

Friends Around the Table Evaluation Report

The Friends Around the Table (FaTT) project worked with adult family carers and adults struggling with feelings of loneliness in rural Suffolk. The outcomes focused on increasing wellbeing, reducing loneliness and increasing skills

Suffolk Artlink used quantitative and qualitative data to demonstrate impact. The two recognised tools for quantitative data exploring wellbeing and loneliness were; the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Well-being Measure and The Campaign to End Loneliness Measurement Tool CtEL). Our intention for the ONS and CtEL tools was to measure and assess the cumulative impact of sessions reflecting how people felt over a sustained period rather than in the moment.

Suffolk Artlink asked two additional questions to capture the in the moment impact on people's wellbeing and feeling of social connection arising within a single session as well.

Increased skills were recorded by asking the simple question: 'Did you learn any new skills with us today?' Yes or No?

Other general feedback was gathered as supportive qualitative data for all three outcomes.

All tools convincingly evidence an extremely positive impact on our participants.

The exit results for the ONS and CtEL tools was for people attending six or more sessions. Attending regular sessions over a sustained period had a particularly positive, sustained impact on this cohort.

Increased wellbeing:

FaTT has provided a safe space to reconnect after a very difficult, isolated time during Covid restrictions. Sessions have not only provided a social space for connection but somewhere that individuals can learn new skills, share stories, knowledge and enjoy creative rest bite from everyday commitments and struggles.

Sessions have created opportunities for individuals to meet likeminded local people, reducing feelings of isolation and improve a sense of wellbeing. Below are examples of lasting connections, enriched lives and increased confidence resulting in increased wellbeing:

'For my mental stability, I needed to be around safe people... I met L at the session and she was so lovely, it really lifted my spirits!' Stowmarket participant.

'I'm meeting up with J for coffee later today and she is going to come along to my art club next week too... it has been wonderful to meet her.' Woodbridge participant

'...I found the poetry session surprisingly very healing – it has helped me so much. Overall these sessions have boosted my confidence while battling decreasing mobility issues.' Hadleigh participant.

'...one lady said she was 'treading more lightly' after the session.' Feedback from the organiser of Woodbridge Carers group

Office for National Statistics (ONS) Measuring Well-being

The Office for National Statistics uses four survey questions to measure personal well-being as illustrated in Table 1. People are asked to respond to the questions on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is "not at all" and 10 is "completely".

