

CREATIVE HEALTH

ARTS & WELLBEING INQUIRY



EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

A report co-commissioned by Creative Wakefield and University of Huddersfield and enabled by strategic investment of external funding managed by Wakefield Council.



Foreword

Wakefield is transforming. The creative sector is working together with private and public sectors to draw inspiration from its proud history of creativity and innovation. But what does this really mean for the wellbeing of the people who live, work and play here?

The district is rich in cultural venues and creativity its assets today are incredibly diverse and dynamic – reflecting a rapidly changing region. This creative energy fuels Wakefield’s identity, culture and economy right across the district. And it is changing ideas on how stakeholders collectively meet many of the challenges facing both West Yorkshire and the wider world. Feeling happy and healthy is central to this. In Wakefield there is a sense of collaboration and shared understanding right across creative health and wellbeing.

Major institutions are working with community groups in innovative ways, but they are often looking for more support to broaden the scope of partnerships to imagine what is really possible.

Impact measurement is happening, but it is too often ad hoc, reactive or running separately. Both qualitative and quantitative measurement of creative health and wellbeing should be more central, it should happen earlier and be built into programmes holistically. This will help to create a better and clearer alignment between funders, partners, stakeholders, cultural leaders and those delivering creative health and wellbeing work.

It was this desire to understand more fully the scale and impact of Creative Health activities in the Wakefield district that led to the co-commissioning of this inquiry by Creative Wakefield and the University of Huddersfield. We hope you enjoy reading it!

~ Dr Steven Michael OBE, Independent Chair Creative Wakefield, Cultural Compact

~ Dr Rowan Bailey, University of Huddersfield





Contents

- **Context**
- **Introduction & Principles**
- **A sense of place**
- **Key questions**
- **1. Identity & Belonging**
- **2. Growth & Movement**
- **3. Autonomy & Security**
- **4. Connectedness & Purpose**
- **5. Joy & Meaning**
- **Conclusions**
- **Thank you!**



Some context on the culture and creativity in Wakefield -

Wakefield is using creativity as a key driver of economic and social development:

- To leverage more funding and support for inclusive creative activity.
- To broaden and increase the range of private sector and philanthropic funders, reducing dependency on public funding.
- To align existing strategy and ambition through an inclusive network of creative stakeholders to increase overall impact.

Wakefield is home to some of the UK's most outstanding cultural destinations. It has played a leading role in the development of non-conformist movements in art and society. It has a particularly strong tradition of female artists and diverse local assets, from Pontefract liquorice to acclaimed working class poets.

It is rich in cultural assets, and home to several cultural organisations of regional, national and international significance. It has a rich and diverse built heritage, both in the city centre and wider district. There is considerable pride in that culture, creativity and heritage - with a particular strength around sculpture.





Introduction

Evidencing Creative Health: a Partnership Journey Between Creative Wakefield and the University of Huddersfield

Partnerships between health and social care and the creative sector have gained greater interest and political support over recent years. Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing (2017 & 2023), set out a national framework to support the development of creative health. More recently, at a regional level, the Mayor of West Yorkshire has voiced strong support for such approaches as has the Chief Executive of the Integrated Care Board, both advocating for West Yorkshire to become a leading light nationally in this area.

Creative Wakefield is currently West Yorkshire's only cultural compact. Supported by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, Arts Council England and Wakefield Council, Creative Wakefield seeks to harness the potential of the creative sector, working in partnership with a range of institutions and stakeholders to enhance the lives of people living in the district, including supporting social and economic regeneration. Over the past year the compact has identified three priority areas: Creative Digital, Public Art and Creative Health.

All are interrelated, but each require a focused and targeted strategic approach. This piece of writing concentrates on the work of Creative Wakefield relating to creative health.

An exciting partnership between Creative Wakefield and the University of Huddersfield has been forged seeking to develop a strong evidence base for creative health with a view to supporting long term sustainability. This partnership seeks to support the approach advocated by West Yorkshire Combined Authority and the Integrated Care Board for West Yorkshire, providing a key pilot area and point of reference. The approach taken will be of particular interest to those seeking to either research such innovation or to develop this in practice.

There are significant creative assets existing in Wakefield, from the prestigious Yorkshire Sculpture Park and The Hepworth Wakefield, to smaller but highly effective community based creative organisations, operating at scale across the district. The relationship between health and creativity has been long established through initiatives such as Creative Minds, an innovation involving partnerships between the NHS and community based creative providers.

The full potential, however, has arguably not been fully realised to the extent that creative health has become established as part of a recognised mainstream offer of service.

Such innovation in the area of creative health is reflective of an increasingly urgent need for entrepreneurial approaches to public sector delivery in the face of increasing demand and societal complexity (Liddle and McElwee, 2019). Following well over a decade of austerity and associated reduction in public service funding, the need to act entrepreneurially has never been greater. As place-based strategies emerge in a new political landscape, new opportunities are manifesting in such spaces, where creative health innovation can play a major role.

As the work of Creative Wakefield progressed in the area of creative health, the importance of developing a sound evidence base for future development was identified as a key consideration. The University of Huddersfield, through its Centre for Cultural Ecologies in Art, Design and Architecture, has undertaken significant work in recent times in relation to community health innovation through its programme Cultures of Creative Health (Centre for Cultural Ecologies in Art, Design and Architecture, n.d.). This presented an opportunity to create genuine synergies between the two parties resulting in an agreement to formalise the partnership in early 2024. This led to a co-designed project of proposed research activities, supported by funding from Creative Wakefield (DCMS and ACE) and Impact Accelerator funding (AHRC) from the University of Huddersfield.

A first milestone in the new partnership was to co-commission a piece of work seeking to both map the current position relating to creative health across the Wakefield district. Given the scale of this task and to make the commission workable, it was necessary to undertake some initial scoping in terms of creative health activity in the Wakefield district.

The first step was to identify links between key partners and organisations now leading the development of creative health innovation. The partners selected for the case study were identified as being a good starting sample for the proposed co-commission. All have a strong commitment to supporting health and wellbeing and have been active in creating opportunities for people from local communities to participate in a range of creative activities. In essence, the organisations identified provide a portal into the wider creative health networks developing within the district.





Inquiry Research Principles, Process and Design

What are the types of qualitative research conducted in this inquiry?

- A) In-depth interviews: deep-dives carried out to explore perspectives on creative health - covering a focused number of issues in but in great detail.
- B) Semi-structured interviews: a form of interviewing that uses open-ended questions to define the area to be explored, with potential widening of research focus according to thematic passion points.
- C) Observation: a participatory approach to behaviour observation, watching and recording what people say and do.
- D) Narrative analysis: an approach that uses case studies and storytelling to model and understand impact.
- E) Visual storytelling: using the power of images to develop understanding.
- F) Amplification: using existing journals, conversations, impact reports and experiences to explore and examine subjective approaches to creative health.

Key principles for high qualitative research:

Rigour in qualitative research means an inquiry that has been undertaken in a systematic and carefully considered way, with a clear and defensible explanation of the approach and how this inquiry arrived at its findings.



Participating organisations:

- The National Coal Mining Museum for England
- Heavy Metal Therapy
- Children & Young People Service, Wakefield Council
- The Hepworth, Wakefield
- The Art House, Wakefield
- Appletree Community Garden
- Spectrum People
- The Mental Health Museum
- Arts, Culture & Leisure Service, Wakefield Council
- Theatre Royal Wakefield
- Yorkshire Sculpture Park
- Creative Minds SWYPFT
- One to One Development Trust



Creative health inquiry process



Verifying Insights

Ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings through triangulation (using multiple data sources) and member checking (sharing findings with participants for feedback).



Interpreting Findings:

Drawing conclusions based on the identified patterns and themes

Writing the Report

Presenting the findings in a clear and concise manner, including a systematic analysis of interviews to generate meaningful insights.



Exploring five pillars of creative health





Research process

Taking an iterative approach to qualitative evaluation is a cyclical process that felt ideal for this inquiry. Throughout a series of interviews and qualitative analysis the inquiry refined understanding across social and cultural contexts. Key aspects of the inquiry in Wakefield:

- Flexibility: adjusting research questions and methods as new insights take shape.
- Reflexivity: being critical of existing biases and assumptions, recognising how they might influence the research process.
- Theory building: the iterative process allows researchers to develop grounded theories that emerge from a conversation and story-led approach.
- Continuous learning: each cycle of analysis provides an opportunity to learn more about creative health and its context in Wakefield.

Using this approach, it became clear that the inquiry could shape nuanced and insightful findings based on rigour and relevance. As the process of inquiry progressed a series of key themes began to emerge. They crystallised in the form of five pillars of creative health:



Five pillars of creative health

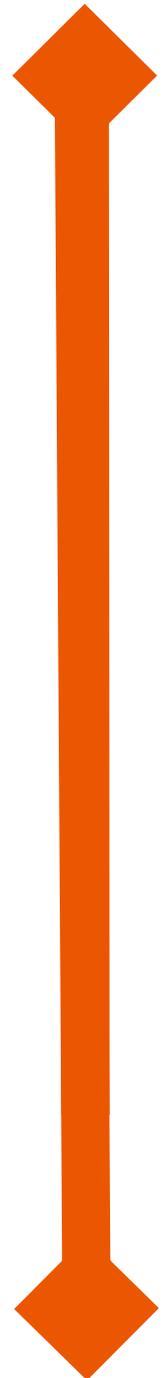
1. Identity & Belonging

2. Growth & Movement

3. Autonomy & Security

4. Connectedness & Purpose

5. Joy & Meaning



The following sections of this report explore the dimensions of each pillar, utilising case study examples to bring the narrative and evidence building to life.



pillar 1: identity & belonging

~ “the fact of being who, or what, a person or thing is.”

This pillar features a piece on the National Coal Mining Museum for England; a first-person piece from a Heavy Metal Therapy facilitator; the view of Wakefield Council's Young Carers group leader; a first-person piece from the Family and Communities Programmer at The Hepworth Wakefield.

A few key quotes from across this pillar:

"We are led by our experiences and that means there's this continual cross-fertilisation and cross-support. It's a different way of doing things here, but I think it works..."

~ Heavy Metal Therapy

*"It's about physically *being here*, a chance to get out and about in the landscape of Yorkshire. That's the thing about mental health and wellbeing more generally, it's about physically where you are and that is so connected to making people feel better."*

~ National Coal Mining Museum for England

"Wakefield is the perfect place for this, because there's a focus on getting something done here. Not just talking about it, but getting it done. There's this 'can-do' attitude which I absolutely love..."

~ Heavy Metal Therapy

"These workshops have allowed our young carers to explore who they really want to be - rather than being defined as a carer.."

~ Wakefield Council (young carers)

"Play and the freedom to explore ideas has become the starting point in our creative health activities."

~ The Hepworth Wakefield





National Coal Mining Museum for England (NCMME)



The **National Coal Mining Museum for England (NCMME)** is located at Caphouse Colliery within the Wakefield district. It opened as the Yorkshire Mining Museum in 1988 and in 1995 was granted national status. The museum seeks to advance the education of the public in the history of coal mining in England. Its rich source of material, linked to its industrial heritage, provides a significant educational and creative resource for the Wakefield district. The ability for the community to understand its heritage and the rich cultural and creative assets associated with this, provides the NCMME with a unique opportunity to contribute to the creative health agenda.



How a sense of place shapes wellbeing

Stepping inside the extraordinary National Coal Mining Museum for England, an interview with Lynn Dunning the organisation's CEO.

The piece explores innovative ideas that builds a sense of belonging - so important for people feeling happy and well. What does identity mean for people in the Wakefield district?

The National Coal Mining Museum for England has an outstanding volunteer programme - building skills with local people and sharing opportunities too.

More than anything volunteering offers both pride and purpose for local people, according to Lynn. She explained: *“Offering a connection to heritage is what we’re all about here - so many of our volunteers have that long standing connection to coal mining here, there is a sense of pride which is so important for us.”*

There is a large amount of work going on to track the museum's work on health & wellbeing - measuring stats on both visitors and volunteers is a focus. According to a recent survey 88.9% of people said volunteering had made their lives better. And wellbeing and its boost to mental health is the number one reason why people volunteer.

But more support is needed to deeply understand the museum's unique content and context and how being present intersects with feeling better: *"We're developing new ways to collect data from people, this is part of an upskilling across the museum. But one thing we're really good at here is putting our visitors first. We have a regular visitor who comes along with his wife everyday. It's a safe place for him, it's a respite.*

*"That's his experience and his story and it's true for so many people who are from here. It's about physically *being here*, a chance to get out and about in the landscape of Yorkshire. That's the thing about mental health and wellbeing more generally, it's about physically where you are and that is so connected to making people feel better."*

Outdoors imagination for Creative Health

It is important that museums and galleries are safe and inclusive spaces. The National Coal Mining Museum for England has recently commissioned an access audit, looking at practical professional advice on how to improve access across the site. This is going to be useful for future funding bids, but most importantly it will drastically improve access across the site for everyone from Wakefield and across the UK who want to access the museum.

