

Community Wellbeing and Mental Health Fund

Impact Report for two year grants
awarded in Spring 2024
END OF YEAR ONE



Dorset
Community
Foundation



COMMUNITY ACTION
NETWORK

NHS Dorset



Supporting the community



A Home-Start volunteer passing on advice and guidance to a young mum

IN EARLY 2024 NHS Dorset approved a £1 million funding programme to be delivered by Dorset Community Foundation in partnership with [Community Action Network \(CAN\)](#).

The Community Wellbeing and Mental Health Fund was designed to complement [Access Wellbeing Dorset](#), which is also funded by NHS Dorset and is offering new ways of delivering mental health and wellbeing services.

By supporting a bespoke funding programme, NHS Dorset was able to fund community based activities delivered by local voluntary groups, who provide non-clinical wellbeing services with an early intervention approach.

Activities targeted adults over 18 experiencing poor mental health and wellbeing, prioritising communities experiencing health inequalities.

The objectives of the fund were to support:

- Early intervention services and activities that support people in community based settings to improve their wellbeing and mental health, helping

people live well for longer, thus reducing the need for NHS appointments and clinical intervention

- Services and activities that empower people to build their resilience and ability to find their own solutions and support strategies, enabling them to lead independent and happy lives. Including building social networks, contributing to communities, taking an active role in supporting others
- Services and activities that enable people living with mental health conditions to participate in activities that support their recovery and wellbeing, help them to manage their condition, live well in their community, maintain appropriate self-care, and thereby reduce reliance on NHS services

CAN continued to offer groups support during the grant period, through networking events that introduced groups to Access Wellbeing partners. Groups contacted Access Wellbeing Hubs and co-ordinators independently to raise awareness of activities and promote signposting.

Impact

A **TOTAL OF £640,000** was allocated in the Spring round of the Community Wellbeing and Mental Health Fund for two year grants, with 11 groups being supported.

Some £313,837.50 was paid in Year One with Year Two payment conditional on satisfactory Year One reporting.

Collectively the grants have so far benefitted **1,330** local people, including 1,139 beneficiaries and 191 volunteers. All groups are proceeding with Year Two plans, except The Horse Course, which has closed.

The cost of the services provided averages **£236** per person. This is higher than for one year grants but reflects that the two year grants were made to larger organisations.

Although they are also largely volunteer led, they have higher staffing and premises costs to support larger scale operations.

Costs remain excellent value for money considering most individuals received weekly support for a minimum of eight weeks and a maximum of 12 months, and considering the life changing outcomes.

Referrals and working with Access Wellbeing

BENEFICIARIES were referred through a number of routes, including self referrals or word of mouth, signposting from Access Wellbeing, Social prescribers or other community groups, referrals from rehab centres (We Are With You), Social Services, GPs, Midwifery and Health Visitors, Community Mental Health Teams and Steps 2 Wellbeing.

The majority of beneficiaries were identified early, before seeking formal or clinical support.

Others were referred after a period of treatment with a view to supporting more effecting long term recovery and wellbeing and preventing further need for treatment.

The Access Wellbeing team have enjoyed building relationships with the groups, which have enhanced the ways that local people can access support.

More details on the collaborations are included in the individual reports from groups.

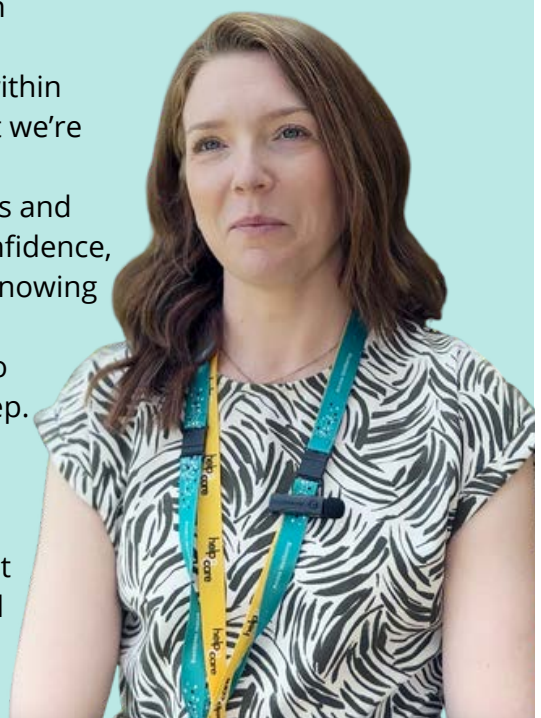
Our hubs are an easily accessible safety net

Karina Green, Strategic Partnership Lead for Access Wellbeing

"IT'S AMAZING to see the impact that's possible when organisations are commissioned to work together strategically. Having the grant recipients embedded within Access Wellbeing has become an integral part of what we're able to offer.

"Much of the work done in the Access Wellbeing hubs and drop-ins is about preparing people; building trust, confidence, and readiness to re-engage with their communities. Knowing we can then offer a warm handover into such a comprehensive and trusted network means there's no cliff edge when someone is ready to take that next step.

"It works both ways too. When people connect with community organisations but their needs go beyond what those services can provide, Access Wellbeing is there, no long waits, no complex referral process. That reassurance is powerful for both the organisation and the individual. It's a safety net that's responsive, human, and easy to access."



Presenting issues

THE PEOPLE supported were struggling with a variety of issues that were already impacting their wellbeing and mental health, with many experiencing an increasingly downhill trajectory.

Issues ranged from early signs of depression or anxiety disorders, addiction issues, eating disorders/difficulties, trauma and abuse, disabilities and their impact on isolation and wellbeing, post-natal mental health issues or pressures of being a new parent, unpaid carers experiencing burnout, and older people experiencing loneliness.

Monitoring impact

GROUPS monitored the resulting impact of their activities in a range of ways, including feedback surveys, focus groups and volunteer observations.

To evidence meaningful outcomes – positive changes beneficiaries experienced in their lives as a result of activities – groups measured various ‘indicators’, depending on their activities and the needs of target beneficiaries.

Groups were not expected to measure every indicator. Most people experienced multiple outcomes.

Outcome One

Improved mental health and wellbeing

- 1,061 people report improved MH / wellbeing
 - 686 people report reduced stress/anxiety
 - 614 people report increased self-esteem & confidence
 - 591 people report improved resilience / self care
 - 283 people report improved interpersonal/communication skills
- 200 people report they are better able to maintain healthy relationships



Outcome Two

Reduced social isolation

- 716 people report improved social networks
- 424 people report they are feeling less lonely
- 426 people report having better access to services / support
- 235 people report an increased sense of belonging in community
- 52 people now volunteering regularly



Outcome Three

Improved physical health and wellbeing

- 237 people report improved physical health / wellbeing
- 196 people report being more physically active
- 117 people report improvements to diet
- 108 people report improved access to healthy food
- 11 people report reduced addiction issues



Outcome Four

Improved aspirations for the future

- 176 people report improved personal aspirations
- 51 report improved engagement in education/learning
- 37 people gained an accredited qualification
- 27 people report increased skills & knowledge
- 8 people taken up volunteer placement/experience opportunities



CAN's key role in training and support

COMMUNITY Action Network (CAN) is playing a pivotal role in building the capacity, connectivity, and sustainability of groups supported by the Community Wellbeing and Mental Health Fund.