Table 1: Four measures of personal well-being

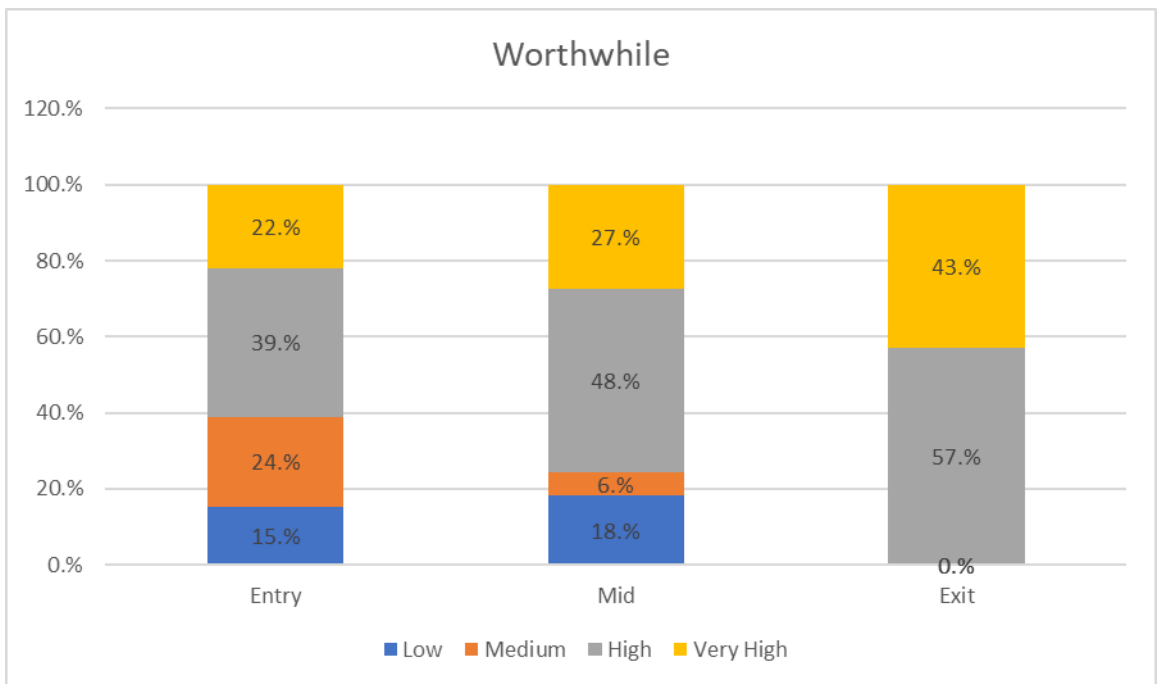
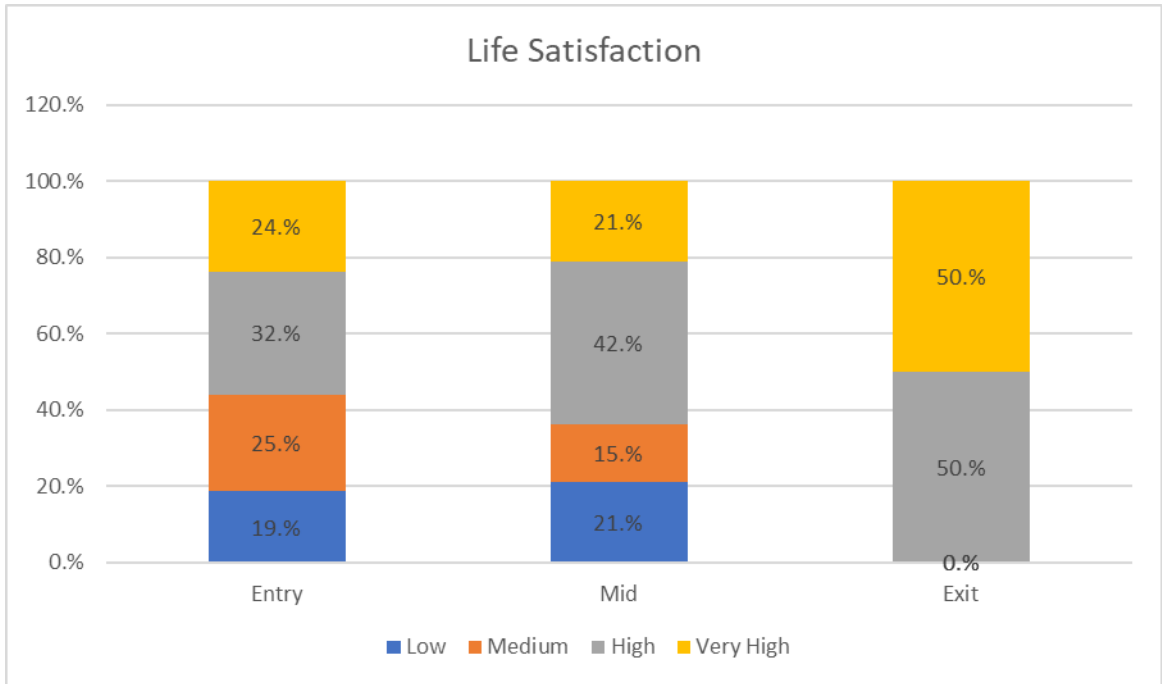
Next I would like to ask you four questions about your feelings on aspects of your life. There are no right or wrong answers. For each of these questions I'd like you to give an answer on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is "not at all" and 10 is "completely".

