



Impact Evaluation – Executive Summary

North Central and East London CAMHS Provider Collaborative

Small Grants Programme for the Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector

March 2024



Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health NHS Trust
East London NHS Foundation Trust
North East London NHS Foundation Trust
The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust
Whittington Health NHS Trust

Contents

1. Executive Summary	3
1.1. Context.....	3
1.2. Aims and Approach	3
1.3. Projects and Beneficiaries	3
1.4. Barriers.....	4
1.5. Outcomes - Young People	5
1.6. Outcomes - Systems.....	6
1.7. Critical Success Factors.....	7
1.8. Process Findings	8
1.9. Systems Learning.....	9

The full version of this evaluation is available from NCEL.

Acknowledgements

This external evaluation was undertaken by:



The team at Charity Fundraising Ltd would like to thank the small grants programme VCSE providers, their service users and the staff of North Central and East London CAMHS Provider Collaborative, Compass Wellbeing, East London NHS Foundation Trust and North East London NHS Foundation Trust for their participation, support and input in the development of this evaluation.

Charity Fundraising Ltd.'s mission is to support the development of charities and other voluntary sector organisations in order to maximise their positive impact on society. We do this through providing expert strategic and practical consultancy services in fundraising development and impact measurement.

W: <https://www.charity-fundraising.org.uk>

Cover image: East London Dance

1. Executive Summary

1.1. Context

The North Central and East London (NCEL) Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Provider Collaborative is a partnership of five NHS trusts responsible for commissioning all CAMHS inpatient services across 13 boroughs in North London. The area has a young and ethnically diverse population with high levels of deprivation.

In 2021, NCEL developed a Strategic Health Needs Assessment (SHNA) that among other things, identified a number of inequalities in access to mental health support across a range of demographic factors such as: Gender; Ethnicity; Deprivation; Autism / LD; and other population groups.

Following the publication of the SHNA, and the recognition of the inequalities in access, experience, and outcomes for CYP with mental health needs, the Collaborative reflected on the findings along with service users through their patient participation group (PPG). The PPG identified a priority to support prevention and to work more closely with Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations to achieve this.

NCEL launched a £1.5 million VCSE Small Grants program in November 2022 in partnership with Compass Wellbeing, a Community Interest Company and subsidiary of ELFT, which acts as a bridge improving connectivity between ELFT and local VCSE organisations.

The program provided grants to voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations across two funding lots to deliver community-based mental health support for children and young people. Patient representatives were involved throughout the process, including forming a service user led evaluation panel for assessing all of the grant applications.

1.2. Aims and Approach

The evaluation aimed to assess the impact of the grant programme, focusing on:

- ▶ Child and youth mental health and the NCEL Collaborative's objectives
- ▶ Development and sustainability of VCSE capacity and the role of Compass Wellbeing
- ▶ Impact across NCEL communities on admission avoidance and health inequalities

The evaluation approach had four phases:

- ▶ Situation analysis to understand context and develop evaluation questions
- ▶ Framework and tools development through provider consultation
- ▶ Research and consultation methods:
 - Provider survey, interviews, monitoring data, case studies
 - Project observation visits
 - Focus groups and interviews with young people
 - Review of Compass Wellbeing monitoring data
 - Interviews with NCEL, ELFT, NELFT, Compass Wellbeing staff
 - Literature review
- ▶ Analysis and report writing

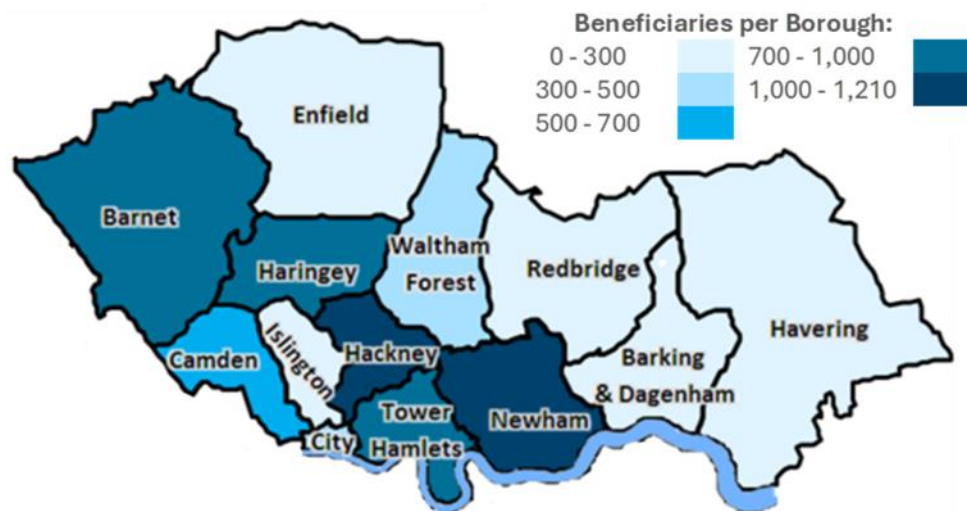
Outcomes were developed for young people as well as systems-level outcomes and indicators to assess impact.

