

The Plate Spinner

The Plate Spinner is actively managing their finances but remains under sustained pressure, often balancing budgeting, planning and self-management with ongoing stress. Recognition of the problem typically leads to further self-management rather than service engagement, as individuals may feel they “should” be able to cope. When support is sought, barriers such as unclear eligibility or generic advice can limit its usefulness. Although this group is engaged and proactive, support does not always translate into meaningful change, meaning they continue “plate spinning” with high effort and risk of burnout.



Friction points

- High personal responsibility can mask severity with people thinking “I should be managing this”
- No clear point to engage with support as they appear to be managing
- Recognition happens, but most often results in self-management rather than service engagement
- Lack of clarity on what additional value services could provide
- Eligibility thresholds might exclude this group
- High effort required to find support that they are eligible for
- Available support is not sufficiently tailored or actionable for someone already active in their money management
- Advice can feel too generic or not tailored to their situation
- The burden remains on the individual to translate advice into action
- Services are unable to address wider societal issues (e.g. cost of living, student debt)
- Advice does not always translate into meaningful change
- No clear resolution point
- Responsibility continues to sit with the individual who is already giving high effort and attention to finances
- Risk of burnout

»» Early signs

»» Realising the problem

»» Finding help

»» Engaging with support

»» Experience of services

»» Beyond support



Current journey

- Existing anxiety and stress is amplified by debt and money worries
- Constant checking of bank balances
- Conversations revolving around money
- Physical stress symptoms
- Mental fatigue
- Constant financial stretch despite solid planning and budgeting
- Social life and activities constrained by money
- Realising that financial commitments are hard to escape
- Awareness through conversations with peers / parents
- Speaking to formal or informal existing support e.g. therapists, friends and family
- Actions to self-manage tracking repayment schedules, budgeting carefully, researching online
- Seeking specific support through formal or informal existing support e.g. therapists, friends and family
- Seeking out services (e.g. university services, Citizens Advice)
- Often finding they aren't eligible for support.
- Articulate and able to share and describe what they want and need from support
- Desire for very practical and tailored advice
- Examples that relate to their specific experience – coping but feeling frustration and risk
- Clear guidance on what to do next helps build confidence
- Emotional relief where support enables action
- Mixed feelings about services. Might feel that the services are warm and supportive but haven't provided the help that they feel they need.
- Frustration at the broad system that they are doing the right things and still experiencing high impact on their wellbeing.
- Continues coping and plate spinning.
- Continued use of tools and possibly making use of tools recommended.
- Situation remains stressful



Opportunities

- Raise awareness of early signs through targeted communications
- Reframe messaging to show that seeking support is part of good financial management
- Target communications through tools they are already using (budgeting apps, banking etc.)
- Clearly articulate what support can provide beyond budgeting
- Provide examples of people like them benefiting from advice
- Identify sources of existing support (e.g. IAPT, private therapy services) and targeting communications / introducing them to routes to support
- Providing signposting resources to university financial support services, Citizens Advice branches and national Citizens Advice.
- Ensure advice is focused on practical steps and planning.
- Provide clear possible actions and not just information
- Ensure that criteria for accessing services are structured to enable this group to receive support – including considering those at-risk as a preventative measure.
- Work to ensure that there is a practical and tailored support offer to meet the needs of this group.
- Acknowledge the active role being taken in their financial management and planning and wider societal challenges.
- Test follow-up support
- Tracking of what people continue to use and do following any support offered to learn from young people and improve over time.

The Smooth-Seas Sailor

The Smooth-Seas Sailor appears financially stable, with money worries not yet dominating daily life, but underlying vulnerability remains largely unrecognised. Financial difficulties tend to emerge reactively, often triggered by life changes such as moving out or shifts in income. Help-seeking is primarily informal, with low awareness of services and a perception that support is only relevant in more serious situations. As a result, there is limited preventative engagement, leaving individuals unprepared when financial pressure increases.



Friction points

- Lack of visible stress or in the moment financial trouble means there's little reflection or support seeking
- Lack of recognition that an external shock could result in crisis
- Low awareness of their underlying financial vulnerability
- Recognition happens late and reactively rather than proactively
- Lack of financial buffer means the impact can be a shock
- No clear pathway to understanding where and how to get help
- Assumption that services are for "more serious" situations and needs
- Low awareness of what services exist or how to find out about support
- Perception that help-seeking is not relevant to them
- Low motivation to engage without immediate need
- Lack of perceived relevance of services
- Lack of services focused on support broader preventative financial resilience rather than dealing with crises
- No preventative pathway
- Lack of skills increases long term vulnerability
- Support systems only engage after problems escalate.

