

# YOUR INVITATION TO INVEST IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S WELLBEING

Insights & Opportunities  
for Funders and  
Decision Makers

States  
of mind



March 2023

# A Report on Learning from the Connecting Minds Programme

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Produced by:  
Colin Falconer (InspireChilli)  
Bea Herbert (States of Mind)

With thanks to all the Foyers and young people who participated in Connecting Minds; to The Foyer Federation for support; to the National Lottery Community Fund for generous investment; and for project partners Ella Gregory, Nina Brown, Chris Bagley, and Talk for Health.



This invitation brings you an amazing opportunity to support future work with young people's mental wellbeing. First, we would like to introduce you to **States of Mind**, a youth-led community interest company that exists to:

- Equip trusted adults and professionals to facilitate high quality therapeutic support to advance young people's mental wellbeing
- Enable young people to apply therapeutic approaches to support themselves and others
- Develop new ways of thinking about and acting on mental wellbeing in order to advance young people's overall quality of life
- Influence the systems shaping our approach to mental wellbeing, redesigning them to create positive future change led by young people

At the heart of States of Mind is a passionate belief that non-clinical specialists can be trained to offer therapeutic support. This has huge implications for the ability of Foyers and other asset-based youth services to build on their strength-based approaches by equipping staff and young people to directly talk about, understand and invest in mental wellbeing in positive ways.

### **It's game changing.**

Over the last 4 years, States of Mind has worked to develop a product called 'Selfology' – which, simply put, supports the study of the self through insights into how we think, feel and relate. **Selfology has become a proven mental wellbeing approach, developed with and for young people, that has been tested in Foyer settings with backing from the National Lottery Community Fund.** It works by opening up access to resources that increase self-awareness, agency, mutual aid and belonging. **92% of young people participating in the Connecting Minds programme directly shaped from Selfology agreed that the approach impacted positively on their mental wellbeing.** After two iterations that have developed a fuller bespoke Selfology product from feedback with young people and staff in Foyers, we are able to share the latest 2023 version that is ready to inspire.

Offered through a tailored package of expert staff training and ongoing advice and guidance, underpinned with practical learning resources accessible through an online platform and/or in a printed workbook format that can be used by both practitioners and young people, **Selfology will equip services to:**

- 1) Create a culture of calmness with a focus on everyone's wellbeing**
- 2) Facilitate regular conversation groups where young people feel safe to talk about topics important to their mental health**
- 3) Support young people and staff to approach everyday challenges in a positive way**
- 4) Raise the quality of support for young people to set and progress healthy living goals**
- 5) Invest in the capacity of staff to help young people lead their own wellbeing solutions**

Selfology adds power to an asset-based offer through its Advantaged Thinking credentials. This is the only mental wellbeing approach developed by young people, for young people, that invests in their capacity to thrive by illuminating how, as humans, we think, feel and know our true selves. Each test of Advantaged Thinking is brought to life through Selfology, from supporting our capacity to talk about mental wellbeing in non-stigmatising ways, to challenging whether we are truly prepared to prioritise wellbeing through positive action.

**Imagine what Selfology can bring to life for other services from the direct experience of those participating in the Connecting Minds programme:**

- ***‘The resource has been incredible to tap into for both staff and young people’***
- ***‘Selfology helped bring structure and content to our work’***
- ***‘The ability to have a deep level of conversation has allowed young people and staff to talk about wellbeing together’***
- ***‘It created the possibility for young people to use time to invest in focusing on themselves. The Foyer has felt more chilled out as a result and less stressed’***
- ***‘Young people have been able to step back and be calmer in response to incidents and respect how different people respond’***

The following pages provide a fuller breakdown of what the Selfology approach can help services achieve, based on learning from the Connecting Minds Programme, covering the establishment of conversation groups, running of health action projects, and offering of wellbeing budgets, alongside deeper impacts and final insights into how Selfology has been modified to best fit future needs.

**If you want to take positive action to address the increase in mental health challenges among young people, please act now by asking for a FREE consultation with States of Mind to talk you through the practical elements of Selfology’s exciting training and resource offer. You will find details on action steps and contact details at the end of this report.**

We hope you enjoy our invitation to invest in young people's wellbeing. Even if you only read our report, we guarantee you'll be inspired from the learning to achieve more.

*Colin Falconer and Bea Herbert*



# CONNECTING MINDS

**Connecting Minds was set up to inspire young people to take control of their own mental health.** The National Lottery Community Fund backed programme responded to overwhelming evidence on the challenges faced by young people to develop healthy mental wellbeing. It offered a practical solution to the Children's Society's 2019 'Reaching out' report recommendations, that young people should be equipped with the skills they need to understand, talk about and manage challenging feelings; and that the teaching of these skills that support good mental health should be embedded into young person focused services.