By hosting two Access Wellbeing Networking Events, CAN created dynamic spaces for peer support, collaboration, and shared learning – bringing together successful groups from all rounds of the fund. Notably, 10 of the 11 organisations who have received funding for two years participated, fostering a strong sense of community, mutual encouragement, and collective momentum.

CAN has also delivered tailored, hands-on support to strengthen groups' effectiveness and long-term resiliences.

Four organisations received one-to-one guidance from CAN's Voluntary and Community Sector Development Team, focusing on critical areas such as volunteer recruitment and governance.

Five organisations have engaged in training sessions led by CAN.

These sessions have covered essential topics, including policy development, business planning, volunteer management, and navigating challenging situations.

These efforts have significantly contributed to building confidence, skills, and organisational capacity across the sector—empowering groups to deliver their services more effectively and sustainably.

Conclusion

WE BELIEVE that by supporting people to achieve improved mental health & wellbeing, reduced isolation, improved physical health & wellbeing and improved aspirations for the future, 1330 people have experienced significant and life changing benefits to their wellbeing.

The trajectory of their previously worsening mental health has changed, and many of those supported have expressed the different ways in which they are more resilient and have better tools and social networks to support their ongoing wellbeing in the long term. We are confident that these outcomes have resulted in a reduced likelihood that these people will seek NHS appointments or need clinical interventions.

Access Dorset



WE HAVE provided over 20 meaningful activity sessions over four weekdays and with two evening sessions a month.

Sessions lasted two hours and were led by staff supported by 20 volunteers supported through our Volunteer Development Program.

We have also recently introduced volunteer support meetings and a monthly newsletter. Activities included drama, cooking skills, build, grow, café, art, music making, confident social communication and healthy relationship courses. Every Monday and Wednesday we held Community Meetings to discuss with volunteers and beneficiaries the week's activities.

We have also introduced monthly community forum meetings for anyone who wants to have influence over what activities are provided. We have used the Community Forum to bridge across activity groups. For example, the Community Forum wanted a means of anonymously making suggestions for improvements or activities and the Build group made a suggestion box that is now in our reception area.

This exchange fosters a togetherness that goes beyond participants merely attending a series of un-related groups. The community forum is establishing a co-opted seat on the Trustee Board, so that their views can be heard.



Fun and games at Access Dorset's summer party

"We have found the regular networking events attached to this funding very useful. They have given us ideas and let us know what other projects are out there helping people that we could refer into."

This funding has enabled the disabled people accessing Access Dorset to improve their mental health, their relationships with others, reduce their stress, anxiety and depression and feel like they belong somewhere and within their community more.

It has alleviated loneliness and enabled people to develop healthy eating and exercise habits. The community forum has empowered them to shape and direct the journey of the organisation. Peer support groups have formed, where people use their own knowledge and experience to help and guide others and to extend support each other out in the wider community as well.

The grant also enabled us to continue building our relationships with other disabled organisations, such as Futures and Shielings, which benefit wider disabled community members who can struggle to move from one organisation to another.

Challenges

We lost two members of staff in the last year, which was unexpected and we had to look at our staffing structure to assess its robustness and resilience to change. We have increased our use of sessional staff as a means to ensure sessions still continue while we look to recruiting and training up new staff members.

There is some work to be done around the areas of Improved Mental Health and resilience and self care. The Community Forum have requested more activities around mental health and have suggested a mental health day initially. We would also like to increase the numbers reporting improved diet; the forum has also asked for menu changes in the café, which will be a starting point. We will also look at ensuring our cooking groups are explicit about eating healthily.

The forum has requested more outdoor sports activities and we will look at improving this over the coming summer.

Contact with Access Wellbeing

It's also really nice to get some peer support and advice through the networking events. We have signposted people through to the Wellbeing Hubs but we haven't had any direct contact or input with them so far.

"The Poole Hub team has reached out to Access Dorset and a conversation is underway to explore potential collaboration. There's strong mutual interest and a sense that our work aligns well."

Access Wellbeing



Impact

200	beneficiaries
200	report a reduction of stress, anxiety, symptoms of depression
186	report they are better able to maintain healthy relationships and increased self-esteem and confidence
180	feel an increased sense of belonging in their community and report that they feel less lonely and have improved social networks
162	report improved physical health or wellbeing
144	report increased resilience and/or self-care and improved mental health or wellbeing
108	report improved access to healthy food, their diet to be more healthy and balanced and that they are more physically active

Story of change

S HAS A moderate to severe learning disability with flashbacks which increase when they are around other people. They started in our cooking skills group where people can sit on individual tables or with others if they chose. S sat at the back of the group with two support workers and rarely communicated with others. One day S had a flashback causing them to become very upset and agitated and push a vase of flowers and some coffee cups to the floor. When S had calmed down it turned out they were upset by all the plants and china ornaments on our window ledges. We made sure S entered the building by a different entrance and all the china and plants were moved out of their eyeline.

It took many weeks before S began to understand that Access Dorset was a safe place and no harm would come to them. Gradually, and in consultation with S, the plants and china were reintroduced. S expressed interest in our Grow and Build projects and took part in them. Finally, they said that they wanted to try working in the café and they have started by taking out people's drinks and clearing tables.

S will now speak to people – even if they do not know them that well – something that would have been unheard of a year ago. Progress is being made due to the tenacity of volunteers, staff and the kindness and generosity of other beneficiaries. We are hopeful that S will continue to progress on their journey with Access Dorset.

Co Create



THE GRANT contributed to the Create:Connect programme, specifically funding three eight week courses across two terms in theatre and visual arts, at Lighthouse Poole and The Powerhouse, Hamworthy, with 29 participants.

We provided pastoral support to individuals attending our courses and signposting as appropriate. We supported one participant to become a volunteer facilitator, enabling them to develop workshop leadership skills and develop their ambitions for the future.

Our application included funding to develop a Create:Connect service in Weymouth.

As we received a smaller award than applied for, we are including a pilot course (seven participants) from which we hope to seek continuation funding.

We held our first advisory group session, inviting five volunteers to explore what CoCreate means to them, and how services can develop in the future. We hope to develop this group, creating a supported and meaningful way for those with lived experience to steer the direction of the organisation with the leadership team.

A majority of attendees were people who have accessed a mental health service in the last 12 months. Engaging in regular creative activities in a supportive group environment, promotes



Some visual art created by Co Create members

"I became more confident as the weeks went on which made me feel better about myself."

social interaction, emotional expression, and personal growth. This creates a sense of belonging, confidence, and emotional wellbeing, which ultimately leads to a reduction in stress, anxiety, and depression. The programme created a vital social lifeline, fostering friendships and reducing feelings of loneliness. Participants formed connections that extended beyond the sessions.

Feedback highlights that the courses provided a boost to personal confidence, which sparked new aspirations and goals related to personal development and creative endeavors. There was a shift in mindset where individuals felt empowered to engage more confidently in social and professional environments.

Challenges and future plans

The reduced grant awarded led to us needing to re-work our delivery plan. We applied for additional funding from other sources, which has increased the number of courses we can offer.

