

Measuring up



The way bait tracks the results of its arts for health programme is starting to show that doing something creative really can make a difference to how we feel.

Well-being is a word we hear a lot these days. In the papers, on the news, in Facebook quizzes our friends are doing. Even the government wants to know if we're happy. bait believes that getting involved in inspiring arts experiences makes people feel better.

Arts for Health manager, Lisa Blaney - a mental healthcare practitioner - explains how bait is working with partners to measure the well-being of local people taking part in South East Northumberland and starting to see results.

“The arts project has helped me relax, feel happier and enjoy doing art again.”

Ashmore House participant

What is WEMWBS?

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) is a scale used to measure positive mental health and well-being. It's a simple self-assessment, with 14 questions asking people to rate things like their confidence, how interested they are in new things and how cheerful they feel. Anyone can take the test on the NHS website: www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/Wellbeing-self-assessment.aspx

How is bait using it?

bait uses WEMWBS to check the impact of its arts for health programme on the well-being of local people. Participants fill in the self-assessment at the start of a project and then again towards the end, so bait can track whether levels of well-being have changed as a result of taking part.

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale was funded by the Scottish Executive National

Programme for improving mental health and well-being, commissioned by NHS Health Scotland, developed by the University of Warwick and the University of Edinburgh.

What's important about this approach?

Lisa: I first came across the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) when I was doing some research for my interview at bait. It gives robust, reliable evidence and it's a much more positive approach than traditional assessments; it's like a breath of fresh air. The wonderful thing is that it literally takes five minutes to answer some straightforward questions. And it uses positive wording which really fits with what we're doing at bait.

What does it tell us?

Lisa: It helps us build a picture of what the impact is. To see a real change takes time – the results show that people who engage in an arts project over a longer period of time show the biggest increase in well-being. Northumberland Recovery Partnership say they're seeing a real difference in their clients when they take part in the arts. Creativity is an open process, and working in a group can be very powerful. People learn from each other.

Who uses it?

Lisa: It can be used with a range of people, anyone aged 13+ really. For example, we're using it to measure the outcomes of numerous art projects ranging from a digital arts project with Healthwise in Cramlington to a creative writing project with Northumberland Youth Offending Service. Theatre director Annie Rigby from Unfolding Theatre worked with a group at Ashmore House and we saw scores rise significantly. We had some great feedback.

Our partners recognise the value of WEMWBS, and some of them are starting to use it themselves. For example, Escape Family Support now use it as a model of best practice in their other services and Newbiggin Learning Hive is piloting it too.

“WEMWBS was introduced to ESCAPE Family Support by bait as a tool that can be used to gather robust and reliable data to measure people's wellbeing. Since using WEMWBS for our art sessions working with bait, we've recently piloted it for a Strengthening Families Course with parents and carers and the results were quite astounding – over 30% increase in people's well-being from the start of the programme to the end. We really like the ease of use and the simple, relaxed format of the questions for participants to complete and we're planning to use it more.”

Nikki Barron, Escape Family Support Team Manager

bait's Arts for Health programme ranges from open sessions where anyone can try out new arts activities, through to working with health and social care professionals, voluntary organisations and charities on targeted provision for groups at risk of mental health issues.

To find out more, contact Lisa Blaney, Arts for Health Manager at bait.
Email lblanky@woodhorn.org.uk

The results so far

- 35 Arts for Health projects
- Over 350 people have attended
- bait has worked with more than 30 organisations and groups from voluntary and public

sectors

- Increase in well-being in people taking part in all arts projects