



# HEALTHWATCH REPORT 2017/18

Creative Activities, Health & Wellbeing.  
Listening to young people in Shropshire.



Professionals working with young people must understand that - no matter what service they are formally part of - they are together responsible for the mental wellbeing of the young people who they deliver these services to." (1)

## RESEARCH PROJECT

Do young people (14 to 24 year olds) in Shropshire recognise that the benefits of creative activities\* and learning new skills help with their emotional health & wellbeing?

Should creative activities/skills learning be offered as a 'treatment' (prevention/recovery) pathway for young people in Shropshire?

Can the research recognise any barriers to why young people are not participating in creative activities and identify how can they be overcome?

Also are these barriers associated with living in a rural or urban setting?  
\*oriented in: music, art, wildlife, nature, sport & leisure

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**“Music and art is about imagination and interpretation – you can put yourself into it”  
(quote from a young person)**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research was originally motivated by conversations between staff from The Hive, Energize and Shropshire Wildlife Trust at the 0-25 Emotional Health & Wellbeing tender consultation events in 2016-17.

Our similar status as ‘small fish in a large pond’ brought us together. During our conversations, we realised that there is very little available information about the benefit of our type of alternative/creative interventions on the health & wellbeing of young people, and even less which expresses the views of the young people themselves. This is despite the fact that many voluntary sector organisations have been managing such projects for years.

This research aimed to capture the voices of young people and provide an opportunity for the three voluntary organisations, providing very different types of activity, to illustrate the wider benefits of their work on the health & wellbeing of young people in the County.

Each organisation planned and delivered a workshop, with their typical target audience of young people. Song-writing for young carers with The Hive; Zip-wire, Archery, and Laser Games for Looked After Children & those facing additional challenges with Energize; and Bush-Craft for school children with Shropshire Wildlife Trust. All of the young people were aware in advance that they would be encouraged to talk at a set point of the workshop, when facilitators would lead a discussion about how these activities benefit them and their peers.

Each facilitated discussion was based on the same set of questions, with additional information gathered through observations, desk research, interviews with professionals, filming and organisation-specific questionnaires and evaluations.

This research reports more on the experience of the age range 11 - 16 than the older age range originally identified. It transpires that this younger bracket was easier for our organisations to engage with through the Summer months, and through existing support agencies. The desk research also suggests that the voices of this age range are least heard in the field of health and wellbeing.

The facilitated discussions revealed a range of benefits experienced by the young people, which included increased confidence and self-esteem recognition that other young people have similar experiences to them, opportunities to negotiate, take decisions and express themselves.

### What helped young people to recognise and articulate benefits?

- Targeting established groups of young people with whom there was an existing relationship to the organisation.
- Running the activity in a designated space and incorporating a theme of self-expression.
- Offering a collective environment, where the young people were encouraged to recognise their similarities and try new things.
- Planning with clear outcomes to encourage expression.
- Delivering the workshop in a way which builds trust and confidence.
- Engaged Support Workers with the trust of the young person
- Approaching each activity appropriately. For example: a well-planned and resourced one-off song-writing intervention with a known and established group can see benefits for young carers, but a single activity like this which focuses on sport does not see the same benefits as an ongoing, programme of sporting activity.



## What are the barriers to access and promotion of alternative/creative interventions like these?

- In Shropshire, statutory health providers do not know what is available, what is possible or the benefits these interventions can offer.
- Organisations providing activities are not systematically building their evidence base to articulate the difference that they can make.
- Outcomes of interventions like these are nationally under recorded with a dearth of research focusing on under 18s.
- In a rural County, if agencies cannot cover the cost of safe and appropriate transport, then young people cannot take part.
- The variety of organisations working around issues impacting on young people do not necessarily have health and wellbeing as their sole focus, nor are their approaches automatically aligned.

## From this research, we identified 7 recommendations for VCS providers:

1. Engage with Shropshire's Health Champions and University Centre Shrewsbury Psychology Students to extend research focusing on under 18s and their response to collective non-medical approaches to wellbeing, in line with Shropshire Council's Early Help Strategy. (2)
2. Work with the emerging Social Prescribing Network to undertake a scoping exercise to identify and record the existing relationships between alternative/creative providers and support agencies working with young people and how they currently capture health & wellbeing outcomes.
3. Encourage the VCSA to commission research into the role of Support Workers as facilitators of successful voluntary sector project delivery in Shropshire.
4. Work with South Staffordshire & Shropshire NHS Foundation Trust (including Arts for Health) and voluntary sector partners to draft a Health & Wellbeing Outcomes Framework to pilot short and long term interventions which focus on collective activities across a variety of areas such as music, sport and nature - and which are proportionate to the organisation's capacity.
5. Work with Radio Shropshire and other media outlets to develop "How does it feel?" - a marketing campaign to highlight activities and associated benefits of alternative/creative activity on the health and wellbeing of young people. Alongside this, organisations increase the profile of their projects which take a social pedagogical approach to their work with young people to ensure that the wider voluntary sector, guardians, parents and agencies understand the difference between these and activities which occupy young people in entertaining and/or educational activity.
6. Include 'transport issues impacting on young people engaging in activity across the County' and raise these issues in every planning paper, funding bid and risk assessment written; taking into account those young people who are not engaged with Support Workers.
7. Make links with the Prime Providers of 0-25 Emotional Health & Wellbeing services to identify and scope opportunities.

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**Health and wellbeing is inextricably linked to the design and aesthetics of our environment and it is a missed opportunity if we do not recognise and promote the enormously valuable contributions artists and the design community make in healthcare today” (3)**

## WHY THIS RESEARCH?

As practitioners, we know that engaging in creative activities has immense benefits for young people’s social and emotional health: reducing social isolation, creating a platform to discuss and release emotions, developing cognitive function, providing leadership and teamwork opportunities to increase confidence and self-esteem, or even just to create a routine or a safe and familiar place for young people to go to.

