

Building Bridges

Reducing social isolation and loneliness



**The Annual Report of the Director of
Public Health 2015**



“People are lonely
because they **build**
walls instead of
bridges.”

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Foreword

Welcome to this my third Annual Public Health Report as Director of Public Health for Harrow Council.

In my previous reports, I have focused on physical activity and on a series of physical health issues that have remained a challenge over the past 50 years. Loneliness and social isolation have been shown harmful to our health: lacking social connections has a similar impact on our risk of dying early as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and is even worse for us than obesity and physical inactivity. So this year, I have chosen to look at the issues of loneliness, social isolation and how it affects both our mental and physical wellbeing.

I'm sure that many of us have felt a transitory loneliness when we are away from a loved one or a best friend or if we feel excluded from a group. This feeling of loneliness can occur as a short term thing caused by feeling alone on occasions like Christmas or holidays when others are with friends and family but it can be a chronic problem, whereby people feel lonely all of the time. It is linked to social isolation but they are by no means the same thing.

Across North West London, health services, councils and the voluntary sector are working on a programme called Like Minded which aims to support people to improve their personal mental wellbeing and to make sure that where people need help, it is there for them.

In this report, I have looked at what loneliness and social isolation are; how they affect our health; how we can be more aware of the issues when we commission services; how everyone can help reduce loneliness and how people can help themselves. This fits into the Like Minded programme in a number of ways: by promoting awareness of mental wellbeing; by promoting resilience and prevention of mental health needs; by highlighting the relationship between physical and mental health; and how we all have a part to play in helping ourselves, our family and friends and our society in general.

In naming this report, we asked for ideas from the public health staff and I think the name we've come up with "Building Bridges" is a positive, forward thinking title. It makes me think of moving forward and connecting. I hope that this report makes you look at what you can do, whether big or small, to reduce loneliness in our society and therefore take a step towards better wellbeing.



Dr Andrew Howe
Director of Public Health
Harrow Council



Key Messages

- Good mental health and wellbeing is about feeling good and functioning well. It is a resource that allows individuals to live a long, productive life. It is good for individuals, families, business and the public purse.
- Social isolation and loneliness have a considerable bearing on the lives of people in Harrow regardless of age. There is evidence to suggest that of the two experiences social isolation is more deadly than loneliness.
- The amount and quality of social connections with people around us are vitally important to an individual's wellbeing. On average people in the UK report have a good family life and more than half (55%) of adults over the age of 16 reported that friendships and associations within their communities meant a lot to them.
- In addition, to having good mental health services it is important that individuals are aware that there are things that they can do for themselves to improve their own and other's mental health and wellbeing.
- The New Economics Foundation (NEF) have produced the 5 ways to wellbeing; a set of evidence-based actions which promote people's wellbeing. These actions are simple things that individuals can do in their everyday lives to improve mental wellbeing.
- We have used these five actions to get adults and children to start thinking about how they can ameliorate the social isolation and loneliness felt in the borough.



Mental Wellbeing

What is it & why is it important?

The concept of wellbeing involves both the mind and the body and so when we talk about mental wellbeing; we're talking about more than just happiness. That isn't to say that, feeling happy isn't part of mental wellbeing it is, nevertheless, far from the all of it.

There is a more profound type of wellbeing, one which is about living in a way that is good for you and of benefit for others around you. Feelings of gratification, pleasure, self-assurance, a sense of worth and involvement with the world are all a part of mental wellbeing. Added to this is the feeling that you can do things you want to do and have healthy relationships, which bring joy to you and those around you. Unsurprisingly, good mental wellbeing does not mean that you have these feelings all of the time, but that crucially you have the resilience and tenacity to cope when times are tougher than usual.

And so, mental wellbeing can be concisely summed up as feeling good and functioning well. From this definition it's clear to see why it is important. Good mental wellbeing is a resource that allows people to live long productive and fruitful lives by realising their full potential, fulfilling their needs, making meaningful contributions to society and coping with the stresses of life. It enables social, economic and personal development fundamental to individual wellbeing, with benefits for both society and the individual.

Good mental wellbeing is good for business; employees with good mental wellbeing are generally more productive, perform better, are more likely to consistently attend work and have fewer workplace accidents. The elimination of the causes of lost productivity, workplace accidents and absenteeism increase company efficiency, productive capacity and by extension the quality of goods produced or services delivered.

Good mental wellbeing is also good for family life. The

Wellbeing and Public health



Wellbeing is a meaningful, positive outcome for individuals and many sections of society; it tells us how well people perceive that their lives to be.

Adequate living conditions (e.g. good housing and fair employment) are fundamental to wellbeing. Measuring these conditions is an important aspect of public policy. However, these types of indicators fail to measure what is really important - what people think and feel about their lives, the quality of their relationships, their positive emotions and resilience, levels of interaction with their communities, the realisation of their potential, or their overall satisfaction with life.

A better appreciation of wellbeing could be achieved through the use of indicators such as these and would enable a more holistic approach to disease prevention and health promotion.

Good wellbeing has been found to be associated with healthy behaviours, mental and physical wellness, social connectedness, better self-perceived health, longevity and productivity.



quality of family relationships throughout childhood, and more specifically negative parenting, have been found to predict a range of common psychiatric disorders in adult life¹, perpetuating the cycle or exacerbating poor lifestyle choice and encouraging deviance. Conversely, children of parents with good mental wellbeing are more likely to grow up in secure, supportive, loving households. Secure children show less aggression and more co-operation in their interaction with peers² and more appropriate, flexible emotional attunement and behavioural responses to a range of social and environmental cues^{3,4}.

But it doesn't stop there; good mental wellbeing is also good for the public purse. A number of studies have shown that when people receive appropriate mental health care, their use of medical services decline. For example, a study of people with anxiety disorders found that after psychological treatment, the number of medical visits decreased by 90%, laboratory costs decreased by 50%, and overall treatment costs dropped by 35%⁵. Further, researchers have projected that between 50% and 70% of a doctor's normal caseload consists of patients whose medical conditions are significantly related to psychological factors⁶. Individuals with untreated mental health problems are more frequent attendees to the doctor's surgery, with visits occurring twice as often as people who receive mental health care⁷. This is because chronic stress and anxiety can contribute to physical problems such as heart disease, ulcers and colitis, reduce the strength of the immune system and increase vulnerability to conditions ranging from the common cold to cancer. Psychological problems also increases the propensity to make poor behavioural choices, such as smoking, excessive alcohol consumption and drug misuse which can contribute to physical ill health and increased medical and criminal justice costs.

The health & wellbeing strategy

Harrow's refreshed Health & Wellbeing strategy for 2016 refocuses collaborative efforts for the next five years on helping residents to start, live, work and age well. It highlights the uneven distribution of health in Harrow and sets out the need to improve mental and physical health for all, with concerted effort for communities with the greatest need.

The Health and Wellbeing board members have committed to work together and use every opportunity to promote mental wellbeing throughout life. This means co-commissioning integrated and well coordinated health and care for all but also supporting communities to find new ways to help each other especially those with the greatest risk of poor mental and physical health. The board aims to reduce inequality in life expectancy and healthy life expectancy in Harrow and improve mental health in Harrow.

The strategy has been informed by an engagement event held in Harrow on the 16th July 2015. The visual minutes from the event are shown below (figure 1 and 2). The event highlighted a range of issues and opinions held by residents. One of the issues raised during the session was the sense of increasing loneliness and social isolation in the borough.

Across North West London a new strategy is being developed to improve mental health and wellbeing. Harrow council we have linked in with this strategy called Like Minded, it is being



developed by the NHS and its partners, with the aim of establishing excellent, integrated mental health services to improve mental and physical health.

