



# Building resilient communities

A practical guide for community groups and service providers



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## 1. Mental health

We all have mental health. Mental health relates to how we think, feel, behave and interact with other people. Just as we can develop problems with our physical health, mental health problems will be experienced by many of us over the course of our lives.

Mental health problems range from the worries we all experience as a part of our everyday life, to serious long term conditions that can be very difficult to manage and have a huge impact on people's lives.

It is estimated that one person in four will be affected by a mental health problem each year. Anxiety and depression are the most common problems, with about 1 in 10 people affected at

any given time. Anxiety and depression can be severe and long-lasting and have a big impact on people's ability to lead their daily life.

Between one and two in every 100 people will experience a serious mental health problem such as bipolar disorder, psychosis or schizophrenia. People affected may hear voices, see things no one else sees, hold unusual beliefs that are not in line with what is generally accepted as real, feel unrealistically powerful or feel worthless, with a loss of interest in daily life.

There are things that we all can do to look after our mental health, which can sometimes help to prevent mental health problems, for example promoting wellbeing and building our resilience.

## 2. What is wellbeing?

In this booklet we are focusing on mental, rather than physical, wellbeing.

The World Health Organisation has defined mental wellbeing as:

a state of mind in which an individual is able to realise his or her own abilities, cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community<sup>1</sup>.

It can be helpful to understand wellbeing as being made up of two key elements:

1. Feeling good
2. Functioning well

Feeling good means experiencing positive emotions like happiness, contentment and enjoyment. It also includes feelings like curiosity, engagement and safety.

Functioning well is about how a person is able to function in the world. This includes having positive relationships and social connections, as well as feeling in control of your life and having a sense of purpose.

Mental wellbeing does not mean being happy all the time and it does not mean you won't experience negative or painful emotions such as grief, loss, or failure, which are a part of normal life. People with high levels of wellbeing will still experience these feelings, but are likely to be better able to cope with them without it having a significant impact on their mental health.

Good mental wellbeing is closely linked to good mental health, but they are not quite the same thing. It is possible to have high levels of wellbeing whilst living with a mental health problem, and you can experience low levels of wellbeing without having a mental health problem.

Supporting people who have low levels of wellbeing can, in some cases, help to prevent the development of mental health problems, particularly problems such as depression, stress and anxiety.

Mental health and wellbeing are strongly influenced not only by our individual attributes, such as age, personality, gender or genetics, but also by the circumstances in which we find ourselves and the environment in which we live.

### 3. What is resilience?

Resilience is the ability to cope with life's challenges and to recover from, or adapt to, adversity.

We are not born with a fixed capacity for resilience. Resilience is something that can be learned and improved, as well as eroded or worn down by difficult circumstances, so a person's resilience may change over their lifetime.

Resilience is important because it can help to protect against the development of mental health problems. People with high resilience are more likely to cope with difficult experiences whilst maintaining high levels of wellbeing. And good levels of resilience can help us to recover more quickly if we do experience mental health problems.

High levels of wellbeing and resilience in a community don't just lead to fewer mental health problems. Good levels of wellbeing are associated with:

- Improved learning and academic achievement
- Reduced absence from work due to sickness
- Reductions in risk-taking behaviours like smoking
- Improved physical health
- Reduced mortality
- Increased community involvement

### 4. Risk factors for low wellbeing, poor resilience and mental health problems

Some circumstances or characteristics increase our risk of developing mental health problems and mean that we may need more support to improve our wellbeing. For example:

- People with less than three close relatives or friends are more likely to experience mental health problems<sup>2</sup>.
- People from Black and minority ethnic groups are nearly three times more likely to attempt suicide<sup>3</sup>.
- The risk of suffering from depression and anxiety disorders is about twice as high for lesbian, gay and bisexual people<sup>4</sup>.
- Men from households with the lowest 20% of incomes are also almost three times more likely to have a common mental disorder than those with the top 20%<sup>5</sup>.
- Rates of depression among those with two or more long term physical conditions are almost seven times higher than in the rest of the population<sup>6</sup>.

## 5. Ways we can improve our resilience and levels of wellbeing

The New Economics Foundation has set out five things that we can all do to improve our wellbeing<sup>7</sup>:

### 1. Connect...

With the people around you. With family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. At home, work, school or in your local community. Think of these as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.

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### 2. Be active

Go for a walk or run. Step outside. Cycle. Play a game. Garden. Dance. Exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity you enjoy and that suits your level of mobility and fitness.

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### 3. Take notice

Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Savour the moment, whether you are walking to work, eating lunch or talking to friends. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.

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### 4. Give

Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out, as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and creates connections with the people around you.

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### 5. Keep learning

Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work. Fix a bike. Learn to play an instrument or how to cook your favourite food. Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun.

These are not just things that people should do by themselves. Community groups, services, resources and facilities also play a role in promoting the five ways to wellbeing to those they come in contact with and supporting people to take part in them.