The Foyer Federation recognises mental health support as a key need for Foyers, with 80% of young people in Foyers identifying mental health as the biggest challenge facing them today (The Big Questions Report, 2021). **Connecting Minds brings an innovative solution for Foyers and Foyer-like services to lead with young people.** The programme was designed by youth-led enterprise States of Mind to place young people at the centre of problem solving in mental health, replacing the negative narrative of wellbeing disorders with more helpful insights into the causes of distress. It drew from psychosocial and trauma-informed practice to offer a model that supports young people to lead their own health initiatives through local projects, peer-to-peer and practitioner conversations.



The Connecting Minds programme was run in 10 Foyer Federation Accredited Foyers from September 2021 to impact on the wellbeing of 120 young people and assist the work of 20 staff, with other young people and staff indirectly benefiting from the positive approaches introduced into Foyer practice. Foyers were given support to the end of June 2022 to work with a cohort of 10 young people each (with 20 additional spaces shared across selected Foyers). Project participants included: Heather Court and Swan House Foyers (Swan Housing Association); Bridge, Coops, Ravenhead, and Verve Place Foyers (Your Housing Group); Braintree and Newhaven Foyers (Salvation Army Housing Association); Sheffield Foyer (Guinness Care); and YMCA Crewe.

Foyers benefited from: £750 of funds to invest in young people's personal wellbeing goals; access to 'Selfology', an online learning resource designed with young people; a budget of £875 to develop a youth-led wellbeing project; and a range of mental wellbeing training, supervision and guidance from experts States of Mind, Practice to Policy, and Talk for Health, with a budget of £500 to contribute to staff time and their wellbeing needs. Training sessions with States of Mind brought Foyer staff together to reflect on their wellbeing and develop knowledge and skills they could apply to their own lives, as well as in their work.

These different inputs were carefully chosen with the aim of enabling Foyers to provide assistance to young people who do not meet the criteria for clinical services but who require support with their mental wellbeing. **This learning report focuses on the key ingredients for sustainable wellbeing support to be offered to young people in any Foyer-like setting.** P:3

**96% of young people found that participation in Connecting Minds enabled them to identify and progress wellbeing goals, primarily through the provision of personal wellbeing budgets. A similar figure of 92% agreed that Connecting Minds had positively impacted on their overall mental wellbeing.**

These figures reflect the success of the programme as a highly effective approach to strengthen young people's mental health. They also compare closely with the impressive impacts from the original 2020 Connecting Minds pilot, in which 97% of young people were helped to identify and progress wellbeing goals, with 93% agreeing that the programme had positively impacted on their mental wellbeing. **To increase the scale of the programme from 3 to 10 Foyers while achieving an outcome within 1% of the original pilot scores demonstrates strong consistency of impact. Connecting Minds has enough evidence to promote itself as a guaranteed approach to strengthen wellbeing rates among young people in a Foyer or other similar youth housing services.**

A smaller but still significant 81% believed that their health action projects would have a positive impact on the Foyer community – with the lower score reflecting a couple of instances where some Foyers had proved less able to engage the majority of their young people to feel ownership over the project. While 81% suggests the health action projects were successful for most young people, the percentage was 9% less than in the original pilot, suggesting further work may be required to support the ability of all Foyers to run youth-led social action projects in which power is fully shared with young people.

Selfology had the lowest approval rating, but still showed that a majority of 58% agreed that the learning resource helped to improve their understanding of Wellbeing. Selfology also played a part in assisting some Foyers to develop conversation groups and enhance 1-1 support, which is reflected in the higher number of 83% of staff who benefited from it. However, the overall score for Selfology showed a sharp decline in approval from the original resources used in the pilot programme, for which 90% had given positive approval, suggesting that amendments introduced to the resource had not proved to be as successful. **That said, the learning generated from the last year ensures that the 2023 version of Selfology now has even more power to invest in the needs of both practitioners and young people.**

