

VCSE Leaders' Wellbeing Hub Evaluation Report

Background

Funding was granted from Humber and North Yorkshire ICS in early 2021 to provide the VCSE sector with appropriate wellbeing support following on from the Covid-19 pandemic. After some initial groundwork discovered issues with the original idea of a telephone support line for the sector, Community First Yorkshire (CFY) redeveloped the project to deliver a comprehensive programme that offered leaders the opportunity to learn how to manage their own health and wellbeing, and gain a healthy work-life balance through a 'VCSE Leaders' Wellbeing Hub'. The Hub aimed to create a culture of wellbeing within the sector, through training 'Wellbeing Champions' and delivering an online Wellbeing Toolkit, bringing together resources from a range of sources aimed at improving individual, community and organisation wellbeing.

Data from the North Yorkshire VCSE Leadership Hub Steering Group and the Community First Yorkshire Resilience Survey indicated there was a need to support CEOs and senior leaders, who have focused heavily on supporting staff and volunteers with their wellbeing during the pandemic. This led to developing the project to focus on Wellbeing Coaching, enabling leaders to access tools and resources required to increase their wellbeing, whilst acquiring skills and knowledge to share with their organisations, enabling them to develop workplaces where wellbeing is a priority and discussed openly.

Project Aims

	Help leaders and colleagues spot wellbeing warning signs, enabling them to take early action and prevent going into crisis mode
	Give transferrable wellbeing tools that can be used with staff and volunteers
	Offer a guide to resources, signposting leaders to further information they may find helpful in both a personal and professional capacity
	Build a positive movement of wellbeing across the VCSE sector

Delivery

The project was delivered in three key areas:

1. Leadership Wellbeing Coaching

Recognising the need to offer a variety of opportunities to leaders due the nature of their work, we offered the Wellbeing Coaching in two key ways:

- a. A four-day face to face programme spread throughout the year to focus on identifying resources for individual and team wellbeing, creating a wellbeing culture through developing a meaningful vision where wellbeing and sustainability are valued, and using natural principles to embed learnings and create lasting change so the wellbeing culture keeps growing. In addition to the structured in person workshops, participants also benefitted from follow up one-to-one wellbeing coaching sessions in nature with the facilitator. The sessions were held in a nature-based venue, allowing leaders' space from their daily activities and a chance to connect with other, like-minded individuals.
- b. A series of four 2.5 hour online workshops, to allow those unable to commit to the four day face-to-face coaching to benefit from the programme were also held, which focused on the following topics:
 - i) Solutions for wellbeing – from basic needs to psychological safety
 - ii) Mental health and wellbeing – recognising and responding (in participants, themselves and others)
 - iii) Practical ways to deal with burnout and overwhelm
 - iv) Brave conversations and communicating wellbeing needs



The Leadership Wellbeing Coaching programme (both online and face-to-face sessions) was delivered by **Where the Mind Grows**, a nature based coach and facilitator who focuses on individual and team wellbeing.

2. Wellbeing Champions

Where The Mind Grows also facilitated a six-session online programme, designed to enable participants to gain skills, confidences and resources to enhance their organisation's wellbeing culture and raise awareness of mental health, contributing towards a collective vision for the VCSE sector within the region. Learners were able to co-produce the sessions to suit their objectives and learning styles, and covered topics such as understanding wellbeing needs, signs and symptoms, creating a culture of wellbeing, strategies for keeping themselves well within their role and how to move forward with their wellbeing plan. Participants are now creating a peer network to continue their engagement around wellbeing, as well as participating in mentoring one-to-ones.

Again, CFY recognised that not all organisations would be in the position to commit to a six-session training course, so to enable the wider movement of change to continue, we offered two Mental Health First Aid Champion training courses to the whole sector, which comprised of two half-day online sessions delivered by Mental Health First Aid England.

3. Wellbeing Toolkit

To enhance the support and learning on offer to Leaders and Wellbeing Champions, and to provide support to those unable to engage, CFY developed a [Wellbeing Toolkit](#). The toolkit comprises of a range of resources, structured around wellbeing for individuals, community and organisations and gives useful ideas on taking action, signposting to appropriate resources. The toolkit also hears from people within the sector on the importance of managing their own wellbeing, to build confidence to hold open discussions around the subject. The toolkit is hosted on the CFY website, and will be continuously updated as new resources emerge. Additionally, provision was made available for our place-based partners to share the toolkit with their area networks and contacts, through funding, copy for marketing and images.



Programme Evaluation

1. a) Leadership Wellbeing Coaching

The face to face Wellbeing Coaching programme has now concluded. The leaders who participated have all spoken very highly of the programme so far, rating it as 'Amazing' overall.