## 6. What can you do to support your community?

It's likely that your organisation is already supporting the wellbeing of the people you work with, even if you are not aware of it. If you provide services or activities that encourage people to take part in any of the five ways to wellbeing, you are already doing something to build the resilience of your community.

But there is always more we can do. Here are some ideas of the kind of things you could do to promote wellbeing and help to build resilience:

### Promote the five ways to wellbeing

- Make the people that you come into contact with aware of the things they can do to improve their wellbeing.
- Think about ways you could make the five ways to wellbeing a central part of the services, activities or support you provide.
- Could you organise some physical activities, like a sports team or walking club?
- Could you organise creative activities that help people take notice and learn, perhaps art or cooking classes, or run a book group?
- Could you facilitate opportunities for people to give their time and volunteer in the community?

### Improve opportunities for social connection

- Can you do more to bring people together in the work that you do, helping them to build social connections?
- Some of the most isolated people may find it difficult to attend community groups or activities. We've found that providing a befriending or buddying service can be a successful way of engaging people who might not otherwise access any support for their wellbeing and mental health.
- Providing opportunities for people with similar experiences to come together is a great way to help people deal with difficult circumstances, for example unemployment, bereavement, or coping with a long term physical or mental health condition. Peer support has been shown to improve both resilience and wellbeing, and even help people recover from problems they might be experiencing.

### Raise awareness of mental health, wellbeing and resilience

- Every time we come into contact with someone in the local community we have an opportunity to support them to improve their wellbeing and build resilience, as well as to spot the early signs of mental health problems. Unfortunately, lots of people don't feel confident talking about mental health and wellbeing or know enough about what they can do to help. We need to make every contact count for public mental health.
- You can use this booklet and accompanying presentation to prompt discussion around mental health, wellbeing and resilience within your organisation.
- If you would like more in-depth training about mental health there are organisations which provide full mental health awareness training, including Mind and the Mental Health Foundation.

### Make sure your services are accessible and welcoming

- Ensure that your services are appropriate to people of all ages, sexual orientations, disabilities, gender, and race. For example, this might include checking whether you could make some of your activities suitable for people who lack mobility, or for people whose first language isn't English. Not being able to access a local service can in itself affect people's wellbeing.
- Actively reach out to people who may be at increased risk of poor mental health, as described in section four. For example, you may want to specifically promote your services to people with long term physical health conditions or who are unemployed.
- There is a lot of stigma around mental health and some people might not feel comfortable attending a group or activity that talks about it. Some groups have found it helpful not to reference mental health when describing their service and instead to focus on wellbeing.
- Some people find that a lack of confidence or low self-esteem makes it difficult to access services. If you have the resources available,



a successful way to help people to overcome this is to run a 'buddying' system, providing buddies who can accompany people the first time they come to your group or service.

### Think about the impact your services have on the wellbeing of the people you work with

- There are some straightforward tools available that can help you to measure this impact, for example the New Economics Foundation handbook 'measuring wellbeing'<sup>8</sup>.
- This can be useful not only to help you assess how well your organisation promotes wellbeing and what activities are the most effective, but to demonstrate the importance of your organisation in the community and to help support funding or commissioning applications.

### Connect with other community organisations

- Consider ways you could work together with other organisations in the community to improve wellbeing. Could you refer people to other organisations that provide activities that you do not? Could other organisations direct people

to you? Are there services you could deliver together?

- Can you share examples of good practice, learning you have found useful, and challenges you have faced?

### Provide information about other services and support

- If possible, think about pulling together a list of other groups and services in your area that you think might be helpful in supporting the wellbeing of the people you work with. This can then be used to signpost people to other groups or activities which you think they might find beneficial.
- If your local council provides an information tool or database of activities in the local area that can help to build wellbeing, help to promote this to make sure that the people you work with know where to look.
- You could also signpost people to other sources of information or wellbeing support, such as Mind's guide to improving mental wellbeing or the Mental Health Foundation's wellbeing podcasts

## 7. Recognising mental health problems

You may come across people who you think might be experiencing more than just low wellbeing, but may be developing a mental health problem. The first signs of mental health problems will differ from person to person and are not always easy to spot.

In many cases of moderate depression or anxiety – the most common mental health problems – the person becoming distressed may not display symptoms, or may seek to hide them because they worry about what others will say or think about them.

However, some common early signs of a mental health problem that you may notice include:

- poor motivation or concentration
- becoming unresponsive or indifferent
- lack of interest in activities that were previously enjoyed
- problems with sleep, lack of energy or becoming unusually lethargic
- a person becoming highly emotional, irrational or distracted
- dramatic change of personality
- mood swings that are very fast or extreme
- hyperactivity or high risk behaviour such as trusting strangers or spending excessively
- making statements of self-worthlessness
- deterioration in hygiene or poor personal presentation
- hearing and seeing things that others don't
- self-harming behaviour, such as a person cutting themselves
- changes in eating habits and/or appetite, such as over-eating, bingeing or not eating.
- loss of, or increase in, sexual desire
- increased anxiety, looking or feeling 'jumpy' or agitated, sometimes including panic attacks

- a person isolating themselves, socialising less or spending a lot of time in bed
- other differences in perception; for example, a person mistakenly believing that someone is trying to harm them, is laughing at them, or trying to take over their body

However, if one or more of these signs is observed, this does not automatically mean the person has a mental health problem – it could be a sign of another health issue or something else entirely. Always take care not to make assumptions and to talk to the person directly, a good place to start is to ask someone how they are and to show empathy and understanding.