"Accessibility is so important for us. It's the same as community engagement for us, an opportunity to build relationships. A big part of this is how we are using outdoor spaces in creative ways, this is a way for us to build bridges."

"Looking ahead we are going to be experimenting with land artists and imaginative and creative ways of using nature and local materials. These creative installations and public art projects will help us to deliver creativity and engagement in more strategic ways, leading to stronger and longer lasting impact."

The National Coal Mining Museum for England works on Five Ways to Wellbeing. This means centring the key actions around the themes of social relationships, physical activity, awareness, learning and giving. Having strong social relationships, being physically active and being involved in learning are all important influencers of wellbeing.

In addition, the idea of giving and becoming more aware have been shown to specifically influence wellbeing in a positive way. A combination of all of these behaviours will help to enhance individual wellbeing and has the potential to reduce the total number of people who develop mental health disorders too.

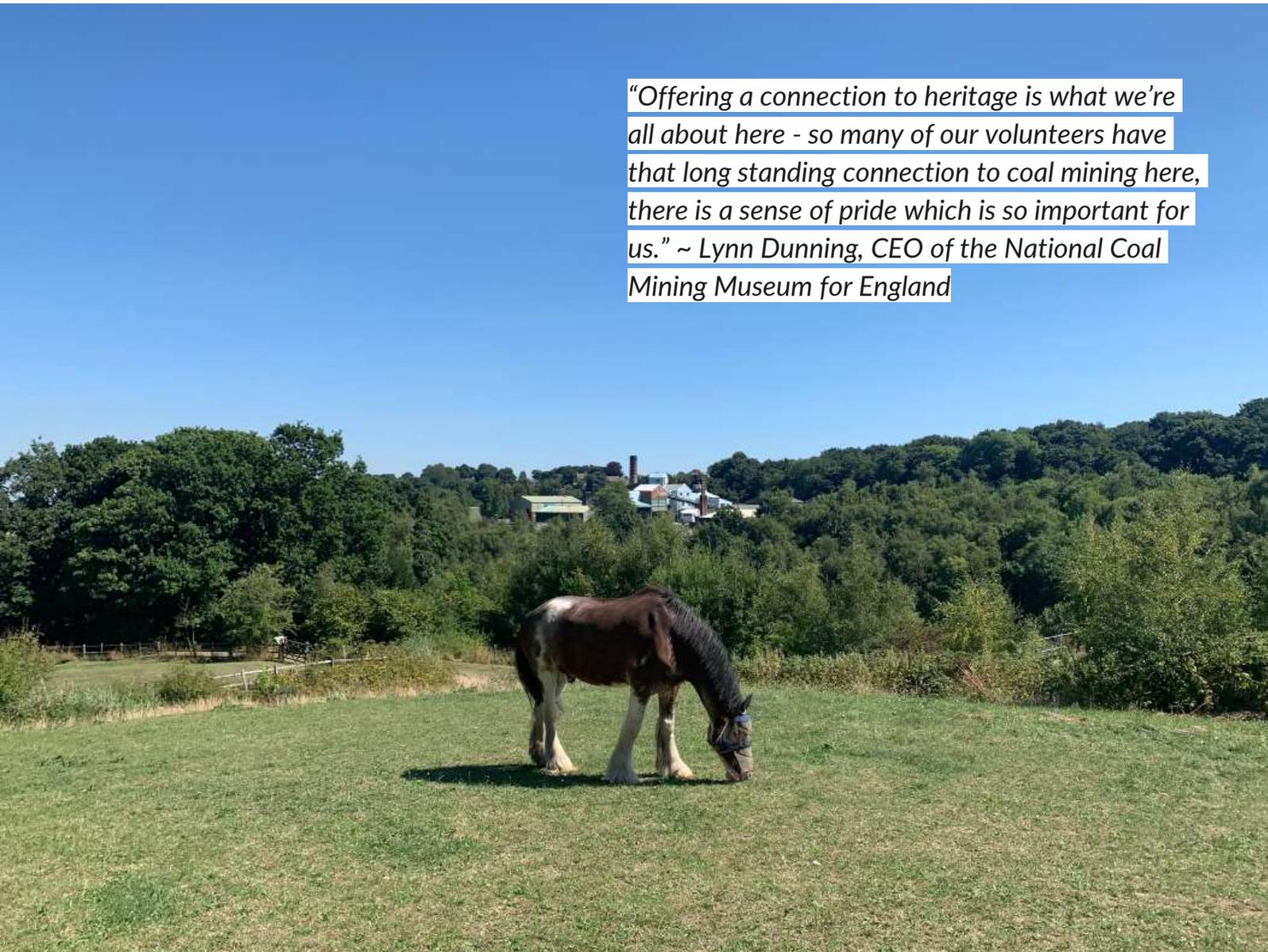
Lynn added: *“Our work here gets people thinking about those things in life which are important to their wellbeing and perhaps should be prioritised in their day-to-day routines. What’s important to us is that we connect the people visiting to some of the activity-based ideas we have going on - this is such an important building block for improving personal wellbeing.*

“Volunteering is just being thankful after all and ‘giving’ your time, your experience. It means people here can see themselves and appreciate their happiness. It’s incredibly beneficial to people’s wellbeing and helps people see connections. Our volunteers here say it is an amazing thing to do and so rewarding.”

“Volunteering is incredibly beneficial to people’s wellbeing. I think it helps them to see connections in their community”

~ Lynn Dunning

“Offering a connection to heritage is what we’re all about here - so many of our volunteers have that long standing connection to coal mining here, there is a sense of pride which is so important for us.” ~ Lynn Dunning, CEO of the National Coal Mining Museum for England



National Coal Mining Museum for England

Volunteering, Learning and Community Engagement programmes







Heavy Metal Therapy



Heavy Metal Therapy is an online resource and community of people who find metal music helpful for mental wellbeing. Born in Wakefield and responding to local creative health needs - it is a participatory space. It is a place to find and share experiences of how metal has helped people, and helping people to find meaning from songs, lyrics and sharing playlists to boost wellbeing.

Supported by investment from Creative Minds, Heavy Metal Therapy began as a collaboration between Health Practitioners, South West Yorkshire Partnership Foundation Trust (SWYPFT) and service users exploring the therapeutic impact of music on recovery. It has developed into a CIC and seeded 8 spin-off groups across the country attracting academic interest and publication on the health impacts of music in the British Medical Journal.



The power of giving back

This first-person piece is from the voice of a mental health facilitator living in Wakefield and supporting people around the district. His words explore the power of culture and creativity in shaping identity and how that impacts on wellbeing.

Kevin Rhodes-Johnson, a Heavy Metal Therapy facilitator, explained why this fresh approach to creative health is so important:

"I've always wanted to give something back."

"I started working on the Heavy Metal Therapy peer support group because I felt I had an authentic experience to share. I knew it wasn't going to be easy, but I was determined. It's my experience."

"I was so lucky because Kate (Principal Clinical Psychologist, SWYPFT) gave me an amazing opportunity - the chance to shape and deliver something myself. I was tasked with assisting in coming up with a structure for our group and delivering it too. I thought from day one that it was a great opportunity."

"I come from an experiential route we have some training with health professionals - but we're not part of the NHS. We are led by our experiences and that means there's this continual cross-fertilisation and cross-support. It's a different way of doing things here, but I think it works."



Kevin Rhodes-Johnson,
in Wakefield

“Here in Wakefield we meet once per month, and there’s up to twenty of us meeting up in those monthly meetings. And, touch wood, our feedback has been brilliant and really positive.

“The Heavy Metal Therapy community see us as a safety net, we offer that structure. We are a safe space and I think everyone understands we've all got our own paths and our own identity - you just need support to try and understand that. Watching our community grow and develop has been absolutely amazing.”

“Wakefield is the perfect place for this, because there’s a focus on getting something done here. Not just talking about it, but getting it done. There’s this ‘can-do’ attitude which I absolutely love. Our Facebook group has got 10,000 members, which is not bad.”

“And then there’s that heritage of West Yorkshire metal bands such as Paradise Lost and My Dying Bride. There’s always been a strong community of metalheads and doom fans from this part of the world. We’ve got a unique approach here it’s about having hands on the ground.”

“It’s not just noise and aggravation. The culture of this type of music is that it allows you to vent - I think people believe the bands are going through the same experiences that we’re all going through. There’s this cathartic release through the music - recognition that someone else understands this... not only survived but written a song.”

“There’s three things we share in our groups:

- 1) You’re not alone*
- 2) You can get through it*
- 3) You can let it out”*

"The metal community and our community by their definition becomes very close-knit... never met one that's more supportive. Gender, sexuality, creed or whatever."

"There's no arguments here, we become close knit I would say and one reason for that I think is that there's this clear parallel between the heavy metal scene and our support group here."

"For me the music and this culture is like a raft, and we're all clinging on."

"I don't know what's next. We are ambitious and we know that this works. But at the end of the day if it is just one man and his dog and you've made him better - you haven't failed. It's possible to get that ripple effect, especially in the right location."

"We want to let more people know about us and the support that's there. There's lots happening here now, but I know we could so much more."

"It's growing organically, but we all know we need to do more to sign-post it to other organisations because this is a chance to really improve people's lives. It's a tribe, and community is THE thing."

**"For me the music and this culture is like a raft, and we're all clinging on"
~ Kevin Rhodes-Johnson, Heavy Metal Therapy Facilitator**



“The interaction has been the best thing - the singing, the dancing, the taking part”

Lesley Robinson has been working at Wakefield Council for the past year, supporting young carers in the district. She has seen first hand the transformational impact that arts, culture and being creative has had on young people.

In her words she describes how access to creative opportunities can help young carers to be authentic and ‘belong’ to where they live in a deeper way.

“I think what we've done so far has been amazing. We've been working closely with the Theatre Royal Wakefield, doing two workshops with them as well as with Lung theatre company.

“We went to the pantomime over Christmas and the best thing was seeing the big show The School of Rock. The young people absolutely loved it!

“That initial reaction most of the time is that they're just really excited - it's something they've never done before.

“The interaction has been an absolutely amazing thing for me. It is seeing the singing, the dancing, and how the young people are taking part.”

“At The School of Rock I saw our young carers just so focused on the story on stage. It was so nice to see them living in the moment, that sense of being present is so important for wellbeing isn’t it?”

*“Self-expression is another important thing for us - and something we’ve covered in creative workshops at the Theatre Royal in Wakefield. These workshops have allowed our young carers to explore who they really want to be - rather than being defined as a carer. The opportunity to *not* be a young carer is so important, even if it just a fleeting opportunity.”*

“Participants always love the dancing aspects of the workshops they’re offered too. Dancing is great for physical health it improves people’s emotional and physical wellbeing so much because the young carers we work with simply don’t have time to fit exercise and self care into their daily routines.”

“We see the impact of this work every day. One of the young carers we support was really shy and reserved and these arts projects have really transformed her confidence. She’s more resilient now, wanting to do things more and more. And the exciting thing is that she is now looking for more creative opportunities to get involved with in the future.”

“And one of the children who attended brought her own play that she had written herself and wanted to work on that. It is inspiring for me to work with people like that, the creative work really helped her to be more dynamic.”

“To me, creative health means an openness and willingness to try new things - a chance to explore the creative side of our young people. I love this type of work and hope to connect with other creative organisations in and around Wakefield.”

**“The opportunity to *not* be a young carer is so important, even if it just a fleeting opportunity...”
~ Lesley Robinson**



*The School of Rock
at Theatre Royal Wakefield*



The Hepworth Wakefield



The Hepworth Wakefield opened in 2011 to house Wakefield's art collection and to continue the ambitious and forward-thinking legacy of Wakefield Art Gallery, as well as hosting major works by Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore, both born in the district. In addition to hosting a series of contemporary exhibitions, The Hepworth Wakefield Garden, designed by Tom Stuart-Smith, provides a new open space for the local community and visitors to the district. The Hepworth is committed to working with communities and families and supports creative health approaches with key sections of the community including children and young people.



“It can be wellbeing by stealth...”

Jess Witkowska, Families & Communities Programmer at The Hepworth has worked on creative engagement projects and programmes for more than 15-years as a freelance artist, facilitator and programmer. Her work is driven by widening participation in cultural activity with a specialism in play, wellbeing and creative interpretation.

In this first-person piece she talks about the surprising potential of contemporary art and creativity in helping to shape belonging - especially with children and people in later life.