We've seen an increase in people applying whose primary need isn't a mental health support need. We have added in a statement to our sign up and will continue to monitor the situation.

We've visited St. Ann's Mental Health hospital in Poole, sharing the benefits of creativity, explaining more about the work we do, and opening conversations to develop services more closely in the future.

Impact

27 beneficiaries

27 report improved mental health and wellbeing, feeling less lonely, seeing an increase in personal aspirations and goals and increased skills and knowledge

"Feedback reflects profound positive impact on mental health, offering emotional relief, reduced isolation, improved daily structure. Participants reported feeling uplifted, less anxious, more hopeful."

"It has helped me to cope with anxiety and grief, and given me something to look forward to."

Contact with Access Wellbeing

We've been able to do important relationship building with Access Wellbeing services (Poole and Weymouth), to raise awareness of Creative Health, help us develop services, and support appropriate referrals.

We visited Access Wellbeing Poole at the start of the grant and along with the Powerhouse Poole relationship, this seems to be providing a good number of appropriate referrals. We spent time developing conversations in Weymouth to explore the pilot sessions, designed for people using Access Wellbeing and The Lantern Trust services. Lantern Trust have been very proactive, and supported visits to existing groups to help us develop a meaningful, relevant offer. Access Wellbeing Bournemouth have been harder to connect with to arrange a visit. Over our whole service provision, Access Wellbeing Hubs are representing a small number of referral pathways. We have some concerns that staff aren't fully aware of creative health activities (compared to green/blue prescribing for example).

We've contributed to the pathfinder system but found it difficult to use accurately and are feeding this back.

We have enjoyed and benefited from the CAN networking sessions for this fund, however we didn't cost our attendance to these events into our project plan, which has caused difficulty in how staff can be paid to attend.

"CoCreate has taken proactive steps to build a relationship with the Access Wellbeing team. Clients receive warm handovers to creative and therapeutic sessions, which are especially valuable for those who don't connect with more traditional forms of support."

Access Wellbeing

Story of change

'SARAH' FIRST came to our online drop-in sessions, and then her first face to face course in 2023.

We recognised Sarah's brilliant skills and talents early on, as well as the barriers she has faced in employment and other areas of life in relation to her lived experience.

During this period of funding we've been able to continue working with Sarah via our Visual Arts courses in Hamworthy, where we've been able to support her to develop her skills and interests in creative facilitation as a volunteer workshop assistant.

"When I first knew Sarah she needed quite a lot of one-to-one support at the end of the session but she's made some real progress and now she's able to give time back to other people and to the group which has been really valuable for the group and really valuable for her. I've also seen her growing confidence about talking about art about how she approaches it and passing on her own skills."

Alongside the opportunity to learn and develop new skills, we know that Sarah really values the increased social connectedness – and we witness how she also supports new people into the group.

"I have made several new friends and already met up with them outside of the group"

Sarah is also a part of our newly formed advisory group, and we really value her perspectives and ideas. We hope to continue nurturing her many skills and support her leadership development through these roles in Year Two.



"It enabled me to gain confidence back and also start to learn to trust people again."

"This course has helped lift me out of depression."

"It gave me a reason to get up and get ready. That's huge when you're struggling."

"It's helped me express things I couldn't put into words."

"It was the only time I spoke to others all week."

"I no longer feel invisible – I'm part of something."

"We've made a WhatsApp group and still meet up – it's become a little community."

"Appreciating others' struggles helps me to keep my own issues in perspective."

EDAS



WE HELD twice weekly drop-in sessions, fortnightly mental health groups, fortnightly carers groups, monthly online sessions and one-to-one support as and when requested.

We also organised Walk and Talk sessions and a Christmas party.

The grant has had a profound and measurable impact on the lives of beneficiaries and the wider community, contributing to improvements in emotional wellbeing, social inclusion, and personal development. For many individuals, the weekly and fortnightly groups and drop-in sessions provided a vital lifeline - often representing the only structured activity they engaged in throughout the week.

These sessions offered consistency, routine, and a safe space in which participants could express themselves freely, share experiences, and feel genuinely heard.

A key strength of the project was the integration of lived experience mentors, whose involvement helped to reduce stigma, encourage participation, and build trust. Their peer-led support created an environment where beneficiaries felt comfortable attending for the first time, knowing there would be someone present who could relate to their situation.

In some instances the mentors met with attendees for walk and talks and telephone support between project meetings.

The groups fostered a strong sense of belonging and purpose. Participants report increased motivation to try new things and to form new friendships to reduce isolation.



Christmas party time for EDAS members

Impact

72

beneficiaries

72

report increased resilience and or self-care and in personal aspirations and goals

66

report improved physical health or wellbeing

51

report being more physically active

37

gained an accredited qualification

11

of 15 with addiction issues report reduced substance misuse

Many were able to create new friendship groups, increase their social networks and become more confident in social situations. Four attendees now volunteer for EDAS, one volunteers at a local walking football club, one at a church, two at local foodbanks and one at the hospital. Some meet up and go swimming, some meet for a walk and talk, many now walk to the project venues at least once per week. We have had requests from the mental health group for activity nights in the summer, playing beach volleyball or rounders. A number of participants report fewer GP visits.

Some 37 attendees achieved a total of 96 accreditations – 28 in healthcare, 33 in financial terminology, 20 in entry level 3 maths and 17 in Level 2 smart business. Passing exams and gaining certificates provided evidence of progress and significant personal milestones, particularly for those who struggled in previous educational settings.

Challenges and future plans

The project was responsive to participant feedback. For instance, a monthly online carers' group was introduced to complement the in-person group, addressing access issues (often due to the need to remain with their cared-for individual) and the desire for more frequent contact. Our drop in sessions were initially 3 days a week but feedback indicated this was too much and participants preferred two sessions, with an extended duration on one of the days. During a transitional period in which EDAS was temporarily without permanent premises, some clients expressed concern that support services might be discontinued. To ensure continuity of care, EDAS secured temporary accommodation for both the mental health and carers' groups at our former venue (previously the Serenitea Café, now operating as Klass Care). This interim solution provided a stable and familiar environment.

"Thank you for the opportunity to be part of the grant programme. Our experience working with your team has been extremely positive.

Communication has been clear and supportive, and we have appreciated the flexibility and trust afforded to us.

Networking events have allowed us greater cross-organisational learning by sharing best practice with other grant recipients."

Contact with Access Wellbeing

The grant supported enhanced partnership working through a weekly presence at the Access Wellbeing Hub. This fostered greater inter-agency collaboration, improved referral pathways, and expanded awareness of EDAS services. The informal nature of these drop-ins allowed for organic, trust-based connections with both professionals and service users, broadening the project's reach. They allowed for immediate and seamless referral pathways, as Wellbeing Coaches were able to introduce clients directly to our staff.



"EDAS is one of our most embedded partners at the Poole Hub, with clients reporting they feel more able to engage thanks to the warm, familiar environment."

Access Wellbeing

Stories of change

'SARAH, EMMA, AND CLAIRE'

accessed the EDAS project independently, each seeking support following histories of emotional and physical abuse in previous relationships.

All three presented with low self-esteem, high anxiety, and a reluctance to engage socially. They began attending EDAS's weekly drop-in sessions and fortnightly mental health groups,



Where over time a deep and trusting friendship formed between them.

