



Wellbeing programmes in prisons in England and Wales: A mixed methods study

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Abstract

Purpose

In the last decade, there has been growing awareness of wellbeing and its importance, and an increase in the development of activities or programmes aimed at improving wellbeing. The purpose of this study was to investigate what wellbeing programmes were being offered to prisoners in England and Wales and what benefits and other outcomes were experienced.

Design

The study used a mixed methods exploratory design in two phases. Phase 1 was a questionnaire survey of all adult prisons in England and Wales, completed by prison staff. In Phase 2, a sample of survey respondents took part in in-depth interviews.

Findings

The programmes identified in Phase 1 included physical activities, creative arts, mindfulness, horticulture, reading, and animal assisted activities. Prison staff reported a range of universally positive outcomes shared by all programmes, including enthusiasm from prisoners, enjoyment of the activities, and being able to do something different from the usual prison routine. However, in Phase 2, interviewees rarely mentioned direct health and wellbeing benefits. The impetus for programmes was varied, and there was little reference to national policy on health and wellbeing; this reflected the ad hoc way in which programmes are developed, with a key role being played by the Wellbeing Officer, where these were funded.

Originality/Value

The literature on wellbeing programmes in prisons is limited and tends to focus on specific types of initiatives, often in a single prison. This study contributes by highlighting the range of activities across prisons and elucidating the perspectives of those involved in running such programmes.

Background

In the last decade, both in the United Kingdom and around the world, there has been growing recognition of the importance of wellbeing, and an increased focus on programmes or initiatives [1] that seek to reduce stress and improve wellbeing. Such programmes are likely to be particularly beneficial in custodial settings. It is well established that people in prison have much poorer physical, mental and social health than the population at large (Prison Reform Trust, 2019). A disproportionate number of people in prison are from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, and being in prison long-term is known to accelerate ageing by about 10 years, so that the health of a 50-year-old in prison is equivalent to that of a 60-year-old in the wider community (Hayes et al., 2012). Furthermore, there are disproportionately high rates of suicide and self-harm amongst both male and female prisoners in England and Wales (Ministry of Justice 2020). There is therefore a strong

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3 argument that wellbeing programmes can be beneficial both for individuals in prison and for
4 Her Majesty's Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS), as they have the potential to impact
5 positively on the rates of suicides and self-harm and contribute to safer custody for all.
6 Indeed, HMPPS's Business Plan 2018-2019 (HMPPS, 2018) makes clear that issues related to
7 wellbeing are a priority, both by improving partnership working to better meet the needs of
8 prisoners with complex mental health needs and by connecting prisons more strongly to
9 local communities, enabling local community organisations to develop wellbeing
10 programmes for people in prison.
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14 Academics have been debating the concept of wellbeing for decades (e.g. Ryff, 1989).
15 Dodge et al. (2012) contend that previous research has focused on dimensions and
16 descriptions of wellbeing rather than definitions. They propose a definition of wellbeing as:
17 'the balance point between an individual's resource pool and the challenges faced [...] In
18 essence, stable wellbeing is when individuals have the psychological, social and physical
19 resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge'
20 (p.230). We adopted this approach to defining wellbeing, as it develops the more dynamic
21 ideas of positive functioning and flourishing (Keyes, 2002; Seligman, 2012), and enabled us
22 to investigate both the hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of wellbeing. A key insight, that the
23 definition of Dodge et al (2012) uses, is that wellbeing is a form of dynamic equilibrium
24 between the resources – psychological, social and physical – that people can draw upon and
25 the life events or challenges they face. In operationalising this definition for our study, we
26 were careful to focus on the range of different resources that prisoners could bring to bear
27 that would include skills and abilities, relationships, and mood and confidence. We thus
28 distinguished wellbeing from the challenges that might perturb it and the actions and
29 activities that might result from an improvement in prisoners' resources. At the same time,
30 we were aware that many of the dimensions used to measure the resources that give rise to
31 wellbeing are severely limited in a prison setting, for example, autonomy, environmental
32 mastery, and realisation of potential. Thus, when designing the questionnaire, although we
33 made some suggestions as to the resources that prisoners might use to balance the
34 challenges they might meet, we also left it open for respondents to suggest other resources
35 they had detected, and indeed, challenges they thought prisoners had to deal with or had
36 overcome. We chose not to share our definition of wellbeing with study respondents, but
37 instead assumed a level of shared understanding of the concept and left it open to
38 respondents to interpret it as they wished.
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46 Prisons in England and Wales, and internationally, have implemented a variety of wellbeing
47 programmes, although it is likely that these are under-reported in the academic and grey
48 literature. Activities such as yoga, nature-based programmes – primarily animal-based
49 therapy but also horticulture (Moeller et al., 2018) – and creative arts programmes are
50 designed to improve the wellbeing of prisoners. However, our searches revealed a very
51 limited body of literature, both in terms of prison location and initiative type. A small
52 number of studies report on programmes in one or more English and Welsh prisons,
53 including yoga (Bilderbeck et al., 2015), horticulture (Baybutt et al., 2018; Farrier &
54 Kedwards, 2015) and shared reading (Billington et al., 2016). Two systematic reviews/meta
55 analyses included programmes in UK prisons, but focussed only on the effects of peer-based
56 programmes on mental health (South et al., 2014) and on yoga/meditation (Auty et al.,
57 2017). Although digital health and mental health interventions are now available, for
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example through mobile devices delivering interactive interventions for depression and anxiety, we found no evidence that these have been trialled in custodial settings.

