

WELLBEING YOUR WAY



Pilgrim Trust Women's Work

Evaluation Report

March 2025

Introduction

This report sets out the results of an evaluation of the Young Women's programme strand of the Odd Arts's Wellbeing Your Way (WYW) project. The 3 year therapeutic theatre programme was supported by the Pilgrim Trust and aimed to engage young women who have experienced disadvantage, trauma, discrimination or mental health issues. It was delivered over a three year period between May 2022 and March 2025.

This final evaluation report follows an interim evaluation undertaken in April 2023. It draws on a range of evidence collected over the period of activity and sets out the overall outputs and outcomes realised during this time.

Evaluation aims & approach

The aim of the evaluation was articulated at the start of the project and focussed on assessing the success of activities in securing positive outcomes for the young women and others involved. These include outcomes associated with changes in their sense of purpose, connection and belonging; mental wellbeing (including confidence and self-worth), skills and/or future prospects.

The approach taken has been necessarily *light touch* and, as far as possible, embedded in existing data collection and monitoring processes. It included a number of evidence gathering mechanisms as follows.

- At the start of the project an **evaluation framework** was developed to align with that of the wider Creative Community Resettlement (now WYW) programme. It involved a number of evidence gathering mechanisms, including a **project monitoring form, participant feedback form and a range of qualitative templates** so that facilitators could record unstructured evidence about participant's involvement and progress. The evidence gathered through these mechanisms was used to inform the interim evaluation report.
- For more recent activities, evidence was gathered using a more generic **daily delivery record** which captured the number of activities delivered, the number of participants involved and a summary of facilitators' feedback about the outcomes and learnings from each session.
- Following the project re-brand and the articulation of a Theory of Change (ToC) associated with it, the **Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS)** framework was used to capture feedback from participants. This involved participants completing a short questionnaire at the start and end of their involvement in the programme and is referred to in more detail on page 10.

The project offer to participants and ToC are shown overleaf, the latter setting out how the programme outputs lead to positive participant outcomes and longer term impacts associated with their improved mental health and wellbeing. The structure of this report follows this ToC: we first set out the key project outputs and then draw on the evidence collected to explore the range of participant outcomes and the longer term impact on participants' wellbeing. Please note that all participants' names have been changed to protect their anonymity.

Wellbeing Your Way Offer & Theory of Change (ToC)



ARTS   

WELLBEING YOUR WAY

A **FREE** Creative Project to Increase Wellbeing & Mental Health.

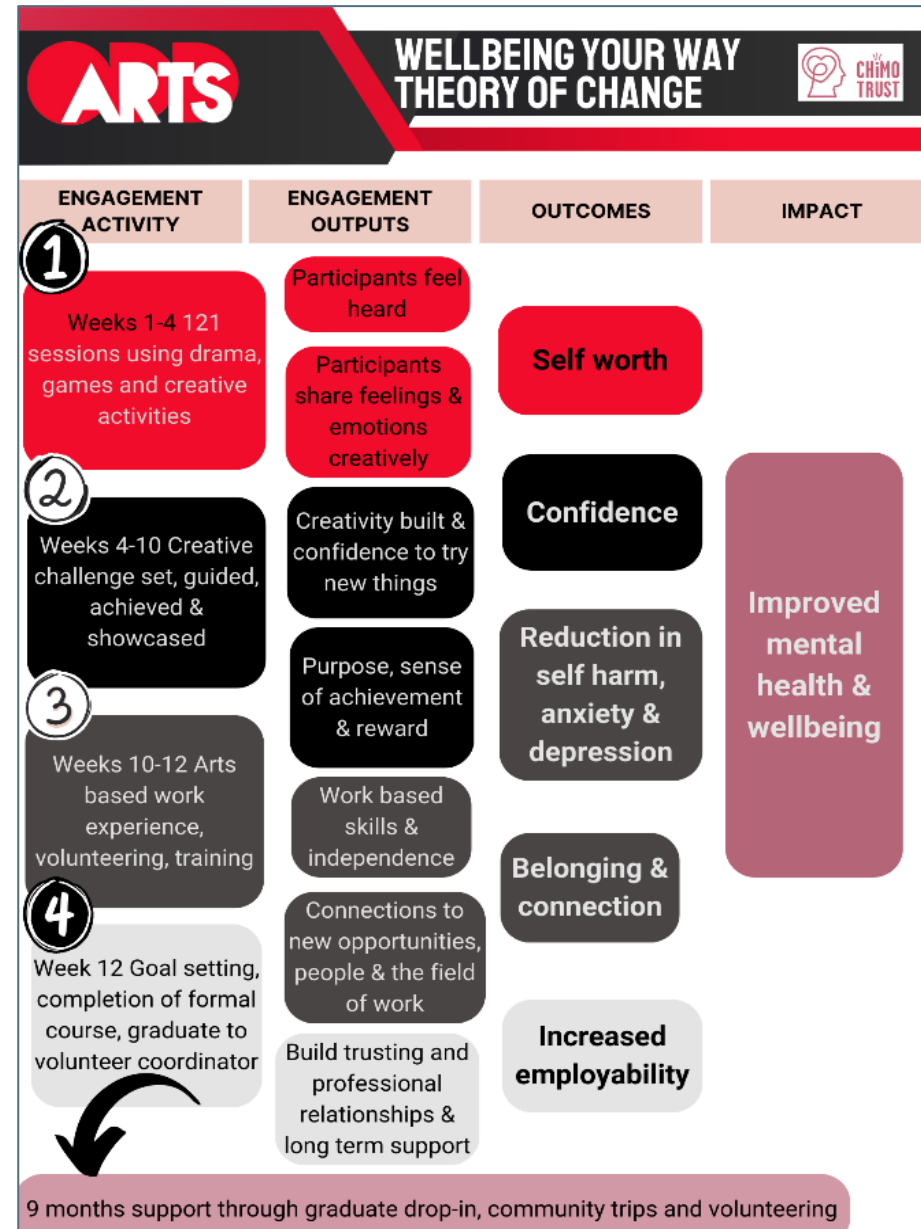
- 1-4 weeks**
Individual sessions using drama, games and creative activities
- 4-8 weeks**
A creative challenge set & working with others
- 8-12 weeks**
Training, work experience, volunteering
- Throughout:**
Cultural trips and experiences