With ongoing encouragement from EDAS staff and the emotional safety provided by the group setting, they began to reconnect with a sense of self-worth and community.

They now meet for social activities such as coffee mornings and shopping trips. They have developed into informal peer mentors, offering a welcoming hand and words of reassurance to new members. This mutual support has been a critical component in each woman's personal journey towards recovery and resilience.

'JAMES', a middle-aged man with a mild learning disability, was referred via the Community Mental Health Team.

Initially shy and withdrawn, he disclosed feelings of shame around his limited literacy and numeracy skills, which had long impacted his confidence. Through patient encouragement and tailored support, he engaged in a range of accredited courses delivered by EDAS, successfully achieving Entry Level 3 maths, Level 1 business studies, and a Level 2 healthy living award.

He now volunteers weekly at EDAS, contributing to cleaning and maintenance of the premises, and finds strong sense of structure and belonging in the process. He reports that his involvement has given him a newfound pride in his capabilities and an increased belief in his value to the community.

'ANNA AND MARK', the parents of a young woman struggling with substance misuse, began attending EDAS's Carers' events to seek emotional support.

Initially hesitant to open up, their participation in the group helped them begin to process their experiences and gain insight from others in similar situations.

Anna went on to engage in counselling provided by EDAS, while their daughter also began accessing individual therapeutic support. As a result, their daughter has successfully ceased substance use and now contributes as a lived experience mentor at EDAS's mental health groups.

The entire family dynamic has improved significantly, with each member receiving support tailored to their needs, leading to enhanced communication, emotional stability, and mutual understanding.

Home-Start Wessex



A Dorset Community Foundation visit to the group with Access Wellbeing's Karina Green, right



THE GRANT has supported work across our catchment, including our expansion into West Dorset, following the closure of Home-Start West Dorset.

Some 14 volunteers were trained since the funding was received. We recruited two new part-time co-ordinators to work with families in West Dorset, one based in Weymouth and the other Bridport. We have a base at Hope House alongside the Access Wellbeing Hub in Weymouth, and we have been carrying out vital promotion of our presence in the West; networking, attending events, dropping leaflets and putting up posters.

We have increased the number of families supported in Dorset areas by an additional 31 parents (main carer). Some 98 per cent suffer with poor mental health, 25 per cent peri-natal, 34 per cent post-natal depression.

All were also struggling with other needs such as disability, poverty, domestic violence, substance misuse, lone parenting and isolation.

Parents were supported on a 1:1 basis by one of our specially trained volunteers, or staff, providing:

- Friendship and confidential space to talk about issues/challenges
- Practical support to build on strengths; ethos of 'doing with' not 'doing for' to increase confidence
- Support to develop self-care skills and to deal with anxiety/stress
- Practical help establishing routines/managing finances
- Encouragement of aspirations for work/study
- Help with accessing benefits/grants/financial support
- Help to access local services including Wellbeing hubs

"The grant has made a huge difference to the lives of parents with poor mental health and wellbeing, ultimately improving wellbeing and reducing the need for NHS intervention."

Our support increases parents' ability for self-care, reduces stress and anxiety and improves personal aspirations.

Resilience increases, so parents feel empowered to tackle issues as they arise, preventing their mental health declining.

A key part of our support has been about re-connecting parents to their community so they can build support networks and have the confidence to access family and community groups after our support ends. By doing this, we've reduced isolation and loneliness, which overall supports wellbeing in the long-term. By increasing community connections/access to other services they will know where and how to turn to for help at the earliest opportunity. We receive consistent positive feedback.

Challenges and future plans

Volunteer recruitment continues to be a challenge which we are addressing with marketing and also revisiting our on-line training package.

Contact with Access Wellbeing

We are based at Weymouth Hope House so many links have been made here and continue to be strengthened by our ongoing presence. We have met with the Poole Hub and the manager from the Boscombe Hub has come to visit us at our main premises in Kinson.

The Access Wellbeing passports are very useful and we're signposting families to services – especially for financial help. We will continue to link with the hubs, visiting the Weymouth Town centre one soon. The networking events have been very helpful.

Impact

31

beneficiaries

31

report improved mental health and wellbeing

28

report increased confidence and self-esteem and feeling less lonely

Story of change

A WAS REFERRED in November by Access Wellbeing at Hope House, following a referral by the Community mental Health Team. She is a lone parent aged 24 to a three-year-old, and struggling with mental health.

Mum and child have recently moved to get away from her abusive ex-boyfriend. A non-molestation order was put in place after he made contact again when the old one expired. Mum is still receiving support to talk about issues and challenges including; coping with feeling isolated as new to the area, coping with child's behavior linked to mental health and an ADHD referral, stress caused by abuse.

Mum and child are receiving support at our weekly Weymouth family group and are on the waiting list for a home-visiting volunteer.

"Filled a gap in support for families. It's been amazing, without HSW things would be really difficult, mental health would be worse."

"Co-location with Home-Start Wessex has allowed for easy warm handovers for families who may need support from both sides. It's a great example of how shared space leads to joined-up working and seamless support for parents and carers."

Access Wellbeing



In Jolly Good Company



A sing-song is a regular feature of Jolly Days – which bring older people together for lunch



WE HAVE BEEN running running five Jolly days in North and East Dorset at least twice per month, plus our Step Outside allotment group at Kingston Lacy twice per month from end of March to the end of October.

Jollies give guests, volunteers and families a unique chance to be involved in creative activities, which help people to have purpose in life and assist them to stay well for longer while remaining in their own homes.

Without a grant of this nature, fewer people would have the chance to socialize, meet new people and feel valued within their community.

The positive ripple effects also take place outside of Jollies when new friendships are formed and people meet to go on trips or join an exercise class, quite independently of In Jolly Good Company.

Feeling less lonely increases personal resilience and physical health.

60 per cent of our beneficiaries reported being more mentally active as a result of their Jolly involvement.

Some of our volunteers need the group as much as the guests and some volunteers are now living with dementia and/or other health conditions - we support them to carry on with their volunteering.

"We are very grateful for this support and find DCF always very friendly, approachable and supportive."

Challenges and future plans

We are working as a team with the Jolly Trustees on the right messaging for encouraging some of our guests who can afford to contribute, to donate to the costs of our days.

We are very proud to support people from all economic backgrounds and so we know that we need to get the message absolutely right in order to not put any pressure on people who cannot afford to contribute, whilst gently encouraging those who can.

Contact with Access Wellbeing

We called into the Poole Access Wellbeing Hub at the Dolphin Centre and ensured they had plenty of flyers and we put an ad on the digital screen. We met a young person with dementia with his wife who subsequently came to our allotment group. He was able to take some photos there – which he loves to do.



“In Jolly Good Company is regularly featured on the Poole Hub’s digital information screen, helping increase visibility of their offer. We’ve found that even this level of promotion can be valuable, enabling residents to self-refer.”

Access Wellbeing



Impact

113 beneficiaries

92 report improved mental health and wellbeing

85 report improved social networks

72 report feeling less lonely

37 report they are more physically active



Stories of change

"I HAVE BEEN coming to the Jollys since 2022. It is a group where I feel safe and where I can have fun with my friends.

