are you being helped to develop your ability to meet the challenges you face in the work place?
- What personal qualities have you worked on that have helped you to improve your work on **What's It Like?**
- Do you feel in control of your own learning?

Responses to the first and second questions tended to be very individual. Things that were listed as being supported with tended to be different to the things individuals worked on themselves.

It has to be taken into account that the questions themselves may not have been fully understood, as 1 team member said "I don't think I've worked on any personal qualities. I just got on with work and tried my best."

There was a universal response of "Yes' to the third question. Some gave further explanation of why this is.

"I do indeed. Nobody is forcing me (or attempting) to do anything in specific ways."

"I feel I have enough control to be able to continue on my own but I also like it when I am given direction in order to pursue what I am trying to find out. Not overly intrusive but nudging."

"There is much more to learn than I have hours in the day for, but the work is so exciting and I am really motivated to learn and to consolidate that learning."

"It has been good to reflect with the team and to make note of the things (like talking about Agile development) that we may not have done enough of."

"With life being really busy I feel like I don't have control over making time for learning in my spare time - due to priorities/ work/family duties. I've recently started making sure I make time to learn as I've realised how important it is to invest time into your own learning."
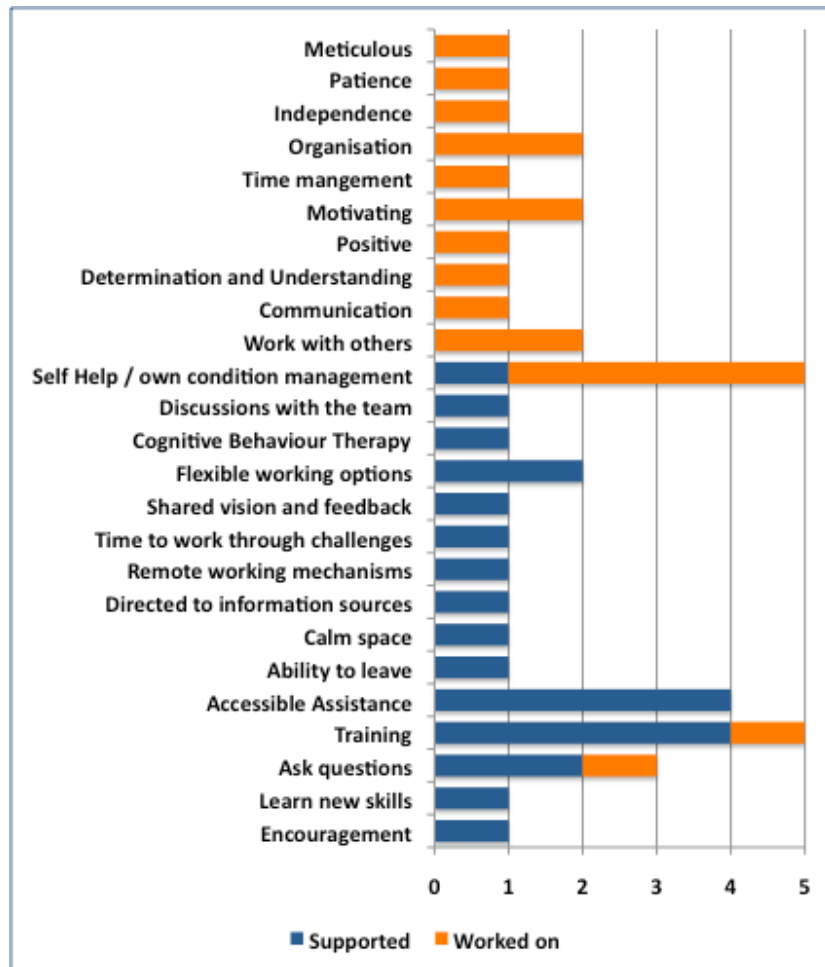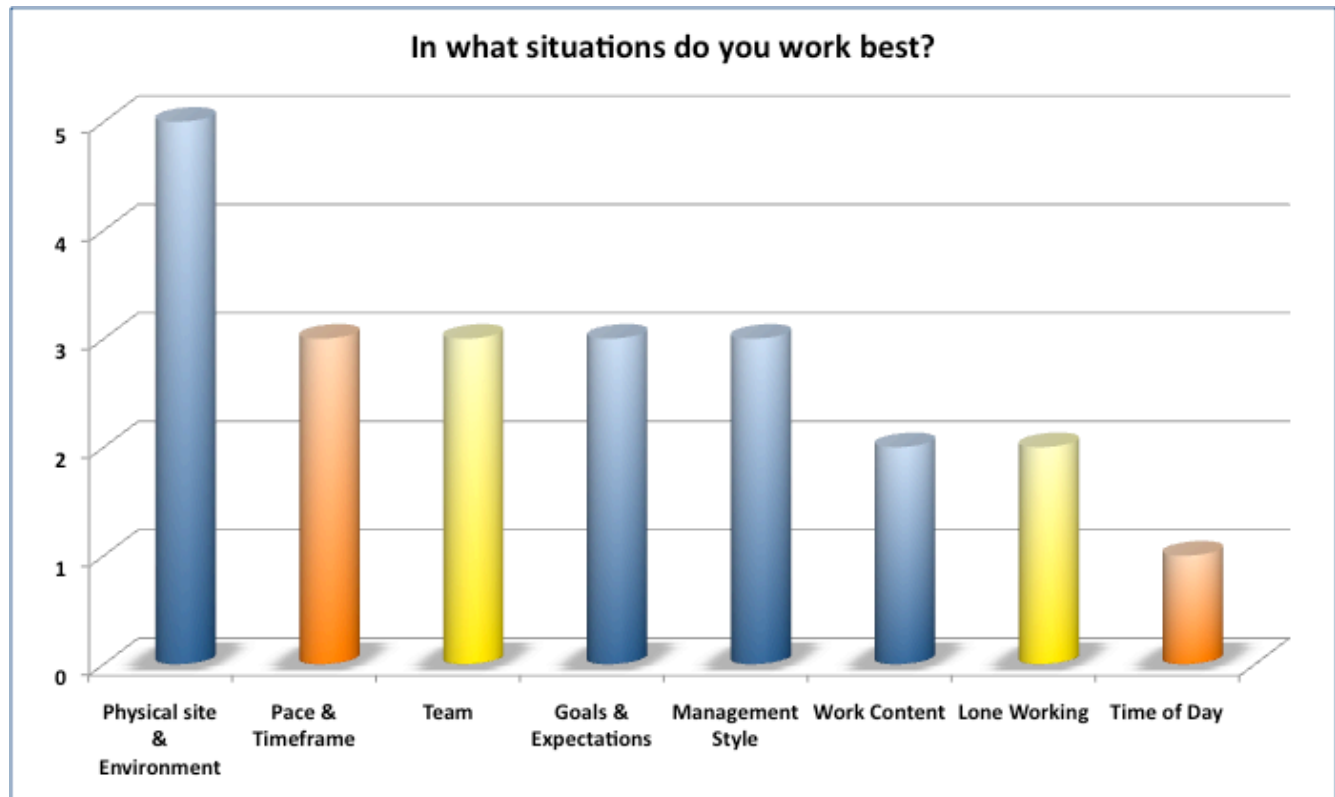
Where they work best

