



**CONVERSATIONS
& CONNECTIONS**

wellbeingexeter.org.uk

How I Feel...

HAPPY CONNECTED

ANXIOUS LONELY

ISOLATED CALM

HOPELESS NUMB

CONFIDENT SHY

UNHAPPY JOYFUL

DEPRESSED SCARED

SUPPORTED

LOW SELF ESTEEM

UNFOCUSSED

HOPEFUL

Wellbeing Exeter has worked on a one-to-one basis with thousands of Exeter and Cranbrook residents to support them lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

Our community connectors meet people on their terms - often in their home - to listen to their story, understand their life, and learn about their challenges, passions and aspirations. Together they plan actions, and help people reconnect with their communities in the way that suits them best. Connectors do far more than signpost. They use their deep knowledge of the local community to suggest ways forward, and will often accompany individuals along to a community group, or to a meeting with housing or debt advisors, for example.

The Wellbeing Exeter team often links with specialist delivery partners to be able to engage with particular groups in the community such as young people, or those from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

This booklet features a selection of case studies from the community connecting strand of Wellbeing Exeter, illustrating the range of ways in which the programme walks alongside people as they take action to move forward with their lives. It is a testament to the creativity and skill of the practitioners, and to the individuals' courage and willingness to try new things. We hope you enjoy reading them.

Read more about Wellbeing Exeter on our website: wellbeingexeter.org.uk.

March 2024

“

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

”



Case Study by YMCA Connector

Ian was referred to Wellbeing Exeter by his GP. He was living with chronic pain and anxiety following an accident that left him unable to work. Ian was also struggling with the impact of this change on his personal relationships – he felt he had lost his identity and felt guilty for not being able to contribute financially to the household. Ian was also coming to terms with the prospect of losing a family member to a terminal illness.

His Connector spent time getting to know more about Ian's life and interests before the accident, to find something positive to build upon. Ian enjoyed reflecting on his love of music and the pleasure that offered him. Together they identified a new musical instrument for Ian to learn, and the Connector provided him with tuition. This added structure to Ian's week and gave him tasks to complete.

During their regular meetings, Ian had also spoken of his desire to help other people in some way. He shared difficult memories of being bullied as a child and the impact this had on his later life. His Connector asked if he had considered sharing his experiences with a wider audience, as a way of raising awareness about bullying. This interested Ian and together they wrote a personal statement that was circulated to a couple of schools. One school subsequently invited Ian to speak.

Although nervous about presenting to a group of high school students, Ian did so and afterwards told his Connector: "It was an amazing experience" and "it would never have happened without your help... I couldn't have done it without you". Ian has been invited to return to the school next year. His confidence has increased, and this positive experience has served to reassure him that despite his recent challenges, there is hope for his future – one that will likely involve using a different set of skills and will enable him to inspire others.

“ —

You won't be ready until you start. I'm now ready.

— ”



Case Study by Cranbrook Connector

Tilly was referred to Wellbeing Cranbrook by her Health & Wellbeing Coach on account of her high BMI and struggles with her mental health. Tilly was keen to engage and make changes to improve her wellbeing but wasn't sure where to start with regards to accessing support and found her anxiety was a barrier.

The Connector met with Tilly at a local café; she explained she was struggling with her anxiety and almost didn't come, but was proud that she had. They talked about Tilly's lifestyle and her work pattern. She explained that there had been a few changes in her home life recently, where her daily routine has been disrupted. Tilly felt that this was the cause of a lot of her recent anxiety.

Tilly was keen to make positive changes to her life that will support her weight loss. She had already lost five stone and was keen to join a gym to help her continue her journey. Tilly explained that she would like to work with a personal trainer to help achieve her goals but unfortunately there were financial barriers for her. She recognised that her health and wellbeing was a priority so she would happily go without some luxuries if the money could be better invested in her wellbeing.