The goal of strategy is to promote wellbeing and to improve the mental health care and support we receive if we need it. One of the eight issues outlined by Like Minded is that not enough people know how to keep mentally well; the strategies ambition is to improve wellbeing and resilience, and prevent mental health needs where possible by:

- Supporting people in the workplace
- Giving children and young people the skills to cope with different situations and
- Reducing loneliness for older people.

Ultimately, we want to help residents to improve their personal mental wellbeing, to know how to look after themselves and to keep well.



FIGURE 2 VISUAL MINUTES FROM HEALTH AND WELLBEING ENGAGEMENT EVENT 16 JULY 2015 (PART B)





Social isolation and loneliness

Social isolation is characterised by an absence of social interactions, engagement and social support structures within the wider community or society. When viewed in terms of voluntary action e.g. a religious retreat, isolation can be seen as a positive action which supports mental wellbeing and resilience but more ordinarily it is involuntary, created or imposed through marginalisation or discrimination by families or communities or through deteriorating mental or physical capacity. This type of isolation is associated with negative mental and physical health outcomes. Social isolation can develop over short periods of time linked to a trigger event or disease, or be protracted and pervasive.

As an independent risk factor, loneliness has been associated with lower reported life satisfaction, alcoholism, suicide and physical illness. Social isolation has wide ranging impacts extending from premature mortality to excessive morbidity, with animal studies demonstrating the physiological impacts on neurological development and function, cardiovascular function and wound healing. Animal studies, have found that social isolation in adolescence has long term impacts into adulthood, with an association with addictive patterns⁸. The negative impact on the health and wellbeing of older people from social isolation and loneliness, increases the risk of death in a similar way to well known risk factors such as smoking or coronary heart disease^{9,10}. It is thought this occurs because there are delays in seeking medical attention leading to earlier death, in part because being isolated may imply that no one else is aware of the first signs of illness, or worsening symptoms of disease.

Critically, however, social contact can have intense physiological effects; affectionate physical contact is linked to lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol and inflammation.¹¹

Social isolation and loneliness



Social isolation describes an absence of social interactions, social support structures and engagement with wider community activities.

Loneliness describes an individual's personal, subjective sense of lacking connection and contact with social interactions to the extent that they are wanted or needed.

Social inaction describes a state where individuals choose or are unable to take part in social actions and are therefore disconnected from concepts of 'we-ness' and civic society.

Social isolation and loneliness are not mutually exclusive and the various features of loneliness make it entirely feasible to be lonely but not socially isolated.



Loneliness and isolation tend to go hand in hand, however according to a growing body of research there is a difference. So which exerts more of an impact – the emotional toll of feeling alone or the lack of physical and social contact? A recent study assessed the extent to which the association between social isolation and mortality is mediated by loneliness. The authors found that mortality was higher among more socially isolated and lonelier participants. However, after adjusting for demographic factors and health at the start of the study, social isolation remained significantly associated with mortality while loneliness did not. These findings suggest that while both isolation and loneliness impair quality of life and wellbeing perhaps efforts to reduce isolation are likely to be more relevant to mortality and as such physically engaging people with those who are socially isolated may do more for improving their health and survival than trying to superficially address the feelings of being left out or lonely¹¹.

Who is affected

A number of life events can contribute to feelings of isolation and loneliness, these range from the obvious such as bereavement where many can find it difficult to spend time with others following the loss of a loved one, work transitions such as restructuring, redundancy and retirement which can lead to many becoming more isolated as they adjust to changes in responsibilities, identities and a new routine to the less obvious such as parenting which while generally positive can leave many new parents feeling quite isolated. Also, the location and manner in which we live can be perceived by the individual to be quite intimidating and unsafe resulting in feelings of loneliness and isolation. Additionally, physical limitations, poor mobility and transport issues can cut people off from access to the rest of the community, financial pressures may make people feel that they cannot afford to get out or to take part in activities that they may have previously enjoyed and social anxiety, feelings of nervousness or dread in relation to unfamiliar social settings, can all make people withdraw for social connectedness.

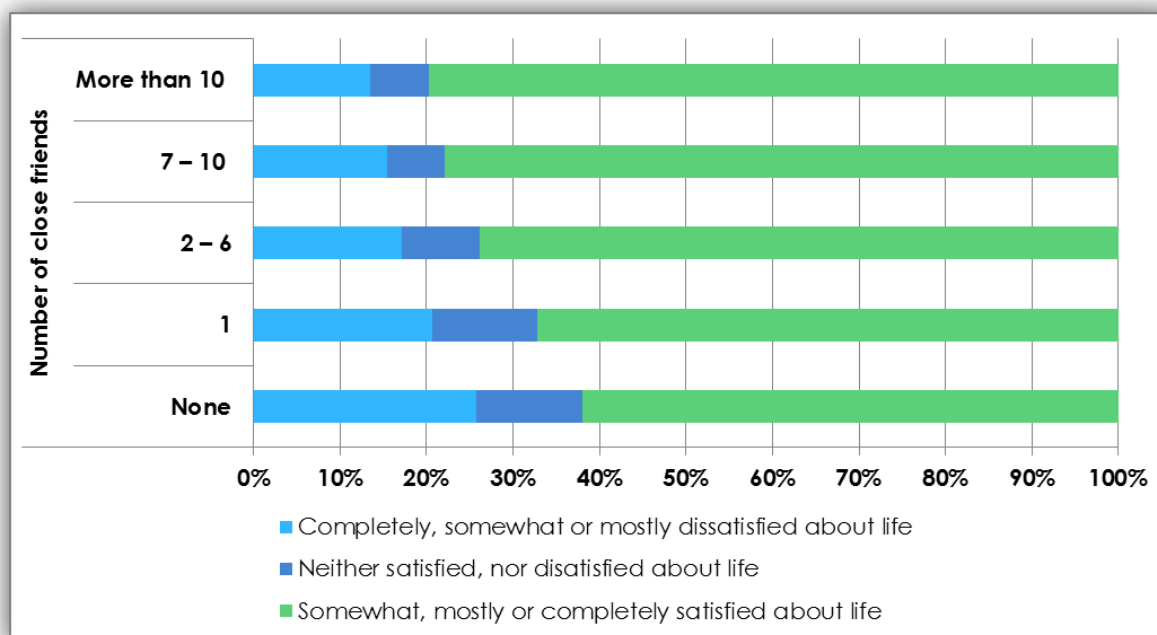
Research shows that loneliness is widely prevalent throughout society among people in marriages or relationships, and among those who have families and successful careers¹². Older adults are particularly vulnerable to social isolation and loneliness due to the loss of friends and family, mobility or income. But it's not just older people; all vulnerable groups are susceptible to social isolation and loneliness including young care-leavers, refugees and those with mental health problems. Longitudinal studies have found that older people who were part of a social group intervention had a greater chance of survival than those who had not received such a service. Loneliness has been described as a social pain – a psychological mechanism meant to alert an individual to feelings of isolation motivating them to seek social connectedness¹³.

In 2011/12, around one in ten people (11%) in the UK reported feeling lonely all, most or more than half of the time with just over a third of people in the UK reporting that they wish they could spend more time with their family (36%) and have more social contacts (36%)¹⁴.



The relationships an individual has with relatives and friends (described as ‘strong ties’ or ‘bonding ties’), work colleagues or neighbours (described as ‘weak ties’ or bridging ties’) are all important for personal wellbeing. One important aspect of personal relationships is the size of people’s networks such as the number of close friends. Most people (95%) reported having at least one close friend, with a majority (68%) having between two and six close friends. The proportion of people reporting being dissatisfied with their life increases as the number of close friends decreases. A quarter (26%) of people with no close friends reported being mostly, somewhat or completely dissatisfied about their life compared to 21% of those having one close friend, 17% of those having between two and six close friends and 14% of those having more than 10 close friends (figure 3)¹⁴.