In 2016, staff from The Hive, Shropshire Wildlife Trust and Energize separately attended a series of workshops organised by Shropshire Council, Telford & Wrekin Council, Shropshire CCG and Telford & Wrekin CCG to consult on the future of the Emotional Health & Wellbeing Contract for 0 - 25 year olds in the County. Surrounded by mainly health sector professionals and VCS infrastructure organisations, we began discussing the alternative approaches that the three organisations could potentially offer and how, if we joined forces we could present a brokerage service to the health sector to enable young people to access our services and local opportunities.

All three organisations involved in this research project have been naturally drawn to the health and well-being sector as recognition grows of the value of the kinds of interventions that we can provide.

We are growing our own body of evidence, utilising our connections with University of Chester, University of Wolverhampton and Birmingham City University, as well as with research teams within the NHS. However, our organisations need to support the voices of young people, in addition to advocating on their behalf, as we increasingly find ourselves connecting with health providers and finding our own feet in this landscape.

At this current time, with additional cuts threatened to both youth and health services, an emphasis on prevention as an economically viable priority makes sense. Increasing pressure on statutory health provision means now is the right time to accelerate the understanding of alternative approaches and the benefits provided by non-traditional third sector organisations.

... the mental health needs of the young population are so large that, even with significant investment, the vast majority of children and young people with a mental health disorder will need to be helped or treated outside of specialist CAMHS (4)

We know that the benefits are there: we frequently witness young people's confidence and self-esteem blossoming when they take part in projects at the Hive and we can produce numerous lyrics and songs created by young people to evidence impact of our work at the Hive. Energize and Shropshire Wildlife Trust have anecdotal evidence of similar impact from their work through existing programmes.

We have not, as a sector, asked young people in Shropshire what those benefits actually feel like to them; the difference the activities make to their health & wellbeing and the best ways to reach other young people who may benefit.

A full assessment of a young person's mental health should not just be confined to checking whether they have specific clinically diagnosable mental health disorders (such as conduct and emotional disorders). They should, rather, address the wider issues associated with a young person's mental wellbeing, or as we prefer, mental fitness. (5) Defined by the World Health Organization as "a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her potential, can cope with the stresses of normal life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community," (6)



## METHODOLOGY

Each organisation planned and delivered an activity to engage young people and act as a catalyst for them to talk about the effect of this type of activity on the health and wellbeing of young people like them.

Information was sent to supporting organisations to inform them that the activity would be accompanied by facilitated discussion to encourage the young people to talk about benefits to them and their peers.

Each group was observed by staff throughout and engaged in a structured discussion at a set point of the activity.

Staff were on site to support the young people with any emergent thoughts, feelings and emotions, as there are multiple examples of disclosure about things relating to young people's lives and thoughts, particularly through the narrative of the lyrics. The sessions with young people were complemented by desk research and four interviews with professionals from carers organisations and Looked After Children.

## **The workshops: Suitably equipped delivery team:**

The Shropshire Wildlife Trust activity team was constructed for their Growing Confidence project and included staff with specialist training to deliver bush craft skills. The activity took place at Wood Lane Nature Reserve in Ellesmere with Year 8 pupils from Mary Webb Secondary School. The pupils worked in small groups to learn some basic bushcraft skills, in a woodland area. Two qualified and experienced 'People and Wildlife Officers' led the bushcraft activity and were supported by two support staff who facilitated conversations with pupils whilst they were undertaking activities, towards the end of the sessions.

The Hive music team consisted of 5 musicians selected for their experience of working with young people facing challenging circumstances. All have worked on other projects at the Hive and have appropriate training [see Appendix 1]. The participants were young carers, recruited through, and supported by Carers Trust 4 All. Their support staff were in attendance throughout and available to respond to any emerging issues and mental/emotional needs.

The Energize sports team consisted of one key member of Energize staff and at least one experienced staff member at the activity venue. Each young person (except one) was also accompanied by their own support staff who were available to respond to any emerging issues and mental/emotional needs.

We also appointed experienced independent facilitators to lead conversations with young people. In the event, they were available for the music and sports workshops; whereas Shropshire Wildlife Trust conducted their own discussion with the help of a mature Harper Adams student. In each instance the young people were engaged in discussion, using a standard set of questions to prompt and capture their thinking.

The original proposal to use the mini WEMWB's (Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale) tool kit, was modified to encourage participants to think about 'young people like them' rather than just answering for themselves. Whilst this was never intended to be an evaluation we retained some of the question-types of WEMWBS because of their direct relationship to mental wellbeing. Thus, the questions and prompts we agreed to use were:

### **Do activities like this help young people to:**

- relax with their peers? Why is that important?
- feel good about themselves? How does that happen?
- feel more confident? In what way/s?
- try out new things? Why is that?
- feel cheerful? How do you know?

What other sort of activities do young people do which make them feel like this?

Why don't young people do more activities like these?

Does it make a difference where they live?

## Workshop 1 - Bush Craft: Shropshire Wildlife Trust, 7th July 2017

SWT incorporated their workshop into bush craft activity at Wood Lane Nature Reserve with Mary Webb School, as part of their Growing Confidence Project. The 'People and Wildlife Officers' leading the activity had been briefed about the research in advance and teachers helped to identify pupils to participate in facilitated conversations.

The young people were tasked with bushcraft firelighting, learning how to make fire using a variety of methods. Groups of two or three students were then provided with firebowls and fire steels to make their own fire. They had to collect natural materials for tinder and kindling and then each take it in turns to light a fire with a spark from their fire steel.

