Well Together Service

Evaluation Report

Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust

February 2024 [v6.1]

helpforce

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Executive summary

The project

The Well Together Service is a service offering a diverse array of interesting, sociable, health-led community-based activities facilitated by dedicated volunteers across Bradford, Airedale, Wharfedale, and Craven. The service aims to **enhance community health and wellbeing, foster social connections, and empower individuals to lead active and fulfilling lives** across the region.

Evaluation approach

Using its established Insight & Impact evaluation service, Helpforce follows a consistent methodology to determine the impact of services on health and wellbeing outcomes. Gathering feedback from service users, volunteers and staff members, we looked to determine the impact the Well Together service had had for key beneficiaries, as well as any insights into potential service improvements.

Key findings

- The Well Together service resulted in multiple benefits for service users, including **increased confidence in managing their physical and mental wellbeing**, and **improved social wellbeing**. Additionally, service users appear to be satisfied with their experience, with the majority **likely to recommend the groups** to others.
- For volunteers, findings suggest being part of the service has **increased their sense of purpose** as well as feelings of **connectedness to their local community and overall emotional wellbeing**.
- Staff who referred into the service also appear to be **satisfied with their experience**, suggesting it can help to **aid patient recovery** and improve overall emotional and physical wellbeing.

Conclusions & recommendations

The NHS Long Term Plan highlights the need for an increased focus on prevention, supporting individuals to adopt healthy behaviours leading to "*both help people to live longer, healthier lives, and reduce the demand for and delays in treatment and care*".[1] This evaluation highlights the **significant positive impact community wellbeing services can have in supporting individuals to effectively manage their health and wellbeing**. From engaging service users to involving volunteers, every aspect of the Well Together service contributes to its unique position in fostering community wellbeing. It is the ambition of Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust (BDCFT) for the service to **grow its position and referrals across Place**, working with partners to address gaps and increase the offer, ensuring all those that could benefit are able to access the service. The insights provided in this evaluation illustrate the service is a **vital pillar of support within Bradford region**, supporting individuals to live well within the community, and therefore **has the potential to have such a positive impact if scaled and implemented further**.

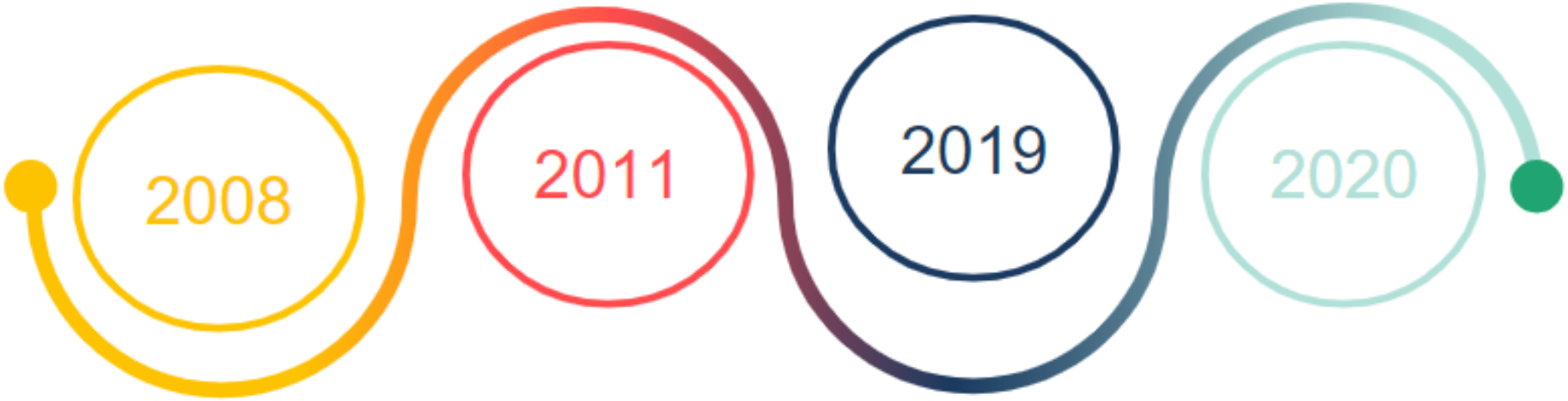
[1] Treating and preventing ill health, NHS Long Term Plan.

Context: Well Together Service

- It is well recognised within the Health and Care sector that supporting people to live well starts in the community. Indeed, the aim of Integrated Care Systems, as legally established in July 2022, was to join up care between the NHS and community support provisions (such as councils and voluntary sector) to achieve the best health outcomes possible for the population.[2]
- Recognised within the NHS Long Term Plan, prevention of illness by supporting individuals to live healthier lives and adopt healthy behaviours is key to not only achieving those positive health outcomes but also in reducing pressures on the NHS.[3] There is emerging evidence that community-based interventions which address physical health and the social determinants of mental health and wellbeing have the potential to improve physical activity and function, resilience, mental health outcomes, and the psychosocial circumstances of individuals and the wider community.[4]
- Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust (hereafter referred to as BDCFT), recognising the potential of community-based services in supporting individuals to live well, created 'Well Together' - a service offering a diverse array of interesting, sociable, health-led activities facilitated by dedicated volunteers across Bradford, Airedale, Wharfedale, and Craven.
- The overall aim of Well Together is to enhance community health and wellbeing, foster social connections, and empower individuals to lead active and fulfilling lives across the region.

[2] 'What are integrated care systems', NHS England.
[3] Treating and preventing ill health, NHS Long Term Plan.
[4] 'Community interventions for improving adult mental health: mapping local policy and practice in England', BMC Public Health, Sept 2021; Moore, M., Warburton, J., O'Halloran, P. D., Shields, N., & Kingsley, M. (2016). Effective CommunityBased Physical Activity Interventions for Older Adults Living in Rural and Regional Areas: A Systematic Review.Journal of aging and physical activity, 24(1), 158–167. https://doi.org/10.1123/japa.2014-0218

History of the Well Together Service



Launch

Part of Altogether Better Community Health Champions programme

Funded by the Big Lottery

Commissioned

NHS Bradford District and Craven CCG agreed to fund the service

Full capacity

Maximum delivery potential reached with existing funding

150 active volunteers leading 70 plus activity groups, supporting over 1711 people a year

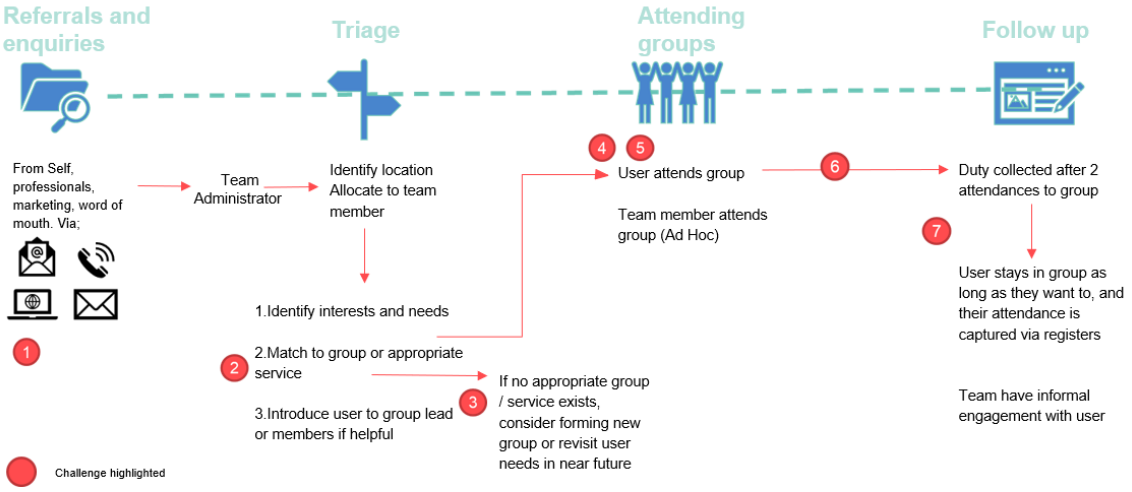
Covid Closure

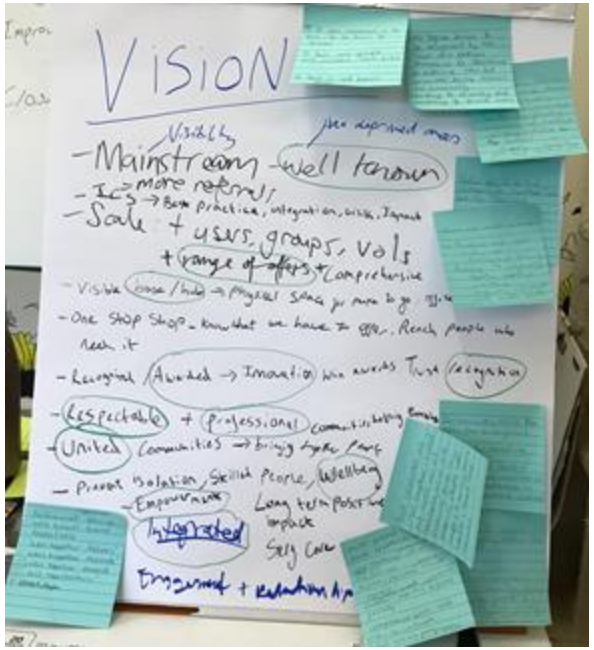
Closed at start of pandemic, reopened in Summer with restrictions on the types of venues and group capacity to reduce risk. Volunteer numbers had reduced, as well as referrals to the service from individuals (self referring) or health & care professionals. Collectively this meant the service was delivering less than half its previous capacity.

Helpforce Supporting Recovery and Growth

In late 2021 Helpforce began supporting Well Together with its recovery and scale plan. We brought the Well Together team together for a workshop in November that aimed to;

- Map the service user and volunteer journeys
- Identify pain points in those journeys
- Agree a shared long-term vision for the service





Action plan

The workshops resulted in an Action Plan for the Well Together Team to take on covering a range of activities that would support service recovery and growth, address pain points and achieve their vision.

Actions included;

- **Simplifying** the referral routes and forms for self and professional referrals
- Analysing the source of referrals and working with partners to **boost referral volumes** from professionals
- Updating presentation material about the service and taking more opportunities to **raise awareness** of it
- Reviewing best practice around **volunteer attraction** and updating the training volunteers receive during onboarding
- Developing a new approach **to measuring impact** that is less resource intensive for team members and provides a sustainable growing evidence base demonstrating how valuable Well Together is.

