

Community Wellbeing and Mental Health Fund

Impact Report for one year grants awarded in Spring 2024



Dorset
Community
Foundation



COMMUNITY ACTION
NETWORK

NHS Dorset



Our innovative approach



A Dorset Community Foundation visit to Emerald Ant's Nature Table group

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 introduced groups to the wider Access Wellbeing partners at its networking days but a number of groups contacted Access Wellbeing Hubs and co-ordinators independently to increase awareness of activities available and promote effective signposting.

Networking days provided space for shared learning



CAN organised networking days to allow groups to feed back and share experiences and views

THROUGHOUT THE Community Wellbeing and Mental Health Fund, Community Action Network (CAN) has played a pivotal role in strengthening the capacity and connectivity of the funded groups.

By hosting two Access Wellbeing Networking events, CAN created valuable spaces for peer support, collaboration, and shared learning.

Bringing together successful groups from all rounds of the fund.

These events saw representatives from ten of the 11 round one funded groups, fostering a strong sense of community and mutual encouragement.

The sessions provided a platform for each group to share updates on their work, helping to build visibility and momentum across the network.

They also provided face to face networking

opportunities with staff from Access Wellbeing, promoting partnership working and effective signposting.

Beyond networking, CAN has provided tailored support to help strengthen the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of the funded organisations.

This has included one-to-one guidance from CAN's VCS Development Team, supporting groups to improve their monitoring practices and better demonstrate value for money

Many organisations have also engaged with CAN's training opportunities, exploring key areas such as volunteer recruitment and organisational development.

These sessions have helped build confidence, skills, and capacity within the sector, enabling groups to deliver their work more effectively.

Funding

A total of £85,075.32 was distributed in the spring round of the Community Wellbeing and Mental Health Fund, for one year grants. A total of 11 groups were supported.

These grants have collectively benefitted the lives of 690 local people, including 613 beneficiaries and 77 volunteers.

The cost of the services provided averages £123 per person. This is incredible value for money considering most individuals received weekly support for a minimum of six weeks and a maximum of 12 months, and considering the life changing outcomes the groups have evidenced.

Referrals

Beneficiaries were referred through a number of routes including self referrals or word of mouth, signposted from Access Wellbeing or other community groups, referrals from rehab centres (We Are With You), Social Services, GPs, Midwifery and Health Visitors, Steps 2 Wellbeing, Occupational Therapists and Pain Management Service.

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.

Presenting issues

The people that groups supported were struggling with a variety of issues that were already impacting their wellbeing & mental health, with many experiencing an increasingly downhill trajectory at the time of seeking support. Issues ranged from early signs of depression or anxiety disorders, addiction issues, medical diagnoses/conditions that impact mental health, post-natal mental health issues or pressures of being a new parent, unpaid carers experiencing burnout, and the impact of poverty on mental health, isolation and homelessness.

Monitoring impact

Groups monitored the 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 activities and needs of target beneficiaries.

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

Outcome One

Improved mental health and wellbeing

- 455 people report improved MH / wellbeing
- 210 people report reduced stress/anxiety
- 195 people report increased self-esteem & confidence
- 77 people report being better able to maintain healthy relationships
- 53 people report increased skills & knowledge
- 35 people report reduced addiction issues
- 24 people report improved resilience/self care
- 10 people report increased personal aspirations
- 7 people report feeling better prepared for work



Outcome Two

Reduced social isolation

- 249 people report an increased sense of belonging in community
- 224 people report they are feeling less lonely
- 91 people report having better access to services / support
- 89 people report improved social networks
- 4 are now volunteering regularly



Outcome Three

Improved physical health and wellbeing

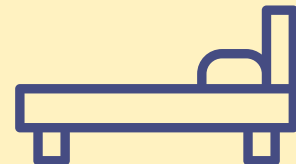
- 140 people report improved physical health / wellbeing
- 115 people report being more physically active
- 21 people report improvements to diet



Outcome Four

Reduced levels of homelessness

- 35 people accessing signposted support services
- 8 people supported to achieve independent living



Outcome Five

Improved aspirations for the future

- 3 report increased practical skills
- 2 have taken up a work/volunteer placement

Conclusion

WE BELIEVE that by supporting people to achieve increased mental health and wellbeing, reduced isolation, improved physical health and wellbeing and reduced levels of homelessness, 690 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.

Axminster and Lyme Cancer Support



THE £5,000 grant contributed to staff costs and running costs for our new premises, enabling us to be open throughout the Week.

Clients are able to attend drop-in sessions every week, support groups, counselling, touch treatment, workshops and physical activities - all available onsite. 21 Clients accessed 1-1 nutrition support with our professional nutritionist. 24 clients came to yoga sessions, four aquatherapy, two horse riding, seven nordic walking, four personal training, two swimming, 14 men's yoga, 31 cold water course.

We referred 102 for counselling (not funded by this grant); typically ten sessions.

The number of cancer diagnosis continues to rise at pace and we work hard to continue to deliver support. The grant has helped us to maintain the premises and ensure staffing is in place.

We have received approx 2500 visits in the last year. Clients attend drop-ins and classes, and enjoy visiting, sometimes to select a library book or simply enjoy a cup of tea.

Local GPs and other charities signpost to us in the knowledge that there is someone available.



A Dorset Community Foundation visit to the group

"We regularly hear clients talking about being with people who 'get it'. They don't need to pretend, or be brave. Often clients come to be with people facing similar challenges and draw strength from that."

Impact

55 beneficiaries

55 have better access to services and support, report they are more physically active and that they feel less lonely

21 report their diet to be more healthy and balanced

"The course gave a welcome boost to my confidence and mental health, and I've swum in the sea each week since it ended."



Challenges

We have increased staff members due to high demand for client support.

Contact with Access Wellbeing

We attended the networking meetings to share information/experiences but currently there is no hub within our local area.