Ten school pupils aged 12-13 took part in research discussions in small groups of three or four.



## Workshop 2 - Music Making & Song-Writing: the Hive, 11th August 2017

Working in partnership with Carer's Trust 4 All who supported young carers to attend, this workshop was branded 'Happy and Healthy Music Workshop' to give the young people an idea about the focus for the day, and advertised through the Carer's Trust newsletter, with some targeted invitations. Ten young people took part in a workshop which ran 10.30am - 3.30pm with two members of support staff, five musicians and two facilitators for the research conversation aspect. Five of the young people were aged 12 - 13 and the other five were aged 14 - 16.

All adults in attendance were briefed on the project aims in advance of the workshop and the lead musician produced a programme which was shared with musicians, facilitators and the project manager before being finalised. The programme intentionally set aside time for the facilitated conversation at the mid-point of the workshop to capture the young people at a 'big point' and to ensure they finished the day with music-making rather than questions.

The questions were asked in a 30 minute slot before lunch in a group setting. Questions were introduced as appropriate and comments were recorded on a flipchart. Consequently it became a fluid discussion rather than a Q&A session.



### **Workshop 3 - Energize: Zip Wire, Archery & Laser Games, 22nd August 2017**

Six young people took part, all either at risk of offending and/or Looked After Children. The 'workshop' comprised of three activities Zip Wire, Archery & Laser Games and was run in partnership with JCA at Condoover Hall Activity Centre

The day tested a range of activities to see which would appeal, with both indoor and outdoor games. The instructors at JCA were highly experienced and used to working with young people with more challenging behaviour. The young people completed a series of questions at the start and end of the day to gather their feelings and the immediate impact.

"The young people were willing to 'be involved' in the activities and willingly gathered for the conversation, but it was pretty hard to get them to actually talk". (Facilitator)

Establishing a relationship with the participants during the activity was extremely important in gaining their views. The observation in behaviour change during the activities was just as meaningful as their feedback.

**Adolescence, which occurs approximately between the ages of 10 and 19, is a turbulent and exciting time, when crucial transitions to adulthood take place .... It is also a time when risks accumulated since childhood start to snowball, affecting the behaviour of young people and their timely transition to adulthood. (7)**

### **Target ages/numbers**

Shropshire Wildlife Trust worked with 12-13 year olds, which is slightly younger than the age range identified in the initial application. Project delays due to staff changes at The Hive meant they had to identify and work with an existing group booking with a large enough sample size. Staff were fully booked over the summer holiday season and unable to accommodate a standalone workshop as planned for April/ May 2017.

The Hive music activity worked with Carers Trust 4 All to engage young carers. The brief stipulated ages 14+ but in the event, many of the older age group were either working or away on holiday.

Energize involved the target age range but unfortunately had a cancellation from one of the care homes they were partnering and so had reduced numbers.

In total, 26 young people took part in the research, all of whom were young carers, looked after children, facing additional challenges and/or school pupils.

Fifteen young people were aged 11 - 13

Eleven young people were aged 14 - 16



Most mental illnesses begin before adulthood and often continue through life. Half of all lifetime cases of diagnosable mental illness begin by age 14 and three-quarters by mid-20s. Tackling mental health problems early in life will improve educational attainment, employment opportunities and physical health, and reduce the levels of substance misuse, self-harm and suicide, as well as family conflict and social deprivation” (8)

## DESK RESEARCH

### Introduction

The desk research was planned to provide context for this project. It found plenty of documentation that mental ill health is a very real issue across the Country, and Shropshire is no exception with Child & Adolescent mental health forming one of four priorities in the local Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

Throughout the literature, there is frequent recognition that mental ill health impacts on half of all 14 year olds, increasing to three-quarters by the time young people reach the age of 24. (9)

Mental health influences how we think and feel about ourselves and others, affecting our capacity to learn, to communicate, and to form and sustain relationships. It also influences our ability to cope with change and manage our physical health. (10)

Most mental health problems start in childhood or adolescence but as the next UK Child and Adolescent Mental Health Survey is not due to be published until 2018, the latest national statistics still need to be drawn from the UK Child and Adolescent Mental Health Survey dating back to 2004, while a 2005 prevalence study carried out in the USA predicted that 75% of mental health problems are established by the age of 24. Having said that, The Guardian reported (23/09/17) on NHS data which shows a “68% rise in hospital admissions because of self-harm among girls under 17 in the past decade” (11)

In addition to the lack of accurate up to date information on the state of our young people's mental health, we are also only just discovering the impact that the arts - and other alternative - interventions can provide. Aesop, the NHS Alliance and College of Medicine, presented the very first national Arts in Health Conference and Showcase for health decision-makers at the Royal Festival Hall in London as recently as February 2016.

There is also substantial literature which draws a link between the practice of arts, sporting activity and/or nature and enhanced wellbeing, and that this evidence is on the increase, (12) as we learn more about how we can "use different experiences in an affirmative and health promoting way: to confirm values, to mirror aspects of identity, to regulate mood and well-being, to empower and define relationship, to access non-ordinary states of consciousness or spirituality". (13)

In Shropshire, we have a long-standing vision for a County where "all children and young people will be happy, healthy, safe and reach their full potential." (14) In terms of how that might happen, the local Strengthening Communities programme promotes a child-centred and coordinated approach where "support to children and their families is provided by an equipped, knowledgeable, supported, committed and combined workforce." This means that services have better knowledge of each other and communities that are able to galvanise and mobilise to support and provide services of good quality that are accessible and work well together. (15) The recent blossoming of a Social Prescribing Network suggests that there are a growing number of local non-medical providers recognising and articulating the benefits of their activities and practice for the wellbeing of the local population.