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Following completion of the programme, you're eligible to attend our monthly creative sessions



ARTS **WELLBEING YOUR WAY THEORY OF CHANGE** 

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY	ENGAGEMENT OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES	IMPACT
1 Weeks 1-4 121 sessions using drama, games and creative activities	Participants feel heard Participants share feelings & emotions creatively	Self worth	Improved mental health & wellbeing
2 Weeks 4-10 Creative challenge set, guided, achieved & showcased	Creativity built & confidence to try new things Purpose, sense of achievement & reward	Confidence Reduction in self harm, anxiety & depression	
3 Weeks 10-12 Arts based work experience, volunteering, training	Work based skills & independence Connections to new opportunities, people & the field of work	Belonging & connection	
4 Week 12 Goal setting, completion of formal course, graduate to volunteer coordinator	Build trusting and professional relationships & long term support	Increased employability	
9 months support through graduate drop-in, community trips and volunteering			

Project strand outputs

Table 1 draws on the monitoring data and summarises the key project strand outputs. It shows that since May 2022, over 280 different sessions have been delivered: 44 on a one to one basis and 237 small and other group sessions. The sessions have involved almost 300 young women, over 100 in each of the first two years of delivery and 65 in this most recent year in which a greater emphasis has been placed on ensuring everyone engaged experienced the full programme offer and had a more consistent experience.

The young women included Year 10 and 11 grammar school students, carers and care leavers, women's aid groups, women involved in sex work and HMP groups. The sessions were delivered in partnership with a wide range of organisations. They included the arts and cultural sector (e.g. Factory International, Home and the Pankhurst Centre); local schools such as William Hulme Grammar and Elbridge School; community groups and centres, including the Aquarius Centre, Trafford Housing, Styal Mental Health and Manchester Women's Aid; in addition to HM Prison Services, including HMP Styal. The partners helped facilitate access to the young women, hosted 'go see' type visits and provided support and venues for the sessions.

Table 1: project outputs	1-2-1 sessions	Group sessions	Total sessions	Participants (individuals)
May-22 to March-23	8	80	88	113
April-23 to March 24	18	78	96	117
April-24 to March 25	18	79	99	65
Project total	44	237	283	295

Encouraging creativity

Although not exclusively, the first few sessions in which participants took part typically involved a range of creative and development activities. They included **improvisation exercises**, in which participants were encouraged to explore a wide range of themes and develop scenes which they could then act out. Participants also engaged in **music and dance**, which they composed, choreographed or performed, exploring such themes as *transformation*, the subject of a physical theatre/movement piece later performed at a fundraiser dinner. **Drama and acting** exercises were a significant feature of the sessions. Participants explored situations, ideas and characters, they worked collectively, performing their scenes, and even created a multi-media performance inspired by A Christmas Carol about a Trump like character's morality.

Creative games were also used, provoking participants to laugh, smile and engage with each other. Following one such session, one participant remarked *'in that room today playing those games, I haven't laughed or smiled like that in four years, I laughed so much, and I just wanted to tell you that'*.

Participants learnt about **graphic design** and took part in **drawing & painting** sessions, in which they created work based on different themes. In one session, for instance, they did some squiggle drawings, which they then turned into mini worlds; and in another, they did mindful sketching,

ending the session with some deep breaths. During the check-out from this latter session, one woman said, *'I was in a really bad mood earlier, but I thought I'll come along and just sit and watch but I did actually really enjoy doing everything'*.

'I feel more confident and less distracted when we are working together on the design project.'

Other sessions involved **creative writing**, including writing **poetry** for an upcoming awards show. Participants practiced writing sestinas (where you start with just a few words from a theme and then end each sentence with one of those words in a set pattern) and shared their work with others within their group.

Demi said she had done a tiny bit of poetry before but had never had her work read aloud. I offered to read hers for her and she said yes, she was really smiling during and afterward and said, 'I'm really proud because that's the first time I've ever heard my poetry spoken'.