"I found yoga such a great way to get moving during chemotherapy. it was gentle movement and lots of relaxation. A way to release some tension, stresses and anxiety. Thank you"



Story of change

DURING chemotherapy, one client was a regular at drop in sessions and joined a number of workshops including art and nutrition.

Sadly she now has a terminal diagnosis. She lives alone and relies on the support of the charity. She has formed good relationships with staff, volunteers and other clients and visits a number of times each week.

She attends a weekly art group, an acupuncture group, continues to have counselling and 1-to-1 support from a trained volunteer. We have been able to support her to come to terms with her prognoses, helping her both emotionally and physically to live as well as possible, for as long as possible.

"I have taken a lot of small 'top tips' away that have helped me to better manage anxiety and build my confidence. Thank you x"



An Axminster and Lyme Cancer Support event

Emerald Ant CIC



NATURE TABLE delivered 3 x 6 weekly sessions to 32 people aged 20-85, referred by Steps2wellbeing and the NHS Pain Management Service.

A series of planning meetings and taster sessions for staff were held to introduce teams to the type of creative, nature-based activities planned. Sessions led by two artists working with five Experts by Experience (current and past patients), from which we were able to learn and modify some of the activities to ensure accessibility.

The two hour workshops were fun, welcoming and interactive, including learning skills in ceramics, printmaking, writing, painting and drawing.

An important part of the programme was building in space and time for informal chats over tea and cake. This break was particularly important for those experiencing long term pain where there was a tendency to overdue it. The groups encouraged conversation, mutual support and motivation.

Bringing nature into the settings was both a stimulus for artworks but also an encouragement to participants to notice and experience nature around them in their immediate environment at home or work.

For many participants attending and engaging a regular course was a real challenge. Pain, anxiety, mood and everyday circumstances often made it challenging to



Emerald Ant's Nature Table group

commit to any regular activity. Having something positive to look forward to each week helped to motivate people and start to explore what is possible in a supportive environment.

For one 80 year old participant it had been 15 years since getting on a bus. She said: "Even if I have to drag myself out of bed, I will come here!"

Some 95 per cent of participants felt they had increased their confidence by attending.

Participants started a WhatsApp group and they meet regularly to craft and go on outings. Some 95 per cent of participants said they intended to carry on with some of the activities or ideas in their own time.



Impact

32

beneficiaries

32

report increased skills and knowledge

30

report improved mental health and wellbeing, feeling less lonely, a reduction of stress, anxiety and or symptoms of depression

"It had a positive impact on my mental health as I had to concentrate on the tasks and not on my pain."

"This is the first time I have seen my client so happy. I can't tell you what this has done to my own wellbeing."



"It was wonderful for the DCF team to visit us in Poole and see the energy in the room. Often it is hard to describe the positivity and enthusiasm the participants demonstrate without physically being present."

A Dorset Community Foundation visit to Emerald Ant's Nature Table group

Challenges

We have learnt a huge amount about the importance of staff investment and shared ambition. Steps2wellbeing in the north of the county have no physical building so staff had less face to face contact with patients. Referrals tended to be in the final stages of contact with the team, resulting in less support with patient 'checks ins'.

Limited public transport meant that finding a suitable venue could potentially have excluded people.

In contrast, our partners at the Poole based Pain Management Service were referring people who were activity engaged with clinics, the sessions were in the clinic building and we always had a member of staff in attendance. The course had a positive impact on staff wellbeing who were there as support but also to participate and observe their patients.

Contact with Access Wellbeing

We welcomed the opportunity to speak at one of the networking events about the project and meet other recipients. These were whole day events and as a small CIC without core funding we attended on a voluntary basis.

We listed the services as part of our handout to further activities at the end of the course.

"The impact felt has been remarkable. Being able to offer this has complimented what the service already offers but for some individuals it was exactly what they needed to assist with a move towards living life the way that they wish to. For some individuals it was a much better fit for them than some of the more educational, structured, and therapeutic programmes we offer."

Story of change

'SAM' HAD been in constant joint pain for about ten years, she was no longer able to work and felt that socialising was difficult because of her condition.

She recognised that she was isolated and that this was having an increasing detrimental effect on her mental health and wellbeing. sessions and joined a number of workshops including art and nutrition.

She was instrumental in setting up the What's App group. After the course finished, the group regularly gather at various locations to continue crafting projects.

It was wonderful to see her at our second course as an Expert by Experience supporting the group, an illustration of how her confidence has grown. She has talked to new participants about how she now uses creativity to support her own mental health.

She says: "Getting me out of the house and of my own head, making friends and trying new skills, the crafting has quietened my anxious brain and let me put my pain to the back of my head."

Future Roots



WE CARRIED out Potter's Garden activities for groups of young adults who were isolated and found it difficult to be around large groups.

They had all been experiencing ill mental health due to low self-esteem, isolation and difficult personal situations. The group designed their own space in a poly tunnel and around the potters garden area, choosing to plant flowers and vegetables. Being active in the garden involved a wide range of physical tasks such as lifting and moving plants, compost, wheelbarrows, and tools, which encouraged participants to use their bodies in different and sometimes challenging ways.

Over time, fitness noticeably improved. We held had a family day and they were so excited to show family around and let them see what they had done.

There is a core groups of four young people who continue to volunteer. We don't think we could introduce more than one more person to the group because they are all very shy and have such different needs. They love the refreshments and socialising in their way and there is laughter. The grant has made a massive difference to the six attendees. We used the 5 Ways of Wellbeing framework to structure sessions, a well-established approach which works well in an outdoor environment.



Future Roots'
Potter's Garden

Impact

6

beneficiaries

6

report improved mental health and wellbeing, a reduction of stress, anxiety and or symptoms of depression, increased self-esteem and confidence, feel less lonely and are better able to maintain healthy relationships, feel an increased sense of belonging in their community and report improved social networks

4

are now volunteering regularly

3

report increased practical skills

2

have taken up work or volunteer placement or experience opportunities

Participants were able to connect in a warm and welcoming environment with friendly and experienced staff.