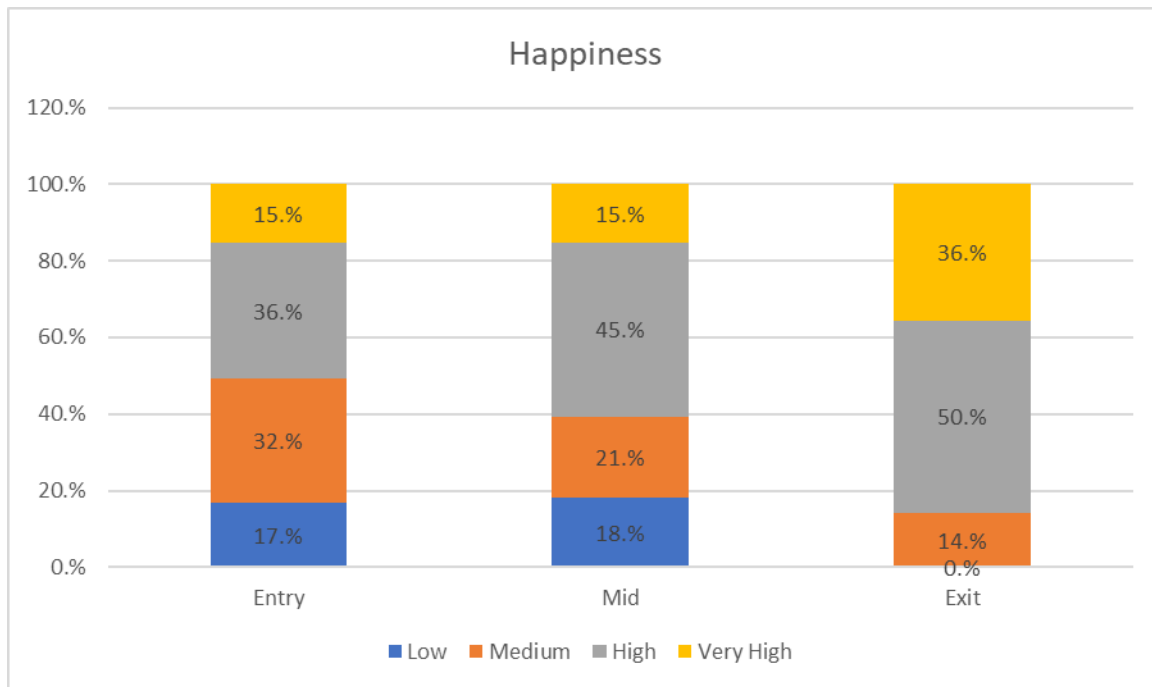
Measure	Question
Life Satisfaction	Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
Worthwhile	Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
Happiness	Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?
Anxiety	On a scale where 0 is "not at all anxious" and 10 is "completely anxious", overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

Source: Office for National Statistics

Suffolk Artlink measured at entry, mid-point and exit. Our total response was 106.

Each question is presented below separately showing entry, mid and exit responses for easier comparison of change.





Reduced loneliness:

FaTT tackled loneliness by offering family carers and adults living rurally, opportunities to connect with others.

These demographics were some of the hardest hit during the pandemic; offering a platform where they could not only connect with others who knew what they might be experiencing, but also a wider array of individuals, created opportunities of more resilient legacy.

It can be difficult attending groups, especially if you struggle with mental health and feelings of loneliness. FaTT's approach of using experienced professional practitioners combined with Artlink's expertise, provided a welcoming and unifying space; sessions offered a hybrid mix of experiential and skills-based workshops. This unique blend made it possible for individuals to share experiences, laugh with strangers and breakdown social anxieties quicker than a traditional workshop.

'I felt apprehension before coming in, but everyone was so welcoming and friendly, it was a lovely atmosphere.' Hadleigh participant

'Really worthwhile session, interesting, informative and excellent session leaders.' Stowmarket participant

Providing remote sessions has enabled those unable to attend face to face to still benefit. Many of the carers the project aimed at reaching, were still self-isolating in the early stages of the project; remote sessions provided much needed stimulation and connection for carers and those who struggle with face to face for varied reasons.