Research from the UK and elsewhere, such as Australia (Heard et al., 2013) and the US (Toews et al., 2018) suggests that such programmes can be effective in improving wellbeing. Nevertheless, the systematic reviews cited above report the quality of research as poor in many cases. It is often difficult to establish how many prisons were approached, and therefore information about response rates is lacking. Existing research has tended to focus on single programme types, and in some cases may have studied only one prison, although again this can be unclear. In general, therefore, there appears to have been no systematic attempt to document which prisons are currently offering wellbeing programmes, the nature of these programmes and their perceived effectiveness. This study was developed to address this gap in knowledge regarding prisons in England and Wales, although we anticipate that the findings will be relevant to prisons in the rest of the UK and internationally.

Aims

The primary aim of this study was to examine the use of programmes within English and Welsh prisons to enhance the wellbeing of prisoners. The research also aimed to identify the programmes offered by these prisons, whether prison staff believe they had an impact on the wellbeing of prisoners, and why.

The research questions were:

- What programmes are offered in English and Welsh prisons that are designed to enhance prisoner wellbeing?
- Do staff think these have been effective?
- How did prisoners demonstrate improved wellbeing?
- Why were specific benefits anticipated?
- In the light of these experiences, are prisons likely to introduce further wellbeing programmes or programmes?

Methods

The study adopted a sequential mixed methods approach and used a cross-sectional design to explore the nature and effectiveness of current wellbeing programmes in prisons in England and Wales, as reported by prison staff. Data were collected between September 2019 and March 2020.

Phase 1: Survey

Data collection

A questionnaire designed by the research team was distributed by post to all 101 adult prisons in England and Wales; the envelopes were addressed to the safer custody team and directed towards prison staff involved in prisoner wellbeing programmes. Survey packs included written information about the study, the Prisoner Wellbeing Survey questionnaire and a contact sheet for respondents to complete if they would be willing to take part in an interview in Phase 2. The questionnaire asked for details of up to three wellbeing programmes offered in the last 12 months in the prison. Respondents were asked to

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3 describe, for each programme, the anticipated benefits, the impacts on prisoners' wellbeing
4 and any other positive or negative effects they felt each had had. A further question asked
5 them, for each programme they had mentioned, to assign a score from 1 to 7 to indicate
6 how much a list of nine outcomes had improved (1 = significantly worsened to 7 =
7 significantly improved). These outcomes were: i) ability to deal with problems, ii)
8 relationships and interactions with others, iii) mood and outlook, e.g. cheerfulness and
9 optimism, iv) self-esteem, v) confidence. vi) feeling stressed, vii) physical fitness, viii)
10 programme-specific skills and learning, and ix) social status or standing with other prisoners,
11 officers or visitors. These reflected the range of measures used in studies of prisoner
12 wellbeing. These include: improvements in happiness and calmness (Billington et al, 2016;
13 Toews et al, 2018); skills development (Baybutt et al, 2018; Heard et al, 2013; Leonardi et al,
14 2017); decreases in stress, negative affect and aggression, and improved mood (Bilderbeck
15 et al, 2015; Deng et al, 2019; Leonardi et al, 2017; Yang et al, 2018); improved social
16 relations and prisoner behaviour (Auty et al, 2017; Baybutt et al, 2018; Farrier & Kedwards,
17 2015) and positive changes in motivation, self-efficacy, life satisfaction and self-esteem
18 (Deng et al, 2019; Yang et al, 2018). Reminder letters were sent after two weeks to all non-
19 responders to maximise the response rate.
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24 25 *Data analysis*

26 Survey data were entered into a spreadsheet and subjected to statistical analysis using SPSS
27 (by DM). Free text responses were analysed using thematic analysis (by DM and GRG). A
28 grounded approach was used to identify thematic groups for the classification of responses
29 towards the following variables: activity type, anticipated benefits, actual benefits, and
30 other benefits. These themes were discussed with and approved by the wider research
31 team. Next, two researchers independently analysed the responses and coded them using
32 the thematic categories. Any disputes between the researchers were discussed and settled
33 with a third researcher.
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37 *Phase 2: Telephone interviews*

38 39 *Data collection*

40 In Phase 2, qualitative data were collected by telephone interviews (undertaken by NK, CL
41 LH and VG). Prison staff who had completed the survey and indicated willingness to take
42 part in a telephone interview were contacted by telephone or e-mail. Of these, eight
43 confirmed their willingness to take part. Unfortunately, the final two scheduled interviews
44 could not be carried out because of the COVID-19 lockdown and the extra demands this
45 created on prison staff's time.
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49 *Data Analysis*

50 The telephone interviews were analysed using the Template Analysis (TeA) style of thematic
51 analysis (Brooks et al., 2015; King, 2012). This is a form of generic thematic analysis that
52 balances flexibility and structure. It involves the iterative development of a coding template
53 by applying successive versions to samples of data, revising and re-applying until a final
54 template is produced. The data set as a whole is then coded to the final template. TeA
55 allows for the use of tentative *a priori* themes that may be drawn from the literature and/or
56 from real-world concerns shaping the analysis, such as evaluation criteria.
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3 In our analysis, we started with seven a priori themes, drawn from the literature and
4 preliminary analysis of the survey responses. These were: *Impacts on prisoner wellbeing,*
5 *Wider impacts on prisoners, Impacts on prison staff, Motives for setting up schemes,*
6 *Institutional support, National policy context, and Public and media perceptions.* Three
7 members of the team (NK, VB, VG) independently coded two of the transcripts and then
8 critically compared coding to produce an initial template. The process was then repeated on
9 further transcripts until a final template, with nine top-level themes, was agreed and used
10 to recode the entire set of interviews. The top two coding levels of the final template are
11 shown in Figure 1, along with the third level of subthemes for 'Type of impact'.
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15 **(Figure 1 here)**

