



Noah's Ark Centre

Safe Haven and Place of Hope



# Integrated Wellbeing Service Report

2024-2025

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## Why I completed the research?

The purpose of the action research was to shape and develop our Integrated Wellbeing Service Project (15-25yrs), funded by The Department of Health and Social Care's Hubs Shared Outcomes Fund, and to influence how we delivered a range of therapeutic interventions to support the young people of Calderdale.

The service aims to take a holistic approach to mental health, and so my action research report seeks to look at mental health with the broadest lens possible, exploring areas such as:

- Real food
- Movement and exercise
- Talking therapy
- Social influences
- Financial circumstances

I utilised the action research approach, with a constant cycle of inquiry and learning from what was shared. Our project followed the steps of "planning → acting → observing → reflecting."

The findings were shared with the rest of the Integrated Wellbeing Service Team in bitesize reports to inform the project and the different interventions being delivered so that they effectively met the needs of the young people within the community.

# How did we collect our research?

We wanted to learn how young people truly think and feel, to ensure the service fully meets the needs of the young people we are supporting.

At Noah's Ark we work in a person-centered way, tailoring our services to everyone's requirements. Our approach is always to centre our services around the individual young person; listening to their needs and echoing their voices throughout our work.

I researched using questionnaires, surveys, 1-to-1 structured/semi-structured interviews. My rationale for choosing the different methodologies were to gain as much insight in a qualitative way and collect as much rich data to analyse and break down into different key findings.

## Participatory Approach

My approach to working with professionals and young people has always been gathering information whilst engaging in activities. I seek to observe and analyse interventions through talking to and interacting with young people. One key strategy was to engage with young people attending wellbeing activities, organised in such a way that they were so focused on enjoying themselves that it did not feel like structured work. I sought to discover what wellbeing means to them, their own experiences of positive and negative wellbeing, what they enjoy doing, what helps them through challenges, and what kind of activities they might find helpful in the future.

The different wellbeing sessions I attended, varied from summer school groups at a skate park to LGBTQ+ support groups, to groups for care leavers and those with neurodiversity. Other sessions included walking in nature with young people, a range of youth groups in Calderdale to visiting young people in a classroom setting.

I conducted research via a range of different methodologies, including;

### Focus groups

Between 5 to 20 individuals. Designed to spark conversation, develop social engagement and peer interactions in a natural and organic setting. Free flowing conversations and honest exchanges which led to a large data set.

### Focused anonymous surveys

Digital and written surveys were provided to generate feedback based on individual experiences of wellbeing. I was there to provide assistance, only for the purposes of accessibility and understanding. Questions were personalised to individual events or settings. Data gathered covered a wide range of topics, including a stress survey at a local Sixth Form.

### One-on-one in-depth interviews

One-on-one interviews completed with me (researcher) and the young person where I provided a loose set of questions that were more of a guide than a formal interview.

The conversation was not designed to follow a specific direction as we wanted the young person to fully express themselves.

This was completed in a private setting, making the young person feel as comfortable as possible and where answers could be discussed in more depth.

These research methods have been extremely important to help guide this project to enable it to better succeed in supporting young people and helping professionals to more effectively facilitate running wellbeing sessions. The research gathered and topics discussed included influences such as social trends, local amenities, financial costs and/or barriers and young people's awareness and understanding of these.

The research project succeeded because of the participation of the large range of individuals involved. Throughout the project we have generated a great deal of trust by valuing each participant's views, thoughts, and feelings. This project has been about constantly learning so that the Integrated Wellbeing Service is able to constantly evolve.

# Who contributed to shape our research?

Professionals and/or young people from the following services:

- Active Calderdale
- BLOSM
- Branching Out
- Brooksbank Sixth Form
- Calder Learning Trust
- Calderdale (Leaving Care) Pathways Service
- Calderdale College
- Calderdale Family Hubs
- CK Careers
- Health & Wellbeing Secondary School Conference (2024) Attendee's
- Healthy Holidays (Orange Box)
- Healthy Minds
- Invictus Wellbeing
- King's Church Halifax
- Local Authority's Specialist Inclusion Team
- Newground Together
- Noah's Ark Counsellors & Therapeutic Practitioners
- Open Minds Therapists / Practitioners
- Park Lane Academy
- Pinc College
- Project Challenge
- Public Health Practitioner
- Skate It Yourself
- St. Augustine's Centre
- The Brunswick Centre
- The King's Trust (previously known as the Prince's Trust)
- The William Henry Smith School & Sixth Form
- Trinity Sixth Form Academy
- West Yorkshire All Age Liaison and Diversion/RECONNECT Service
- West Yorkshire Police
- Youth Justice Service
- Youth Social

# What themes emerged through our research?

Throughout the research some common themes presented themselves to us. Some were expressed via the young people directly, whereas others were fed back from professionals who work directly with the young people.