"I love talking to everyone because I live on my own. My depression got worse when I lost my husband. I believe going to the Jollys helps me cope with depression better. I started going to the Jollys group not long after I had a stroke. I couldn't do what I used to with my left side.

"The first friend I made loves knitting and crochet. Her friendship helped me to start crochet again at the Jollys and then at home. I don't go to physiotherapy anymore. I don't feel I need it.

"My fine motor skills got better and I felt happy. My friends and I at the Jollys are making blankets to help other elderly people who aren't well. I love the movement and gentle exercise we do, sometimes with yoga and music because I like to keep active and I believe this helps me move better.

"One of the Jolly volunteers helps me at a strength and balance exercise class once a week. She has become a good friend. I even celebrated my 90th birthday at a Jolly! I painted a silk flag. I like looking at it hanging in the Jollys hall."

"I HAVE BEEN enjoying coming for nearly three years. I always look forward to going because it is the only opportunity and time I get to socialise with a large group of people on a regular basis. I care full time for someone with complex needs.

"This is isolating and has affected my confidence and self esteem. The staff and volunteers at Jolly have helped me rebuild my confidence socially because they are extremely welcoming and supportive.

"The group is so friendly, relaxed and non judgmental that I feel I am amongst friends who I can laugh with and chat openly to.

"Nighttime caring causes sleep deprivation and I tend to neglect myself physically. Intensive caring is also stressful.

"At Jollys I am given an opportunity to sit down for a number of hours, rest, relax and enjoy a nutritious meal. I feel cared for by others and these regular breaks have improved my physical health and my capacity to resume my caring role. I go for strolls with people who have become friends."

Everyone is encouraged to join in with the fun on Jolly Days





Options Wellbeing Trust



WE HAVE worked closely with an NHS lived experience practitioner and coach who works with Eating Disorder services across Dorset and Hampshire. We have also recruited and trained four volunteers as trained listeners, buddies and peer supporters.

We have planned, promoted and facilitated monthly sessions for eight group members and carers, involving themed craft activities as a focus alongside support, safe sharing and discussion around eating disorder issues with activities chosen by members.

We have also been networking with eating disorder professionals and organisations including universities, colleges, Citizens Advice, social prescribers and Access Wellbeing.

We have carried out marketing using flyers, posters and regular themed Facebook posts, as well as developing our closed Facebook group and online portal, which has 60 members.

Everyone who has enquired about or attended the group meetings have reported that there is nothing like this locally and the only options have been private and unaffordable.

They value the support, education, hope, and understanding of the difficulties and complexities of what they are dealing with and the validation of their efforts to become well and healthy. They recognise what we are offering is a unique resource and otherwise, when treatment ends they have to go out into the community without any support. Three group members have expressed their interest in becoming peer support or lived experienced volunteers.

This is testimony to the strength and resilience they have developed.

We provide worksheets, tools, books and psycho education information sheets at



A Dorset Community Foundation visit to the group all of our groups. Members often also share any useful techniques or coping strategies that have worked for them.

For example, one of our members couldn't get on with journalling but found that a visual scrapbook helped her on a daily basis and this was shared in our last group which inspired others to go away and try it.

We also provide helpful resources, self help tips and motivational quotes on our Facebook group.

Our online portal has self-help worksheets and other resources, and is available to all members of the network.

Challenges and future plans

Unforeseen organisational changes within Options impacted the development and initial setup stages. It has been difficult to recruit volunteers locally and to get into local relevant organisations such as Kimmeridge House, GP surgeries, Social Prescribers. We had to do more networking and CAN events, and their support has helped in recruiting volunteers. In the coming year we are planning:

- A one-to-one buddy programme scheduled for July 2025
- Regular scheduled posts for our closed Facebook group
- Launching a separate carers group in September
- A monthly Walk Talk session
- A Resilience Recovery Programme with our volunteer team

Contact with Access Wellbeing

We met with the Access Wellbeing Manager in Poole in June 2024 so that she could let the Wellbeing co-ordinators know about the Peer Support Network and refer anyone in need of this provision. We also plan to meet with the manager of the Access Wellbeing hub in Boscombe. We have attended the networking events. All of these contacts have been very positive and helpful in making introductions and disseminating information about our project.



"We're now actively supporting clients to access the eating difficulties peer support group, and the early response has been very positive. It's an excellent example of specialist support being made more accessible through partnership working."

Access Wellbeing

Impact

67
9

beneficiaries

Nine face to face and 58 on closed facebook group)

report improved physical and mental health and wellbeing, a healthier diet, an increase in personal aspirations and goals and a reduction of stress, anxiety, symptoms of depression

Story of change

A MEMBER who has been engaged with the group for nearly six months is looking to become a lived experience volunteer and she is already working with us to create more interactions and support within the Facebook group.

She says: "When I first discovered Dorset ED peer support Network, I joined with the intention of becoming a volunteer. I was informed that I needed to be a service user for six months before I could take on that role. Initially, I was hesitant, but as I engaged with the group I realised how invaluable it was.

"Dorset EDPSN provided a safe and creative space for support during times when assistance from the NHS Eating Disorder service was unavailable or I had been discharged.

"Six months prior to contacting them, I was at the beginning of my true recovery journey. I sought help but had been discharged from the NHS service. I was reluctant to become a patient again by asking for help and felt I didn't require intensive treatment at that point. I wish Dorset EDPSN had been available then; it would have been an invaluable resource for me

"I sincerely hope that the service can expand, allowing for continued buddying support, more groups, and carer support. Currently, there's a significant lack of support outside of hospital settings, and services like Dorset EDPSN are vital for reducing life-threatening relapses."

"There's nothing like this around. I have been looking for something like this for years. Until now, the only option was private unaffordable therapy but now this group allows me the space to be amongst others who have similar lived experiences to me, and this has helped me to feel supported, motivated and hopeful for my future."

"I feel like I am able to get out of anxious moods around eating quicker."



A Dorset Community Foundation visit to PramaLife



THE FUNDING sustained our network of 12 carers support groups across BCP (including two new groups), and Oakley Friends for carers of people with dementia.

Induction involves ten sessions about the key issues for new carers, e.g. organising powers of attorney, welfare benefits and continence.

The aim is to help carers prepare for their future caring roles and the potential impact on their mental wellbeing. Speakers are invited and we also cover access to other support services including respite. We signpost and support carers to use a variety of existing support services in the communities where they live.

We also explore with them whether there is the possibility of

Impact

305

beneficiaries

305

305 report improved social networks, reduction of stress, anxiety or symptoms of depression and improved mental health and wellbeing

166

increased self-esteem, confidence and resilience or self-care

80

report better access to services or support

"The grant has enabled PramaLife to focus on carers mental wellbeing, which is a significant need, enhancing the lives of many carers and preventing demand on the health and social care system. Funding has enabled us to take a realistic approach to developing our services, building on our strengths and enabling us to respond to what we are learning from carers."

additional support from family/friends. We provide time for peer support, something which is considered to be essential by the carers for their mental well-being.

One of the groups (Stress Busters in Ferndown) is led by the carers themselves - we would like to develop similar groups because it empowers the carers.