Evaluation approach: Outcomes

Using its established *Insight & Impact* evaluation service, Helpforce follows a consistent methodology to determine the impact of services on health and wellbeing outcomes. Target outcomes and key insights are identified across a range of beneficiaries representing the people and organisations involved, and then the necessary data is collected to prove and evidence the outcomes and provide insights.

Evaluation of the Well Together service at BDCFT was completed using data captured from service users, volunteers and staff members. We were looking to answer the following questions about the project:

- What impact has the Well Together service had on service users?
- What impact has volunteering had for the volunteers themselves?

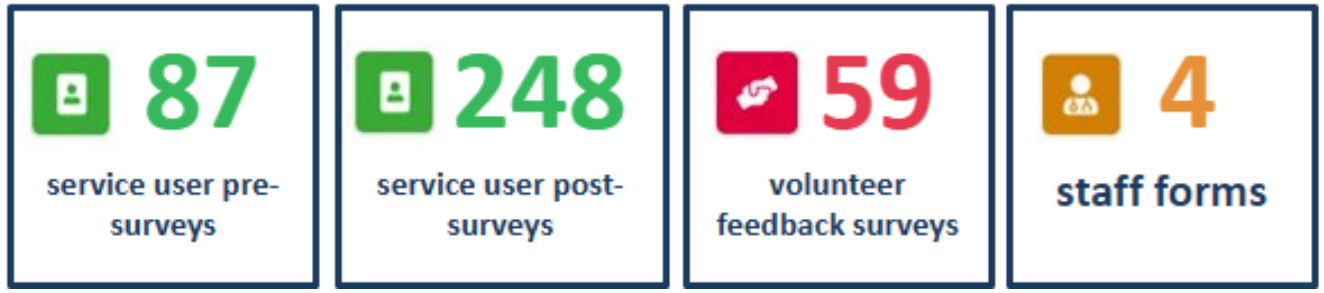
The Well Together service evaluation aims to achieve a multitude of positive **patient/service user, volunteer, and organisational outcomes**, including improved physical and mental wellbeing, and increased connections with local community for both service users and volunteers.

Evaluation approach: Methodology

The evaluation consisted of three different collection methods:

1. **Service user surveys:** Individuals who were referred to the service were asked to complete a survey before (referred to as the 'pre-survey') and after receiving support (referred to as the 'post-survey'), asking questions regarding their service support experience and outcomes achieved.
2. **Volunteer feedback survey:** Individuals who volunteered in the service were also asked about outcomes achieved and their overall volunteering experience.
3. **Staff member forms**: Staff members who frequently refer patients to the service were asked for more in-depth information about their experience with the service.

In the Well Together group's geographical spread across the region, the use of QR codes in data collection has proven highly effective. QR codes are easily distributed for the surveys, simplifying the process and enabling easy completion on people's mobile phones. This is particularly beneficial given that many service users may never have direct interactions with staff members.



Throughout the report data findings are linked back to the data collection method using icons at the top right-hand side of the page. Evidence strength is also rated used icons. These icons are as follows…

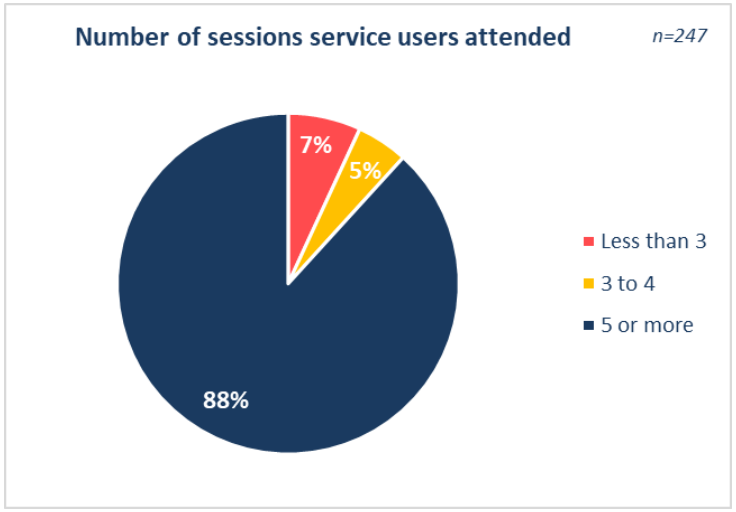
More information related to insight, impact and evidence strength can be found in Appendix C.

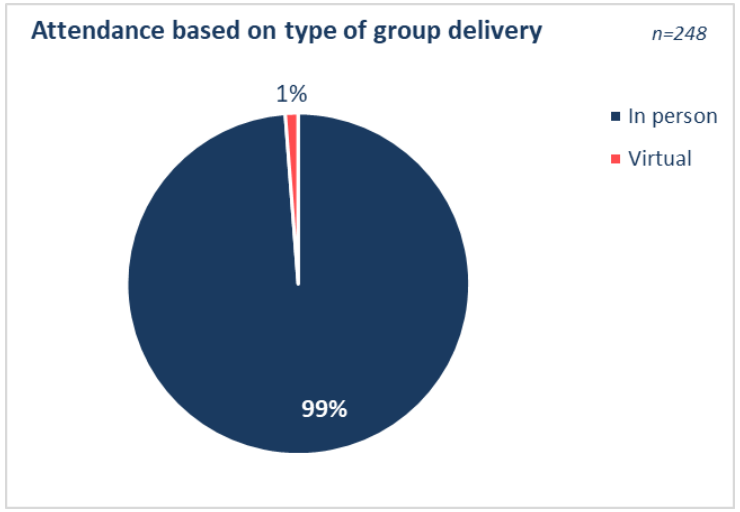
Insight: Group activity

- The groups support adults aged 18 and over, particularly those with long-term health conditions, who are capable of independently joining the groups. To access the service, individuals can self-refer or they can be referred by healthcare professionals.
- Upon referral, individuals are contacted by the Well Together team to identify their interests and match them with suitable activities.
- The community-based activities offered through the Well Together service range from cooking or crafting groups, to physical exercise and walking groups, to peer support groups. Between April 2022 and March 2024, with more than **50 groups offered**, a total of over **23,000 service user interactions** were recorded by **1,316 participants.** These figures not only demonstrate that these activities have become regular parts of people's lives but also highlight the scale of people accessing the service.
- All support is offered free of charge in accessible venues throughout the region, with service users able to join as many groups as they wished. Once joined, the groups have good retention of service users, with **88% of attendees** participating in **five or more sessions** within their respective group/s.
- Groups are offered both in-person and remotely, however, the majority of service users attend groups **in person.**

23,440

service user interactions were recorded by **1,316** participants between April 2022 and March 2024





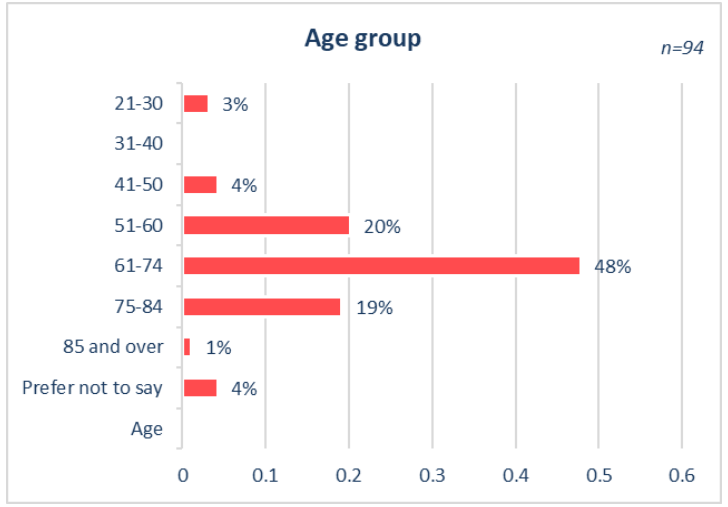
Insight: Service user demographics

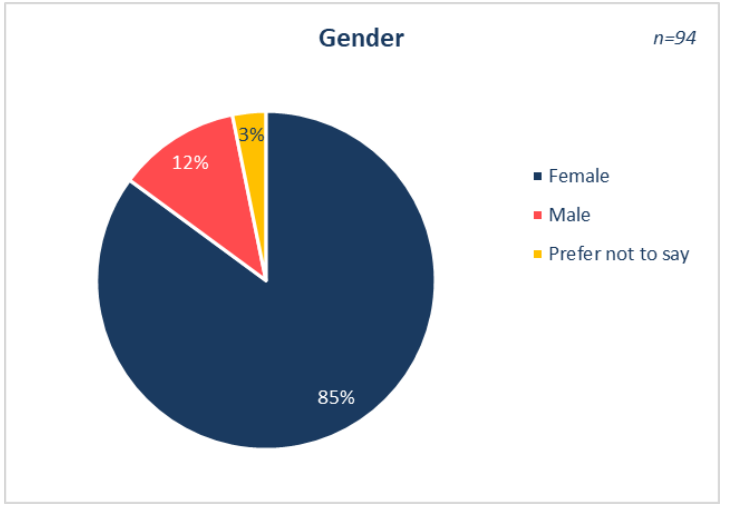
Through the service user surveys, 94 individuals provided their demographic information. Of the respondents:

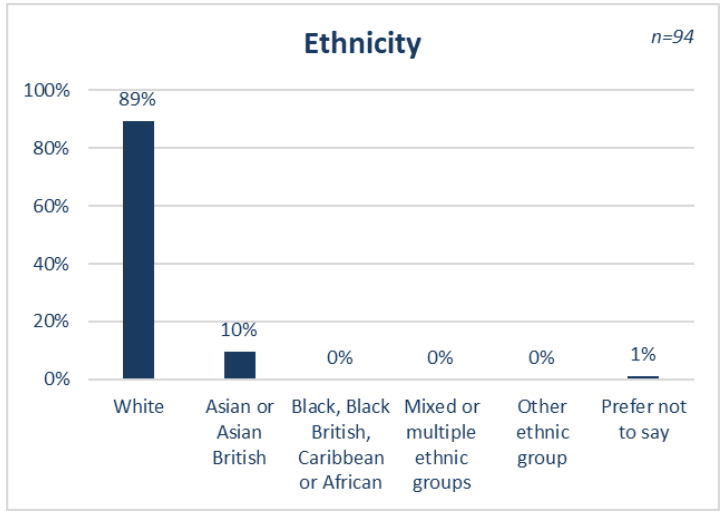
- Almost half (48%) are aged between 61-74 years.
- A significant majority (85%) identify as female.
- Over half (57%) reported having a long-standing illness, disability, or infirmity.
- People from White ethnic background accounted for the largest proportion of service users (89%).