FIGURE 3 OVERALL LIFE SATISFACTION BY NUMBER OF CLOSE FRIENDS, 2011/12



Data source: Office for National Statistics

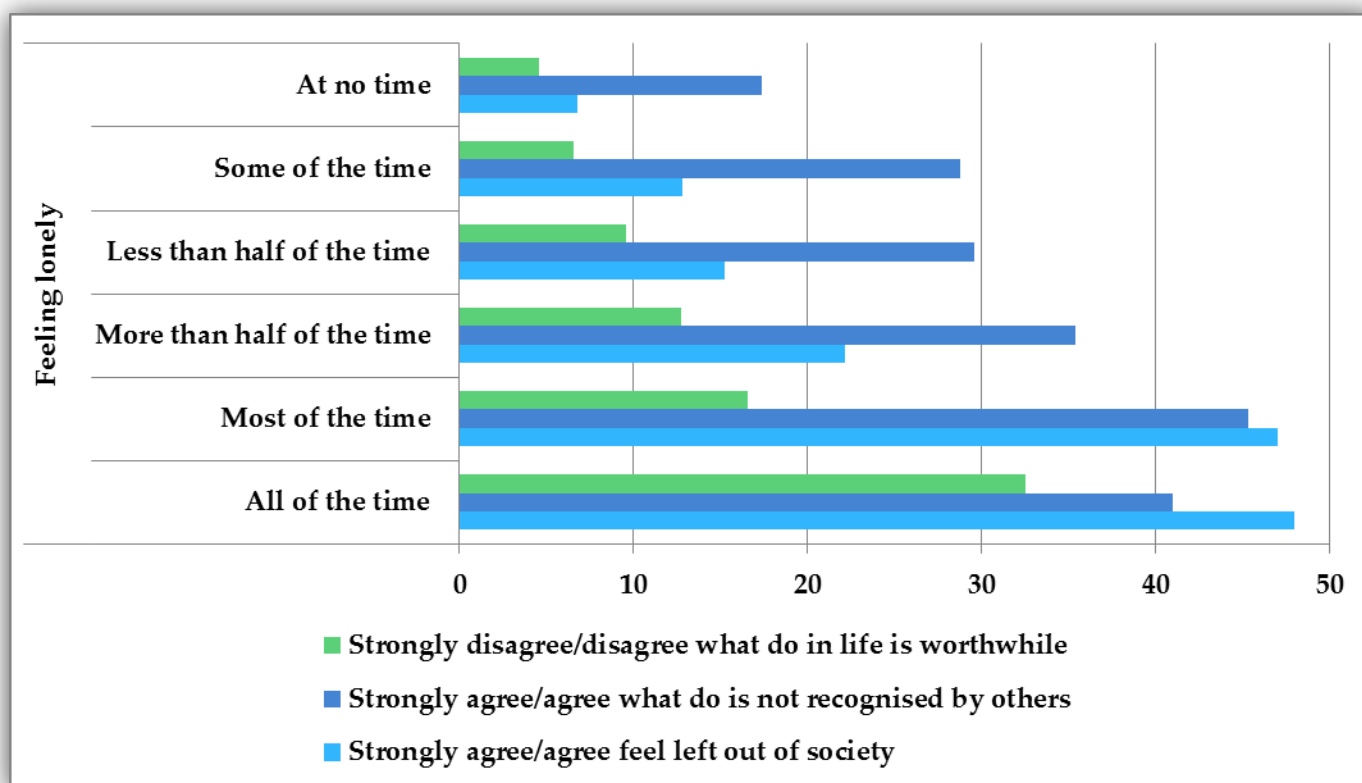
The frequency of contact with others has been highlighted as an important indicator of people’s wellbeing. The large majority of people reported being in touch (by visiting, telephoning or any other mode of contact) with their closest friend very regularly, either on most days (34%), or at least once a week (38%). According to the European Social Survey 2012/13, 63% of people met socially with friends, relatives or colleagues at least once a week, but 13% of people did so less than once a month or never. The main reasons for not going out socially or visiting friends were: the lack of time (as mentioned by 31% of those who did not go out socially), a



health condition, illness, impairment or disability (26%), financial reasons (19%) and caring responsibilities (18%), or no one to go with (9%).

Around one in ten people (11%) reported feeling lonely all, most, or more than half of the time. There was a strong relationship between loneliness and other negative experiences, such as feeling left out of society, feeling that things done in life are not worthwhile and feeling a lack of recognition by others (figure 2). Among those reporting feeling lonely all the time, nearly half (48%) also reported feeling left out of society, while four in ten (41%) reported feeling that what they do is not recognised by others and three in ten (32%) feeling things they do in their life are not worthwhile. In comparison, among those reporting never feeling lonely, 7% reported feeling left out of society, 17% feeling that what they do is not recognised by others and 5% feeling that what they do in their life is not worthwhile.

FIGURE 4 PEOPLE'S NEGATIVE PERSONAL WELLBEING BY FEELING OF LONELINESS, 2011/12



Data source: Office for National Statistics

Social Networking

Belonging to a social network website could build social capital, by maintaining links with family and friends and widening existing social networks. Half of people (46%) reported belonging to

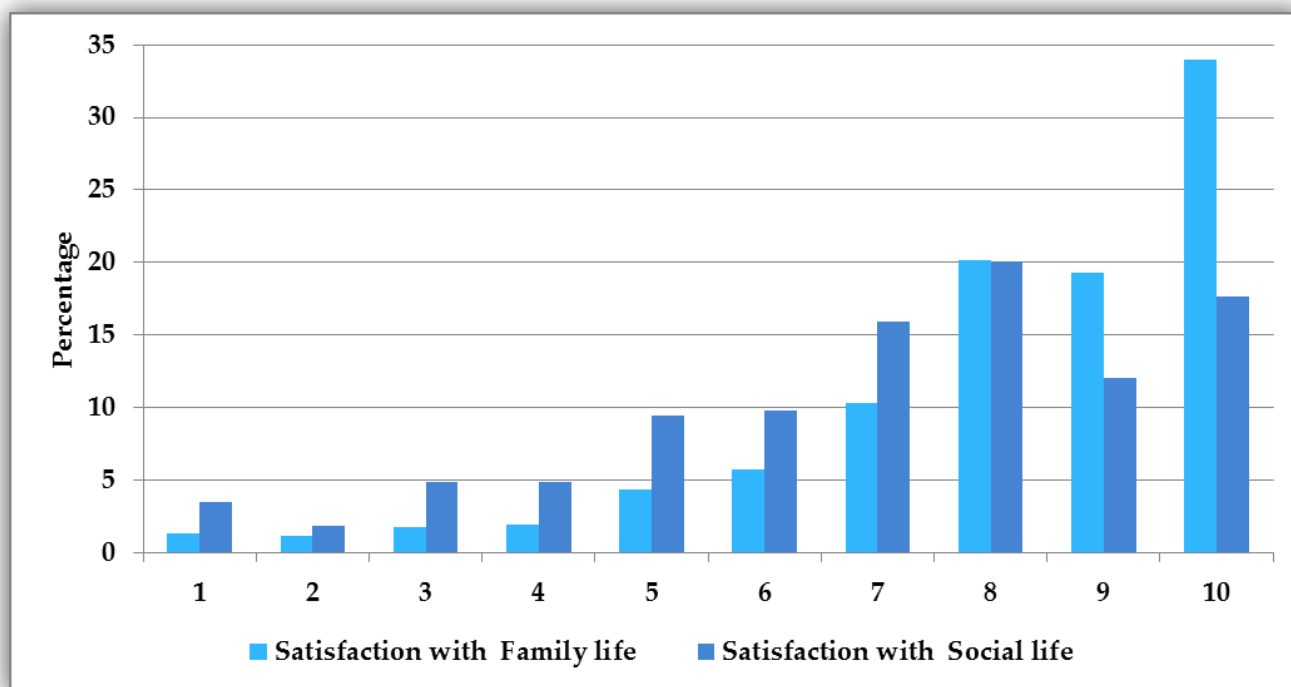


a social website. Among those who belonged to a social website, half of people (53%) spent less than an hour per day on week days interacting with friends through social websites while a quarter (24%) spent between one and three hours per day interacting with friends through social websites on week days.

