



Valuing Wellbeing Exeter: Reflections on Impact

Devon Community Foundation - March 2024

Connecting people, communities & opportunities



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Devon
Community
Foundation
Giving more locally

**“ The support
of Wellbeing
Exeter has
reminded me of
things I used to
enjoy and has
given me
encouragement
to try them out
again. ”**

Foreword

Wellbeing Exeter is a dynamic system of community development activity focused on improving health and wellbeing outcomes for residents across the city of Exeter and the neighbouring town of Cranbrook. Established in 2013, it is an alliance of community, voluntary and public sector organisations, responding to diverse and complex systemic health and social challenges across the population.

The model is made up of four interdependent parts:

- 1) Community Connecting
- 2) Community Building
- 3) Community Physical Activity Organisation
- 4) Network Co-Ordination

Wellbeing Exeter's strength is in its people, with skilled staff working at grass roots with individuals and communities; a core team co-ordinating and enabling collective action, learning and development; together with leaders who have a role to play in ensuring that the future growth of the city is resilient and inclusive.

Wellbeing Exeter's ethos is rooted in collaboration, listening, learning, testing and growth. Ongoing evaluation has demonstrated that Wellbeing Exeter's focus on bespoke, personal relationships between people across the city has tangible benefits for individuals, neighbourhoods and the wider public sphere.

The current social and economic climate necessitates public, private and voluntary sector organisations working even more closely and intelligently with communities.

This impact report summarises the scale and value of the Wellbeing Exeter programme, in particular what has been achieved in the last five years. The report presents a range of independent research and evaluation, both quantitative and qualitative, to illustrate the depth of the programme's impact. This report is part of a suite of documents that will inform the next phase for Wellbeing Exeter.

It has taken us ten years to get to this point. The evidence presented here shows the Wellbeing Exeter model and approach is effective, value-for-money and inclusive. We are now looking for enthusiastic and committed partners to join us in embedding and expanding this work in the city for the next decade. By tackling entrenched health inequalities, we can continue to support everyone to benefit from all the opportunities Exeter has to offer and to be part of our 2040 vision for a fully inclusive city in which everyone can thrive.

Jo Yelland
Director
Exeter City
Council



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Summary

Wellbeing Exeter has been working in the city since 2013 to support residents to live happy and fulfilling lives.

This report summarises our understanding of the impact of this work to date, and reflects on the potential for the programme to continue to innovate and develop.

The Wellbeing Exeter partnership currently supports four interdependent strands of work:

- 1) Community Connecting
- 2) Community Building
- 3) Community Physical Activity Organisation
- 4) Network Co-ordination

Although the programme is often identified as a social prescribing initiative, this combination of person-centred one-to-one work, alongside neighbourhood-based community development strands, as well as a focus on maintaining a functional place-based network of organisations, is greater than the sum of its parts.



COMMUNITY CONNECTING

Community Connectors employed by Wellbeing Exeter delivery partners work on a one-to-one basis with individuals to support them to identify areas of their life they would like to change, and to find practical ways of doing this together. In order to understand the impact of this, we ask participants from all cohorts a series of questions about their wellbeing and relationships at the beginning of their work with a Community Connector, and at the end.

Robust analysis of this data shows that community connecting is effective in improving wellbeing, reducing loneliness, and connecting people with their community. Scores on recognised scales for levels of loneliness and wellbeing both saw a marked improvement. For Exeter families we observed:

- **'Our family has positive and supportive relationships in our local community' saw a 27% increase in levels of agreement.**
- **'Relationships in our family are strong and positive' showed a 19% increase in levels of agreement.**

We also asked participants about their engagement with the Five Ways to Wellbeing. For Exeter adults we observed:

- **An increase of 26% in 'paying attention to how they are feeling' (from 50% to 76%)**
- **An increase of 25% in 'chatting to somebody in the community' (from 37% to 62%)**
- **An increase of 22% in 'meeting socially with others' (from 26% to 48%)**
- **An increase of 20% in 'attending a local group' (from 17% to 37%)**

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For Exeter young people we observed:

- **An increase of 44% in 'paying attention to how they are feeling' (from 17% to 61%)**
- **An increase of 27% in 'taking notice of the world around them' (from 23% to 50%)**
- **An increase of 27% in 'working on a skill or project' (from 18% to 45%)**

Statistical analysis of the data found the following:

- Significant overall mean increases in general wellbeing, development of relationships with others and community engagement from baseline to post intervention across all cohorts.
- A significantly greater proportion of participants in the family subgroup reported being physically active post intervention compared to pre intervention.
- A participant who reports a greater level of engagement with their community post intervention also reports higher wellbeing scores post intervention compared to an individual who reported a lower level of community engagement. However, if a participant had higher wellbeing before starting the intervention, community engagement does not play a significant role in wellbeing outcomes. This suggests that **for those participants that entered the programme experiencing lower wellbeing, engagement with their local community is a crucial element in the pathway to reporting higher general wellbeing when exiting the programme.**
- A longer intervention length is associated with higher wellbeing scores post intervention.
- Young people experienced greater increases in post-intervention wellbeing compared to the family and adult subgroups.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

There is currently a Community Builder in every ward in the city (as well as in Cranbrook). The builders' role is to engage with residents, and enable them to take action in their communities to make them better, more inclusive, and more connected places to live. Wellbeing Exeter has published a series of detailed reports into how the Community Builders work. A survey of residents identified a series of valued roles:

- **Active listening:** this links closely with the person-centred ethos of the Wellbeing Exeter programme as a whole.
- **A trusted source of information:** Community Builders actively manage and use their knowledge, to everyone's benefit.
- **A means to link with others:** Community Builders can avoid residents having to reinvent the wheel, and give them access to a network of civic solidarity and wisdom. Universal, citywide provision facilitates this. ***'It is a complex community and they have worked to make a diverse network of relationships'***.
- **A maintainer of momentum and smoother of paths. An encourager and enabler:** Community Builders walk alongside residents to support their action to make their communities better places. ***'Our Community Builder has encouraged us to become a community'***.
- **A channel into and between organisations:** Community Builders often act as mediators between citizens and public sector bodies. They have developed special expertise in supporting 'new communities' to develop.

Summary

- **A flexible source of support – with an exit plan:** support from Community Builders changes over time, ranging from intensive engagement, to a more light-touch 'strategic' link as something becomes more established.
- **A champion of the community, from behind:** one resident described this as being the 'scrum master', a servant-leader whose role within a team is facilitation.
- **It's personal:** because this role is built on direct relationships, how it is done is as important as what. Residents described builders as: *friendly and approachable, lively, encouraging, full of humility, inclusive, empathetic, pro-active, energetic, positive, supportive, responsive, and accessible.*

LEADING AN ACTIVE LIFE

Wellbeing Exeter's association with Sport England's Live & Move programme has involved a focus on improving levels of physical activity in the least active. The data suggests that engagement with a Community Connector is having some impact on participants' levels of physical activity, with a slight increase in the proportion of participants classified as 'active' and a slight decrease in the proportion classified as 'inactive'. Increases in levels of physical activity are more evident amongst those participants who indicated at the outset that support with physical activity was something they hoped to gain through their engagement with Wellbeing Exeter. The data also suggests that since engaging with a Connector increasing proportions of participants are being more social in their physical activities, opting to undertake physical activity with another person or group of people.

Community Physical Activity Organisers (CPAOs) work in the community and with individuals to support increased physical activity. Although this new role had a challenging start during the pandemic, CPAOs are now working effectively with other Wellbeing Exeter colleagues across the city to design and support opportunities for leading a more active life.

PARTNERSHIPS, NETWORKS & SYSTEMS

Rather than being a rigid structure, Wellbeing Exeter is a flexible, values-based partnership mechanism that can respond to new challenges with agility. Examples include its expansion of referral mechanisms, working with smaller community organisations, responding to the covid pandemic and Ukrainian refugee crisis. It has also been able to focus activity on cultural connecting, and engagement with ethnically diverse communities.

An under-reported aspect of the value Wellbeing Exeter brings to the city is its contribution to building, maintaining and participating in cross-sectoral organisational networks and ecosystems. Social network analysis revealed that **of 1185 relevant organisations identified in the city, Wellbeing Exeter has links with 1136 (96%) of them.**

As a mature and outward-looking actor in local wellbeing systems, the partnership has great potential to contribute to and influence joint efforts to improve systems and outcomes for Exeter residents.

Introduction

THIS REPORT

Anticipating the end of the current funding cycle, Wellbeing Exeter programme managers Devon Community Foundation (DCF) recognised the need to begin to draw together the existing programme evaluation strands. Having been involved with the evaluation and learning aspects of the programme since 2017, we were also keen to ensure the range of value within the programme was fully explored and captured, beyond the reporting required by the existing commissioners. Following approval by commissioners in February 2023, DCF convened a working group to develop a holistic enhanced evaluation plan, identifying data we already held, and commissioning new primary research or secondary analysis as necessary. We have deliberately embraced a wide range of different methodological approaches, both qualitative and quantitative, to allow us to examine all aspects of a complex and holistic programme. The group met monthly to ensure the separate pieces of work were informed and influenced by each other.

Evaluation of social prescribing and community development projects is notoriously difficult, owing to the range and often-intangible nature of many outcomes, and the difficulty of attributing them to specific interventions. We are fortunate with Wellbeing Exeter that the programme has been running (and data has been collected) for several years, resulting in a large bank of both qualitative and quantitative evidence on which to draw. Our intention is for this report (and the series of individual pieces of work that sit behind it) to do justice to this wealth of insight, and the important work it describes.

This report summarises the findings of this evaluation work, and synthesises them to reflect on the overall impact and value of Wellbeing Exeter to residents of the city and the institutions within it. It looks back across the whole of the life of the programme to date.

The report explores these headline questions:

- How and to what extent does Wellbeing Exeter community connecting enable Exeter residents to live healthy and fulfilling lives?
- How and to what extent does Wellbeing Exeter community building support the city's neighbourhoods to be active, inclusive and connected places to live?
- How has the Wellbeing Exeter programme contributed to systemic change in the city?
- What role does Wellbeing Exeter play in the citywide ecosystem of organisations (social enterprise, voluntary, public and private) working to improve health, wellbeing and connectedness?

Fuller details of many of the pieces of work that have contributed to this report will be published on the impact page of Wellbeing Exeter's website (wellbeingexeter.org.uk). Please also take a look at this parallel publication showcasing case studies from Wellbeing Exeter connectors, and the [fantastic film from Beccy Strong](#) that communicates the spirit of the programme so movingly.

If you have any further questions relating to this evaluation, please email Dr Nicola Frost, Devon Community Foundation: nfrost@devoncf.com.