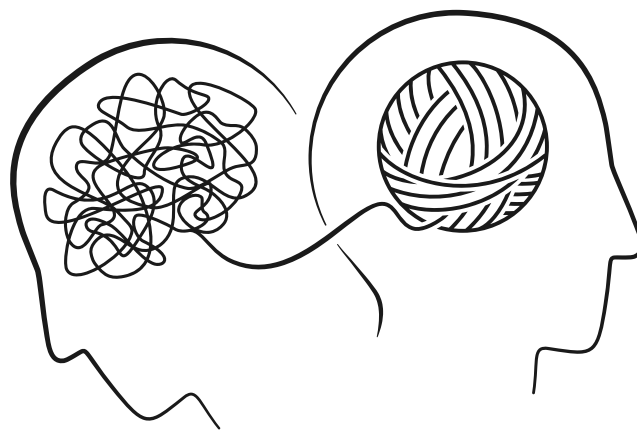
**Connecting Minds achieves a highly impressive overall Net Promoter Score of 54%, which puts it in the category normally considered to be 'excellent', 16% higher than the average NPS score according to SurveyMonkey (2022).** This means that the vast majority of those benefiting from Connecting Minds were likely to actively promote it to other young people – which is significant given the importance of word-of-mouth recommendations to build trust. While a Net Promoter Score was not used in the Pilot evaluation, comparison can be made between the 97% who recommended the pilot programme, and the 97% who gave the programme a promoter score rating higher than 6. **The consistency in positive impact between a small pilot of 3 Foyers and a scaled-up programme reaching 10 Foyers demonstrates that Connecting Minds is highly suited to the needs and potential of Foyers and similar services seeking to work with young people's mental health in positive ways.**

# CONVERSATION GROUPS

One of the most powerful impacts from the Connecting Minds programme was the encouragement it provided for Foyers to set up **mental wellbeing conversation groups** with young people. These typically formed part of a blended offer that included 1-1 support alongside, in some cases, young people's individual use of the selfology resource.

Groups focused on mental wellbeing were split between informal conversation groups, reflective learning sessions, and more focused health activity and therapy sessions that formed part of specialist Health Action projects.

Session content for groups revolved around the use of Selfology topics (particularly linked to identity, relationships and anxiety), general wellbeing themes, issues directly raised by young people from current experiences, and Health Action Project activities.



**Groups worked best when they consisted of small friendship cohorts of around 2-5 young people, where individuals were more likely to feel able to talk about wellbeing issues together.** While sessions tended to attract young people in a set friendship group, in other examples they also encouraged young people to strengthen links between each other, highlighting the potential for groups to develop stronger peer support opportunities. The largest group sessions attracted 8-10 young people.

Sessions normally ran for 1 hour; while some turned into 2 hour sessions due to the quality of the conversations; or, if linked to a Health Activity Project activity, sessions could cover up to a whole afternoon.

Sessions tended to stretch over 12 weeks, up to 6 months in one case. **The most important characteristic was that sessions were held on a regular basis, making wellbeing a constant focus at the Foyer where young people had access to a space that was for them.** This proved to have a strong impact on a more calming atmosphere in services.

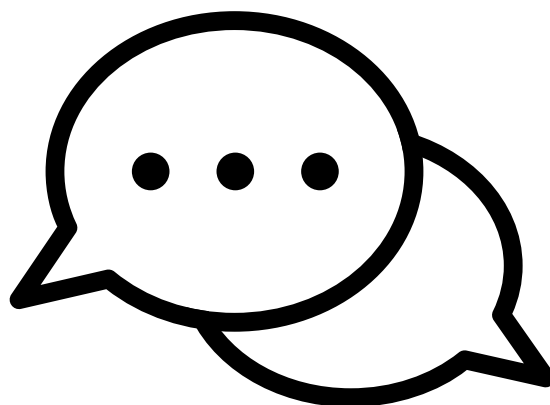
Some foyers allowed young people to meet together to talk as peers, asking for staff to be involved when needed; others found more impact from staff and young people being able to talk about the topics together from the outset.

## Example impacts from groups included:

1. Young people encouraged to have deeper conversations on wellbeing than staff had witnessed before.
2. **Regular group sessions helping young people to ‘*put time aside each week to focus on their selves*’,** which had a positive impact on the culture of the foyer as well as individual behaviour.
3. Some young people gaining in confidence from the groups to engage more with the wider Foyer offer as a result of their participation.
4. In one case, a group focused on family relationships encouraged some young people to reconnect with family members; in another case, a group session that talked about running being good for clearing the mind encouraged 4 young people who had not met before to set up their own running group together.

**Overall, the focus and approach taken from Selfology helped equip Foyers with the content and impetus to support the set-up of conversation groups in Connecting Minds that impacted positively on young people’s wellbeing.**

This is a highly replicable part of the programme which participating Foyers reported they were more likely to sustain over the longer term.





# HEALTH ACTION PROJECTS

Foyers were allocated an £875 budget to work with young people to lead a health activity that could improve people's wellbeing, with the opportunity to establish a project that could produce a lasting legacy for the service and/or test out a new approach for the future. Examples ranged from running a focused programme of regular activity sessions – focused on health tasters, animal therapy, or conversations on family relationships and anxiety – through to refurbishing space for young people to come together around food, games, or relaxation in a garden environment; a thematic project exploring hair and beauty options, and a one-off physical challenges to climb a mountain and complete an obstacle course.

