

Working in Sustainable Employment Project (WISE) Evaluation

Supporting people with experience of homelessness, improving
skills, confidence and self esteem



About The WISE Project

The Working in Sustainable Employment Project (WISE) began as a pilot in 2015 to support people find and sustain employment as a route out of homelessness. Since then the project has undergone significant changes to meet the needs of participants, and the level of support needed can vary significantly depending upon their unique circumstances and history.



The project also underwent considerable changes in response to the coronavirus pandemic, including a move to group support and learning sessions online, and the creation of an eight-week short programme referred to as WISE Lite.

The WISE project is funded and supported by The Hodge Foundation. Without their grant this project would not have been possible.

Overview of independent review findings

An independent review carried out by Hannah Woods and Mark Richardson found that WISE participants are supported towards improved confidence and wellbeing, and that even where a job is not secured by the end of their participation, many achieve positive progression towards employment and becoming more self-reliant.

This review was carried out with staff, volunteers and service users at The Wallich, and as such all findings and recommendations were agreed in collaboration with current and former WISE participants. Co-production and inclusion are important elements of the service and reflects the values of The Wallich as a community.



The review also noted the successful combination of support from both a WISE mentor and a housing support worker, who working in partnership can address barriers to participation alongside addressing specific needs including accommodation, benefits, rehabilitation and mental health. The flexibility to leave and return to the WISE programme was also recognised as a strength given the non-linear progression of many participants

Additionally, the review did make a number of recommendations as to how WISE could be improved for the future. Firstly, the evaluation suggests a framework by which key outcomes and distance travelled can be measured. Embedding better data collection into the service will allow The Wallich to monitor and improve outcomes, as well as provide evidence of successful interventions.

The review also recommends formalising the modular approach to the course, with a clear vision of what will be the core content for all participants, and what are the additional elements that might be added on in order to tailor the programme to individual needs.

Overview of independent review findings

It is recommended that the project be formalised into two distinct strands:

- **WISE Core:** an introductory project to build wellbeing and confidence.
- **WISE Flex:** offering tailored support for those ready to take their next steps into education, volunteering or employment.

It should be recognised that transitioning into employment may not be a realistic outcome for all participants, so a new framework ought to emphasise other outcomes including increased confidence, resilience and independence.

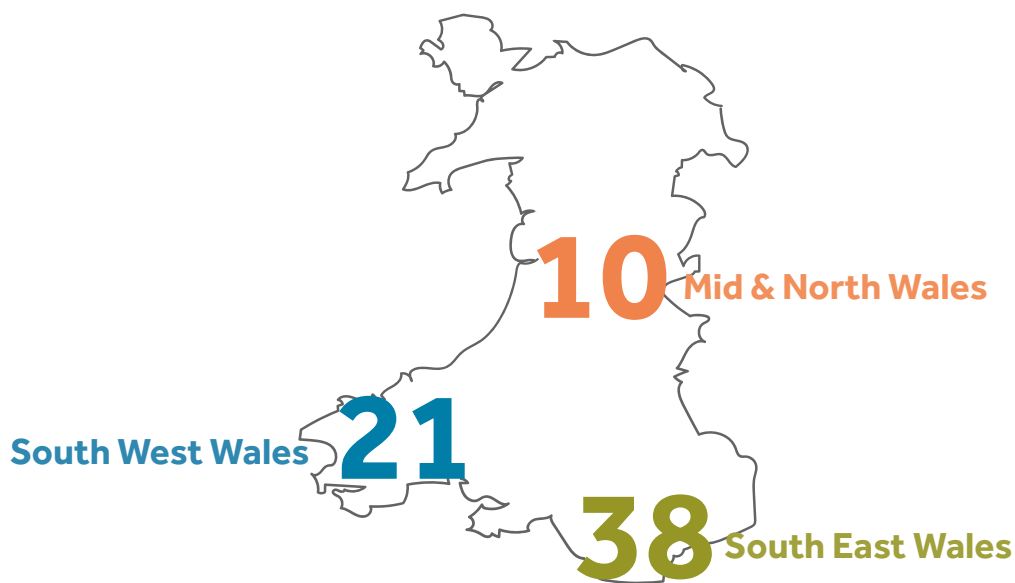
The review recommends monitoring outcomes across four categories, based on the Warwick Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale:

- Improving resilience and optimism
- Improving worth and competence
- Improving relationships and autonomy
- Improving access to support for the learning journey

