



Annual Report

2024-25



Funded by:



Delivered by:



www.wellbeingexeter.org.uk



**“With the support
of organisations like
Wellbeing Exeter,
we can help others
but also help ourselves
at the same time.”**

“I am proud of the leadership the City Council continues to provide in championing this pioneering model. Wellbeing Exeter is a partnership rooted in innovation and a shared belief that community connection is the foundation of wellbeing.

This year’s report highlights the tangible impact of our collective efforts: from supporting individuals to become more active, to supporting community activity in our neighbourhoods.

With long-term investment from the Council, and the continued support of our funding partners, Sport England.

We are demonstrating what’s possible when local government leads with purpose, alongside our partners.

As we look ahead, our focus remains on reducing inequalities, sustaining momentum, and ensuring that every resident - regardless of background - has the opportunity to thrive.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this year’s achievements.”



Cllr Duncan Wood

Portfolio Holder for
Leisure Services
and Healthy Living

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Summary

Wellbeing Exeter is a collaboration of organisations working together to improve the wellbeing of individuals and communities across the city. Our shared goal is to make Exeter a healthier, more connected place to live.

Commissioned by Exeter City Council and Sport England, and led by CoLab Exeter, the programme is delivered in partnership with Exeter City Community Trust (ECCT) and Exeter Community Initiatives (ECI). Together, we form a strong alliance of community, voluntary, and public sector organisations.

Launched in 2013 as a small pilot in a single GP practice, Wellbeing Exeter was created to support people facing challenges such as isolation, anxiety, and housing issues. Since then, it has grown into a city-wide, nationally recognised model of place-based wellbeing. The programme continues to evolve in response to complex health and social challenges, with a strong focus on collaboration, learning, and community-led action.

Our work is built around four interconnected pillars:

- **Community Connecting**

One-to-one support tailored to individual needs.

- **Community Building**

Strengthening neighbourhoods through local engagement.

- **Community Physical Activity**

Encouraging active, healthy lifestyles.

- **Network Coordination**

Linking organisations for greater collective impact.

These elements form a dynamic system of community development that is unique to Exeter.

What Sets Us Apart

The strength of Wellbeing Exeter lies in its people—working at the grassroots level with individuals and neighbourhoods, enabling collective action, and supporting local leaders to shape a resilient and inclusive future for the city.

Our approach is:

- **Person-centred**

Focused on individual strengths and aspirations.

- **Neighbourhood-based**

Rooted in local communities.

- **Collaborative and evolving**

Built on partnerships and continuous learning.

Our Approach: ABCD

We use an **Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)** model, which means:

- Focusing on strengths, not problems
- Empowering local people to lead change
- Building social connections that support wellbeing
- Creating healthier, more inclusive communities

Ongoing evaluation shows that our focus on personal relationships and local networks delivers real, lasting benefits for individuals, communities, and the wider public sector. We listen, learn, and adapt—always striving to create the conditions for people to live their best lives and for organisations to achieve their greatest impact.

The Wider Context

Exeter is a great place to live and work with positive health and wellbeing outcomes, however there are some areas in the city with entrenched inequalities where life chances for some children and life expectancy for some adults are considerably lower than in other parts of the city.

For example, life expectancy at birth for residents in Topsham is over 86 years. This is more than 12 years greater than for those living in Sidwell Street where life expectancy is just 74.5 years.

This is close to the maximum life expectancy inequality (16.7 years) between most and least deprived areas in England. Six wards in the city are among the top 20% most deprived wards in England.

This is why Wellbeing Exeter has an unrelenting focus in our priority neighbourhoods; improving outcomes for those with the most to gain will improve overall health and wellbeing across the whole city.



**As Wellbeing Exeter:
We are greater than the sum of our parts.**

As the previous 10-year funding cycle for Wellbeing Exeter concluded, a collaborative evaluation was launched to capture the programme's full impact. The detailed analysis published in 2024 and findings offered a compelling case for continued investment in this innovative model as a cornerstone of inclusive, place-based public health.

Here is a summary of some of the key findings:

Community Connecting

There were significant improvements in wellbeing and social connection through the Community Connecting programme.

Key outcomes included:

- A 27% increase in agreement with the statement "Our family had positive and supportive relationships in our local community."
- A 19% increase in agreement with "Relationships in our family were strong and positive."
- Loneliness scores dropped from 4.74 to 3.05 on the Campaign to End Loneliness scale.
- Young people showed a 44% increase in 'paying attention to how they were feeling' and a 27% increase in 'working on a skill or project'.

These findings demonstrated the effectiveness of person-centred, one-to-one support in improving mental health and community engagement.