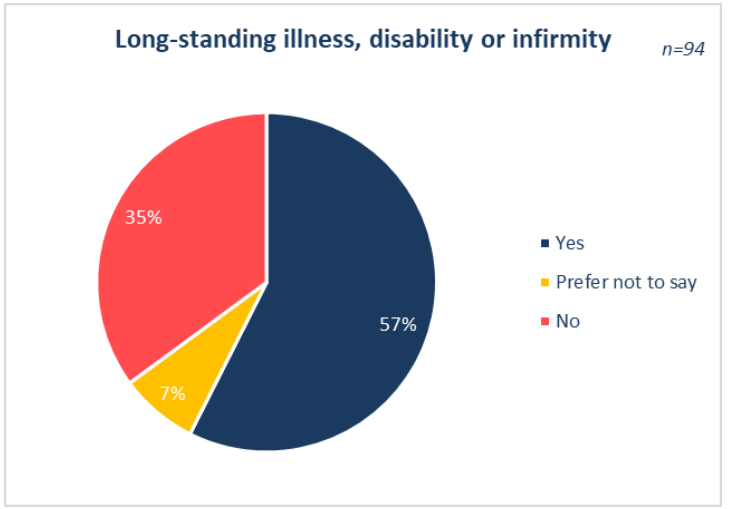
The insights illustrate that whilst the programme has attracted services users from a range of age groups and individuals with various health conditions, there is limited diversity in terms of ethnicity and gender.

However, it is also important to recognise that these figures might not be fully representative of the entire service user group, as they are based on 94 respondents out of a total of 248 who completed the post-survey, and of 1,316 service users overall. This therefore indicates that a substantial proportion of them did not provide demographic information – *this is further explored on the data limitations slide.*

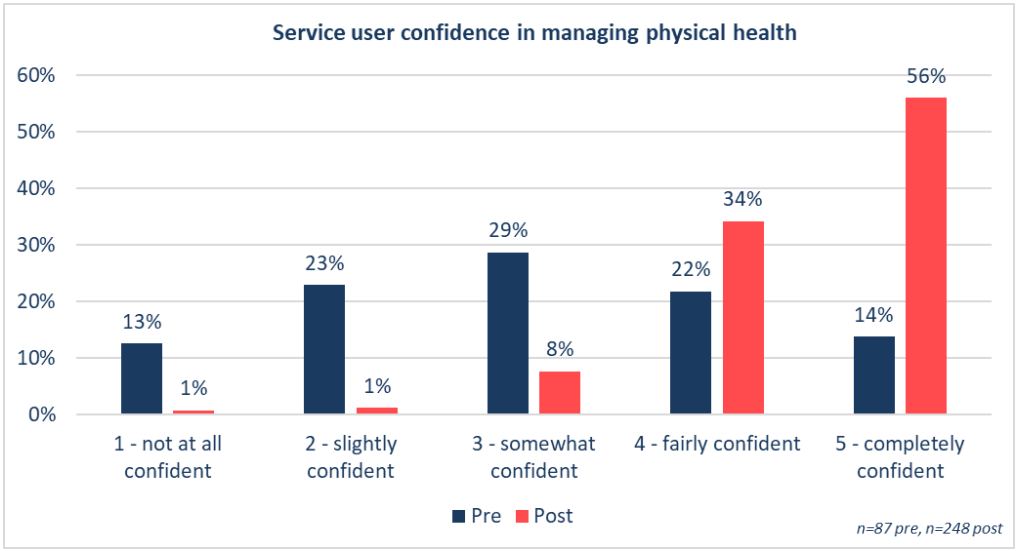


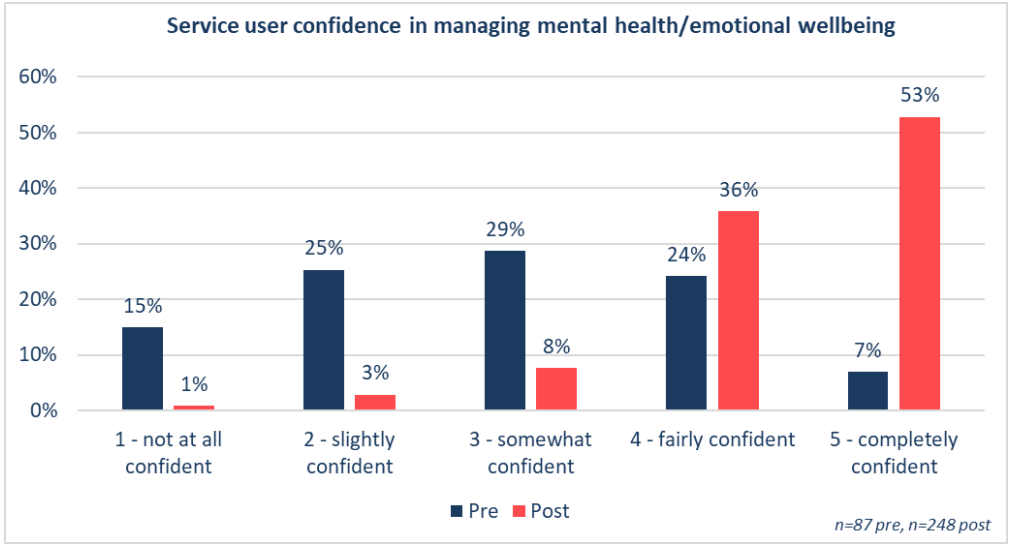






Impact: Service user confidence in managing health





As a result of participating in the Well Together service, a key anticipated outcome was for service users to feel an increased level of confidence in managing their physical and emotional wellbeing. Service users were asked to reflect upon this confidence before joining and after participating in the groups:

- After joining the groups, **90% of service users reported feeling fairly or completely confident in managing their physical health**, an increase of 55% from before joining the group/s.
- Similarly, the proportion of service users feeling **fairly or completely confident in managing their mental health and emotional wellbeing rose to 89% from 31%** before participating in the Well Together group/s.
- The increase in confidence levels for managing both physical and mental wellbeing before and after joining the groups **was found to be statistically significant.**[5]
- In addition, **as service users attended more sessions, their confidence levels in managing both physical and mental wellbeing increased**, as indicated by a **statistically significant correlation**.[6]

These results indicate that participation in the Well Together group/s has a positive impact on service users' confidence in managing their physical and mental wellbeing.

[5] Independent samples t-test analyses indicated a significant difference in confidence levels for managing physical and mental wellbeing before and after joining the programme ($p<.001$). Results of statistical significance testing are only indicative – please see 'Data limitations' slide for reasoning.

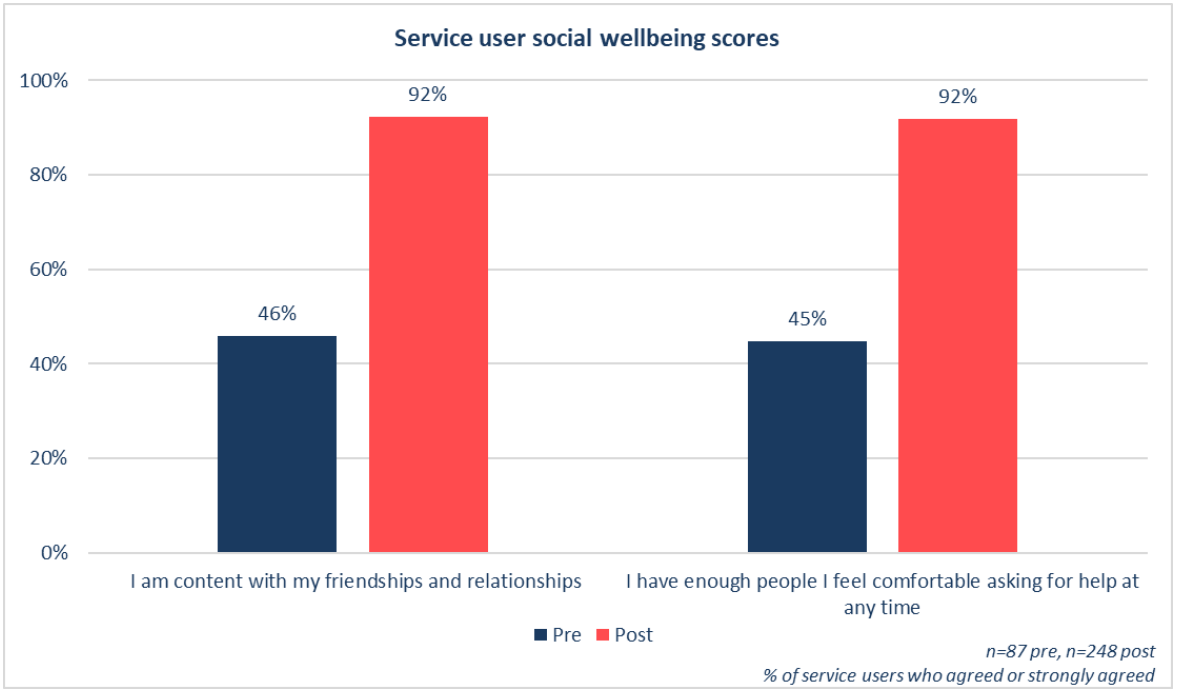
[6] Statistical analysis indicated a significant positive correlation between the number of sessions attended and the confidence levels in physical and mental wellbeing ($p<.001$).Results of statistical significance testing are only indicative – please see 'Data limitations' slide for reasoning.

Impact: Service user social wellbeing

An additional anticipated benefit of participating in the Well Together service was to reduce the risk of social isolation and to increase connectedness with the local community. Service users were therefore asked to reflect upon their relationships and support networks before and after participating in the groups.