‘The online sessions I have attended, have been very educational, welcoming and comforting. I would not normally see or talk to anyone all day... Company with familiar people.. smiley faces and enthusiasm. ‘ Zoom participant.

The Campaign to End Loneliness Measurement Tool

This tool contains the following statements:

1. I am content with my friendships and relationships
2. I have enough people I feel comfortable asking for help at any time
3. My relationships are as satisfying as I would want them to be

To each of these statements respondents to give one of the following answers: Strongly Disagree / Disagree / Neutral / Agree / Strongly Agree / Don't Know.

In order to score somebody's answers, their responses are coded as follows:

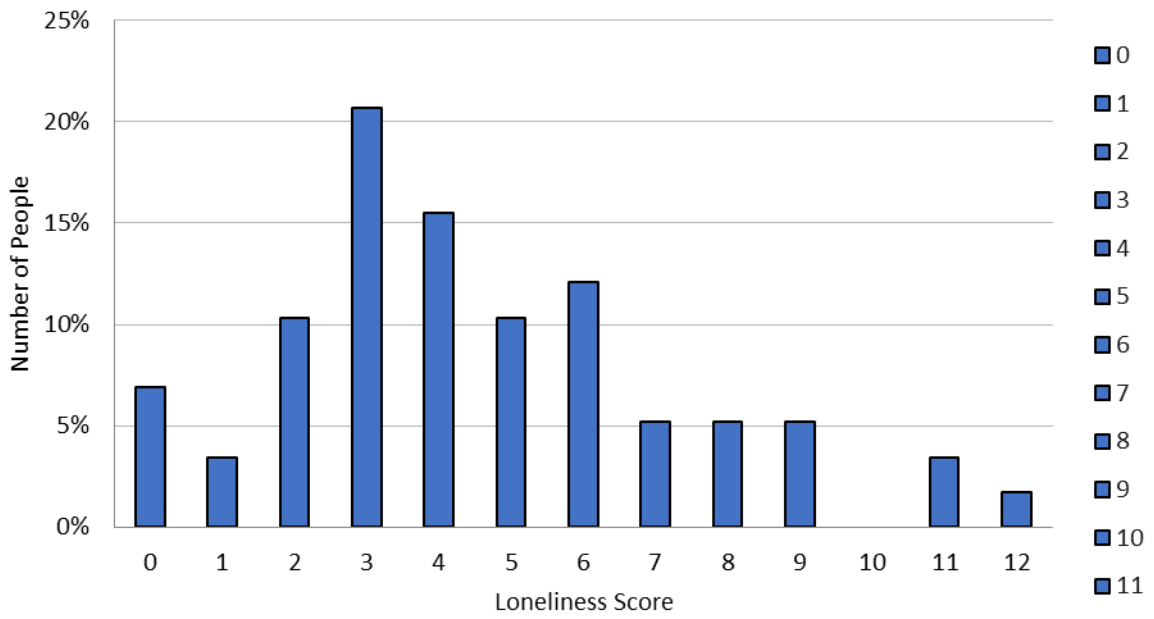
Response	Score
Strongly disagree	4
Disagree	3
Neutral	2
Agree	1
Strongly agree	0

The scores for each individual question need to be added together. This gives a possible range of scores from 0 to 12, which can be read as follows:

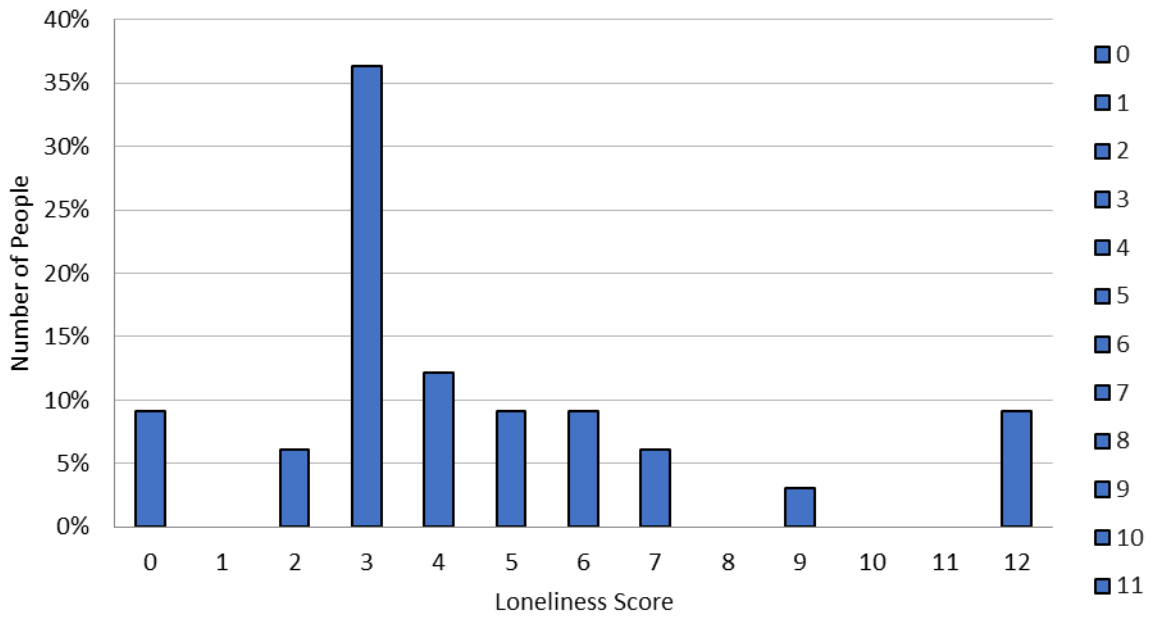


Suffolk Artlink measured at entry, mid-point and exit. The total response for this measure was 104.

CtEL entry



CtEL mid-point





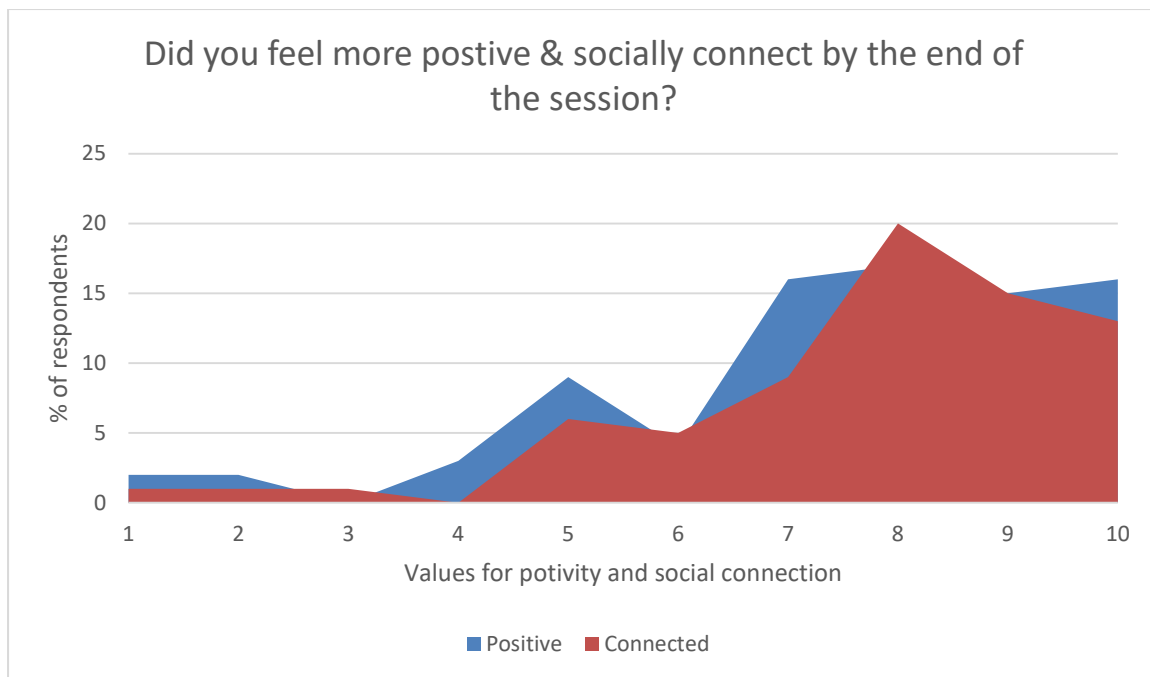
Additional questions relating to wellbeing and loneliness