“Our work is all about supporting communities to feel welcome and confident at the gallery. A recent example is a collaboration with Castle Nursery and a freelance artist on the development of Garden Play; a family activity delivered in the garden. Castle Nursery is a local pre-school that engages with a diverse community of families. Together we explored creativity and play with the families and nursery staff through workshops at the nursery and visits to the gallery.

These experiences informed the design and development of Garden Play which runs on weekends and during the school holidays. We have also developed an ‘outreach’ version that we take into local communities. Local families tell us that playing with the resource in their local community builds their confidence to be creative and try new things at home, and to visit the gallery.

Garden Play breaks down barriers through outdoor and creative play, using play as a way to build confidence, acting as a ‘bridge’ to accessing our exhibitions and learning programmes. Being outside, drawing, making and playing together is so good for the wellbeing of all children and all of our visitors. When you develop activities like Garden Play it can be wellbeing by stealth.”

“Since the pandemic, the focus of our family and community learning programmes has become much more about using art, creativity and nature/outdoors to support wellbeing. This was partly inspired by our creative health work with vulnerable young people ages 16-25, where we collaborate with local youth services and wellbeing providers to support vulnerable young people to develop their wellbeing, confidence and life skills through creative activities.”

Working with families, children and young people

“I’m happy if families and communities feel safe to play for the sake of playing, draw for the sake of drawing, i see it as facilitating an opportunity to be creative without a target or outcome in mind. Creating a space to develop creative thinking and positive experience - it’s as important as viewing the exhibitions.

“Play and the freedom to explore ideas has become the starting point in our creative health activities. Making art is playful and joyful. We celebrate ideas and want families to be visible and welcome in our spaces and know that the gallery is for them.”

Creativity and a dementia support programme

“We also run Creative Café at The Hepworth Wakefield. It’s a monthly creative session for people living with dementia and their carers, friends and family. A space where everyone can come as they are and relax for a few hours, joining in with activities if they want to and hopefully enjoying some respite from medical appointments or caring responsibilities. We also deliver these sessions in care homes in the Wakefield district, supporting care home staff to use creativity in their daily activities with residents.”

“Being in the spaces or taking part in the activities has a noticeable impact on the wellbeing of the people that come along to the sessions. In one session participants built sculptures in response to an artwork. There was an immediate difference in the level of calm and level of focus, that kind of flow when you’re making art. I think that’s what unique about creative health.”

Why slowing down matters

“We’ve just recently started a new monthly wellbeing session for adults. It’s all about slowing down and being calm. We hope it will help people with their physical and mental health by inspiring clarity, focus and seeing art in new ways.”

“This session encourages people to leave their mobile phone to one side, and to look at something in real life. Something I really want to explore in this new session, and we’re still experimenting with, is the idea that play isn’t just for children and families. I think art galleries are ideal spaces to be playful, even if that’s in a quiet and considerate way. Sometimes as an adult you need an invitation to be playful, or some designated time to be able to do that and to see how it makes you feel.

Does ‘play’ shape wellbeing in creative health?

“Something we’ve been thinking about is how and why people play. As a society we know what play looks like for children, but what does it look like for young people, for adults? Giving people time, space and creative prompts as tools to think about their lives can have a big impact on wellbeing.”

[in reference to ongoing work with refugee families] “Play and creativity are a way to support wellbeing. It means movement, physical activity, moments of joy and doing something different. We often explore the therapeutic nature of clay. People immediately want to make something, and it becomes a mindful activity. It works so well. Participants tell us that it makes them feel optimistic and creative which has got to be good for wellbeing.”

“We have a beautiful garden here. We facilitate a lot of sessions linked to nature, biodiversity and the seasons, helping people feel settled and connected with nature. Something I notice about people when they are engaged in the arts and in creative workshops is that they get into a focused, flow state - I’d love to measure the impact that has on people’s wellbeing.”





pillar one - identity & belonging

The vital significance of identity and belonging is frequently underestimated, coming up time & time again during inquiry interviews.

It is clear that communities in Wakefield crave the feeling of being accepted and included by people around them. When this sense of identity is fulfilled, it gives people focus - whether that is through creative facilitation, workshops, volunteering or other creative pursuits.

Wakefield organisations are providing these opportunities - beginning to offer new rituals and traditions to facilitate senses of belonging and bind us together. But more could be done to widen access and ensure inclusivity for all.

Inquiry participants pointed to creativity contributing to our emotional well-being, mental health, and overall life satisfaction but more academic research is needed to understand these links. This understanding will help to ensure investment, funding, new partnerships and support are directed to the right places.





pillar 2: growth & movement

~ “personal development and progress”

pillar two - growth & movement

This pillar features a piece on The Art House, Wakefield important ideas from Spectrum People and contributions from staff and volunteers at Appletree Community Garden.

A few key quotes from across this pillar:

“What we’re doing at The Art House is more of a longitudinal thing where we can measure the impact. Then it’ll become more about working with the NHS in a strategic way. Sharing our outputs, case studies and shared understanding”

~ The Art House

“What Wakefield is doing is making use of its cultural base.. also challenging policy and proving that it works.”

~ Spectrum People

“So many participants say this group has been a lifeline and transformed the way they see their wellbeing”

~ Appletree Community Garden

“I just know that creativity boosts your wellbeing and that’s a fact. It slows your mind down doesn’t it?”

~ Appletree Community Garden





The Art House, Wakefield



The Art House, Wakefield was founded in 1994 by a group of artists with a vision to provide studio space that is physically accessible and adaptable for as many artists as possible. In 2008 The Art House moved into its current premises, a new building, exemplary in terms of physical accessibility, offering artists' studios, accommodation, meeting rooms and community spaces. In addition to providing such facilities, The Art House hosts a programme of exhibitions and delivers a wide range of projects aiming to connect to the community including the Re-Emerge Arts and Health programme, achieving recognition as the UK's first Studio of Sanctuary supporting those seeking asylum and refuge, and Maternal Journal using creative techniques to explore the changes, joys and challenges of pregnancy, birth and parenthood.



“We need training to scale this thing”:

The Art House opens its door to wellbeing

Staff across the VCSE and health and social care sectors need to understand each others' sectors – language, history, pressures – to effectively deliver meaningful impact, according to Diane Saxon, Arts & Health Programme Manager at The Art House.

Staff need training and the right framework to really deliver meaningful impact, according to Diane Saxon, Arts and Health Programme Manager at The Art House.

“This (Creative Health) work has crept into the sector really. It’s so important but policymakers and decision makers need to remember that it is a big cost to deliver and it means adding in the resource of looking after the practitioners delivering it too, which is so important. I think the delivery of mental health and wellbeing programmes really needs to be recognised as a vital part of what we do in the sector.”

“We do try and improve wellbeing just by being present here in Wakefield and being a welcome, friendly and accessible space. At the end of the day you don’t need to know how to solve every problem but you need to know how to signpost people to the support they need.”

The Art House currently has funding to deliver creative health to males and perinatal women as well as sanctuary seekers.

According to Diane there are three core things that are needed to scale the activity:

- 1) long-term sustainable funding and support;
- 2) embedding creative health as a recognised pathway for recovery and prevention in health and social care;
- 3) ensuring VCSE organisations have access to necessary training and systems to be able to ensure creative health participants have holistic health and wellbeing support and organisations are using secure systems e.g. safeguarding and data protection.

Around the team at The Art House there is huge pride in the delivery of Maternal Journal, as part of a global community movement to support the huge changes, joys and challenges experienced during pregnancy, birth and parenthood. It is a creative journaling group with weekly sessions designed to help mums of under 2s and mums-to-be with their wellbeing. The sessions provide calm guided activities to support creative expression through painting, drawing, collaging, and printing. They are designed to be inclusive to those with no experience in the arts and always take place in a relaxed environment.

The Art House started delivering Maternal Journal particularly to support perinatal mental health during and after the Covid pandemic, bringing people together, sharing ways to be mindful and build resilience. It has built to develop new partnerships with other organisations supporting families, to train practitioners around the Wakefield district and widen the delivery through these partnerships.

Helping people have their voice heard

Diane explained The Art House team work with academics from University of Sheffield on evaluation and research to develop suitable data collection tools for the projects and the participants of the creative health work.

Data is drawn from interviews, questionnaires, observational notes, photographs, artistic outputs and documenting emotions at the start and end of each session. Evaluation data demonstrates the diversity of experience across the programme and how participants engage with the different creative activities on offer. Building community, and the opportunity to connect with people with similar lived experiences, is an important finding across the programme strands. Participants are keen to contribute to the evaluation and research and to have their views heard.

The Art House also collects data from artist practitioners on their thoughts about the sessions how this impacts their own practice. The team also explores the role of an arts organisation like The Art House as a catalyst for social change, and as an inclusive and welcoming community space.

Creative Health can take root in a community - but it needs to be accessible

“Our feedback is just so good from this programme, it shows how a simple idea can take root and evolve into something that has the potential to change lives through that combination of creativity and community.”

The sense of community is key to why projects like the Maternal Journal are so successful in Wakefield. Diane said: *“It’s my first time working here in Wakefield. I’ve been surprised at just how creative it is - there are so many things going on and there’s a sense of collaborative working across different sectors including the creative sector working well with communities and community organisations.”*

Building an evidence base for creative health

“There’s so much evidence out there that this [Creative Health] works. For me it is about shifting the focus of what is deemed as a success. Yes, number crunching the data of how many people etc is important, but what we’re doing at The Art House is more of a longitudinal thing where we can measure the impact.

“Then it’ll become more about working with the NHS in a strategic way. Sharing our outputs, the case studies and shared understanding.” Diane explained.

“Health and wellbeing is such a broad picture. It is interconnected. We want to embed our Maternal Journal with NHS services in this area. We want to take it wider. Make it more regular. Perinatal is a focus for the NHS, for us this is about scaling... Mothers in Wakefield know that our creative approach helps their wellbeing. What we want is consistency.”

“There’s a sense of collaborative working and the creative sector lending a hand when it’s needed...”
 ~ Diane Saxon

MATERNAL JOURNAL

Creative activities to support wellbeing for pregnant women and mums with pre-school children.

- Weekly sessions with activities including drawing, painting and collage.
- All materials provided.
- No experience needed.
- Friendly and supportive.
- Free to all.
- Childcare support.



When? Starting Wednesday 11 September 2024, 1pm - 2.30pm
Where? Five Towns Centre, 12 Welbeck St, Castleford, WF10 1DP
To find out more or express interest contact
Hilary Adamson h.adamson@rycroftleisure.com or 07399 090179





Appletree Community Garden



The **Appletree Community Garden** is an outdoor community garden in Agbrigg, Wakefield, offering a spacious and vibrant place for people of all ages and walks of life to come together, to be outdoors, and to grow and enjoy organic fresh fruits, vegetables and flowers.

Appletree is open to everyone, whether they would like to learn new skills or share existing ones, meet new people, or simply enjoy being out of doors in an emotionally uplifting and friendly green garden space.



“Creativity is self-care”:

Using the arts to make people feel at home

From Saima Amir, Project Manager at Appletree Community Garden in Agbrigg, Wakefield.

In this first-person piece Saima explores how creative health helps people to grow their skills and can keep people moving.

“I help to run classes and groups here at Appletree Community Garden. These range from crochet to gardening, and food is a big thing for us too. We recently celebrated the Eid festival with people making a dish and socialising - I’ve always said that food is a great way to bring communities together.”

“I’m currently helping to run a sewing course and we’ve got a refugee from Syria doing crochet here and helping to teach other ladies too. And later this year we’ve got a little fashion show too that’s something everyone is really looking forward to.”

“This is important because many of them are carers and mums and unemployed. So this is something really, really, powerful for them... it is self care.”

“All of these events are a way to connect with English culture too. We have people here from so many different backgrounds - Syrian, Kurdish, Iranian, Sudanese, English, Pakistani. This creative offer is a little bit of anything and everything to be honest, and I’d say the main impact is bringing people together.”

“We just delivered a poetry session called ‘I am from’. This was an amazing way for people to share the stories of their homeland. That’s why creativity is so important for people, it gives them a constant and a chance to make connections and to grow. Because there is so much happening we see people from diverse backgrounds really getting to know each other.”

Why growth can mean happiness and purpose for wellbeing

“There is something magical about this green space here in Agbrigg, I think it reminds people where they’re from - links them back to their homeland. This gives them happiness. And as so many of them are carers it takes them away from their daily responsibilities and gives them a new sense of purpose.”

So many participants say this group has been a lifeline and transformed the way they see their wellbeing. And when they sample the apples we grow here, that’s a whole other story.”

“That’s why creativity is so important for people, it gives them a constant and a chance to make connections”

~ Saima Amir

Appletree Community Garden

Images from 2024 community fashion show and apple day





Community fashion show
Appletree Community Garden



“This place saved my life”:

The power of community gardens for wellbeing

How do creative safe spaces build positive health outcomes?