## Views of therapy and possible misconceptions

Throughout the past year, I have listened to various misconceptions young people have of talking therapy, due to a lack of understanding or based on their own or others previous experiences of therapy. I worked closely with the young people, building trust and patience, and breaking down the stigma around talking therapy. I answered any questions they had without judgement and helped to remove any barriers to them accessing support.

We spoke about different feelings people may have regarding talking therapy, such as meeting the therapist before a session so that the first time did not feel so intimidating. I also explained where the sessions would take place, the frequency and duration of therapy sessions as well as what to expect in the first session, so that the young people would feel more at ease when attending sessions. We also discussed confidentiality and privacy within therapy, in particular several young people expressed concerns about information they shared being disclosed and what would happen with that information.

Speaking to young people in a relaxed and neutral setting allowed them to ask questions and to share things they may not feel safe to share in other environments. Having a neutral setting, that was neither mine nor the young people's, meant that there was less of a power imbalance between us. Many young people discussed being too anxious to even begin counselling because they would feel too nervous about meeting the counsellor and going to a new place that they weren't familiar with. In some cases, this prevented young people from attending entirely even though they felt as though they needed support.

Some young people also spoke about being "locked up in a mental asylum" if they disclosed what went on in their head. This opened a conversation which I facilitated regarding understanding and breaking down the stigma of 'mental hospitals' as well as mental health in general. We discussed and challenged misconceptions in terms of the depiction of mental health facilities that young people had seen in fictional television dramas, including the idea that all therapy was conducted while 'lying down with your eyes closed'. I was able to use the fact that I was not a therapist to act as a go between and break down the barriers between counsellors and service users, showing them that counsellors are just people who want to help and support them.

## Loneliness

Feedback from the young people I met with revealed that the first symptom of mental health challenges and the development of poor mental health for many was a sense of loneliness.

This feeling led to an increase in a range of emotions, including anger, stress, upset, anxiety, a sense of isolation, and in some cases depression. Anonymous surveys revealed these emotions and showed the complexity of the presentations of many mental health issues in young people.

## Influence of social media, mainstream media and advertisement

I conducted a survey with young people asking the question: “What do you think influences the food that you eat?”

63% of young people said they were influenced by social media, advertisements, celebrities, and TikTok.

Some key conversations that came out of these questions included:

- One young person expanded further and said that throughout the day the main influence on the food he is eating is via the digital marketing around him, such as fast-food adverts and TV adverts for snacks. He described not feeling hungry until he saw an advert for ‘Pringles.’ All day he had ‘pringles’ in his head and so he had to go to the shop and get some, highlighting the power of this kind of marketing.

- Within focus groups we discussed the impact global companies have on our lifestyle and how much power they have over our diets and health. Some young people described feeling like these companies “controlled their existence”.

-We spoke about supermarket aisles and how most of the ‘offers’ that are on tend to be big global brands and how most of the time these are also ultra-processed foods.

-We spoke about ‘family global names’ such as Dolmio and Heinz and how these brands have become staples in our day-to-day family cooking, which led to discussions on convenience, laziness and the future of food.

-We spoke about convenience foods, which are often cheaper but lacking in nutritional value.

These types of conversations sparked a great deal of debate and discussion about how we cook and consume food on a day-to-day basis, our diets and the impact of food on our emotional and physical wellbeing.

## Diet

I undertook several anonymous surveys with twenty-five 15–25 year-olds, with one specific question asking: “Do you think what a young person eats has an impact on their overall wellbeing, mentally and physically?” 100% answered ‘yes’, showing an awareness of the impact their diets are having on their mental health and wellbeing. Part of the remit of the Integrated

Wellbeing Service project was to support young people to make mindful and informed choices and be more conscious of the options available to them.

As my research kept building with the young people and they participated in my research answering questions around diet and lifestyle the more the discussion around energy drinks became apparent, such as Monster, Red Bull and cheaper alternative caffeine drinks. When discussed with them, many young people said they 'need' them as they feel so tired, saying they struggle to function without them, and needing them to get through the day. We discussed the impact these drinks have on their body, with one participant explaining "they have a buzz and then a crash a few hours later" meaning they could consume between 4-5 cans of Monster, we discussed the caffeine intake with 160mg per can, potentially some young people could be consuming around 600+mg of caffeine in these energy drinks. From this information we were able to discuss the effect caffeine has on your body and to help and support around healthy diets and lifestyles.