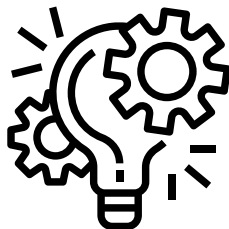
**The most impactful projects were those that came from and were led by young people.**

Common impacts strengthened relationships (both between peers and with staff), increased young people's confidence to explore beyond the Foyer, engaged young people in their Foyer's wider offer, and boosted positive wellbeing habits and feelings. Due to these impacts, the majority of Foyers were keen to repeat future health activity projects.

## EXAMPLE PROJECTS

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1. **A Wellbeing Festival** over a month consisting of taster health sessions every week, covering yoga, art therapy, music and dance therapy. Young people were engaged in helping to identify the sessions chosen, which were otherwise based from past experiences of what had worked well at the Foyer. Staff hoped to scale up successful sessions for other young people to benefit from the local area beyond the Foyer, with a target of reaching around 30 young people in all.
2. **Refurbishing a basement space as a playroom** for residents, with young people suggesting the purchase of retro arcade machines as a popular activity to engage others. The impact from the project created more social connection and encouraged young people out of their rooms, both key to supporting positive wellbeing habits. Young people also did a lot of the work to help refurbish the basement.
3. **A green space project**, using additional funding from a local co-op and donated compost from a local business to build up an external space at the service with wild flowers, a bug hotel and benches for people to sit on. 12 young people were involved in choosing the project, with 4 helping out directly to build the space over a 12 week period. The project impact helped increase a sense of community through active use by others at the service, social connection and engagement with staff, and improved wellbeing rates. As a wild space, it is much easier for the service to maintain than a formal garden. The project will also help engage more young people to be involved in the service's additional allotment space.



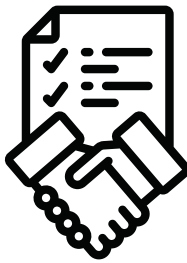
4) **A programme of animal therapy sessions**, with 6 sessions run by an external company. Up to 15 young people attended these over a 12 week period. Overall impact broadened engagement levels from young people and gave the Foyer a practical way to respond positively to young people's request for a pet, given they were not allowed pets under current service rules. The activity brought together new groups of young people around a common interest which helped to support stronger peer relationships at the Foyer.

5) **A project split between the same animal therapy sessions as the above example, along with alternative therapy and mixed martial arts sessions** to look at general fitness and beneficial health activities such as positive sleep habits. The Foyer was surprised by the number of young people who engaged over the 12 weeks and started to be more inwardly focused. The success of the animal therapy sessions encouraged management to revisit its pet policy, given the calming effect on young people from the presence of animals. The project gave the service the impetus to do more health activities in future, recognising the general positive impact they have on young people.

6) **A project to walk up a local climb.** Young people requested this project as a result of previously witnessing staff complete the same activity as a team building exercise. Up to 11 young people got involved in the planning, with a core group of 3, and 6 young people undertaking the climb with 2 staff in attendance. The Foyer produced a memory book from the event for the young people to have something to reflect from. The activity had a positive physical and psychological impact on young people, helping them to broaden their horizons, overcome anxiety, and give them greater confidence to explore beyond the Foyer. Three of the young people involved continued to go out on local walks afterwards.

7) **Refurbishing a Foyer space** into a homely area for young people to eat together, recognising that conversations over food offer a positive way to invest in wellbeing. The impact from the project leaves a future legacy at the service for others to benefit from, while its current success kickstarted the introduction of other building improvements led by young people, reflecting its positive influence on service culture.

8) **A hair and beauty project** over 12 weeks, with a focus on supporting young people in transition (though open to all) to learn about personal hygiene and care skills, covering facial hair, make-up and hair cutting. This offered an accessible environment for young people who may be anxious or without sufficient income to explore such services externally. The positive impact from sessions gave one young person the confidence to express their female identity more openly at the Foyer, while another 4 participants felt more confident to begin to access external hair and beauty services.



9) **Regular group and 1-1 sessions exploring family relationships and anxieties**, making use of the Foyer's relaxing garden and café space for 1-1 sessions on anxiety over 30 minute slots, while group sessions on family relationships took place over 30 mins to an hour. Session topics were chosen by young people. A lot of self-reflecting came from these sessions, from which some young people successfully reconnected with family peers to discuss their experiences. Young people looked forward to sessions and, for some individuals, the sessions proved to be a stepping stone for them to engage more fully in the wider Foyer offer. 7 attended 1-1 sessions while up to 8 residents joined in the group sessions. Impacts noted included the experience of young people smiling and laughing together – showing how the sessions enabled people to support each other's mental health in ways that were emotionally powerful and moving.