This piece celebrates the mental health impacts of gardening and its transformational potential for people in Wakefield.

Is there something special in the ground in Wakefield? A potential for creative growth in that fertile Yorkshire soil?

Ade Atkinson, a trustee at Appletree Community Garden explained that the community garden space ‘saved his life’ after a long period of mental health challenges.

“It’s not easy to explain but it is a safe place here. It’s not like we’re working to a specific deadline or with any models or frameworks of behaviours. We know that not everything works, but we’re willing to try it. And then we know it works because people just love it here.”

It's this broad approach to what works, and generous scope for defining creative experiences that is helping people feel at home.

"I'm an artist too, I've had my work exhibited in galleries around the north but there's nothing quite like being outside," explained Ade. "I just know that creativity boosts your wellbeing and that's a fact. It slows your mind down doesn't it? It makes you concentrate and learn something new. And it's amazing to share it with other people too."

An active accelerant for physical wellbeing

Community gardening is linked to improved physical health because it involves activities such as digging, lifting, and harvesting, which can help improve cardio fitness, muscular strength, and mobility. It also means better nutrition, because community gardens can provide access to affordable, nutritious, and locally-sourced food.

Community gardens can be a catalyst for connectedness and neighbourhood improvement because they offer a supportive environment where gardeners can undertake tasks that align with their physical fitness, age, and health conditions.

It's the chance to be present, rolling up your sleeves. Ade explains: *"As long as people are here and we're outside then it is work. It is absolutely key for me it connects to a deep and social side of things. I'm part of something here. Just take a look around, we've got ducks and chickens, fruit trees and arbours. It's constantly changing and I think it's beautiful."*

"We grow people here, not just vegetables. I know for a fact that this place saved my life."

Community gardening is linked to improved physical health because it involves activities such as digging, lifting, and harvesting, which can help improve cardio fitness, muscular strength, and mobility.



"We grow people here, not just vegetables. I know for a fact that this place saved my life" ~ Ade Atkinson, Appletree Community Garden trustee



Spectrum People



Spectrum People founded as a registered charity in 2013, serving the population of Wakefield district. Spectrum People works to embrace the life experience of those finding themselves vulnerable, provides a complementary offer to mainstream provision and seeks to expand community regeneration and creation of social value. Key activities include Appletree Community Garden, providing a range of projects and resources and specific Creative Health projects, including art therapy, drama, dance, music, poetry and creative activities. The charity has gained national recognition, achieving the Green Flag Community Award (Appletree) and winning the 2022 BBC Radio 4 All in the Mind Group Award.



Challenging policy and proving that it works:

Bridget Gill, Chief Officer at Spectrum People, shares how art therapy can help people grow and how this impacts on mental health.

“So, how does art therapy intersect with purpose? Well I think in today’s world a lot of purpose is about money. But here it is different, because we don’t talk about money. It’s just not a consideration. Purpose informs itself, I think, it is cyclical.”

“When money is taken away, the purpose becomes ‘community’. We often hear that there’s nowhere for people just to ‘be’. But Appletree Community Garden embodies what that can be. That might sound idealistic, but I think you need idealism to make things happen.”

“A big consideration for mental health services is that they don’t have to be delivered in traditional ways. We’re always trying to innovate. That idea of innovation is at the heart of what’s going on here. What Wakefield is doing is making use of its cultural base.. also challenging policy and proving that it works.”



Understanding growth in a wellbeing context

Interviewees noted that growth is a continuous process that is intertwined and influenced by external factors with expert support and guidance being so important.

1

Personal Development

This involves expanding your knowledge, skills, and understanding of yourself and the world around you. It could include learning new hobbies at places like the Appletree Community Garden, taking courses, or engaging in self-reflection in creative places around the Wakefield district.

3

Emotional Maturity

This refers to the ability to understand, manage, and express your emotions in a healthy way. It includes developing emotional intelligence, empathy, and resilience.

2

Positive Relationships

Building and nurturing strong, supportive relationships with others contributes to overall well-being.

This could involve spending quality time with loved ones, joining social groups such as the Maternal Journal, or volunteering.

4

Healthy Habits

Personal growth encourages the adoption of healthy habits like regular exercise, balanced nutrition, and adequate sleep.

pillar two - growth & movement

The nuts & bolts of growth & movement were mentioned time & time again during the inquiry. Physical activity obviously helps people to balance and develop healthy muscles and bones - improving motor and cognitive skills. Exercise - whether it is dance, gardening or the gentlest art activities - can also protect memory, improve brain function and boost mental health through managing symptoms of depression and anxiety.

The pillar of growth manifests itself in different ways in Wakefield but fundamentally a central recurring theme is that self-improvement leads to increased self-esteem and a more fulfilling life.

Interviews pointed to growth helping people and community groups to set new goals, build new skills, become more self-aware and driven.

Growth becomes both a physical and mental wellbeing way marker, a way for people to believe in something better. So self-improvement can be a powerful way for creative health activity to drive wellbeing.





pillar 3: autonomy & security

***~ personal development,
progress and the power of
feeling safe for wellbeing***

pillar three - autonomy and security

This pillar features a long read on The Mental Health Museum and the work of a creative-focused mental health practitioner in the Wakefield district.

A few key quotes from across this pillar:

*“Co-production can help improve outcomes by delivering better designed services in a more efficient and effective way...” ~
Mental Health Museum*

*“Museums have traditionally been places that celebrate the amazing but approaches to museum practice are changing. And the work that is happening here in Wakefield is important in that. Now, we’re inviting people to tell their own story because they are the experts in it...”
~ Mental Health Museum*

*“‘It depends’ is my motto and it’s my tattoo too. We’re navigating complex needs, but I think we already know that a certain sort of person sticks with it here... we’ve created a safe space that people can be built back up. Art therapy builds resilience and tolerance...”
~ Katie Armstrong-Lamb, Wakefield-based arts therapist*





The Mental Health Museum



The Mental Health Museum is the successor organisation to the Stephen G Beaumont Museum founded in 1974 at the Stanley Royd Hospital in Wakefield. This focused on the history of the hospital which opened as the West Riding Pauper Lunatic Asylum in 1818. In 1995, the museum moved to Fieldhead Hospital, Wakefield and was later reimagined as the Mental Health Museum. Today the museum works with mental health service users, staff and the wider community to challenge, shape and develop an understanding of mental health histories. It charts the development of contemporary and innovative approaches to mental health care, including the role community care plays in mental health recovery and wellbeing.



Co-production for wellbeing

Becoming a
museum that
everyone is
part of

In this Q&A piece the Mental Health Museum big ideas around co-production and participatory approaches are explored - considering how they intersect with creative health.

You can't be creative unless you feel safe in a space.

Jane Stockdale, Curator of the Mental Health Museum in Wakefield is passionate about the power of co-production and challenging the hierarchy of knowledge in museums - believing this democratic approach to learning is crucial to wellbeing.

Q. When did you get started at the Mental Health Museum?

"I became curator in 2020 and loved working here - this is a unique space for people, different to anywhere else. I work three days per week now."

Q. So, what makes it special?

"The Mental Health Museum is a co-produced space. This is really important to us because co-production is a way of working where people who use services and the professionals who provide them share power and responsibility. It's based on the idea that everyone has something to contribute and that all input is equally valued. Here it means involving people who use services in the earliest stages of designing and developing services and researchers and practitioners working together from the beginning to the end of a research project."

How does co-production help people in Wakefield?

‘Co-production can help improve outcomes by delivering better designed services in a more efficient and effective way. I think it can also be empowering for all involved, as people are no longer passive recipients of services - that’s really important to us. Key principles of co-production at the Mental Health Museum include equality, diversity, access, and reciprocity that lets people explore their own journey in mental health. It allows people to participate in telling their own story.’

Q. Is that where the impact is?

“Yes, I think so. One of the most powerful things we do is making that conversation very public. Challenging the stigma of mental health is so important to me and to everyone working here. We have such a broad range of people coming here - guided tours, schools, object handling sessions, local interest groups and many more - it’s so important to think about the change we can make and have people participating in it. One of the most powerful things we can do is make it ordinary to talk about mental health.”

Q. What is the context for these conversations?

“We have so many objects available for handling from the Stanley Royd Hospital, which was previously called the West Riding Pauper Lunatic Asylum. Opened in 1818 it tried to employ principles of humane treatment - that heritage is so important to us. Pioneering research exploring possible reasons for mental health conditions was carried out here. Artefacts include restraining equipment, photographs, medical and surgical equipment, and documents.”

Q. Is there a therapeutic value to this history?

“Yes, that is part of our mission. We definitely believe exploring objects can have a therapeutic use - but we don't know much about exploring objects that have a direct link. We want to measure how these stories and connections affect people via direct engagement. We also have artists responding to objects in the collection, often a creative person will respond to something here that speaks to their own lived experience. Then when other people visit they see that artwork and then connect with the object in a new way. I think the therapeutic value comes from people knowing that we're not alone in this. It builds that sense of connectedness in people.”

Q. That sense of interconnectedness is so interesting, what does it mean for wellbeing?

“Co-creation and participation is a complex process so it is something we’re still trying to get to the bottom of. But what is really crucial for us is that we always emphasise that we open our doors and invite people to write labels and share their experiences in a safe way, through these historic stories. Because we're a small space we're able to do that. I often say that we're a museum, but we're a museum that everyone is part of. The distance between museum professionals and the public has collapsed a little bit and that liminal space is somewhere we're very happy to exist in and experiment in.”

Q. Are there any examples?

“Well yes, in the displays about Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) we invite people to contribute their experiences and their voice to a discussion. We don't shut things down and welcome debate on things that are complex. It's a shared belief here that it is so important to have a public space for stories which have been silenced. The Mental Health Museum is a unique place - only three places in the country represent this type of research.”

Q. Anything else you focus on?

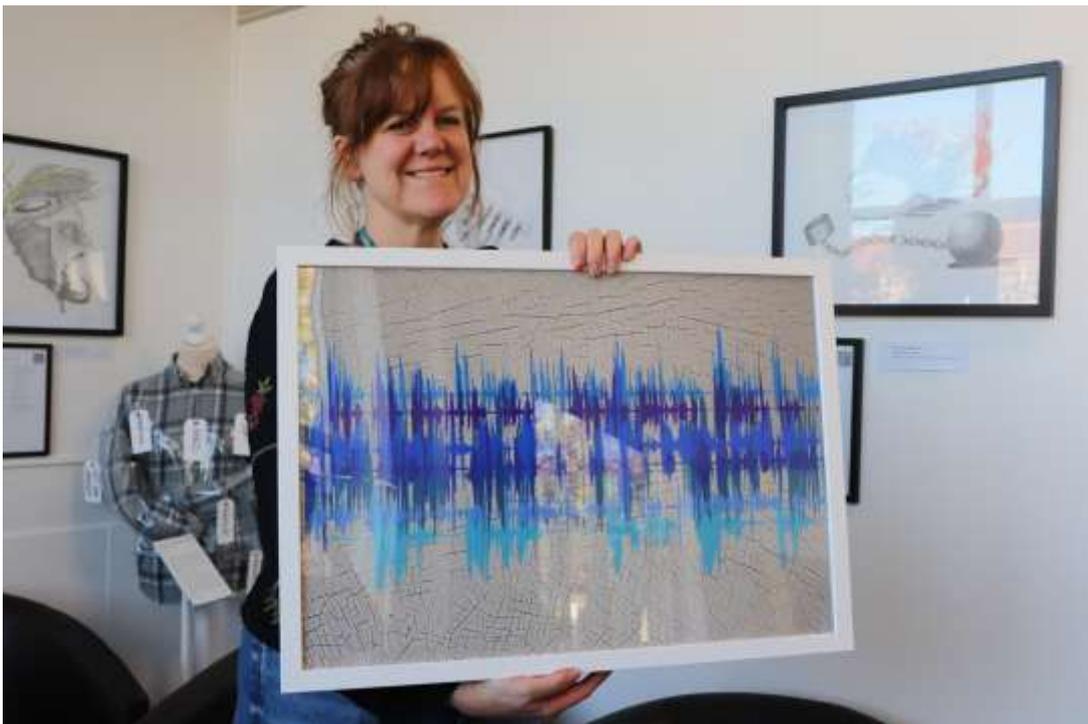
“I think storytelling is key. People have been on a unique life journey, so it is vital to have a place where your story is valued. We want to be given a space to talk about the things that are important to us. Museums have traditionally been places that celebrate the amazing but approaches to museum practice are changing. And the work that is happening here in Wakefield is important in that. Now, we're inviting people to tell their own story because they are the experts in it... This kind of process can shift ideas around it can empower people. What we say here is that we like to give people a space to take ownership of stories. In a medical system that's so important, to empower (people experiencing) mental health issues or trauma.”