Quality of relationships

Subjective measures of satisfaction often reflect the quality of relationships an individual has with family and friends. Satisfaction with both family life and social life has been shown to have a positive correlation with life satisfaction and happiness. The average ratings for satisfaction with family life and social life were 8.2 and 7.1, respectively, out of 10. Figure 5 shows the distribution of ratings for satisfaction with family life and with social life. A higher proportion of people (53%) reported very high satisfaction with family life as (rating of nine or ten out of ten), compared to their satisfaction with social life (30%). A higher proportion of people (15%) rated their satisfaction with their social life as low (rating of one to four out of ten), compared to their satisfaction with family life (6%).

FIGURE 5 DISTRIBUTION OF SATISFACTION WITH FAMILY LIFE AND SATISFACTION WITH SOCIAL LIFE RATINGS, 2011/12



Data source: Office for National Statistics

NB: 1 = very dissatisfied & 10=very satisfied



Talking to neighbours Around two out of three people (66%) reported that they regularly stop and talk with people in their neighbourhood. A large proportion (85%) of those for whom having a local friend is important, reported stopping and talking regularly with people in their neighbourhood. In comparison, only 24% of those for whom having local friends is not important reported stopping and talking regularly with people in their neighbourhood. It has been highlighted before that for people to form interconnected social networks in their local area, residential stability is very important⁵.

Changing society

For centuries in the United Kingdom, we have seen increases in life expectancy and better public health; we now have clean water, fewer mothers die during childbirth and largely as a result of becoming a wealthier nation there have been major improvements in treatment and diagnosis. But focusing solely on wealth as a measure of progress may not be all it's cracked up to be. The sense of togetherness so fondly recalled by those who lived through the second world war has long since dissipated leaving behind growing inequality, greater competition for a piece of the pie and fear propagated by divisive rhetoric. It is no wonder that evidence from population surveys in which people were asked to rate their own happiness or mental wellbeing, have found that mental wellbeing has not improved.

Buying into the division robs us of our empathy, logic and humanity and is guaranteed to leave us depressed and despondent. Our desire for acquiring more - more money and more luxury goods – cultivated by advertisers who play on making us dissatisfied with what we have and encourage invidious social comparison ensuring that we spend more time striving for material wealth and possession and less time focussed on the things that truly matter for our family life, relationships and quality of life. This prevents us from thriving and flourishing at an individual and societal level.

It's time to rethink mental wellbeing.

What can be done

A key focus for the council is to allow older people to remain in their own homes and communities, rather than living in residential care. It fosters independence and offers a higher quality of life. It is also more cost effective and given the current programme of austerity across all government departments this is important. Social isolation and loneliness, however, is a risk to independent living.

We know that the actions we take and the way we think have the biggest impact on mental wellbeing and as such improvements can be achieved by these actions. From a board evidence base, the New Economics Foundation (NEF), reduced a long list of actions to a set of five key messages; connect, be active, keep learning, take notice and give. The Children's Society have for children replaced 'give' with 'be creative and play'. These actions are designed to promote their own positive feedback loops in order to reinforce similar and more



frequent wellbeing promoting behaviours. Following the advice of these interventions enhances personal wellbeing by increasing positive feelings and bolstering mental capital.

The following is a thorough specific guide to how the five ways to wellbeing can be used to help reduce social isolation and feelings of loneliness. If you approach these actions, with an open mind, you can judge the results yourself.



Connect

Connect with 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

Why is it important?

1



PROMOTING WELLBEING:
Social relationships are critical for promoting wellbeing and for acting as a buffer against mental ill health. This seems to be the case for people across all ages of society.

2



PREVENTING COMMON MENTAL DISORDERS (CMDs):
A primary social network (total number of close relatives and friends) of three or less predicts the probability of CMD in the future even when previous CMDs have been adjusted for.

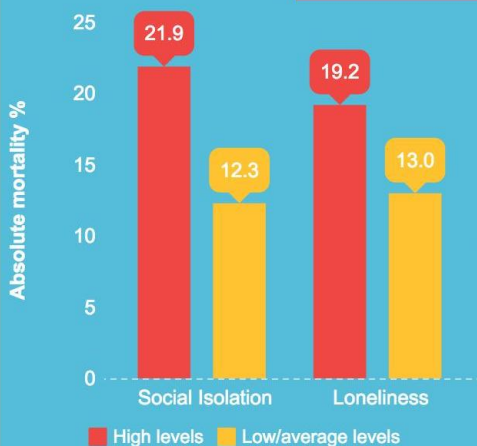
3



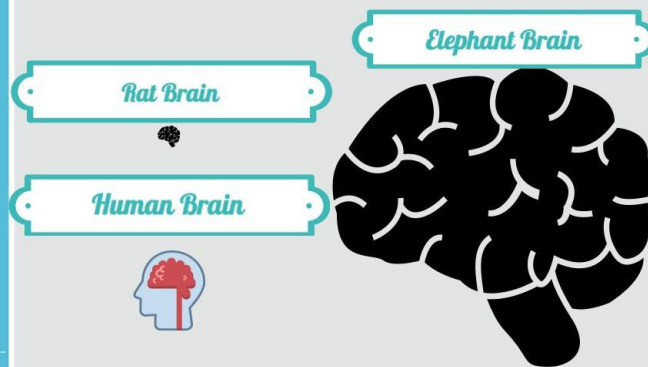
IMPROVES LIFE SATISFACTION:
Life goals associated with a commitment to family, friends, social and political involvement promoted life satisfaction. While, life goals associated with career success and material gains were detrimental to life satisfaction.

CONCLUSION: Giving time and space to both strengthening and broadening social networks is important for wellbeing

Humans are social creatures



Social isolation is repeatedly shown to prospectively predict mortality and serious morbidity both in general population samples and in individuals with established mortality.



Brain size in the animal kingdom generally correlates to body size. An elephant's brain is huge (4783g), a rat's is tiny (2g), the adult human brain (1400g) is the exception. Brain size is the strongest predictor of an animal's social size. We have big brains, relative to our size, in order to socialise.

What can I do?

Tip 1:
Slow down and take time to spend with family, friends and loved ones, share meal times, pursue activities that you can enjoy, listen & support each other



Tip 2:
Keep in touch with friends & family, the internet can be very useful in maintaining long distance relationships



Tip 5:
Ask for help, don't struggle alone. Offer help to others too

Tip 3:
There is much greater neural activity during face to face conversation suggesting that this is an important mode of communication

Tip 4:
Making new friends can help you lead a more fulfilled enlightened life

Private messages Hate-based comments
Photo comments

Cyberbullying is an increasingly common form of bullying behaviour which happens on social networks and mobile phones.



62% of 13 -25 year olds have been sent nasty private messages via smartphone social networking apps
42% have received hate based comments (racism, homophobia etc.)
40% have received nasty photo comments

Cyberbullying can happen to anyone, anywhere at any time and can feel like there is no escape.

A Truly 21st Century Problem

49%

of 13-25 year olds experienced a loss in confidence as a result of bullying

Social networking has its place it is often viewed as a useful tool in connecting with family and friends who live further afield.