They often worked as a team, learning about each other's strengths and weaknesses, which helped them support one another and work more effectively together. Alongside practical skills, participants developed important social skills, learning how to manage stress, communicate needs, and navigate relationships.

One lady in her 20s is now doing an animal care course on another day because she wants to get a qualification. One man had stopped leaving the house since Covid and absolutely loves mixing with the group.

The project has made a difference to the other young people and the Countrymen's Club who use the farm, inclusivity was also a priority in the young people's design of the allotment, ensuring it was accessible for all levels of mobility. Farm users can help themselves to produce.

It has generated interest in gardening because the areas look so nice. Two men in their 60s are going to volunteer to help the young people.

Challenges

One of the challenges was matching the people together as they all had different interests and stages of anxiety, but once gelled, they and made friends and didn't want to move on. The group leader is leaving and this is difficult for the group, but we've a lot of applications to choose from. We have secured £1,000 for seeds and soil and we had some LAG funding to help with increasing the indoor space.

Contact with Access

Wellbeing

We went to the wellbeing events, it was good to share experiences.

"The group fostered a strong sense of mutual support and celebration of each other's successes."



"It is nice to do stuff away from home – it is just for me."

"At the weekend you'll never guess what I did. I cleaned out my stepdad's greenhouse and repotted plants for my mum! Before this I didn't know how to do any of that, now I do! When mum asked, I was like 'Yep, I know how to do that!' I feel quite proud of myself."

I really like spending time with the group, it's very easy and relaxed... there is no social pressure."



"I'm not a person who grows things... well I wasn't until two weeks ago and now I love planting!"



Story of change

'NORA', WHO is 21, was spending most of her time indoors and experienced very low self-esteem.

She has autism with a history of hospitalisation due to poor mental health and described herself as nervous in new environments and around unfamiliar people.

She had no prior experience of gardening and expressed fear of unpredictable social situations as well as specific triggers such as lightning and thunder.

Despite her anxieties, Nora began attending the programme weekly. Initially, she preferred to work alone but with encouragement and gentle support, she built confidence and began working as part of the team.

Nora shared early on she was learning how to cope with challenges and if things go wrong. This mindset shift became foundational to her progress. She found new strategies for managing uncertainty and discomfort, particularly in social settings.

Over time, Nora's social skills and confidence blossomed.

She now works collaboratively with others and actively supports her peers.

She has developed a strong interest in wildlife and insects, and enjoys sharing her knowledge. She also feels more comfortable in everyday situations, such as shopping and asking for help.

She says: "I feel more resilient and have a sense of self, I can now go to the shops and talk to the staff. Before I couldn't, it's given me so much more confidence."

The sessions have enabled her to engage more freely and confidently with new people. She also learned to manage challenging interactions, noting that she's developed strategies for coping with people or behaviour she might find difficult.

Nora's interest in gardening has flourished. She wants to pursue a career in gardening or farming. She is completing the NOCN Future Farmers qualification at Future Roots and is enthusiastic about continuing into further education.

HealthBus Trust



HEALTHBUS TRUST delivered 382 social prescriber appointments, supporting 112 patients experiencing or recovering from homelessness.

Appointments provided tailored non-clinical support to address complex and intersecting needs.

Key activities included accompanying patients to vital medical appointments at hospitals and urgent treatment centres, ensuring continuity of care and reducing barriers to accessing health services.

Practical day-to-day support was provided, such as help with shopping, budgeting, and improving nutrition; foundational areas that contribute significantly to overall health and wellbeing.

Patients were referred to essential services, including accommodation providers, debt advice agencies, mental health and addiction recovery services, and counselling support.

Social prescribing has connected patients with support such as housing advice, addiction recovery programmes, mental health services, and community groups. Patients report feeling more supported, less isolated, better able to manage their health and wellbeing. This holistic approach enabled individuals to engage in pathways towards stability and independence, regaining a sense of control and direction in their lives. Many are engaging in positive activities they may not have previously considered.

Patients often feel more settled and reassured after connecting with our service, which helps to reduce their anxiety and concerns about how they will cope. They experience improved well-being, knowing they have someone to talk to about both clinical and non-clinical concerns. Many of our patients report improved physical health and wellbeing after connecting with our service, thanks to receiving treatment.



"Thank you for your support. we are very grateful. The service has helped reduce the strain on emergency services by addressing root causes (of homelessness) and promoting preventative care."

Impact

112	beneficiaries
90	report improved physical health and wellbeing
40	report improved mental health and wellbeing
30	report a reduction of stress, anxiety and/or symptoms of depression
35	referred to and accessing other advice/support services
8	supported to achieve independent living

Story of change

'BARRY' first connected with our service last summer. Although he was in temporary accommodation and receiving support for his addiction, he required additional help to develop the skills needed for independent living.

Our social prescriber worked closely with Barry to support him in areas such as financial management, where and how to shop, and how to safely prepare meals for himself. Over the past five to six months, Barry's confidence has grown significantly. He has developed an interest in cooking and has begun to take greater responsibility for his health and wellbeing.

This tailored support has not only improved his mental wellbeing but also had a positive impact on his physical health. Barry is now proud of how far he has come and is eager to share his progress by cooking for friends and others in his community, demonstrating both his personal growth and renewed sense of purpose.

Challenges

Supporting individuals towards independent living remains a challenge due to the complex needs of the patients we work with. Those in supported or emergency accommodation, when provided with the right support, are more likely to remain housed. In contrast, those who are rough sleeping continue to face significant barriers.

Accessing advice and support services is generally positive.

However, a key challenge is that many patients struggle to attend appointments consistently due to the leading highly complex and chaotic lives, often shaped by trauma, addiction, and unstable housing situations.