Introduction

WELLBEING - THE WIDER CONTEXT

Wellbeing is beyond simply an absence of illness. It represents a holistic state of health, encompassing physical, mental, and social aspects of an individual's life. Wellbeing is not static but is dynamic, influenced by daily experiences, lifestyle choices, and societal factors. Cultivating wellbeing involves fostering resilience, self-awareness, and a sense of belonging within communities. Wellbeing then is interwoven with personal and collective social capital. Evidence suggests that social capital is positively associated with improved health outcomes; access to strong, diverse social networks has been found to reduce overall risk of mortality.^[1]

Building social capital involves fostering social cohesion, promoting civic engagement, and creating opportunities for meaningful social interactions, the foundations for a 'healthy, inclusive and sustainable city' (Exeter City Council's 2040 vision). The core model for Wellbeing Exeter creates the platform, a progressive infrastructure framework, from which to build sustainable change. In a city where there is a gap of 16.8 years between the areas with the longest life expectancy and the shortest and where health inequalities exist with markedly different outcomes for some communities such as those with complex needs or experiencing multiple disadvantage, the need for understanding 'levelling up' as a 'social as well as economic endeavour' is essential. Research suggests that demand on public services is likely to increase in areas with low social capital, suggesting that the Wellbeing Exeter model of supporting developing personal social capital and creating connected communities is essential at a time when public services are overwhelmed.^[2]

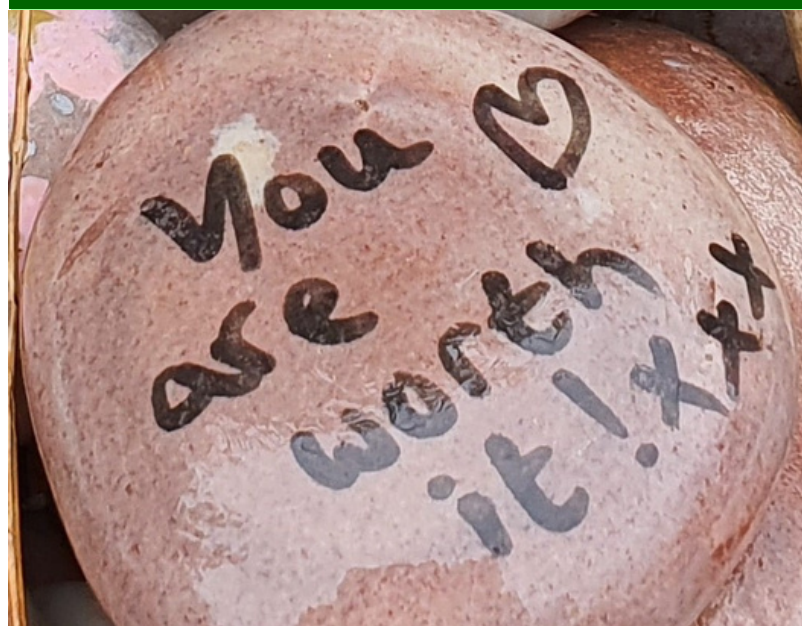
In adopting the 'social prescribing' approach, addressing the root causes of health issues and fostering social connections and support networks, Wellbeing Exeter aims to empower individuals to take control of their health and lead fulfilling lives. The vision locally for Wellbeing Exeter and indeed the next steps for sustainable change at a national level are eloquently captured in The Wildlife Trust's recent report 'A Natural Health Service'.

"We now need policies that enable shared investment from Government departments concerned with housing, employment, community cohesion, transport and culture. This would create the 'engine room' for community-based health services and would also enable private, public and philanthropic investment at a local level."

Fiona Carden, CEO, CoLab Exeter

[1] 'Social capital and health: A systematic review of systematic reviews', *SSM Population Health*, 8, 100425 (2019)

[2] 'Social capital and public service performance: a review of the evidence', *Public Policy and Administration*, 27(1) (2012)



Introduction

THE WELLBEING EXETER MODEL IN NATIONAL CONTEXT

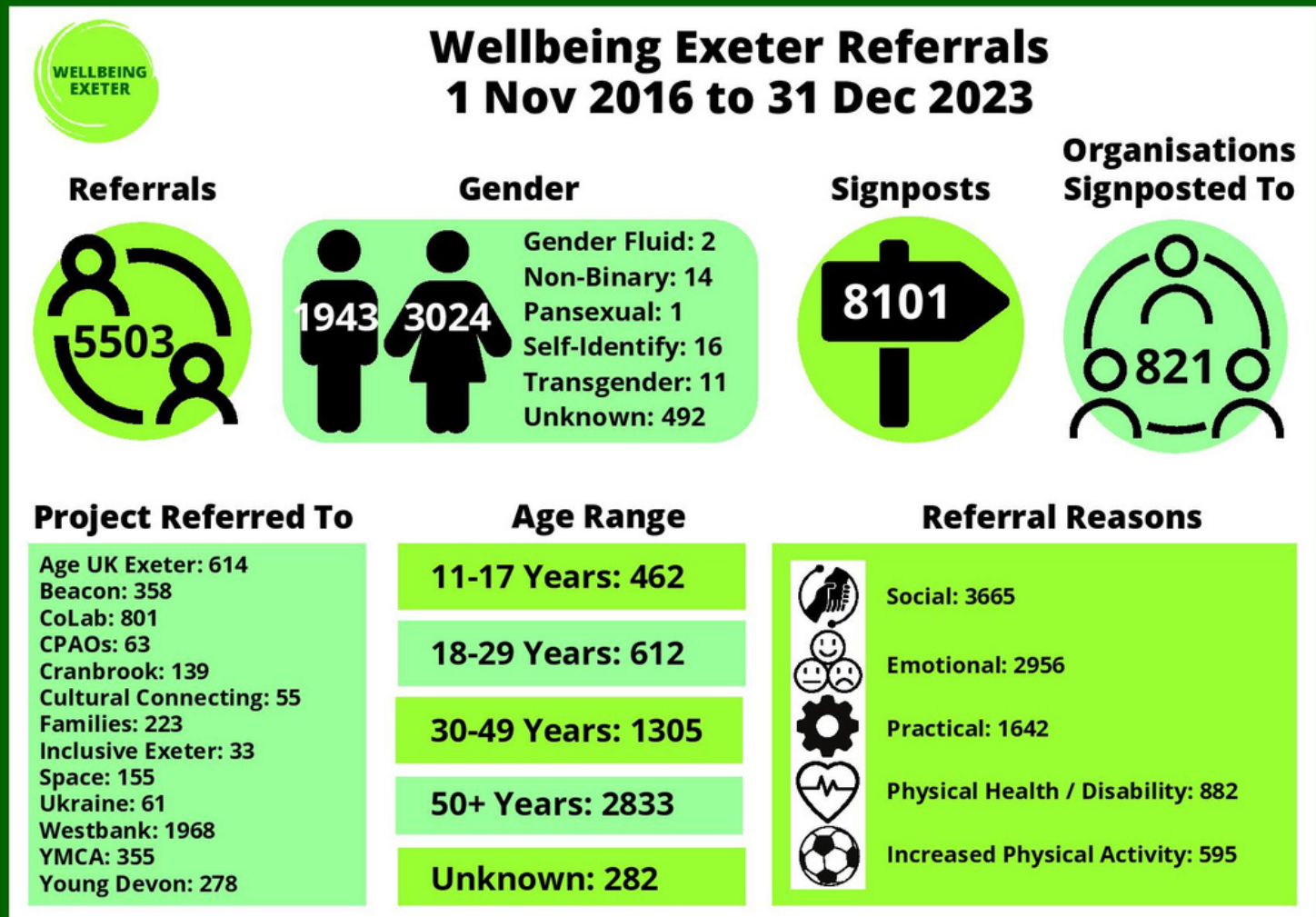
Aware of the need to situate Wellbeing Exeter's model of social prescribing (its funding, its delivery, its scope, its evaluation) within a wider national context, we asked Daniel Mutanda from the University of Exeter to conduct a rapid review of the literature. He considered 148 review papers exploring the sustainability of social prescribing models.

Despite the wide variety of models (and the widespread understanding of a need for a stronger evidence base, to which we hope this report contributes), four themes contributing to sustainability were identified. We have set these alongside observations about the Wellbeing Exeter model:

THEME	VALUE	WELLBEING EXETER
Integration	Integration within the local community and primary care systems enhances scope, and creates inclusive and proactive care processes with dynamic and personalised practice that can withstand shifting contexts long-term.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community Connectors not formally integrated within primary care, but embedded within a dense cross-sectoral ecosystem of health and wellbeing organisations the city.
Knowledge	Understanding local resources is a skilled, labour-intensive task best situated in the VCSE sector where there is deep understanding of community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Connectors employed by VCSE delivery partners, with extensive knowledge, including diverse specialist providers.• Parallel community-based roles add to insight.
Accessing resources	Training and partnership development needs to be properly resourced. Longer-term funding contributes better to sustainability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Partnership invests heavily in training.• Making creative use of local assets is efficient.• Short-term funding risks loss of skills and knowledge.
Stakeholder feedback	Programmes are more sustainable when multiple stakeholders feed into their design and implementation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Huge resource of qualitative and quantitative data from range of stakeholder perspectives.• Future governance to consider co-design.

Introduction

WELLBEING EXETER IN NUMBERS



Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks to the following for their contributions to the material presented here: Melanie Brooks, Fiona Carden, Simon Chant, Marie Dyke, Gary Head, Melinda Humphrey, Maria Koutsoumanis, Gail Mistlin, Melissa Muir, Daniel Mutanda, Laura Robinson, Beccy Strong, Michelle Tester-Jones and Jo Yelland.

All commissioners and partner organisations, and especially Community Connectors, Community Builders and Community Physical Activity Organisers.



Community Connecting

Community Connectors employed by Wellbeing Exeter delivery partners work on a one-to-one basis with individuals to support them to identify areas of their life they would like to change, and to find practical ways of doing this together. People can be referred to the programme for a wide range of reasons – crucially, there are no predetermined criteria for participation. Wellbeing Exeter Connectors work with people facing challenges with anxiety or loneliness, as well as those needing support to address practical issues such as debt or housing. Individuals may well be facing physical or mental health challenges alongside their social ones. We have observed that the initial impetus for the referral is often not the only, or even the primary challenge facing an individual. Taking time to ‘peel back the layers’, and determine what to address first, is part of the skill of the connector.

Originally, GPs were the sole referral route, but this expanded over time to include other primary care staff, and currently includes a much wider range of referrers, including a pilot self-referral route. Likewise, there is no pre-determined length of time over which a Community Connector can work with an individual – this is guided by a person’s situation. At points throughout Wellbeing Exeter’s history, this generic ‘core’ model for adults has been enhanced by more specialist support for different demographics: most recently there have been specialist streams for young people, families, and those from culturally diverse backgrounds. There has also been a focus on community connection through cultural participation. In previous years we have also worked with a delivery partner focused on older people.

Our evaluation of community connecting has considered the encounter from all angles.

We understand that how relationships are built, and the space given to listening to people is as important as actions taken, and have built a collection of case studies to illustrate this approach. Some are presented throughout this section and a wider selection is published separately. Given the extremely wide range of reasons for individuals engaging with the programme, it is difficult to design a single evaluation mechanism relevant for all. We ask participants to complete a questionnaire on first engaging with the programme, and again as they finish their work with us. This, alongside a demographic profile, gives us insight into how participants feel their wellbeing has changed over this period. We use a range of scales, including the widely recognised Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) and some questions devised by the Campaign to End Loneliness, as well as some bespoke questions which look at each of the **Five Ways to Wellbeing** (connect, get active, take notice, learn, give). The analysis presented below shows how this data, alongside other qualitative measures, can examine the impact of participation in the programme for individuals against key outcomes.