## Music

In 2016, Arts for Health and Wellbeing developed an evaluation framework (16) to meet their own challenge of recognising the potential for, and impact of, arts activity - defined as music, dance, theatre, visual arts and writing - on health and wellbeing.

Taking this a step further is the link between music intervention as a challenge to conventional public health responses, evidenced by Research from the Centre for Performance Science which demonstrates that making music enhances health and wellbeing, "offering new, accessible, and affordable alternatives to traditional public health solutions". (17)

It is not so much what we do but the way that we do it that can have the greatest impact. Music activity rooted in social pedagogy (the policy & practice, theory & research, training & education of workforce) has four inter-linked 'process outcomes': well-being; holistic learning, relationship and empowerment. This approach gives conscious consideration to young people as complex social beings with enormous potential, rather than adults-in-waiting.

**Music is a powerful tool that can shape moods, define moments and ignite memories. In creating music we can share something of our experiences and ourselves - a notion explored in therapeutic songwriting - Lisa Cugnetto (18)**

Digging deeper, is the examination of why music making leads to positive health change. (19) Ruud (2010) underlines the social aspect of “health as participation” and describes the potential of musicing as, “A provider of vitality; (...) a tool for developing agency and empowerment; a resource for social capital in building social networks; a way of providing meaning and coherence in life” (Ruud, 2010, p. 111)

Music interventions in health settings are increasingly endorsed and their credibility moved on a step by organisations like Live Music Now (20) (founded by violinist Yehudi Menuhin), an example of specific programmes where professional musicians bring live music into health care institutions.

## Sport

The national lead in connecting sport to wellbeing is the Government’s strategy “Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation”. (21) This focuses on five key outcomes, which include physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, individual development, social and community development (with the fifth being economic development).

The Mental Health Charter for Sport and Recreation sets out how sport can use its collective power to tackle mental ill health and the stigma that surrounds it. (22) Definitions of ‘sport’ relating to this are largely geared towards physical activity, with recognition of additional parallel benefits of social interaction of group or team activity. More broadly, in terms of health benefits, there is growing evidence of the power of sport to make us more satisfied and happier with life, and feel less anxious and depressed. (23)

Much of this evidence is generic in terms of age, a situation specifically flagged by “A systematic review of sport and dance participation in healthy young people (15-24 years) to promote subjective wellbeing” published in June 2017. (24) This extensive literature search went back over 10 years and found a distinct lack of good quality evidence - concluding that this is not because the benefits don’t exist but because the evidence has not been collected.

Researchers have found a direct connection between physical activity and depressive symptoms among adolescent boys and girls, with the likelihood of depressive symptoms decreasing by around 8% for every additional hour of exercise undertaken. (25) Impact on self-esteem is increasingly positive when exercise is moderate and over an extended period of 12 weeks. (26)

Get Set to Go (27) is a long-term research project initiated by MIND and currently underway with results due later this year. The focus of this research is within the age range of this piece of work but at the upper end, being focused on adults (18+), interim findings already recognise the value of physical activity and regular activity - adding to the mix the benefits of mindful activity such as yoga and Tai Chi.



## Environment / nature

Nature and the natural environment is also a growing area for the recognition of benefits to wellbeing. As recently as 2015, The Wildlife Trusts commissioned a literature review of evidence (28) which found that simply being in touch with natural environments themselves can have great benefits for physical, psychological and social wellbeing in the form of: reductions in stress and anxiety, increased positive mood, self-esteem and resilience, and improvements in social functioning and social inclusion. The resultant report calls for 'green prescriptions' to be issued by GPs.

Once again there is no substantial reporting on benefits - or not - specifically for young people, although activities in natural settings are generally reported to have therapeutic properties for people with lower levels of wellbeing (e.g. lower self-esteem and mood), often experience greater benefits. (29)

We can make a positive difference, not just for the individuals, but for society as a whole if we create an environment that enhances well-being, supports learning, human growth and social inclusion through empowering relationships. (30) The most beneficial activities are recognised as those which involve specific planning for outcomes.

Nature-based initiatives usually consist of a facilitated, regular and specific intervention, for a particular participant (or group of service users), rather than simply a 'natural' experience for the general public. (31)

Meanwhile, MIND's own research (32) has led to them putting out an official call for the recognition of "eco-therapy". Activities including gardening projects, walking groups, conservation work, running and cycling saw benefits which were grouped into four categories:

- Natural and social connections
- Sensory stimulation
- Activity
- Escape

Whilst the research is emphatic, it is not specifically focused on the experiences of young people.

# RESEARCH FINDINGS: OBSERVATIONS AND WORDS FROM THE WORKSHOP

## The young people said:

*"It's a good chance/opportunity to be able to express your feelings"*

*"It's really good for people who are shy and have their feelings tucked away inside of them - the way it is run brings them out of themselves"*

*"Makes you feel good about yourself - makes you feel more confident'  
If we had fewer rules then we could do more and feel more comfortable."*

*"Makes you feel really good - good for stress relief - takes your mind off the everyday things, you can forget about reality for a while; it's a different world here"*

## Together

On the whole, the young people found it easy to express how these music, sport and nature activities help young people like them to relax with their peers - and the adults around them could easily see the benefits

*They help people to bond because they are working together*

*Doing something different away from school helps them to get to know each other*

*You can all work together and create something new and no one needs to be told that their ideas aren't good as everybody gets to say what they think*

*It's better together'; 'we're all in similar situations and we just click and come up with good ideas'; 'we have similar thoughts as we have similar experiences'; 'we are like different streams that make a river*

**(They)....develop friendships and a sense of community. The young people we work with often perceive themselves as being viewed as different and are open to being bullied, feel vulnerable. Here they feel similar with things in common - similar interests. No judgements are made, no stigma. - Support worker quote**

Most of the young people taking part in the nature activity knew each other - they may not all be part of the same strong friendship groups but they were familiar with each other; the same was the case for those taking part in the music activity who also had the commonality of being young carers.