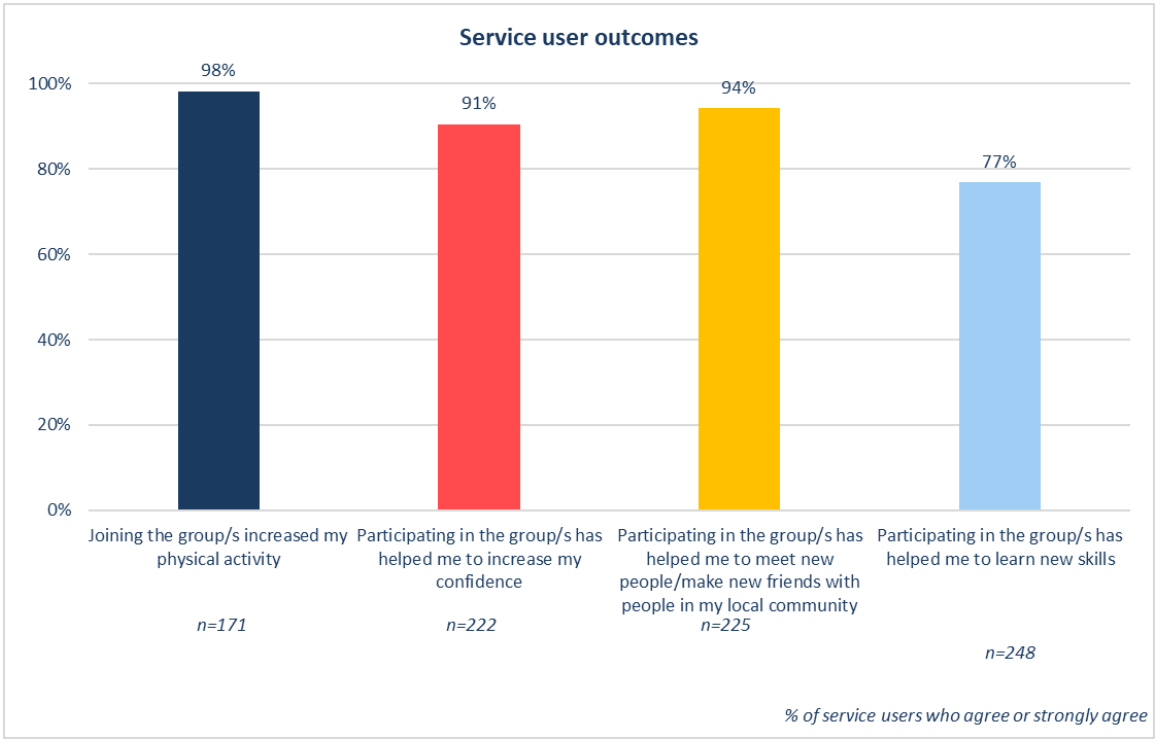
- **92% of respondents agreed they were content with their friendships and relationships after joining the group/s,** a 46% increase from before joining the groups.
- Additionally, **92% of service users stated that they have enough people they feel comfortable asking for help,** a 47% increase from before joining the group/s.
- The increase in service users' social wellbeing scores were found to be **statistically significant.**[7]
- The number of sessions attended was also found to have a significant positive correlation with service users' social wellbeing scores, indicating that **the more sessions they attended, the higher scores they reported for their social wellbeing**.[8]

Whilst several factors can impact upon an individual's feeling of social connectedness, these results do indicate that participating in the Well Together community groups has a positive impact on social wellbeing.



[7] Independent samples t-test analyses indicated a significant difference in the service users' social wellbeing scoresbefore and after joining the programme (p<.001). Results of statistical significance testing are only indicative – please see 'Data limitations' slide for reasoning.
[8] Statistical analysis indicated a significant positive correlation between the number of sessions attended and the higher social wellbeing scores (p<.05). Results of statistical significance testing are only indicative – please see 'Data limitations' slide for reasoning.

Impact: Service user outcomes



Service users who participated in the Well Together group/s were also asked to reflect on the difference joining the groups had made to them.

- An overwhelming majority (98%) of the respondents felt that their **physical activity has increased** as a result of joining the group/s.
- A large proportion (91%) of the service users agreed that participating in the group/s helped them to **build their confidence**.
- Similarly, a high proportion (94%) of respondents reported that joining the group/s has helped them to **meet new people and make friends in their local community**.
- Whilst a lower percentage (77%) agree or strongly agree that they have **learned new skills** compared to other outcomes, this still represents a majority, suggesting that the group provides opportunities for individuals' skill development.

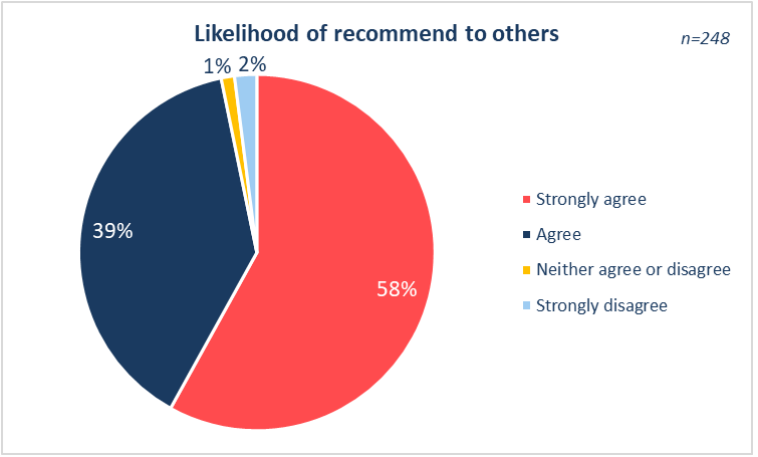
Much of this feedback compliments earlier findings regarding the impact of participating in the groups on physical, emotional and social wellbeing.

[9] The difference in sample sizes for these statements is due to some only being introduced at a later date as part of survey improvements. For more information, please see Appendix A: Data limitations

Impact: Service user experience

Finally, participants were asked to reflect on their overall experience of participating in the Well Together service:

- Overall, **97% of service users agreed or strongly agreed they would recommend the service to others**, with the majority (**58%) strongly agreeing.**



Service users described a wide variety of benefits they had seen from their interactions with Well Together groups…

"Has been really good to help me to get out and socialise with other people. Improved my confidence."

Service user

"Has given me more confidence and helped with my panic attacks and depression."

Service user

"I have found talking to other people with the same health issues as me to be comforting and has given me confidence. It is important to me to be able to join in these sessions. The facilitator is excellent and follows up with relevant information as well as being a friendly presence within the group."

Service user

"It has given me the courage to get out and talk to others in similar situations to me. I have been encouraged to keep active."

Service user

"Such a lovely bunch of people they are and what a great service, life changing!"

Service user

Service user case study

NB: The image is used for illustrative purposes only.

R's Story - Woodland Wanderers walking group

R is a bright bubbly lady who has encountered both physical and mental setbacks over the last 5 years. R was diagnosed with kidney problems and faced long trips to the hospital for dialysis treatment on a regular basis, until she was found a suitable donor and underwent a kidney transplant back in 2013. R's father had also suffered kidney problems and had died prior to her having the transplant – as a result, sadly R was also living with the guilt that most transplant receivers face around the circumstances of who her kidney come from. R had also suffered a loss of a child at full term birth, and this led her to develop severe anxiety and depression for which she was receiving treatment from specialists.

R had been referred to the Cellar Trust in Shipley to provide emotional support, supporting her to develop coping mechanisms and hopefully gain the confidence to return to work. R also attended sessions at Kala Sangam - a coffee and social group - which gave her something to get out of the house for and the chance to be around other people. Whilst she was attending Kala Sangam, she saw the activity and walk leaflets and discovered the Woodland Wanderers group run by Well Together. She decided to contact the walk leaders and made the first step to meet up with the group the following week. R has now been with the group for over a year.

R has now built up both her strength and confidence through attending these walks, seeing them as a support mechanism which she enjoys greatly. She has now returned to her job at Tesco's part-time and is a valued member of staff - enthused about her job and responsibilities, her confidence shows. R also now organises workplace support charity to raise money for kidney disease and other health conditions, being recognised for this in an article placed within the Tesco staff magazine of which she is extremely proud. R will also be attending a three-day conference as a guest speaker, talking about her experiences with the disease and being a transplant receiver.

When discussing her experience of attending Woodland Wanderers, R stated…

"I feel that Woodland Wanderers has helped me to maintain both exercise and my mental health by being around other people and helping me to stimulate a happy mood. Meeting new people has helped with this and has made me feel healthier and happier. I always look forward to attending the walk on Thursdays which is always carefully planned to suit the needs of the group. When I'm walking and I see nice scenery and breathe in the air, I feel peaceful and relaxed. We all get on well together and we have lunch and a catch up at the end. Everyone is friendly and polite and trips away and events are always arranged well through the walk leaders.

I would highly recommend to people who have low self-esteem or confidence to make contact with the Well Together team and especially the Woodland Wanderers group as it will make a difference in their lives. If they are recovering from physical or mental health conditions, their journey to recovery will begin here"

R is now reducing her medication gradually and attributes this to her walking group. She is also looking at ways to cope with her anxieties and learning to appreciate what is around her.

Service user case study

A's Story - Friday Friends

A is an 83-year-old female. Sadly widowed 3 years ago, A has a big family with 4 grandchildren and 23 great grandchildren. Despite her close-knit family, who telephone and visit at different points of the week, she still has periods of being on her own. A continues to adapt to living alone after nearly six decades of being happily married - she explains: *"I can't get used to this being at home alone, I still think he's at the back of me. I like my own company but then I get days where I think 'is this it?'. I have my moments, I can cry 'just like that', so I know I'm still grieving".*

Filling her week with some activities, A found that she wasn't doing anything on a Friday. *"I used to go to Morrisons as I had nowhere else to go, that's where I met B [a Friday Friends group member] and she invited me along".*

A has been attending Friday Friends steadily for 7 months now. The group takes place at a local church hall which held many memories for A – her and her late husband held a dance there for 34 years and were well known in the community. She explained *"I was dreading going at first as I thought it might make me feel sad to be there without him, but now I'm going it's the place I feel most comfortable because I feel he's there watching over me." She* further comments, ***"my children were worried it'd make me upset, but I love it. My kids are proud of me for going and it makes me feel good as I've made them feel happy. I don't think I could stop in every day; I know my husband would want me to go out and enjoy life."***