We have been developing with Help&Care a six-week course focusing on mental wellbeing, covering the following topics: managing stress and fatigue, mindfulness, dealing with setbacks and communication. We will ensure that at least annually at each support groups mental wellbeing is the topic for discussion; probably more due to demand. We are responding to feedback from carers and encouraging joint problem solving.

For example, carers have told us about the stress of managing relationships with family/friends. In response we have delivered a new session for wider family members about dementia awareness so that the entire family can understand.

Challenges and future plans

We aim to develop at least one more carers support group in 2025/26, ideally Boscombe or Trickett's Cross

We want to recruit more current/ex carers to lead the groups or become volunteers supporting other carers on a one-to-one basis. This process is already happening with carers coming forward on their own but we recognise that we must do more to facilitate this by providing more training.

A lot of focus has been on carers of people with dementia or adult children with learning disabilities/mental health needs. We are now working with more carers of people with strokes.

Carers have requested more support to manage situations when their family members are violent as a result of their dementia.

We are developing better systems to identify carers who are becoming ill



Members Carol, Hazel and Janet

because they have been caring for a long time without support.

We are doing more work with specific communities of people e.g. older women from a variety of BAME communities.

Contact with Access Wellbeing

Approaches at the Poole Hub led to Help & Care providing PramaLife with induction sessions with the Hope Programme for carers, focusing on managing stress.

This is proving to be successful with four sessions delivered to date, with positive feedback and learning. The carers have benefited from identifying how they are already managing their stress and understanding when they need to seek help, such as when they are no longer sleeping well.

The networking meetings have been beneficial, not only because we have been able to signpost to other support providers but also because hearing the perspectives of partner organisations has challenged our thinking. For example, the importance of cultural activities, diet and nutrition for people living with dementia.



"PramaLife remains a trusted and well-recognised part of the local landscape. Our teams regularly introduce clients to their social groups and events."

Access Wellbeing

Story of change

'A' HAS been caring for her daughter, who has Smith Magenis syndrome, since her birth, 46 years ago.

The condition is a developmental disorder which can affect how someone learns and can a person's sleep pattern. A has been the lead carer for the past seven years since the death of her husband. Her grieving was affected by having to focus on her full-time caring role.

A has another non disabled daughter who helps her to access other services use the internet and has supported A with caring for her sister. A little over a year ago A was reaching the point when she couldn't continue caring full time.

A was becoming mentally and physically ill because of a lack of sleep, fatigue and stress. At that point it was decided that A's daughter should move into residential care (with waking night care), this had an immediate impact on A's health and wellbeing, but A still had to rebuild her mental well-being and resilience in a variety of ways.

She has been attending one of PramaLife's carers support groups which involves a joint walk with other carers. The physical exercise has helped A as well as the engagement with the other carers and PramaLife staff.

Whereas before she was quiet and would not venture an opinion, she is now confident to engage in conversation and advise others. A is better connected to other support services, including for parents of disabled adult children as well social groups. A has a wider social network now because of the confidence the PramaLife group enabled her to develop.

She says: "I feel 100% better now, previously I didn't have the energy, but I now focus on myself, I have a better perspective on my own life and the future. I see my daughter's disability and life in a different way, I have learnt from her and my caring role. Feeling better about myself makes me realise how grateful I am for my daughter."

A's daughter nows stay at her home once a week. Even though this can still be a challenge, A welcomes the visits, knowing that she is more resilient and has a support network behind her.

"You know you are going somewhere where you can be with others in a sociable environment. away from caring. You can either sit and relax or 'offload.' Just telling your story can lift the burden to some extent. It might be the only two hours away from home."

"This carer group is the only real help that I receive and could not carry on without them."

"At a time when I was totally lost. incapable of doing much else besides the caring and overwhelmed by the enormity of my situation. Prama guided me – as if taking me by the hand and led me through."



Sexual Trauma and Recovery Services (STARS Dorset)



WE HAVE been running Psychoeducation Groups with male survivors, and female Empowerment and Wellbeing Sessions with our female clients.

All are on the waiting list for counselling here at STARS.

Of the female individuals seen since January, two have decided that they no longer need to remain with STARS or access counselling.

They needed to feel validated and these Wellbeing sessions have allowed them to realise they are not alone feeling like they do. They were able to 'move on' and recognised that they can have a life going forward.

Of the male individuals, one also decided that he no longer needed counselling. The others have now completed all their counselling sessions with positive results - they do not want to come back into STARS.

Again, validation and belief has been key in this work. One male client commented that he would not have been able to access counselling had he not attended the group first. The group helped him to feel grounded, heard, validated and able to feel prepared for accessing the counselling a few weeks after completing the group programme.

Peer networks developed between the clients that attended. For example, five female clients wanted to continue to meet for walks in nature to maintain social contact. Clients report feeling better connected and more confident of accessing further support or new services.

Challenges and future plans

We experienced some organisational challenges last summer with sudden long-term absences of four frontline staff, leaving the project with our CEO's leadership & oversight.



A Dorset Community Foundation visit to STARS

Impact

20 beneficiaries

19 report mental health and wellbeing, a reduction of stress, anxiety or symptoms of depression, improved social networks and better access to services or support

"We have found our contacts at Dorset Community Foundation to be supportive and helpful throughout the process. The main positive is the benefit to the those in the local community who need help and support as well as the local NHS / CMHT services who are already stretched and overrun."

In respect of the project itself, there have been a number of challenges that we had not anticipated in Year one.

The group facilitator originally appointed had a change in personal circumstances and pulled out before the delivery of the first programme in Summer 24. These were postponed and recruitment for an additional facilitator began in Autumn 24.

For the Autumn programme of groups planned, there was little engagement with those invited to attend; with one group having 100 per cent non attendance and others only with one or two attendees.

Those who did attend found the support to be hugely beneficial, demonstrating the value of the work and group sessions for those who are able to overcome the barriers experienced.

One barrier that we had not anticipated was travel to our centre in Poole, lack of parking on site as well as not being close to the train station. We have identified community spaces and are exploring these as alternative venues for the Summer 2025 groups.

Following a review of these challenges faced in the autumn and the lack of engagement, we conducted a survey in March with clients who had initially expressed interest in attending groups and the results have helped us to adapt the offer to meet the clients' needs.

The most significant feedback was that over 50 per cent of those completing the survey requested a Saturday morning which we have put into place. Another significant barrier was the word "group" and perceptions of having to share your story or trauma sat in a circle.

We reflected on the choice of language and to overcome this we have instead used words like 'course', 'programmes' or 'Wellbeing sessions'. We also sent out a survey to around 150 individuals on our counselling waiting list.

Story of change

"I CAN OVERCOME what I'm going through mentally and emotionally and I don't have to do it alone.

"Having a safe space to process and talk about things has unequivocally changed me for the better. I am like a new woman. I have learnt to take care of myself and to be kind to myself. I have let go of the self-hatred and abusing my body. I am now able to go out on my own regardless of how I feel about it.

"I am now more confident at speaking up and standing up for myself, setting and enforcing boundaries and going places on my own.

"The facilitator would never judge, I could speak openly and honestly. She is empathic, supportive and encouraging. I have thrived so much because of her and the group.

"Thank you for providing such a vital service and self and life evolving experience. I am forever changed and grateful."



"This card doesn't cover my appreciation of the support I am getting from STARS. I am now raising funds for STARS and I hope it will go some way to help others like me. Thank you so much."