1.3. Projects and Beneficiaries

The programme distributed £1,475,497 in funding across 47 projects targeting mental health support for young people in North Central East London (NCEL) boroughs. The projects aimed to reach 7,113 direct beneficiaries, with the

approaches ranging from preventative activities (3,090), early intervention (1,927), management/recovery support (800), to crisis support (130).

The majority of beneficiaries were aged 12-17 years old and female. Ethnicity data was limited but appeared broadly aligned with borough populations. Most projects targeted 1-4 boroughs, with inner London boroughs having higher beneficiary numbers compared to outer boroughs.



Across all of the projects, provider engagement and data quality varied, with 8 projects having insufficient data to evaluate their impact as part of the programme evaluation.

1.4. Barriers

The evaluation identified a wide range of barriers that young people may experience in accessing mental health support.

- ▶ **Stigma and Awareness:** Persistent stigma and lack of awareness prevent open discussions about mental health, especially in some communities, leading to a reluctance to seek help.

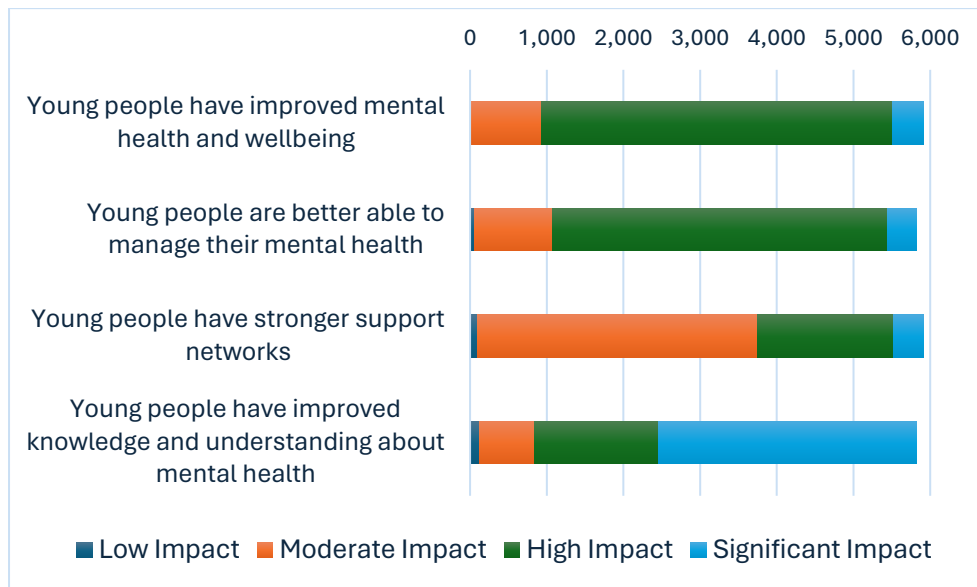
“Most of the young Black men that I speak to are saying no, I don't want that on my record. I don't want mental health on my NHS.”
- Provider Interview

- ▶ **Limited Trust:** Negative experiences and a perceived lack of understanding and support from statutory services result in distrust and a hesitancy to seek mental health support.
- ▶ **Complex Needs:** Individuals with complex needs often have an expectation that treatments like CBT or medication may be the only options provided and will not address their unique needs.
- ▶ **Access and Waiting Lists:** Long waiting lists and intimidating service environments can deter young people from seeking help, with the NHS and CAMHS seen as particularly challenging to navigate.
- ▶ **Culture and Faith:** Cultural and faith-based beliefs shape attitudes towards mental health, with a lack of culturally sensitive support from professionals who may not understand these complexities.