## Poverty

I conducted anonymous surveys with professionals at a local secondary school and sixth form in Calderdale, asking for opinions to the following question: "If a child lives in an area of high poverty does it affect their overall wellbeing and mental health?". 88% voted 'Yes, poverty does have an impact.'

This led to further discussions around food choice and the financial pressures for people when choosing the food that they consume. Professionals discussed foods of convenience and price, revealing

that these foods had the least nutritional value, but tend to be the foods that disadvantaged young people are consuming. We also spoke about school canteens and food provided at school and how their exposure to such food choices had a significant impact on food choices and habits in later life.

## Modelling healthy behaviors to young people

Our anonymous surveys also revealed that many of the young people we spoke to copy / model the behaviors of the people in their lives and those they look up to, which can have a huge impact on their overall wellbeing if these behaviors are 'unhealthy' or 'risky' in any way.

The topic of vaping was also raised. A sizeable percentage of the group discussed that they were surrounded by vaping, including vapers who were family members, friends, school staff. Seeing these individuals made them more susceptible to begin using vapes because it seemed 'normal' and 'everyday' and that they had always been surrounded by these behaviors. Other discussions included what behaviors we would consider risky. We discussed the feelings and consequences that come when engaging in activities or behaviors that put us at an elevated risk. We also discussed how our bodies and minds feel when we use substances, such as alcohol, cannabis and those in vaping .

## Exam pressure and stress

I met with local sixth form students and conducted an anonymous survey on how they were feeling in general. One question asked was: "What often triggers your stress?" 64% of young people said, 'exam pressure and coursework deadlines.' Using this information, we were able to discuss the service, offer coping strategies and support to combat exam stress.

I was able to gather a sizable amount of research and was able to feed it back to my team at IWS and consequently we now have a therapist based within the local sixth form delivering single/ one off therapy sessions.

## Not having time to prioritise wellbeing ("I'm too busy for self-care")

Following on from our conversations around exam stress, many young people stated they wished they had the time to prioritise their wellbeing, self-care or different activities that they would otherwise use a coping strategy. I spoke at length with them about making little changes to their routines or adding different circuit breaker activities into their lifestyles to help improve their overall wellbeing and reduce their anxiety and stress.

From these sessions we were able to form discussions on phone usage, social media, gaming and the amount of screen time that young people were having.

In an anonymous survey, 88% of young people said they 'felt like they spend too much time on their phone.' I conducted one-on-one conversations with young people about how screen time can negatively impact their mental health and how addictive it can become. We discussed why it is that they spend so much time on their phone, with one young person speaking about her phone and social media as a form of 'escapism'.

She described 'switching off' and 'not letting her mind think' so that she can just watch TikTok. Asking what she watches, the young person said funny videos, recipes, dances and WIEIAD videos (What I Eat In A Day).

Self-care was a topic that was frequently discussed in conversations between me and the young people. We also discussed the different ways people can develop their own self-care. A survey showed that many young people already have a degree of understanding about self-care and productive ways to reduce stress and overall mental health.

The things young people currently do for self-care included:

- Journalling
- Talking with friends
- Going on walks
- Playing football
- Having a bath with no phone
- Skin care routine

## Young women's diet and need for mental health support

I conducted an anonymous survey with 11 young women focused on their diets and attitudes and relationship with food. One question asked was "Have you ever thought about how food can impact you on the whole?" For example, emotionally and/or physically - i.e. does it make you happy, sad, tired, energised?"

This question was designed to provoke ideas and feelings that may not have been considered before or the young women may have wanted to know more about but were not aware of the support available. One young person's response was: "Yes, normally eating lots of processed and unhealthy foods make me feel down," with another saying: "Physically, the food you eat does influence your mood and energy, the better and more balanced the food you eat, the better you will feel. But anything in balance and moderation is good for you".

Emotionally/mentally it's the same link, foods high in sugar cause greater fluctuations in mood and creates less stability."

A range of professionals had a discussion around young women in particular presenting with very poor diets linked directly to poor mental health. Signs of this included: poor skin, energy levels and a refusal to go to school, which in turn led to poor life choices such as shoplifting.

## Navigating diagnosis (neurodivergence)

When conducting a focus group within the local community many young people expressed a wish that they had the support and access to resources once they had a diagnosis of neurodivergence. Many discussed being labelled as 'autistic or having ADHD' but not being given the tools to process this information and live with their new diagnoses. Many were left asking 'what does it mean?'