The Connector gave Tilly some information on Nordic Walking and the local Parkrun, both of which really sparked an interest. Tilly explained that pre-lockdown, she had joined the Couch to 5k group but felt that her pace was too slow and she was holding up the rest of the group. Off the back of this conversation, Tilly had the idea to message the local running group and see if anyone would be willing to buddy up and join her in starting the Couch to 5k program again on a 1-1 basis.

A few days later, the Connector received an email from Tilly explaining that she had had a spark of motivation and had made the leap to joining a gym, signed up for some free yoga sessions and also committed to joining the Parkrun that following weekend. She also asked if the Connector had any information on walking football groups local to her.

Tilly and the Connector will continue to meet to discuss how she is progressing with her goals and find out whether she feels the activities she has chosen to join are suitable and helping to improve her wellbeing.

“

I didn't feel like coming out today but now I feel happier after meeting you and getting some things done.

”



Case Study by Young People Connector

Reuben (15) was referred to the Community Connector, experiencing low mood and feeling fed up with school and family dynamics. Following an initial phone call which helped begin build rapport, the Connector arranged to visit him at school for a first face-to-face meeting. Over the following eight months Reuben and his Connector struck up a friendly relationship which allowed him to explore some of the reasons why he was feeling dissatisfied.

One of the main things that emerged from these conversations was Reuben's struggle to motivate himself and make time to revise regularly for his upcoming GCSE exams. He shared that he experienced a lot of internalised pressure in trying to achieve good exam results. It appeared that this was blocking him from getting on with the task of revising regularly. Together, Reuben and his Connector developed a revision schedule, setting achievable goals while avoiding too much pressure which would be counterproductive. They agreed that the Connector would check in with him via text each week. This introduced an element of accountability as well as a support framework, which worked well: Reuben quickly took ownership of this process.

Early on, Reuben and his Connector also discussed that he would like to find part-time employment over the summer. The Connector strongly encouraged this and offered to support him in his job search. Following a couple of conversations, Reuben seemed very motivated and independently took the initiative to seek part-time employment. He soon succeeded and found himself a weekend role, which he is still working in now.

Both the part-time employment and his successful revision schedule appeared to boost his confidence and positively affected his overall wellbeing to the point that Reuben was happy to conclude his Wellbeing Exeter referral earlier this year.

“ ———
It was great
knowing that
someone was there
to talk to if things
were bad.
————— ”



Joint Working Case Study: Connector, Builder & CPAO

The joint working approach of the Connector, CPAO and Community Builder in this case study, ensured that their unique skillsets were supporting Georgie's different needs. It also served to avoid duplication of support and allowed Georgie to become aware of the Five Ways to Wellbeing in ways that felt achievable and sustainable.

Georgie was introduced to Wellbeing Exeter following bereavements. She lived alone and was experiencing a deterioration in her mental health due to financial issues. Combined with the effects of the pandemic lockdowns, she recognised she needed to start thinking about ways to support her wellbeing.

From the first conversation with her Connector, Georgie was open-minded about exploring opportunities. She was able to identify activities she had enjoyed in the past and this provided a good starting point for conversations as well as assisting the Connector with their research.

Georgie had a particular interest in physical activities and so her Connector met her for walks and talks on several occasions. Repeated references to canoeing highlighted what mattered most to Georgie and her Connector introduced her to a Community Physical Activity Organiser who was able to explore this further with her.

Consequently, her Connector was able to then focus on other ways in which Georgie's wellbeing could be supported. Georgie enjoyed walking her dog and was introduced to a local dog-walking group who meet regularly. The Connector worked with a Community Builder to generate 'shout outs' in order to 'match' people with other interests that were important to Georgie. Circumstances led Georgie to feel very low at points during her involvement with Wellbeing Exeter. Her Connector used active listening skills to help her identify what she needed – at points this meant she needed some time to herself. Her Connector respected that and was a consistent but gentle presence in Georgie's life during that period.