Community Connecting

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

In 2018, the South West Academic Health Science Network (now Health Innovation South West) conducted a small study of Community Connector participants, interviewing ten individuals to understand their perspective on their experience and its outcomes. The results are summarised below:

- Participants reported Community Connectors provided **'walking alongside' support to build confidence**, often in a way that was very hands-on: *"She offered to come here to my home and talk to me about where I wanted to go, come with me, stay with me, and bring me home. Knowing that she was there, I knew I could get out and do it."* This involved **taking time to build trust**: *"...I've come to trust her and what she is doing for me is what needs to be done."*
- This was achieved through creating **space to talk**, in a non-directive way: *"I thought at the end it was a very very good service, because it was allowing people space to talk about what they wanted to."* **And to feel listened to**: *"I felt like I was definitely being listened to all the time, she understood what I was trying to say and would narrow it down for me to keep my thoughts on track."*



"I thought at the end it was a very very good service, because it was allowing people space to talk about what they wanted to."

- Community Connectors took an **empowering approach**: *"It was the way [the Community Connector] talked to me... She said 'what do you want to do?' and 'if you could, what would you like to do?' She took away the element of 'we are going to fix you' and allowed me to dream a little about what I could do."* *"[The Community Connector] made me realise there are possibilities in life, she's given me the confidence to realise you can get better, even when you go down as low as I was, you can get better and see life ahead of you."*
- Connectors worked with participants to develop plans for **timely, flexible, proactive practical support**: *"When [the Community Connector] saw me the first time I was having a good day but the next time she saw me I was a completely different person. She picked up on that which was good, was so supportive. She came to see me again and went over her allotted time a bit which was good of her. I know she's busy."*
- And the fact that the **support did not end abruptly** was welcomed: *"[Community Connector] still rings me now to check I'm ok and if the people she referred me onto are helping."* *"I wasn't asking for long-term support but she always made it clear I could go back."*

Community Connecting

GROUP WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Connectors working with young people noted the need for accessible, affordable music-making provision in central Exeter to support the wellbeing of some participants.

Funding was secured from Wellbeing Exeter and Devon County Council to run a free eight-week samba fusion drumming course for a diverse group of young people aged 11-18, some with additional needs. The sessions were led by a Young People Connector, with help from a volunteer.

Over the weeks young people bonded well with each other and built good connections to the session leaders. Group members gained more confidence in their abilities and tried their hands at various instruments.

Gradually the group started picking up new rhythms and began experimenting during improvised jamming sessions. It wasn't long before each young person started leading the group for short periods, allowing them to further increase their confidence and refine their new musical skills.

By the final weeks the group had learned many complex rhythms and a whole tune, which culminated in a final drumming jam before the start of the summer holidays.

The session leader felt pride at the group's strong communal spirit and the impressive talent and connections that emerged over the course of these drumming jams.

The young people displayed a wonderful capacity for their own social and musical development and the youth band they formed over this short period looked and sounded impressive.



SAMBA-FUSION YOUTH DRUMMING

MONDAY EVENINGS
6:30PM - 8:00PM
NEWTOWN COMMUNITY CENTRE
(Belmont Park)

FREE SESSIONS

NO MUSIC EXPERIENCE NECESSARY

Are you between 11-18 and want to try this style of drumming and maybe become part of a new youth band?

COME AND JAM WITH US!

Limited spaces - pre-booking essential!



More information / book a space:
Email: felix.elsen@spacepsm.org
Phone/Text: 07708 477021



Community Connecting

QUESTIONNAIRE ANALYSIS

Wellbeing Exeter works closely with SERIO, the evaluators of Sport England's Live & Move initiative in Exeter and Cranbrook.

SERIO's Melanie Brooks' analysis of community connecting questionnaire data gives us insight into which groups benefit in what way from working with a connector.

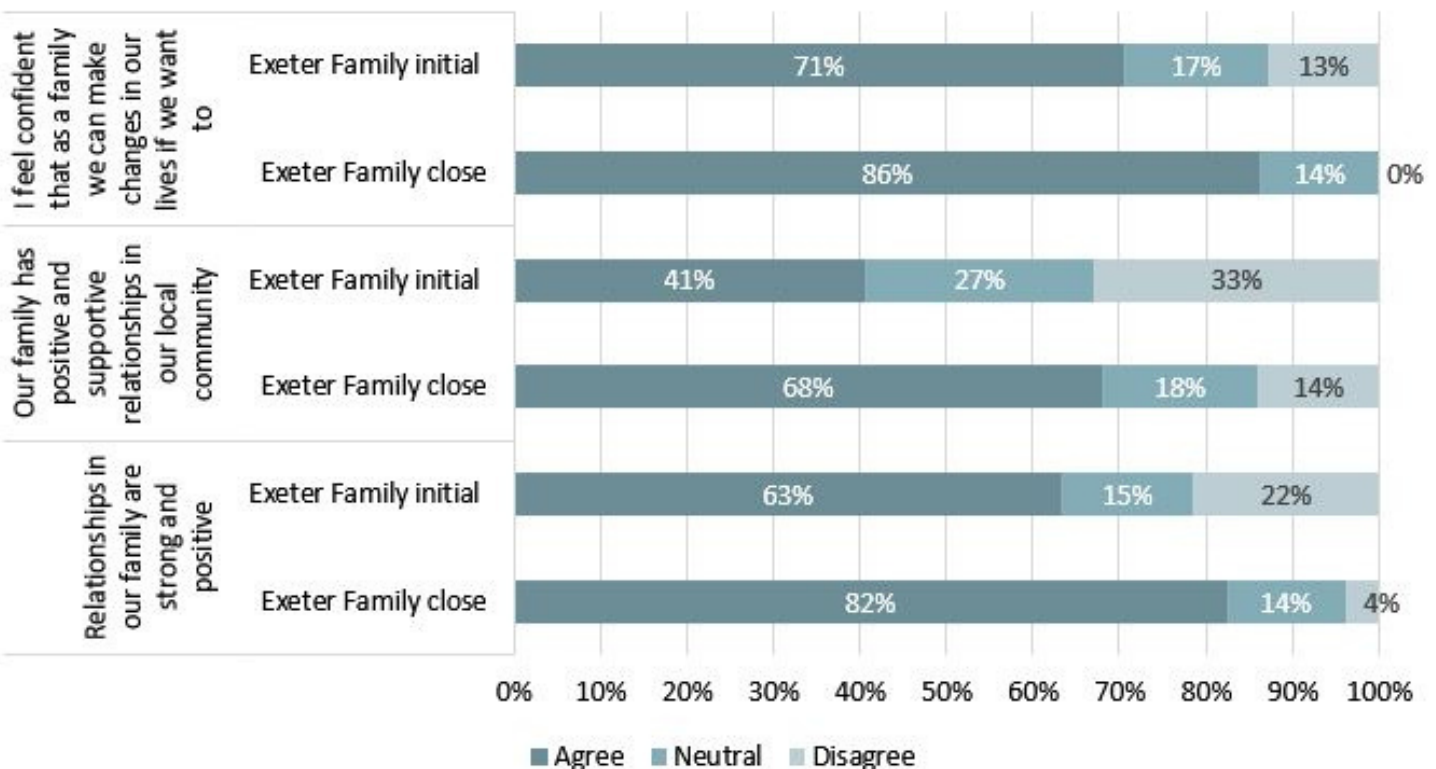


FAMILY PARTICIPANTS

We asked those working with family connectors a series of questions about their family relationships and time spent together, at the beginning of their engagement with the programme, and at the end.

As can be seen from the chart below, overall family relationships (both internal and external) were reported to be strengthened following engagement with Wellbeing Exeter:

- 'Our family has positive and supportive relationships in our local community,' saw a 27% increase in levels of agreement.
- 'Relationships in our family are strong and positive' showed a 19% increase in levels of agreement.



Community Connecting

Families also reported doing more things together following engagement with Wellbeing Exeter, often involving an active element.

This was most evident for:

- **'Spend time together doing something you enjoy'**

which has seen a 12% increase in the proportion of families doing this weekly or more frequently, and:

- **'Go for a walk, bike ride, play sport, some other form of physical activity together'**

which has seen an 11% increase in the proportion of families doing this weekly or more frequently.

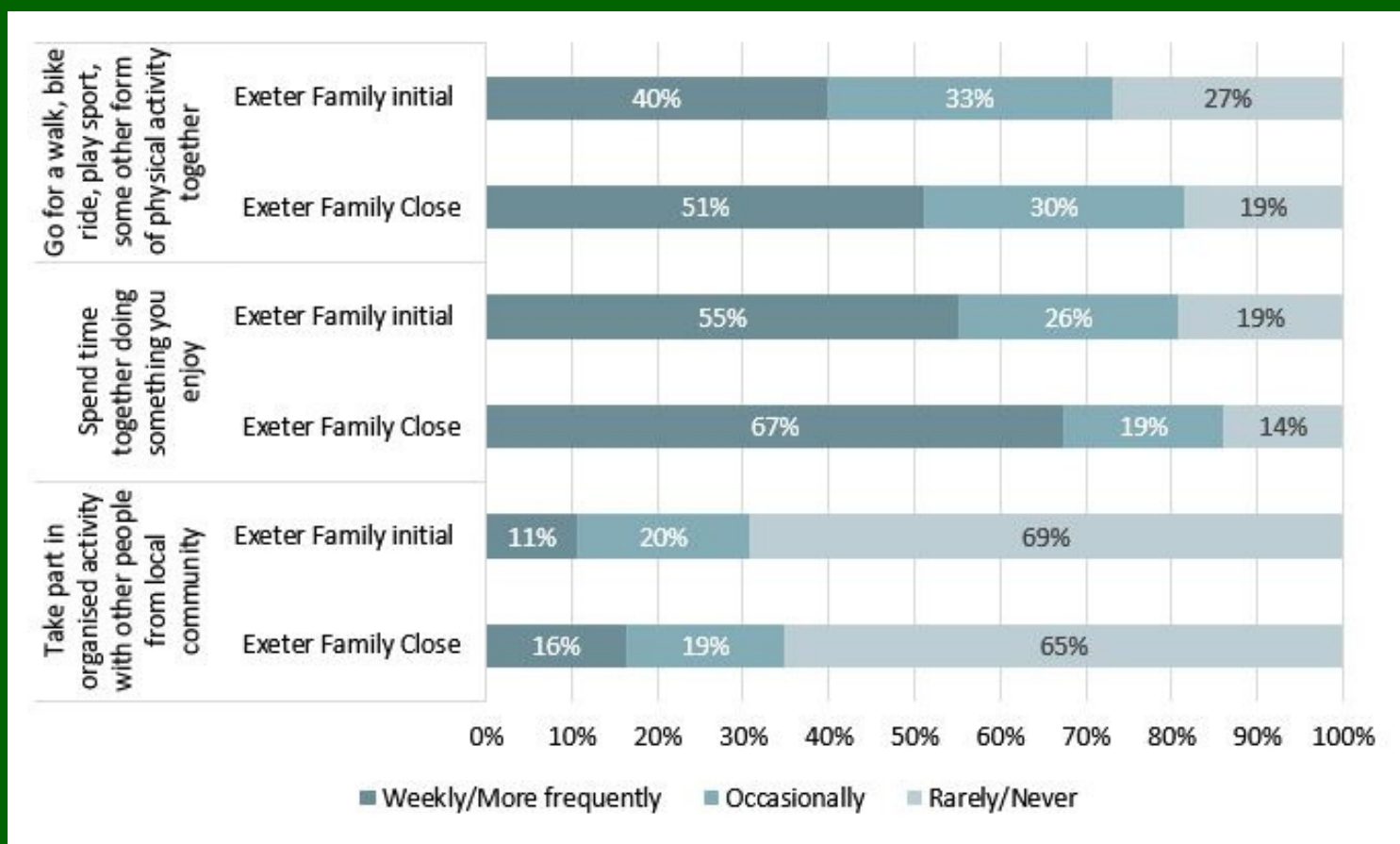
LONELINESS

The Campaign to End Loneliness' measurement tool is a short, sensitively worded means to explore loneliness amongst respondents. Response scores give a possible range of 0-12, with a higher score indicating greater feelings of loneliness.

