



what works
wellbeing

sector perspective: a wellbeing lens in the third sector

How can the community and voluntary sector measure what matters, and tell our stories better?

vital stats



Samir Singh Nathoo is the Community Development Officer at Arsenal in the Community. Samir has 15 years experience in the voluntary and community sector across a wide range of issues: education, equality, disability, health, social inclusion, heritage and charitable initiatives for mostly young people across north London.

He conducted his research at the What Works Centre for Wellbeing in 2016 as part of the Clore Social Fellowship. He carried out:

- 6 interviews with Arsenal in the Community staff**
- 13 meetings with Sport For Development organisations**
- 28 interviews and meetings with Islington voluntary and community groups**

This paper and recommendations are based on Samir's research.

In partnership with:



HM Government



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Currently we identify measures in employability programmes in terms of hard outcomes. However, looking at it from a wellbeing perspective allows us to see the programme and its success in its entirety.

Staff member in community organisation, London

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Key messages

Based on his findings, Samir shares why it's important that the community and voluntary sector start measuring wellbeing impact, in its various forms, alongside 'traditional' outcomes, like employment rates.



Wellbeing is a different and useful lens to help us move away from a deficit focus, for example re-frame 'reducing gang membership' to become 'building healthy relationships'.



Staff in the sector are enthused by measuring wellbeing, since it's where they consider they make a real difference, despite measuring it informally



Wellbeing can be useful for a common outcomes framework and narrative across different projects, themes and departments.



Wellbeing is a useful lens for a place-based focus to show impact on community wellbeing, not just individuals.



Wellbeing is a useful narrative tool for sharing stories about our impact on people's lives.



Wellbeing offers new data for us to consider base decision making on, rather than using deprivation and health indices alone.



We need to use existing, recognised wellbeing questions for our surveys, not make up new ones in order to benchmark.



You may be improving wellbeing without realising it. Measuring wellbeing impacts is important even if you don't think your project or organisation is about improving wellbeing.



A wellbeing lens can help us measure impact based on strategies, aims and mission statements. It is at the heart of these and now there is a way to measure them.



A wellbeing lens fits well with an asset-based approach. An asset-based approach makes visible and values the skills, knowledge, connections and potential in a community. It means how we deliver, not just what, is important.



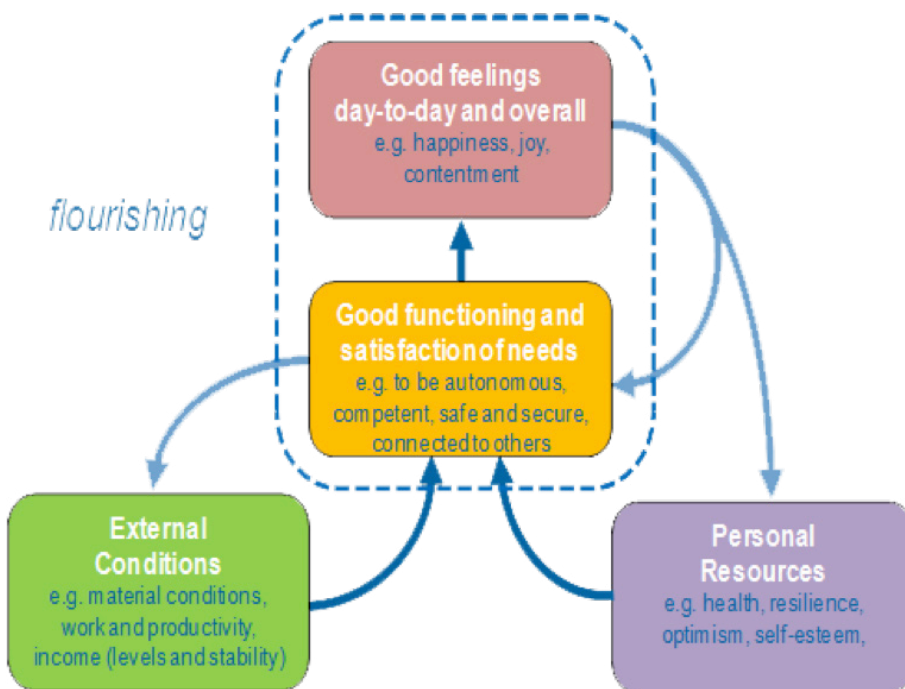
Improving wellbeing is what our sector actually does and is best placed to deliver. This is why we should measure it.

What is wellbeing?

Wellbeing is 'how we are doing'. Wellbeing is about people and creating the conditions for us all to thrive. It is quality of life and prosperity, positive physical and mental health, sustainable thriving communities.

Wellbeing is a measure of social progress and, arguably, the goal of good government and charitable activity.

This diagram, from the What Works Centre for Wellbeing's partners, the New Economics Foundation, shows one way to visualise wellbeing.



Many community organisations are already contributing to community wellbeing, but don't realise, or measure, it

Why is this important?

Community wellbeing is about feeling safe and supported; recognised and appreciated; having a sense of belonging; opportunities; and a sense of purpose. Things like happiness, enjoyment and fun. Often these have been assumed as obvious impacts, and therefore not measured.

What needs to happen?