Delivering cultural trips & experiences

Throughout their involvement, and where possible, participants were given opportunity to go on cultural trips and experiences. These have included trips to theatre performances, such as Opera North's adaptation of A Midsummer Night's Dream, and exhibitions, such as the immersive David Hockney: Bigger & Closer experience at Factory International. Several also involved participants in the delivery of work. For example, three young women performed their work at the CPC awards held at the Hilton: one led the audience in a grounding exercise and read their poem, whilst another performed magic tricks to diners at their tables.

It is clear from their feedback that these trips and experiences have benefited participants in a wide range of ways, exposing them to venues they would not otherwise have attended, work they would not otherwise have seen or presented, and experiences they would not otherwise have had. Not only have they enjoyed themselves, but these experiences have helped to broaden their horizons, spark their imaginations, build confidence and aspirations, and inspire their creativity and career prospects.

Ellie and Deb went on a trip where they got to see a huge video exhibition/documentary of David Hockney's work. Both participants were smiling and laughing throughout and said they had a great time.

Providing space & support

Beyond the creative activities delivered, the sessions provided a space for participants to **consider, discuss and share** their lived experiences, thoughts, ideas and feelings. Topics included toxic relationships, everyday sexism, as well as their own personal struggles. Participants were encouraged to voice and share their struggles, including feelings of being overwhelmed, misunderstood, and dealing with past traumas. For example, one participant spoke about how *'they bottle things up until it becomes too much'*, and another, about their experience with EMDR therapy and the challenges of managing their anger.

Cara shared a lot of what was going on in her life and continues to tell us more about the domestic abuse she experienced. In this sense we are offering a listening space - the creative activities weave around the traumatic events seeming to hold them.

There are many examples of the **support for specific issues** received by participants, including around domestic abuse, mental health struggles, and the challenges of being a young woman. The sessions have provided opportunity for them to share experiences and receive help from both facilitators and peers. For example, after one session in which participants talked about their experiences with domestic abuse, one participant described how it had helped them *feel lighter*. Others referred to *feeling better*, in a *better mood*, *more confident* and *supported* and how the sessions helped them *feel like they were being listened to and cared for*.

Other topics discussed covered **personal growth and development**, following which, participants talked about how the sessions had *helped them see their experience in a different light and grow in confidence*, and *how the sessions helped them feel more like themselves and more able to take risks*.



We started with a check-in by asking 'Thinking about how you're feeling today, if you were a shoe, what would your shoes look like?' At the beginning M's shoe was a trainer as she is busy and has lots of things going on. We asked the same question at the end and M then said her shoe would be a 'white, canvas shoe' and talked about how she is feeling creative and ready to start to decorate it with colours.

Working together

During weeks 4 to 8 of their 12 week course of sessions, participants were set creative challenges and encouraged to work with others in meeting them. This is evident in the first trans-identifying group (see box overleaf) and in sessions in which participants collaborated to develop scenes around power and politics; created drawings that depicted each other's past; and explored characters for their performances.

It is clear from their feedback that, despite occasional resistance, the majority of participants enjoyed these opportunities to work collectively and bounce ideas off each other.

One participant, Denise, who was initially hesitant, ended up performing a scene with Emma about a bus driver and a customer.

Our first trans identifying group



The group involved people who all came to us individually, but who then worked together as a group to create an animation. Each group member had specific needs and expressed how they wanted to connect with other young people who had a similar experience to them.

Through the animation, they explored their identity and needs and although, at first, they found being together in a group challenging, they gave very positive feedback as the project closed: particularly about connections they had made and how the space had felt important.

The film they created is at <https://youtu.be/9ddyER79pZk>.

'This is the best thing I've ever done'

'I feel like I can be creative and make friends here'

'My voice is important'

Group participants

Providing training, work experience & volunteering

Towards the end of their 12 week course, participants were supported in undertaking training, work experience and/or volunteering activities. These have included opportunities at Odd Arts as well as partner organisations. The case study overleaf shows how one participant, Ellie¹, was commissioned and paid to present her poem at a charity event. Other examples include a participant who had been very proactive in pushing forward with their graphic design work. They were supported in finding **volunteering opportunities** and provided a **reference for future employers or commissioners**.

Another participant who opened up about the abuse she faced in the past and how it led to her being workless was offered support to help her find a job that suited both her interests in helping people and creativity. And another, Illa, whose experiences are also summarised overleaf, was supported in preparing for a forthcoming interview to become a youth worker.

¹ All names have been changed to protect participants' anonymity

Ellie's inspiration

Ellie heard about OddArts from their youth worker. They attended drama workshops exploring colourism and saw an Odd Arts play celebrating Black history. They then accepted a place on the Wellbeing Your Way project.

Ellie attended project sessions involving animation making, writing, improv, acting and songwriting. As they identified as neurodivergent and struggled with communication, they also spent time practicing facial expressions and reading the facial expressions of others.

'It's been good to have a creative outlet rather than being sad about not being able to express myself....I've always felt welcome at Odd Arts....some places are easier to go back to than others and Odd Arts has always been good to me'.

More recently, Ellie was introduced to an Odd Arts partner organisation, who commissioned and paid them to write and perform a poem for a large charity event. They were supported to refine and deliver their performance which included a grounding exercise enabling audiences to interact.

It was enjoyable and nice to have something to do and feel good about myself'.