“I think with mental health there is an additional barrier which is the overlap of spirituality...there are concerns about spiritual influences... And so people, particularly, parents, would worry about their children and young people being exposed to content or material or ideas that are contrary to that of their faith.”
- Provider Interview

- ▶ **Intersectional Identities:** Simplification of identities by statutory services fails to recognize the complexity of individual experiences, leading to feelings of exclusion and disengagement.

1.5. Outcomes - Young People



Young People have improved mental health and wellbeing

- Providers took a wide range of approaches to supporting young people to improve their mental health and wellbeing. For example, **Hackney Quest**, **4-22 Foundation**, **She Wise** offered counselling and/or group therapy. Others like **The Running Charity**, **Key Changes** and **Frames of Mind** focused on non-clinical interventions like running, yoga, music-making, and multimedia training.
- Overall, the diverse approaches allowed providers to positively impact the mental health and wellbeing of **5,909 young people**, with **4,985 showing high to significant impact**, through increasing confidence, happiness, feeling listened to, and reducing anxiety/depression and risks.

Young People are better able to manage their mental health

- Young people were supported to develop coping strategies and increase resilience to mental health challenges. This included focusing on physical activities and wellbeing workshops by providers like **Company Drinks**, **Scarabeus**, **East London Dance** and **Mindful Peak Performance** have led to notable improvements in beneficiaries' physical health, including better exercise habits, nutrition, and sleep patterns.
- Other providers such as **Body and Soul** and **Urban Mindfulness** for example included mindfulness, peer support, and creative outlets, which created a positive mindset towards overcoming mental health challenges.

“I was going to have a panic attack last week but then I remembered the grounding technique you taught us in the anxiety session – it worked!”
- Beneficiary Feedback

- Overall, the data suggests that **5,771 young people** improved their ability to manage their mental health, with **4,756 showing high to significant impact** for this outcome.

Young People have stronger support networks

- Support networks are a crucial factor in positive mental health. Providers like **Khulisa** and **Leytonstone and Wanstead Synagogue** dedicated support to help families understand and rebuild relationships with young people facing mental health issues or neurodiversity.
- A critical focus was developing positive social skills. Providers like **CB Plus** and **Higham Hill Hub** used approaches like peer support groups and novel activities like bushcraft, outdoor cooking and mountain biking. This

helped young people interact more constructively and develop their social and communication skills.

- ▶ Providing belonging through group activities and layering 1 to 1 counselling with social engagement opportunities really helped to reduce isolation. Providers like **4-22 Foundation** actively engaged with beneficiaries to help them develop their networks and social connections.
- ▶ Overall, the data suggests that **5,811 young people** now have stronger support networks. **2,165 young people showing high to significant impact** in this area

Young People have improved knowledge and understanding about mental health

- ▶ Many of the providers, such as **Open Door, Wellbeing Connect, Hackney Quest, Bonny Downs** and **Project Zero** embedded learning and understanding about mental health in their projects. **Mind in THNR** used a peer model engaging groups of young people to co-produce awareness raising activities and materials. **Reverse the Trend's** Neuronimo project leveraged digital media and technology to reach an extensive number of young people, providing learning about how the brain works and why feelings like anxiety occur.

I've learned so much about mental health. Not just about my own. But the mental health of others. I've been telling my family all this stuff and now they are coming to me and asking me questions!.

- Beneficiary Focus Group

- ▶ Many young people can find it really hard to express their emotions and be open about how they are feeling. Some organisations have undertaken targeted work with groups such as young men who can find talking openly difficult. Others have used novel approaches to break down the barriers

people can feel such as **Tailored Futures, Outsider Music, Misgav** and **Key Changes** who used video, music and other creative media to empower young people to express themselves.

- ▶ Overall, the data suggests that **5,690** young people now have improved knowledge and understanding of mental health. **4,978** young people experienced high to significant impact in this area.

1.6. Outcomes - Systems

Voluntary sector providers have improved capacity to support the mental health of young people