Organisations working in the community should look more closely at the full wellbeing effect we can have rather than just a narrow measure, such as qualifications, attendance and so on. It makes sense to capture sense of purpose, supportive personal relationships, strengthening communities that your organisation contributes to. We need to measure the quality and value of the relationships, the environment and the connections we create.



what support can you get from the Centre?

Later in 2017, The What Works Centre for Wellbeing will be publishing a handbook for community groups to better measure wellbeing in a consistent and comparable way. If you would like to receive an alert when this becomes available, please email info@whatworkswellbeing.org

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Having a clearer picture of what things are being measured in national and other surveys and how to replicate this locally to give comparative impact data is something that could be invaluable

Community sector staff member, London

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What does it look like in practice?

Of course, we still have to show hard outcomes like how many people we get into employment but we also need to focus on how we got there. If we run a lunch club for pensioners in the area, alongside recording how many turned up, could we monitor if we helped create greater feelings of safety? Foster greater sense of belonging? If we built local trust?

Wellbeing creates a level playing field for measurement in different organisations

Why is this important?

Wellbeing is a way to fairly compare the impact of smaller and larger organisations. It also helps to show the 'distance travelled'. This is especially the case for those who are working with more vulnerable groups, or those starting with populations who have lower wellbeing scores and may not have a great impact in other measures of success, such as educational attainment.

What needs to happen?

Where community groups and Football in the Community teams are delivering across a wide range of themes, a wellbeing approach should be used as a common currency. In this way, two very separate health and employment projects could have the same wellbeing outcomes.

What does it look like in practice?

Organisations should measure what is most important for them, but do so in a consistent way, using existing wording on questionnaires set out by organisations like the Office of National Statistics.

Funders and commissioners can play an important role

Why is this important?

Community groups often respond to the needs of their local areas via commissions and applying for funding. These small groups will only understand their programmes in wellbeing terms, and measure what matters, if this is what is asked of them. And, importantly, if funding is provided by commissioners and funders to enable these organisations to pay for appropriate monitoring and evaluation of their programmes.

What needs to happen?

Funders and commissioners need to expect high evaluation standards and make sure the funding is in place to support them. They also need to recognise these intermediate wellbeing outcomes, things like increased confidence, and so on, as important.



We're speaking different languages when it comes to wellbeing

Terminology has been a significant barrier to community organisations using wellbeing measures. In the sector, we may use terms like 'self-esteem', 'community cohesion', 'life satisfaction' or 'anxiety' without connecting the dots and seeing that these are part of what makes up wellbeing.

When we talk about 'wellbeing' in the community and voluntary sector, we are talking about things like: **Feeling inspired and recognised by an institution**

Something to look forward to

A sense of belonging

Positive social connections

Part of something bigger

Knowing someone who can help you

Inspired by role models of local people

Pride in local area

**Part of the community
Sense of identity**



What does this look like in practice?

Commissioners or funders provide grants to organisations who improve wellbeing. Measuring the impact, and understanding if an approach is effective or not, may be one of the requirements of a grant.

Evaluations are not feeding into the evidence base, or helping us tell stories about how we impact real people's lives

Why is this important?

If we don't share evaluations, surveys or impact reports beyond our funders and within our own organisations, we've missed an opportunity to contribute to a local and national conversation about what works when it comes to improving people's lives.

Measuring wellbeing is also something that will help us to tell our story as well as offer better evidence of our impact. Because the Office of National Statistics questions are based on what really matters to people, the public and football fans will better understand our work if it is framed like this. To explain impact in terms of wellbeing will resonate. Community wellbeing is something that the public will intuitively understand.

What needs to happen?

Organisations can evaluate their impact using methods which help to show the difference which their project or programme has made. Organisations can use consistent questions for measuring their impact, which allows comparison across areas and programmes.

With good evaluations and consistent questions, these evaluations can be considered together. This body of evidence can build up into a picture of what works - where, and for whom. Academic and policy work can increasingly draw on these evaluations to inform the next steps.

What does this look like in practice?

Organisations using the What Works Centre for Wellbeing practitioner guide: developing a theory of change, measuring impacts using consistent questions. Policy and systematic reviews drawing upon the whole body of evidence, including evaluations from smaller organisations.

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The impact on wellbeing of participants has always been central to our practice, but it has not necessarily been what funders and commissioners have been interested in hearing about

Community
sector staff
member, London

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Director: Nancy Hey



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Head of Communications: Patricia Curmi



Team administrator: David Thomas



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You can read about what the evidence says works for wellbeing when it comes to culture and sport on the What Works Centre for Wellbeing's website. Existing and upcoming research includes:

Music, singing and wellbeing in healthy adults | **Music, singing and wellbeing in adults with diagnosed conditions** | **Sport and dance for young people's wellbeing** | **Measuring wellbeing guidance and tools**

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We are an independent organisation set up to produce robust, relevant and accessible evidence on wellbeing. We work with individuals, communities, businesses and government, to enable them to use this evidence make decisions and take action to improve wellbeing.

The Centre is supported by the ESRC and partners to produce evidence on wellbeing in four areas: work and learning; culture and sport; community; and cross-cutting capabilities in definitions, evaluation, determinants and effects.



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