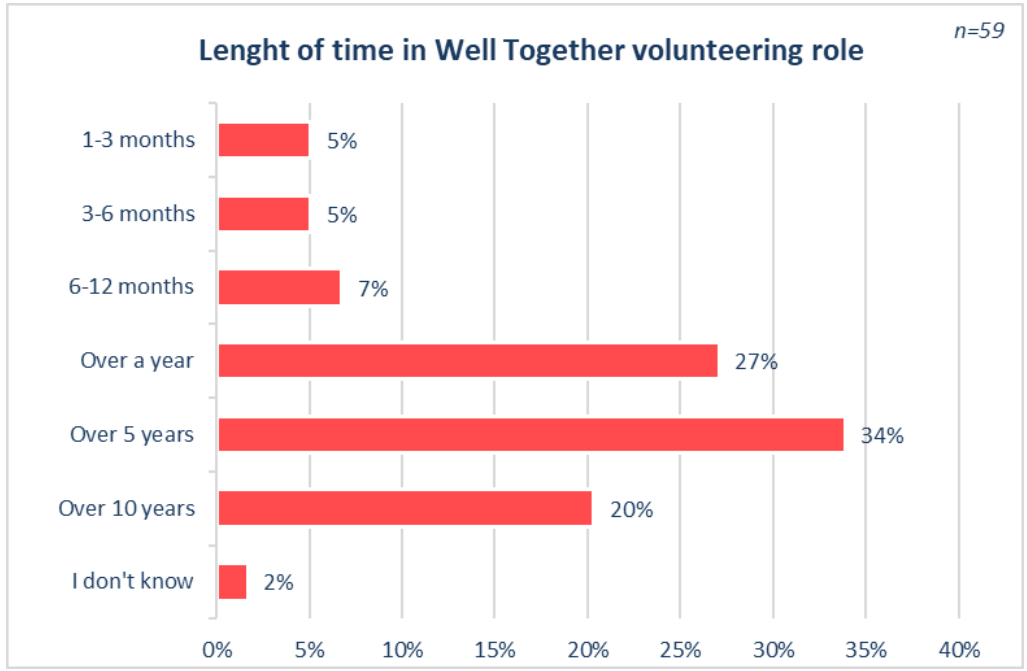
A has arthritis which is self-managed as well as some historical heart challenges. She noted that, as well as benefits to mental health and a renewed link with the community, attending Friday Friends has had some positive outcomes for physical health too: ***"It lifts me a bit, you forget your troubles when you go there. Sitting at home all day doesn't help with your aches and pains. We all help with getting the tables and chairs out, it does me good."***

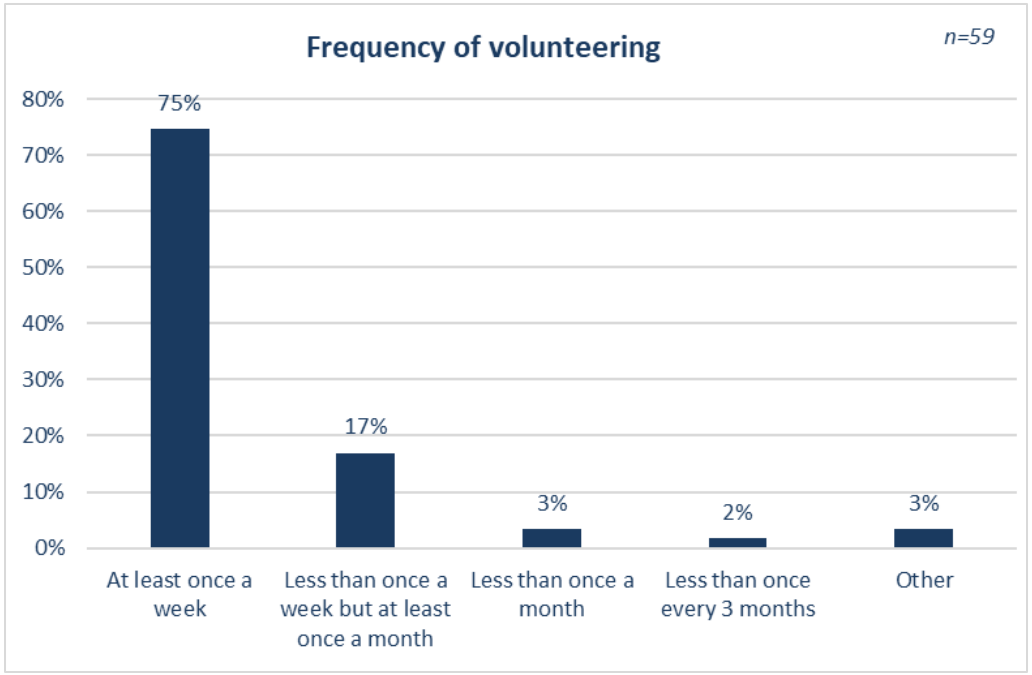
The Volunteer Leader for the group discussed A's contributions to the group, stating "*she is a lovely friendly person and is particularly good at welcoming new people to the group and making them feel comfortable."* A also reflects upon this, discussing how she has befriended one of the group members who has a hearing impairment and dementia and that she enjoys supporting others*: "I love older people. I used to help at the Wellbeing Cafes, going round and talking to people, but I had to stop after I had a heart attack. Going to the group has filled a bit of that gap — a chance to socialise and bring some joy to other people too."*

NB: The image is used for illustrative purposes only.

Insight: Volunteering with Well Together

Well Together volunteers provided insights into their volunteering activity through the feedback surveys.





- Individuals who volunteer with the Well Together service appear to have **been in their roles for a long time.** 54% of respondents have been volunteering for 5 years or more.

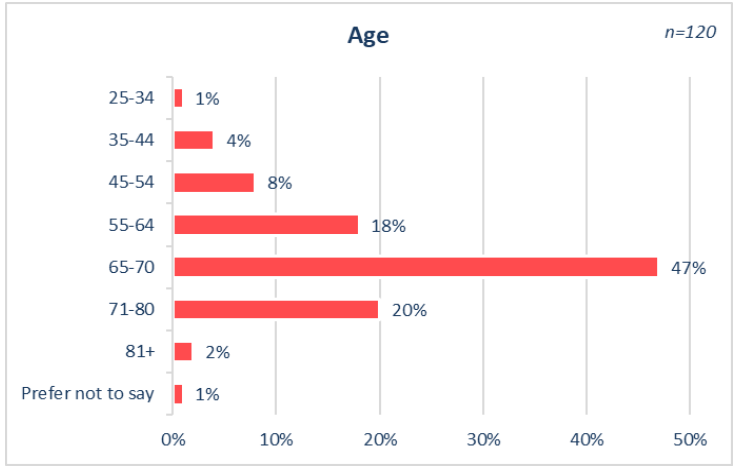
- The majority of respondents (75%) reported **volunteering at least once a week**.
- Additionally, 3% of respondents selected 'other', indicating that they weren't actively volunteering at the time of completing the survey.

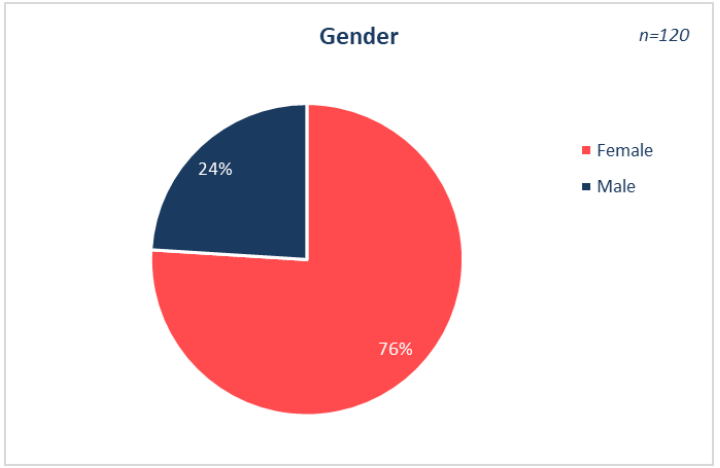
Insight: Volunteer demographics

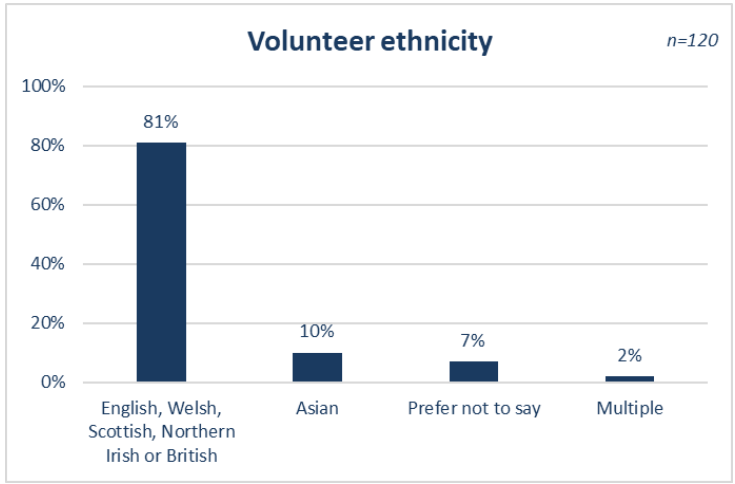
Helpforce was also provided with demographic information of the Well Together volunteers from June 2023, revealing that:

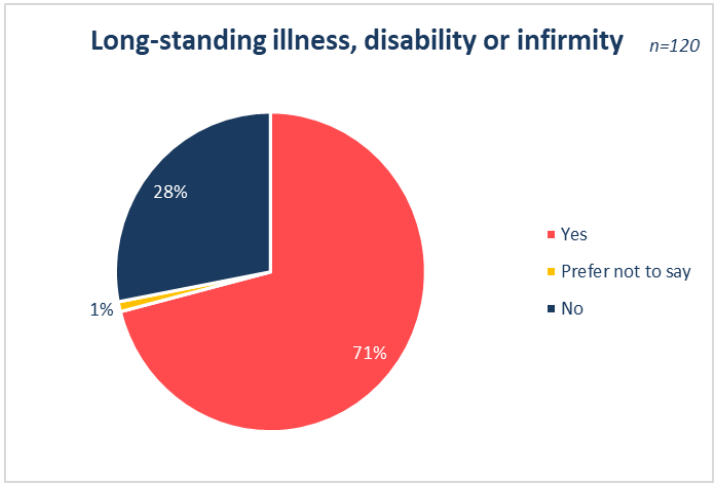
- Almost half of them (47%) were aged between 65-70.
- The majority (76%) identify as female.
- 71% reported having a long-standing illness, disability, or infirmity.
- People from White ethnic backgrounds accounted for the largest proportion of volunteers (81%).

The insights illustrate that whilst volunteering for the programme has attracted individuals with various health conditions and from different age groups, there is limited diversity in terms of ethnicity and gender.