There are negative impacts, social networking may make you more susceptible to peer pressure, can destroy your ability to think independently and may damage your self esteem.

5%

of 13 year olds send naked photos several times a week

49% turned to self harm as a coping mechanism

22%

tried to change their appearance to avoid further abuse

24% of 13 - 25 year olds have had a naked photo shared without their consent



16%

of 13 - 25 year olds said sexting was normal

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What support is available?

Harrow's Happiness Campaign



Harrow's Happiness campaign was inspired by the Action for Happiness Movement. The founders have taken the movement's pledge to bring more happiness to the world and they are starting where they know best - Harrow.

Every month they perform a number of activities designed to bring happiness to the people they encounter in the borough. These include:

- *Hugs4Harrow - free hugs flash mob takes to the streets somewhere in Harrow.
- *HIGH5Fridays - giving HIGH 5s to people while saying "well done for getting through the week", "you're all doing great", "thanks for working so hard this week", "have a great weekend" and "keep smiling"...
- *Street Smilers - hang around busy places with a sign and smile at people
- *#HappyChalk - leave happy chalk messages of encouragement and peace on the streets of the borough
- *Happy Snappers Photography Walks - local people lead walks in different parts of Harrow to take photos of happy people and places
- *Operation #HappyOnTheBeat - encouraging people to smile and say hello to officers of Harrow Metropolitan Police
- * Happy hour on www.radioharrow.org. Send your good news, stories and acts of kindness, happy requests and tell us the community activities that are making Harrow Happier to the Happiness Campaign show on Harrow Community Radio or be a guest good news reader on the show.



Join Harrow's Happiness campaign, like them on Facebook and follow them on Twitter.

Some of the things that the campaign want to do in the future that they need your help with are:

- *Organise street art exhibitions
- *Start a laughter club
- *Get donations for a thank you postcard stall and a little sit down sofa
- *Sing a longs
- *Fancy dress days
- *Pop up bands and poets
- *Comedy group

STAY CONNECTED





Be active

30 minutes of moderate intensity activity on 5 days

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; one that suits your level of mobility and fitness. Look after your physical health

The magic pill

The magic pill of physical activity is powerful with effects demonstrated on numerous health outcomes including positive mental health.

In an era of rising mental health costs, physical activity is a potentially viable alternative or adjunct to traditional forms of treatment such as drugs or talking therapies and is an inexpensive and free of serious side effects.

Moreover physical activity has some added advantages that other interventions cannot claim:

[Physical activity is] "Today's best buy for public health."
Professor Jeremy Morris

- 1** Besides being potentially effective as a therapeutic agent, physical activity also seems to have great potential value as a preventive agent among healthy individuals
- 2** In addition to its physical effects, physical activity also has substantial beneficial effects on psychological health

The feel good factor

So how does it work? Exercise causes the brain to release the feel good chemicals, these act to minimise the discomfort of exercise, block the feeling of pain and are even associated with a feeling of euphoria. Other chemical released have a protective and reparative effect acting as a reset switch - making us feel at ease and clearing our minds after exercising.

Benefits for Wellbeing

- Improved physical and general self-worth
- Improved mood states
- Enhanced health-related quality of life in elderly and other population groups
- Improved cognitive function in all populations including older adults
- Reduced reactivity to psychosocial stressors
- Reduction in anxiety
- Reduction in depression
- Improved sleep

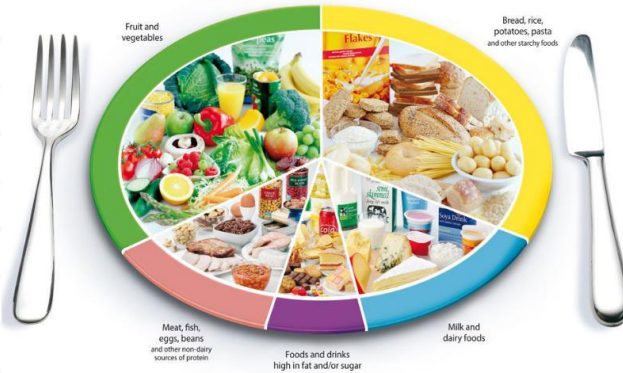


Diet

In order to get the most out of exercise you need to eat healthy. Eating a well balanced diet at regular mealtimes with plenty of water and vegetables will help you feel more healthy and happy. Stopping or reducing your alcohol intake, and avoiding tobacco and recreational drugs can also help improve your general wellbeing.

So, what does a well balanced diet look like? The eatwell plate opposite highlights the different types of food that make up our diet, and shows the proportions we should eat them in to have a healthy, balanced diet.

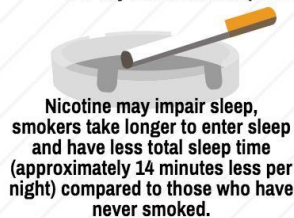
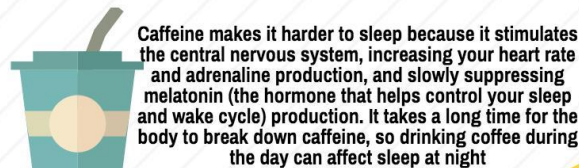
You don't need to do it at every meal. But try and aim to get the balance right every day.



Sleep

Sleep is a much more complex process than many people realise, but it is crucial to the health of us all. The Great British Sleep Survey data indicate the extent to which poor sleep can negatively impact on a person's daily life with inevitable consequences for mental wellbeing and the ability to be active.

Caffeine, alcohol and nicotine are all substances which can impair sleep quality.



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Harrow walks

Last year I was diagnosed with cancer following my treatment I suffered from coughs for months, I was in constant pain and my energy levels were rock bottom. I had not been out walking much during my treatment.

This year I joined the Harrow Walking for Health Group, at first I was the slowest person walking in the slow group and I would need to sit down for a rest before the end of the walk followed by bed rest at home. I was given great support and encouragement by the leaders, this enabled me to carry on walking once a week.

After a couple months I had a medical check up and discovered my glucose levels were raised and I needed extra medication. So I dieted and increased my walking with the group to two walks a week. After four months I had lost weight, my glucose and cholesterol levels returned to normal, my pain levels lowered; I felt great and I was able to come off the extra medication.

During the summer, my energy levels increased and I was walking with the group three times a week and comments were made about how well I was walking. In August, I was given the all clear regarding my cancer I am still recovering from my treatment but I have come a very long way.

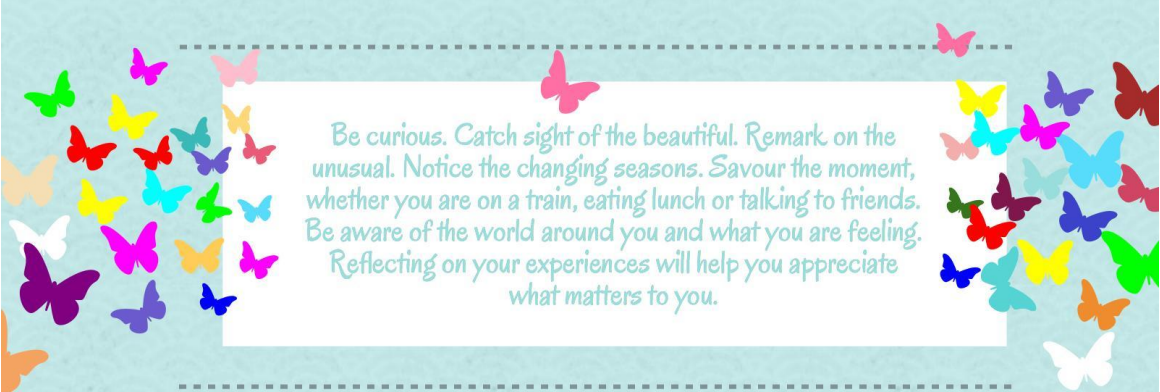
Joining the Walking for Health Group, has helped me to loose weight and keep my diabetes and weight under control it has also helped me recovering from my cancer treatment by increasing my energy level and enabling me to cope better. On the walks I have met very interesting people and I have enjoyed the social get-together at the end of the walks. All the leaders have been very supportive and I look forward to the walks each week.