Physical Activity and Community Physical Activity Organiser (CPAO) Impact

- Among participants who hoped to become more active, the proportion classified as 'active' rose from 30% to 43%, while 'inactive' dropped from 55% to 39%.
- CPAOs played a key role in removing barriers such as cost, accessibility, and confidence.
- Activities were tailored to local needs, with a focus on sustainability and community ownership.

Social Return on Investment (SROI)

The programme generated an estimated social value of £1,948,172 in 2023. This value was derived from outcomes such as:

- Improved mental health
- Increased volunteering
- Reduced anxiety

The SROI analysis followed Social Value UK principles and used proxies from HACCT Value Bank and the TOMs framework. This demonstrated the financial and societal value of Wellbeing Exeter's work.

Community Building and Systems Change

Wellbeing Exeter's Community Builders were instrumental in fostering inclusive, connected neighbourhoods. Key roles included:

- Active listening and trusted information sharing.
- Linking residents and maintaining momentum for community initiatives.
- Acting as neutral facilitators and champions of community-led change.

The programme was connected to 96% of the 1,185 relevant organisations in Exeter, highlighting its central role in the wellbeing ecosystem. It also demonstrated agility in responding to challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukrainian refugee crisis.





Physical Activity in Clinical Pathways

Lucy Davis from the Office for Health Improvements & Disparities

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What was the issue?

Wellbeing Exeter initially focused on improving health outcomes in the most deprived areas of the city.

Using a community asset-based approach, Wellbeing Exeter provides Community Builders who map what's already happening and develop new initiatives based on what people are interested in doing. Through agreed referral routes from GP's and other public services and Community Connectors who provide one to one support to connect people with local opportunities. Its work has since expanded to support the least physically active residents as well.

What did you do?

In 2020, following launch of a nationwide **Sport England** campaign, Exeter and Cranbrook received funding to integrate physical activity within Wellbeing Exeter programme. This included support for a Community Physical Activity Organiser role.

Referrals to the service are split between health professionals (45%), self-referrals (35%) and other professionals (20%). The programme is open to anyone who wants to increase their physical activity, provided they are ready to engage with community activities.

What was the result?

Qualitative data indicates that individuals reported increased confidence, the development of new skills, greater engagement with their community and higher levels of physical activity.

Wellbeing Exeter also supports the creation of new community groups, many of which have since become successfully self-sustaining.

What were the key learning points/evaluation?

Barriers faced by individuals engaging in the programme included issues such as transport, the cost of activities and anxiety around trying something new.

One challenge in the process is that, while activities may be targeted at specific local areas, participants often come from further afield. This can make it difficult to evaluate the programme's impact on the intended population.

For example, Pickleball has become a popular and successful club, but many of its attendees are not from the originally targeted group.



Physical Activity in Clinical Pathways

Lucy Davis from the Office for Health Improvements & Disparities

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The cost of setting up new groups can also be a barrier to long-term sustainability. It is beneficial to offer activities free initially to encourage participation and support behaviour change. However, ongoing costs such as venue hire and instructor fees must be considered to ensure the group's future.

Another key learning has been the importance of community ownership. Wellbeing Exeter's role is to support, not lead, the group. Ensuring that someone from the community takes the lead is essential for long-term success and sustainability.

What is next?

Wellbeing Exeter has primarily taken a geographical approach, focussing on the most deprived and least physically active neighbourhoods.

However, it is important to recognise that not all communities are defined by location – some are based around shared identities, such as ethnicity, religion or culture.

As a result, there will be increased focus on identifying and engaging with non-geographical communities, applying the same community-led approach to support and inclusion beyond neighbourhood boundaries.



Office for Health
Improvement
& Disparities



**SPORT
ENGLAND**

If we:

- Connect with others
- Keep learning
- Take notice of what is around us
- Give something back to our community
- Stay active

then our happiness and wellbeing will increase.

These 5 Ways To Wellbeing inform and underpin how we engage and work with individuals and communities to enhance and promote wellbeing.



Funding, Outcomes and Structure

Wellbeing Exeter is funded through contributions from Exeter City Council's Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy and funding from Sport England. In **2024–25**, the cost of delivering the core programme, since contract renewal in July 2024, was **£582,088**.