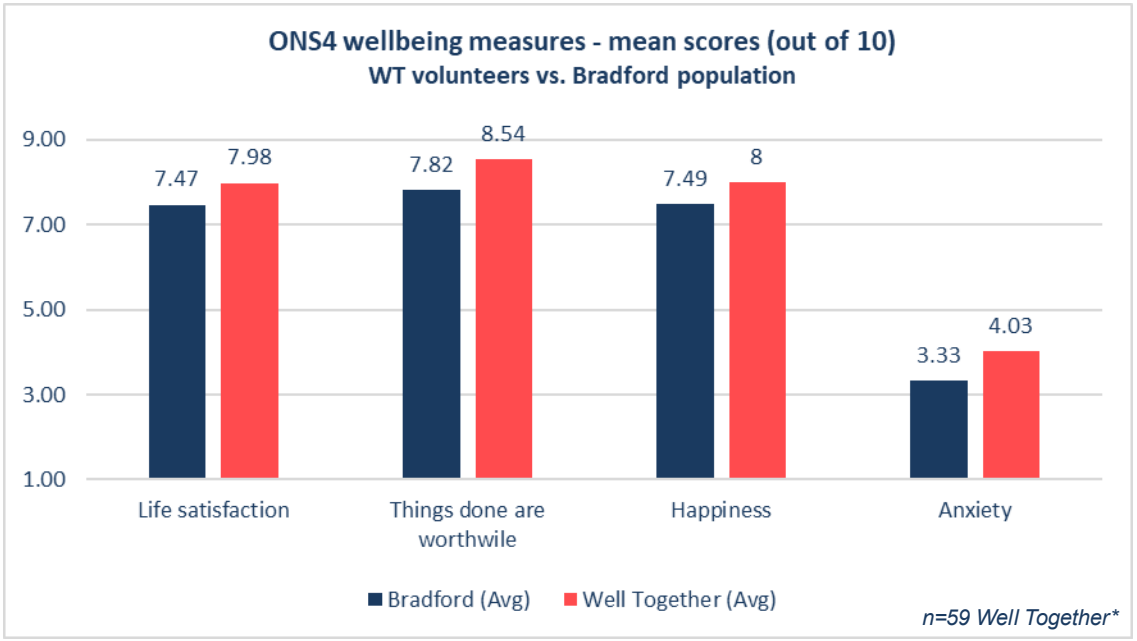








Impact: Volunteer wellbeing



It is hoped that as a result of delivering Well Together Groups, volunteers will enhance their emotional wellbeing. Through the feedback survey, volunteers were asked to rate their emotional wellbeing on a scale of up to 10 across all ONS4 wellbeing measures. When compared with the latest average scores for Bradford:[10]

- Well Together volunteers' scores in **life satisfaction, feelings that the things done in life are worthwhile and happiness** appeared to be **more positive** than the latest averages for Bradford.
- However, volunteers' average **anxiety score was higher than the Bradford average**.
- Whilst it is important to note that several factors can influence individuals' emotional wellbeing, these findings indicate that Well Together volunteers do have a higher sense of life satisfaction, worthwhileness and happiness than the general population within Bradford.

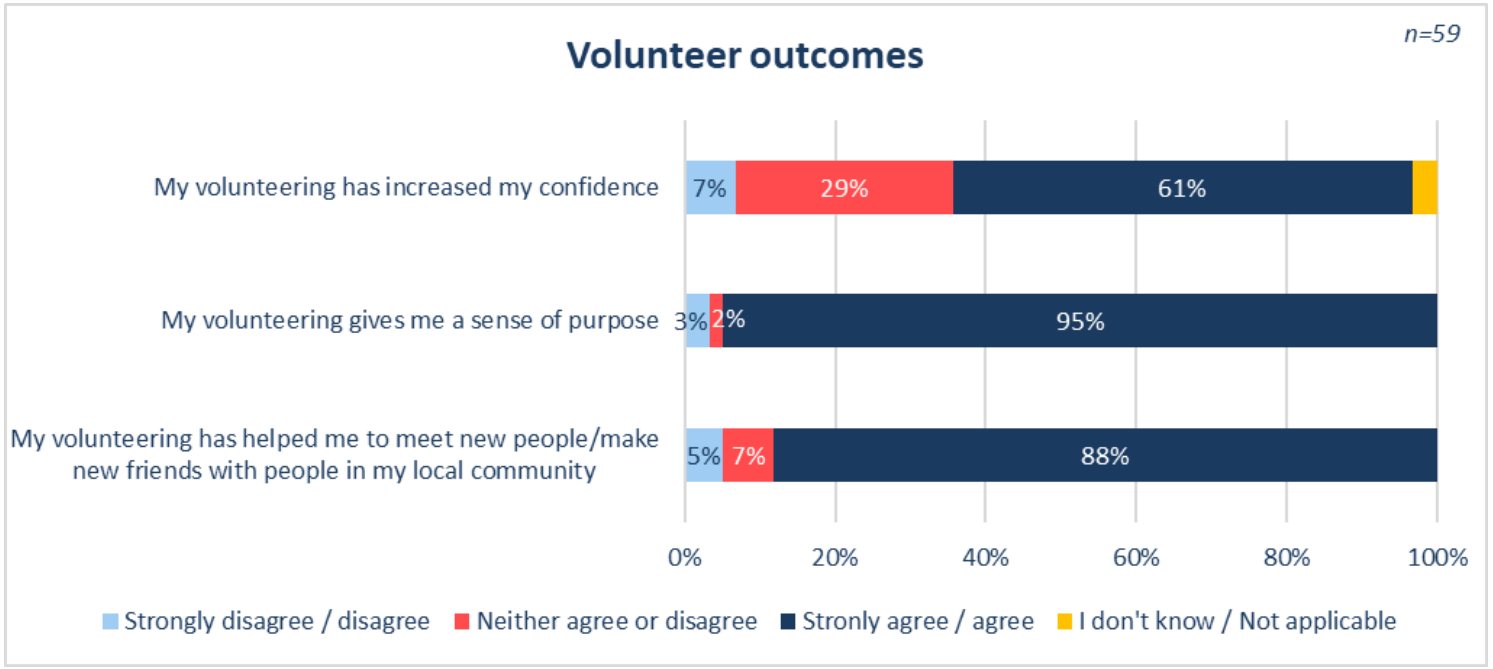
[10] ONS4 is a set of personal wellbeing measures developed by the Office for National Statistics, which allow respondents to give their views of their own personal wellbeing – further information can be found on the ONS website.
**Base sizes for ONS4 results for Bradford are not publicly available.*

Impact: Volunteer outcomes

It was also hoped that volunteering with the Well Together service would result in additional personal outcomes for volunteers. Following feedback provided in the post-survey:

- 61% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that volunteering has **increased their confidence**, whilst 29% neither agree nor disagree, and a small percentage (7%) strongly disagree/disagree.
- 95% of volunteer respondents agreed or strongly agreed that **volunteering gives them a sense of purpose.**
- 88% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that volunteering has **helped them meet new people and make friends within their local community**.

The results indicate that volunteering within the Well Together service appears to have a positive impact on volunteers themselves, in particular increasing sense of purpose and social connections.



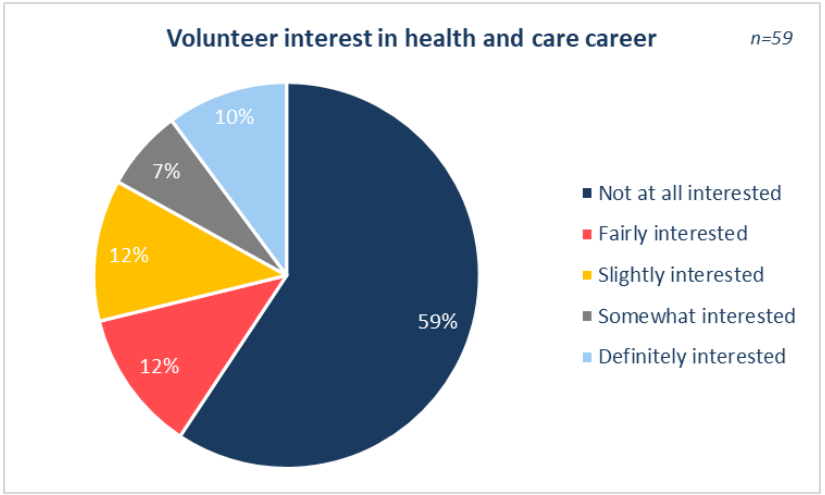
Impact: Volunteer outcomes

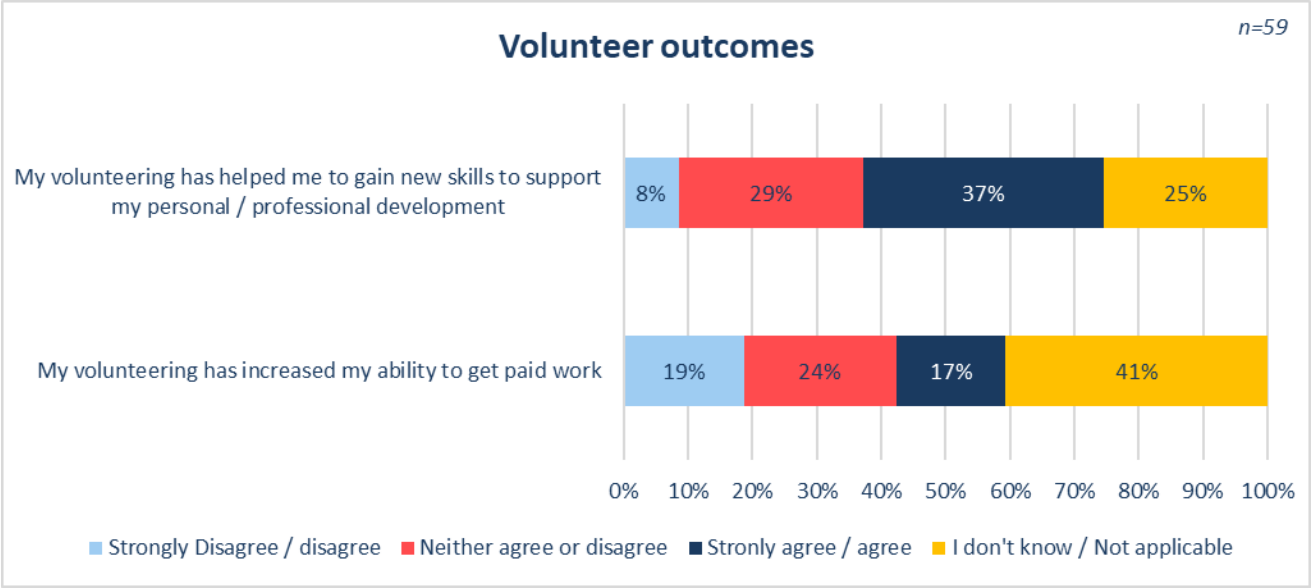
In addition to the personal outcomes discussed on the previous slide, volunteers were asked to provide feedback on volunteering outcomes related to professional development.