Ellie has also taken part in a number of cultural trips, including a theatre trip to HOME, trips to the cinema and AO Arena. Although they're now coming to the end of their weekly Wellbeing Your Way sessions, it is clear that Ellie has both the confidence and motivation to continue to build on these positive experiences.

'I feel ok cause at the start of receiving support I don't think I was doing anything else but now I've been coming out to see you and it's been helping me to do other things. I've been going out doing things with Odd Arts and thinking oh that was really good, I wish it was longer - what else could I do. It's really helped my confidence and motivation. I'm never in the house, which is great'.



Illa's confidence & positivity

Illa has shown significant development throughout her involvement in the sessions.

At the start she was keen to focus on preparing for her forthcoming interview to become a youth worker. During this time, she was helped in practicing mock questions and refining her answers. Her facilitators provided support by helping her to filter and condense her notes. They even experimented with different text colours so that Illa could read her notes more easily. This personalized approach helped Illa to feel calmer and more confident about her interview.

After completing her 12 Wellbeing Your Way sessions, Illa continued to have monthly check-ins with facilitators. She has returned to university and has reported feeling less pressurised to *put on a front for people or worry about what others think* of her. Her newfound confidence and self-belief have been evident during her check-in sessions, where she has been a lot more confident and surer of herself.

Most recently, Illa mentioned that she had exams coming up but that she felt like she had *things under control*. She indicated that she feels more able to manage stress and responsibilities now.

Overall, Illa's development has been marked by an increased confidence, better stress management, and a much more positive outlook on her future.



Participant outcomes

It is clear from the preceding case studies that participants derived a range of positive outcomes from being involved in the Wellbeing Your Way sessions. Further evidence of these and other outcomes was collected via the participant feedback forms (completed by those involved in the first year of activities) and SWEMWBS questionnaires subsequently issued to a sample of participants as they joined the programme and following their completion. This feedback provides evidence of outcomes associated with participants' increased confidence and self-worth; levels of anxiety, depression and self-harm; sense of belonging and connection; and their increased employability. The impact of these outcomes on participants' mental health and wellbeing is also evident in their overall wellbeing scores, set out on page 16.

Increased confidence

The interim evaluation highlighted how successful sessions had been in **increasing participants' confidence** with 88% of participants indicating that their confidence had increased significantly. The findings also demonstrated how confidence increased with the number of sessions attended and that improved communication skills developed through sessions and their interactions with others had helped contribute to this.

"Before these sessions, I didn't have much confidence in myself or my ability to speak up. But the activities and role-playing have made me realise that I can be heard, and I'm capable of more than I thought. It's given me a lot more self-belief, and now I'm not as afraid to share my thoughts or take the lead."

The evidence collected from participants most recently clearly demonstrates that this continues to be the case. Many participants referred to how they had lacked confidence, felt unsure, intimidated or afraid before they became involved in sessions. Many also referred to how they had previously found it difficult to speak up for themselves, were nervous or hesitant to try anything new or different. However, in all cases, they also indicated how much more confident they felt as a result of the sessions and the support they received from facilitators and peers. They refer to feeling *more understood* and *being heard*; they have learnt how to express themselves better, that they are more capable and can achieve more than they previously thought, and that they can be brave, stand tall and be proud of their achievements.

"I've learned how to breathe properly, how to stand tall, how to speak without my voice shaking. Never realised how much those little things matter, but they do. I carry myself differently now."

~~

"When I'm acting, I don't feel like a prisoner. I feel like a person. I can be someone else for a bit, or maybe just more of who I really am. Either way, it's a break from all the heaviness in my head. I gained confidence and felt good about myself."

Improved self-worth

Linked to the increased confidence is the **improved self-worth and belief** that participants have secured. This is evident from their comments, many of which refer to having surprised themselves, *feeling good* about themselves and their achievements, and feeling *brave* and *strong*.

'It's weird, but when I'm doing this, I feel kind of proud of myself'

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'Usually, I just keep my head down in prison, stay out of the way. But in drama, I feel seen. I feel like I matter. That's a feeling I forgot I could have'

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'Never thought I'd be good at anything like this, but I've surprised myself. I get up, I take part, I actually enjoy it. Feels like I've found a part of myself I never knew was there.'

Participants commented on how much they learned about themselves through sessions; how they had enjoyed challenging themselves; tried new and different things; and, how they had stopped worrying so much.

Many refer to the trust they developed in the facilitators and how they had helped them to develop. They refer to the space and encouragement they were afforded, and how much they felt able to share their thoughts and ideas, voice opinions and be themselves.

'I've learned so much from this, not just about drama, but about myself. I've learned I can be brave; I can try new things; I can mess up and still be okay.'

Millie's self-esteem

Millie's involvement in the sessions has been significant. She has participated actively in discussions and activities, which have helped her open up about her feelings and experiences. She has been encouraged to share her thoughts and feelings prompted by a journal made especially for her. The journal aimed to help her to look at things in a new light, to be kinder to herself and to acknowledge and understand her parameters.

Millie has indicated that the sessions at Odd Arts have helped her feel authentically herself. She has been able to discuss her fear of being judged by friends if she shared too much about her life and she has been assured by the facilitators that she could be authentic without oversharing, which has given her a new perspective on her life.