10) **Completing a mud racing obstacle course together.** Up to 14 young people across 3 Foyers attended this event alongside 7 staff. The project started out as a plan for a collective sports day before the obstacle course was identified as an option. The positive impacts from this included increased connections and trust levels between young people and staff; improved confidence among young people and stronger peer relationships, with young people supporting each other to complete the course together. In one example, a young person diagnosed with anxiety disorder was able to 'shed her insecurity and embrace the challenge', proving to be 'one of the stars of the day' and 'persuading others to attend'. The wider impact of the Connecting Minds programme encouraged more young people to participate in the project than would normally have done so. The project was run at the end of the Connecting Minds programme as a way of celebrating the overall experience while '*building bridges for the future*' through the investment in relational connection.



The health projects offered a practical way to bring together the collective learning from Connecting Minds, **showcasing how positive relational experiences can engage young people and accelerate their wellbeing.** They encouraged more opportunities for young people to take greater ownership over service development through their ideas and involvement, and inspired both staff and young people to engage in future activities.

Over 120 **young people were directly involved across the 10 projects, with 81% of young people participating in Connecting Minds believing that these health projects would have a positive wellbeing impact on the Foyer community.** Approval rates varied across services, with two examples that were more led by staff producing lower scores. This accounted for a 9% decrease on the 90% rate achieved in the original pilot for Connecting Minds. **The 81% recorded is still a strong indicator that health projects deliver an impactful approach to invest in young people's wellbeing. They represent exceptional value for a total budget that equates to only £66 per direct beneficiary.**

# PERSONAL WELLBEING BUDGETS

**120 young people spent personal wellbeing budgets of around £75 each on 240 purchases, averaging 2 items per person.** As noted in the pilot evaluation, the purpose of the wellbeing budget was not to incentivise young people to participate in Connecting Minds – it was aimed at enabling young people to make their own positive health choices.

**96% of young people believed that the use of a personal budget helped them to identify and progress positive wellbeing goals.**

Young people mostly wanted to spend their personal budget on items that made them feel better about themselves (40% of purchases), allowed them to pursue a positive activity (30% of purchases), or directly released stress and anxiety (20% of purchases). Less young people made budget decisions this time to feel more connected with others or manage and reflect on personal health – though the latter can in part be accounted for from the programme's better focus on this through the Selfology resource, while the former still accounted for 9% of decisions. Interview evidence suggests that those young people most engaged in conversation groups or selfology explorations were more likely to find it easier to make wellbeing budget decisions, which highlights the importance for a personal budget approach to be connected with a culture at the Foyer where wellbeing is in positive focus.



The top 5 purchases were associated with clothes, cosmetics and physical appearance (16% of purchases); household goods to improve the appearance of flats (15% of purchases); physical activity and sports items (11% of purchases); cooking implements and food (9% of purchases); and specific sensory/relaxation items (9%)



**The impact of the cost-of-living crisis was notable in some choices. The most significant increase from the original pilot in purchase decisions was linked to a greater focus on physical appearance, which evidenced a wider choice of items beyond just cosmetics to more everyday clothing.**

One Foyer noted that the experience of young people spending budget on clothing items with support from staff made them better appreciate *‘the importance of freeing up time for staff to go on shopping trips with young people as a key opportunity to support personal growth. The act of trying things on in supportive and encouraging company is powerful. Staff reported how powerful an experience it was helping residents to choose clothing and giving them lots of positive encouragement’*. There were moving examples where young people purchased items that supported their gender transition, in which *‘Choosing this item and being “allowed” to choose it was a big thing in being accepted’*.

Other examples of the economic pressures on young people were illustrated in purchases of essential items that ranged from a bus pass to baby goods or, in four cases, where the budget was used to pay off rental charges in order to relieve anxiety and free up other positive spending choices. The purchase of household items, though often linked with creating a more homely environment, also helped some young people to secure personal items to navigate the move out process beyond the Foyer, given that the lack of furnishings in a new property can negatively impact on wellbeing levels.

**While the majority of Foyers commented on challenges in encouraging young people to take advantage of the personal budget, its overall use produced positive impacts that showed the power of investing in young people to make decisions about items most likely to impact on their mental wellbeing.** Examples varied in line with the individual circumstances of the young people on the programme, reflecting the fact that Foyers were successfully able to hand over decision making power to the young people. However, external observation of practice in some Foyers warned that *‘traditional power dynamics between staff and young people sometime got in the way’* along with pressures from the *‘culture of managing risk’* in Foyers and the *‘lack of time to support young people’* during periods of the pandemic when many Foyers experienced staffing shortages and operational pressures.