The last question asked of the team is in two parts:
- In what situations do you feel you work best?
- How has your experience at **What's It Like?** helped you to understand this?

Responses relate to these particular areas.

In what situations do you work best?

A bar chart titled "In what situations do you work best?" with the y-axis ranging from 0 to 5. The categories and their approximate values are: Physical site & Environment ≈ 5, Pace & Timeframe ≈ 3, Team ≈ 3, Goals & Expectations ≈ 3, Management Style ≈ 3, Work Content ≈ 2, Lone Working ≈ 2, Time of Day ≈ 1.

Specific responses as to how their experience at **What's It Like?** has helped include:-

"The freedom with this project plus other commitments allowed me to work at different times of day and length of time."

"Helped me to understand by having a panic attack at the start of the project when I was asked to contribute when I did not feel able to."

"I can take things at my own pace. I don't feel pressured to get everything done all at once."

"I work best when I am collaborating with other developers as a team compared to working solo. What's It Like? has helped with this as it's a great break from 9-5 work and gives me time to reflect on the kind of environment I enjoy being in, which is the environment we have created here."

"What's It Like? helped me to understand that I like to have a well organised desk and to work with people who care for the quality of their work."

"I like agile working where the project develops as we learn."

"I work best either in the editing room or out filming, these are the two areas I have worked in and have really enjoyed it and hope to do more."

Impact Assessment of Pilot Stage

Owl XL CIC worked in partnership with PALS Society to carry out this impact assessment of the pilot stage of **What's It Like?**.

Owl XL CIC

Supporting Social & Community Enterprises to build plans with measurable outcomes that can be impact assessed

Owl XL CIC help promote enterprises by ensuring they can measure their deliverable outcomes. This enables them to show current and potential funders and customers, that they can illustrate with evidence the value they are able offer through their planned activities.

We believe that good planning, including high level monitoring, will deliver the outcomes required. At the same time ensuring that their systems, processes and procedures are fit for purpose, as well as improved by constant and consistent evaluation.

We do all this in collaboration with each enterprise, ensuring their vision, ideas and plans are developed to a professional standard. Working with them we give them full view of how their outcomes can be monitored, to share with their clients how they meet their needs.