Those taking part in the sports activity did not all know each other - there was one small group of friends and then two singletons, one of whom had greater confidence to engage with the group than the other. Those in established groups taking part in nature and music were easier to engage in meaningful discussion than those in a more disparate group.

Simply being 'with others' had its own benefits. Some of the young people taking part in the Energize activities had a significant increase in their scores for 'enjoying being around others' after the activity, compared to before it.

The discussions about the benefits of being part of a group were supported by observation, even where the activities were not in themselves collective, during the Energize Archery, a group of four boys initially declined to take part, saying it was 'daft', but watched the others from a distance. Gradually they got drawn in to have a go, initially wanting to be the best but ultimately not being competitive at all - just joining in. They seemed to want to do well for themselves - and for others to do well too.

The Hive's music leaders also observed the benefits of collective working: "It was also fantastic seeing how when we brought the group back together as a whole to share ideas everyone was so supportive, no one fought for their own idea to be included, and everyone accepted the changes that the group wanted to make graciously".

## Boundaries

The activities and the way they were delivered helped some of the young people to understand more about - and express the boundaries they encounter

*Lighting fires [on bush craft activity] is something where you can learn something and have fun but be safe at the same time*

*It's a bit dangerous but they are able to do it and they've been to a new place*

*It's a 'controlled environment' - 'not a dictatorship like school'; 'everyone contributes'*

**(They have) so little control in their lives - feel powerless and no sense of agency - it's a really important opportunity for them to have some control over what they do, but also to need to practice negotiation skills with the group, resolve conflict, manage disappointment  
- Support worker quote**

**Esteem** - (by which we mean - How you think and feel about who you are, your self-worth and the value you put upon yourself)

Young people discussed how these types of activities help young people like them to feel good about themselves, rising to challenges, accomplishing new things and being part of a group, particularly one which includes those with similar experiences.

*... if you were scared of flames doing this type of activity could help you to build confidence and get over it. Then you would feel proud for achieving something, and would have regretted it if you didn't*

*because they are learning important life skills*

*It makes you feel that you're not alone'; 'you get to know other people - you're not the only one and there are other people like you*

*If we were not similar it would be like colliding'; 'we are all similar, parts of a puzzle that clicks together'; we create something bigger, together*

These responses were closely linked to others about whether activities like these help young people like them to feel cheerful (which was considered to be a dated term),

*Depends on whether they like it or not. It is better being outdoors, exploring area and being with friends*

*Yes because it is fun. Better than being in a hot sweaty classroom*

**Confidence** - (by which we mean how you think and feel about what you can do - and not do)

These sessions feel comfortable to young people- they get told 'that's a great idea' which gives them ownership and a sense of personal agency

*It's Ok to say to someone 'I like that but can we change something' - and there's no come back*

The young people were asked specifically about any increases in confidence arising from activities like the ones they had engaged in.

*Yes - because you are learning new skills*

*If they do something similar in the future they will know what to do so feel more confident Learning what to do - useful skills for survival*

*Makes you feel good about yourself - makes you feel more confident*

We wondered if taking part in activities like these helps young people to try out new things, they told us:

*Yes, because they are doing something they haven't done before like building shelters. Although some people have done things like this before, like at Guides - being part of a group*

*Yes because they wouldn't do it at home*

*The musicians are fun to have around - they know what they're doing and they value what we think'; 'they have a passion for the music'; 'it's different to the music at school*

*I enjoy it, enjoy coming here*

*Makes you be more open minded about other people*

*You have to listen, really listen to what others are saying and we develop ideas together I like to hear others' opinions - it opens your mind*

*I like to hear others' opinions - it opens your mind*

*You're not just subjected to your own ideas, we connect all our themes together*

*We change the ideas and go somewhere better, together*

*Doing music skills in this way makes you want to keep on doing it - you want to keep going and take it into your life*

## Comparable Activity

We were interested to know about other activities that young people do which make them feel similar to this. They identified:

- Horse-riding
- Farming stuff - tractor pulling, shooting. Anything that means they can be outside and aren't doing homework
- RAF cadets - is good because you have to pass drills and get trusted to fly planes
- Music and arts activities versus sporting activities
  - Music and arts feels less competitive than sport
  - Sport can be a team activity but more chance of being blamed when not good at it
  - Sport has more rules to follow
  - You can always take music with you anywhere you go

## Support workers

The concept of 'being free' or 'free-er' was a recurrent theme of both the Hive and the Energize activities. Team work and supporting each other were a key theme emerging from the bushcraft activity.

Some of the young people with Energize were keen to run - outside and to explore inside; they expressed how they are watched all the time and their movements restricted. The presence of essential support workers bears this out. The young carers involved in song-writing at the Hive took the opportunity to express similar sentiments, albeit for different reasons, with the lyrics: "I have wings, I can fly away from it all." [See Appendix 4]

*If we had fewer rules then we could do more and feel more comfortable.*

The role of Support Workers, their application, skills and the quality of their relationships with the young people (and with the organisations), all had influencing factors on the workshop experiences and the quality of outcomes in terms of young people engaging with the questions.

- Where Support Workers maintained communication with a young person throughout, encouraging them to be involved and take part appropriately the engagement levels were higher than the instances where Support Workers were absent or detached from the process.
- Where Support Workers had clearly established trust with a young person they were able to work with them at their own speed to take part and talk to them about their interests and how these had relevance to the activity.
- Where Support Workers had clearly established relationships with the organisation providing the activity, they bought into and assisted the process of the facilitated discussion more than where this was absent.