This makes it difficult for them to navigate referral pathways, maintain appointments, follow structured support plans, or consistently engage with services designed to help.

We addressed this by increasing the role of our social prescribers and support workers to provide more personalised, hands-on support and advocacy. This helped improve

Follow-through and engagement with key services.

Access to healthy food remained a consistent issue, especially for those rough sleeping or living in temporary accommodation.

Patients with addictions craved sugary foods, further impacting their health. In response, we strengthened our partnerships with local food providers and charities to offer more consistent food support where possible, while also using social prescribing to raise awareness of better dietary choices.

Contact with Access Wellbeing

We had contact mainly with the Boscombe Wellbeing Hub, which was accessible for our patients, and support available complemented our social prescribing.

We established a positive working relationship with the wellbeing coordinators, who were invited to attend our team meetings.

This helped to strengthen communication, streamline support, and ensure a more joined-up approach to patient care.

Home-Start Blackmore Vale



A Dorset Community Foundation visit to the group



OUR MOTHERS in Mind group supported mums who are struggling in the perinatal period because they are feeling overwhelmed with the demands of being a new parent.

They may be suffering with isolation and loneliness and experiencing anxiety, depression, OCD and trauma from birth or for other reasons.

This funding allowed us to run this group for 48 weeks providing over 100 hours of support to 36 families.

Our peer support volunteers have lived-experience and have facilitated therapeutic conversations at group, whilst also giving the mums time to talk while their children are entertained. Members enjoy taking part in simple craft activities.

Our Group Co-Ordinator and volunteers promote healthy eating and provide freshly made 'healthier' versions of cakes each week such as seeds/ peanut butter/ banana, and talk about the benefits.

All the mums that attended the group have been informed about the other services available to them. We have referred four mums to the 'Rise' course, the local baby massage course, Face Family Advice which is a parent support service and the Home-Start Walking Group.

Every mum has reported improvements in some areas - the most common being improved mental health and mood, improved bond with children and family relationships, and confidence in parenting. Five mums have returned to work and two on new career paths.

We have made contact with the Wellbeing Co-Ordinator's for North Dorset and are liaising with them to visit our group.



"I love sharing similar worries with parents in similar situations, and sharing tips to help us all and even sharing positives and victories!"

Impact

36

beneficiaries

36

report report: improved mental health and wellbeing, reduction of stress, anxiety and or symptoms of depression, feeling less lonely, improved social networks, better access to services, better able to maintain healthy relationships and more physically active

31

report increased confidence and self-esteem

26

report improved physical health and wellbeing

Story of change

AMBER was referred by her midwife when seven months pregnant with her second child. She had suffered with Postnatal depression with her first who was three years old. Although externally was coping well, she had persistent low mood and anxiety. Amber settled quickly into the group sessions. As her confidence grew she started to share more about how she was really feeling as well as growing in confidence by supporting others. She found the change from having one to two children especially challenging.

She said how much she appreciated the group giving her week a structure and enabled her to get through the hard days knowing she had the group to go to and other mums who understood what she was going through. Home-Start referred Amber to Steps to Wellbeing following a tearful Reflection Session, and the subsequent CBT therapy offered enabled her to cope better with the anxiety. Amber was grateful for the groups 'promotion of better mental health, for her and her children.

The group has supported Amber with the transition of her son starting Primary School and her readiness to start back at work. She used the group to prepare for these milestones and stated how she really appreciated the chance to talk things through, helping her to feel less alone in her decisions.

Now back at work part time, Amber still attends the group as she finds it supports her mental health. In a recent Reflection Session of coping scores she went from 1 (not coping well) to 5 (coping well, the highest score) on 'confident to talk openly about your mental health'.

She said: "The group is helping me to stabilise and maintain my mental health, instead of the peaks and troughs previously."

"The group has been really supportive and makes me feel less stressed and alone which makes me feel better able to parent."

"The other parents are my safe parents and it is a space I can be open and honest about my experiences and challenges. Knowing it is a safe and non-judgmental space where people have similar experiences thoughts and feelings."

Mudeford Wood Community Trust



“The wellbeing coffee morning was a dream achieved. Previously I have done this work with another charity and missed helping people.”

TWELVE TWO-HOUR sessions of wellbeing coffee mornings are held monthly.

We have a ten-minute catch up with refreshments, followed by reflection on self-esteem and the things that might affect it. We discuss issues raised by the group and introduce coping mechanisms. We offer arts and crafts related to self-esteem such as memory boxes, collage, creative writing, gratitude journal, decorating cushions. Vision board and walls of achievement help us let go of things we can't control.

All attendees demonstrated a change at the end of the session. Some attended two or three sessions, some just one.

For the ones who attended more sessions, we saw them become happier.

One lady got the confidence to restart her meditation group that she had stopped during covid, and became less isolated and more confident.

Another lady started to focus on what was causing her stress and anxiety and introduced changes to her daily routine to avoid getting stressed, deciding to prioritise her hearing over a new mobile phone. A gentleman who suffers from dementia became more open minded to living 'one day at a time' and to alternative therapies and that helped him with the anxiety he experiences. One reported a complete change in her self-esteem and confidence, by introducing small changes in the way she sees and experiences situations in life.



Mudeford Wood Community Centre

Impact

12
4
4
4

beneficiaries

report increased self-esteem and confidence

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

report an increased sense of belonging in their community and feeling safer in their community

Challenges

The number of people attending the sessions was small – five to seven per session. I've sent emails to health professionals of all the surgeries in the area. Posted leaflets and advertised in all the local shops and surgeries.

We sent emails to schools, advertised on our website and Facebook page.

“I came to these sessions feeling so low and useless and I ended feeling so much stronger and my self-esteem has hugely improved. I feel self-reliant and I can love myself again regardless of others around me.”