Across all survey types the data suggests that respondents were less lonely at the time of completing the close surveys than they were on completing the initial survey:

- **Initial average loneliness score: 4.74**
- **Close average loneliness score: 3.05**

More work could be done to examine shifts in scores of those explicitly seeking help with feelings of loneliness.



Community Connecting

WELLBEING

The Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS)[1] presents seven statements about thoughts and feelings and asks participants to state how often they have experienced each one over the last two weeks. Responses are scored, with a range up to 35. A higher score indicates more positive mental wellbeing. Scores reported at the beginning of engagement were compared with those at the end, and show a clear improvement in reported mental wellbeing:

- **Initial mental wellbeing score: 20.1**
- **Close mental wellbeing score: 24.7**

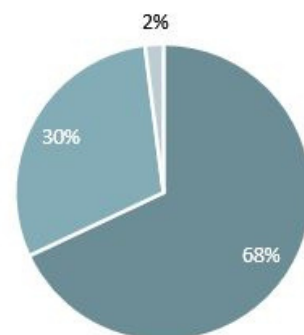
Wellbeing Exeter's open referral approach means we work with participants on an extremely wide range of areas. While many of those with whom we work may well be facing challenges with their wellbeing, often significant ones, others may have rather different reasons for engagement for which these questions are less relevant as a measure of impact.

Nevertheless, taken overall this is a positive finding. SWEMWBS has a mean score of 23.5 in samples of the general UK population, so it is clear that entrants to Wellbeing Exeter's community connecting programme do overall have lower-than-average wellbeing, and leave it with an overall higher-than-average score.

We can also consider the proportion of participants who move wellbeing 'categories' following engagement with the programme. Respondents' scores are clustered into three groups – low, moderate and high wellbeing. We can see that the wellbeing 'profile' of the Wellbeing Exeter cohort shifts significantly towards higher wellbeing following engagement.

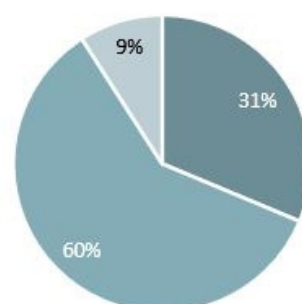


Before Engagement



■ low wellbeing ■ moderate wellbeing ■ high wellbeing

After Engagement



■ low wellbeing ■ moderate wellbeing ■ high wellbeing

[1] The Warwick-Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale or [WEMWBS] was developed by the University of Warwick in conjunction with NHS Health Scotland, University of Edinburgh and the University of Leeds. ©University of Warwick, 2006, all rights reserved.

Community Connecting

COMMUNITY

Participants were asked whether they had engaged recently in activities representing the Five Ways to Wellbeing. Results showed an overall positive shift following engagement with a community connector. For Exeter adults we observed:

- **An increase of 26% in 'paying attention to how they are feeling' (from 50% to 76%)**
- **An increase of 25% in 'chatting to somebody in the community' (from 37% to 62%)**
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Positive findings amongst Exeter families are less substantial; however, an increase is evident in the frequency of making time to learn something and taking notice of the world around them.

Beth was referred to Wellbeing Exeter by her GP due to feelings of isolation, a lack of confidence and anxiety. Although living in supported accommodation and having other people around, she found herself confined to her room, with these symptoms only becoming more severe due to the pandemic.

Beth was contacted by her Connector, who arranged a meeting with her, her Mum and support worker. She is autistic and so the extra support in the meeting was helpful to her.

With gentle encouragement Beth was able to explain her situation and her feelings of loneliness and lack of social connections. Together they talked about the things she would love to do and the things she used to do, that she would like to start again.

Beth said she needed to be more active to help with her joints and said she was keen to volunteer. She talked about her passion for cooking and wanted to join a social group.

As trust was built over several meetings, Beth started to try out some of the suggestions her Connector made. She was able to start regularly volunteering with St Sidwell's café and Exeter Foodbank.

She attended some cooking courses and began to see an improvement in her confidence. She joined trampoline fitness sessions and regular swimming lessons. She also benefited from her sessions with Talkworks and felt able to start attending a weekly drama class.

Over the six months of working with her Connector, Beth had gone from having feelings of isolation and anxiety, to feeling much more confident and connected and able to have a full weekly schedule.



Community Connecting

OUTCOMES FOR PEOPLE ENGAGING WITH COMMUNITY CONNECTORS: A STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

We worked with statistician Michelle Tester-Jones, a lecturer in public health at the University of Exeter and member of the School for Public Health Environments Research at Exeter (SPHERE), to perform some statistical analysis on the same questionnaire data as SERIO considered.

This analysis examines the before (T1) and after (T2) impact of the programme on key wellbeing outcomes. The aim was to investigate whether, through these datasets, it was possible to confirm whether taking part in the Wellbeing Exeter programme leads to statistically significant changes in wellbeing outcomes, and how these impacts might happen. The following analysis examines the statistical evidence for a relationship between engagement with community connectors and wellbeing outcomes, in order to better understand whether the improvements in wellbeing that have been observed using descriptive statistics are simply due to chance, or whether the improvements are likely to be specifically due to participation in the Wellbeing Exeter programme. Michelle analysed data from 507 participants in the programme between 2021 and May 2023.

Four key research questions were defined:

1. What aspects of life can the Wellbeing Exeter programme support people with?

Specifically, how does participation in the programme impact participants':

- (a) General wellbeing
- (b) Physical activity levels
- (c) Ability to develop relationships with others
- (d) Engagement with their community

2. What are the possible pathways to improvement in outcomes?

Specifically, does developing relationships and engaging with the community (which is representative of the work of community connectors) account for any of the improvement in post intervention wellbeing?

Do these change the strength of the relationship between wellbeing before and after?

For example, if a service user reports a greater level of engagement with their community, does this individual also report better wellbeing outcomes post intervention compared to an individual who reported a lower level of community engagement?

Engagement with the Five Ways to Wellbeing was explored in the same way.

3. What length of intervention is most impactful for improving wellbeing outcomes?

4. Do different subgroups benefit differently on the outcomes measured (comparing adults, families and young people?)



SPHERE

School for Public Health Environments Research at Exeter

Community Connecting

SUMMARY OF KEY RESULTS

- We found significant overall mean increases in general wellbeing, development of relationships with others and community engagement from baseline to post intervention. This finding was consistent across adults, families and young people (i.e. all subgroups demonstrated significant mean increases in each variable).
- A significantly greater proportion of participants in the family subgroup reported being active post intervention compared to pre intervention.
- As a participant reports greater relationship development post intervention, they also report higher wellbeing post intervention.
- Engagement with the community, length of intervention, and each of the Five Ways to Wellbeing (with the exception of 'give') all have an impact on the strength and/or direction of the relationship between pre and post intervention wellbeing scores.
- A participant who reports a greater level of engagement with their community post intervention also reports higher wellbeing scores post intervention compared to an individual who reported a lower level of community engagement (Figure 1). However, if a participant had higher wellbeing before starting the intervention, community engagement does not play a significant role in T2 wellbeing outcomes. This suggests that **for those participants that entered the programme experiencing lower wellbeing, engagement with their local community is a crucial element in the pathway to reporting higher general wellbeing when exiting the programme.**

- A longer intervention length is associated with higher wellbeing scores at T2 (Figure 2).
- Young people experienced greater increases in post-intervention wellbeing compared to the family and adult subgroups.
- Differences in physical activity levels were not associated with engagement with the community, developing relationships or any of the Five Ways to Wellbeing. They were also not impacted by intervention length.

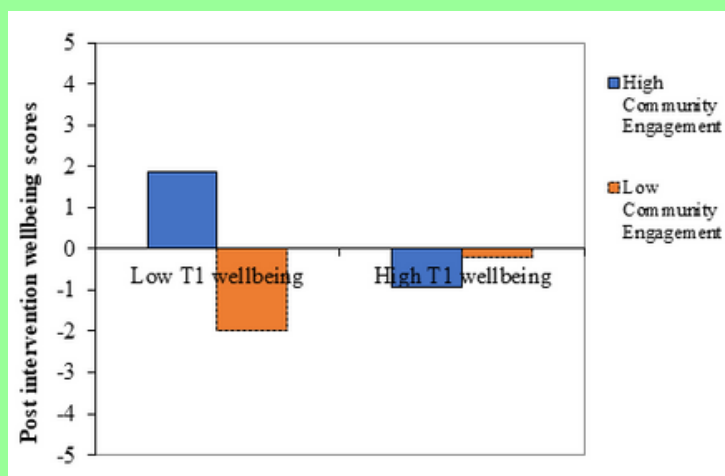


Figure 1: The effect of community engagement on the relationship between T1 and T2 general wellbeing scores.

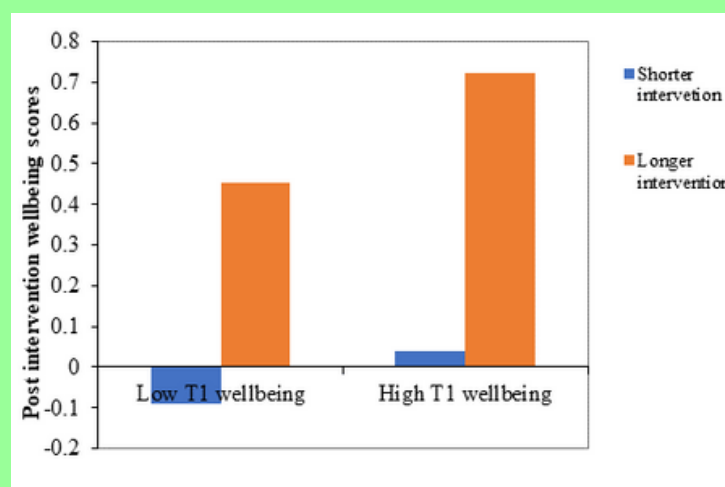


Figure 2: The moderating effect of intervention length on the relationship between T1 and T2 general wellbeing scores.

Community Connecting

Dr Tester-Jones' analysis indicates that for those participants that entered the Wellbeing Exeter programme experiencing lower wellbeing, engagement with their local community is a crucial element in the pathway to reporting higher general wellbeing when exiting the programme.

"Receiving regular support from a Community Connector has been of great help. Sometimes it is easier to talk things through with a stranger, especially when I had the feeling of being trapped in my house because of blindness. The personal touch given has been very important."