Georgie's confidence has steadily improved and she has regular community connections in her calendar, with friendships developing as a result. She reached the decision that she no longer needed the support of her Connector and feels able to face the future with more hope.

“ ———
I really appreciated the
space to be listened to
in a non-judgmental
way... and focus purely
on me and what was
important.
————— ”



Case Study by Family Connector

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. The impact of this strain was 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 was also able to share 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: "I really appreciated the space to be listened to in a non-judgmental way... and focus purely on me and what was important."

“

Meeting people and engaging with my Community Connector and wellbeing staff has helped me to look at a brighter future. I appreciate Wellbeing Exeter... a LIFELINE!

”



Case Study by Cultural Connector

Leah: I was referred to Wellbeing Exeter by my GP in May 2023 and first met with Susy, my Connector, in June. At the time 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 which she willingly agreed to. 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 and wellbeing staff 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!

Susy: It has been a pleasure joining Leah on her journey. She has always said 'yes' to new ideas and embraced these new experiences. It is so good to see her settling into new social groups and discovering new interests that are helping her live life to the full.

“ —

I was helped by being introduced to people in my area who have the same sort of interests in common with me.

— ”



Case Study by Young People Connector

Evie (aged 14) was referred by a school Family Support Worker. The Support Worker said that Evie was struggling with school friendships, was self-harming and was isolating herself in her bedroom when she wasn't at school. The Connector met Evie in school. She presented as a timid, angry, young lady who was used to displaying a hard exterior. Evie said that she felt confident and happy and things in her life were good, however when she began to talk she spoke of her dislike of school, other people and her life. Evie went on to say that she lived with her grandparents due to a turbulent relationship with her mother. Evie reluctantly took the Connector up on the offer of further support and in total they ended up meeting eight times.

During their time together, Evie began to question her relationship with her boyfriend and the Connector spoke about healthy relationships and behaviours towards others. At one meeting Evie announced that she had split up with her boyfriend because she thought he was controlling and not good for her wellbeing. Over time Evie began to consider her own behaviour and attitude towards others and was able to recognise the value of being positive, kind and appreciative of others. Evie agreed to focus forwards towards her future and the Connector encouraged her to consider the positives in her life, develop a growth mindset and a more optimistic perspective.

The Connector informed Evie of a fantastic opportunity to attend a week course with a local theatre company. Evie felt it would push her out of her comfort zone, and she was apprehensive about engaging with other young people, but said that she wanted to give it a go. She managed to attend half the course before she found herself in a challenging position. The Connector worked alongside Evie who was able to draw upon the positives of this experience and her response to the challenging situation, and they worked with the theatre company to ensure that Evie completed the work to achieve a Level 1 qualification.

The Connector shared Evie's achievements with her school and Evie decided to return to Cadets. She spoke eloquently about how much she has valued the support of Cadets and the young people that attend. Evie also commented how much support she does have from particular people in her life and how she intends to appreciate this support, rather than push it away.

“

I honestly cannot imagine how I would have got here without the always kind, patient and thoughtful support I regularly received from the Connector from the wellbeing service.

”



Case Study by Adult Connector

The Connector first spoke to Mike in November 2021 after referral by his GP. Initially Mike was unsure whether he felt up to meeting or if it was the right time for him to have input from Wellbeing Exeter. He had experienced some significant mental health issues over recent years and was still having quite distracting symptoms and could feel overwhelmed by them. He was finding it very hard to leave the house.

After some long phone calls to get to know each other, the Connector and Mike finally met up in the library café. It required quite an effort for Mike to come to town to meet as his anxiety was very high at that time but it was a good first step. During the first couple of meetings he was still feeling fairly unwell and talked about the various symptoms he was experiencing and how they prevented him from doing things that interested him. At the same time, Mike recognised that it would help him to get out and be busier, and they spent some time discussing what he might like to do and what was achievable, for example, going for walks or helping neighbours.