## 8. Helping people get the right support

If you think someone is experiencing a mental health problem and needs help, there are a range of people and organisations that offer advice, support and treatment that you can direct people towards. For many people, GPs can be the first point of contact. GPs offer advice and treatment, as well as making referrals for more specialist support.

If someone is experiencing severe mental distress, they can make an emergency appointment to see their GP, go to the Accident and Emergency

department of the local hospital or call their local crisis care team. If you are worried that someone is at immediate risk of harming themselves or others you should call 999.

There are also a range of national telephone helplines and websites that can be contacted for support, with many available 24/7. As well as helping people living with mental health problems, many of these can also provide information and support for people supporting others who are in distress.

### Other sources of support

**Alcohol Concern**  
020 7264 0510  
[www.alcoholconcern.org.uk](http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk)  
Directory of services for problem drinkers and their families.



**c.a.l.m.**  
0800 58 58 58  
[www.thecalmzone.net](http://www.thecalmzone.net)  
Support for young men in the UK



**b-eat**  
0845 634 1414  
Youthline: 0845 634 7650  
[www.b-eat.co.uk](http://www.b-eat.co.uk)  
Helplines, online support and a network of UK-wide self-help groups for adults and young people with eating disorders



**Hearing Voices**  
0845 122 8641  
[www.hearing-voices.org](http://www.hearing-voices.org)  
Information & support for people who hear voices and those who support them.



**Bipolar UK**  
020 7931 6480  
[www.bipolaruk.org.uk](http://www.bipolaruk.org.uk)  
Support for people with bipolar disorder (including hypomania) and their families and friends



**Mind**  
0300 123 3393  
[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)  
Information and support for anyone concerned about their mental health problem or supporting someone who is.





**National Self Harm Network**  
0800 522 5000  
www.nshn.co.uk  
Information, support & advice  
for people who self-harm, their  
family, friends and carers.



**No Panic**  
0800 138 8889  
nopanic.org.uk



A voluntary charity which helps  
people who suffer from Panic Attacks, Phobias,  
Obsessive Compulsive Disorders and other  
related anxiety disorders including those people  
who are trying to give up Tranquillisers

**NHS Direct**  
0845 46 47  
www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk  
24-hour information and advice on  
any health problem or service. The  
website has a Mental health section  
providing advice about what to do if you  
or someone close to you has a mental  
health problem



**Rethink Mental Illness**  
0845 456 0455  
www.rethink.org  
Support and information for people  
affected by severe mental illness.



**NHS Choices**  
www.nhs.uk  
Comprehensive information about  
NHS services and medical advice



**Samaritans**  
08457 90 90 90  
www.samaritans.org  
Confidential non-judgmental, emotional support  
24 hours a day for people experiencing feelings  
of distress or despair, including those which  
could lead to suicide.



## 9. How to change things in your area

If you feel that more needs to be done to support the wellbeing of people in your community - whether it is making access to mental health services easier, giving more support to community organisations that have an impact on wellbeing, or investing more in local wellbeing services or facilities - there are local decision-makers and organisations that you can contact.

You could try writing to your local MP or local Councillor - they are your elected representatives so it's your right to tell them what matters to you and ask them to speak up on your behalf. You can find out who your MP and Councillors are and how to contact them at [www.writetothem.com](http://www.writetothem.com) or by calling your local council.

Healthwatch is the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in England. Your local Healthwatch can help to raise your concerns with the people who make the decisions. You can find your local Healthwatch online at [www.healthwatch.co.uk/find-local-healthwatch](http://www.healthwatch.co.uk/find-local-healthwatch), or by calling 03000 683 000.

These materials are part of a series produced on behalf of the Mental Health Strategic Partnership with funding from the Department of Health.

Find more resources at  
[www.mind.org.uk/publicmentalhealth](http://www.mind.org.uk/publicmentalhealth)

1. World Health Organisation (2008), Global burden of disease report
2. The New Economics Foundation (2008). Five Ways to Wellbeing, The Evidence
3. The Royal College of Psychiatrists (2010), No health without public mental health
4. National Institute for Mental Health in England (2007) Mental disorders, suicide, and deliberate self harm in lesbian, gay and bisexual people: a systematic review.
5. The Royal College of Psychiatrists (2010), No health without public mental health
6. ibid
7. New Economics Foundation (2008) Five Ways to Wellbeing: The Evidence
8. The New Economics Foundation (2012) Measuring wellbeing