Jackie had previously been severely visually impaired but following an accident she had become completely unsighted. She also no longer had a guide dog. When the Connector first met her, her priority was to be able to get out of the house more and lead a more independent and varied life.

The Connector supported Jackie to attend an assessment meeting with an agency that offers enabling support. The Connector also contacted the Adult Social Care team and attended a meeting with her. This resulted in her being offered some one-to-one IT support which she has found extremely helpful. Jackie said:
"Receiving regular support from a Community Connector has been of great help. Sometimes it is easier to talk things through with a stranger, especially when I had the feeling of being trapped in my house because of blindness. The personal touch given has been very important."

Jackie is no longer eligible for a guide dog due to her age. She found this very upsetting. The Connector discussed other options with her and she has now requested some additional hours with an enabler. Although this does not give her the independence of a guide dog, it has helped her to feel more positive, as has using technology more effectively. Jackie said that it had been extremely challenging initially to contact and get input from services and that having support to do this from Wellbeing Exeter had been essential for her.

Jackie and her enabler have enjoyed outings to garden centres and Topsham and Jackie enjoys planning outings and looks forward to them. She says that for example just being able to buy and write a birthday card for a family member without involving them has really made a huge difference to her life.



Community Connecting

ONE DEVON DATASET: UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL PRESCRIBING'S RELATIONSHIP WITH HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The One Devon Dataset is a pioneering model developed by NHS, Public Health and Social Care teams in the One Devon Integrated System that brings together information about individuals' use of health and social care provision from across the system, allowing much greater analytical capacity for assessing the impact of interventions.

The dataset is large enough to allow control cohorts to be identified, which can be used to show comparative outcomes for a group not experiencing the intervention in question.

Wellbeing Exeter has a long-standing association with Devon's public health team, collaborating in the past to overlay public health data on frailty at a neighbourhood level with qualitative data from community builders, to add contextual and explanatory detail. We are delighted to be working together again, with Wellbeing Exeter serving as a vanguard trial project for the new dataset.

What is especially exciting is that Wellbeing Exeter data on individuals who have worked with community connectors will be extracted into the dataset, using a pseudonymising tool based on individuals' NHS numbers.

It is a testament to the quality and size of Wellbeing Exeter's dataset that it can act in place of data from GPs on their social prescribing activity (this is not otherwise accessible for Exeter as a result of low sign-up to the dataset from Primary Care Networks in the city).

This data can then be used initially in the following ways:

- It permits comparative analysis of Wellbeing Exeter participants' use of a range of health and social care services against a control group who did not work with Wellbeing Exeter. Through this we can understand whether, and in what way, working with Wellbeing Exeter has a subsequent impact on participants' use of services.
- Through comparison with data from other parts of Devon from those who have engaged with other social prescribing offers, we can see whether there is any difference in the impacts observed between projects.
- The longitudinal range of Wellbeing Exeter data allows us to understand more about the longevity of impacts over much longer time periods following the intervention than it is usually possible to track. Too often, evaluation is conducted much too close in time to the activity to have any real sense of long-term impact.
- We can look at other aspects, such as what level of frailty individuals had reached before referral to Wellbeing Exeter, and whether there is any variation in outcomes depending on what other physical and mental health conditions the person is living with at the time of referral.

There is obviously huge potential to explore this data in a much wider range of ways.

Plans are being developed to work closely with the public health team to maximise the insight we can draw from this work.

Community Connecting

Sarah's family was referred to Wellbeing Exeter following a challenging few years in which they had experienced several significant losses, including bereavement, relocation and loss of a family network. Due to public health restrictions during that time, no member of the family had been able to develop social connections in the way they would ordinarily have expected to. The impact of this strain was being felt throughout the household, with sibling rivalry causing tensions and Sarah unable to work due to the stress of managing her family's needs.

During the initial meetings with her family connector, Sarah identified her priority was to better acquaint herself with Exeter, so that she had a sense of what resources were available. She subsequently met with her connector to take walks and visit local cafes. During these meetings, she spoke about activities that her daughter would enjoy trying out which included horse riding. The family connector was able to introduce her to a local riding school and they visited together to learn more about the opportunities there. The connector also shared resources with Sarah that would enable her to support her daughter's mental health and wellbeing. Sarah's developing confidence about prioritising her needs led her to seek private counselling so she could better support her own wellbeing.

A significant link was made when the family connector facilitated a meeting between Sarah and her local community builder. Through this connection, Sarah was able to meet with others in her community and together they planned and held a street party to mark the Platinum Jubilee. Sarah has subsequently developed closer connections with some of her neighbours, with some now regarded as friends.

*Sarah's involvement with Wellbeing Exeter came to a natural end when she recognised her own confidence had increased and her social network had developed. She told her Family Connector she had **"...really appreciated the space to be listened to in a non-judgmental way... and focus purely on me and what was important."***

COMMUNITY CONNECTING WITH UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

One of the ways in which Wellbeing Exeter is valuable within the wider system of social support in Exeter is the flexibility of the basic mechanism to accommodate unanticipated challenges rapidly and effectively.

One such example is the work of Wellbeing Exeter in partnership with Exeter City Council to build an agile and culturally appropriate response to the arrival of Ukrainian refugees in the city.

Two Community Connectors were recruited to work exclusively with this community, supporting the refugees immediately on arrival and over the succeeding months. Connectors worked with 61 individuals and families, mostly of working age, between July 2022 and November 2023.

Our review of the value of this work included a focus group involving around ten Ukrainian participants, along with the Community Connectors, and ECC's Homes for Ukraine support worker.



Community Connecting

Interpreting was of course a very welcome aspect of the connector role, as Google translate can only take you so far. But it was the fact that the Connectors were more than interpreters that really made the difference: ***“I had a million questions and she could answer them.”***

Most of the Ukrainian people who attended the focus group had had positive experiences with British sponsors, and with coming to Britain. But inevitably there were practical challenges, in particular with understanding and navigating British bureaucratic and legal systems.

One woman had an accident at work, which then necessitated a number of medical appointments and formal meetings with her employer. Others welcomed help with finding private rental accommodation once the six months family host placement ended, or in applying for school places.

Paperwork was a cause of substantial concern, even down to email composition etiquette in English. The Connectors were very helpful, not only as interpreters, but as guides to the system: ***“From the start, Viktoria was always with me. She was so patient with my stupid questions.”***



Homes For Ukraine Scheme Referrals Start (1 Jul 2022) to End (30 Nov 2023)



Referrals



Gender



Age Range



Events



Welcome Visits



No of Signposts Exeter



No of Signposts Outside Exeter



Referral Reasons



Community Connecting

Connectors also provided invaluable support in helping people build social networks, and avoid isolation.

This was sometimes evident in concrete ways, through the Ukrainian conversation café in Paris Street, and social events, for example. More often it was through providing a feeling of security.

The fact that the Connectors were so available, through a variety of means, very much helped to support a sense of community: ***"I could reach her any time by phone or text."***

"I could reach her any time by phone or text."

At times of stress, such as when a challenge arose with a host, it was important to have someone else to turn to. The impact of this 'safety net' - whether used or not - on wellbeing, is not to be underestimated.

Refugees valued the Connectors' warmth, their can-do attitude, and the fact that they cared about people's wellbeing as well as the practical issues. The attendance of the Connectors at initial welcome visits was very valuable; the support was timely, meaning that if any issues were subsequently identified, the person knew where to turn.

Engagement with the Connectors was for obvious reasons most intense in that period shortly after arrival. After that it would be when something went wrong, for example the illness of a child. ***"I don't feel that I have been left alone here"***.

One of the most successful elements of this work was the strong collaboration with Exeter City Council staff.

The ECC Homes for Ukraine Support Worker said that her job was a struggle before the Ukrainian Connectors started.

Not only was the language barrier an issue, but it was hard for her to understand the emotional side of the refugees' situation: ***"When they started, it was such a relief."***

It was clear what a beneficial impact they had on the refugees: ***"You could see their shoulders drop... they know there's someone there who understands... it changes the atmosphere in the room"***.

The Connectors and Support Worker worked closely as a team: ***"We're so glad we went down this route... they've been invaluable."***

The combination of language skills, alongside cultural understanding, and a flexible, informal, person-centred remit has enabled the Connectors to make a real difference.

Wellbeing Exeter's person-centred ethos was a good fit; the existing close working relationships with Exeter City Council meant trust was quick to establish.

It should be noted however, that managing a new service is not an insignificant management commitment, requiring adequate core team capacity.

"I don't feel that I have been left alone here"

Community Connecting

SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT / SOCIAL VALUE ANALYSIS

SROI assesses the social impact of investment by quantifying social, environmental and economic outcomes in monetary terms. By analysing the detail of the day-to-day social value of Wellbeing Exeter's community connecting work, we can quantify – monetise - the impact of social interventions and calculate what the 'social return' has been on the investment by commissioners and funders. This value can inform future resourcing of the programme by, for example, focusing on the most socially impactful activities.

Navigating the terrain of establishing social values and crafting proxies for outcomes involves an inherently subjective process. In executing this task, our analysts have conscientiously adhered to the guiding principles of Social Value UK, particularly emphasising the organisation's eight core principles.

Proxy values have been presented within ranges and various options, recognising the inherent complexity and diversity of social changes, thereby ensuring a nuanced and adaptable evaluation that aligns with the dynamic nature of the societal impact. The proxy values of Wellbeing Exeter outcomes for service users and communities have been developed using established approaches from the HACCT Value Bank, the national TOMs (Themes, Outcomes, and Measures) framework and the Social Value UK SROI Library.

In summary, Wellbeing Exeter has achieved a significant number of social outcomes.

The programme had an estimated social value equivalent to £1,948,172 in 2023.

This figure is derived from a sample of outcomes which has been scaled up to the number of service users accessing Wellbeing Exeter and includes 'dead-weighting' at 20% and attribution at 30% which removes any value that would have come about without Wellbeing Exeter.

This analysis found that Wellbeing Exeter is particularly good at achieving the following outcomes:

- Membership of a social group
- Relief from depression/anxiety
- Improved health
- Regular volunteering to support health-care-related charities or community projects.

In conclusion, this social return on investment analysis demonstrates the wide-ranging and multifaceted societal value generated by Wellbeing Exeter.

Through a rigorous evaluation methodology aligned with best practices, the analysis quantified over £8m (before attribution and dead-weighting) in social value outcomes attained in the past year alone. Notably, Wellbeing Exeter excels at fostering social connectedness, supporting improved mental health, encouraging healthy lifestyles, and enabling participants to support community causes.

The SROI report, which is available on the Wellbeing Exeter Impact webpage, provides an initial framework to understand Wellbeing Exeter's diverse impacts. This framework can act as a guide for the next phase of Wellbeing Exeter and inform the application of social value analysis as a means to unravel more of the value of its work.

Community Building

Community Builders have been working in neighbourhoods across Exeter as part of the Wellbeing Exeter partnership since 2016. There is currently a Community Builder in every ward in the city (as well as in Cranbrook), organised into area clusters, and employed and managed by key Wellbeing Exeter partner, Exeter Community Initiatives.