A Harrow walker
10th October 2014





Take notice



Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Savour the moment, whether you are on a train, 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.




Why bother?

Reminding oneself to 'take notice' is a step in the right direction towards strengthening and broadening awareness on an interpersonal (within person) level.

Studies have shown that being aware of what is taking place in the present directly enhances wellbeing.

Heightened awareness enhances an individual's self-understanding and allows an individual to make choices in alignment with their own values and intrinsic motivations.



Keeping track of your moods in a mood diary can help you work out what affects your mental wellbeing and recognise changes in your mood that would be difficult to spot otherwise. For example, you may notice that a certain type of food or season affects your mood.

Knowing what affects your moods can help you take steps to avoid or change the situations that have a negative impact on you. Even if you don't change the situation, knowing your triggers can help you remember to take extra care of yourself during difficult times.



Identify mood triggers





Stressed? Think Teflon[®], not Velcro[®]

Sometimes stress can be a positive force, motivating you to perform well at your piano exam or job interview. But all too often in today's fast paced societies it's a negative force. If you experience stress over a prolonged period of time, it could become chronic — unless you take action.

Chronic stress can affect your:



Heart



Sleep



Digestion



Weight



Memory



Skin

Chronic low level stress "gets under the skin" through a number of bodily systems influencing the release of the hormone cortisol, cholesterol levels, blood pressure and inflammation.

In one study, researchers examined the association between "positive affect" — feelings like happiness, joy, contentment and enthusiasm — and the development of coronary heart disease over a decade. They found that for every one-point increase in positive affect on a five-point scale, the rate of heart disease dropped by 22 percent.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is an integrative, mind-body based approach that helps people change the way they think and feel about their experiences, especially stressful experiences. It involves paying attention to our thoughts and feelings so we become more aware of them, less enmeshed in them, and better able to manage them.


Mindfulness interventions aim to teach us how to accept our thoughts without unhelpfully identifying with them. When people practice Mindfulness, they are encouraged not to aim for a particular result but simply to 'do it and see what happens.'

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Mindkit: Introduction to Mindfulness



Mind in Harrow's Mindkit programme offers free, interactive wellbeing and resilience sessions, including introduction to mindfulness, to groups of young people, aged 14 to 25 in schools, colleges, universities, youth centres and a range of community organisations. Young people learn about evidenced-based approaches and Mindful Living to look after their mental wellbeing and boost their resilience, which can improve their ability to cope with life's challenges, their self-confidence and performance.



The programme offers session lengths to suit you, a free 40 or 60 minute interactive session, or a 15 minute assembly-style session for larger audiences, that fits in with institutions' and young people's timetables.

Mindkit wellbeing and resilience sessions are delivered by trained, DBS-checked volunteer youth wellbeing trainers who are mainly young themselves (or young at heart!) and speak from their own mental health experiences to inspire others.

Every young person attending a session will receive a printed leaflet with wellbeing tips and a wallet card with information about local services. Online access to information about services and resources is also available. In addition, attendees will get 12 months, free online access to Headspace, a mindfulness meditation tool (usually worth £54.88). Headspace enables young people to practise mindfulness in their own time (Parental or guardian consent is required for young people under 18 to use Headspace).

To book a Mindkit session for your institution, contact Mind in Harrow on 020 8426 0929



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 to do

Learning something new, or taking up a new hobby, boosts confidence, encourages social interactions and occupies your mind in a positive and creative way.

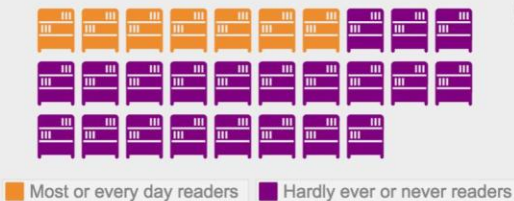
To make learning a bigger part of your life, it helps to think about it in the broadest sense.

Learning improves health outcomes partly by its effects on four types of capital:

- Identity capital (e.g. confidence & self-esteem)
- Social Capital (e.g. levels of civic engagement and social cohesion)
- Human Capital (e.g. knowledge and skills)
- Economic Capital (e.g. employment opportunities)

Visit a gallery or museum, learn about a person or period of history that interests you, learn to cook, rediscover an old hobby, take on a new responsibility at work.

LOWER WELLBEING AMONG CHILDREN WHO DO NOT READ FOR FUN



Children

Learning plays an important role in social and cognitive development. The continuation of learning through life has the benefit of enhancing an individual's self-esteem, encouraging social interaction and a more active life

LIFELONG LEARNING LEADS TO...



Adults

Adult learning has been correlated with positive effects on wellbeing reports of life satisfaction, optimism and efficacy. The opportunity to engage in work or educational activities helps to lift older people out of depression



Feel the fear and do it anyway!

We often stand in our own way when it comes to trying new things

生き甲斐

In Okinawa (Japan) – a place where people have the longest disability free life expectancy that is they have the best quality of life – ikigai is thought of as “a reason to get up in the morning”. The Japanese believe that every one has ikigai and it is the point at which your passion, profession, vocation and mission intersect culminating in your reason for being.

Setting goals that align with your own ikigai are easier to connect with and pursue when fear creeps in, these goals also play an important role in the way learning influences wellbeing.

Achieving your goals will create positive feelings of accomplishment and achievement

生き甲斐

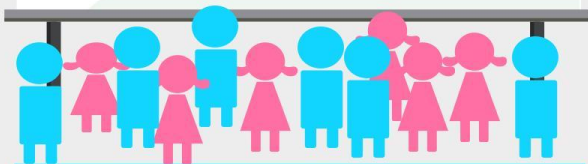
What do you think stands between you and where you want to be?



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XZRw91uNMq0>

Building Resilience

1. Make connections
2. Help others
3. Maintain a daily routine
4. Take a break
5. Teach your child self-care
6. Move towards your goals
7. Nurture a positive self-view
8. Keep things in perspective and maintain a hopeful outlook
9. Look for opportunities for self-discovery
10. Accept that change is part of life



Children

We tend to idealise childhood, but childhood alone offers no shield against the emotional hurts and traumas many children face. Building resilience - the ability to adapt to adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or even significant sources of stress - can help our children manage stress and feelings of anxiety and uncertainty.

Failure is a matter of perspective

Even successful people fail:

Michael Jordan arguably the one of the greatest basketball players of all time was cut from his high school basketball team because his coach didn't think he was good enough



Warren Buffett one of the world's richest and most successful businessmen, was rejected by Harvard Business School



Richard Branson's academic performance was described as poor



Overcoming failure



Analyse all potential outcomes



Learn to think more positively



Have a contingency plan



Look at the worst-case scenario



Quick wins: Set tiny goals on route to much bigger goals

Adults

The fear of failure can be immobilising - it can cause us to do nothing and therefore resist moving forward or subconsciously undermine our own progress in an effort to avoid the possibility of a larger failure. When this happens we're likely to miss some great opportunities along the way.

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Learning in Harrow

Children

Harrow council's public health team fund the Harrow Schools' Wellbeing Programme the programme is available to all primary and secondary schools. The programme is delivered by Health Education Partnership (HEE).

Primary Schools

HER offer consultancy support to meet the requirements of the School Food Plan, staff training to build capacity within schools, develop schemes of work for healthy eating and an online directory of local services.