The leaders came from different places within their career and mental wellbeing. When asked to briefly describe their experience of the programme so far, some of the quotes include:

"My experience so far has been transformational. The programme has given me 'permission' to take a step back and reflect, on my own wellbeing and the challenges I have experienced as a leader in recent years."



"Life changing!...it feels a huge privilege to be part of this programme with this group of women."



All participants spoke of nature being the stand out resource that has helped them so far, and having the natural principles as a motivation for change and an everyday approach for wellbeing. Nature was seen as an essential and powerful part of the programme, with all participants reporting their connection with nature increasing due to participation.

When asked how the programme has helped their own personal wellbeing participants said:

"Helping me to put myself/own needs first without guilt of shame. Feels empowering to have this new vision that is sustainable...I am 6 months in and feeling great, never felt health and happiness like it about myself"



"My personal wellbeing has been hugely improved through this programme...I feel more secure in my values and how to recognise when they are being compromised and the impact this has on my wellbeing"



When asked how the programme has helped with the wellbeing of the participant's team/organisation they spoke of:

- shifting the current negative aspects of their workplace culture
- using the tools they have learned to pass onto their team
- the introduction of wellbeing practices such as an annual staff wellbeing day
- developing a wellbeing policy
- modelling new ways of working to show healthy leadership and resisting the culture of overwork.

The individual changes participants had noticed included more structured professional boundaries, prioritising themselves more, reduction in anxious feelings, and integrating wellbeing into their daily habits.

The feedback about the facilitator (Jennie-Kate McCreight) delivering the programme has been excellent, speaking of her passion for wellbeing and her thoughtful, adaptable and supportive approach.

When asked what leaders would tell others about the programme they said:

"I would recommend it to anyone! Meeting in the outdoors to switch off internal distractions is exactly what my busy mind needs. I will take so much from this programme and be very sad when it is over!"



"That this isn't a luxury. It's an essential part of being an effective leader. Leading in the voluntary sector is increasingly difficult and the risk of burnout is huge. This programme and the support around it is life changing and will build resilience within yourself, your team, your organisation and the sector."



The face to face coaching element had six participants, but did have capacity for more. When initial marketing was released in October 2021, organisations within the sector were, and continue to, struggle with the effects of the pandemic. Although leaders within the sector were positive about the programme and recognised the potential effects for their wellbeing, many did not feel they could commit to the programme at the time. However, some of the participants have spoken of the benefits of the smaller group size, allowing them to connect better as a group. Further suggestions for improving the Leadership Wellbeing Coaching is to build in a reflective journal as an integral part of the programme.

1. b) Online Leaders Wellbeing Workshops

Attendance at the online workshops was consistent with an average of seven people attending each time, and many of the same participants attending all four sessions.

Evaluation of the sessions shows consistently good feedback. All sessions predominately rated as 'Very Good' in terms of the overall learning experience, how effective the workshop was in encouraging participants to make change, extending the understanding of the subject area and engaging interest.

Some of the things that participants enjoyed most about the workshop included:

"The opportunity to share in a safe space with my peers"



"The format was really clear and concise and held my attention. I felt like I learnt a lot as well and appreciated the chance to have break out rooms to talk in smaller groups and share ideas."



"Getting a better understanding about some of the models and ideas that can be used when thinking about wellbeing...overall the training was well paced (not too fast or too slow) and a good intro into lots of different ways of thinking about wellbeing."



When participants were asked how they plan to use what they had learned in the workshop they said:

"It will be used as I work with our external HR support to build a strong and practical wellbeing plan for the organisation. I have already and will continue to use some of the methodologies in the training with other managers in the organisation to expand all of our knowledge"



"Using the tools I have been introduced to further improve our culture and share with others, thinking about language used in the team - e.g. creating 'space' if time poor etc."



"I will meet with our CEO/Director to discuss how we can explore and implement changes to create better wellbeing within the workplace, with particular reference to meeting psychological needs and safety"



This indicates the workshops had a broader impact than on the individual participant, and that learnings will be fed back into organisations to implement wider change.

Some participants also commented on the value of the sessions being online as it made easier to attend - both physically and emotionally.

2. a) Wellbeing Champions

Although the programme had capacity for up to twenty participants, we had three people from the sector come forward to participate in the six-session online Wellbeing Champions programme. All of the participants remained engaged throughout and contributed consistently. Although from different parts of the sector, of different gender and ages, the group bonded well and have continued the Peer Network as a follow up to the programme, sharing ideas and resources for their Wellbeing Champion role.

The evaluation feedback gathered for this element of the programme was very positive throughout.

When asked to discuss content and delivery, participants said:

"A variety of topics (which were) explained well. Participation (was) encouraged which grew naturally throughout"



"I really liked the way the sessions were developed around our feedback... if we asked for something to be covered or explored more deeply you took that on board. I feel there was a good mixture of 'teaching' time and time in breakout rooms to discuss/reflect. Lots of good models/theories were shared during the sessions and I felt they were explained in an easy and accessible way. You always linked back to how we could practically apply the model or theory too."