16 *Ethical considerations*

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18 Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the University of Huddersfield Research
19 Ethics Committee and the HMPPS National Research Committee (NRC) prior to
20 commencement. In Phase 1, consent was assumed if the participant completed and
21 returned the survey. In Phase 2, all potential participants who sent the research team their
22 contact details were sent an information sheet and consent form, and they completed and
23 returned the consent form before taking part in an interview.
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29 **Findings**

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31 Thirteen surveys were completed and returned in Phase 1 (12.8% response rate), and six
32 respondents took part in telephone interviews in Phase 2. The characteristics of the sample
33 for both phases of the study are shown in Table 1.
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36 **(Table 1 here)**

37 *Phase 1 Findings*

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39 All responding prisons mentioned at least one wellbeing programme (33 in total) and these
40 were categorised into eight different groups: Physical activities (8, including running, yoga,
41 'morning bootcamp'); creative arts (8, including arts and crafts sessions, art courses, art
42 therapy and music courses); mindfulness sessions (4); advice and help (2); horticulture (3,
43 including team gardening and horticulture classes); reading (3); animal assisted activities
44 (AAA) (3, including dog therapy and tending chickens) and other (2, including 'good
45 vibrations' and fidget spinner activities). Responses about the anticipated and actual
46 benefits of the programmes were categorised into eight different groups (see Table 2) and
47 the responses to other benefits were categorised into five groups following thematic
48 analysis of free-text data.
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54 **(Table 2 here)**

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56 The anticipated and actual benefits of the different activity types are presented Table 3. In
57 relation to the anticipated benefits, health benefits (33.3% of the programmes) were cited
58 most frequently, followed by skill development (30.3%) and emotional awareness (27.3%).
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3 Physical activities appeared to have a diverse range of anticipated benefits in addition to
4 maintaining health. Creative arts were primarily used for skill development and enjoyment
5 or distraction. As one would expect, mindfulness programmes were predominantly used to
6 promote emotional awareness and positive mental wellbeing. Horticultural programmes
7 were expected to produce multiple benefits and, alongside physical activity, were the only
8 programmes where a sense of achievement among prisoners was an anticipated benefit.
9 Reading programmes were primarily thought to benefit skill development. All animal
10 assisted programmes were expected to improve mental wellbeing.
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14 When asked to describe the actual observed benefits relating to prisoner wellbeing,
15 respondents indicated a diverse range of positive effects that did not always reflect those
16 anticipated. In almost no cases were anticipated wellbeing benefits exactly matched by
17 those observed, and on 23 occasions (of the 48 times different benefits were mentioned
18 across the 33 wellbeing programmes) the anticipated benefits were not subsequently
19 observed. On the same number of occasions (23 out of 48) benefits were observed that
20 were not anticipated. Table 3 therefore presents no clear picture that observed benefits
21 matched those anticipated.
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25 **(Table 3 here)**

26
27 Respondents were asked to report other (non-wellbeing) benefits of each programme;
28 however, five of these responses were related to wellbeing and the majority of these (four)
29 had already been reported as an 'observed benefit' of the programme. One response
30 identified a wellbeing benefit that had not been reported as an 'observed benefit' and thus
31 was subsequently moved into the 'observed benefits' column. The remaining 'other'
32 benefits (see Table 2) related to promoting prisoner engagement with the community and
33 with programmes ($n=9$), reduction in transgressions ($n=4$), personal development ($n=4$),
34 enjoyment/distraction ($n=2$) and quieter periods ($n=1$). Although some of the
35 aforementioned qualities overlap with wellbeing, it is important to note that they were not
36 acknowledged as wellbeing attributes by respondents.
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41 Respondents were also asked to score each programme in relation to different aspects of
42 wellbeing improvement (see Table 4). The data suggest that all programmes had perceived
43 positive effects on some form of wellbeing and none of the programmes had any perceived
44 adverse effects on prisoner wellbeing (scores <4). The type of programme perceived as most
45 beneficial appears to be horticulture.
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48 **(Table 4 here)**

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50 *Phase 2 findings*

51
52 Six telephone interviews were conducted with prison staff (see Table 1); the mean length of
53 interview was 40 minutes (range: 12-80 minutes). Interviews took place from September
54 2019 to February 2020. As well as shedding light on the observed benefits of the
55 programmes, these data also exposed some of the issues that underpinned the running of
56 the wellbeing programmes. We will present the qualitative findings in relation to four broad
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3 areas: setting up and developing programmes, the perceived impact of programmes,
4 evaluating programmes, and the wider criminal justice context.
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6 7 *Setting up and developing programmes*

8 The most commonly mentioned impetus for setting up new programmes was in response to
9 ideas from the prisoners themselves; sometimes this was just one individual, but more
10 commonly it was a group with a shared interest or enthusiasm. For example, the interview
11 from Prison 8 refers to a group of especially keen prisoners who are often instrumental in
12 initiating and running new programmes:
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15 *There's the top 5 to 10 percent that are actively engaged in organising events, that*
16 *might be members of our prisoner council, which self-organises, represents the*
17 *prisoner group to me, they might be peer supporters or in key positions around the*
18 *prison. And we do rely here an awful lot on the men to do an awful lot for us.*
19