The Builders' role is to engage with residents, and enable them to take action in their communities to make them better, more inclusive, and more connected places to live. This strand of the Wellbeing Exeter programme sits alongside its social prescribing and physical activity elements to support its work with individuals, and help develop the community assets needed to enable everyone in Exeter to live healthy, fulfilling lives.

Over the years since they began work, DCF has worked closely with the Community Builders to understand how they go about their work, and where this has supported community change at neighbourhood level.

We have also closely monitored the types of activities undertaken by Community Builders. Through this, we have built a detailed understanding of the distinctive character of community building in Exeter, as a truly place-based response to local conditions, as it has developed over time.

The report [Community Building in a Pandemic](#) (2022) explores Builders' responses to the changing context as a result of Covid 19. It considers the impact of a shift to virtual communication for an area of practice defined by face-to-face interaction, and also looks at the rise of hyper-local links, and the changing nature of volunteering, among other issues. It has been useful to have experienced, knowledgeable people on the ground to help us interpret the changes wrought by the pandemic at neighbourhood level, and their implications.

Seeking to understand the value of Community Building has required some methodological ingenuity. Measuring Builder activity (counting their conversations, listening events, organisations with which they are involved, etc) can be useful to inform internal discussion and supervision, but tells us little about how Builders work, or what difference that work makes. We developed neighbourhood profiles initially as an evaluation mechanism that took a different approach (we subsequently decided to publish them, to share their insight more widely – you can see them on the Wellbeing Exeter website). The profiles sought to understand each ward from the ground up, exploring its geography, its micro-communities, its assets (both physical and social), and its challenges. Far from being simple directories, the profiles provided us with a 'baseline' description to which we could return, after a period, to consider what had changed, and what role the Community Builder had played in that change. In this way we could for example plot the way a Builder's role shifts over time, becoming less intensive and more advisory as an initiative builds momentum. Or we could see beyond the numbers of organisations in an area, to ask questions about how they were connected and how inclusive they were.



Community Building

In summer 2023 we conducted a survey of Exeter residents, asking about their knowledge of and engagement with their Community Builder. We received 354 responses from all wards in the city.

In addition, we held a series of interviews and focus groups with residents who have had significant contact with the Community Builders, to understand from their perspective where the value of community building lies. The results are summarised below. Read the full report, [Knitting it all Together](#).

Active Listening: Many residents value the Community Builders' listening role, which links closely with the person-centred ethos of the Wellbeing Exeter programme as a whole. Because Community Builders work with residents to support them to take action on the things that matter to them, this is an essential step.

"I have lived on this road for six years and had never really met my neighbours. With [the Community Builder's] help, I have met neighbours I had never spoken to and we often get together for a chat while our children play together. It has made living here so much better for us all."

A Trusted Source of Information: *"She's a walking encyclopedia"*, says one resident. But Community Builders are much more than excellent local directories – we have apps for that. They actively manage and use that knowledge, to everyone's benefit.

"The newsletter is just one aspect of how the community builder shares information on what is going on in the locality."

A Means to Link with Others: one of the most impactful ways in which Community Builders can support local action is by linking people with complementary ideas and aspirations together. No one can change the world, or even their neighbourhood, on their own, but connecting with others can make those aims more realistic.

As Community Builders are also linked with each other (a strong team spirit has been deliberately incubated, as this can be isolating work), they have access to citywide examples and experience – someone, somewhere, has probably already faced the same challenges, and might have some ideas to share. Community builders can avoid residents having to reinvent the wheel, and give them access to a network of civic solidarity and wisdom.

Several residents noted how the sheer variety of connections Community Builders hold means they can introduce people to ideas and activities beyond their immediate range of experience, 'bridging' between groups of people.

Community Building

A Maintainer of Momentum and Smoother of Paths: Community-based action can be difficult work, and it invariably ebbs and flows as other life priorities come along. Residents told us the Community Builders have an important role to play, not in instigating, but in 'holding' projects, and helping maintain their momentum through those more challenging moments. One active community member explained how 'his' Community Builder 'smoothed the path' for his project, booking rooms, sending invitations, writing minutes, and generally making it easier to keep the project on-track.

This might sound like a gentle and very straightforward aspect of a Builder's role, but stepping into a community space is often challenging, and requires residents to decide to leave their comfort zone. A Community Builder's combination of persistence and support is often what can give someone the confidence to act.

"She is good at being the glue or the gap filler."

"A lot more people have met each other as a result of her endeavours."

A Neutral Person, Who Knows When Not To Act: People become involved with community activity because they care passionately about it, and this can mean there is a lot at stake for them personally. As one resident put it, there are a lot of 'doers' in this area. Builders can help residents take a step back, and remember their ultimate goals, when they encounter the inevitable setbacks along the way. Importantly, they are good at judging when not to intervene – when a community does not need external involvement.

An Encourager and Enabler: Community Builders walk alongside residents to support their action to make their communities better places. Sometimes this will be just the encouragement someone needs to take that first step. Many people told us that they felt the Community Builder helped them understand that they have 'permission' to take action to change things where they live, and that this was very empowering.

"Our Community Builder has encouraged us to become a community."

"It is a complex community and they have worked to make a diverse network of relationships."



Community Building

The long-established **Exwick Community Association** had been dormant for some time, when a small group of Exwick residents decided it would be useful to revive it, so it could act as an umbrella under which smaller ideas and projects could flourish. This was easier said than done, and the plan progressed slowly. It would have been easy for the residents to lose heart as they met challenges, but the Community Builder was with them at every step, helping to organise and publicise meetings, taking minutes, even sourcing free food to attract more people to attend.

Her support, says one association member, helped them maintain the momentum needed to wade through all the paperwork, and get the association up and running again. Since then, she has been an invaluable sounding board – knowledgeable, but neutral. He recalls a moment when the association was in discussion with a potential activity leader, and they were getting sidetracked and bogged down. The Community Builder was able to see the bigger picture, and remind everyone what their original goal had been, getting the conversation helpfully back on track.

"I'm not terribly community minded... without her I wouldn't have done it. It's been good for me."



A Channel Into and Between Organisations:

Residents say that Community Builders make a valuable contribution in this area, perhaps by making introductions, or acting as mediators, or by simply signposting residents to the right person.

"She knits it all together."

A Flexible Source of Support – With an Exit Plan:

Several residents noted how the support from their Community Builder changes over time, ranging from intensive engagement at points where a project needs it, to a more light-touch 'strategic' link as something becomes more established.

"She is not an influencer, but she certainly has influence."

A Champion of the Community, from Behind:

Much of what is really valuable about community building is barely noticeable from the outside. One resident described this, beautifully, as being the 'scrum master', a servant-leader whose role within a team is facilitation.

It's Personal: Overwhelmingly, residents commented on the personal qualities of the Community Builders. Because this role is built on direct relationships, how it is done is as important as what. Builders are all different people, of course, but there is a lot of common ground in the way they were described: friendly and approachable, lively, encouraging, full of humility, inclusive, empathetic, pro-active, energetic, positive, supportive, responsive, and accessible.

Community Building

In 2020 a group of individuals in the Pennsylvania area of the city formed a WhatsApp group to discuss the idea of opening a community shop and meeting space locally.

The Community Builder engaged with them online, and walked alongside an energetic and enthusiastic group of residents, coming together for the first time to bring some much-needed community space to their neighbourhood.

***Sylvania Stores** opened in the summer of 2021 and is a bustling and well-loved local asset.*

A committee member explained how the Community Builder provided practical help as they established the organisational structure, and recruited postholders, linking them with another local organisation for support. Over time, he explains, her involvement has become less hands-on, and more strategic, suggesting connections, and providing advice, but not needing to be present at every meeting.

“She is a powerhouse of enthusiasm and care.”

DCF will shortly publish a new report, **Building Communities in Exeter**, which reflects on Wellbeing Exeter’s version of community building as it has evolved and matured since the beginning of the programme, as a distinctive place-based response.

- It considers the important role community builders have in working alongside residents of ‘**new communities**’ in Exeter and Cranbrook, as well as with existing residents of rapidly developing neighbourhoods.

- We note the important role Community Builders play, not only in linking citizen with citizen, but in **connecting individuals with various public sector bodies**, including local council officers and representatives. Carefully neutral and independent, despite being funded by the City Council, Community Builders nevertheless play an under-recognised role in supporting active citizenship and local democracy.
- One of the important observations of the report is the contribution Community Builders make to **linking together groups of residents who might not otherwise interact**, or indeed who might have adversarial relationships: students and permanent residents is an example very pertinent to the Exeter context. We have also seen how connections between more ‘asset-rich’ neighbourhoods and contexts, and those with poorer infrastructure/less experience in community action can be similarly important in this respect.
- Although community building is obviously a neighbourhood-focused activity, this report clearly locates the value of Exeter’s model in its **long-term, holistic, citywide** perspective, describing the value-added of an approach that sees community building as a universal exercise in citizen engagement, concerned with strengths rather than needs, and able to link people, ideas and experience across the city, to everyone’s benefit.



Leading an Active Life

Sport England's ten-year strategy, *Uniting the Movement*, highlights an ambition to better connect with health and wellbeing, including building a stronger relationship with the health system to meaningfully integrate physical activity. The strategy specifically references social prescribing as a key mechanism to achieve this; it aims to enable and support the inclusion of high-quality physical activity within social prescribing systems, ensuring that activities are person-centred, accessible, inclusive and supportive to all. In order to achieve this, Sport England brokers and builds partnerships and collaboration across a range of sectors. One such initiative is the local delivery pilot focused on Exeter and Cranbrook, known as *Live and Move*, which Sport England has supported since 2019. Wellbeing Exeter is a central pillar of the pilot: Sport England's involvement has enabled a focus on supporting physical activity among the least active, through the community connecting function, but also through newly created community-based roles.

COMMUNITY CONNECTING SUPPORTING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Live & Move's evaluation partner SERIO focused their attention on the extent to which engagement with Wellbeing Exeter supported people to increase their levels of physical activity. To do this, questions from the Short Active Lives Survey (SALS) were included within the questionnaires completed by all those engaging with community connectors (whether focused explicitly on increasing physical activity or not). SALS was developed in response to the Government and Sport England's aim to increase the number of people who are physically active and reduce the number of people who are physically inactive, in line with the UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines.

A determination of 'active' means an individual achieves the recommended levels of at least 150 minutes of weekly moderate intensity physical activity. 'Inactive' means they achieve less than 30 minutes. A third category, 'fairly active', is used for people who achieve 30-149 minutes per week.

SALS asks respondents whether they did any physical activity in the last seven days across three activity types:

- Walking
- Cycling
- Sport, fitness, and dance

For each one they did, they are then asked:

- On how many days they did it
- How long they did it for on average (in hours and minutes)
- Whether it usually raised their breathing rate (to determine whether it qualifies as at least moderate intensity)

By adding together total activity (days x time) for each activity type that raised their breathing rate, respondents' overall weekly moderate intensity physical activity levels can be calculated. From this, respondents can be classified as inactive, fairly active or active.