Over the months and meetings that followed, the Connector spent time listening to Mike talking about the things he had been trying, the difficulties he had encountered and the positive steps forward he had taken. Mike said: "I came away from these appointments feeling a lot less burdened and hopeful for my future. These were the first few tentative steps for me to return to a normal life."

He volunteered collecting clothes for Ukraine. He helped a neighbour in her garden and made sure he got out for walks as often as possible. As he began to feel more confident, they talked about Mike's long-term desire to return to work. The Connector and Mike discussed volunteering and explored some options for new learning. Mike found having someone to talk ideas through with and offer some information and suggestions had been really helpful. He said: "Through the meetings I had with the Connector I was able to foster an increasing sense of self belief and hope for the future. I looked forward to the meetings and they were a big part of my monthly routine."

It was agreed to close the referral in November 2022. The Connector has been in contact with Mike more recently and he reports that things have really moved forward for him. He is now getting out a lot and feeling a lot more confident. He is currently doing some retraining which will help him return to work. Mike said: "I honestly cannot imagine how I would have got here without the always kind, patient and thoughtful support I regularly received from the Connector from the wellbeing service."

“ ———
It's a profound
change that has really
brought that old me
back. I feel like I can
have a life again.
————— ”



Case Study by YMCA Connector

Lloyd was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis in his 20s whilst a music student. This life-defining moment, coinciding with the pandemic, hugely reduced his connection with friends and fellow students.

When the Connector first encountered Lloyd, he was effectively confined to the living room of his one-bedroomed flat. He was receiving regular support from carers, but other than that and the occasional trip to the local shop, he saw few people face-to-face. His main social interaction was through on-line gaming.

Lloyd explained that he missed making music. Using the Connector's own recording equipment, they recorded him singing "Feels Like Rain" by Buddy Guy. They subsequently worked on another song that he could potentially sing at an upcoming family event. The Connector also found a vocal coach for Lloyd. The lessons have continued for several months now, and he hopes to take part in a public performance.

They have also explored the possibility of Lloyd volunteering with older people. The Connector has supported Lloyd to apply, and he is hoping to begin the role soon.

Lloyd mentioned to the Connector his interest in tabletop role-playing games and this led them to putting him in touch with a local individual who shared this interest – and who happened to live within easy walking distance. The Connector has also connected Lloyd with another fellow connectee, who plays games with him on-line.

Lloyd also agreed to be a part of the Wellbeing Exeter film. He was happy to share his story with the film maker and be recorded playing some music.

“

I think it's fabulous. I think it's more effective than having an enabler. I love working with you. I think you all do a fabulous job. I love Wellbeing Exeter. I know it helps so many people.

”



Case Study by Adult Connector

Margaret was initially referred to Wellbeing Exeter by her GP as she had become quite low, following both herself and her partner, John, contracting COVID. Both in their early 80s, they had become scared of going back out into their community, resulting in them feeling very lonely and isolated. All Connector contact took place over the phone, every few days over a two-month period in 2022.

When the Connector initially spoke to Margaret, she explained that she had felt very overwhelmed with caring for her husband, as he was making a much slower recovery. The couple had at that time barely left the house since the beginning of the pandemic. Margaret explained that pre-covid they had both been heavily involved with their local church, but the pandemic had interrupted this, and they did not feel part of the congregation any longer.

As time went on Margaret and John started to become a little more confident about going outside. They missed seeing their family and so braved a trip to their daughter's house for Christmas, which was a huge success and boosted their confidence. The Connector then supported them to re-establish contact with their church.

Margaret told the Connector that they were planning to go to church that Sunday and John had started to attend choir practice again. They were also now going for regular walks and Margaret had started an exercise and rehabilitation class for people suffering from arthritis, held at Riverside Sports Centre. She was also very enthused as she had received a leaflet through the door with local activities, including an art class which she'd like to attend.