We asked two additional questions regarding people’s feelings of wellbeing and feelings of social connectedness to assess the impact of a single session.

Positive: Thinking back to how you felt before starting the session, and then to how you felt at the end of it, please rate how you felt on a scale of 1-10. 1 = no difference, 10 = much more positive.

Socially Connected: Thinking back to how you felt before starting the session, and then to how you felt at the end of it, please rate how you felt on a scale of 1-10. 1 = no difference, 10 = less lonely/more connected.

There were 133 responses to the question about positivity and 115 to the question regarding social connection.



Quite clearly even attending one session had a positive impact on feelings on wellbeing and social connectedness.

Increased skills:

98% of participants answered 'Yes' when asked 'Have you learnt any new skills with us?' demonstrating an overwhelmingly positive increase.

Examples of skills learnt:

'Making paint from scratch'

'Learning to make spring rolls'

'Whittling and foraging plants'

Beneficiaries have learnt new skills that can be shared beyond the project, improving not only their lives but others around them:

'I've had so much fun with my turmeric paint – took it to my other group who were painting sunflowers for Ukraine...they loved it!' Woodbridge participant

Sharing our skills and resources leaves a legacy even after one session:

'The activities have been stimulating and fun... volunteers love them! Everyone can do them at home as well...some of our volunteers do other roles in the community, and I know will transfer the activity skills to their wider community.' Trimley Memory Lane Co-ordinator.

Case studies:

Social Prescriber:

Jess Kemp, a social prescriber shares the positive impact of Friends Around the Table's safe and relaxed environment.

'I referred 5 people to Friends around the Table at MEAL and witnessed first-hand the therapeutic benefits of art. Individuals, who during their first social prescribing assessment, spoke of hopelessness, low self-esteem and anxiety, came alive when encouraged to freely express themselves in a safe space, with purpose and without judgement.

One participant told me she nearly didn't attend due to anxiety but following the session was surprised by her abilities and excitedly spoke of planned future creative endeavours and social connections.'

Participant:

S is a family carer based near Stowmarket who cares for her mother, as well as dealing with her own mobility restrictions which can be very isolating. S is a creative individual, but due to her demanding and complicated home life, can struggle to find outlets which in turn impacts her mental health.

Immediately it was obvious the positive impact the sessions were having for S: 'It is helpful to attend the group as I live alone with only a cat for company...Meeting people and doing something completely different. It's very therapeutic. '

S found the skills and knowledge shared useful and inspiring, enabling space to be creative and build confidence. She would end sessions with a big grin and with many a 'thank you' to the practitioners.

'I have learnt many interesting skills... I now have a keen interest in expanding my knowledge and cooking skills...it has been interesting to go foraging and learn a new skill cooking scones on the fire with a stick!... It has been brilliant. I used the FaTT spice mix sprinkled on root veg chips baked in the oven - Loved it!'

When it was decided that the Stowmarket group would like to continue as an independent group, S's confidence had grown to a level that she felt empowered to manage the legacy group.

'Thank you so much for giving me this opportunity. It's going really well with 9 people attending the last session, 3 of those new faces... I really feel there is a need at the moment as I am getting more people contacting me all the time with other local groups folding.

I am going to make a new programme... I have so many ideas. I am in my element. I have had a lot going on recently with close family deaths, and sometimes I feel like I am on auto pilot, but I am keeping everything ticking over and it's a really positive focus for me. I love it.

Everyone's enjoyed it; I've had so many 'thank yous' so I must be doing a good job!