They also offer transition support by conducting a consultation for Year 6 pupils investigating their hopes and worries about transition which aims to among other things enable pupils to identify what resources and interventions would support them through transition

Secondary Schools

HEE offer the creation of bespoke school action plans and developing emotional wellbeing opportunities for students.

They also work with schools to develop and implement peer mentoring programmes for students to support emotional wellbeing and prevention of risky behaviours.

Transition support comes in the form of gathering the experiences of Year 7 students who have moved to secondary school.



Adults

The Harrow Adult, Community and Family Learning Services is part of the Community and Culture Division of Harrow Council, in the Community Health and Wellbeing Directorate.

It is based at Harrow Arts Centre and provides a wide range of courses across the borough, both directly and through other providers. Currently these providers include: Harrow College, Stanmore College, Mind in Harrow, Royal Mencap Society, African Cultural Association, WEA London Region, Relate London North West, Herts Inclusive Theatre and Anti-racist Alliance Trust.

Learning opportunities include:

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in a range of venues

Community-based computer courses in locations that include the Sangat Centre, the Shree Kutch Temple, the Beacon Centre and Kenton Learning Centre

Maths and English Programmes

Family learning courses and activities in schools, childrens centres and community venues

Courses for mental health service users run through the Stepping Stones project of MIND

Programmes for health, including Yoga, Dancercise and Yoga

A wide range of courses for personal development and leisure, including art, photography, modern languages and cookery





Give

DO SOMETHING NICE FOR A FRIEND OR 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 WILL CREATE CONNECTIONS WITH THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU

Helping others predicts reduced mortality specifically by buffering the association with stress and mortality

Upstream reciprocity

A single act of kindness typically inspires several more acts of generosity

occurs when an act of altruism causes the recipient to perform a later act of altruism in the benefit of a third party.

Individual level

Societal level

Evidence suggests that notions of reciprocity and 'giving back' to others promotes wellbeing for people of all ages. It offers a sense of purpose and makes you feel happier and more satisfied about life

Prosocial behaviour - including expressing gratitude and giving to others - is key to our psychological wellbeing.

The Physiology of Giving

The recipient is pleased to have received a small but meaningful gesture

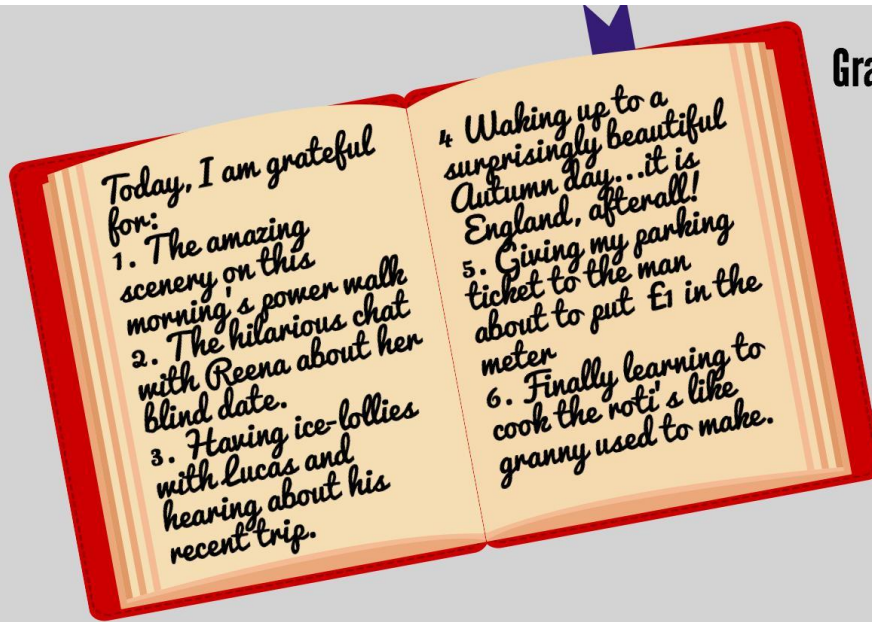
As social animals we are hard-wired to get pleasure from helping others

The brain's reward centre is activated, the appearance of these positive feelings supports the upstream reciprocity process

When giving, areas of the brain associated with processing unexpected rewards become active releasing dopamine

The recipient is elevated, happy and grateful

Helper's high - release of endorphins, feelings of satisfaction and gratitude for what you have, pulls you away from self-preoccupation



Gratitude Journal

Writing in a gratitude journal is a way of radiating and generating more goodness for yourself as you are aware of all you have and not your have-nots

Strongly linked to positive mental health and life satisfaction, gratitude acknowledges connection. People who are grateful experience more happiness, love and zeal. While being protected from disparaging emotions such as greed, animosity and jealousy

Gratitude also reduces lifetime risk for anxiety, depression and substance abuse disorders. For individuals currently experiencing these issues, expressions of gratitude can help to heal and allow them to find closure for these problems. Leaving the individual with a profound sense that goodness exists, in the face of some very harsh realities.

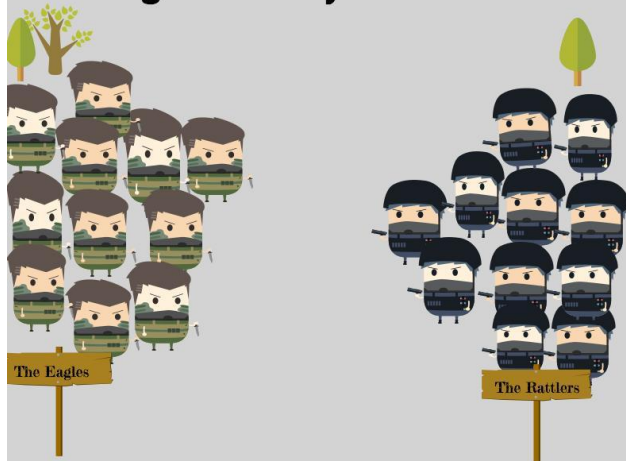
Gratitude also benefits physical health, grateful people recover more quickly from illness, cope better with stress, and have lower blood pressure.

Ways to help others

Volunteering can take many forms, which type suits you?



Giving outside of your comfort zone



The Robber's Cave Experiment, 1954

Twenty-two groups of boys who didn't know each other beforehand were invited to a special summer camp and put into two groups where psychologist Muzafer Sherif tested the ability of competing groups to overcome their differences

The boys bonded within their groups, initially without knowledge of the other group. After group bonding had occurred situations arose where one group gained at the expense of the other group and a series of competitive games were arranged with a trophy for the winning group and individual prizes for winning team members. Soon the competition bred prejudice in the boys, initially in the form of taunting and name-calling. But it soon developed into flag burning, ransacking cabins, and fighting which had to be broken up by the camp organisers (who were actually researchers). All of which confirmed Sherif's conflict theory - conflict between groups can trigger discriminatory behaviour and prejudiced attitudes.

The researchers then integrated the groups with a number of reconciliatory and get-to-know-you activities. These contrived activities failed to bring the group together leading the researchers to devise scenarios that was beyond the resources and effort of one group such as the removal of a felled tree deemed a danger to camp, setting up tents without complete sets of equipment and moving a stalled truck carrying food. Finally there was an appreciable reduction in the tensions, with each boy helping towards the shared goals of the group. A sense of trust and cooperation developed strengthening ties to the group and turning enemies into friends.

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**REACH OUT
&
GIVE SOMEONE A
HELPING HAND**



Harrow Community Click



Harrow Community Click is a way for people to help other in their community and rewarded for it in time. For every hour of time you give helping someone, you receive one time credit. Harrow Community Click will also be running fun free activities in partnership with the local community.