**Impacts from enabling young people access to a personal wellbeing budget are best illustrated from the following quotes:**



- *'**The change in his attitude and confidence was amazing**, just by wearing/owning a track suit. He will socialise more and has got more sense of self'*
- *'She was helped by having the choice to be able to buy candles when these are banned in the foyer. **[It] gave her some control over her life that she had felt was lost...** The candles became the focus of having something someone cannot stop you from having , your own rules , being in charge of your life'*
- *'[Access to the budget] was a great support to me when I needed it and **helped me through anxiety**. I have now managed to get a part time role and am more financially secure'*
- *'I am unable to live with my daughter and being on universal credit I find it difficult to contribute much which hurts me. I was able to buy some clothing and a teddy for her, and started a savings account for her. **This really felt like I was contributing to her life. This made me feel better'***
- *'She felt self-conscious due to having to carry her laptop to college by hand ... feeling unable to fit in with her peers. [Purchase of the] Handbag and laptop case set helped positive impact - **There has been an increase in her attendance at college [and she] completed her college year with merit and distinctions'***
- *'[He] found a community through online gaming which has helped him with his mental health after losing a job. **A very independent and solitary young person who, by the very act of reaching out and accepting this offer has breached his normal boundaries'***
- *'I feel so much better when I am able to experience something new.... I've enjoyed being able to explore what I love doing. It has made me so happy'*



An important design feature to achieve impact on empowering young people to identify health and wellbeing needs was the association between:

- **cash investment in young people**
- **self-directed action to purchase items for personal health goals**
- **access to learning through selfology and/or conversation groups**

The personal budgets offered powerful ways to help young people begin to take control of their health challenges by identifying things they could act on to alleviate a health issue or promote positive health behaviours.

Because it is so unusual for young people to have this type of opportunity, it did take more time and support than staff anticipated to encourage young people to take up the investment available.

Young people's decisions were most often made in conversation with staff, creating a positive focus to reflect on health action and personal progress during 1-1 support sessions.

Expenditure choices by young people were matched with a clear rationale on decision making and positive impact in 90% of cases, an increase of 14% from the original Connecting Minds pilot. This was supported by staff making use of a simple Connecting Minds tracking tool to comment on purchases in terms of their decision and impact.

***As one Foyer noted, 'The evidence bank of the impact from wellbeing budgets has been huge.. enabling us to raise funds for personal budgets from local corporates as a giving campaign'.***

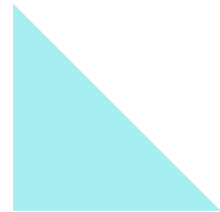


# SELFOLOGY

At the heart of the Connecting Minds programme lies a relational, Advantaged Thinking approach to understanding mental wellbeing that is embodied through the Selfology learning resource. Over 2022, Selfology was presented as an online learning platform. Based on the experiences of Connecting Minds, the platform has been further developed to enhance its presentation and navigation, alongside which an attractive workbook has also been produced to provide an alternative route for accessing its important insights.

Young people reported that Selfology:

- *'was therapeutic'*
- *'helped me understand my mindset and character better'*
- *'made it feel natural to have worries and doubts'*
- *'helped me have insight'*
- *helped me understand myself more which helped repair my relationship with mum'*



Additional evidence also suggested that group activities based on Selfology in Foyers *'helped build trust and understanding.. [and] positive mindsets'*.

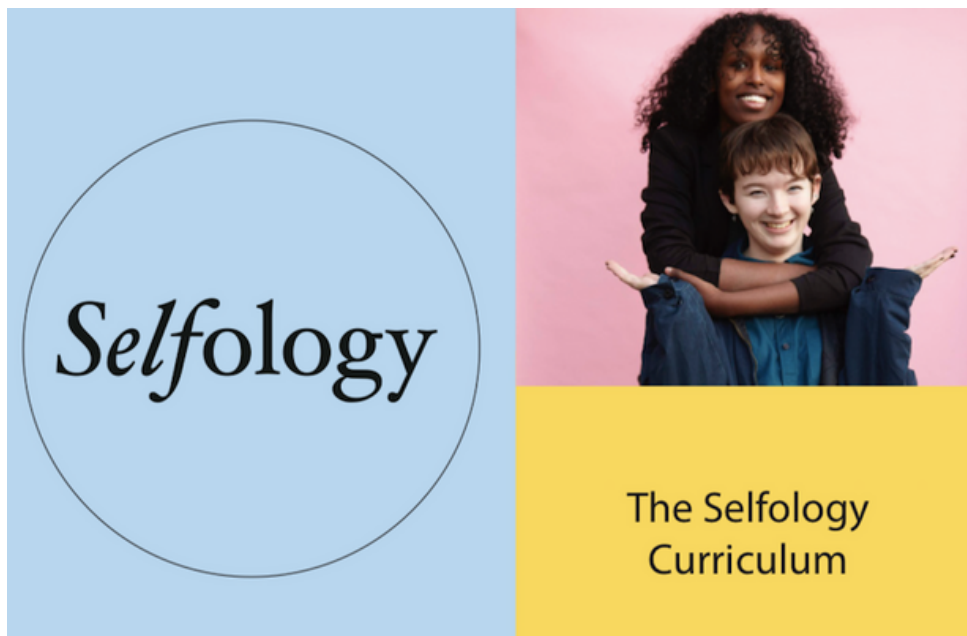
However, the platform used in Connecting Minds did receive mixed feedback. Some young people found it: *'a bit overwhelming and very wordy'*; *'hard to navigate or understand'*; *'tricky sometimes and ... triggering for me'*.