Story of change

AT HER first session one lady reported that she was not optimistic about the future was not feeling confident or good about herself, and also not thinking clearly or able to deal with problems.

She has mobility and hearing problems which prevent her from moving to places and knock down her confidence.

She had tears rolling down her face when we were doing a wall of achievement and said: "I am not proud about many things."

She attended five sessions and all of these aspects showed improvement. She reported feeling more relaxed and more able to think clearly. By the last session she felt more optimistic about the future and said her self-esteem and anxiety had changed for the better.

Coming to the sessions made her realise that all have problems and difficulties, but the beauty is for us to accept what we are and love ourselves the same way. At the last session she agreed she is a person of worth and has good qualities.

Pavilion Dance South West



"The mid-project visit by DCF Grants Manager was positive, reflective and reassuring. Participating in the Access Wellbeing networks has made the project feel part of a bigger intention to evidence how third sector organisations can contribute and make real change for individuals and the wider health sector."



WE DEVELOPED two weekly wellbeing classes at Pavilion Dance, initially for people living with/at risk of developing a mental health condition, then widening to carers.

This included taster sessions with a PramaLife Carer support group, Central Bournemouth PCNs 'Living Mindfully' group of ten adults with experience of long term illness and mental health conditions, Wessex Cancer Trust and OTs from BCP Adult Learning & Disability Service.

We delivered 35 Mindful Breath, Mindful Movement classes with 139 attendances; using the rhythm of breath to help release tension from body and mind, bringing a sense of ease and focus to the present moment.

We delivered 33 Moving to Music classes with 126 attendances; combining uplifting music with easy to follow steps and guided creative tasks to lift moods and alight joy. We remain committed to offering the class on a pay-what-you-can basis, so the class can continue to be accessible.

In our written feedback, reoccurring words used to describe the difference the classes make include: relaxing, calm, peaceful, de-stressed, enjoyable, fun and uplifting.

The longer term impact of delivering these classes hasn't just been the effect it has had on the participants attending, but also the evidence it has shown that movement is a valued tool to support mental health and wellbeing. This has had a ripple effect on developing further activity. As part of National Carers Week, in June we are working in partnership with Forward Carers and Leonardo Carer Support to host a morning of social refreshments, information sharing and Moving to Music experiences.



The BCP Carers Support community have also been signposted to the wellbeing classes. Central Bournemouth PCN have contacted us to explore a wellbeing movement class for their group with lived experience of cancer.

We successfully received a 2 year grant to deliver two weekly wellbeing movement classes for older adults in two of Bournemouth and Poole's most deprived areas and hosted in Turlin Moore and Bourne community centres.

Challenges

It has been a challenge to maintain consistent numbers and grow the classes, even with significant time placed into reaching out through group visits, tasters and connections into local organisations.

Class ticket income was expected to support the project but was not full met, so Pavilion Dance contributed core funds (13% gap). Reflecting on this, we will continue to be aspirational in our delivery, but more realistic about participation numbers.

Contact with Access Wellbeing

We visited Access Wellbeing Hub in Poole Dolphin Centre during its opening weeks. We have attended the majority of the Access Wellbeing Networking events.

We had a visit and positive exchange with Karina Green, Strategic Access Wellbeing Lead, to discuss our programme. We are visiting the Bournemouth Hub soon.



Impact

97

beneficiaries

89

report improved mental health and wellbeing

81

report increased self-esteem and confidence

73

report an increased sense of belonging in their community

73

reported feeling less lonely



Story of change

JENNY HAS been a carer for 79 years, earlier in life to her parent/sisters and most recently to her partner, who she still cares for.

When Jenny first came through the door, it was on recommendation from her doctor. At her first class, Jenny admitted she wasn't in a good place. On arrival her mood score was at its lowest point of one and ended on its highest point of seven with a verbal boost to the team. She said: "To whoever has organised this, it was worth it just for me."

She attended 31 classes and continues to come. According to her mood score data, her mood has improved every single session. After class Jenny would often reflect deeply about her experience through written and verbal feedback.

"After a stressful week, felt the sick feeling stop. Experienced the help and benefit of letting the weight of body & care be held by core and FEET. Wonderful, felt more balanced."

"Permission to take one hour for myself. On the start of class I gave my mind permission to do the exercises. A battle of the mind – result – TEARS was the result – another onion layer removed as I accepted the need to breath."

"Lovely helpful class learning how to glide my movements and relax and not over support my body. Classes are fun."

"A tremendously helpful class. Discovering taut tension held between shoulder blades. Great progress."

"I felt anxious before class and a little overwhelmed with my workload. After class I felt calmer and that I can achieve more now."

"Very tired at start of class. but thankful to be here. Benefitted from the opportunity to SWITCH off & slow down & therefore relax."

"Felt a bit low and stressed before I came and feel very uplifted and happy. Great fun and exercise."

Poole Waste Not Want Not



OUR CORE weekly activity, Wellbeing Wednesday, has become a vital part of many people's routines. Starting with a friendly, accessible walking group, we set achievable physical activity goals that help build confidence, support mental health, and improve fitness.

After the walk, a healthy lunch is provided, offering a shared space for socialising, connection, and learning. Our nutrition-focused, volunteer led cooking workshops that introduced affordable, plant-based alternatives to processed meals.

These sessions focused on practical tips like batch cooking, shopping smartly, and using fresh vegetables and fish.

Families were supported to spend time together on inclusive outings to the Oceanarium and Brownsea Island, giving people the opportunity to bond, relax, and enjoy new experiences regardless of background or income.

With a focus on connection, health, and learning, we've built a safe and welcoming space for individuals and families of all ages from 5 to 91, to share experiences, improve their lifestyles, and rediscover their value and purpose. All participants felt they were part of something meaningful and reported improved well-being, connection, and confidence. Some 95 per cent tried new foods, and all reported feeling better and more connected.