Most recently Millie participated in a theatre trip, during which she enjoyed engaging with the facilitators and other participants and was able to relax and smile more. She has since expressed a wish to participate in future trips and activities, including a forthcoming trip to see *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

It is clear from Millie's comments and those of her facilitators that her involvement in the programme has had a profound impact on her: in helping her gain new perspectives, build confidence, and feel more connected with the people around her.

"[Millie] and I had some really great discussions today. She loved the idea of the journal which I had made for her and it prompted her to open up about a lot of her feelings, whilst we were talking through the questions. I tried to reframe a lot of the things she said to make her consider them differently, particularly focusing on positive self-talk, having self-compassion, being bounded, and she really responded well to this." **Session facilitator**



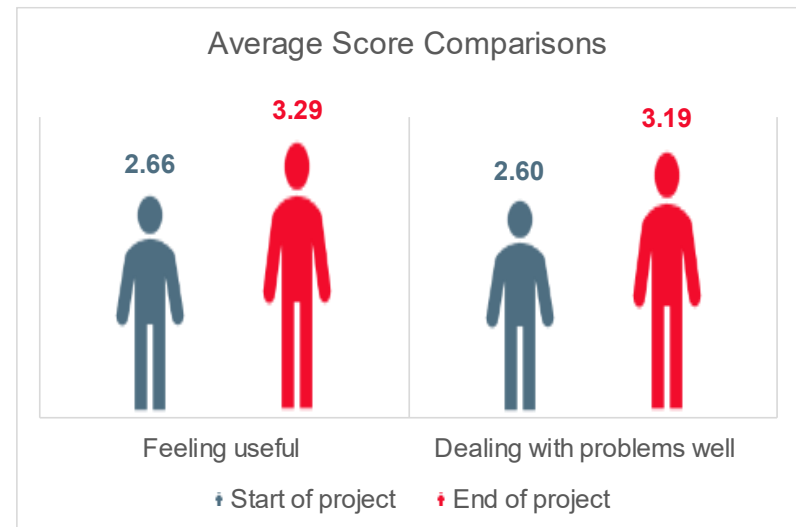
The extent to which participants confidence and self-worth have increased as a result of the project is also evident in their responses to the SWEMWBS questionnaires. The **SWEMWBS framework** is a short version of the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS), developed to enable the monitoring of mental wellbeing and the evaluation of projects aimed at improving mental wellbeing. It uses seven statements about thoughts and feelings, which relate to functioning. The statements are positively worded with five response categories from 'none of the time' to 'all of the time' and participants are asked to indicate which category most reflected their current status. In comparing their responses at both the start and end of their involvement in the project, we can assess whether there has been a meaningful change in them.

'Challenging myself has been the best part. I've done things I never thought I'd be brave enough to try. Every time I step up and do something new, I prove to myself I'm stronger than I think.'

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'No one treats you like a criminal in drama. You're not just what you've done, you're a person. I feel respected, like I matter. That means a lot when you're in a place that makes you feel worthless most of the time.'

The chart aside shows the average scores given by participants to two of the SWEMWBS questions before and following their involvement in sessions. In both instances, participants average scores have increased indicating that they felt **more useful and able to deal with problems** at the end of the project than they did at the start. In fact, the average scores have each increased by almost a quarter, providing clear evidence of a positive change in both participants' self-worth and their confidence to deal with issues.



"I used to be scared of looking stupid, like I wouldn't know what to do. But I've learned to just go for it, to stop overthinking. Turns out, when you stop worrying so much, you actually enjoy yourself."

Reduced anxiety, depression & self-harm

The interim evaluation report demonstrated the **significant improvement in participant's mood** as a result of their involvement in the programme with 90% of participants reporting being in either a good or very good mood after sessions compared to just 16% before sessions. The results also showed that the longer participants had been involved, the more likely they were to report being in good mood.

Throughout the facilitators' notes of sessions delivered more recently there is evidence that participants have felt calmer and happier following sessions. They refer to participants' *internal weather reports* changing from 'rainy' to 'sunny'; and observations of participants' states changing from being insecure, anxious and agitated at the start to being more relaxed, calmer, happier and in much better spirits after their sessions.

Lucy mentioned that she had a tight feeling in her chest at the start of a session due to an off-and-on relationship. After talking it through and participating in drama games, she said the tight feeling had gone, and she felt better.

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Annie entered a session in an agitated state but seemed to relax as the session progressed. Her exit word was "calm," suggesting that the session helped alter her initial feelings

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There are references to participants appearing more *cheerful* and *excited* to perform in their sessions, *laughing*, *smiling*, and *putting on funny voices for characters*, being *happier*, *brighter* and *more positive* in later sessions and rating their mood as much more improved.