Q. What is the physical aspect to this?

“There are many ways we could be considered to be part of people's wellbeing. We create a quiet and contemplative space. We create a temporary and geographic "time out" mechanism - this means we let people think through things via the mechanism of history. For people constantly in medical spaces that's really important, it is something different.”

Q. How is the wellbeing mission changing at the Mental Health Museum?

“It is the fact that people come back into the space as regular visitors that is so important. There are people who use the space regularly and come back a lot - we give people a sense of ownership. We know that we're creating a community in this museum and we know that the community is changing, I think we become a social hub for people too. That's what is special about Wakefield in my opinion, you can take risks and be creative in your thinking. It's a very powerful way of cross working and together we've developed interesting and innovative ways of pursuing creativity. It can be challenging, but the adaptability of Wakefield is really strong. It's a place where possibility is always present.”



Outside In's research group, funded by the British Art Network, explored collections of art created historically in mental health settings. The groups findings are documented in a new publication, shedding light on the often overlooked narratives of artists whose work has faced medicalisation and stigmatisation. By prioritising the voices of artists and those with lived experiences, the group aimed to foster compassionate curating and drive long-term change within the arts sector.

Read about their findings and insights: <https://outsidein.org.uk/news/ban-research-group-resource/>



"the adaptability of Wakefield is really strong. It's a place where possibility is always present" ~ Jane Stockdale, the Mental Health Museum



Why is co-production and a participatory approach important for health and wellbeing?

These themes felt important for many organisations through the inquiry, a way for the sector across the Wakefield district to offer a cohesive and sustainable approach to make a meaningful difference to people's lives.



A person-centred approach

Co-production ensures that creative health initiatives are designed with the needs, preferences, and experiences of the target audience at the forefront. This leads to more relevant and impactful programs.



Breaking Down Barriers

Co-production can help identify and remove barriers that prevent people from accessing creative health opportunities, such as transportation, cost, or stigma.



Community-Driven Solutions

By involving community members in the decision-making process, co-production fosters a sense of ownership and empowers individuals to address their own health and wellbeing needs.



Community Empowerment

By actively involving community members in the design and delivery of creative health initiatives, co-production empowers individuals to take charge of their own health and wellbeing.





Trainee Arts Therapist



Katie Armstrong-Lamb is a trainee arts therapist, working with Spectrum People. She believes in the power of art and creativity to allow people to express their true selves. She delivers a therapeutic process in a holistic way in a nature-focused setting.



Creating a calming space

How art therapy is transforming access to mental health services

A first-person piece capturing the practice and ideas of Katie Armstrong-Lamb, Trainee Art Therapist, and how creative wellbeing can shape autonomy

“I’m the fourth trainee art therapist on placement here at the Appletree Community Garden and the eighth with Spectrum People overall. I’m on placement from Sheffield Hallam University and I just couldn’t imagine doing my placement anywhere else. I wouldn’t do well in a traditional NHS therapy role. What’s really special is the freedom to practise here, that feels really special for Wakefield and for mental health services.”

“My dissertation is about the idea that green space opens up creativity. In the most simple way just looking at a tree out of your bedroom window reduces anxiety. Here is one of the best green spaces and an artistic community too - we’re making a space that’s calming already.”

“In neuroimaging the parts of your brain that light up are at the front. Trauma is in the amygdala, shutting off the interaction. What this means is that my practice is about gently shaping the creativity we offer according to the need.”

"I think it's important to remember that not everyone's the same. Some people might not like getting messy. So, collage is a good one for them. But being welcoming and flexible is the most important thing. When people step foot through the door they say 'ooh it is nice in here'."

"It's a bit rickety and that takes the edge off. I tell people it is OK to make a mess, the theory is that it makes it easier for them to open up."

Building security

"Art therapy is a distraction away from their troubles. It's a chance to look out of the window and get back to reality and that builds security in understanding who they really are and feeling safe. We find this type of approach just works - so many more people seem open to community, proactive, it is such an interesting time to be doing this training - there's an explosion of people interested and it feels so good to be part of it."

"Art therapy is my tool to do therapeutic work. I've chosen art therapy because I've chosen art to communicate. Learning and developing my practice is so important - that's why 'it depends' is my motto and it's my tattoo too. We're navigating complex needs, but I think we already know that a certain sort of person sticks with it here... we've created a safe space that people can be built back up. Art therapy builds resilience and tolerance."

Understanding change

"It's not easy to measure the impact of this work but you can always track progress, I do informal reviews with clients - reviewing after five or ten sessions. What I want to do more of going forward is more data-led impact reporting. That's my aim for 2025 and the next couple of years - to understand the change and to put some data behind how we're helping people in Wakefield navigate these complex challenges."



Images from the art therapy space at Appletree Community Garden

Autonomy and security were not always referenced directly, but the inquiry found that they are truly fundamental to health because of that vital sense of control and agency.

This is a crucial building block to health, according to the people interviewed. Because when people feel like they have the autonomy - a.k.a. freedom and self-power - to make their own choices they are more likely to engage in healthy behaviours and seek appropriate care. This applies to physical health and mental health here in Wakefield.

The inquiry found that just the sense of control that creative endeavours can deliver can have a positive impact on health.

Security is so important too. Interviews referenced both physical and emotional security and creating a foundation for social connections.

In the context of creative health autonomy and security are too easy to overlook. But they are critical for ensuring people receive the best possible care. Artists and cultural organisations can utilise co-creation, participatory approaches and work together as part of a bigger ecosystem in Wakefield to empower individuals - recognising when people need to seek help.





pillar 4: connectedness and purpose

~ the huge emotional impact of feeling loved

pillar four - connectedness & purpose

This pillar features a first-person piece from the Arts, Culture & Leisure Service, Wakefield Council; an interview with the Theatre Royal Wakefield; Q&A and case study from Yorkshire Sculpture Park

A few key quotes from across this pillar:

“It’s about realizing the power of creativity, culture, heritage in addressing inequality and improving wellbeing for everyone – in other words in ‘creating’ health. ” ~ ACL Service, Wakefield Council

“We strive to ensure we provide an inclusive, friendly and safe space for everyone, to develop a sense of belonging within their local community and with one another.” ~ Theatre Royal Wakefield

“There’s something about being outdoors in the landscape here - it allows people to be themselves...” ~ The Yorkshire Sculpture Park

“Light coming through the trees. It means you can think about the world from a different perspective and ground people - connecting them to where they really are and connecting them to where they are going. This is something so special that builds empathy within the group. Everyone can relate to being outside.. the seasons, the trees... it's a connector for people to talk about....” ~ The Yorkshire Sculpture Park





Arts, Culture & Leisure, Wakefield Council



The Arts Culture & Leisure (ACL) Service is part of the Regeneration, Environment & Economic Growth Directorate at Wakefield Council. ACL are uniquely placed to support the wide-ranging outcomes of the district; from supporting health and wellbeing; enabling inclusion; encouraging learning and ambition; place shaping and regeneration: and fostering a sense of pride across our residents and business. This award-winning service achieves this by enabling networks and partnerships to develop and thrive, creating a cohesive approach to increasing engagement in culture, creativity and movement, district wide.



“Creative health can support truly sustainable, and equitable wellbeing solutions, which can meet people where they are at”

In this first-person interview ACL Service Director Julie Russell shares her view on how the Local Authority supports place-based Creative Health activity at scale.

About ACL

The ACL service helps to shape policy, regionally and locally, based on the energy, insight and intelligence from wider networks. It directly provide services, with over 25 venues, including libraries, museums, castles, special collections and active wellbeing hubs (Aspire).

ACL also supports the district tourism function and major festival programme and commissions THW Trust. Wrapped around this direct provision is an ‘asset based’ development approach, supporting resilience and wellbeing across communities, offering advice and co-producing or funding activities at a granular community level.

In 2024 ACL led Our Year (a yearlong celebration of culture, creativity, heritage and movement). Our Year supported 1000+ activities and events district wide and attracted more than 350,000 visitors. In early 2025 ACL opened Wakefield Exchange a new creative sector hub and vibrant destination space for the city.



Julie Russell is **Service Director of ACL** overseeing a team of 400+ and **Chair of the National Chief Culture & Leisure Officer's Association**. Julie is a passionate advocate of tackling health inequalities and the value of creative and active wellbeing to create health by enhancing the quality of lived years. In this first-person interview Julie shares her view on how the Local Authority supports place-based Creative Health at scale.

Q. How do you describe Creative Health and why does it matter?

“Creative health is a magic tonic or pill, but with wider societal benefits than drug provision alone could possibly offer. It’s about realising the power of creativity, culture, heritage in addressing inequality and improving wellbeing for everyone – in other words in ‘creating’ health. Only a small amount of good health and wellbeing is generated by our NHS systems and services, despite the substantial investment, recent reports by Lord Darzi emphasises this as the reason we must get more preventative about health.”

Creative health can support truly sustainable, and equitable wellbeing solutions, which can ‘meet people where they are at’, in highly varied community settings and importantly can help address many aspects of an individual’s wellbeing and personal needs, from isolation, friendship and inclusion, to skills and learning; it’s a perfect tool to help address the ‘causes of causes’. Perhaps beautifully, there are times that creative health supports wellbeing, without the participant even knowing!”

Q. What types of Creative Health activity does the ACL service deliver?

“The Local Authority is ultimately responsible for supporting the health and wellbeing of its population, often led through the public health function, but working in close partnership with services like ACL and a range of wider statutory agencies and bodies. Local Authorities seek to take a strategic approach to population health: across Wakefield district the value of creative health has already been recognised both in prevention (and treatment); but so much more is possible, on relatively smaller investment levels.”

The breadth of opportunity we offer (or enable), provides creative health in a variety of settings for residents, to engage across the life course: underpinned by Marmot principles, such as proportionate universalism, to create equitable access.



Work by Professor Daisy Fancourt, UCL articulates that the very availability of such opportunities at such scale improves the health and wellbeing of communities and individuals. Therefore, it's important to recognise this as a key ingredient to better quality lived years. In addition to this universal offer our ACL service provides and/or enables focused programmes to create health for specific stages across the life course and/or specific groups of greater need, from creative grants to support residents with disabilities, to collection-based memory programmes for those with dementia."

Q. Why do you prioritise creative health and wellbeing within your service provision?

"Many of Wakefield's communities experience multiple health, social and economic inequalities (Wakefield is the 54th most deprived district in England). This has a devastating impact on quality of life, with those in our poorest communities experiencing deteriorated life quality up to 20 years earlier, than those in our wealthier areas. Put simply, without good health and wellbeing we have very little. Tackling systemic health inequalities in place and at scale is essential, to support the district's ambitions to be an inclusive and happy place and one with a thriving workforce to support the economy."

Q. What do you hope that this Creative Health work will change for Wakefield district residents and communities?

"We need to build strong resilient communities, helping communities to help themselves and developing a prevention first concept. By example, what if every GP was incentivised to prescribe lifestyle solutions first (creative or active programmes) before any drugs could be prescribed?"

We also know that long term progress relies upon communities having strengths to lead themselves and so the way we develop, and support communities needs to consider this – increasing co-production and locally tested and tried approaches. Ideally our work as a district in creative health will help shift funding from treatment to prevention, as a small percentage of investment would support significant locally led activity.

In the shorter term by creating health through cultural, creative and heritage participation there is a direct economic benefit through the work delivered, and improving quality of life reduces dependence on overstretched health and social care services which is one of the largest pressures at a local level."



Q. How are your teams gathering evidence of sustained and long-term impact within ACL's work?

"The wide scale of our offer, means we can't collect data all the time. We gather information on several metrics, including qualitative surveys asking key health questions, to wider quantitative metrics. The external funding we received for Our Year 2024 enabled us to test service wide methods of evidence collection including self-reporting questions on wellbeing, happiness and social connectivity. We're excited to see what the formal evaluation brings and how we can apply this learning to our future approach, as this is the largest collection approach at scale we've ever embarked on. On programmes, data collection is easier, and our Wellbeing team is leading on collection of meaningful data based on WELLBYS (Wellbeing Adjusted Life Years), a measure of social value recommended by the Treasury (Green Book) which we aim to implement across our service, in a proportionate manner, to provide some consistency in measurement of health outcomes."