## Barriers

Why don't young people do more activities like these? We were keen not to lead the responses and the young people were very pragmatic in their answers - suggesting that inappropriate or bad weather would impact on outdoor activity, lack of appropriate space or equipment and concerns about danger or risk.

When the question was turned around in one workshop to explore instead how young people might encourage others to take part, the responses were more explanatory:

*'don't be scared about coming as you won't be judged or left out'*

*'don't close in yourself'*

*'you feel more confident at the Hive - there are no nasty people here'*

*'some people agree and some disagree and that's OK here'*

*'everybody counts here - you're not left sitting on your own'*

*'it's about fear and acceptance'*

Observation brought more responses as, on one occasion a young person did not engage with an activity because they did not like the idea of it (zip wire) and were happy to watch instead.

Particularly in the sports and nature oriented activities, the young people found it difficult to anticipate the level of enjoyment and benefit that they might experience and found this much easier to identify and talk about once they had had a go. In the sports activity there was an option to opt out, which was not the case in the nature or music activities. It is a careful balance in each instance, and important to recognise that young people have preferences and choice, whilst still needing that extra encouragement to try something new.

Staff talked about the prohibitive cost of some activities and how they are dependent on funding and particular projects to access opportunities for young people. More fundamentally, they also raised the question of how choices can only be made if they - and the young people - know what is possible and how they can be part of it!

## Location

We wanted to explore if it made a difference where young people were based - whether in rural or urban areas.

Our initial idea had been to ask the Support workers where the young people are located and then see if they had responded differently if they were in rural or more urban areas. However, there did not seem to be any conclusive evidence that location made a difference. The particular groups taking part in our activities were either school pupils and so had already travelled to the activity location from their home - or part of a specific support system which provided taxis for them. The agencies worked hard to ensure that they were not disadvantaged by location

The key up-coming barrier here is the lack of funding now provided for those services to provide taxi transport.



# CONCLUSIONS

## Do young people (14 to 24 year olds) in Shropshire recognise the benefits of creative activities and learning new skills help with their emotional health & wellbeing?

This research reports more on the experience of the age range 11 - 16 than the older age range originally identified. It transpires that this younger bracket were easier for our organisations to engage with through the Summer months, and through existing support agencies. The desk research also suggests that the voices of this age range are least heard in the field of health and wellbeing.

Bearing this in mind, the simple answer to the research question above is - yes, some of them do and some of those are able to articulate it - especially if they have a supportive environment.

It is quite hard to engage young people in discussion about the benefits of activities without some form of catalyst being used, as in the workshops - and it can take more of a relationship than was afforded by a single encounter to get them to open up.

Targeting established groups of young people with whom there was an existing relationship to the organisation, made a difference. This is no great surprise as most activities require a period of introduction and group development typically cites periods of 'forming' and 'storming' (33) before anything constructive can happen.

Responses were more forthcoming when the activity was in a designated space and incorporated the theme of self-expression, as it did with the song-writing where the young people were facilitated as a whole group, supported by the music leaders with whom they had formed a bond. It is also important how we ask the questions that we ask e.g. turning around the question about barriers to participation, using skilled facilitators.

Factors impacting on the mental health and wellbeing of young people encompass anxiety, depression, bullying, levels of satisfaction or happiness and more. In a collective environment, where the young people are encouraged to recognise their similarities they are able to recognise and articulate key issues impacting on them. When supported to do so they are also then able to make the link between their response to these and the positive impact of creative intervention.

Mental health and wellbeing of our young people in Shropshire is a matter of importance to us all and the wider benefits of creative and other diversionary activities are not well recognised. We also know that it isn't just a matter of delivering distracting activity, but of a considered and deliberate approach to that activity. The structure of the research made us do things with more intention and challenge our musicians at the Hive - this led to clearer and greater outcomes than we usually record.

### **Interventions like these offer opportunities for**

- self-expression
- building/developing confidence
- bonding with others and feel part of something
- reducing stress
- developing pride in oneself and ones achievements

Everything consistently points to group activity, social inclusion and togetherness as a huge benefit of these non-medical approaches to wellbeing. Many of the young people indicated that being part of a group - whilst maintaining their own unique self - made all the difference, in increasing their confidence to try new things.

In Shropshire, we have some quality local provision which is under-recognised and under-utilised. Statutory health providers do not know what is available, what is possible or the benefits these interventions can offer - nor do they necessarily have the confidence in the quality of local provision to refer to creative activities.

Young people are able to articulate the benefits of these interventions when there is a specific project in place to help them to do so, but the organisations providing them are not systematically building their evidence base to articulate for themselves the difference that they can make.

Whilst this small piece of research has added considerably to young voices heard in Shropshire, outcomes of interventions like these - are nationally under recorded with a dearth of research focusing on under 18s.

There are different models for delivery to get the best and most appropriate outcomes for each circumstance. For example: a well-planned and resourced one-off song-writing intervention with a known and established group can see benefits for young carers, but a single activity like this which focuses on sport does not see the same benefits as an ongoing, programme of sporting activity. Realistically, it is not always possible to offer extended provision and tailor-made, shorter programmes need to be considered.

Transport is key, particularly in a large rural county where activities like these tend to take part in higher-populated areas with more facilities. If agencies cannot cover the cost of safe and appropriate transport - often in the form of costly taxis - then young people cannot take part.

Should creative activities/skills learning be offered as a 'treatment' (prevention/recovery) pathway for young people in Shropshire?

In our view, yes.