The feedback has been very positive and only two didn't want any interventions whilst waiting for counselling.

An important reflection has been the specialist area of support we work in. Victims of abuse are some of the most vulnerable individuals with a range of complex needs to be met.

The trauma experienced by our clients leaves a huge impact and so we have recognised the need to ensure any barrier to engagement is identified and overcome.

Contact with Access Wellbeing

Our Engagement Team regularly attend the Access Wellbeing Hubs and link in with the wellbeing co-ordinators to arrange regular drop-in dates for the team to be present at the Poole & Weymouth Hubs. This has been really positive for the Hub teams, STARS Teams and those individuals seeking support at the Hubs.

We have been invited to the Bridport Hub opening in June.

The networking events held with other grant holders have been extremely helpful and very positive to hear how others are using their grants.

The input at each event from the different presenters has been very insightful and the networking opportunities have enabled us to develop new connections and start forming new partnerships.

“STARS has played a key role at the Poole Hub, running weekly drop-in sessions that gave clients a safe and informal way to connect with their service.”

Access Wellbeing

“The experience of attending a group before having counselling was invaluable. It made my counselling experience more positive. It also meant I was able to work with a male counsellor.”



Plants & Minds (previously SWOP Cherry Tree Nursery)



An event at Plants & Minds' Cherry Tree Nursery



OUR FIRST steps were to get acquainted with as many like-minded charities and organisations in the area to establish connections for collaborative working.

We attended several Mental Health Awareness events and set up meetings with as many organisations as possible including Access Wellbeing, BH1 Project, BCHA, BCHA Learn, Healthbus, Help and Care, Seetec and Healthwatch Dorset, to talk about our project and discuss how we can work together.

We hosted a See How We Grow event at Cherry Tree Nursery to showcase how we support our service users.

We shared our history, our aims and objectives, and gave a tour of the site. Participants took part in propagating, potting and weeding/top dressing the plants. Finally, we set up a monthly Growing Communities networking event to bring together like-minded people, and encourage cross referrals. These events have been well attended and a great resource for referring service users

into and out of Cherry Tree, but has also enabled us to help potential referrals who are not suitable for our project to access different opportunities.

Our current monitoring structure for our volunteers is an initial four week review and then annual reviews so this is why some of the figures may seem a little low.

Next year's figures should give a clearer picture as most will then fall into the 12 month category. Also, many of our volunteers come to us feeling anxious, withdrawn and, to them, it is like the first day of senior school - everyone looks like they know what they are doing, they all seem to know each other and they all fit in. To a new volunteer, this can be incredibly overwhelming.

All our new volunteers adjust at different rates. As a result of the grant we have been able to link in with other adult mental health organisations and charities. This not only means that clients who are being referred to us are being given long term support (which enables them to stay out of mainstream NHS



services) but also gives them additional opportunities to help them grow in confidence and bring structure and meaning to their lives.

We support volunteers who are seeking learning opportunities outside of our project by helping them with applications and taking them to visit other organisations that they can join.

Some of our clients are now studying formal qualifications within the organisations that we have linked up with, and some are hoping to apply for part time paid work.

Challenges and future plans

Since starting the project and connecting with other organisations, we have accepted more volunteers into Plants and Minds than anticipated. This has made us rethink our plan to offer six week placements to employees from local businesses in favour of the more vulnerable adults that are being referred to us.

Contact with Access Wellbeing

One of the first people we met was Maja at the Access Wellbeing Hub in Poole and we remain in contact and refer our service users to them for support, especially with Citizens Advice type queries.

We also visited the Boscombe Hub for its official opening and several of their advisors attended our Growing Communities networking events.



“We’ve built strong connections with both Cherry Tree and Chestnut Nursery. Our teams have attended their events, and mutual handovers are now common. As one Wellbeing Coordinator described: ‘You can see people come back to life there.’”

Access Wellbeing

“We’ve found it very useful attending the Access Wellbeing Networking Events. These have been very informative, the topics varied and really useful for meeting other grant recipients. The sharing of experiences, difficulties and successes is a most valuable resource.”

Impact

32 beneficiaries

report improved mental health or wellbeing and improved social networks, feel an increased sense of belonging in their community and less lonely, and are now volunteering regularly

17
16 report increased self-esteem and confidence

15 report a reduction of stress, anxiety /symptoms of depression

14 feel better able to maintain healthy relationships

12 report increased interpersonal (social, communication and relationship) skills

11 report improved social networks

9 report increased resilience or self-care

7 report an increase in personal aspirations and goals

6 report better access to services or support

5 taking up work or volunteer placement/experience opportunities

Stories of change

"I KNOW I am not good with words but I wanted to write to you about how much I value Cherry Tree and the people around me here. You have built a fantastic community and I am really grateful to be a part of it.

"To me, this is a second home that I can feel more comfortable in. I am extremely grateful to have a place where I can have a release. After years of isolating myself, this was a big change but I am glad I took the chance. You have shown me more care and support than I am used to.

"Everyone is so kind and it has impacted me greatly. You have helped me and made me feel wanted and cared for. I appreciate everything you have done since being here."

"MY EARLY years were difficult. At seven years old I was a sensitive child growing up on a difficult council estate with my mum and her violent, cross addicted partner, I was often hungry and scared. At 14 I left home. At 17 I had my first breakdown.

"I met my wife 13 years ago. For the first three years we had a great time together, but as before, old behaviours surfaced and I began to feel that things were not going well in my head, I was struggling with intrusive thoughts, I had become possessive, controlling, paranoid, I started to suffer psychosis and I was flipping from angry to sad throughout the day.

"Ten years ago I had my last breakdown, and eventually a diagnosis of Psychosis and EUPD (Emotionally unstable personality disorder).

"For the next six years we worked at limiting my triggers and building confidence and resilience.

"I have always worked until the last breakdown, when all of my confidence evaporated.

"There are still periods of days when I am hurting so much that I can't face anyone. It may be, that I never work again, but the point is, I want to if I can. I miss people, structure and purpose. Unfortunately, because of my circumstances, there are not many places that would consider employing me, that's why I was so happy to have been offered a placement at Cherry Tree Nursery.

"Cherry Tree is a space where people can volunteer to work with the plants to receive the many therapeutic benefits that encompasses. It is the perfect place to build confidence and resilience, further to that it provides an opportunity to work a job in a controlled and safe environment, where my challenges are known and accepted, and the people are understanding and empathetic.

"When attending the nursery, you are only expected to do your best and the people who attend go for the same kinds of reasons, so people support each other, it's a place where you can talk about mental health without judgment or ridicule, people understand because they have had similar experiences.

"Cherry Tree Nursery is a special place, it has helped me immensely over the year that I have attended, my confidence is higher and I'm doing better, generally."





The Harmony Centre

THE GRANT funded drop-in weekly programmes offering a broad range of activities to support of our beneficiaries, including a Monday arts and crafts group including painting, printing, sewing, collage, pottery and much more, a Pilates easy movement group, a mens, walking group, an Allotment Group, drop-in Wednesdays for coffee and chat and Wellbeing Fridays, which feature sessions like meditation, photography, and creative writing.