Q. Can you share an example of a recent change-making project or approach that will change your team's future practice?

"It's always tempting to consider 'programmes', because they are easier to isolate and measure! But it's important we recognise the value of the sheer scale of opportunity we either provide or enable as a service, particularly the work rooted in some of our more deprived communities. Ultimately, the outcomes from Our Year 2024 are likely to be the largest district wide experiment on Creative Health we've created to date. However, there are some notable and relatively long-term areas of our offer and programme which are established as change making on health, such as:

- **Our Year 2024 (service wide)** - Impact report awaiting
- **Story Times:** - 'stay and play' engaging families to enhance their literacy (reading and communication) through music, words, creativity and fun.
- **Fifty Things to do before you're 5 (Early Years Team)** - supporting under 5's to be school ready.
- **Youth Forum (NPO Museums & Castles service)** - a co-produced approach to creative programming.
- **Know Your Neighbourhood (Libraries Service)** an ACE funded programme reaching out to individuals at risk of chronic loneliness.
- **Culture Grants (Cultural Development)** – funding for community groups and creatives helping to make culture, creativity and heritage available to everyone, everywhere across our district."





Theatre Royal Wakefield



Theatre Royal Wakefield built in 1894 and designed by the famous Frank Matcham. The theatre hosts a varied programme of produced and touring work. In addition, it provides a busy learning and participation programme, working regularly with young people, socially isolated older people, refugees and asylum seekers and adults working to improve their mental wellbeing.



**“In a rapidly
changing world
the power of
culture to
generate
belonging can't be
underestimated”**

In this piece on the Theatre Royal Wakefield big ideas are shared around how creativity can deliver connectedness for diverse communities and the surprising power of new friendships.

Aoibheann Kelly, Head of Participation, leads Theatre Royal Wakefield's work with children and young people and with communities.

Aoibheann explained that the Theatre Royal Wakefield is a Theatre of Sanctuary.

“It is about wellbeing, but there’s such a social aspect to what we do too. We want people new to West Yorkshire to get to know the place better - that’s why our Conversation Cafe is so important.”

Wakefield district City of Sanctuary offers welcome and inclusion to people whose lives are in danger in their own countries. The charity encourages communities, voluntary groups, faith and community organisations to welcome and assist asylum seekers and refugees. It highlights, communicates and celebrates stories of positive contributions by asylum seekers and refugees, as well as challenging hostility and discrimination.

Arts and creativity can be vital for this, because the number of people needing support is going up, according to government figures. Around 1,250 more people arrived in Wakefield from overseas than left the district, with many seeking refugee status.

Tackling isolation through the arts

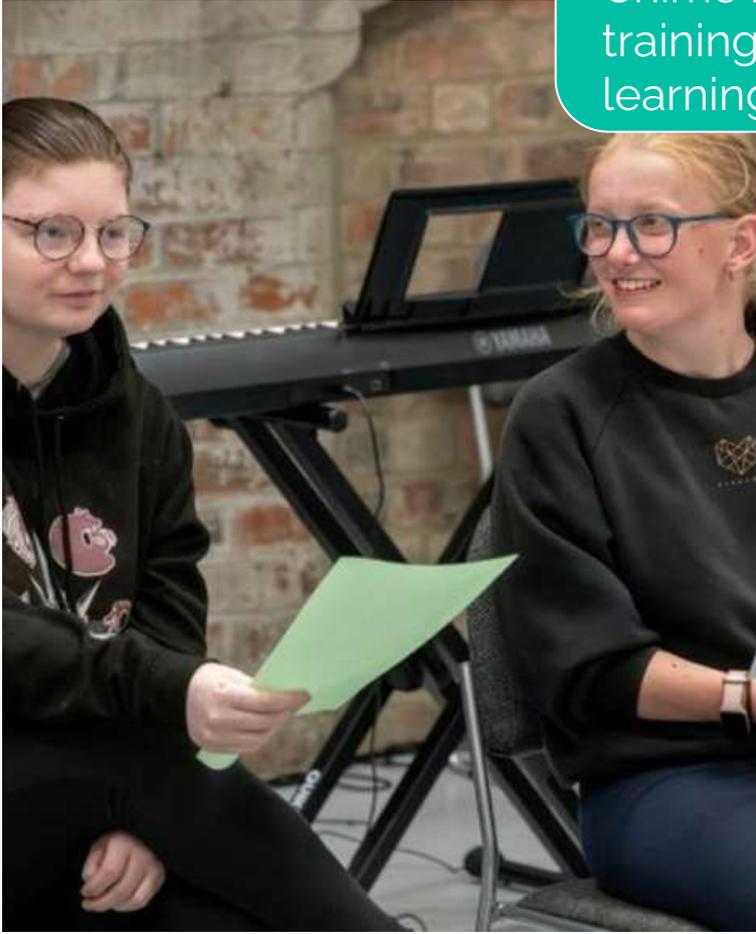
In 2024 The Hatchling, part of Our Year 2024 (Wakefield district Year of Culture, led by Wakefield Council), brought some of the Theatre Royal community groups together - from the Conversation Cafe, Chime and Stepping Out. Aoibheann explained: *“Through the creative activities we provide, we always aim to enhance people’s wellbeing, but the social aspect is incredibly important too. From older people who experience loneliness, to learning-disabled young people and the Asylum-seeking and Refugee communities, we strive to ensure we provide an inclusive, friendly and safe space for everyone, to develop a sense of belonging within their local community and with one another.”*

“Our Integrated Company for The Hatchling, brought people together into one collective for the first time, from across all of our projects, helping participants to view the place they call home in a whole new way. The Hatchling dragon was visiting Wakefield for the first time, and we worked as a collective through creativity, inspired by the theme of belonging, to welcome it with open arms.”

“We strive to ensure we provide an inclusive, friendly and safe space for everyone, to develop a sense of belonging within their local community and with one another.”

Theatre Royal Wakefield

Chime is weekly musical theatre training for young people with learning disabilities, aged 12-25





Yorkshire Sculpture Park



Yorkshire Sculpture Park: Formed in 1977, Yorkshire Sculpture Park is the largest sculpture park of its kind in Europe and is both an independent charitable trust and registered museum. Situated in the 500-acre 18th century Bretton Hall estate, it is host to a collection of contemporary sculptures including work by Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore, as well as important pieces by contemporary artists including Damien Hirst. In seeking to grant, nurture and sustain interest and debate around contemporary art and sculpture, it mounts a year-round temporary exhibition programme and seeks to reach out and enable open access to art, including access for those whose participation in art is not habitual or familiar.



“Noticing, making, playing and being creative outside in nature, builds confidence”

The power of sculpture to create connectedness

Emma Spencer, Informal Learning Manager and Kathryn Brame, Formal Learning Manager at Yorkshire Sculpture Park share what is special about nature and the outdoors and how this impacts on wellbeing.

Q. So, what do you do at Yorkshire Sculpture Park?

Kathryn Brame, Formal Learning Manager, said: *“I manage the schools programme at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, which covers Early Years, Primary and Secondary, through to Further and Higher Education. Our work is grounded in what is special and unique to YSP - which is sculpture in the beautiful Yorkshire landscape. We find that delivering activity outdoors encourages confidence amongst young people, which in turn enhances wellbeing. We explore sculpture outdoors though drawing, making and critical discussion. Being outdoors removes the barriers that some visitors may experience when exploring art in a traditional gallery setting. We often find that students who are usually quieter within their school setting, feel more comfortable to speak up and share their opinions when outdoors with our artist educators.”*

Q. How do you engage with people here?

Emma Spencer, Informal Learning Manager at Yorkshire Sculpture Park looks after families and communities: *“One of our goals is to support people to feel more connected to themselves, others and the wider world. We have the opportunity to make, notice and create in nature and gallery spaces. We have sculpture and nature as our gift and inspiration. This gives us opportunities to make as we move, or while we are or have been in nature. I have noticed that this sometimes helps people feel more comfortable expressing themselves. Walking in itself encourages a sense of ease and wellbeing. We monitor this quite anecdotally, through conversations, feedback and you can sense it in people when they’re here.”*

Q. What else can you say about the connection between confidence and wellbeing?

Kathryn: *“We begin each school session by reassuring students that there is no right or wrong answer when discussing art and that their drawings are an expression of their own unique experience of the Park. This supports confidence, as the children know that they can’t ‘fail’. They are encouraged to connect with and be inspired by the sculptures and the nature around them and to explore their ideas in their own unique way. This non-judgemental approach to making, supports students to be proud of their work, ideas and contributions, which helps them to feel good about themselves.”*

Q. How does Yorkshire Sculpture Park intersect nature and wellbeing?

Emma: *“Nature is at the heart of our programming. We think about nature connectedness, and the different pathways to wellbeing. We have all of YSP and also smaller spaces like our Hidden Forest which is under the trees. We open this space for groups which can help people feel less overwhelmed. We want visitors to be outside and feel welcome, safe and inspired. There's something magical that happens in this space. You are encountering something... light coming through the trees... the sounds and sights of nature. It means you can think about the world from a different perspective, and it can help to ground people - connecting them to where they really are and connecting them to where they are going. This is something so special that builds empathy within the group. Everyone can relate to being outside... the seasons, the trees. It's a connector for people to talk about.”*

Q. How does the Yorkshire Sculpture Park empower teachers through its CPD?

Kathryn: *“We run a programme of continuing professional development for educators which explores new techniques to use in the classroom. We follow a process and materials led approach, which supports teachers to have confidence in allowing their students to follow the process of art making rather than worrying about producing a final outcome. We hope that by empowering teachers to think differently about sculpture and creativity they will feel more confident to pass this on to their students. It is important that our teacher CPD sessions also offer creative and reflective time for educators to develop their own artistic practice and have time for themselves to nurture their own creativity and wellbeing. “*

Q. What other programmes are you proud of?

Emma: *“We’re currently working with STAR Bereavement, a local based charity supporting grief experienced young people. We have developed a year-round programme, using seasonal change to connect, and if wanted talk about their personal stories. In this work the park becomes a priceless tool - providing space, a place to process and make positive outdoor creative memories ”*

Kathryn: *“We also work with Future in Mind, the mental health support team for children in Wakefield. We have worked collaboratively on a wellbeing resource for teacher-led school groups, and they've recommended schools for us to work with, which has been very beneficial.”*



Fostering strong intergenerational connections and a lasting sense of belonging: A case study from Yorkshire Sculpture Park

Yorkshire Sculpture Park is proud of welcoming families and communities into the gallery by fostering a sense of belonging and creating meaningful connections through an emphasis on play, creativity, kindness, and openness. We aim to create a warm, creative and nurturing environment.

A creative intersection of art and nature

Yorkshire Sculpture Park's programming supports all visitors, from the youngest with 'Sculpture Baby' to older adults, ensuring that everyone is seen as an active participant. The park integrates both indoor and outdoor gallery spaces, providing opportunities to support family relationships, be active, be creative and imaginative with materials, and thinking alongside spaces to find solace, and connect to our wellbeing.

Through the interplay of art and nature, we help families understand themselves and be inspired by natural wonders, such as seasonal changes, to reflect on personal growth while discovering extraordinary sculptures which can inspire new ways of thinking and finding meaning. Yorkshire Sculpture Park's Family and Community Programme creates a sense of belonging, helps visitors find meaning in the world around them, and allows imaginations to grow.

We work hard on building positive family relationships, making space for everyone's voice, and supporting adults to be inspired by and discover child-led play and shared imaginations.

Supporting families and communities in our indoor and outdoor galleries gives us opportunities to develop connections, meet people where they are, and build a sense of belonging, encouraging people to feel part of wider communities. We listen to staff, volunteers, visitors, artists, and are always reflecting on what we do, building in the possibility of change and adaptation.

The Family & Community Programme has numerous strands supporting people in different ways to build engagement. We offer family-led activities with Talking Together cards, which spark conversations between ourselves and others, and creative Art Baskets with playful ideas so our younger visitors can make and play alongside our exhibiting artists. For people who enjoy mark-making, we offer imaginative drawing ideas to support Drawing Together. In our main gallery we have transformed the last room into a creative space for all where families and communities can be artists together, with materials to make art, books to read, and opportunities to play and create. We support our activities through family-focused spaces such as the Living Room in the Yorkshire Sculpture Park Visitor Centre, which is a quiet space to read, feed, and catch your breath.

There is also family-led adventure across Yorkshire Sculpture Park: the Art Cart resources are creative activities to carry into the landscape, nature and sculpture scavenger hunt, I Spy, and family holiday trails. The outdoor creative play area, Little Wild Wood, was designed and built in 2024 specifically for visiting families.

Alongside this work we work with specific communities in their spaces and at Yorkshire Sculpture Park to introduce them to the Park with supported sessions building confidence to return independently. This includes a long-term partnership with families from Early Help, LimbBO foundation, Refugee and Asylum Communities, and many other community partners.