»» Early signs

»» Realising the problem

»» Finding help

»» Engaging with support

»» Experience of services

»» Beyond support



Current journey

- Financial situation appears stable and manageable at present
- Money worries do not dominate daily thinking
- Financial safety often comes from external supports
- Low financial resilience including low levels of savings and overall low income
- Financial vulnerability only becomes visible when circumstances change e.g. having to move out of parents' home, changes to family support or income / cost changes
- Often feels as though they are hit suddenly by a problem
- First instinct is to reach out to family, parents or close friends.
- Formal advice services are rarely the first point of contact.
- May assume support services are designed for others in more serious situations
- Accessing help may feel unnecessary unless a clear problem or change emerges
- Conversations about money are more likely to happen within trusted personal networks
- May have a negative perception of services prior to engagement
- Limited experience of engaging with formal services
- Very variable experiences of services, with some very positive and also some very negative experiences of services if they have engaged.
- Building financial independence becomes increasingly important as external supports change

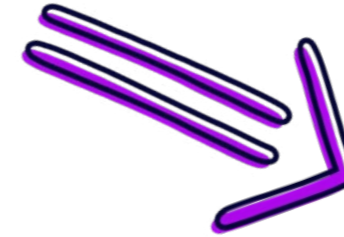


Opportunities

- Encourage awareness of the importance of financial independence and resilience.
- Raise awareness of how transitions in life (moving out etc.) can create financial challenges and the need for proactive financial planning
- Identify sources of existing support (e.g. IAPT, private therapy services) and targeting communications / introducing them to routes to support
- Reframe services as relevant prior to crisis (where they are).
- Encourage engagement through low barrier ways of accessing (e.g. anonymous chat) as a starting point
- Highlight that financial advice is not only for crisis situations but can be preventative
- Use peer examples of changes in circumstances to highlight risk and how services can help
- Ensure practical, preventative advice tailored around key life transitions in this age group.
- Tailor messaging to future focused needs.
- Provide tools that support future planning and financial independence.

The Silent Struggler

The Silent Struggler experiences financial stress as an emotional and mental health burden rather than a clearly defined financial problem. Early signs often include anxiety, avoidance and withdrawal, with difficulties remaining hidden until a crisis point is reached. Help-seeking tends to begin informally, with low awareness and fear of judgement limiting engagement with formal services. Even when support is accessed, individuals may struggle to fully articulate their needs, leading to partial engagement and mixed experiences. Without ongoing, emotionally informed support, there is a risk of disengagement and continued distress.



Friction points

- Financial distress is experienced as an emotional and mental health issue rather than being recognised as financial
- Avoidance behaviours prevent people from recognising the need for support and advice
- Recognition happens late at a crisis point because financial issues are identified indirectly or at crisis
- Lack of consistent integration between mental health and financial support
- Reliance on informal networks means no escalation to formal support
- Low awareness of services
- Perception that services are for more serious cases or other people
- Fear of judgement that leads to hesitation
- Fear of judgement limits openness
- Partial disclosure leads to incomplete or misunderstanding of need
- Engagement is tentative and partial
- Services underestimate severity of impact on wellbeing
- Eligibility thresholds can exclude or deprioritise the group
- Advice is not emotionally informed, or creates pressure to act before the person is ready
- Limited follow-up means there is the "fall off a cliff" moment
- Advice and suggested actions are not considered realistic and so are not followed up on
- Ongoing emotional or mental health challenges, particularly anxiety and depression

»» Early signs »» Realising the problem »» Finding help »» Engaging with support »» Experience of services »» Beyond support