20
21 Four interviewees gave examples of instances where the impetus for new programmes
22 came from staff and two referred similarly to Governors. The reasons given for setting up
23 new programmes, other than the enthusiasm of prisoners or staff, were quite disparate and
24 included responses to specific concerns (such as self-harm and violent behaviour), the wish
25 to widen access to particular activities, or in two instances in response to relevant research
26 evidence.
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30 In terms of the factors that influenced the success or otherwise of wellbeing programmes,
31 there was extensive discussion of institutional support and barriers. The overall ethos of the
32 prison towards health and wellbeing was mentioned frequently, especially in terms of
33 support from Governors and senior leaders:
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36 *I wouldn't have been able to do it without, erm, you know, the Governor and the*
37 *Head of Education, they've both been really good. Erm, and I have had ones that are*
38 *a load of flannel and nonsense. (Prison 3)*
39

40
41 *I think back in the day, if you go back five, nearly ten years ago, it was all about lock*
42 *and key type thing and, um, providing a programme - an accredited programme to*
43 *deal with their offending behaviour. And that was about it really, now with these*
44 *types of interventions and this type of work coming into the prison, I think it is valued*
45 *massively now at [prison name]. (Prison 12)*
46
47

48 Funding and resource issues were referred to by all the interviewees, as might be expected;
49 these included issues of physical space, the suitability of the prison environment for specific
50 activities, and the availability of staff with the right skills, as well as the purely financial
51 costs. In four of the six interviews, the question of the sustainability of programmes was
52 highlighted; while it might be relatively easy to start a new initiative, keeping it going in the
53 longer term could be more of a challenge. The interviewee from Prison 3 said:
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57 *So the biggest issue for me is trying to get the activities that I'm doing embedded*
58 *properly, not just as bolt on extras.*
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3 While security issues relating to proposed new programmes were referred to by most of the
4 interviewees, they were rarely portrayed as insurmountable barriers.
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7 Four of the six interviewees emphasised a collaborative approach to developing and running
8 programmes and reported an involvement of local agencies or organisations. Several talked
9 about the nature of health and wellbeing leadership; specifically, they described the scope
10 of their role and their background prior to current role. There were comments from three of
11 the six interviewees about programmes “evolving” over time; this was mostly presented as
12 an organic process, rather than anything more planned:
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15 *...then we set up a range of interventions within that department, um, which now has*
16 *grown sort of across the establishment. (Prison 12).*
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19 It was notable, though that there was relatively little discussion of how programmes ended,
20 with only brief mentions of this by two of the interviewees.
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23 *The perceived impact of programmes*

24 While wellbeing impacts were reported extensively, direct effects on the health of prisoners
25 were not mentioned very often, and primarily by just two interviewees. (By this we refer to
26 such things as improvements to physical and mental health, withdrawal from substance use,
27 becoming calmer or more relaxed and sleeping better.) Interviewees were more likely to
28 focus on emotional impacts such as prisoners responding positively to programmes, their
29 obvious enthusiasm for them, the relief they provide from prison routine and a general
30 positivity. Prisoners’ self-development stood out as being impacted by the programmes in
31 all prisons except one. In particular, taking ownership of their lives and developing a sense
32 of self-worth and pride were emphasised by all interviewees except one. For example:
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36 *And I've always been surprised sometimes when you get some men who had often*
37 *quite difficult backgrounds or childhoods that have struggled with education, and*
38 *actually give them something practical to do. Whether it's learning a practical skill, or*
39 *art or pottery, we in the past have run a radio production course. They really engage*
40 *with that because they actually enjoy doing it. And if you can get them into*
41 *something that they enjoy doing, and they're positive about, again, you're more likely*
42 *to reinforce that with their re-settlement journey. (Prison 8)*
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46 Interviewees also noticed the impact of the initiatives on prisoner relationships, particularly
47 in terms of developing friendships and good working relationships with other prisoners, and
48 in some instances with staff too. Talking about a prison fun-run, the interviewee from Prison
49 1 said:
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52 *Again it is about equality between staff and offenders, you know, everybody takes*
53 *part, um, obviously there is still a, um, hierarchy, but you know, it helps with*
54 *communication, um, it helps with building that community spirit, um, it's a whole,*
55 *um, site event so everybody gets involved in it, um, a bit like a village fete, so yeah it*
56 *works quite well.*
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3 Other types of wellbeing benefit that were not directly related to individual health were
4 highlighted quite often, with five of six interviewees describing such things as impacts on
5 prisoner behaviour, sense of community in the prison and encouragement to try further
6 new activities.
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9 Some interviewees reported benefits to staff as well as prisoners (such as job satisfaction
10 and the ability to engage in and benefit from the programmes themselves), and this was
11 especially the case for one of the prisons. However, in general, there was little discussion of
12 the impact of programmes on prison staff.
13

14 15 *Evaluation of programmes*

16 There was little evidence of the use of any kind of formal or systematic evaluation of
17 wellbeing programmes. Where there was any reference to evaluation, it was often of an
18 informal rather than a formal nature, and discussion of the issue was usually only in
19 response to an interviewer's direct question. The enthusiasm of prisoners for programmes
20 and anecdotal accounts of positive impacts were seen as evidence of success:
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24 *No, we have done no formal evaluations, but you know it is hugely recognisable that*
25 *when, um, we have got certain prisoners that we, you know, who if we wanted to we*
26 *could do some sort of evaluation, but it is easily identifiable; that one, for example,*
27 *he doesn't self-harm or misbehave at all when he is on the boot camp, at all you*
28 *know, so good, we have got another one or two that normally they are in trouble,*
29 *you know, quite um, give a lot of back chat to staff, but when they go back to the unit*
30 *they just don't do it anymore. (Prison 12).*
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34 Interviewees suggested it was difficult to judge the benefits of particular programmes
35 because prisoners might have been involved in several different programmes. They also
36 referred to finding a degree of variation between prisoners in terms of what the benefit of a
37 particular programme was, and this made it hard to assess the overall impact.
38