A Wellness Wednesday walk



Impact

166 beneficiaries

166 report improved mental health and wellbeing

166 report an increased sense of belonging in their community

80 a reduction of stress, anxiety and or symptoms of depression

"The impact of this grant has been truly transformative, not only for our members, but for the heart of our community as a whole. From cooking workshops and wellbeing walks to health checks and day trips, each activity has sparked real, meaningful change. Thank you."



MANY volunteers expressed feeling a renewed sense of purpose and connection, with volunteering helping to reduce loneliness and improve mental wellbeing. Our four young men with learning disabilities especially thrived, gaining confidence, learning new skills, and feeling fully included. One volunteer, out of work for over a decade, is now a valued staff member.

We saw powerful personal growth stories emerge. One retired woman, feeling lost after retirement, found purpose through our wellness chats and is now an active volunteer supporting people with learning disabilities.

A 21-year-old man referred to us by the Jobcentre, shared he felt 'worthless' before joining our group. Through volunteering and engaging with our activities, he's regained confidence and now sees a path forward.

A woman with type 2 diabetes reduced her symptoms and stabilised her condition thanks to the advice from our team.

A strong sense of belonging has been a key outcome of our work. This was clearly reflected in consistent weekly attendance, where our group built friendships, and continued meeting outside the group for walks and social time. The simple act of being listened to, sharing stories, and feeling welcome has made a powerful impact. It gave many participants a reason to get up in the morning, and helped reduce isolation and low mood.



A Wellness Wednesday walk



Food prep at Wellness Wednesday

Challenges

Originally, we planned to run arts and crafts sessions. However, as our group continued to meet, we heard consistent feedback that the food-based workshops were more enjoyable, inclusive, and engaging. We adapted by reallocating some of the funds intended for art materials to additional cooking equipment.

Contact with Access Wellbeing

Following a visit with Poole Wellbeing Hub, we formed a mutual signposting relationship. As a result, we have successfully signposted three vulnerable individuals to the Wellbeing Hub.

These members now receive support for their other complex needs - support that was previously inaccessible or unknown to them.

This has had a positive impact on their wellbeing, helping them feel more secure, connected, and empowered.

In addition, we developed a strong working relationship with the NHS staff based at Beales and partnered with LiveWell Dorset to offer 32 free health checks, eight of which flagged high blood pressure, which prompted changes in diet and lifestyle.

This collaboration has been so valuable that LiveWell Dorset is now planning a pilot drop-in session at our shop, making health advice more accessible.

Story of change

"I FELT SO isolated, and most days, alcohol was all I had to get me through. Then I came across PWNWN, they offered me a sandwich, a hot meal, and invited me to join the wellbeing group.

"At first, I didn't want to go, but after a few weeks of gentle encouragement, I gave it a try – and my god what a difference it has made. I still have a small drink at the weekend, but now, thanks to the cooking skills I've learned and the friendships I've made, I feel human again.

"I have energy, purpose and I don't feel alone anymore. The shop has given me 'me' back. Bless you all."

"MARIA' IS 60 and lives with her 86-year-old mother. Before discovering our Wellness Wednesday sessions, she described her life as isolated and emotionally draining. Struggling with anxiety and low self-worth, she rarely left the house.

Her GP had advised counselling and social engagement, but Maria found it hard to take that first step. One Wednesday, while walking to the shops with her mother, she noticed the activity at Poole Waste Not Want Not.

Curiosity got the better of her, and she bravely walked through the door. What happened next changed her life. She said: "Wednesday was my first challenge. I was greeted with kindness and warmth, and a feeling of 'it's okay not to be okay'.

"They helped my physical and mental wellbeing and showed me that it doesn't have to cost much to eat healthy. They are my rock."

Maria and her mother now attend every week. They've taken part in our cooking workshops, shared meals, joined our group walks, enjoyed a day out to the oceanarium, and even contributed to supporting others. She smiles more, shares stories, and recently helped another newcomer feel welcome – just as she once was.

"Thanks to the grant, Maria's life has shifted from isolation to connection, and from anxiety to empowerment.



Wellness Wednesday activities at Poole Waste Not Want Not

The Absolute Music Trust



OUR FUNDED activities were weekly music making ensemble sessions, at our studios and in the community, in partnership with We Are With You.

Two full days in our professional recording studio, recording four original compositions with the group. Participants all attended regularly, with drug testing prior to each session to ensure they continue to remain sober.

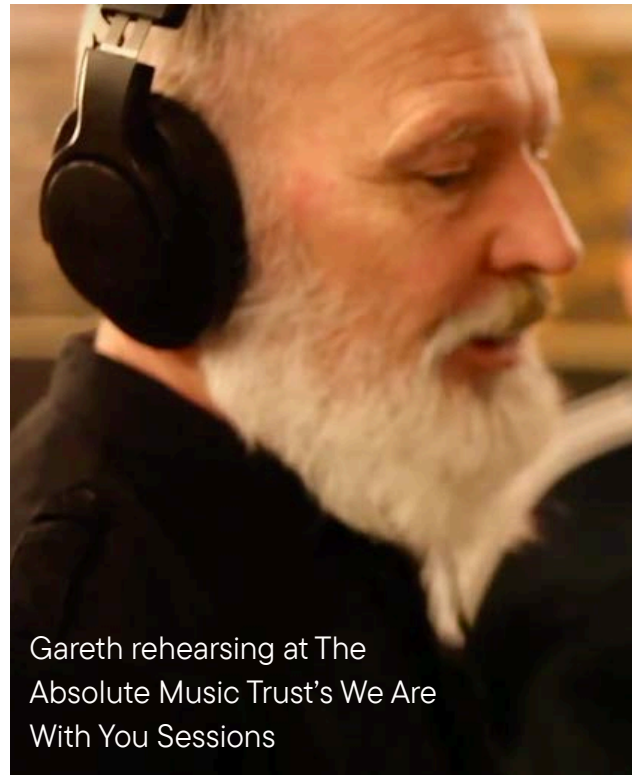
Participants have realised new skills or passions with two people purchasing instruments and others reporting they didn't realise they can sing.