The grant has improved access to supportive and engaging activities which provide enjoyable, therapeutic opportunities that help reduce feelings of isolation, build confidence, and foster a sense of belonging.

The Centre provides early help and encourages social connection and peer support, which are vital for mental health and community resilience. Many visitors developed new skills and friendships through the activities, which contribute to personal growth and emotional wellbeing.

The grant has not only enhanced individual lives but contributed to a healthier, more connected, and supportive community.

Challenges and future plans

One of the challenges we faced was the time and effort required to develop and embed our new evaluation and monitoring processes across the organisation.



A Dorset Community Foundation visit to Harmony

We used the outcomes specified in the programme as the foundation for creating a comprehensive new system but engaging visitors in providing feedback proved to be somewhat difficult. Feedback could fluctuate depending on their circumstances, which made it more complex to gather stable and representative data.

To address these challenges, we focused on building trust and making feedback processes as accessible and supportive as possible.

Contact with Access Wellbeing

We have been in contact with Access Wellbeing and its associated services such as hubs, drop-ins and wellbeing coordinators.

The Harmony Centre will officially start delivering the West Dorset Access Wellbeing from April 2025; we have been working closely with other teams to understand the aims and scope of the programme.

We look forward to providing an additional layer of support that will complement and enhance the current services available to our community.



"The Access Wellbeing drop-in based within Harmony Centre created an open, shared environment where people move naturally between services. This informal, day-to-day connection means support can be coordinated smoothly, and trust is easily built."

Access Wellbeing

Story of change

A WOMAN IN her 30s made contact with the Community Front Room in a highly anxious state, low in mood with strong suicidal ideation.

She felt a sense of disempowerment, not feeling listened to or understood, and being alone while having to move through big life events. Initially she struggled to speak or share her story.

For the first few visits we created a sense of safety with warmth and empathy and space to talk with no expectations.

In creating an environment where anything and everything could be shared with no judgement, she began to be able to navigate and sit with the myriad of emotions that came flooding to the surface.

With support she came to replace negative coping-mechanisms such as alcohol consumption with sitting and sharing time with people.

With our support she engaged with services which were able to offer therapeutic input specific to her needs.

To create a routine that supported her wellbeing and could support the development of her social network, she attended the Harmony drop-in sessions every Friday.

She was able to carve out time just for her, and foster friendships and creative outlets.

She now works as a volunteer at Harmony Drop In and has supported our events to help people understand what we do.

Impact



“The centre’s increased capacity and improved services have helped raise awareness of mental health issues and promote a culture of collective wellbeing within West Dorset.”



The launch of Harmony’s Access Wellbeing service

Story of change

A MAN IN his mid 20s with some cognitive difficulties started to attend the Community Front Room after losing his mother to cancer.

He had been brought up within a religious community but just prior to his mother's death, decided to leave this faith.

The bereavement was compounded by the sense of isolation at leaving the community that he had grown up within. We helped him to process his grief and find hope for a life beyond grief.

He had highlighted on numerous occasions how difficult he had found it to interact with others, initiate and maintain friendships.

He had lived through a lot of change in

the past few years and in that had lost some of his sense of self.

Through interactions with our Peer Support Workers, he began to find himself and what is meaningful to him as an individual.

He is contemplating volunteering. The change in this mind is palpable, he has a very different approach to people and those around him.

He had the opportunity to explore and enhance some of his creative assets and skills at Harmony.

This confidence and new learning meant that he went on to work with other groups in the community, creating some wonderful pieces of work including a shelf made with the body of a guitar, now in use at his home.

"Today I managed to open up to two people about the dilemma I was having and, historically, I have found it impossible to express my problems to people. I felt I had made great progress and felt better for it."

"Wonderful to be somewhere where I can 'just be' myself – I feel welcome and 'safe'. Thank you."

"The atmosphere is absolutely wonderful... supportive, loving, caring and peaceful... Just exactly how we need it to be."

"I had really enjoyed last week's class and fully intend to come along next week! You all seemed so friendly, welcoming and down to earth that I felt I'd known you all a long time."



The Horse Course



A Dorset Community Foundation visit to The Horse Course



THE GRANT THE GRANT funded our ReStart programme: a five day intensive one-to-one equine-assisted non-clinical intervention to build psycho-social resilience skills, with world leading evidence of outcomes.

Other work funded was Lighter Touch, an equine-assisted taster and top up session, supported volunteerin, tapered longer term support in groups, based around growing vegetables from seed to table and taking care of the site, the horses and the hens.

It also supported non-verbals toolbox training: a workshop to support psycho-social skills for service users, also delivered as an online CPD option for professionals. Adults for whom all else had failed, were able to learn core psycho-social skills which then lead to improvements in relationships, learning, training and work; reduced problem behavioiurs and renewed hope and self-belief.

"After attending a Wellbeing Coordinator taster session at The Horse Course, staff were able to speak more confidently with clients about the impact of equine-assisted therapy. The relationship between the Access Wellbeing team and The Horse Course is one we're proud to support and eager to grow."

Access Wellbeing

The knock on effect ripples through their families and the wider community as "service users" shift to citizens.

All our ReStart participants reported an increase in Calmness at the end of the course, this indicates an improvement in self-calming and therefore managing anxiety.

Referring professionals re-assessing ReStart participants two months later reported: 84 per cent improvements in calmness, 81 per cent improvement in relationships, 79 per cent improvement in engagement with education/training or work,

Challenges and future plans

We faced a funding crisis which escalated into a cashflow crisis. We took prompt action to restructure the charity such that our Weymouth centre will sadly have to close. However, we are supporting a key member of staff to start a new organisation with lighter overheads – offering the service on a smaller scale in future.



Story of change

'SALLY' WAS referred with anxiety and depression; she was struggling with substance misuse, domestic abuse and anorexia. She had poor self-care and her son had been removed due to child protection concerns.

She had been offered support but was struggling to make the changes she needed to and was by this time in emergency housing to escape the abusive relationship.

She engaged well with our ReStart programme and found that with gentle coaching and feedback from our specially trained horses, she was able to use mindfulness techniques.

Over the week the challenges increased and she was able to target the calm feeling of "neutral", with clear rewards from the ponies as they became more and more confident in her as their handler.

Once she had their trust she was able to complete tricky tasks, such as asking a pony to jump over a barrel, or kick a ball into a goal.

She found her sense of fun and grew in assertiveness, focus, perseverance and self-belief.

She joined one of our adult supported volunteering groups and began to build friendships and discovered the feeling of "giving back" increased her confidence.

She worked on her substance misuse and housing issues and she has now secured a home and her son is living with her. She brought her son to visit us – wanting to show him the place where she had started to turn her life around.

Impact

116

beneficiaries

71

report an increase in personal aspirations and goals

68

report a reduction of stress, anxiety and/or symptoms of depression

59

report improved social networks

51

how improved engagement in education/learning

32

now volunteering regularly



"The main positive is the benefit to the those in the local community who need help and support..."

"This carer group is the only real help that I receive and could not carry on without them."

"I became more confident as the weeks went on which made me feel better about myself."

"It's been amazing, without HSW things would be really difficult, mental health would be worse."

"The experience of attending a group before having counselling was invaluable."

Front cover photo: Members enjoying being outdoors at an In Jolly Good Company Step Outside group



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