39 40 *The wider criminal justice context*

41 Only two interviewees mentioned the national policy context relating to health and
42 wellbeing priorities in prisons, and then only very briefly. This is despite the fact that there
43 were plenty of examples of programmes that were relevant to issues such as substance use
44 and mental health. There were more references to collaboration and information-sharing
45 between prisons, but the programmes themselves were very much discussed in terms of the
46 local needs, demands and constraints within the interviewees' own establishments.
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49 Three of the interviewees talked about public perceptions of wellbeing programmes,
50 especially through the media. For example, the interviewee from Prison 7 said:
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53 *Everything is public purse money so when we're purchasing things that deliver things*
54 *in a prison, so we have to take that into account, and it's also, we often have the Sun*
55 *or the Daily Mail [...] you know, if the papers got hold of it, how would they think of*
56 *what we're doing in the prison?*
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3 They recognised that in some cases external publicity (good or bad) could significantly
4 influence the future of a programme. It was notable that the interviewee from Prison 8
5 discussed this issue far more often and in more detail than the others:
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8 *So we are always mindful of we operate them in a very political environment with a*
9 *lot of public focus on us.*
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11 This reflected both his role as a Governor and some issues of pertinence to an Open Prison
12 in particular.
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15 16 17 **Discussion**

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19 As has been found in other studies of prison wellbeing programmes, there is a wide range of
20 positive changes in prisoners that fall within the construct of 'wellbeing'. This picture is
21 supported by the results in our exploratory study from the perspectives of prison staff. The
22 programmes they oversaw were reported to have a positive effect on health and wellbeing
23 and to improve mental health. 'Wellbeing', in relation to the programmes discussed,
24 appeared to be perceived in common sense terms as activities meant to occupy, educate or
25 entertain, which promote positivity and improve self-regard. The definition of wellbeing
26 proposed by Dodge et al (2012), which goes beyond the simple listing of dimensions, could
27 potentially be drawn upon in future research by focusing attention on the extent to which
28 programmes enable prisoners to develop the emotional, psychological and social resources
29 to cope with the challenges of prison life and to prepare for life after imprisonment.
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34 Table 4 suggests that no programmes in our survey were perceived to have had negative
35 effects, with horticulture programmes perhaps seen to have the most positive effects and
36 mindfulness and reading programmes the least positive effects on wellbeing. However,
37 although interview respondents did mention other benefits such as prisoner self-
38 development, prisoners taking ownership of their lives and developing a sense of self-worth,
39 and improved prisoner relationships, and also overwhelmingly talked about how prisoners
40 were enthusiastic and enjoyed and engaged with the programmes, they did not see these as
41 components of improved health and wellbeing. This perhaps reflects the fact that there was
42 little formal evaluation of the impact, benefits or effectiveness of the programmes. As
43 reported in the interviews, assessment of impact was usually informal and impressionistic
44 but did find many general benefits. For example, respondents reported that the
45 engagement with the programme also led to more engagement with other aspects of prison
46 life. Compared with the bulk of existing literature on such programmes however, there was
47 relatively little mention in the interviews of the impact on mental health or skills acquisition,
48 although these issues were mentioned in the survey responses.
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54 Despite the clearly positive benefits to wellbeing programmes, our interviews particularly
55 revealed the rather ad hoc manner in which programmes were established and developed.
56 We found little evidence of a systematic choice of programmes. They often resulted from an
57 idea on the part of the prison officers or governor or from suggestions by prisoners, rather
58 than from an identified need, such as improving mental health or reducing self-harm. Often
59 Wellbeing Officers had a general idea that they might do some good, or programmes
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3 resulted from enthusiastic staff or management. Senior management support was
4 important too, as was relationships with outside organisations. There was little reference
5 by interviewees to successful programmes at other prisons or to any literature about
6 wellbeing programmes, nor to specific problems that needed addressing, and there was
7 little mention of the general policy context (with the exception of one prison governor
8 interviewed). Although the HMPPS Business Plan (2018) identifies priorities that can be
9 viewed as related to wellbeing (such as improving living conditions and improving responses
10 to prisoners with complex needs including mental health difficulties and substance use),
11 there are no priorities explicitly focused on wellbeing. Our research indicates that the
12 initiation of wellbeing programmes is ad hoc and only takes place in prisons that have
13 managed to find funding to support a Wellbeing Officer and/or have the resources (such as
14 space or staff) to support new programmes. This may go some way to explaining the finding
15 in the survey phase of a relatively poor relationship between the anticipated benefits of
16 programmes and those actually observed. Without a systematic review of the evaluations of
17 similar programmes it would be hard to accurately predict the expected benefits.
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23 Perhaps one consequence of the lack of formal evaluations was that our research found
24 little consideration of how programmes might be continued, modified or improved.
25 Interviewees made no mention of any process of development of programmes nor of any
26 discontinued programmes (e.g. because of lack of resources, poor results or lack of
27 enthusiasm by prisoners).
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30 Since the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 the prison system in England and Wales has
31 been subject to a severely restrictive regime. This has reduced the time spent out of cells to
32 about 30 minutes a day, suspended prison transfers, and new arrivals are quarantined for
33 14 days (Prison Reform Trust, 2020). There has been a suspension of jury trials and delays to
34 court hearings and so the time spent on remand for many prisoners has increased. Remand
35 is a period in which offenders are especially vulnerable and often ruminate about legal
36 outcomes and become distressed, uncertain and anxious about their future (Freeman &
37 Seymour, 2010). Adult social visits have been temporarily suspended but family and friends
38 can make video calls to people in prisons using a mobile phone or tablet. However, this is
39 not available in all prisons and a prisoner is only allowed one 30-minute video call a month
40 (Prison Reform Trust, 2020). With all of these new restrictions, many recreational and
41 occupational prison programmes have been halted. Alternative activities are scarce in
42 prisons, where access to equipment and the internet is restricted. Increased time spent in
43 cells (up to 23 hours per day) and scarcity of programmes will certainly have had an impact
44 on the wellbeing, both mentally and physically, of prisoners.
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50 *Limitations of the study*