We hosted two performances where participants were able to invite friends, family and the wider community to watch them perform the music they have made.

By fostering a supportive and non-judgmental environment, participants have been empowered to rebuild their self-esteem and develop a sense of purpose. We actively encouraged positive belief systems and have improved participants' emotional and social wellbeing. Shared experiences and collective growth contributed to a cohesive, empathetic group where individuals supported one another.

Members demonstrated increased accountability and motivation, often drawing strength from one another's stories and progress.

“We have felt well supported throughout the process and have appreciated the continued interest in our small charity. The group evolved into a cohesive and resilient community, where participants feel a genuine sense of belonging, which is critical in sustaining recovery and reducing the risk of relapse..”



Gareth rehearsing at The Absolute Music Trust's We Are With You Sessions

Impact

35

beneficiaries

35

report reduced substance misuse and addictions ands feeling better able to maintain healthy relationships

26

report improved mental health and wellbeing and increased self-esteem and confidence

21

report an increase skills and knowledge

10

report an increase in personal aspirations and goals

7

report feeling better prepared for work

Challenges

Establishing the group initially presented challenges due to the chaotic and often unpredictable circumstances of the individuals involved. Many participants were facing instability in various aspects of their lives, which impacted attendance and group cohesion.

A more flexible and inclusive approach was needed and so we made the decision to merge the early intervention group with the recovery group.

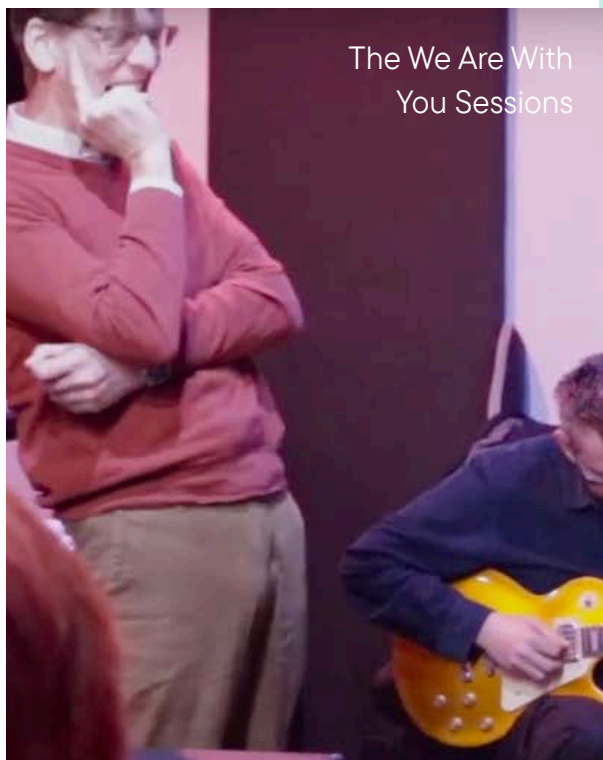
This allowed individuals at different stages of their journey, whether just beginning to confront their substance use or already working through recovery, to come together in a shared space.

The diverse mix of experiences and perspectives enriched group discussions.

A strong, supportive group dynamic emerged, characterized by high levels of commitment, trust, and participation.

Contact with Access Wellbeing

We met with a Co-ordinator from the Bournemouth wellbeing hub and also attended the Dorchester networking event.



Story of change

"THERE'S A different feeling amongst other people that are recovering than there is anywhere outside that support community.

"Music has a way of bringing everybody together whatever their differences and it's easy to work with each other. They've given me the confidence to make music a part of my life. I've just taken the first step. Now I'm, going to take another one and just keep moving forward with it.

"It gives you such a great feeling, being a part of making something musically. It helps with my mental health quite dramatically I think, because it is difficult dealing with your emotions and putting it all on paper and sharing with others is very therapeutic.

"I have shared some stuff with the family, I was very surprised at the positivity that came back to me.

"I felt proud, and I haven't felt that way for a long long time. You feel like you're part of the human race, part of the people around you. When you become sober, you don't really know how to share, it's incredibly difficult to talk about.

"Putting it on paper and then voicing it, it's a release of the emotions you feel inside. It develops relationships with families it re-builds bridges. It gets you used to not bottling up your feelings. You become more expressive, more sociable and a lot more honest."

Gareth features in a video where he tells his story [here](#).

Wild and Free Therapy



"I didn't realise how little time I took for myself until I did the carers programme, where in the gentlest, kindest and safest space I had the time and encouragement to reflect and begin a journey to better self care."



Parent carers took part in sea swimming surfing and beach activities with Wild and Free Therapy

OUR ACTIVITIES featured three group programmes, each with eight participants – all unpaid carers of children with SEND, disabilities or health conditions.

Each programme ran six weeks with two-hour sessions, consisting of beach yoga or mindful movement, sea swimming, surfing, paddle boarding, beach-based fitness, SUP Yoga, hula-hooping on the beach and social time.

We had four drop-in sessions with four to six people learning to surf and taking part in beach yoga, sea dipping and social time.

Participants on our six-week programme demonstrated and reported that the impact on their overall wellbeing was vast.

They were surprised at how much of a positive impact the programmes had on them, and expressed such gratitude

and relief that they felt brave enough to take the step to sign up and turn up to the sessions.

The 24 participants joined our past participants in a network of dozens of parent carers who have their own active community.

They arrange activities together with no more involvement from us and have the confidence and connections to set up meetings, activities, and social time.

Each participant expressed how they feel more equipped and able to face the difficulties of their caring role.

They said they had learned coping strategies and self-regulation techniques and built a stronger resilience and self-worth. Not to mention the newly formed connection they have now as a group, making them feel more socially connected with increased wellbeing.