The focus group then discussed what support they would like moving forwards. All twenty of the neurodivergent participants spoke of a need for more safe spaces within Calderdale to give them the confidence to be who they are and to be able to act in a way that feels natural. One young person I interviewed stated "I want somewhere I can learn skills to become an independent adult but feel safe to be myself."

## Nature

When conducting focus groups, several questions focused on exercise, walking and getting out into nature. Some of these asked were: "Where in Calderdale would you like to walk?", "Is there anywhere local you wish to visit?" and "What type of walks do you like doing? Quiet walks, near water etc?". I was able to inspire conversations about different locations, difficulty and preferred length of walks and then create a bank of successful walks which young people would be happy to take part in.

This led to many young people wanting to share their current walking routes as well as them feeling an increased sense of confidence talking to family and friends and encouraging others to come with them to visit local attractions. By involving the young people with the planning and preparation for going on walks and getting into nature we were able to give them a sense of autonomy. It was clear from the young people's reactions that they valued being asked and like their opinion really mattered.

A young person attending the weekly walking group stated that "going on the IWS walks is my happiest time of the week". She further elaborated that taking time out of her busy college schedule to prioritise her mind and body was of great benefit. This then led to discussions of the importance of fresh air, exercise, and exploring different parts of nature.

A survey with 12 young sport students from Project Challenge (Orange Box) were asked "Do you enjoy walking?" and "Does going on a walk help you physically and emotionally?". 100% of the young people who participated said that 'Yes, it does'.

## Transitioning to adulthood

During the young person led focus groups, many young people discussed wanting to be in control and responsible for making their own choices. They further explained that this is something they felt was part of the transition into adulthood. They spoke about making their own decisions as it is something they had not had the opportunity to do, either because their caregivers made a lot of their decisions for them or their home environment having very little freedom. I spoke with a group of

young care leavers who confided that only when acting recklessly and being excited by something and following through on it, is the only time young people felt when they had freedom in making decisions for themselves.

As part of my research, we discussed what some young people would like to achieve or have support with before they felt they had fully transitioned into being 'an adult'. Many of the answers included; wanting a space to learn about making food, renting a flat, how to get a job, and learning about finances, including pay slips and tax codes.

## Motivation, purpose and challenge

Whilst on a research walk with the Integrated Wellbeing Service walking group, a member of the group discussed "having a purpose, having a goal and wanting to achieve something". I discussed with the young people how to set goals and how it can feel when we achieve them. It doesn't matter how large or small the accomplishment, only that we have achieved something, although this feels different to and is unique to everyone.

We related these ideas to a variety of achievements, including cooking a healthy meal with the 'Real Food' Cooking Group or reaching a daily step count goal on a walk.

The group spoke of the IWS sessions as fun and engaging, as a chance to challenge themselves to see how far they can push themselves on the walk and always feeling 'happy' at the end of the walks.

## How has the research influenced ongoing service design and delivery?

### Single / One-off Sessions at Sixth Form

We undertook a research session with wellbeing staff at a local sixth form, speaking at length about students' wellbeing. It became apparent that we could make a real difference to the wellbeing needs of the students there and assist them with building resilience and confidence throughout their education. Specific things highlighted included being responsive to students' needs, understanding the pressure and stresses they are being put under and the need for further wellbeing support to ensure positive outcomes. After the success of these sessions, I did separate sessions with students. The young people expressed their wish for a counsellor and one-off talking therapy sessions accessible at their educational setting reducing their anxiety of travelling to unfamiliar venues.

As a result of this, we now have an IWS counsellor based at the sixth form one morning per week providing single-session/drop-in counselling support to students who expressed inability to attend a series of sessions due to the demand faced with their studies.

### [Instagram page](#)

The Integrated Wellbeing Service has set up an Instagram page as a way to reach young people throughout Calderdale. Through working collaboratively with organisations and attending events, we began to get engagement, including followers and messages. Instagram is very popular with young people, and they spend a significant chunk of their time on the platform. It was therefore a great way to connect and showcase our work. Our main aim for our Instagram page has been to provide psycho-educative tools and support for young people, focusing on the holistic approach to wellbeing, incorporating mental & emotional wellbeing, as well as the impacts of movement and diet on our wellbeing.

### [Running IWS sessions in trusted local community settings](#)

Many of the young people we worked with spoke about wanting the Integrated Wellbeing Service sessions in other locations within Calderdale / Halifax that they know, where they feel safe and where they trust visiting. As a result, we have set up strong links within different venues within Park & Ovenden.

particularly the local college and other provisions, such as Family Hubs where we offer our IWS interventions. The research and feedback gathered has also led to further discussions about accessibility, and we are currently looking into the possibility of basing an IWS counsellor in a more central Halifax venue as well as exploring more venues in the Park Ward to, so that we can continue to remove the barriers which prevent young people from accessing mental health support.