When looking at the change or impact created because of attending the course, participants said they had:

- created shared drives for wellbeing resources and were sharing these via weekly emails
- reaching out to colleagues in different departments such as marketing to see how the resources could be shared more widely
- developing a wellbeing policy for the organisation
- delivering staff wellbeing events

- developing a 'Colleague Council' to improve communication with their CEO.

All participants said their needs were met during the course, including developing a shared drive with a toolkit of resources to use and getting a lot of information around good practice for a Wellbeing Champion.

Again, the facilitation style of [Where the Mind Grows](#) was highlighted as a positive, with topics being explained well, the right amount of 'home play' and the opportunity for internal reflection. Participants also commented on how being in a small group worked well for the course, as it enabled them to get to know each other and all have their say.

2. b) Mental Health First Aid Champions Course

To enhance our offer, and increase reach throughout the sector, we also funded two online Mental Health First Aid Champion courses, which were delivered online across two half-day sessions by Mental Health First Aid England. This meant those from sector who didn't feel they could commit to the six-session Wellbeing Champion programme still had the opportunity to participate in some Mental Health training which would benefit their organisation. The places were offered to the VCSE sector through our usual communication channels, with a maximum of 16 places available on each course. The first course filled up immediately, and the second course, held a few months later in June 2022, had 9 participants.

The feedback from the evaluation forms completed by participants was positive, reporting that an increase in knowledge and confidence to discuss mental health, alongside some qualitative comments including:

"The course was very open for discussion and felt listened to throughout. The training tools were very helpful, my team and I will be utilising them."

"Such a valuable course. Lots of practical support to take forward. Fantastic course delivery."



To build on the success of this training, we will be offering a further MHFA England training course to the sector using an underspend from the project.

3. Wellbeing Toolkit

To launch the toolkit, Community First Yorkshire's Marketing team completed a campaign launch for the first week of Stress Awareness Month (April 2022), alongside a tagline of "self-care isn't selfish". We commissioned a designer to create specific graphics for the toolkit and its promotion. Social media posts during the launch highlighted different aspects of the toolkit and resources available, and posts were shared on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

A media bundle was sent to place based partners with graphics, social media posts and a media release for them to publish to their own sites. Place based partners were offered the opportunity to receive a small amount of funding to promote the toolkit in their area. Additionally, the toolkit was shared within our e-news, which reaches more than 2,200 people across North, West and South Yorkshire, and with key partners including North Yorkshire County Council and York & North Yorkshire LEP.

Over the course of the launch week, the Tweets relating to the Wellbeing Toolkit earned 4.7k impressions, and to date, the toolkit has been viewed over 280 times. The most popular downloadable links within the toolkit are a guide to Wellbeing at Work and Managing the Wellbeing of Volunteers (a CFY created resource). The toolkit will continue to be promoted on relevant national health and wellbeing days.

Summary

In conclusion, although we did not reach capacity for two of the main elements within the programme (Leadership Wellbeing Coaching and Wellbeing Champions) we can see from the evidence collected how valuable these opportunities were to those who did participate. In terms of the quality of the training delivered and the life changing impact it has had on participants, the programme has provided a real value to the sector. Feedback as to why some of the sector did not take up the chance to participate, despite a clear need for this type of work, included the inability to take time away from their roles and the potential travel to North Yorkshire was seen as too far for some partners. A contributing factor could be the timing, as the programme was originally marketed in October 2021 when organisations were still very much dealing with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

If we were to run the programme again, we would like to increase the numbers of leaders attending the programme. We know there is still an issue of burnout within the sector, but we hope to have started a movement that will make people think about their own wellbeing and how to improve it. Seeing the transformation it has provided for participants will hopefully have an effect on enabling leaders to see the benefits of taking part, as well as have the example of their peers taking time out to put their wellbeing first, therefore improving their personal resilience. You can read our case study from the Leadership Wellbeing Coaching on our website, which shows the impact the programme has made.

We would also aim have more people attend from other places within the ICS area, as all elements of the programme were predominately attended by people from North Yorkshire, with a small amount from York, Hull and East Riding. Issues such as losing time to travel by attending the Leadership Coaching in North Yorkshire would hopefully be negated by a more central venue, but this is difficult to do considering the large geography of Humber and North Yorkshire that provides the right facilities for 'nature based' training. Smaller place based groups (York & North Yorkshire, Hull & East Riding and North & North East Lincolnshire) could work well, but this would also incur an increased cost for venues and the facilitator's time. The virtual elements of the programme are easy and cost effective to repeat, but this would not be an option for the Leadership Wellbeing Coaching, which benefits from in-person peer connection and a nature based setting.