- The **majority** of the volunteers (59%) **expressed no interest in pursuing a career in health and care**.
- 37% of respondents felt that volunteering **helped them gain new skills** for personal and professional development. However, **54% of volunteers were either neutral or didn't know**.
- **Only 17% reported an increase in their ability to secure paid work** through volunteering, while 41% reported "I don't know/Not applicable".

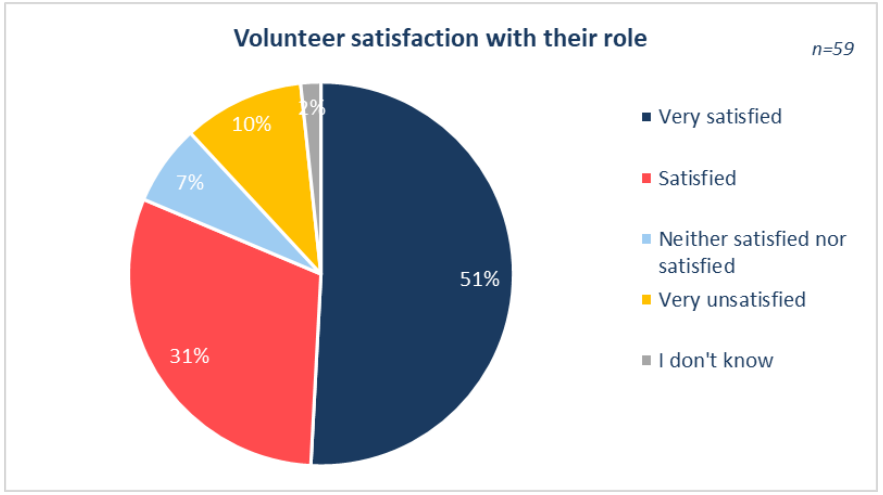
The results suggest that outcomes related to professional development may not align with the interests or profile of individuals volunteering with Well Together, considering 25 out of 27 respondents are aged over 50.

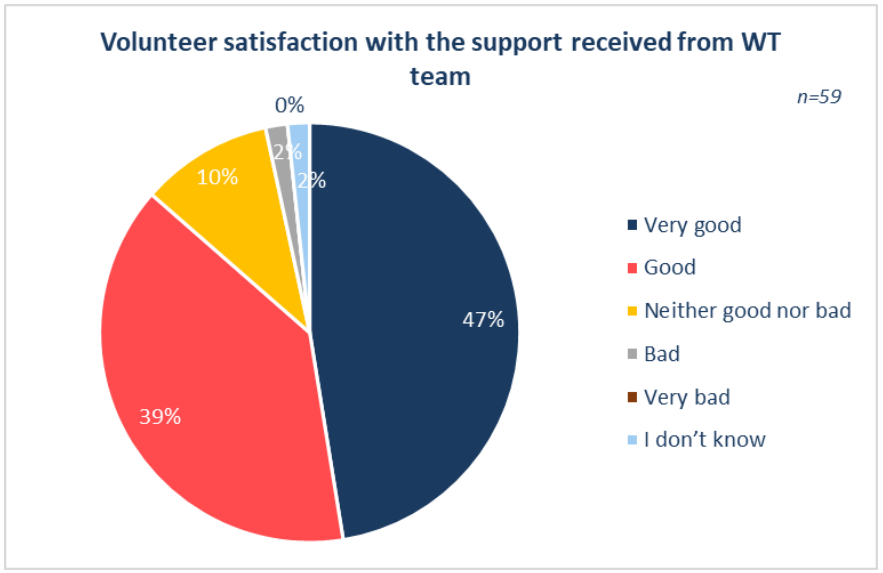
Researchers recommend that, if this is a desired outcome for volunteers of the Well Together service, more information be sought from volunteers to understand why some did not agree with these statements and to offer further professional development support where applicable.





Insight: Volunteer experience





Finally, volunteers were asked about how satisfied they were with their role and the support they received from the Well Together staff team.

- **82% of respondents were satisfied with their role**, while 51% of these being 'very satisfied'.
- **Six volunteers reported being 'very unsatisfied' with their roles.** However, when asked for further insights into their satisfaction levels, four of them did not provide further feedback, while one volunteer told us *"it is a very happy & comfortable group, with many people showing concern and helping one another"*, indicating a possible error in option selection. The other respondent expressed feeling excluded from decision-making within the group, indicating a possible area for organisational improvement.
- Of the respondents, **86% rated the support they had received from the Well Together staff team as 'good' or 'very good'**. Many volunteers described the team as "friendly", "approachable" or "supportive".
- **Just one individual rated the support as 'bad', and an additional seven volunteers rated the support as 'neither good nor bad' or selected 'I don't know'**. These volunteers suggested they have not had a lot of contact or communication with the team since their initial induction. This is further explored on the recommendations slide later in this report.

Overall, volunteers appear to be satisfied with their volunteering experience, with some areas for improvement noted.

Insight: Volunteer feedback

Volunteers provided some additional feedback into the impact the role had had on them and their volunteering experience…

"I would recommend volunteering to anyone who is in need of developing their skills, confidence, social life and sense of purpose."

Volunteer

"I believe that volunteering is an amazing thing to do when one is part of a great team and, I believe this is the one. My experience has been nothing less than wonderful."

Volunteer

"The role gives me a real sense of achievement, when the ladies keep coming back to have a go at chatting and crafting."

Volunteer

"This is a very cohesive group with immense care for each other and newcomers fit in seamlessly. a relaxing two hours where problems can be approached, and spirits invigorated."

Volunteer

"It's good to feel useful and walkers have commented about how much they appreciate the walks and the work of the walk leaders."

Volunteer

"Volunteering gives me a sense of purpose, helps me to meet new people and feel that I'm doing a bit for my community."

Volunteer

"It helps keep me fit physically, emotionally and mentally getting out walking and socialising with people I now count as friends."

Volunteer

Volunteer case study

NB: The image is used for illustrative purposes only.

I's Story - Chat 'N' Relax Group

I is a lovely helpful lady who has encountered a few mental health setbacks over the last few years. After working for a local clothing firm, she went through a redundancy which she deemed unfair. She took this very badly and it brought on a bout of depression which left her feeling closed in and isolated and unable to speak with people daily. She decided to look for another job to help with this and found part time work as a kitchen assistant in a school. She thought that this new role would help her to recover, but sadly due to circumstances in the role she did not enjoy it which resulted in her feeling worse. I travelled to India with her husband where he became ill and as a result I experienced a very bad time in India. Along with overseeing an extension build at home, this was more than I could cope with and she started to become stressed and withdrawn.

I made an appointment to see her GP where she was referred into a six week wellbeing course and some counselling sessions, here she met a lady who was attending the Well Together Mindfulness group. She thought that this would be good for her to try. I found the courage to attend the group and realised that **it was becoming a great help to her, it was nice to feel that she was not the only one going through these problems**. She felt that if other people could come and talk about it and cope with situations that were worse than hers, then so could she.

I used to walk to the weekly sessions and **started to feel better week by week enjoying other people's company and making new friends**. The leader of the mindfulness group was going on maternity leave and the future of the group was hanging in the balance. I decided after a little persuasion from the rest of the group, to become a volunteer and take over the group under a new name. She attended relaxation training through Well Together and was able to deliver a relaxation/peer support group that was welcomed by all in the group. She has forged good friendships and has become a good leader for the group, arranging trips out to the theatre, cinema and to each other's homes for food and chat. She has also attended various Well Together events and has enjoyed being part of the volunteers.

I went on to say that **thanks to this group and the chance to have been encouraged into a role she did not think she could do, she has learned how to cope with stress and her health & wellbeing have improved dramatically.**

Volunteer case study

P's Story - STICKS Group

"At the age of 31 (I'm now 56) I was diagnosed with depression after a lengthy and painful illness that I didn't get a diagnosis of until 18 months after the contraction of it. Six months prior to this our family had lost someone very special to cancer and this was a very upsetting time for all of us. Prior to this I had experienced some difficult times in my life and I had found my own coping mechanisms. It became apparent that these coping mechanisms weren't useful or helpful anymore and that I'd outgrown them and sought help from my GP. Fast forward to 6 years ago and more of life's curved balls and a pattern forming of illness and loss with me not looking after myself. Lack of confidence and growing anxiety resulted in me making my World quite small."

P first learned about Well Together groups through a counsellor, and then continued attending different groups in the region.

"My counsellor told me about MIND in Bradford and a course that they were about to start and after some thought I attended for the 12 weeks. Towards the end of this course we were informed about a WRAP course that was about to start and that there were still some places left. I attended WRAP and worked really hard on my folder even decorating the outside of it. (I'd previously lost all my interest in being creative). 8 months or so after the end of the WRAP course I still didn't know what to do with my folder and the knowledge I'd gained and sought help from a peer support group in Shipley and they suggested that I got in touch with NS and see if he could help. He did and then told me about a Well Together peer support group that they were wanting to start in Keighley. I attended this group from week 1 and continued to do so on and off for three years and ***in that time received amazing support from the facilitators and group members****."*

"Towards the end of my time attending this group (December 2016) I wanted to visit my friend in Australia but I'd never flown on my own before or even gone on holiday without anyone else. With huge support and encouragement from the peer support group, family and friends my husband booked the flight for me and 6 weeks later I flew on my own to Brisbane to spend a month with my friend. The members of the peer support group also recommended a book which I took with me and reading this was a tremendous help on the build up to flying out and coming back home."

"Also during the time I was attending the peer support group I started to attend other Well Together groups, namely rag rugging and STICKS. After a couple of weeks attending STICKS I was asked if I'd thought about becoming a volunteer, which I had and talked some details through with a member of staff with Well Together. There was no pressure and I was given time to think about it. I decided that I was happy to assist the facilitator of the group (STICKS) in a supportive role but that I wasn't sure at that time if I was ready to be a facilitator myself on a new group but would like to be in the future."

"I was then made aware of Craven Crafters in Skipton and they met on my day off, so off I went for a visit and loved it. Months later the facilitator of the group asked if anyone would like to be a fellow facilitator of the group and help out. I said I would be willing to help out if needed. A peer support group was started in Skipton and I offered to be one of the facilitators and was until the group closed. In February 2017 I became the sole facilitator of Craven Crafters, which was an anxious time for me but ***I had full support and encouragement from Well Together and with training my confidence grew.*** *To my delight a member of the group, SG, offered to become a volunteer, a bond and friendship grew. Creative sparks and having similar senses of humour have been such an amazing part of our journey as a team together.* ***I cannot thank Well Together enough for all their help in my continuing journey to stay well. Well Together have been a beautiful light on my hardest darkest days and I will be eternally grateful for all of their help and support."***

NB: The image is used for illustrative purposes only.