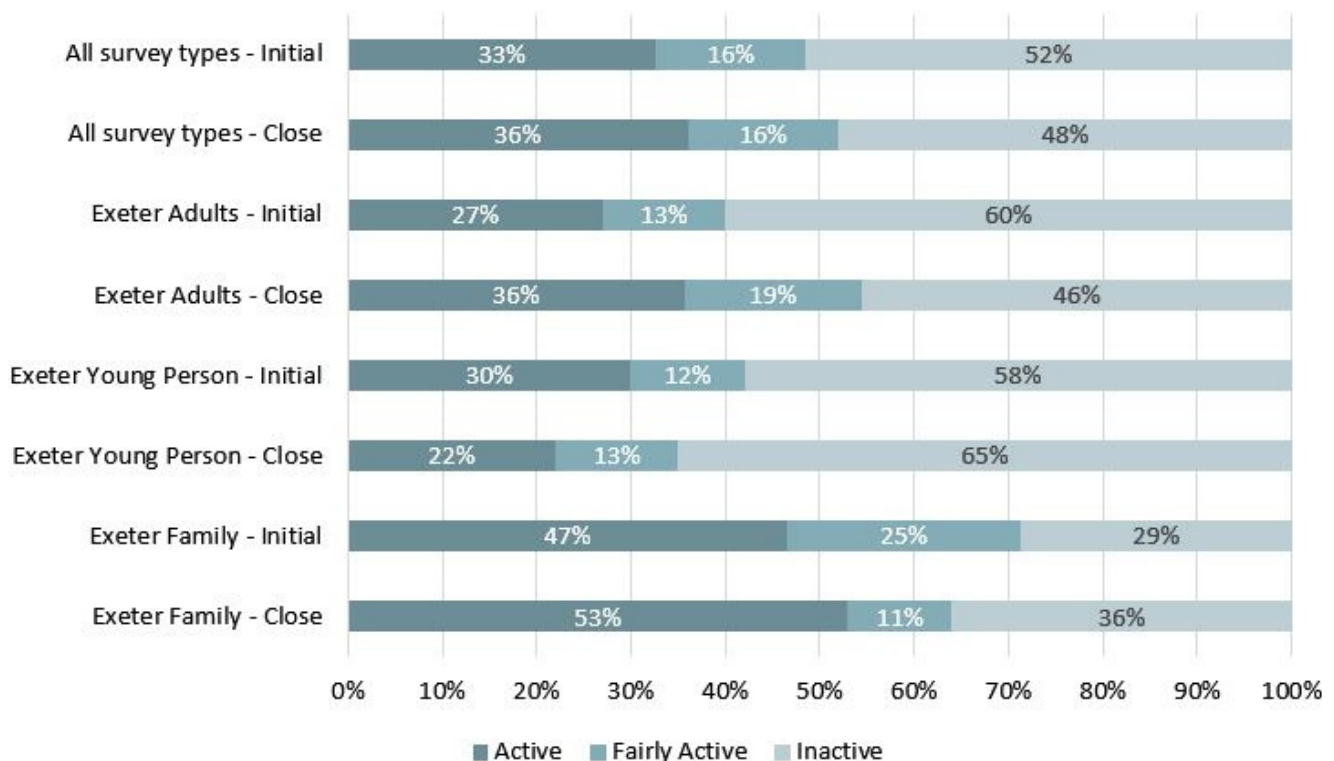
Leading an Active Life

The chart below highlights the findings for Exeter respondents. Base sizes for Cranbrook respondents are currently too small for any meaningful comparisons to be drawn. Across all survey types there has been a slight increase in the proportion of participants classified as 'active' (up from 33% at initial survey to 36% at close survey) and a slight decrease in the proportion classified as 'inactive' (down from 52% at initial survey to 48% at close survey). Wellbeing Exeter's open referral approach means we work with participants on a wide range of areas. As not everyone is focused on raising their levels of physical activity, it is not necessarily meaningful to consider changes in the data overall. Amongst those indicating they hoped to gain support to become more physically active as a result of their engagement with Wellbeing Exeter the proportion classified as 'active' increased from 30% to 43% and the proportion being classified as 'inactive' decreased from 55% at the initial survey to 39% at the close survey.

The data suggests that engagement with a Community Connector is having some impact on participants' levels of physical activity, with the data highlighting a slight increase in the proportion of participants classified as 'active' and a slight decrease in the proportion classified as 'inactive'.

Increases in levels of physical activity are more evident amongst those participants who indicated at the outset that support with physical activity was something they hoped to gain through their engagement with Wellbeing Exeter.

The data also suggests that, since engaging with a Connector, increasing proportions of participants are being more social in their physical activities, opting to undertake physical activity with another person or group of people, rather than alone.



Leading an Active Life

COMMUNITY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ORGANISERS (CPAOS)

This new role was added to the Wellbeing Exeter family in 2020, following the partnership with Sport England's Live and Move.

CPAOs work both with individuals referred to them, and more generally in the community, to remove obstacles to physical activity, and promote more community-based opportunities.

This infographic shows data on those individual referrals.



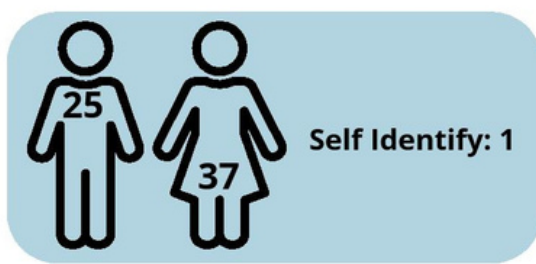
CPAO (Physical Activity) Referrals 1 Nov 2020 to 31 Dec 2023



Referrals



Gender



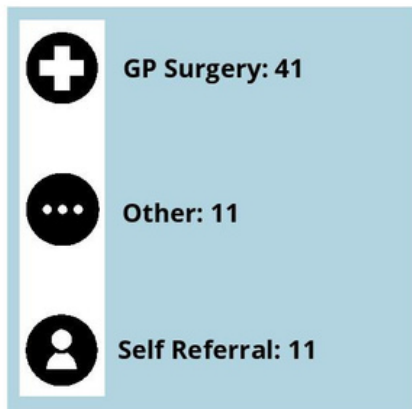
Signposts



Organisations Signposted To



Referrers



Age Range



Referral Reasons



Leading an Active Life

The role has evolved over time after a challenging start during the pandemic. Early mapping of factors affecting physical activity levels noted the importance of:

- **Geography:** An understanding of locality, and how far and where people will or can travel is important in encouraging regular participation in activities. A familiar venue such as a community centre can be less daunting than a gym.
- **Cost:** This is often a barrier to participation – activity needs to be low-cost or free, with a ‘pay as you go’ approach rather than longer-term commitment. Commercial activities are regularly out of reach for those on lower incomes.
- **Level:** Matching the level of skill or experience is important. There is a need for accessible, consistent ‘complete beginners’ options, not just one-off taster sessions.
- **Green Space:** The pandemic led CPAOs to work a lot in public open spaces, and their value as accessible local resources has been highlighted. There are some security concerns in certain contexts, but a sense that ‘positive activity breeds positive activity’ was prevalent.

Although it can be a challenge to support volunteers to take on the managing of groups, and accessing start-up funding is slower and more difficult than it ought to be, the CPAOs have been involved for example in establishing walking groups, youth clubs and table tennis sessions across the city. It is recognised that individuals engaging with CPAOs often experience a range of challenges that are obstacles to increasing their physical activity, and need addressing alongside opportunities for moving more. Many of these challenges are around mental ill-health, though practical issues such as benefit and housing can also prevent someone focusing on their levels of physical activity.

CPAOs work increasingly effectively with other Wellbeing Exeter roles, especially Community Builders, where a specialist physical activity perspective combines well with a deep, holistic knowledge of a neighbourhood.

CPAOs have also welcomed the opportunity to work alongside connectors to support individuals. These intersections are exactly what is needed to respond holistically and creatively to the wider range of challenges residents face when attempting to become more physically active.



Partnerships, Networks & Systems

Since Wellbeing Exeter's inception, the partnership has undergone a series of significant reconfigurations. In retrospect, it is easy to mistake the programme's longevity for unchanging stability.

In reality, Wellbeing Exeter has always responded dynamically to the external context, constantly reinventing itself to accommodate a shifting and often uncertain funding landscape, and seizing new opportunities to respond to perceived need within the community.

- The genesis of Wellbeing Exeter was in an interest in supporting those who presented at GPs for essentially social rather than biomedical reasons. As the programme developed, it became clear that, for certain cohorts in particular (young people, for example, or those from diverse ethnic backgrounds), presentation in a GP's surgery was likely to be a last resort, and we needed opportunities to connect with those individuals much sooner. This engendered a **broadening of referral mechanisms**, from physiotherapists to support workers and schools. WE has for example partnered with Inclusive Exeter to trial dedicated support for those from diverse ethnic communities.
- While many Wellbeing Exeter delivery partners are relatively large organisations, we have explored how the model can flex to accommodate much **smaller community partners**, who are fully embedded within hyper-local contexts. Our work with community connectors based within the Beacon Centre has for example helped us understand the support needed to accommodate smaller partners, but also the great potential of localised activity located within a community space, especially outside of the city centre.

- The most striking example of how the basic Wellbeing Exeter mechanism can be adapted to respond to a changing context is during Covid. Wellbeing Exeter's strong, trusted partnership with Exeter City Council, along with its established relationships in the voluntary sector, allowed it to pivot swiftly to support the city's pandemic response initiative, Exeter Community Wellbeing. Those involved recall how the in-principle design of the system took place over a single week, with each partner playing to their strengths.

Although the make-up of the Wellbeing Exeter partnership has shifted over time, the core of the programme remains an uncompromising commitment to its central ethos: broad referral criteria, flexible engagement, and person-centred care, premised on active listening. Wellbeing Exeter works with people, not patients, and begins from strength and passion, not weakness and need. An adherence to this ethos has not always been easy: when high referral rates resulted in longer waiting lists than we would like, there has been pressure to limit the lengths of time connectors engage with individuals. When external agencies have expressed an interest in using Community Builders' position within the community to pursue organisational rather than residents' priorities (however worthy), it has required energy to explain why this shouldn't happen. We are proud of this steadfastness, and grateful to our commissioners for supporting it.



Partnerships, Networks & Systems

CULTURAL CONNECTING

AGEUK Exeter (AUKE) and the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM) have worked together within the Wellbeing Exeter framework since February 2023 to offer community connecting with a focus on engagement with cultural opportunities.

Despite the emphasis on cultural opportunities, this partnership retains the essential Wellbeing Exeter person-centred and holistic principles, supporting participants with bereavement, employment, mental health and physical activity needs as well.

By October 2023 the two Cultural Connectors had worked with 46 referrals, connecting them into 90 different groups or organisations. This work was evaluated in late 2023 by Melinda Humphrey. The main points of her report are summarised below.

There is evidence that engagement with the programme increased participants' social and cultural connectedness, and helped them learn new things and build new connections to place. Participants also reported improvements in their mood, and that they felt more hopeful for the future.

The enthusiastic reception for the cultural connecting offer is testament to the skill, enterprise and commitment of the Cultural Connectors.

Cultural Connectors worked with RAMM staff to develop a cultural offer specifically tailored to the needs and interests of connectees. 'Friendly Fridays' offered an opportunity for connectees to handle museum objects, engage in craft activities, and take tours of the collections, in a relaxed way.