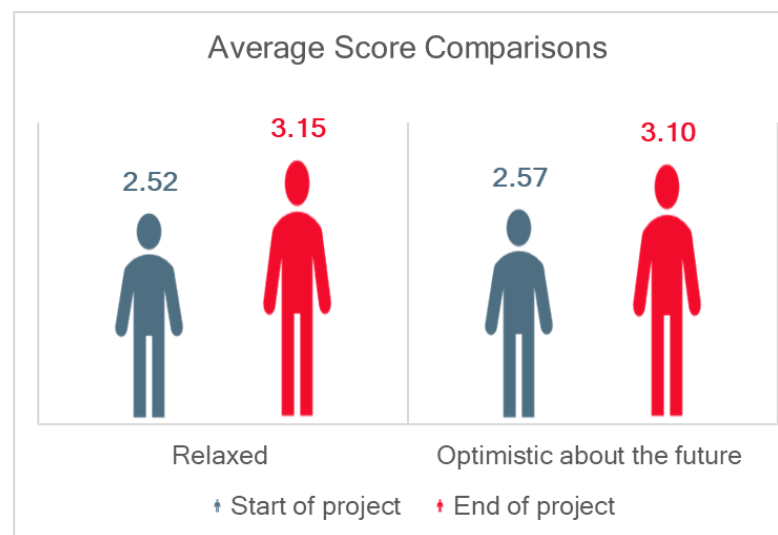
The chart aside draws on the participant feedback and compares the average scores given to two more of the SWEMWBS questions at the start and end of their involvement. It again shows that the scores have increased between the time they started and finished the course of sessions.

The extent to which participants feel relaxed is significantly greater than at the start, with their average scores increasing by 25% overall. Similarly, the extent to which they feel **optimistic about the future** is also much greater and evident in a 21% increase in the average scores.

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'Usually, I self-harm when I feel trapped, like there's no way out of my own head. But when I'm in drama, it's like I get a break from that. I don't feel so stuck. It's helped me find other ways to let things out without hurting myself'

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"When I know I've got a session coming up, it gives me something to hold onto. Some days, I just want to hurt myself, but then I think, just get to drama. And sometimes, that's enough to get me through."

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These results are reflected in many of the comments made by participants at the end of their sessions. They refer to how much the sessions have helped reduce self-harm, given them *something to hold on to* and *space to breathe*. Others refer to how their sessions *got them out of bed*, helped them *manage feelings in and outside sessions*, *let go of worries* and *focus on something positive*.

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"Prison makes my mental health worse. You've got too much time to think, too much time to sit with your own pain. But drama takes me out of that for a while. It gives me space to breathe, to feel something different."

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### Sense of belonging & connection

The interim evaluation demonstrated the extent to which participants secured a great sense of belonging from the sessions: evident in references to *feeling connected, informed, safe and supported*.

More recent feedback indicates that these positive outcomes have continued, with facilitators observing participants **increased willingness to interact, share and work with others**; and participants valuing the connections and interactions they have secured.

As the case study aside illustrates, participants have both valued and given support from and to each other. They refer to having made *new connections, bonded with each other, felt a part of something and helped each other grow*.

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'The best thing about these sessions is the way we all come together as women. Prison can be lonely, but drama has given me a chance to bond with others, to laugh and support each other...it's about connection, and that means everything in here.'

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### Carrie's sense of belonging

Carrie's engagement in the sessions has been multifaceted. Initially, she was hesitant to engage but gradually became very involved and enthusiastic about the activities. She was particularly interested in acting games, where she put on different accents and was highly creative. She also had a strong interest in developing her singing skills.

As her confidence and trust in the facilitators grew, Carrie was encouraged to share her experiences and participated in discussions about her personal history and the abuse she suffered from her ex-partner. Her increased openness and willingness to share her experiences has been most evident in her desire to write a play about domestic abuse, a topic that is both significant and emotional for her.

Carrie has also been very supportive of other participants over the course of her involvement. She has been instrumental in encouraging other women to join the sessions and has welcomed and supported them. Her positive attitude and willingness to engage in a wide range of activities, such as acting and writing, have clearly contributed to her overall development as well as a strong sense of belonging and community responsibility.



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'I've met women in drama I'd never have spoken to on the wing or in the houses. We're all different, but when we're in that room, we work together. It's nice to feel like part of something, not just on my own.'

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We can continue to draw on participant's responses to the SWEMWBS questions to draw further conclusions. As illustrated aside, the average participant scores to the question about how close they felt to others have changed since the start and end of their involvement. They have increased by 13%, averaging a fairly high 3.27 out of a maximum possible 5.

These positive results are again reflected in many of the participant's comments that further demonstrate the **increased sense of belonging and connection** that participants have secured from being involved.

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'The drama sessions have brought us together as a group. We work as a team, support each other, and it's helped me realise I'm not alone in what I'm going through. ...it feels good to be part of something positive where we all help each other grow'

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### Increased employability

In addition to the **connections** participants forged with each other are those they secured with other people and organisations. Participants were put in contact with past employees of Odd Arts, other community groups, charities and cultural partners such as Home and Contact Theatre. These people and organisations have offered them opportunities to further their interests, develop their skills and creative practice and gain valuable work and volunteering experience.

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Illa is already part of projects at the Contact Theatre, and there is a recommendation for her to apply to the CYC Neurodivergent project.

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Beyond the connections made and opportunities to gain experience, there is considerable evidence of the skills that participants have gained from the sessions. They include **life-ready communication skills**: being confident and able to express their views and opinions, manage their emotions, listen and be heard. In their feedback participants refer to a greater ability *to deal with people*; to present themselves, ideas and work; *to handle conversations without panicking*, *face challenges* and *stretch* themselves.