Impact: Referrer staff members' experience

Staff members who made referrals into the Well Together service were asked to reflect upon their experience and their perception of the impact the service had on their patients.

Positive referral experience

When asked how they would rate their referral experience, many staff members agreed that the process was good, easy, and efficient. When discussing the Well Together team, a respondent said, *"**they are professional and do try to engage hard to reach clients."***

Contributes to recovery

Staff members suggested the Well Together service positively contributes to their patients' recovery. One staff member discussed that ***"clients have found this service helpful to continue with their mental health recovery",*** whilst another respondent suggested the service helps ***"people feel more connected to each other and their local community. Participating in a meaningful activity provides a sense of purpose and builds positive self-image".***

Multiple benefits for patients

Staff members discussed an array of patient benefits through joining the Well Together service. These included; providing a meaningful structure to the week, an opportunity to meet other people with similar interests, reducing social isolation, encouraging individuals to reengage with their hobbies, and feeling more connected to their local community. Overall, one staff member reported that the service ***"contributes towards physical and mental wellbeing of our clients."***

Calls for more groups

When asked if there were any improvements they would recommend to the service, staff members requested further expansion of the service, suggesting an increased ***"choice of activities and outdoor activities will be of interest to more clients with differing needs and desires."*** Additionally, one staff member requested ***"more activities in areas where there is little to no health and wellbeing offers."***

Satisfied with the service

Overall, staff members appears satisfied with their experience of the Well Together Service, expressing both the volunteers and the staff members did an ***"amazing job"*** and that they have had positive feedback from their clients. Additionally, staff appreciated the Well Together team keeping them informed of the referral outcome.

Insight: Recommended improvements

Within their surveys, patients and volunteers also noted some potential areas for improvement to or expansion of the Well Together service…

Additional groups requested

Alongside referrers, when asked if there were any additional groups they would like to see offered, 16 service users made a request. These groups included; Art or drawing, DIY, Men's group, Family friendly groups (such as mother & toddler), Sit down exercise groups, Tai Chi, and coffee groups not just in the mornings. There were also requests for day trips, and an increase in "culturally themed" groups and events.

New localities and formats

A small number of service users and volunteers made requests for groups within additional geographical locations. These requests included walking groups within Shipley, exercise classes within Eccleshill, as well as some more general points requesting meetings from different locations and walking groups from different starting points. Additionally, one service user requested an increase in face-to-face craft groups as opposed to virtual.

Calls for more communication

Whilst the majority of volunteers felt they had received good support from the Well Together staff team, some volunteers requested additional communication. For example, volunteers described *"minimum help"* and having to *"ring to find out answers when the details should have been communicated"*. Additionally, where volunteers experienced issues or concerns in their group, they suggested they did not know how to escalate these, and that regular reviews with the team would be helpful.

Additional funds for groups

One volunteer who runs a craft session mentioned that they struggle to provide the crafts for the group within the current limits. They often supplement provisions with their own items from home. They suggested the policy could be reviewed to allow for an amount per head, as opposed to an amount for the total group, to allow for more attendees.

Conclusions and recommendations

- As NHS England reported in their 'Improving access for all' publication, "*improving prevention and working with patients to increase their capacity for self-care and self-management requires an upfront investment but reduces demand over time which ultimately improves access*".[11]

- This evaluation highlights the significant positive impact community wellbeing services can have in supporting individuals to effectively manage their health and wellbeing. From engaging service users to involving volunteers, every aspect of the Well Together service contributes to its unique position in fostering community wellbeing.

- Service users report multiple benefits such as increased confidence in managing physical and mental health, as well as improved social and emotional wellbeing. Findings also indicated volunteers feel a heightened sense of purpose and social integration. Both service users and volunteers express overwhelmingly positive experiences with the Well Together Service, relaying high satisfaction levels and a willingness to recommend the service.

- Some areas for improvement were highlighted in the feedback from staff, volunteers and service users, which researchers suggest require further exploration. The demand for additional groups and activities as well as requests for delivery in alternative locations or formats highlight the potential for expansion of the Well Together Service. Additionally, some volunteers made a call for more enhanced communication, funding and support.

- It is the ambition of BDCFT for the Well Together service to be a well-recognised and respected approach to uniting and empowering local communities to strengthen their wellbeing. The service hopes to grow its position and referrals across Place, working with partners to address gaps and increase the offer, ensuring all those that could benefit are able to access. The insights provided in this evaluation illustrate the service is a vital pillar of support within Bradford and Craven district, supporting individuals to live well within the community, and therefore has the potential to have such a positive impact if scaled and implemented further. However, it was noted that the recommendation for growth is limited by existing resource.

- This approach aligns with the NHS Long Term Plan which highlights the need for an increased focus on prevention, supporting individuals to adopt healthy behaviours leading to "*both help people to live longer, healthier lives, and reduce the demand for and delays in treatment and care*".[12]

[11] Improving access for all: reducing inequalities in access to general practice services, NHS England, September 2018.
[12] Treating and preventing ill health, NHS Long Term Plan.

Acknowledgements

Helpforce would like to pass on our thanks to **Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust**, and in particular to Catherine Jowitt, Head of Charity & Volunteering, Service Managers Razia Islam and Sarah Wimpenny.

We also like to pass on our thanks to the **service users participating in the groups, volunteers, and staff members** for providing their insights and feedback.

Without them, this evaluation would not have been possible.

Appendix A: Data limitations

- Data collection across the four regions where the groups operate posed challenges, and service users reported difficulties in completing online surveys. In response, Helpforce conducted site visits to observe any challenges in data collection. As a result, both paper and online surveys were offered to service users and volunteers. Additionally, to enhance reach among service users from various ethnic backgrounds and for whom English was not a first language, Helpforce and the volunteering team at BDCFT worked diligently together to ensure data collection tools were accessible.
- After reviewing the incoming data following initial responses, some changes were made to the service user survey. This included removing or replacing some questions with the aim of decreasing the length of the survey, increasing response rate and improving the quality of the data being received. For this reason, sample sizes for a small number of questions may be different to the overall sample size.
- For service user surveys, there is a sample-size discrepancy between pre- and post-survey responses. However, this discrepancy reflects how the service operates. Well Together has been operational in the region for a long time, and group participants tend to remain involved for a long period, as supported by the data insights in this evaluation as well. Therefore, the discrepancy of receiving fewer pre-surveys was inevitable.
- The data indicates that the number of service users and volunteers was higher than those who responded to surveys overall. The response rate from service users for demographic questions was also notably lower. Additionally, BDCFT advised Helpforce that service users whom they would consider more ethnically diverse were less likely to respond to the surveys without additional support. Consequently, the sample size and analysis of demographic data may not fully represent service user demographics.
- The results from service user pre- and post-surveys are not directly comparable. To maintain confidentiality, respondents were not asked for identifying information. Consequently, it is unknown whether respondents who completed the post-survey had also completed a pre-survey. Additionally, a smaller number of respondents completed the pre-survey, indicating not everyone who completed a post-survey also completed a pre-survey.
- In order to determine if the comparisons between pre- and post-survey responses were significant, statistical significance testing was completed. However, dependent samples testing was not possible due to these discrepancies. Therefore, an independent samples t-test was performed, although it cannot be claimed that the samples are entirely independent. Consequently, results from any statistical significance testing between these samples can only be used indicatively.
- As the majority of volunteers have been volunteering in the service for a long period of time, the pre-survey designed for new volunteers to complete before joining the service received low number of responses. Therefore, Helpforce excluded this data from the evaluation and instead focused on analysing the information gathered from the volunteer post-survey only, comparing to secondary data sources where possible and appropriate.
- Due to a low response rate from staff referring patients to the service, Helpforce excluded staff outcomes from the evaluation, instead providing an overview of the key themes identified within the feedback.
- The Well Together team also encountered staffing struggles during the evaluation, resulting in limited capacity to collect responses. Consequently, data collection spanned a long period, with the majority of data collected near the end of the evaluation period.

Appendix B: About the groups

Return to Context: Well Together Service

Information about a small selection of the groups available through Well Together.

Bereavement and Loss Support Group

The death and loss of a loved one can be a very difficult time. If you are struggling to cope, this volunteer led group can provide support. The aim is to give people a space to talk about their difficulties, and loss, with others in similar situations. Talking can be a very therapeutic process and can help people to develop their own coping strategies.

Wellbeing and Recovery Action Plan 12-Week Course

Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) is a wellness tool anyone can use to get well, stay well, and make their life more the way they want it to be.

Fibromyalgia Support Group

This is a friendly support group for people with fibromyalgia. Come along and meet people who understand you and what it is like to feel lost in a fog.

Khush Haal Women's Group

This is a women's only group and they will focus on varied wellbeing activities such as healthy eating, exercise and peer support.

Busy Minds

Exploring Relaxation and Mindfulness - This group is aimed at people who would like to revitalize mind and body, help improve focus, and reduce stress.

Dressmaking Group

Come a learn dress making skills from learning to make a pattern to producing your own garment all from our skilled volunteer Sajida Malik.

Appendix C: About the Helpforce Insight and Impact Service

What is it?

- The I&I Service is an online tool to help you easily and effectively evaluate your voluntary project or initiative.
- It guides you on a simple 4-step process, from designing outcomes for your beneficiaries through to what data we will need to collect - how, when, and from whom.
- Resulting in an evaluation report that our team produces for you, showing evidence of impact made against the outcomes and insights around how the project is working.

A guide to some key terms we use

Insights provide an understanding of a situation or problem. They help us to share valuable information around what is working well, and what is not working so well, so that we can advise on potential service improvements and developments.

Impact relates to evidence of lasting and sustainable changes. Impact data helps us to understand the value and difference being made as a result of the project – and the intervention or service it is aiming to establish.

How the service is making a difference

We have worked with many NHS and VCS organisations over the last 3 years to collect data on over 100 high-impact voluntary projects. We have produced evidenced findings against a broad range health and care outcome measures, that have helped to scale up volunteering services and unlock additional funding for our partners.

Evidence is reviewed against the following criteria to determine if it is compelling, promising, or limited:

- Is the sample size / response rate reliable and robust?
- Is the data direct or a proxy measure?
- Is there a causal link between the evidence and the outcome?
- Is there a control group or comparative data set?
- How was the evidence gathered – directly from participants, or via a third party?
- Was the survey question well designed, or has there been signs of misunderstanding by participants?

Thank you

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helpforce.community/iandi