Work to expand Selfology and develop its navigation based on experiences from the original Connecting Minds pilot did not always achieve the positive impact intended. This was due to a combination of issues including: poor wifi provision in some services that limited the embrace of technology; restricted understanding from staff members who had not attended introductory sessions promoting use of the Facilitator Guide to support Selfology; over-reliance on written text that was sometimes pitched at the wrong level for Foyers; some young people feeling overwhelmed by the size and focus of the resource.

While Selfology was the least popular element of the Connecting Minds programme overall, **it still proved to be vitally important, with a majority of 58% agreeing that use of Selfology had improved their understanding of wellbeing. This was particularly so among staff, where 83% made successful use of the resource to guide group conversations and 1-1 support sessions with young people.** As some Foyers noted *'this is something staff can use in keyworking' [It] 'has become part of the support work we do with young people'*. There were also examples of staff supporting their own wellbeing through use of the Selfology platform.

There were certainly weaknesses in the presentation of Selfology, but **the core concept - to make wellbeing accessible and understandable both for young people and practitioners - has proved compelling.**





**The Selfology curriculum has been designed to provide young people and practitioners with new ways of thinking about mental health in personal life and society. It is a holistic curriculum that draws on a broad range of approaches, while providing practical exercises to apply in everyday life.**

## **Topic Areas Covered**

**Body, Feelings, Mind  
Personality and Identity  
Family and Relationships  
Anxiety  
Depression**

Connecting Minds has shown that the Selfology approach offers a powerful resource to work positively with young people's mental wellbeing. As a young person benefiting from Selfology concluded:

***'Selfology breaks down mental health and wellbeing and makes it about you'***

2023 improvements to simplify Selfology's navigation, introduce more video content, and offer an attractive workbook alternative, will all increase the power and potential of Selfology to equip young people and practitioners with a greater understanding of mental wellbeing.

**The new 2023 version of Selfology, operating as an online learning environment and/or workbook resource, offers the potential to make a positive impact on any practitioners and/or young people.**

Revisions have responded to feedback as follows:

1. *'Too too text based'*

All content is now presented primarily in video format, with an audiobook of all text provided alongside each video and reading provided as an optional drop down menu.

2. *'Difficult to navigate'*

The user journey has been redesigned so that users are now able to access an overview of all content when first entering a module, with the addition of video thumbnails that support navigation through the content journey more easily.

3. *'Content too advanced at points'*

Content has been redeveloped into shorter, digestible video lessons, enabling key concepts to be explained and conveyed more clearly and simply.

4. *'Young people overwhelmed by the size'*

The platform has been redesigned so that the content journey is clearer and simpler. Rather than scrolling down the page to access more content, the reading content is now provided as an optional drop down menu after each video lesson, reducing the size of the resource and making it easier to navigate and process information.

5. *'Group sessions would benefit from a physical guidebook to provide young people with a way to capture their notes and support their ongoing learning and development'*

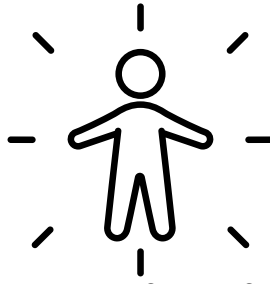
Two Selfology workbooks are now available containing all the reflective practices and exercises from the online Selfology platform, increasing people's accessibility to its content and messages.



**A key learning from the Connecting Minds experience was that Foyers who did not access training sessions on the Facilitator Guide (a guidebook for staff to utilise Selfology ) were least likely to understand and make use of it.**

**In future, Selfology will primarily be offered by States of Mind as part of a training package supporting its facilitation, either through an intensive half day session or over a fuller programme of six 2-hour sessions. While it will be possible to purchase Selfology as a stand-alone resource, the emphasis will be on encouraging services to invest in facilitating Selfology's full potential.**

# EXPERT SUPPORTS



Alongside access to Selfology and guidance for its facilitation, Foyers in Connecting Minds could also benefit from three additional expert supports:

- **Access to Talk for Health sessions for staff and young people**
- **Access to clinical support sessions for staff with an external expert**
- **Additional expert support to offer staff space to explore any issues from Selfology**

While these supports were strongly welcomed from the Foyers who benefitted from them, the majority of Foyers were simply too overwhelmed with other pressures over the pandemic period to fully take up this offer. For example, only 3 Foyers participated in expert support sessions, which mostly took the form of staff listening to each other to exchange practice tips and encouragement.