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*'It's helped me deal with people better. I used to avoid eye contact, hate speaking in front of others. Now I feel more comfortable, like I can handle conversations without panicking'*

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*'The project has given me more than just creative fun—it's also provided practical tools for handling emotions and preparing for life after prison. I feel more equipped to deal with challenges in a healthier way'*

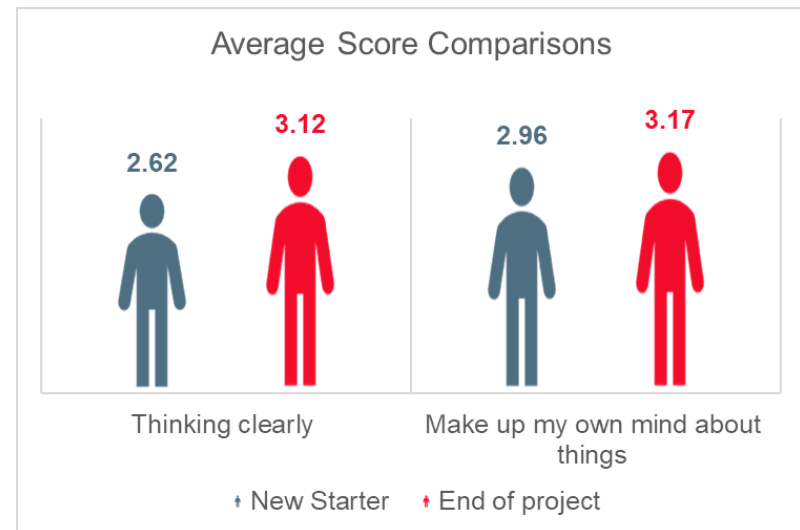
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This increased capability amongst participants is also evident from their responses to the remaining two SWEMWBS questions which asked them whether they felt they could think clearly and make their own minds up about things, both strong indicators of their ability to consider issues, undertake tasks and be effective.

The average scores are shown aside and indicate that between starting and finishing sessions, participants' ability to think clearly and be decisive have both increased with the average scores increasing by 20% and 7% respectively.

These increases and the **transferable skills, confidence and increased self-worth** secured by participants have undoubtedly increased their employability. As, indeed, have the **creative skills** and inspiration that participants have secured and developed.

These have been extensive and include visual arts (drawing, painting, graphic design and digital visual arts); performance skills (singing, improvisation, scene setting, choreography, music, drama and dance) as well as creative writing. It is clear from participants feedback, that not only have they acquired these skills, but that in doing so, they have been **able to stretch and challenge themselves and take pride** in their achievements.



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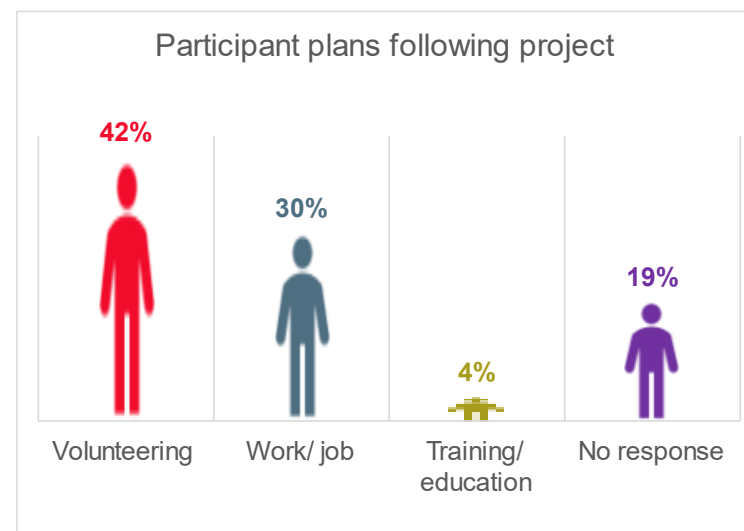
*'It's the only time in here where I get to be creative. Most of prison is just rules, waiting around, and being told what to do. But in drama, we make things, tell stories, imagine. It wakes up a part of my brain I thought was gone'*

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*'I never knew I could be creative until I started this. I've surprised myself. I've written things, acted things, come up with ideas I never thought I had in me. I feel proud of myself for the first time in ages.'*

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To gain further insights about participants' **increased employability**, they were asked whether they had plans to progress on to volunteering, work or education following the project. As the chart aside illustrates, the significant majority (81%) indicated that they had either plans to or had already secured volunteering, work or education positions since completing the sessions. 2 in 5 had secured volunteering positions, 1 in 3 had secured a job or work and 4% had sought or planned to gain further training/education.



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*'I've got a job in the prison I'm made up'*

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*'I'm being released. I plan to get a job and try to stay off crack. I know it will be hard.'*

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Several participants from HMP Styal referred to jobs they had secured recently, one, as a listener for other prisoners. Others referred to being **inspired or determined to secure creative or other employment** when released; and many indicated that whether through a structured role or otherwise, they would like to carry on developing their creative skills and do more.