The current contract runs until March 2027, with funding allocated across the following four core delivery strands. Example measures and outcomes are listed against each strand:

1. Community Connecting

- Referral reasons and sources (Self Referrals, GP Referrals etc.)
- Individual Wellbeing Outcomes and Obstacles
- Community Connecting Stories

2. Community Building

- Numbers of new community groups
- Resident Ideas put into action
- Community Building Stories

3. Community Physical Activity

- Resident Ideas put into action
- Number of new activities
- Mapping and neighbourhood profiling

4. Network Coordination Enhanced Services

In addition to core delivery, from 2025 Wellbeing Exeter includes a 2-year Enhanced Services programme, commissioned to address specific local priorities. These services are designed around:

- Equality and Diversity
- Partnering with Leisure Service
- Getting Back into Work
- Access to Walking and Cycling

Staffing and Delivery Roles

The core programme is delivered by approximately 16 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) staff, including:

- Community Connectors - providing one-to-one support
- Community Builders - facilitating neighbourhood engagement
- Community Physical Activity Organisers (CPAOs) - promoting active lifestyles
- Management and administration of programme

These roles are embedded within local communities and supported by a central coordination team at CoLab Exeter.



Activities: Community Connecting 2024/25

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No. of Referrals received



No. of Adult Referrals received



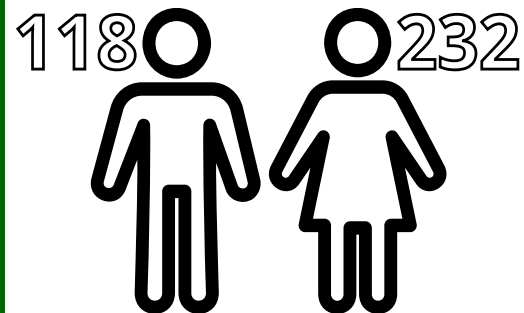
No. of Signposts Made



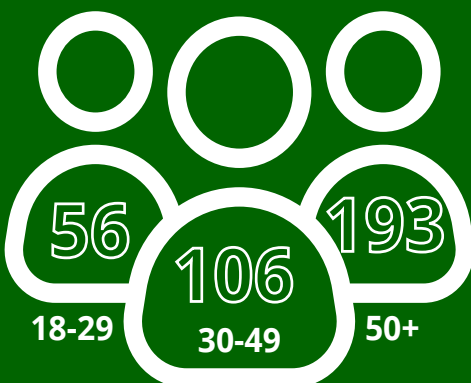
No. of CPAO Referrals received



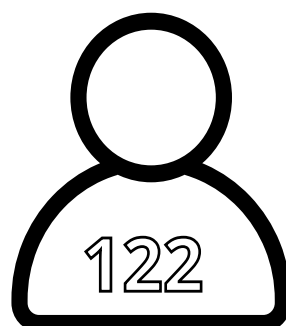
No. of Cranbrook Referrals received



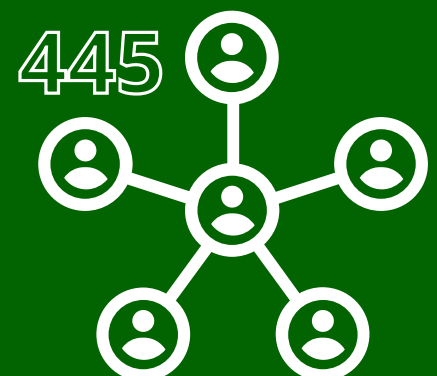
Referral Gender



Referrer Age



Most Referrals received were Self Referrals



No. of Organisations referred to



Activities: Community Building 2024/25

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New Conversations



Ongoing Conversations