51 Major limitations of this study are the low response rate in the survey and the small number
52 of interviews conducted. However, the degree to which our findings from the survey agree
53 with those of other studies suggests that our findings are probably reliable. The small
54 number of interviews in the qualitative phase of the study is not necessarily a drawback, as
55 its purpose was to build upon the picture established by the survey phase and raise further
56 issues. Nevertheless, our conclusions have to remain tentative. In fact, we suspect that the
57 low response rate reflects the small number of prisons where there is a Wellbeing Officer,
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3 and of course this reflects our finding about the key role such staff play in establishing
4 wellbeing programmes.
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7 Our study also did not establish some key data. The first is that we have no direct data on
8 what prisoners thought about the programmes or what they found the benefits were. We
9 know, or at least we were told by our prison officer respondents, that the prisoners were
10 enthusiastic and experienced some positive changes, but it could be revealing to ask
11 prisoners directly what they thought about the programmes. Second, although we got data
12 from one women's prison this was insufficient for us to draw any conclusions about gender
13 differences in the impact or development of wellbeing programmes. Third, we have nothing
14 about the impact of programmes on the feelings and experiences of other prison staff.
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17 **Recommendations**

18 Since our findings are based on research with prisons in England and Wales, our
19 recommendations relate principally to these. However, to the extent that at least some of
20 the issues pertinent to wellbeing initiatives will be relevant to prisons in the rest of the UK
21 and internationally, we argue that they merit broader consideration.
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24 *Recommendations for policy and practice*

25 There is a need for systematic and thorough evaluation of wellbeing programmes to ensure
26 they are both worthwhile (i.e. having noteworthy and significant benefits) and cost
27 effective. This would enable a robust case for funding/continued funding for successful
28 programmes to be made, enabling them to be further embedded into the work of the
29 prison. Along with establishing desired wellbeing outcomes, evaluations need to link
30 programmes with data about self-harm, violence, recidivism, and drug taking. COVID-19
31 provides prisons with an opportunity to explore and evaluate strategies for new and novel
32 wellbeing programmes that respond to the restrictions introduced, such as exercise in cells,
33 mindfulness and novel wellbeing applications via digital methods, the latter of which may
34 have particular relevance in custodial settings.
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39 *Recommendations for research*

40 Future research should seek to explore what wellbeing means to people in prison and how
41 their experience of prison might be improved through wellbeing programmes. It would be
42 valuable to explore how wellbeing is defined and interpreted within the criminal justice
43 system and how this compares with academic understandings of the concept. Studies are
44 also needed to investigate gender differences in prisoners' views of programmes. Evaluation
45 research would help prisons establish how to evaluate the impact of their programmes
46 effectively and efficiently.
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50 **Conclusion**

51 The evidence of this study and many other similar studies of wellbeing programmes in
52 English and Welsh prisons is that they work, at least in improving prisoners' wellbeing. There
53 is some suggestion from our study that horticulture programmes may be particularly
54 effective, but this must be treated with caution given the sample size and the nature of the
55 data. We have been unable to undertake any cost benefit analysis of programmes.
56 Notwithstanding differences in the structure and delivery of prison services elsewhere, it
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3 seems likely (and in line with the limited research evidence) that wellbeing programmes in
4 prisons internationally will be similarly successful but also lack systematic evaluation.
5 Moreover, our findings suggest programmes may not target particular needs, but rather all
6 programmes tend to produce general benefits. Nevertheless, we have strong evidence that
7 the process of selecting programmes and developing them tends to be ad hoc, and poorly
8 supported by reference to the published literature, previous evaluations, or experience of
9 programmes at other prisons. We therefore believe there is a need for well-constructed
10 evaluations of wellbeing programmes to be undertaken in collaboration with the Wellbeing
11 Officers who are running them, and for the results of these evaluations to be made easily
12 available to all prisons in England and Wales.
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18 Endnote

- 19 1. The research and policy literature refers to these as interventions, programmes, initiatives and
20 activities. The term 'programmes' is used throughout this paper to refer to them.
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Wellbeing programmes in prisons in England and Wales: a mixed methods study

Figure 1

Figure 1: Coding Template (top levels)

1. Impacts on prisoner health and wellbeing
 - 1.1 Type of impact
 - 1.1.1 Direct health impacts
 - 1.1.2 Positive responses to programmes
 - 1.1.3 Relationship impacts
 - 1.1.4 Prisoners' self-development
 - 1.1.5 Wider wellbeing impacts
 - 1.2 Timing of impact
 - 1.3 Who can benefit?
2. Impact on prison staff
 - 2.1 Sense of satisfaction
 - 2.2 Emotional connection with prisoners
 - 2.3 Staff can engage in / benefit from activities
 - 2.4 Governor shown in a good light
 - 2.5 Staff personal development
3. Impetus for setting up schemes
 - 3.1 Governor's enthusiasm
 - 3.2 Local contacts and agencies
 - 3.3 Prisoners' ideas
 - 3.4 Staff's ideas
 - 3.5 Response to a specific problem in prison
 - 3.6 Transferring ideas from previous job/role
 - 3.7 Desire to widen access
 - 3.8 Responding to research evidence base
4. Institutional support and barriers
 - 4.1 Ethos of prison towards health and wellbeing
 - 4.2 Funding and resources
 - 4.3 Security issues
 - 4.4 Staff attitudes
 - 4.5 Collaborative approach (internal and/or external)
 - 4.6. Means of communication
 - 4.7 Prisoner attitudes to initiatives
 - 4.8 Type of prison
5. Public and media perceptions
 - 5.1 Positive public perception of prisoners' achievements.
 - 5.2 Positive coverage of prisoners' achievements in local media
 - 5.3 Prisons aware of politics and being in the public eye
 - 5.4 Negative public perceptions of interventions
6. Nature of health and wellbeing leadership
 - 6.1 Autonomy and discretion of role
 - 6.2 Funding security of role
 - 6.3 Personal working style
 - 6.4 Personal characteristics
 - 6.5 New role
 - 6.6 Role facilitates collaboration
 - 6.7 Scope of role
 - 6.8 Background prior to current role
7. Development of initiatives
 - 7.1 Evolution
 - 7.2 Accumulation of small things