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*I am hoping to carry on with writing a play and developing my story.*

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*'It's nice to use my imagination again. Prison is all grey and routine, nothing interesting ever happens. But in drama, we can create stories, be different people, escape... it's inspired me to do more within the prison'*

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## Wellbeing impact

Turning now to the overall impact that the project has had on participants' mental health and wellbeing, to which we already know the positive participant outcomes will contribute. To assess the extent to which these have been improved, we can draw on the overall average wellbeing scores given by participants at the start and end of their involvement in the project. These are calculated by adding the scores for each of the seven statements together for each participant and then taking the overall average across all participants at the start and end of their involvement.

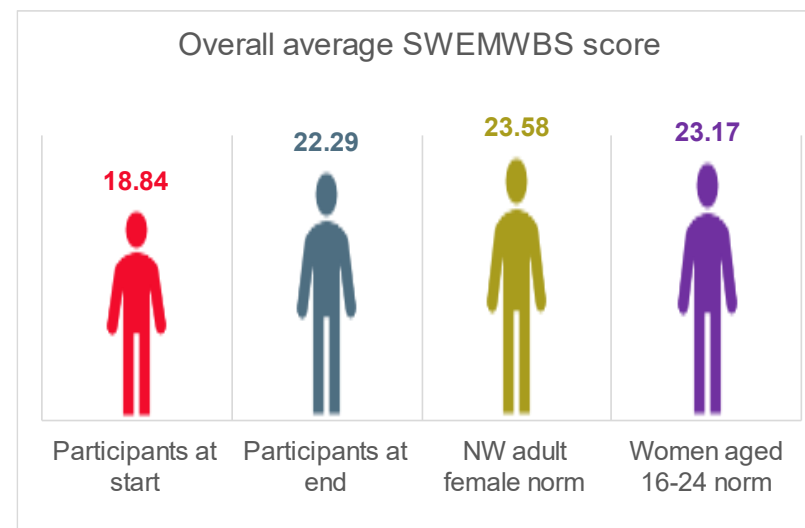


These overall average scores are shown in the chart aside alongside the norms expected for women aged 16 to 24 and women resident in the North West region.<sup>2</sup>

The chart highlights how much lower the overall wellbeing of participants was at the start of the project when compared with the norms for women in the region and women of this age group. At 18.84 the scores are 20% lower than those typical of women of this age more generally. This demonstrates how **well targeted** the project has been to vulnerable young women who have low levels of wellbeing and mental health and who had most to gain from being involved.

The chart also shows how the average score for **overall wellbeing amongst participants has increased** between the start and end of their sessions. Whilst at 22.29, this remains lower than the norms, it is 18% higher than the average score given by participants at the start.

These results provide clear evidence that not only have participants secured positive outcomes that will have a longer term impact on their wellbeing, but that that **impact is already being realised**. Again, the findings are reflected in the observations of facilitators and the feedback of participants.



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*'I've always thought I was broken, that I couldn't change. But drama has shown me I can be more than my mental health struggles. I can be creative, I can express myself, I can be part of something. That gives me hope'*

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*'I used to hate making mistakes, but in drama, there's no right or wrong. You just try, and if it goes wrong, you laugh and do it again. It's taught me not to be so hard on myself. I can't believe what I've managed to do on stage. my family has seen the difference in me. I have something to talk about and they love hearing about each session.'*

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<sup>2</sup> Latest SWEMWBS norms (<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5376387/>)

## Conclusions & implications for the future

The findings herein demonstrate that through the Wellbeing Your Way programme, the young women involved have secured positive outcomes associated with their confidence, self-worth, sense of community, increased capability and prospects. They also show that the longer term positive impact of these outcomes on their mental health, wellbeing and aspirations are already being realised.

Finally, the analysis suggests that a number of factors have contributed to the project's success in achieving these outcomes, from which we can share key learnings to help shape future projects of this kind. They include the following.

- **Provide emotional support:** Throughout the project participants have had access to emotional support during and after sessions. Having a strong support system in place that can help them get the best out of sessions.
- **Understand participants' needs:** Facilitators took time to understand the individual needs and experiences of participants. Providing a non-judgmental space for participants to share their experiences can help them feel understood and supported.
- **Create a safe and inclusive environment:** Facilitators made sure that the environment was safe and inclusive for all participants. They were flexible to the level and type of involvement participants wanted and fostered a supportive and respectful atmosphere.
- **Encourage participation and engagement:** Facilitators used a wide range of creative games and activities to encourage participation and engagement. These types of engaging activities can help participants feel more comfortable and involved.
- **Offer one-to-one support:** Participants were offered one-to-one support where it was felt needed. The sessions helped address individual needs and provide personalised support.
- **Address specific issues:** Activities were tailored to address the specific issues participants were facing at the time. They were encouraged to choose and discuss topics and personal struggles. Addressing issues through discussion helps participants share their experiences and build trust with others in the group.
- **Provide positive feedback:** Throughout the project facilitators offered positive feedback and encouragement to participants. This positive reinforcement helped to boost their confidence and self-esteem.
- **Adapt activities to participants' needs:** There are many examples where facilitators needed to be flexible and adapt activities to suit the needs and preferences of participants or the situation. Adapting activities to participants' interests helped them feel more engaged and motivated.

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