The study highlights how the park's emphasis on play, creativity, kindness, and openness creates a welcoming environment that fosters strong intergenerational connections and a lasting sense of belonging. Yorkshire Sculpture Park builds spaces where families and communities can rest, connect, think, play, move, sing, dance, make, laugh, cry, make memories, change, question, feel safe, and grow.

pillar four - connectedness and purpose

Nearly every interview pointed towards a sense of purpose as being key. Throughout the inquiry facilitators and creative organisations noted that individuals with a strong sense of purpose tend to experience higher levels of satisfaction, are more resilient to everyday challenges, and in their general psychological wellbeing.

Through observation this inquiry noted that purpose often unlocked optimism and helped people see the world in a new light - increasing self-esteem and demonstrating how to overcome obstacles.

But there was a sense that purpose didn't work in isolation. Feeling connected to others is so important - it allows a sense of self to develop which can improve both physical and mental health through trying new ideas and activities.

Positive wellbeing outputs from connectedness included new friendships, positive relationships between organisations and communities, and improved energy and determination to take part in diverse clubs and creative activities. Many interviewees noted that connectedness didn't just mean with people and community groups - it also meant being connected to Wakefield's unique landscape, history and heritage.





pillar 5: joy & meaning

~ “a feeling of great pleasure and happiness”

pillar five - joy & meaning

This pillar features two interviews with the Creative Minds team, Phil Walters and Ash Mahmood; big ideas from Judi Alston, the Founder and CEO/Creative Director of One to One Development Trust; and a first-person piece from Heavy Metal Therapy's Kate Quinn.

“So, how I do define wellbeing? It's about solving someone's problems - creativity is such a big part of that. It allows us to implement changes in their lives and hopefully that can be shared in their community too. At the end of the day, it about handing up and not holding hands. Human beings have an in-built versatile way of making change happen for themselves...”
~ Ash Mahmood, Creative Minds

“Many of our members are neurodivergent and we think that we offer wellbeing support to communities who struggle with traditional routes to support and health...” ~ Kate Quinn, Heavy Metal Therapy

“The chance to work together, to collaborate really improved the wellbeing of young people at a pivotal time...” ~ Judi Alston





Creative Minds ~ Ash Mahmood



Creative Minds is an innovation supported and encouraged by its host South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust. Launched in November 2011, it has enabled over 875 creative projects and sports events, integrating creativity with mainstream health and wellbeing practice. Since its inception, Creative Minds has seen over 6,500 people per year benefitting from the work. Partnership working with local creative practices is central to the approach, with approximately 280 formal partner organisations working across the localities of Barnsley, Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield. In 2015, Creative Minds was the winner of the Health Service Journal, Department of Health sponsored award for compassionate care. Creative Minds is Creative Wakefield's NHS partner.



“People need champions”

How Creative Minds is making change happen through the joy of creativity

Ash Mahmood is a Development Worker for Creative Minds with a clear view on how creativity and wellbeing are connected.

“For me, mental health is about activity. It doesn’t have to be art in the traditional sense - it can mean building a bike, playing football or dancing. What is so important is that people are active and doing something. That is what my work is all about, we sponsor and part-fund people and organisations to deliver these activities which have a measurable impact on wellbeing.”

“I always say that people need champions - and that is so true. What we do is try and support people with the ability to make change happen. When people come to us, they don’t believe they want to be part of arts, they want to be part of a community.”

“Saying that, I believe art is actually really powerful. It speaks across cultures and we’re lucky here in Wakefield. People often call it the rhubarb triangle, but it is also a triangle of creativity and culture. With so much history and heritage - Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore - I do believe that it makes a mark. And there’s a universality to it that is so important.”

“When I came to England I didn't speak a word of English, so it is great to be supporting people here through this work. I know that it's a universal thing, it is about uniting people and bringing things together.”

A place-based approach to delivering creative health

“Here at Creative Minds we use the ABC model which means area-based communications. We know where people are and how we need to reach them. My work in Wakefield is all about building a dialogue really, going out and talking to them. When you do this it is amazing to learn how many people are listening. That reaching out and engaging aspect of creative health is important because it empowers people to make their own change happen.”

“I don't like the world social prescribing. Instead, I think we need to do more to invest our money locally. A localised approach is absolutely crucial. I steer clear of frameworks instead I like to leave this work more fluid. But what we're working towards is a different way of capturing evidence and much better reporting.”

Creative health for problem solving

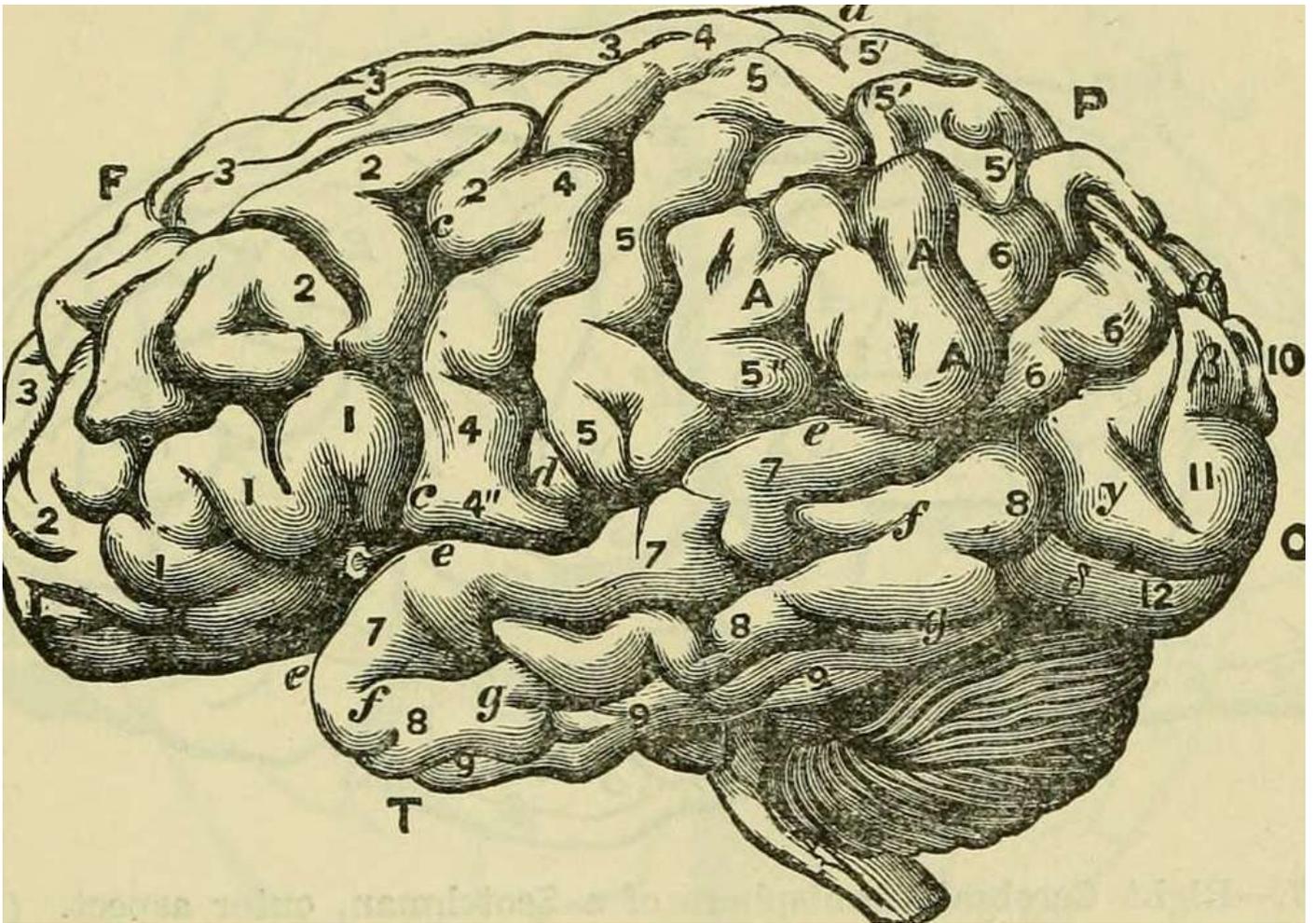
“So, how I do define wellbeing? It's about solving someone's problems - creativity is such a big part of that. It allows us to implement changes in their lives and hopefully that can be shared in their community too.”

“At the end of the day, it about handing up and not holding hands. Human beings have an in-built versatile way of making change happen for themselves.”

**“Creative Health empowers people to make their own change happen”
~ Ash Mahmood**



Creative Minds ~ Phil Walters





Mind the gap: integrating the joy of creativity and the arts into mainstream health

Creative Minds is an innovative charity that integrates creativity and the arts into mainstream health and wellbeing practice. The organisation develops and runs projects for local people, to develop individuals' and communities' mental, physical and psychological wellbeing.

This piece is a strategic view making connections between sports, culture and delivering creative health in an impactful way.

Programmes delivered by the organisation help in stress reduction; emotional expression and cognitive stimulation. Physical health benefits are being measured too; such as increased activity and improved immune function alongside better pain management.

Q. What is the history of the organisation?

Phil Walters, strategic lead for Creative Minds: *“Our organisation has been running for almost 15 years. Since our launch in November 2011, Creative Minds has enabled more than 875 projects inside and outside of NHS services, alongside facilitating over 100 sports events. Together with our team’s dedicated work, this benefits over 6,500 people per year. We have around 280 Creative Minds partner organisations from across all our localities too.”*

Q. Is there a particular focus for this work?

“Yes, if I had to say one particularly important aspect of creative health for us is shared experiences. Participating in creative groups or workshops can foster social connections and a sense of belonging - I think that’s something we do really well. It is about building a community, as creative projects can bring people together and promote a real sense of shared purpose. And of course, this can increase self-esteem and confidence too.”

Q. It seems like there’s a bridge between mental and physical health?

“Yes, I think creativity can help bridge the gap, because the idea of creative expression promotes a holistic approach to wellbeing. Our work here in Wakefield has really shown that by engaging in creative activities it brings joy, fulfilment and a sense of purpose too. Although we’ve been running for almost 15 years now, it somehow feels like we’re just getting started too. By recognising the therapeutic benefits of creative health in Wakefield, healthcare providers can offer more comprehensive and effective care to people and communities who use services.”

Q. How important is human connection to what you do?

“Developing social skills is crucial, isn’t it? It’s part of joy and happiness because we can develop integration by connecting communities with like-minded people. I think when there are shared passions, it can improve people’s quality of life through making new friends and just getting out there by attending Creative Minds events and activities.”

“Engaging in creative activities brings joy, fulfilment and a sense of purpose too”
~ Phil Walters

Q. What is the future for your work?

“Something we’re really proud of here is how Creative Minds links people from NHS services and their carers into creative activities. These days many of our creative partners are keeping in touch with participants via social media and online creative activities, to compliment face to face activities. In order to develop our work, the Creative Minds team support people who use South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust services, their carers and the people in our broader communities to access creative projects if they need support.”

“Creative Minds links people into creative activities and support locally and regionally, including arts, sports, recreation and leisure activities, keeping people stimulated, connected, fit and well. We also link up with local community partners like Recovery Colleges to coordinate activities locally.”

“People that use South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust’s services, their carers and people in our broader community who have needs can link direct to projects or through the Creative Minds team. We are trying to make it as easy as possible for everyone to make these connections or links to Creative Minds and the cultural activities and events we offer with our local partners.”

“I think that’s going to be one of the keys to future success of this work. Removing barriers, simplifying the process and making sure people are aware of the support that is out there.”



One to One Development Trust ~ Judi Alston



One to One Development Trust has a 30-year history of producing groundbreaking films and digital work. An arts charity using digital media to work with communities, they have gained recognition within the Wakefield district, the wider region and nationally for this innovative work. Current projects in the creative health space include Powering Up where One to One Development are working with partners; Wellbeing & Health Action Movement, The Canal Project and young people and doctors from around the UK to radically reimagine health and the delivery of healthcare.



Powering up wellbeing through creativity, digital storytelling and meaningful engagement

One to One Development Trust is led by its founder and CEO Judi Alston. She explains why empowering young people to be creative and author their own story through gaming is so important for wellbeing.

The piece explores the joy of making, playing and gaming and examines why it is so important for wellbeing.

"I'm so proud of my team's work on Our Earth Your Choice, which was a unique video game project co-produced with under 25-year-olds during Covid."

"Innovation was absolutely the key word for the whole of this project, which is free to download and play - that's the best way to experience it."

"The chance to work together, to collaborate really improved the wellbeing of young people at a pivotal time. The game became like a living legacy that tackled eco-anxiety, connected people and sparked joy. It made everyone feel like a superhero!"

"What we discovered is that if you feel like you've got some control in something, you've got agency and you've got power... If you feel powerless you feel very depleted."

"Our Earth Your Choice was more than just a game for people. It was an untold peer to peer adventure that represented the thoughts and ideas of diverse people. Representation is key to wellbeing people want to feel part of something."