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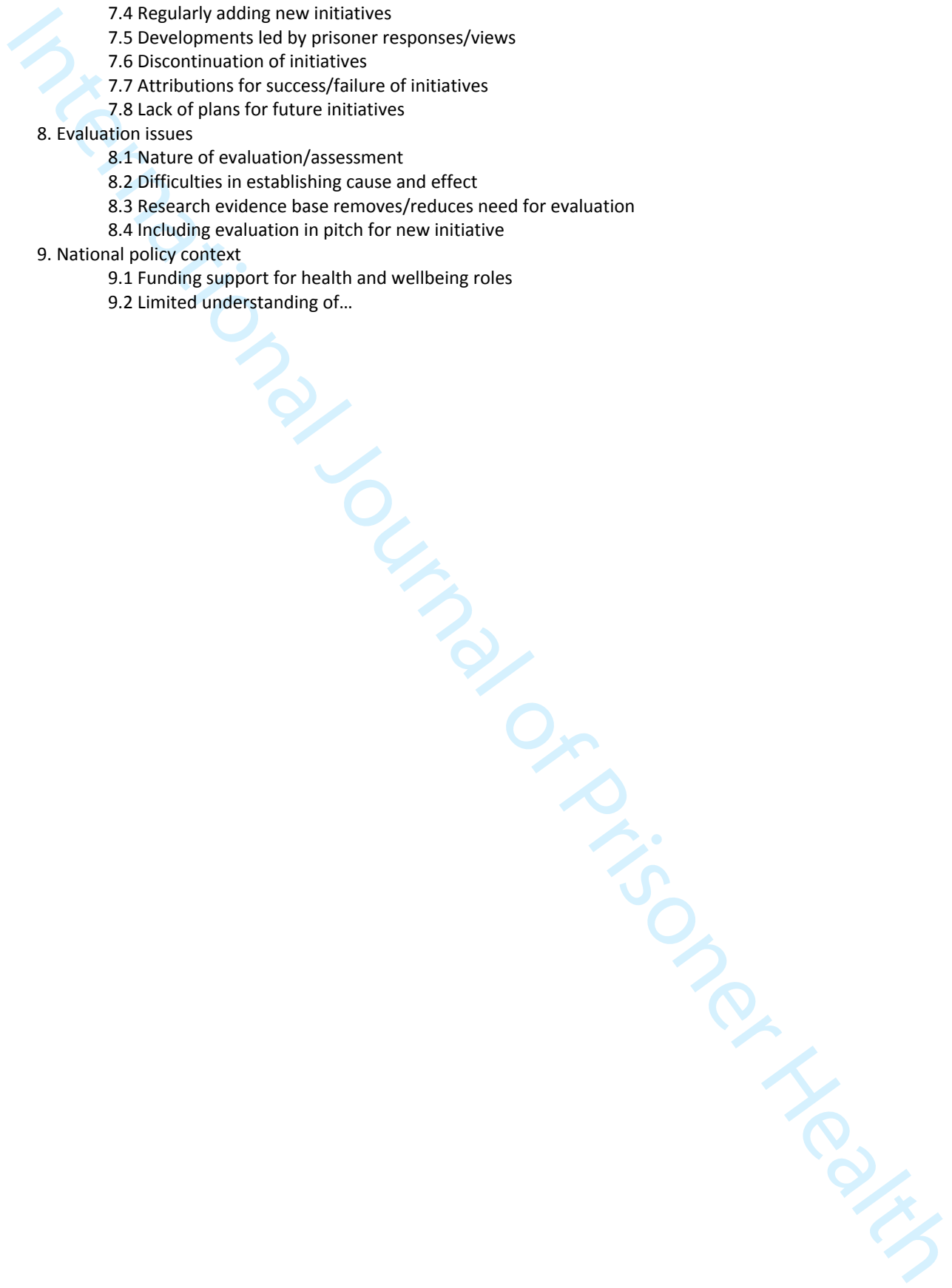
- 7.3 Initiative(s) inherited from previous HWB leader
- 7.4 Regularly adding new initiatives
- 7.5 Developments led by prisoner responses/views
- 7.6 Discontinuation of initiatives
- 7.7 Attributions for success/failure of initiatives
- 7.8 Lack of plans for future initiatives

8. Evaluation issues

- 8.1 Nature of evaluation/assessment
- 8.2 Difficulties in establishing cause and effect
- 8.3 Research evidence base removes/reduces need for evaluation
- 8.4 Including evaluation in pitch for new initiative

9. National policy context

- 9.1 Funding support for health and wellbeing roles
- 9.2 Limited understanding of...