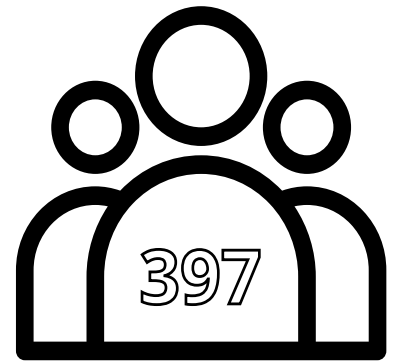
Residents Linked to New Group/Activity



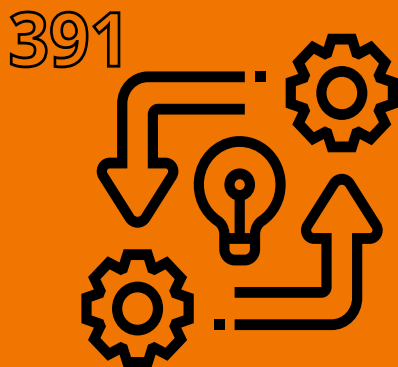
New Ideas



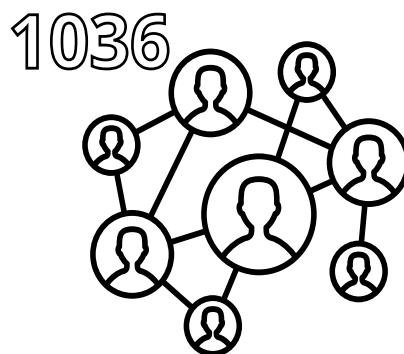
Ongoing Ideas



Groups Attended



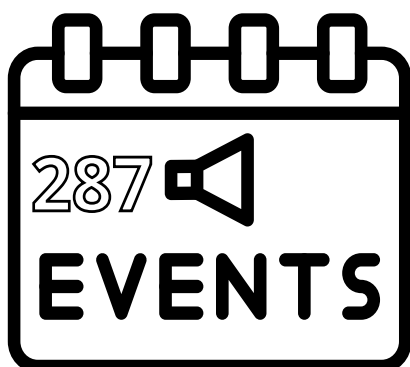
Ideas into Action



Connections / Networks Made



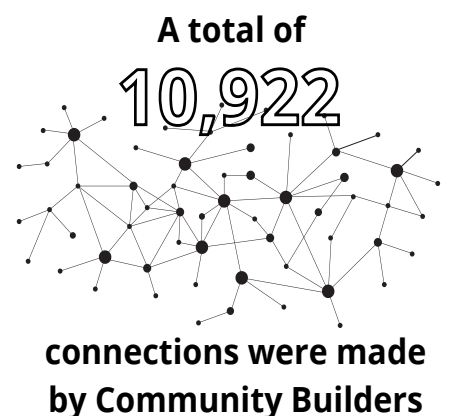
Funding Applications



Events Attended



Meetings Attended





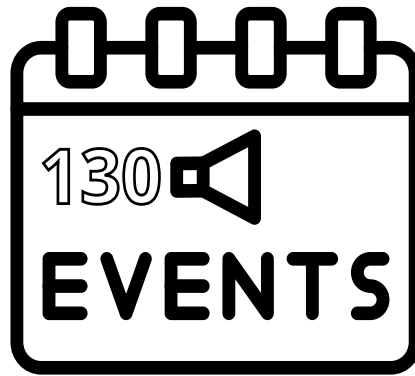
Activities: Community Physical Activity Organiser 2024/25

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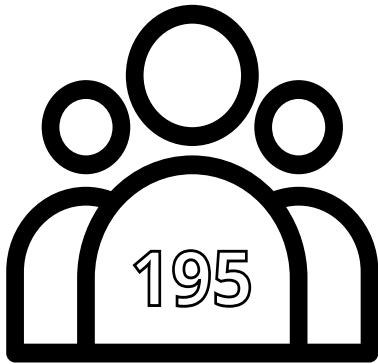
New Ideas



Events Attended



Engagement (Individual)



Groups Attended



Meetings Attended

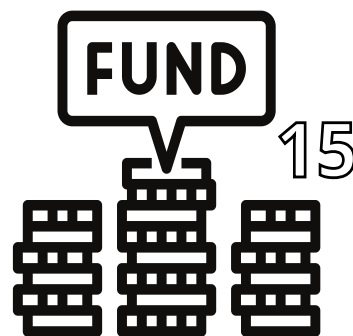


Walks

244



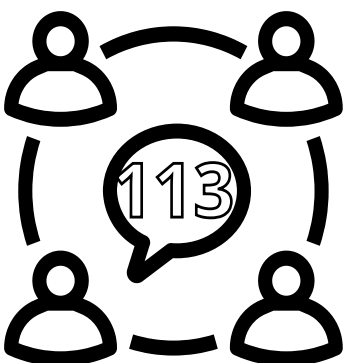
Connections / Networks Made



Funding Applications



Exercise Classes



Engagement (Groups)



Indoor / Outdoor Sport



CPAO Run Activity

Building Independence

When the Community Connector first met Jane, she had recently lost her sight completely following an accident, having previously been severely visually impaired. She no longer had her guide dog, which had once been a key support.

Jane expressed a strong desire to leave the house more and live a fuller, more independent life. She said: "When I was contacted by Wellbeing Exeter, it was the best thing that happened to me. I had been left totally alone after the accident."

The Community Connector shared information about support services, including enablers, and encouraged Jane to give them a try. With the Connector's help, Jane contacted an enabling agency and attended her first assessment. The Connector also reached out to Adult Social Care and attended a meeting with the Sensory Team, leading to Jane receiving one-to-one tech support, which she has found very helpful.

Jane later reflected: "Receiving regular support from a Community Connector has been a great help. Sometimes it's easier to talk things through with someone neutral, especially when I felt trapped at home because of my blindness. That personal connection has meant a lot."