### 'Real Food' Education Roadshow

We have worked as a team and had lots of discussions around developing a 'real food' program. We believe in a holistic approach to wellbeing and mental health and believe that developing young people's skills around cooking and diet would make the world of difference. This led us to leading a 'Real Food' cooking education session. We sought to build confidence around nutrition, cooking skills and get young people making actual food instead of relying on convenience and junk foods. A key finding of our research completed early in the project was to embed ourselves and work collaboratively with other groups, organisations and educational settings.

Participants suggested a 'roadshow' (pop-up event) within their own settings such as schools, sixth forms, community groups and further provisions. A key finding was that many young people didn't have the time to schedule extra sessions into their routines, and so we worked with them to find space in their timetables to bring such activities to them, so that they could still benefit from and engage in the sessions we were offering.

## What will be focused on moving forward?

We are extremely proud to have been awarded funding from DHSC for another year to deliver the IWS Service. We look to focus on the following:

- Young people expressed interest in wanting external support surrounding exam pressure and stress.
- Continue to develop our curiosity and understanding of young people and their wellbeing, by asking thought-provoking questions that incorporate our integrated and holistic approach to wellbeing, such as “what can I do today to make me stronger?”, “what is important to me?” and “how can I feel more connected?”. We feel this curious approach really engages young people and gives them the control and autonomy over their own wellbeing.
- We will be gathering our young people’s voices and creating case studies on their progress, ensuring their stories are being heard.
- Explore expanding our single-session therapy interventions to be responsive and accessible to more young people.
- Continue to deliver wellbeing sessions in different settings, widening the reach of young people these are delivered to
- Continuation of ‘Real Food’ education and cooking sessions.
- Development of engaging resources/content such as TikTok recipes & lifestyle videos.
- Self-care awareness sessions.

# What are the highlights from data collected as part of the ground-breaking Early Support Hub Evaluation?

As an Early Support Hub funded by DHSC, Noah's Ark Centre have been collecting demographic and outcome data across all our services (both school and community based) supporting young people 11-25 years. This is contributing to an evaluation led by the Mental Health Policy Research Unit at University College London (MHPRU). Noah's Ark Centre team are proud to be part of this ground-breaking evaluation to highlight the value of counselling, youth work and advice in supporting young people's mental health and researching those often-underserved groups in our community.

With special thanks to our Admin/ Data Support Staff and our Therapeutic Service Manager for meticulously inputting and reviewing the data every month for submission to the MHPRU research team.

## This is a summary of the data collected for our Integrated Wellbeing Service (15-25yrs):

- 182 young people referrals were made through the self-referral link on the service webpage on Noah's Ark Centre's website
- 155 Person-centered assessments were completed
- 502 counselling interventions delivered
- 25 young people regularly attended activity groups – either focused on real food cooking or walking
- 47 young people received money advice interventions
- 18 young people attended a budgeting course
- 58 grants (such as carpets and white goods) provided to young people
- 95 young people engaged in wellbeing interventions (individual counselling and/or activity group of cooking or walking)

Of these 95 who answered our questionnaires:

- 62 attended counselling
- 39 describe their gender identity as male
- 46 describe their gender identity as female
- 5 describe their gender identity in another way
- 7 identify as a "trans person"

- 61 selected "White British, White Irish or other White background" as their ethnicity; 11 selected "Asian or Asian British", 15 selected "black" or "mixed" or "other"
- 39 selected 'Yes' to the question "Have you ever been diagnosed as autistic or as having ADHD or are you awaiting assessment?"
- 32 selected 'Yes' to the question "Is this the first time you have received mental health support?"
- 54 selected 'Yes' to the question "Do you receive or have you ever received free school meals?"
- 9 selected 'Yes' to the question "Do you consider yourself to have a physical disability?"
- 5 selected 'Yes' to the question "Have you ever been in care? (select yes if you have ever lived in a children's home or have been a looked-after child e.g. with foster carers)"
- 11 selected 'Yes' to the question "Are you responsible for supporting anyone in your family who needs extra support because of physical or mental illnesses, or any disabilities, or because of drugs or alcohol?"

# Thank you to all the Integrated Wellbeing Service Team

- Integrated Wellbeing Service Delivery Coordinator
- Therapeutic Practitioners
- Project Activity Workers
- Money Advice Workers
- Admin/ Data Support Staff
- Therapeutic Services Manager
- Money Advice Service Manager