These were extremely well-received by participants. Comments from connectee that hadn't left his house for three years: *"I've been in lockdown for a long time. That's probably why I'm talking so much. [The Connector] here got me to come to this. To be honest, I'm amazed I'm here. But it's great - to hear this."*

Connectee who attended RAMM Friendly Friday as their first visit to the museum for many years: *"I didn't realise it was free to get in. The cost of living has kicked the backside out of my benefits and unexpected bills can decimate my ability to pay for things. It was marvellous. I'm planning to go over next week and use the voucher [for a free drink in the museum café]. A visit to RAMM will enable me to pursue my wide knowledge and interests."*

The benefits of the cultural connecting partnership extend beyond the immediate response from participants.



Partnerships, Networks & Systems

- For AUKE, the partnership has brought a broadening of their offer to clients: “The partnership enables us to offer our clients something different with the targeted arts and cultural offer. This enhances the menu of choice that we want for older people in the city and helps us deliver a more person-centred approach where people are able to choose what activities they would like to engage in. It also helps deliver on our strategic plans around collaboration across the city, to work in partnership to support people to age well in Exeter.” – **Nicky Flynn, Chief Executive Officer, Age UK Exeter**
- Having the specialist knowledge and insight of the Cultural Connectors within the wider Wellbeing Exeter family also boosts other ‘core’ connectors’ knowledge of cultural opportunities. RAMM has in the process become a popular hub for other connectors and connectees from across the programme.

There are undeniably challenges with working collaboratively in this way, especially where a partnership is relatively new, and still clarifying expectations, respective roles and priorities, as well as practical considerations like operational policies, leave arrangements and caseload management. However, the value of working in partnership here is clearly seen to add up to more than the sum of its parts, both for residents (who benefit from a holistic approach alongside specialist insight) and for participating organisations (who draw on each other’s strengths in enhancing their individual missions).

The following section takes a closer look at the network of organisational connections Wellbeing Exeter has engendered.

Leah: I was referred to Wellbeing Exeter by my GP in May 2023. I was in a whirlwind mentally and needed a lifeline to help my quality of life.

Susy: When I first met Leah she had been through a very tumultuous period. Serious ill health had caused her to take early retirement from her busy role in healthcare. Wanting to retain her independence whilst planning for an uncertain future led Leah to Wellbeing Exeter.

Leah: I did not want to be isolated from people and wanted to join in and access new activities. Susy explained about activities and was very informative and supportive. Together we agreed what to focus on.

Susy: Leah had found that rather than planning for a relaxed retirement and having time to put new things in place, her work life had stopped very suddenly, she was dealing with the news that her condition is terminal. Despite still having links with former colleagues, Leah missed the social side of her working life, and wanted to connect to new social activities to fill her time. Having talked about the kinds of activities she might like to try, I invited her to join us on several tours of historical buildings in the city. We visited the Exeter Guildhall, St Nicholas Priory, a concert at St Stephens Church and she has joined a regular wellbeing focused group at RAMM. Alongside this Leah has joined a social group at Exeter City Football Club where she is making friends, and we are now looking at visits to groups in her neighbourhood for some more local connections.

Leah: I’ve had to find myself again. I’ve discovered an interest in history. Local history is grounding: it makes me think about people in times before, and how they lived, and what we take for granted now. It helps me stay positive. I feel good in my mood and am enjoying myself, having motivation and interests are returning. Meeting people and engaging with my Community Connector has helped me to look at a brighter future. My relationship with Susy is very good. She has contributed so many things which I do appreciate. I appreciate Wellbeing Exeter... a LIFELINE!

Partnerships, Networks & Systems

WELLBEING EXETER & ORGANISATIONAL CONNECTIONS: SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS

An under-reported aspect of the value Wellbeing Exeter brings to the city is in its contribution to building, maintaining and participating in cross-sectoral organisational networks and ecosystems.

We commissioned Melissa Muir from the University of Exeter to use social network analysis techniques to illustrate and explore this area.

This approach allows us to map these organisational connections, then consider particular groups and patterns of connections. Data from Wellbeing Exeter's own database, along with parallel information from Devon County Council's Pinpoint directory was used, alongside a survey circulated to wellbeing organisations in Exeter and Cranbrook.

The network analysis revealed that Wellbeing Exeter is a core part of a strong and diverse wellbeing ecosystem.

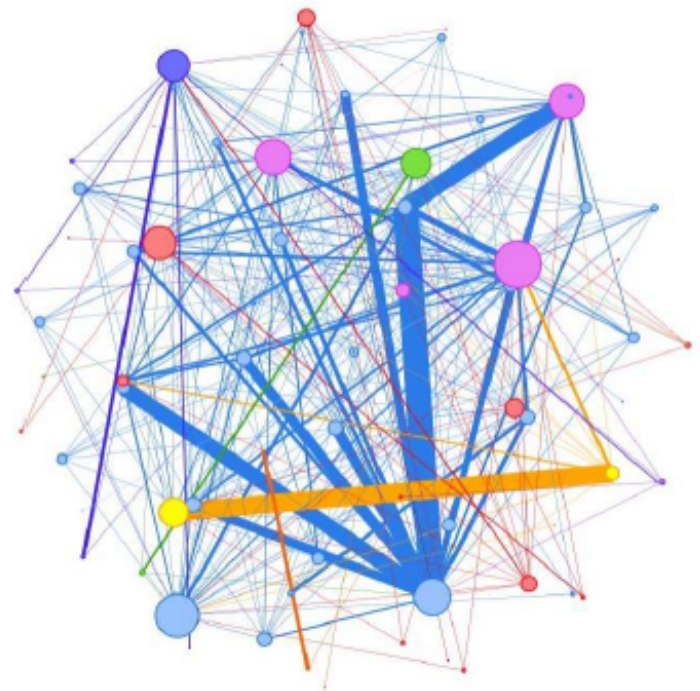
Of 1185 relevant organisations identified in the city, Wellbeing Exeter is – or has been – connected to 1136 (96%) of them.

There is also a correlation between the geographical location of organisations in Wellbeing Exeter's current network with higher levels of deprivation.

An algorithm was used to detect connections between organisations, and where patterns of connection exist (for example, referrals or introductions of individuals), to highlight 'communities' of connection.

The figure below shows these connections. The nodes represent organisations – the larger the node, the better connected the organisation.

Nodes are coloured according to the 'communities' of connections they are observed to be part of.

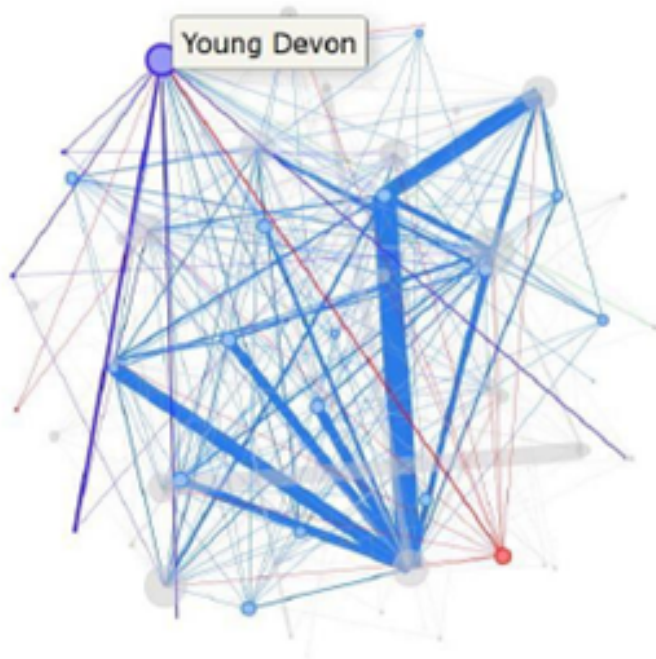


The analysis detected four significant 'communities' that accounted for a majority of the connections (the largest involving 32 organisations), and 20 smaller ones, suggesting that within the Wellbeing Exeter network, some connections are or have been far denser than others.

We can examine the connections and 'communities' within Wellbeing Exeter for an individual organisation.

Partnerships, Networks & Systems

Here are the visualisations for two delivery partners, Young Devon and Inclusive Exeter. We can see that Young Devon has a relatively dense set of referral relationships, while Inclusive Exeter has a less dense, but very wide-ranging set of connections across multiple 'communities'.



It is recognised that Wellbeing Exeter does not primarily exist to maximise connections between organisations in the wellbeing field in the city. However, this analysis shows that there is potential to work intentionally in this space, through diversifying collaborations, addressing gaps, or working to integrate more isolated groups of organisations, for example through encouraging interconnectivity among smaller organisations.

Given Wellbeing Exeter's demonstrable organisational reach, there is also potential for future commissioners to consider involving the partnership in the creation of a platform for knowledge exchange and discussion of best practice and innovation among wellbeing organisations in Exeter.

This would capitalise on the broad connections to improve service delivery and innovation. Along with the identification of specialised networks, for example those associated with mental health or family support, this is helpful in considering the role of Wellbeing Exeter in specific aspects of systems change – something we explore below.



Partnerships, Networks & Systems

CHANGING SYSTEMS

Wellbeing Exeter does not exist in a bubble. The programme is premised on connection and a holistic approach to living a healthy and fulfilling life. Very often, Wellbeing Exeter participants engage with a range of other services alongside or in intersection with their work with the programme. Wellbeing Exeter therefore is well-placed to understand the challenges various parts of the system are facing, and to work with others to achieve systems change.

Community Connectors, for example, regularly work with people who are on waiting lists for mental health services, or who have not been able to access suitable mental health provision. They have observed the various ways in which these services do not satisfy the needs of their clients – how hard it is to get good information, how difficult the system is to navigate, the catch-22 of rigid eligibility criteria, how it can be hard sometimes even to know whether you are on a waiting list or not – and above all the human cost of this non-person-centred approach. They certainly have a detailed understanding about how community connecting can work alongside, and complement, therapeutic support (and when it can't).

Some Connectors note their discomfort that referral to Wellbeing Exeter is at times offered as a substitute for effective mental health support, making them therefore complicit in the system's inadequacy. But their on-the-ground experience also involves some extremely beneficial partnerships, and productive 'system hacks', collaborating with other dedicated practitioners to achieve the best possible outcomes for those they work with.

With its unrivalled range and length of experience across the field of wellbeing in the city, Wellbeing Exeter has the ability to look outwards more widely than it has done to date.

The partnership has great potential to contribute to and influence joint efforts to improve systems and outcomes for Exeter residents. Speaking with a collective voice, from a position firmly rooted in an ethos of person-centred, asset-focused care, and informed by on-the-ground experience, a maturing Wellbeing Exeter could be a powerful advocate for transformational systems change, as well as providing some of the mechanisms through which to achieve it.

"It was an amazing experience. It would never have happened without your help... I couldn't have done it without you."



Programme Partners

The evaluation working group would like to acknowledge the skill, care and creativity with which all Wellbeing Exeter delivery partners, past and present, have engaged with Exeter residents since the beginning of the programme. The strong person-centred ethos of the programme has been a true joint effort, maintained, reinforced and reinvented by all partners. The value described in this report is a testament to your commitment and contribution.



**“The
Connector
allowed me to
dream a little
about what I
could do....
I then asked
myself:
‘Why not?’”**



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