Challenges

We found that the drop-in sessions were difficult to predict and manage and the numbers of attendees were low. Engagement was poor, and therefore after agreement from the grant-givers, we diverted some of this funding towards running a third six-week programme instead of running the full course of drop in sessions as per the bid.

Contact with Access Wellbeing

We spoke to the co-ordinators at Access Wellbeing who were very interested in our sessions.



Impact

39
39
24

beneficiaries

report improved mental health and wellbeing

report increased self-esteem and confidence, resilience and/or self-care, a reduction of stress, anxiety and/or symptoms of depression, feeling less lonely, improved social networks, that they are more active and improved physical health

Story of change

"SINCE HAVING my son with complex needs, I've often felt isolated.

Parenting a unique child means care always comes first, and that leaves little space for community, fun, or restoration.

I'd lost my spark and didn't know how, or if, I could get it back. I couldn't always make every session, but I knew the group would understand. It was a space where I didn't need to explain myself. The other mums just got it.

Living in a state of hyper-vigilance due to ongoing uncertainties made simple things feel like climbing mountains. Knowing I'd be met with compassion, not questions, made all the difference.

The sea sessions themselves felt transformative—supportive, cleansing, and restorative in ways I didn't expect.

That first dip helped lift years of stress. I loved it so much I took up paddleboarding, something I never thought I'd have time or confidence for. It's now a cherished hobby, offering stillness, joy, and a renewed connection with friends and nature. It's even become something I share with my children and their friends.

Out on the water, we get a break from our challenges. It restores us and reminds us of life's adventure.

That spirit has helped me rebuild confidence, resilience, and most importantly—recover my spark.

Even when I couldn't attend, the WhatsApp group gave me a sense of belonging. Just seeing others show up gave me hope that I could too."

"The impact of this program has continued well beyond the weekly sessions. I now swim two to three times a week and have even started a regular meditation practice. These changes have been so meaningful that I've recently been able to come off anti-depressant medication"

"I was at a low point when we started the course but being outdoors by the water has brought me back to feeling more like me again. Just being with people who understand what we're going through with our children is just invaluable."

The Rendezvous, Sherborne



WE SUPPORTED young parents aged 18 to 25 in Gillingham and Sherborne providing opportunities to meet and build networks and gain informal support and provide additional 1:1 emotional wellbeing support and advice and guidance.

One ex young parent who has set up her own little photography business, came back to group and run a photo session for the young mums and their children.

Young parents have become more confident in themselves and their ability to parent, and making new members of the group feel welcome.

They have grown as individuals and taken their learnings outside the group setting by meeting up socially with and without their children, replicating behaviors and engaging in crafty and gardening activities with their children that they first experienced at group.

The group sessions provide a focus in their week and absences are followed up, which improves self-worth by making those young mums feel valued and missed. They truly look out for each other and their children and through ongoing discussions about healthy relationships they were able to identify a group member in trouble and confident and trusting enough to discuss it with the group lead.

This resulted in a safeguarding referral which was picked up and dealt with by CHADS. For others there has been practical support onto the housing register and practical advice and guidance around money management and benefits, all of which goes to improve their lives and lifestyles and reduces stress and anxiety.



Activities at The Rendezvous, Sherborne

Impact

23

beneficiaries

23

report increased self-esteem and confidence, improved mental health or wellbeing and improved social networks



Challenges

In contrast to Gillingham, the Sherborne attendance started to dwindle. We contacted health visitors and social prescribers to seek more direct referrals but this wasn't hugely successful.

We encouraged young people and others in our network to share the information.

We have now decided the Sherborne group is unsustainable so we are focusing on 1:1 support and practical help and guidance for young parents on an as needed basis. This is a hard decision to make given the group has run for 25 years but we hope it will restart in the future.

"Young parents have made friends and built their own networks of support."

Contact with Access Wellbeing

Two staff members were able to attend the first meeting but given issues with staff capacity/illness and the distance, we were not able to engage more.

Young parents have become more confident in themselves and their ability to parent, and making new members of the group feel welcome.

Photography at The Rendezvous, Sherborne



Story of change

'CHLOE' WAS pregnant when she was first referred to us by her health visitor as an isolated and vulnerable young person. She was anxious and fearful of life and hesitant to leave the house.

Despite our best efforts she did not engage with us until her baby was six weeks old and she recognised she needed our help to be put on the social housing register. Chloe worked with one of our team to sort out her housing situation.

Sarah met her weekly and helped her work her way through setting up and running a small flat which meant learning how to take meter readings, council tax, sort out the bins. She had no carpet, no cooker or beds so by drawing on our network of agencies we were able to help her source free or low-cost items.

We did not do it for but instead modelled behaviors that would encourage her to believe in her own abilities. Our project lead encouraged her to attend the group in Gillingham and to visit Sherborne.

Chloe's baby was nine months old, and she was still seeing Sarah when her father died suddenly. With no siblings or other family member it fell on her to manage the aftermath of his death whilst dealing with her own shock and grief and managing motherhood and her first home.

Sarah continued to provide emotional support for Chloe, walking her through the steps she needed to complete such as death certificates and organising a cremation.

Today Chloe is a different person. She's happy to talk to people, to talk on the phone. Train travel is of no issue to her. She doesn't panic and get flustered and now smiles and is happy, confident and enjoying being a mum.

"The impact of this grant has been truly transformative."

"I have taken a lot of small 'top tips' away that have helped me to better manage anxiety and build my confidence. Thank you x"

"I felt anxious before class and a little overwhelmed with my workload. After class I felt calmer and that I can achieve more now."

"Often clients come to be with people facing similar challenges and draw strength from that."

"A way to release some tension, stresses and anxiety. Thank you."

Front cover photo: A Wellness Wednesday walk organised by Poole Waste Not Want Not



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