Margaret seemed much happier in herself and positive about the future. She had a lot more things to look forward to and had regained her energy and enthusiasm.

“ ———
It's been
important to have
someone to speak
to, someone to
listen. ——— ”



Case Study by Adult Connector

Jen, a woman in her 40s, was initially introduced to Wellbeing Exeter by her GP, who believed we could support her with connecting to the community after the Covid-19 pandemic. She lives with her adult son, for whom she is a carer, and has no other family around.

Jen has been living with a very debilitating mental illness, plus depression, anxiety and PTSD for a long time. This has been incredibly stressful and debilitating, every phase of her life presenting different challenges and the involvement of different services. At the time of her referral to Wellbeing Exeter, her needs were considered to be too complex by a variety of health and mental health services and Jen was receiving no support. Even if she could afford to pay for private support, she felt it would have been very difficult for her to find the right person.

When the Connector met Jen she was feeling extremely lonely, isolated, miserable and like no one cared, making comments such as: "What's the point?" and "I don't exist". The Connector first asked Jen about her needs and how mental illness affects her life. The Connector offered to work alongside the GP and, after thorough research, was able to suggest suitable mental health support. The Connector also explored a range of social opportunities in the city that might benefit Jen and offered to accompany her to them.

Together, they made an agreement about how the Connector could help make Jen feel more comfortable in different scenarios. The Connector making time to get to know Jen and her needs made Jen feel: "Listened to and seen for the first time in a long time".

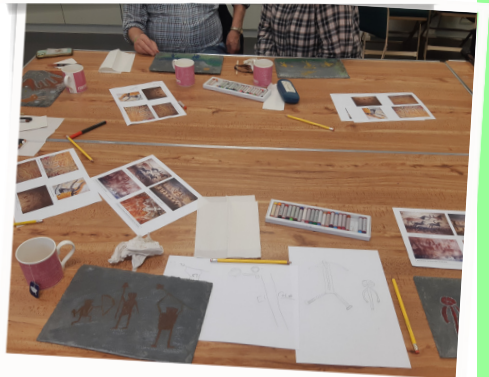
Jen was then connected to a local group, and she started attending regularly, once or twice a week. She now participates in different activities and outings. This required some adjustment from Jen but led her to feel less isolated and to meet new people in a place that felt safe. There Jen met a member of staff, Hannah, who was familiar with her mental illness and was able to immediately establish rapport with her, becoming a safe person for Jen. After receiving some support around her finances from Citizen's Advice, Jen was able to afford some private help and that gave her the chance to hire Hannah privately. Hannah has now become an incredible source of support for Jen. Jen is also planning to join another local group which the connector referred her to, with the hopes this will enhance her wellbeing further.

Overall, since Wellbeing Exeter's involvement in Jen's life, she feels her situation has dramatically improved: while her life still has many limitations, she now says she feels more connected and that someone cares.

“ —

The service you offer is what I've been looking for all this time.

— ”



Case Study by Cultural Connector

Dan, in his 60s, self-referred to Wellbeing Exeter. He explained that he wanted to discover opportunities to live and feel better, get support in meeting new people and knowing his community better, as well as being introduced to new groups. Through conversations, it was obvious Dan had many interests but due to a combination of living alone through Covid lockdowns and managing health issues, he was facing considerable barriers and was not confident in being out of the house. This could cause him to experience anxiety attacks.

The Connector chatted to Dan and encouraged him to identify what he would like to connect with first. Dan's goals included getting more physically active, learning new skills that might aid returning to work, volunteering, and craft activities. It was clear that music was a big passion. He said he'd recently gone to an event at the Exeter Phoenix and had a brilliant experience - he said how much he'd love to volunteer there. Dan and his Connector decided to focus on this as their first goal. When the Connector met with Dan again a few weeks later, he had already lined up an interview at the Phoenix for a volunteer steward role. They celebrated Dan's success together with coffee and cake!