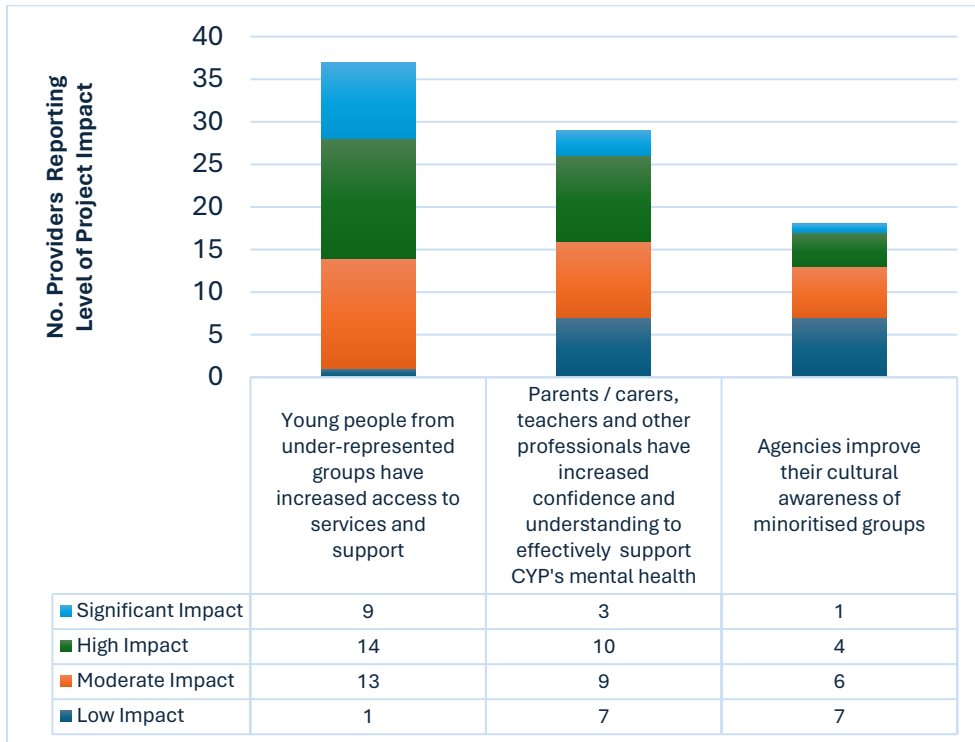
Providers highlighted a range of positive organisational impact from their grants:

- ▶ Most significant impact on capacity has been on providers' ability to reach more young people – **100% of providers** reported this outcome in the survey.
- ▶ Providers have also reported benefits in developing or sustaining important services, testing new approaches, and retaining or growing their experienced staff team.

Young People from underrepresented communities and groups have improved access to mental health services and support

- ▶ Most providers (**97%**) have reported that the funding has enabled them to reach and support more under-represented young people.
- ▶ Whilst developing cultural awareness of other agencies has not been a major aspect of delivery, a number of organisations have been involved in co-production work with other bodies.

- ▶ Organisations have developed a number of approaches for working with parents, teachers and practitioners – such as through educational workshops and bespoke practitioner courses. As a result, **79%** of providers have reported moderate-significant impact in this area.



1.7. Critical Success Factors

A number of key themes emerged through the evaluation which appear to have been important enablers in achieving impact:

- ▶ Providers offering holistic and integrated support delivered a range of services that tackled both mental health and the wider determinants of health inequalities such as employment, education and social inclusion.

- ▶ Those organisations successful in working with minoritised communities were delivering culturally appropriate and/or multi-lingual services, often designed and led by people from the same communities themselves.

“ And these young Black men are seeing Black faces in terms of professionals and it means they’re gonna engage..... It’s about seeing recognizable faces when you walk in, the safety, you know, feeling at least as safe when you walk out as when you walk in.

- Provider Interview

- ▶ Services which utilised co-production and peer mentoring models were able to empower young people to be experts by their own lived experience and to shape and deliver services rather than being passive recipients.
- ▶ Organisations which embedded mental health support in recreational activities / interests rather than in clinical settings found they were able to reach those young people that felt uncomfortable about accessing mental health support, it was also an important route to developing trust and building support networks.
- ▶ Flexible service models contrasted with typical statutory offers. They proved very effective and enabled organisations to adapt to YP’s needs and preferences.

“ ...led to us doing drop-in sessions and just having a very flexible service that they can dip in and out of as opposed to you’ve gotta show up at this time on this day and be in this room.

It’s all very flexible and you know, we leave the door open for them.

- Provider Interview

- ▶ Organisations demonstrated adaptability, iterating project design or making other changes to address challenges and respond rapidly to learning and feedback.

- ▶ Recognising the diverse needs of the beneficiaries, providers tailored support to intersectional identities and needs based on ethnicity, gender, faith, sexuality, disability and neurodivergence – this ensured they were able to engage and retain participation of under-represented groups

1.8. Process Findings

Providers Experience

Overall, providers were very positive about the grant and monitoring process.