# THE HIVE, SONG-WRITING AND MUSIC-MAKING: A CASE TO SUPPORT PROPOSAL

## Young people say:

*"Deep relatable lyrics can bring up memories or regrets from the past ... happy energetic music can encourage people to do more and live life fuller"*

*"Music inspires me to try new things"*

*"Music makes me feel happy, energised and I feel that I can tell a story and share it; learn from others"*

*"Music relaxes me and focuses my thoughts"*

*"I like to play music because it makes me express my feelings and personality"*

*"it makes a big difference to be around others who are going through the same as me. It's really nice not to be judged or asked lots of questions about what it's like."*

The Hive has invested in the development of an evaluation framework which is in its early stages. It has already identified a whole range of highly valuable outcomes for young people arising from the approach that we take to projects. That approach is articulated by the young people, musicians and partner agencies in the paragraphs below - it is about:

- **Increasing confidence:** young people start to feel 'good enough' in themselves; they have a sense of achievement and pride; they support each other, get over nerves, don't want to let each other down and they challenge themselves. The workshops create time out for the young people where they can focus on something else and relax. Young people increase aspiration and confidence. They develop skills to manage their feelings and situations - writing about it, performing it - the 'problem' becomes the focus of the song - putting their feelings down and articulating them.
- **Modelling and promoting inclusion:** There is no stigma. Workshops feel relaxed and provide freedom for young people who are often being 'watched'. They develop friendships and a sense of community. The young people we work with will often perceive themselves as being different and open to being bullied, they feel vulnerable. At The Hive, they feel similar with things in common. No judgements are made.
- **Encouraging structured teamwork and organisation:** The young people learn how to have an opinion - be part of a group - negotiate with others and take them into account - working as a team and decision making. They gain a sense of responsibility and ownership for their own learning and behaviour. They feel less alone and 'the only one'. They feel supported, develop friendships and a sense of community.

They develop empathy and recognise the need for negotiation, and have awareness of other people, their views or priorities. They also learn to work as a team, and how to have an opinion.

- Providing opportunities to influence: Young people start to realise that they have/are entitled to their own opinion. They start to articulate things in a way that makes sense to them. They feel less angry and are less likely to act because they feel heard. They develop resilience for themselves - which has an impact on other things in their lives.

There is still scope for evidence to be collected, more work to be done - and arguments to be formed around preventative work with young people which can be presented to commissioners in a way which speaks to them.

Thinking beyond The Hive, the variety of organisations working around issues impacting on young people do not necessarily have health & wellbeing as their sole focus, nor are their approaches automatically aligned. More work needs to be done if they are to be in a position to make a coherent and comprehensive offer to health and wellbeing in Shropshire.

It would seem that we are timely in asking these questions - with a lot of recent interest in looking at benefits for young people of alternative interventions.



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VCS PROVIDERS

Engage with Shropshire's Health Champions and University Centre Shrewsbury Psychology Students to extend research focusing on under 18s and their response to collective non-medical approaches to wellbeing, in line with Shropshire Council's Early Help Strategy. (34)

Work with the emerging Social Prescribing Network to undertake a scoping exercise to identify and record the existing relationships between alternative/creative providers and support agencies working with young people and how they currently capture health & wellbeing outcomes.

Encourage the VCSA to commission research into the role of Support Workers as facilitators of successful voluntary sector project delivery in Shropshire.

Work with South Staffordshire & Shropshire NHS Foundation Trust (including Arts for Health) and voluntary sector partners to draft a Health & Wellbeing Outcomes Framework to pilot short and long term interventions which focus on collective activities across a variety of areas such as music, sport and nature - and which are proportionate to the organisation's capacity.

Work with Radio Shropshire and other media outlets to develop "How does it feel?" - a marketing campaign to highlight activities and associated benefits of alternative/creative activity on the health and wellbeing of young people. Alongside this, organisations increase the profile of their projects which take a social pedagogical approach to their work with young people to ensure that the wider voluntary sector, guardians, parents and agencies understand the difference between these and activities which occupy young people in entertaining and/or educational activity.

Include 'transport issues impacting on young people engaging in activity across the county' and raise these issues in every planning paper, funding bid and risk assessment written; taking into account those young people who are not engaged with Support Workers.

Make links with the Prime Providers of 0-25 Emotional Health & Wellbeing services to identify and scope opportunities.

# APPENDIX 1: DELIVERY TEAM CPD RECORDS

## Music team at the Hive

- Emergency First Aid
- Mental Health First aid
- Mental Health Awareness
- Safeguarding Multi agency approach
- Child Safeguarding
- Autism Awareness
- Social Pedagogy

Experience working in medical PRUs, on mental health wards and in community settings with mental health service users.

## Youth Work Team at Shropshire Wildlife Trust

- Managing Volunteers and Difficult Situations
- Coastal Activity Leader Training
- Emergency First Aid at Work
- Emergency First Aid (outdoor first aid)
- AED Awareness- Rescue Emergency Care
- First Aid at Work
- Introduction to Managing Health and Safety
- Child Safeguarding
- Safeguarding in education

## Team leaders at Energize

Introduction to Substance Misuse

STORM training

Developing Practice: Child Sexual Exploitation

Inclusive Community Training

Supporting Men with Aggression and Violence Training

Behaviour change training

FA Emergency First Aid

Raising Awareness in Safeguarding & Protecting Children

Managing young people with Challenging behaviours

First Aid

Marketing to young people

Mental Health First Aid

# APPENDIX 2: HIVE MUSIC LEADERS

## EVALUATION OBSERVATIONS

During the day the young people wrote, recorded and evaluated their song as well as taking part in a discussion group on the effect music activities have on young people. ... the young people really did express their ideas and views and weren't holding back their opinions. That was nice to see as they clearly felt comfortable. The key ideas expressed were [these were recorded and notated]:

- "you can all work together and create something new and no one needs to be told that their ideas aren't good as everybody gets to say what they think"
- "I don't feel judged"
- "I feel that I am not silly and what I come up with will be seen as valid"
- "there is no competition, in sport you have to win, but here we can just create something and we don't compete with each other"
- "it takes my mind away from all the problems at home"
- "I had totally forgotten about exam results and was able to enjoy myself"
- "I can go home feeling happy"
- ... carer's Trust 4 All Support staff said "This is much needed respite for our young people"

This was an inspirational session as we don't often get to hear from young people such in depth evaluation on the effect that they feel from the music related activities. It was also interesting to notice that those that are younger often express their opinion with more personal take and honesty.