Current journey

- Anxiety and stress begin to affect everyday functioning
- Financial worries feel overwhelming but difficult to talk about
- Withdrawal from social life, including cancelling plans with friends
- Avoiding checking finances or discussing money
- Feelings of isolation linked to both money and mental health
- Often reach a breaking point with emotional or financial triggers that cause family or services to intervene
- This could be raised through interaction with existing mental health support or through banks.
- Conversations with friends, family or trusted people highlight the issue
- Initial help-seeking often happens informally – friends or family, university advisers or other trusted peers.
- Online support can feel quick and easy to access – but desire for a personal and human connection.
- Formal services feel distant or intimidating
- Crisis may mean that they are directed into help in a way they feel they can't turn down
- Hesitant to share the full extent of financial problems – finds it difficult to talk about
- May present with emotional or mental health issues before revealing financial ones
- Confidential routes can feel safer when engaging with support
- Worry about being judged or that it's their fault or that they won't be taken seriously
- Marmite experiences of service use – some agree that it's helpful but lots of low scores for experience too. Services are inconsistent with the extent to which they are perceived to take mental health into account.
- Feelings of pressure to act before able and being overwhelmed by what is being asked
- Rebuilding of confidence in managing money is gradual
- Continued need for reassurance and access to practical guidance
- Difficulty in separating financial difficulty from personal identity

Opportunities

- Raise awareness of common links between money and mental health amongst 18-25 year olds.
- Specifically promote early warning signs in campaigns and communications.
- Engage with common mental health support such as IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies), private therapy services and university offers.
- Test comms targeted to parents and family members
- Signpost support within environments young people already use
- Test ways of delivering online support with a personal touch
- Develop entry points to services with low barriers (e.g. anonymous chat or informal routes as a starting point)
- Identify opportunities to work in partnership with banks, lenders and other debt advice services
- Ensure advice is very focused on practical steps and planning.
- Design entry to services that allows for building of trust and gradual disclosure
- Ensure communication is relatable and empathetic in tone.
- Combine emotional reassurance with practical advice
- Ensure services are able to move at a pace that is manageable to the young person
- Train staff to recognise hidden or underreported distress
- Ensure advice is tailored and that actions are clear, manageable and agreed with the young person
- Test models of follow-up support that combine emotional reassurance and continued practical advice.
- Consider how routes back into support could be provided

The Tightrope Walker

The Tightrope Walker is not currently in debt but is living in a financially fragile position, with little capacity to absorb unexpected costs or changes in income. Stability is maintained through careful management and external support, but vulnerability becomes visible when a financial shock occurs. Despite this, individuals often do not see themselves as eligible for support and are unlikely to engage with formal services. This creates a gap in provision, where those at risk are not supported early, increasing the likelihood of progression into more severe financial difficulty over time.



Friction points

- Stability can depend on external support
- System does not identify them as needing support

- Limited ability to build financial buffer
- Limited ability to respond to shocks or changes in circumstance

- Perception that support is not for them
- Lack of knowledge about where to go for help
- Not qualifying for services that they can find

- Perceived by the system as low need.
- Support may not explore their underlying vulnerability

- Services are unable to help as they don't fit criteria
- Discourages future support seeking

- Continued precarious financial position
- Low income and external pressures from cost of living persist

»» Early signs

- Coping on a low income
- Living arrangements currently absorb financial shocks
- Avoidance of formal credit
- Managing on a very tight but controlled budget
- Social activity sometimes limited by money

»» Realising the problem

- Awareness of risk of changes exposing financial vulnerability
- A sudden financial shock highlights how little financial buffer exists

»» Finding help

- First instinct is to reach out to family, parents or close friends.
- Formal advice services are rarely the first point of contact.
- Unlikely to seek out support and likely believes they won't be eligible.

»» Engaging with support

- May find that they are not eligible for support as it currently stands as they are not in debt, even though budgets are very tight

»» Experience of services

- Services feel like they aren't designed for them and they may feel dismissed or deprioritized.
- May feel that there is no place for them to seek support.

»» Beyond support

- Continued need to build financial resilience over time
- Risk of transition to silent strugglers or plate spinners

Current journey

Opportunities

- Reframe support so that it can respond to those who are in insecure positions but do not yet have debt

- Ensure an offer is available for those at risk with little financial resilience.
- Increase awareness that support exists before financial crisis

- Potentially a major gap in existing service offerings

- Develop a preventative support offer targeted at those not yet in crisis.
- Encourage forward looking conversations regarding risk and resilience

- Ensure services acknowledge concerns and the importance of acting to prevent debt
- Treat as a preventative intervention point

- Ensure that there are clear routes back into support
- Provide tools to support ongoing financial resilience