Dan was excited about this opportunity, but travelling to and from the Phoenix remained a barrier. The Connector and Dan spent a few sessions making the journey by public transport, trialling different routes, which allowed Dan to build some confidence in making the journey himself. They would finish their meetings in the Phoenix café and Dan would greet all the staff. After that, each time the Connector checked in with Dan, he had done some more volunteering - and seen some great gigs! Dan was elated with his voluntary role but was aware it would take time to build up his confidence fully.

Recently, whilst volunteering at one event, Dan had spoken with some volunteers from Phonic FM and decided he wanted this to be the next focus. Following some health issues, Dan's currently having a break from connecting and volunteering, but can't wait to return when he can!

“ —

I had no idea there was so much I could get involved with - I don't think I'd have found it without being introduced to Wellbeing Exeter.

— ”



Case Study by Inclusive Exeter Connector

Nellie is 30 years old and lives with her husband and two children. The family arrived in the UK relatively recently, and do not speak fluent English. Nellie and her husband were struggling with debt accrued from utility bills and outstanding council tax payments. Her husband is the sole breadwinner in the family and until recently was also financially responsible for his elderly mother's care overseas. The amount sent every month was more than any other monthly expense. This meant that he was finding it difficult to manage and reduce his debt.

The Connector supported Nellie and her husband in the process of managing their growing debt. They were referred to Citizens' Advice. Initially they were very reluctant as Nellie's husband did not want to discuss personal issues and felt that he would be misunderstood. He was worried that he would be judged, or it would be assumed that he was neglecting his children in order to ensure that his mother was well looked after. The Connector reassured him, and the Connector interpreted at the meeting in a culturally sensitive manner. As a result, the utility bill debt has been managed. They still have a substantial amount to repay towards council tax but they are now confident that they can do this without struggling too much.

Nellie said: "Before we were introduced to Neomi, we didn't really understand how to overcome our debt. We had difficulty in speaking English so we didn't know how to explain our situation. We were shy to speak about the money we sent home because our children had to sacrifice what other children get to enjoy. We are grateful to the utility company for accepting a payment plan that we could afford to pay. We were stressed because we didn't know how to reduce the bills. We have limited money, and we strive to save every penny where we can".

“ —

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

— ”



Case Study by Young People Connector

Karen (aged 15), was referred to Wellbeing Exeter as it was felt she could benefit from someone to talk to and that she was struggling emotionally, getting into trouble at school, having frequent family arguments and had been self-harming. She was initially unsure about engaging. The Connector contacted her school who were very concerned about her mental health and said her attendance was poor. They felt that seeing a Connector during lesson time was a constructive opportunity to assist Karen's mental health and might encourage her into school.

The Connector met Karen three times and allowed her space to speak about the challenges she faced. She presented as a young woman trying her hardest to manage, be understood and navigate through challenges. Karen asked for school support, saying she felt misunderstood, whilst eloquently expressing her anger and frustration. She also questioned her friendships with peers and how to manage these. The Connector enabled Karen to identify small actions that she could do to support her wellbeing. They discussed Karpman's Triangle of Drama and Karen recognised how others were drawing her into drama and stress.

The Connector prompted Karen to focus on her future and she spoke about her aspirations for college and about becoming a beautician. They called her local college and Karen asked about the grades she would need to get onto her chosen beauty course. Karen realised that she could obtain these grades and they put together a plan of how she could best achieve these.

The Connector supported Karen to unpick her frustrations with school into a list of realistic constructive actions that she and the school could take so they could better understand her needs, support her learning and help her achieve.

The fourth time the Connector went to meet Karen in school she asked if she could attend her science lesson instead of meeting as she wanted to attend her lessons and do well in her GCSEs. The Connector has liaised with Karen and her school and been informed that her attendance has improved, she is working hard towards her GCSEs and she no longer feels she requires support.

5 Ways To Wellbeing