Up to 5 Foyers participated in the clinical support sessions, which often took the form of talking through practices for giving young people greater agency in decision making. While Foyers strongly believe in giving young people power and purpose, staff sometimes faced barriers in doing so from lack of resource, time pressures, and expectations from risk management processes. It was noted that it was sometimes hard to tease apart the anxiety faced by staff in giving up power to young people and the anxiety of young people to take up these opportunities, such as through the management of the personal budget offered in Connecting Minds. **Foyers reported that the clinical sessions helped give them more confidence that they were adopting the best approach or guided them to progress their practice. It proved helpful to have an external expert guide to turn to.** While the experience of staff attending the sessions was overwhelmingly positive, some may have still felt over apprehensive that they were some-how being ‘checked up on’ suggesting that other experiences of external ‘check ins’ had not always proved so empowering.

**5 of the Foyers also participated in a series of four Talk for Health sessions, based around insights into using an evidenced-based method for therapeutic talking.** This benefited mixed groups of staff and young people in a number of ways, including: listening skills; questioning skills; feedback skills; self awareness and positive self-esteem. The sessions also challenged managers who attended to talk about their own feelings in front of other staff and/or young people, which had some positive impacts on trust-building. As with other elements of the Connecting Minds programme, the delivery of Talk for Health was challenged by poor IT equipment in some services, and constraints on staff time to engage.

# ACTION POINTS



The final results from Connecting Minds - impacting positively on 92% of young people's mental wellbeing in Foyers, with an excellent overall Net Promoter Score of 54% - indicate that the programme offers a compelling investment option for any organisation seeking to prioritise better mental health outcomes among young people overcoming disadvantage.

There are 4 discrete recommendations for action to invest in Foyers and any other Foyer-like services working with young people:



**Recommendation 1:**

invest in the provision of personal budgets and health action projects to enhance impact on mental wellbeing



**Recommendation 2:**

Invest in therapeutic support training for staff to encourage young people to talk about mental wellbeing topics



**Recommendation 3:**

Invest in young people's access to mental wellbeing resources that increase their own self-knowledge.



**Recommendation 4:**

Invest in conversational wellbeing groups as a core part of the service offer for young people

## **Recommendation 1: invest in the provision of personal budgets and health action projects to enhance impact on mental wellbeing**

**Why:** Connecting Minds shows that even modest amounts of investment set aside to support a personal budget for young people's mental wellbeing goals, and/or a project to bring young people and staff together through a health challenge, produces tangible benefits on people's progress and the overall culture of a service. The choices made by young people to invest personal budgets and lead health projects offer profound insights into their needs and goals. Service funders and managers should look to innovate further in the targeted use of funds that give young people greater power over their support.

## **Recommendation 2: Invest in therapeutic support training for staff to encourage young people to talk about mental wellbeing topics**

**Why:** Connecting Minds demonstrates that, for services with an existing relational approach, the Selfology resource and its facilitator guide can equip staff to offer more purposeful therapeutic support for young people during 1-1 and/or group sessions. The more staff feel comfortable to facilitate conversations on wellbeing, the more young people will be encouraged to trust them with their feelings. This will ultimately increase the quality of 1-1 support and the positive progress of young people towards future independence.

## **Recommendation 3: Invest in young people's access to mental wellbeing resources that increase their self-knowledge.**

**Why:** the use of Selfology in Connecting Minds showed that the majority of young people embraced its access to insights to help them understand their own mental health and use practical tools to develop stronger wellbeing. If you believe in sharing power with young people, giving young people access to self-knowledge must form part of that commitment. The 2023 version of Selfology offers a bespoke solution for services to enhance support in 1-1 or group sessions with young people, with the option of self-guided study for those young people who wish to dip in and out of the resource in their own time.

## **Recommendation 4: Invest in conversational wellbeing groups as a core part of the service offer for young people**

**Why:** Connecting Minds produced compelling evidence that Conversation groups impacted on levels of calmness in Foyers, strengthened peer-relationships, stimulated positive health behaviours, and encouraged wider engagement in the Foyer offer. Regular conversation groups helped keep wellbeing a positive focus for staff and young people. With the support of the Selfology resource and - ideally - activity from a local health action project, services can easily establish conversation groups as part of their normal timetable of activities.

**CONTACT: [bea@statesofmind.org](mailto:bea@statesofmind.org)**

**[www.statesofmind.org](http://www.statesofmind.org)**