For some of the young people ... it really helps them to have more confidence around other young people [to collaborate as a team]. When I first met her she was super quiet and didn't really say a lot in front of the whole group. Now she comes up with lots of ideas and is happy to share them with everyone. .... She talked about how it helps her to come to a place where she can socialise with other people in similar circumstances to herself. All the young people had a similar view. All of [the young people] said that they liked the collaborative process.

The one day workshop was an incredible success and the outcomes from the day were incredible. We started the morning with a plan to get a group of young people to write and record a song in a day .... The music leaders had already spoken to each other and decided what key and direction the harmony would take... We broke into smaller groups and wrote lyrics that the young people wanted. The small groups worked independently of each other and wrote lyrics about subject matter that was important to them. That being the issue of bullying. It transpires all the young people had been victim of quite severe bullying in their schools... the lyrics the young people wrote were mainly about providing support to the listener and how to be themselves and everything will be OK.

A really fantastic day ... we split the group of 10 into 3 groups to try to throw some ideas about for lyrics, and what they wanted their original song to be about. It was really quite incredible that all three groups, although working separately, created lyrics along a similar theme. This workshop gave them the chance to open up about their negative experience, particularly bullying, and be able to address the in a cathartic manner.

There seemed to be an almost visible weight lifted from one or two at the end of the day compared to when they arrived. It was also fantastic seeing how when we brought the group back together as a whole to share ideas everyone was so supportive, no one fought for their own idea to be included, and everyone accepted the changes that the group wanted to make graciously. Before lunch I was lucky enough to be in the room when the young people were asked to give their feedback about their experiences.

I can honestly say it left me feeling so emotional, seeing the impact that these weeks have on the kids and what they take away from them. Hearing how these weeks and days help them escape from what they're dealing with at home makes the work we do feel so worthwhile. ... I certainly was completely reminded of how important our work is.

# APPENDIX 3: ENERGIZE ACTIVITY QUESTIONNAIRE

## Sleeping Habits

	Average hours of sleep per night	Time participant falls asleep	Time participant wakes up
Participant 1	9	2AM	11AM
Participant 2	8	Midnight	10:45AM
Participant 3	6	2AM	10AM
Participant 4	6	Midnight	6AM
Participant 5	6	1AM	7-10AM
Participant 6	9	Midnight	9AM

## The Activity

	Would you have thought to try this activity if it wasn't offered to you today?
Participant 1	Maybe but I wouldn't have gone
Participant 2	No
Participant 3	Maybe, I was looking
Participant 4	Maybe, I was looking
Participant 5	Maybe, I was looking
Participant 6	Yes

	BEFORE	AFTER
	The thought of this activity makes me feel	The thought of this activity makes me feel
Participant 1	Nervous, Excited, Anxious	Excited, A little nervous
Participant 2	Curious, Energetic, Excited	Fun, Sociable, New
Participant 3	Sleepy	Sick, haunted
Participant 4	Tired, Sound	Hyper
Participant 5	Tired, bed	Good
Participant 6	Worn out	Sick, hiding, house

Rate the following statements on a scale of 1-10 (1 being not at all and 10 being totally):

### I feel in a good mood

	BEFORE	AFTER
Participant 1	8	9
Participant 2	9	10
Participant 3	5	9
Participant 4	5	5
Participant 5	5	10
Participant 6	9	10

### I enjoy being around others

	BEFORE	AFTER
Participant 1	10	10
Participant 2	10	9
Participant 3	0	7
Participant 4	5	10
Participant 5	5	10
Participant 6	YES	10

### I think I have good teamwork skills

	BEFORE	AFTER
Participant 1	9	9
Participant 2	8	8
Participant 3	7	6
Participant 4	5	5
Participant 5	5	10
Participant 6	YES	10

### I feel calm and relaxed

	BEFORE	AFTER
Participant 1	7	7
Participant 2	10	7
Participant 3	4	5
Participant 4	5	5
Participant 5	5	10
Participant 6	YES	10

### I feel confident that I can achieve new things that challenge me

	BEFORE	AFTER
Participant 1	7	9
Participant 2	10	10
Participant 3	5	7
Participant 4	5	5
Participant 5	5	10
Participant 6	YES	10

# APPENDIX 4: SONG LYRICS

## Fly Away

Calming lullaby - sends me to sleep  
Sometimes I dream - of what I'd like to be  
I travel in a world - of colour and light  
Feeling free - no sadness inside

It's too early to get up, so I hide behind a different face  
The same surroundings but they're all in a different place  
Listen to the sounds, that take me back to who I used to be  
But is it even me?

Climbing up a hill - keep pushing on  
Trouble haunts us - as if it was a ghost  
I have wings  
I can fly away - from it all

It's too early to get up, so I hide behind a different face  
The same surroundings but they're all in a different place  
Listen to the sounds, that take me back to who I used to be  
But is it even me?  
But is it even me?

Climbing up a hill - keep pushing on  
Trouble haunts us - as if it was a ghost  
I have wings  
I can fly away - from it all

Calming lullaby - sends me to sleep  
Sometimes I dream - of what I'd like to be  
I travel in a world - of colour and light  
Feeling free - no sadness inside  
I have wings  
I can fly away - from it all

From it all (from it all)  
From it all (from it all)

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