Wellbeing programmes in prisons in England and Wales: a mixed methods study Tables

Table 1: Characteristics of the study sample

Prison	Male / Female	Security category	Wellbeing programmes noted on survey	Interview completed?	Interview number	Role of survey completer
1	F	C	Fun run, Yoga, Arts and crafts	Yes	1	Head of Healthcare
2	M	C	Art	No		Treatment Manager for Interventions
3	M	B	Dog therapy, Self-help workbooks, mindfulness relaxation	Yes	3	Wellbeing Co-ordinator
4	M	D	Park run, Mindfulness session, Fidget spinner activities	No		Head of Equalities
5	M	C	Yoga, Art therapy	Yes	6	Head of Health and Wellbeing
6	M	C	Wellbeing day, Horticulture, Creative arts courses	No		Head of Reducing Reoffending
7	M	C	Yoga, Chicken run, Choir/song writing course	Yes	2	Head of Reducing Reoffending
8	M	D	Reading groups, Art, Horticulture classes	Yes	4	Governor
9	M	B/C	Mindfulness sessions, Book clubs	No		Health and Wellbeing Practitioner
10	M	C	Music, Horticulture, Mindfulness	No		Undisclosed
11	M	B	Good vibrations, Yoga	No		Learning and Skills Manager
12	M	B	Pat dogs, Early morning boot camp	Yes	5	Head of Community Engagement
13	M	A	Yoga, Reading, Creative Arts	No		Head of Reducing Reoffending

Table 2: Thematic groups for anticipated and observed wellbeing benefits

EA	Emotional awareness/gains
SA	Sense of achievement
ED	Enjoyment/ distraction
H	Health improvement (mental & physical)
SD	Skill development
So	Socialisation
R	Reduction in self-harm
O	Other (<i>morale, environmental awareness, socialisation and care</i>)

Table 3: Anticipated and observed benefits of different programme types

Programme	n	EA	SA	ED	H	SD	So	R	O
Physical activity									
Anticipated	8	1 (12.5%)	2 (25%)	0	4 (50%)	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	1(12.5%)	1(12.5%)
Observed	8	3 (37.5%)	1 (12.5%)	0	2 (25%)	1 (12.5%)	2 (25%)	0	2 (25%)
Creative Arts									
Anticipated	8	2 (25%)	0	3 (37.5%)	1 (12.5%)	5 (62.5%)	0	0	1(12.5%)
Observed	8	1 (12.5%)	2 (25%)	1 (12.5%)	2 (25%)	3 (37.5%)	3 (37.5%)	0	0
Mindfulness									
Anticipated	4	3 (75%)	0	1 (25%)	2 (50%)	0	0	1 (25%)	0
Observed	4	2 (50%)	0	1 (25%)	0	0	2 (50%)	0	0
Advice and Help									
Anticipated	2	1 (50%)	0	0	1 (50%)	0	0	0	0
Observed	2	1 (50%)	0	0	0	1 (25%)	0	0	0
Horticulture									
Anticipated	3	0	1 (33.3%)	1 (33.3%)	0	1 (33.3%)	0	0	1 (33.3%)
Observed	3	2 (66.6%)	0	1 (33.3%)	1 (33.3%)	1 (33.3%)	0	0	0
Reading									
Anticipated	3	1 (33.3%)	0	0	0	2 (66.6%)	1 (33.3%)	0	0
Observed	3	0	1 (33.3%)	0	0	1 (33.3%)	0	0	1 (33.3%)
Animal assisted activities									
Anticipated	3	1 (33.3%)	0	0	3 (100%)	0	0	0	1 (33.3%)
Observed	3	0	1 (33.3%)	1 (33.3%)	1 (33.3%)	1 (33.3%)	0	0	1 (33.3%)
Other									
Anticipated	2	0	0	1 (33.3%)	0	1 (33.3%)	0	0	1 (33.3%)
Observed	2	0	1 (50%)	0	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	0
Total									
Anticipated	33	9	3	6	11	10	2	2	5
Observed	33	9	7	4	7	9	8	1	5

Key to observed benefits

EA	Emotional awareness/gains
SA	Sense of achievement
ED	Enjoyment/ distraction
H	Health improvement (mental & physical)
SD	Skill development
So	Socialisation
R	Reduction in self-harm
O	Other (<i>morale, environmental awareness, socialisation and care</i>)

Table 4: Median (Range) values for Wellbeing scores

	Problems	Relationships	Mood	Self esteem	Confidence	Stress	Fitness	Skills	Social
Physical activity	6(4-6)	5 (4-7)	6(5-7)	6 (4-6)	6(4-6)	6(5-6)	6(5-7)	6 (5-7)	5 (4.7)
Creative Arts	6 (5-7)	6 (5-7)	6 (5-7)	6 (5-7)	6 (5-7)	6(5-6)	4 (4-6)	6 (5-7)	6 (5-7)
Mindfulness	5 (5-6)	5 (5)	6 (6)	5 (4-6)	4 (4-5)	6(6)	4 (4)	4 (4-5)	4 (4-5)
Advice and Help*	6	6	6	5	6	5	4	6	5
Horticulture*	5	7	7	7	7	6	6	7	7
Reading	4(4-5)	6(6-7)	5 (4-6)	6 (6-7)	6(5-6)	5(4-6)	4 (4)	6(4-7)	4 (4-7)

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Animal assisted activities	4 (4-5)	5.5 (5-6)	6.5(6-7)	5.5)5-6)	5.5 (5-6)	6(6-7)	4 (4)	5.5(5-6)	5.5 (5-6)
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* = because of missing data there was only one case in the group

Key: 4 = neither improved/made worse, 5= slightly improved, 6 = Improved, 7 = significantly improved

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