Stories: Community Connecting 2024/25

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Building Independence

Jane was recently told that, due to her age, she's no longer eligible for a guide dog - news that was very upsetting.

We explored alternatives, and she has now arranged extra hours with her enabler on a second day each week.

While not a full replacement for a guide dog, this has lifted her mood and improved her outlook.

Technology also supports her independence. Jane uses her iPad for emails and texts, listens to audiobooks daily, and regularly uses virtual assistant tools.

She said accessing services was extremely difficult at first, and that support from Wellbeing Exeter was essential in navigating the system.

Jane and her enabler have enjoyed visits to garden centres and Topsham. She loves planning outings and having something to look forward to.

Recently, she shared how meaningful it was to simply buy and write a birthday card for a family member without needing help - something that made her feel more in control and independent.





Stories: Community Building 2024/25

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Exwick Gardening Group

In the summer we organised a litter pick and nature walk. I also found a disused bathtub and filled it with soil donated by a neighbour. I ordered a free water butt from South West Water, we did another litter pick and filled the bath tub with herbs donated by B&Q. A few of us met with camping chairs and mugs of tea to chat about what else we wanted to do.

In late summer, we joined up with Exwick History Society for a history walk and litter pick, ending at the garden space, and encouraged people to bring their ideas of what we could do. We planned another event to make bug hotels, created a planter out of patio tiles, planted an apple tree and installed an archway (all sourced from Facebook Marketplace, second hand or recycled goods).

During winter, we planted bulbs, wildflower seeds and installed the water butt. We finished off the year by making nature wreaths for the birds, and drawing colourful displays with chalk on the brick walls. We had so many families attend that we filled the space, so we'll soon have to start expanding to the other patch!

It was great to be so connected to my neighbours and for my ideas to turn into reality. Now as a Community Builder, I am helping communities across Exeter grow their ideas!



Exwick Gardening Group

In January 2024, I moved to Farm Hill in Exwick and noticed two 5m² grassy patches which looked a bit neglected. I was aware of some local wildflower sowing led by Devon Wildlife Trust, so I asked if I could have some seed. They were happy to help and also put me in touch with my local Community Builder, Rachel. I didn't really know how to get started - who owns these patches of land, how do I get neighbours involved? Rachel helped by putting me in touch with the Council and we were offered guidance on how we could use the space. We decided to organise a joint litter picking and wildflower sowing session.

Rachel suggested we distribute fliers, and I was pleasantly surprised at how many positive conversations we had, and the ideas other residents came up with.

On a cloudy day and with Council equipment, nine people came to our first session and we managed to gather several bags of rubbish including a large tyre. We sowed wildflowers and started talking about other things we could do in the space, including putting plants in the aforementioned tyre!

From there, we made steady progress improving the space and set up a WhatsApp group.





Stories: Community Physical Activity Organisers 2024/25

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Women's Walking Football

In autumn 2024, two women at a local community meeting in St Thomas, proposed the idea of women's walking football. Walking football, a non - contact, accessible version of the popular game, seemed like a great opportunity to engage women of all ages and abilities. The Community Physical Activity Organiser (CPAO) saw the potential in this and decided to take the idea further.

Word was spread through community groups, social media and the local Community Builder. The response was overwhelmingly positive, with women from across the city expressing an interest and joining a dedicated WhatsApp chat organised by the CPAO. The chat became one of the main communication and planning tools for the new project. The CPAO secured initial funding from **Live & Move**, with **Exeter City Community Trust** offering balls and bibs to help get things off the ground. A few weeks down the line, **Riverside Leisure Centre's** 5-a-side indoor football pitch was booked, with the first session launching early in November 2024, less than two months after the idea was born. The sessions were deliberately kept free of charge to enable as many women as possible to participate, and a couple of walking football coaches volunteered their time to help with the first few sessions.





Quotes: Community Connectors

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“Thank you for your support. It helps to have someone to listen.”



“It is so nice to talk to you, what you do is great and very helpful.”



“Being stuck at home is not good for my mental health, instead of pity, I need to do something about it, at least try to, with you on board I can help myself and others.”





Quotes: Community Builders

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“You connect us to the wider community and bring invaluable insights on community issues.”



“As always, your hard work, enthusiasm and energy is very much appreciated.”



“It was good to meet you yesterday. I appreciated the chat. Thank you for doing the work you do, it's really valuable.”





Quotes: Community Physical Activity Organisers

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“It is a pleasure meeting you and we are so happy with all your advice.”



“ I would like to say a big thank you, to everyone who was involved in making this walk happen. I look forward to the next organised walk with you all.”



“Thank you for encouraging me and getting me out of my comfort zone, much appreciated!”