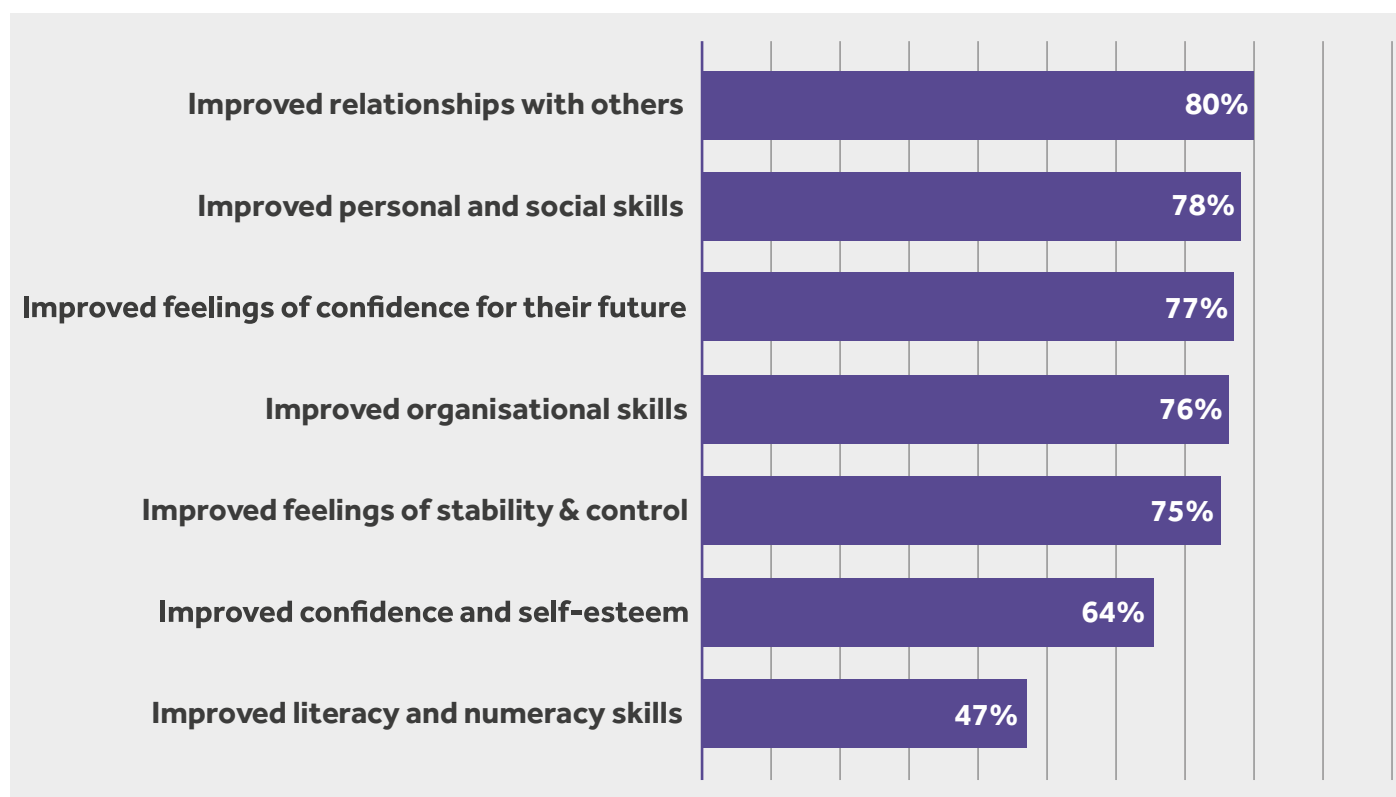


Positive outcomes from WISE

88 individuals started WISE Lite in 2021 and 42 graduated.



Of the 88 participants, the following positive outcomes were self-reported to their WISE Mentors:





Further to this, WISE also monitors progress against five progression pathways (two intermediate and three longer-term). In 2021/22:



Testimonials

Who has been helped by WISE?



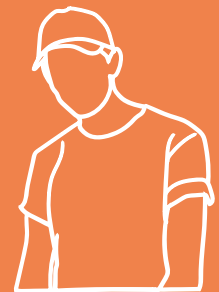
Resilience and optimism

"I definitely feel more confident about the future, definitely more positive. I believe in myself that I can achieve what I want to do. Especially when you hear other peoples' stories on the course.

I realised how strong people are, and how strong I can be. Even though we go through terrible times, others have done it, and I can do it."

Worth and competence

"It was the refreshing thing I needed at that time. And now that I have my zoology course I'm smiling every day. I finally feel like I'm moving forward. I know there is always going to be barriers, but WISE has made it easier to move forward."



Relationships and autonomy

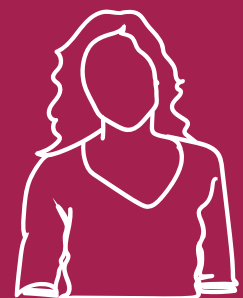
"I found the diversity of backgrounds really interesting. I enjoyed learning that other people had been through similar struggles, and that people in more difficult situations than me were able to cope, which showed me I could do it too.

Having people around you who understand allows you to be honest and open about yourself."

Improved access to support

"I found out a week before I was supposed to start college that I would lose my benefits, which would mean I lose my home. So, when WISE came I jumped straight into it. [The WISE Mentor] was really caring.

It was always a dream for me, to work with zoo animals, so when it came to it [the WISE Mentor] did find the course for me to do online, and she has been in talks with two zoos - bombarding them on a daily basis for opportunities to volunteer to get my foot in the door. She's been brilliant, anything I ask for she's been there and done it."



Recommendations to improve WISE

Based upon the independent review of the project, The Wallich will:

Build a consistent delivery model, that ensures core content areas reliably deliver key impacts.

Incrementally extend the regional model of delivering the WISE Project, allowing additional time to set up and embed the WISE Project in new areas.

Provide a blended model of online and offline support for WISE participants, as aspects of online group learning have been beneficial to overcoming some barriers to participation including anxiety, isolation, and rural location.

Develop an in-work support package to help participants sustain employment. Participants who reach employment value the ongoing support from Mentors to help them settle into their new work.

Embed The Wallich value pledge to help participants clearly understand expectations for them to participate in the WISE Project.

Extend the peer mentoring volunteering programme to provide structured opportunities for previous WISE participants to support the delivery of the WISE Programme.

Review and update group sessions to focus on specific outcomes to improve overall wellbeing.