“Having met Dr Guddi Singh through ‘Our Earth Your Choice’, we felt an immediate alignment of values and mutual desire to radically change healthcare. For over 30 years One to One Development Trust has worked with young people, displaced communities and older people using creativity to amplify the quiet and unheard voices, challenge stereotypes and inspire positive change.”

“By aligning our organisations, bringing in partners, and drawing on creative practices, we believe that Powering Up is more than a one-off project, it’s a movement where creativity is a force for healthier change.”

Why creative health needs to focus on marginalised communities

“Powering Up is a bold, innovative, creative project that’s inspired a ‘movement’ of social change through the personal development and transformation of both young people and clinicians working together to co-produce and instigate a generational shift in attitudes to healthcare.”

“Young people with chronic conditions are often overlooked because doctors cite them as being difficult to connect with. As a result, adolescents ‘do not attend’ 15% of their medical appointments. These figures represent the most marginalised young people from the poorest backgrounds and with the highest needs. As traditional medical systems fail to engage with this cohort and clinicians lack the skills or time to effectively communicate, a bigger health inequality is compounding.”

“Powering Up advocates and explores what holistic health looks like and how through creative co-production we can create new ways forward in radically reimagining healthcare.”

Powering Up has co-production at its core. A young person as paid Co-Ordinator was the first step. The design and branding created in partnership between artists, young people and clinicians in Wakefield through digital artwork, game design, illustration, film and printing set the tone for Powering Up becoming a collective powerhouse of a project.

Putting the voice of young people centre stage

Young people from one of London's most deprived areas worked alongside clinicians. One clinician shared, "I expected to just watch and applaud the young people, not work alongside them in a performance!" Through drama, dance, and music, clinicians and young people found common ground and forged unexpected connections.

In Birmingham students worked with clinicians on a citizen research project investigating different health concerns in their immediate community then presented their findings to health professionals.

The collective power of Powering up has manifested at the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health conference, The Southbank, in Milestones magazine and at the Health Service Journal Patient Safety Awards where the projects energy, identity, values and young people's voices have been centre stage.

*** Powering Up is a partnership between Wellbeing and Health Action Movement (WHAM), One to One Development Trust, The Canal Project funded by Health Foundation*



"Young people are becoming more and more anxious about climate change and what I see in Our Earth Your Choice is a way to help them cope with their feelings, it helps them feel empowered. Here is a creative solution to a big problem, something that no prescription I could ever give a child would do."

Dr Guddi Singh
Consultant Paediatrician & TV Broadcaster





Heavy Metal Therapy

~ Kate Quinn



Heavy Metal Therapy was born in Wakefield and takes a community psychology approach to mental health and wellbeing. What this means is the organisation takes the principles of the community, of equal partnership of all members. This means the direction of Heavy Metal Therapy is related to the idea of citizen participation. This roots wellbeing within the metal community and the power and resources within the community to support each other. The group's founder explains why this is so important for creative health.



“All my best friends are metalheads!”

A participatory approach creative health

Heavy Metal Therapy has grown in Wakefield, around West Yorkshire and now nationwide in an organic and citizen-led way.

The fact that it is so distinctive and has such a loving and engaged support network means it is a unique offer for Wakefield.

In this piece, the group’s founder Kate Quinn (Principal Clinical Psychologist SWYPFT) tells the story of its growth, its roots and its impact.

“The idea for Heavy Metal Therapy started in 2018, and it was influenced by ideas like participatory action research - something driven by people. That’s always been so important for us. I know that people needing mental health support often engage with music and as a metalhead I know that this community has been stigmatised sometimes due to outdated ideas about heavy metal.

“I do really like the DIY thing. Heavy Metal Therapy has been grown by the community. I think if it’d started with a bigger idea then it might not have been so community-led. We have grown over time - in the direction we’ve been shown by the community.

“Online music communities can provide much needed peer support, especially now as people often live quite isolated lives. For too long there has been a negative connotation associated with preferences for extreme music and membership of the heavy metal subculture, like the ‘satanic panic’ and scare stories like that.”

“Heavy Metal Therapy highlights that many metal fans describe an opposite impact of the scene and music that people from the outside see - and that is the sense of community, the calming effect, the therapeutic and other benefits for wellbeing.

“What I mean by that is that because metal has such a bad reputation, people want to demonstrate its impact for good. And that’s something we’re working on we want to get better at different types of impact measurement.”

A distinctiveness to Wakefield

“Some members use our community as part of a recovery process from addictions; for other people it helps to stop loneliness; and some people just value the support and being part of something. It is all co-created, so we are led by what people want and need. There’s a distinctiveness to Heavy Metal Therapy in Wakefield that is so important.”

“We are so inclusive too. Many of our members are neurodivergent and we think that we offer wellbeing support to communities who struggle with traditional routes to support and health.”

Exploring radical ideas

“Growth is important to us, and I think that momentum has really helped us to build Heavy Metal Therapy into exactly what it is today. The website is obviously important, we are registered as a CIC, and we now sell Heavy Metal Therapy merchandise. After our success in Wakefield we have launched support groups in Bristol, Sheffield, Leeds, Birmingham, London and Coventry too.”

“But it is our peer-to-peer work that is most important to us. The creative health and wellbeing impacts for our community including sharing stories of recovery, building playlists together, writing blogs and stories and exploring radical ideas about the impact of metal on people’s lives.”

pillar five - joy and meaning

Is there anything more important than meaning in your life? The inquiry uncovered that 'meaning' is all about building true relationships with like minded people - but also to yourself. This is something to hold on to in difficult times.

Joy is simpler to describe in that it is a sense of spontaneous happiness that is linked to achievement. Physical activity, arts and culture are ideal catalysts for joy - with numerous case studies bringing this to life throughout the inquiry.

Put simply, joy can trigger awesome physiological and psychological changes that can improve a person's health and wellbeing. New skills, gratitude, letting go and being present to appreciate art and the world can all trigger joy. And this doesn't have to be fleeting - the sense of joy can translate to long-term improvements in wellbeing too.

Finding meaning was a heartbeat of inquiry interviews. It often meant giving people the space to consider their values and how they act on them.

Perhaps the most complex pillar, maybe it is the most important too? Creative health has a unique value here, unlocking new perspectives on meaning that can accelerate wellbeing.



Conclusion



Informing future work

The rich and diverse findings from interviews and case study work led to the development of the 5 pillars framework discussed throughout this report. The pillars serve to highlight what is important about the work of creative health seen in the case studies described. It also allows for people who are engaging in creative health work, or those thinking of embarking on a specific project, to consider the key dimensions where impact of individuals, their communities and the broader economy can be maximised.

The inquiry is in many senses a reflection of the beginning of a much longer journey in relation to creative health. The next phase of the co-commissioned work between Creative Wakefield and the University of Huddersfield will seek to gain a deeper understanding of the necessary conditions required to ensure that such valuable work as evidenced by the case studies described here, can be sustained. The intent is to inform future work led by Creative Wakefield in partnership with University of Huddersfield, including making a contribution to the wider development within West Yorkshire led by the Combined Authority and Integrated Care Board.

From a creative perspective the case studies show what a vibrant, energetic community Wakefield is able to have a positive impact, even save people's lives, through participation in creative activities of many forms has shone through in the various conversations discussed in the report. This is at a time of significant systemic, societal and economic challenge and strife.

The work and activity described here provides a sense of genuine hope for the future.



A thank you to partners, stakeholders, collaborators and supporters

This inquiry was co-commissioned by Creative Wakefield and University of Huddersfield. It was carried out by independent Creative Freelancer, Paul Drury-Bradey, Culture & Social Impact Stories, taking place from summer to winter 2024.

Creative Wakefield, Cultural Compact

Creative Wakefield is a Cultural Compact (place-based-partnership) led by an Independent Chair. It is enabled by strategic investment of external funding managed by the Arts, Culture & Leisure Service, Wakefield Council and by core infrastructure support from the Council. The aim of Creative Wakefield is to foster cross-sector Leadership Networks that will enable creative placemaking. It does this by:

- influencing policy development,
- harnessing academic expertise,
- seeking new ways to unlock resource and opportunity,
- surfacing powerful stories that demonstrate impact.

Creative Wakefield has identified 3 interconnected priority areas: Creative Health, Public Art and Creative Digital. The main focus of this report is on Creative Health yet it reveals many examples of this interconnectivity.

Discover more: creativewakefield.net



A thank you to partners, stakeholders, collaborators and supporters

University of Huddersfield, Creative Health HUB

The Creative Health HUB is part of the new national health innovation campus at the University of Huddersfield. The project is funded by the School of Arts and Humanities and the School of Human and Health Sciences at the University of Huddersfield. The project is working in collaboration with West Yorkshire Combined Authority and core representatives from across the five districts in West Yorkshire. These include people from local authority, university, NHS, creative and cultural industries, voluntary, charity and enterprise organisations.

Discover more:

research.hud.ac.uk/institutes-centres/ceada/creative-health-hub

Wakefield Council, Culture Grants

Culture Grants are managed by the Arts Culture & Leisure Service at Wakefield Council funding a wide range of creative and heritage activities and supporting creative people and groups based in Wakefield district. Many of the creative programmes described in this report are, or have been, supported by Culture Grants.

Discover more:

wakefield.gov.uk/culture-grants



A thank you to partners, stakeholders, collaborators and supporters

Thank You!

Many thanks to the participating organisations and individuals who generously shared their time, expertise and life experiences, making this inquiry possible.

Our Funders

This inquiry was enabled by strategic funding from the DCMS Cultural Development Fund managed by ACE and Wakefield Council, and ACE Cultural Compact Funding managed by Wakefield Council.



Department for
Digital, Culture
Media & Sport

Picture credits

Page 1: Image %: The Hepworth Wakefield

Page 3: Image %: **Health by Nick Youngson CC BY-SA 3.0 Pix4free**

Page 6: Image %: Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Little Wild Wood. Photo by: **David Lindsay**

Page 10: Image %: Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Niki de Saint Phalle, Buddha, 2000. Photo by: **Jonty Wilde**

Page 14: Image %: Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Square with Two Circles, Barbara Hepworth, 1963. Photo by: **Jonty Wilde**

Page 20, 24-26: Images % NCMME

Page 27: Image %: Wikimedia Commons Photo by: **Cecil, CC BY-SA 3.0**

Pages 29: Photos by: **Paul Drury-Bradey**

Page 32: Image %: CYP Service Wakefield Council.

Page 35: Image %: Theatre Royal Wakefield. Photo by: **Robling Photography**

Page 36, 40-41: Image %: The Hepworth Wakefield

Page 43: Image %: Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Robert Indiana, LOVE Red Blue Green, 1966- 1998. Photo by: **Jane Hewitt**.
Artwork © 2022 Morgan Art Foundation Ltd. Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York-DACS

Pages 45, 49: Image %: The Art House Wakefield

Pages 50, 53-4, 57: Images %: **Appletree Community Garden**

Page 58: Images %: **Spectrum People**

Page 64, 68-9 Images %: **The Mental Health Museum**

Pages 71 + 74: Photos by: **Paul Drury-Bradey**

Page 76: Image %: Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Kimsooja, A Needle Woman, Galaxy was a Memory, Earth is a Souvenir, 2014.
Courtesy of the artist and Axel Vervoordt Gallery. Photo by: **David Lindsay**

Page 78 Image %: Our Year 2024, ACL Service Wakefield Council. Photos by: **JMA Photography**

Page 80: Image s%: Our Year 2024, ACL Service Wakefield Council. Photos by: **Nick Singleton**

Page 82: Images %: Our Year 2024, ACL Service Wakefield Council. Photos by: **Nick Singleton; David Lindsay**

Page 84: Images %: Our Year 2024, ACL Service Wakefield Council. Photos by: **JMA Photography; Nick Singleton**

Page 86: Image %: Our Year 2024, ACL Service Wakefield Council. Photos by: **Nick Singleton; Phillip Lickley**

Pages 87 + 90: Image %: Theatre Royal Wakefield. Photo by: **Robling Photography**

Page 91: Image %: Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Large Two Forms, Henry Moore, 1966-1969. Photo by: **Jonty Wilde**

Page 95: Image %: Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Hidden Forest & Early Help Staff Wellbeing Day. Photos by: **Paolina Varbichkova**

Pages 99: Image %: Wikimedia Commons. Photo by: **Corey Coyle**

Pages 101: Images %: **Creative Minds**

Page 104: Image %: Wikimedia Commons. Illustration by: **Henry Charlton Bastian**

Page 107: Image %: CreativeCommons Photo by: **Sam Shennan**

Pages 108 - 113: Images %: **One to One Development Trust**

Pages 114: Image %: Wikimedia Commons Photo by: **Andreas Bohnenstengel**

We're just getting started...