- ▶ Providers really valued the role of Compass Wellbeing including the personal approach and proactive support offered.

We felt supported every step of the way and questions were quickly answered by a member of the team.
- Provider Survey Response

- ▶ The grant and monitoring processes were straightforward and accessible to most providers, although a delay to grant decisions could have been communicated better. Consideration could also be made in future around options to improve accessibility in to those with communications challenges.

Project Delivery Challenges

- ▶ A number of projects supporting new cohorts of young people found it took longer than planned to build trust and rapport with beneficiaries.

We had anticipated that users would talk about change and goals setting at an earlier stage than most did...
- Provider Survey

- ▶ Some providers faced much higher demand for support than they could meet.
- ▶ Some organisations expressed challenges engaging with planned partners, particularly those seeking to work with schools but one also found challenges in building a partnership with CAMHS services.

We found it really difficult to get schools to sign up to our programmes. We were very surprised by this - usually we have a waiting list of schools desperate to work with us.

...building trusting relationships with different CAMHS organisations and personnel proved very time demanding and requires a longer-term, sustained effort to keep new referrals coming in...

- Provider Survey

- ▶ Many providers struggle to achieve financial sustainability and provide consistent longer-term support for those who need it. They would really value multi-year funding opportunities where possible.

Reflections on the Evaluation Approach

- ▶ Providers have found the monitoring approach proportionate to their organisations.
- ▶ Taking a participatory and mixed methods approach to evaluation has been effective and valued by providers.
- ▶ Whilst every effort was made to directly engage with young people, this has for the most part not been possible due to provider concerns about trust, mental health and suitability of service.
- ▶ Timescales have been incredibly challenging, and this has had an impact on the ability of providers to participate in the evaluation.

- ▶ The range (size, activity, intensity, capacity) of providers and their projects has meant that there have been highly variable approaches to monitoring and evaluation which has had an impact on data collection.

1.9. Systems Learning

Supporting the aims of NCEL

- ▶ The programme effectively contributed to the priorities of NCEL by addressing gaps identified in the SHNA, primarily in enhancing mental health service access for underrepresented groups and reducing inequalities.
- ▶ The funding strengthened local voluntary sector capacity, enabling service expansion, skills improvement, and new interventions, crucial for supporting youth mental health. Sustainable impacts, however, depend on the future of the programme.
- ▶ NCEL was able to build closer relationships with local VCSE partners, enhancing dialogue, trust, and with potential to feed into clinical strategy.

Lessons in partnering with VCSE

The programme demonstrated the substantial value of partnering with VCSE organisations and the grant programme was a very effective method to do so. Potential developments to the funding programme could include consideration of...

- ▶ Potential for longer grant duration to meet providers objectives of building trust with YP's, sustaining support for those who need it and to support service and organisational sustainability.
- ▶ Targeting Service Users: Maximising impact requires either preventative work at scale to reach a higher volume of young people, or more targeted approaches reaching those already impacted by poor mental health, or a combination of the two.

- ▶ Impact Focus: An enhanced focus on impact across all stages of future grant programme development, guidance, assessment and monitoring would be really beneficial.
- ▶ Grant Size and Process: The current Lots could potentially be replaced with a two-tiered grant size to help balance grant sizes to the strength of providers systems and capacity. For larger grants a two-stage application could reduce the burden of assessment and the time and cost for providers in developing detailed funding proposals.
- ▶ Networking and Partnership: Compass Wellbeing could take a stronger role in building networks and partnerships between VCSE providers and between VCSE and statutory agencies.

Future role and potential of VCSE

- ▶ Flexibility and adaptability mean that VCSE organisations can rapidly test new approaches, pivot if necessary and share learning.
- ▶ The programme has seen many providers complementing existing systems and addressing statutory gaps and there is strong scope to develop this further within the existing mechanism or develop new ones.
- ▶ There is potential for VCSE to achieve a meaningful impact in CAMHS inpatient demand and a number of providers demonstrated routes such as holistic support within inpatient settings as well as working holistically with those at high risk in the community, however this will need a more targeted and integrated approach to scale effectively. Additionally or alternatively, at the prevention / early intervention end of the spectrum a focus on volume would be needed to achieve systems level impact.
- ▶ VCSE organisations can offer the nuance and flexibility to work with and really understand the intersectional needs of local people.
- ▶ Continued and structured VCSE engagement could further refine NCEL's clinical strategies and care pathways.