These time credits can then be 'spent' when you need help from someone else. You could also give them to another person who needs some help or you could save them.

Volunteering in Harrow



There are so many opportunities for you to give whether it be giving your time, money or expertise. People choose to volunteer for a variety of reasons. For some it offers the chance to give something back to the community or make a difference to the people around them.

For others it provides an opportunity to develop new skills, build on existing experience and knowledge or a route to employment. And yet for others volunteering appeals because of its social benefits. Regardless of the motivation, what unites all volunteers is the chance of finding work that is both challenging and rewarding.

Bharti (pictured above) is one of Harrow's volunteering queens. She volunteers for between six and seven organisations including MIND in Harrow and the police. She campaigns, with others, on behalf of service users and fights against unfair cuts. All of which helps her, her service users and the people of Harrow. Bharti also volunteers as a befriender

Giving is the ultimate expression of human relationships - people acting on behalf of their communities, because of a desire to contribute and help. When we asked Bharti what makes her happy, one of the first things she said was volunteering, quickly followed by looking after her family and friends, singing and dancing.



Be Creative & Play

*draw, paint, build, code, act,
play, dream*

Why is it important?

Play is an essential part of every child's life and is vital for the enjoyment of childhood as well as social, emotional, intellectual and physical development.

When children are asked about what they think is important in their lives, 'playing' and 'friends' are usually at the top of the list.



Creativity and play

Children are naturally imaginative and creative. They can take an object and discover a hundred different uses for it, invent an entire character to be their imaginary friend or produce a masterpiece of modern art with just a crayon.

Sadly as they get older, it's easy for children to lose this ability. This is why it is vital that they're encouraged to continue with some form of creative activity. Magic shows, storytelling, collage making, poetry, reading, and visiting some of the wonderful museums and galleries in the UK that offer free entry, are all brilliant ways to get their creative juices flowing.

For Children, it's almost impossible to separate creativity from play. Happily, most children need little encouragement to do it and playing inside and out are essential to their emotional and physical development. National Playday (www.playday.org.uk/playday-events/top-tips/parents-families.aspx) have produced some top tips for parents to help encourage their children to play and their verdict? Turn off the TV and get outdoors, weather permitting, of course.



How does play & creativity impact wellbeing?

Play has an impact on the architectural foundations of development such as gene expression and physical and chemical development of the brain. In turn, these foundations influence the child's ability to adapt to, survive, thrive in and shape their social and emotional environments.

Children's development and wellbeing cannot be understood as separate from their environment.



Play can help build resilience - the capacity for children to thrive despite adversity and stress in their lives. Emotions have a key role in playing and play makes a major contribution to developing emotion regulation, building strong attachments and peer friendships, engendering positive feelings and enabling children to cope with stressful situations through developing creative approaches and problem solving skills.

The benefits of play accrue from its characteristics of unpredictability, spontaneity, goallessness and personal control, rather than directly from its content.



Activities for children to get involved in

The National Trust have produced a list of 50 things to do before you're 11½ (<https://www.50things.org.uk/activity-list.aspx>). The list ranges from going star gazing and building a den to setting up a snail race and making a mud pie.



Make a grass trumpet

Creativity for adults

There is no reason why creativity has to stop in childhood. Modern life has become more stressful in recent years and one way to manage this stress in a healthy and constructive way allowing the release of your inner child may be adult colouring-in books.

Art (including music, dance and drama) therapy has been shown to be a useful tool offering patients with mental illness a sense of control. It encourages self-expression, enhances coping skills, reduce stress, and boosts self-confidence.

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Play days

Playday is the national day for play in the UK, traditionally held on the first Wednesday in August

Coordinated by Play England and now in its 28th year on Playday thousands of children and their families get out to play at hundreds of community events across the UK

As well as a celebration of children's right to play, Playday is a campaign that highlights the importance of play in children's lives.

From small-scale community events to thousands of children taking part in events organised in parks and open spaces - Playday is celebrated by each community in a way that suits them.

Playday events range from jubilee style street parties, festivals in parks or village greens, mass adventures in woodlands, fields even beaches, and public events at community venues.



As well as a celebration, Playday is an opportunity to campaign on issues affecting children's play. Each year, we call on everyone to celebrate Playday and show what play is fundamental for children's enjoyment of childhood, and vital for their health, wellbeing and development. In light of government cuts to play services across the country, it is more crucial than ever that we unite to stand up for play.

Whether you've got kids, you work with kids, or you're a big kid yourself, Playday needs you!

From local authorities to community groups, a wide variety of individuals and organisations get involved in Playday. There are lots of ways you can celebrate Playday and get involved in the wider campaign, why not: organise a celebration or spread the word, you can keep informed using Facebook and Twitter



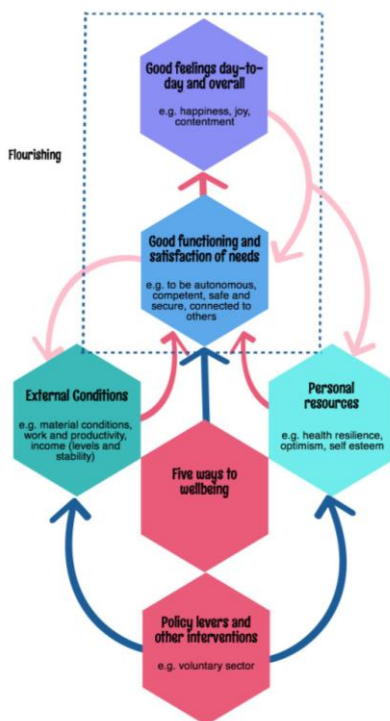


Conclusion

Loneliness and social isolation are fast moving up the public health agenda, which highlights how impactful these two issues can be on quality of life. This report was intended to offer an insight into the things Harrow residents can do for themselves to help ameliorate the impact of these conditions on their lives.

NEF's five ways to wellbeing offer simple actions that residents can perform in their everyday lives to improve their wellbeing and the wellbeing of others, these actions can be used to reduce isolation and loneliness. This is exemplified in the dynamic model of wellbeing (figure 6). The model describes how an individual's external conditions act with their personal resources to enable them to function well in their interactions with the world and experience feelings of contentment - to flourish. The model also shows that aspects of wellbeing interlink with these external drivers - personal resources and external conditions. As a result, improvements made in one area will influence other parts of an individual's experience.

FIGURE 6 DYNAMIC MODEL OF WELLBEING



The model clearly shows that the five ways to wellbeing have a direct impact on an individual's wellbeing most likely because these actions combine elements of each driver. Explicitly demonstrating that it is what an individual does and not what they have that feeds positive wellbeing.



The campaign to end loneliness has stated that strategies to address loneliness and isolation should be undertaken in partnership, ensuring that interventions are delivered by all sectors. In order to build more resilient communities that resist loneliness and isolation, the evidence suggests that a community development approach alongside professional support yields the greatest impact. It is also an approach that offers value for money since small amounts of investment are required to achieve community action¹⁵.

Harrow's public health team will continue to form strategic partnerships with health and wellbeing partners to ensure that we intervene to positively impact the external conditions of our residents and their personal resource in order to reduce the burden of social isolation and loneliness across the borough and in all age groups. These interventions will include, supportive relationship based interventions such as befriending, mentoring, gatekeeping, targeted support activities based on shared interests or other characteristics such as young carers or location based services such as community growing and group interventions with an educational focus.

The Health & Wellbeing strategy priority two states that we will empower the community and voluntary sector to collaborate with new sources of funding. We intend to do all we can to support the positive mental health and wellbeing of our residents but the power to truly flourish lies with our residents.



***“Isolation is being by
yourself; loneliness is not
liking it.”***

-Older man from independent age focus groups



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