

Joint Cross Party Group on Arts and Health & Mental Health and Eating Disorders 3rd June 2025 12:00, hybrid meeting held in The Media Briefing Room, Y Senedd



Present

Heledd Fychan (Chair), Member of the Senedd
Angela Rogers, WAHWN
Becca May Collins, WAHWN
Nesta Lloyd-Jones, Welsh NHS Confederation
Rebecca Hardy-Griffith, Arts Council of Wales
Dan Allen, Arts Council of Wales
Simon Jones, Mind Cymru
Nia Sinclair, Mind Cymru
Jo Whitfield, National Lead, Wales Beat
Brooke Webb, Senedd Staff
Johan Skre, Swansea Bay UHB
Kathryn Lambert, Hywel Dda UHB
Ruth Jones, Hywel Dda UHB
Sarah Pace, Hywel Dda UHB
Sofia Vougioukalou, Cardiff University
Sally Thelwell, Velindre NHS Trust
Andrea Davies, Betsi Cadwaladr UHB
Nick Horn, Betsi Cadwaladr UHB
Claire Turner, Aneurin Bevan UHB
Naomi Swift, Cardiff & Vale UHB
Nia Holford, Cardiff & Vale UHB
Katherine Pyke, Cardiff & Vale UHB
Rachel Humphreys, Cardiff & Vale UHB
Lucinda Bevan, Powys Teaching Board
Prue Thimbleby, Swansea Bay UHB
Sarah Goodey, Aneurin Bevan UHB
Niamh Salkeld, Senedd
Eleri Morgan, Senedd
Dewi Druce-Perkins, CAHMS
Amy Crossley-Lewis, Cwm Taf Morgannwg
Helen Pritchard, Betsi Cadwaladr UHB
Rhys Watkins, NHS Executive
Martin Ball
Annabelle Llana Sierra

Emily van der Venter, PHW
Teri Howson-Griffiths, Betsi Cadwaladr UHB
Emma Henwood
Jennifer Smith
Carol Harris
Kelly Barr
Kieran Bryant
Nailia Noori
Sara Crowley
Steven Crane Jenkins
Theano Ntokou
Thomas Freeston
Sally Lewis
Helen Williams, Arts Council of Wales (minuting)

Apologies

Maggie Russell, Chair, Arts Council Wales
Kate Newman, Social Care Wales
Timothy Jenkins, Welsh Government
Liz Clarke, Arts Council of Wales
Joanne Brandon, Cardiff & Vale UHB
Elinor Lloyd-Davies, Arts Council of Wales
Jemma Wray, Mental Health Foundation,
Richard Jones, Mental Health Matters,
Dafydd Huw, RC Psych,
Rachel Suff, CIPD,
Cecile Gwylim, NSPCC,
Keith Bowen
Helen Misson

1. Welcome and Introductions

Heledd Fychan MS welcomed everyone to the meeting and expressed her enthusiasm to be joining with the Cross-Party Group on Mental Health & Eating Disorders to explore the impact of the arts on mental health. It was encouraging to report that more young people who are experiencing mental health difficulties, are seeking help, rather than suffering in silence and being unsupported. While this was a welcome development, significant challenges remain, and it's clear that collective mental health has been under considerable strain in recent years. From the isolation of the global pandemic through to the cost-of-living crisis, wider economic and political uncertainty, global conflicts and the climate crisis, individuals and communities have had much to navigate.

Discussions around mental health often focus on medical support systems such as the NHS and personal experiences within those structures. However, the understanding of the role that social and community-based activities play in mental health support has grown significantly. These initiatives foster connection, promote resilience, and aid recovery by building supportive networks.

Heledd noted that we know that the arts are well placed to provide this type of support and looked forward to hearing from Kathryn Lambert, Head of Arts at Hywel Dda University Health Board, about an exemplary project run at Hywel Dda. Kathryn has led the co-creation and publication of Hywel Dda's groundbreaking Arts and Health Charter, the first public commitment from the NHS in Wales to integrate the arts into healthcare to enhance wellbeing and support recovery. Kathryn will be speaking on Arts Boost, a project designed to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people known to CAMHS who have mild to moderate mental health needs.

2. Molly Leonard, Pride of Britain award winner – Jo Whitfield, National Lead, Wales Beat

Jo Whitfield introduced Molly Leonard, a Pride of Britain award winner, who had joined the meeting to share her lived experience of overcoming a severe eating disorder. Molly reflected on the six years she had spent in and out of hospitals, often far from her home in Wales.

Molly spoke about the transformative role that arts and creativity played in her recovery, particularly mindful crafting, which became a vital source of healing. Inspired by her own journey, Molly began running crafting sessions for fellow patients, offering them a creative outlet during their treatment. With the support of The King's Trust, she further developed her skills, leading to her facilitation of crafting workshops in schools, youth services, and her local community.

Heledd expressed her gratitude to Molly for sharing her powerful story, recognising the inspiring impact of her journey. She highlighted how Molly's experience demonstrated the profound benefits of arts in recovery and expressed hope that her story would offer encouragement and inspiration to others facing similar challenges.

3. Overview of Arts Boost, part of the National Arts & Minds programme – Sally Lewis, Arts & Health Consultant and Kathryn Lambert, Head of Arts & Health, Hywel Dda UHB.

Sally provided an overview of the Arts & Minds Programme | Celf a'r Meddwl which aims to embed creative activities with mental health services across the NHS in Wales. Managed by Dan Allen at the Arts Council of Wales and driven by the Arts & Health Coordinators in each Health Board, Arts & Minds is a national partnership programme that began in 2021 through a joint commitment by the Baring Foundation & ACW and with strategic support from the Welsh NHS Confederation and the sector network, WAHWN. Phase 1 took a broad focus with a wide range of people benefitting from creative arts activities including new parents and their babies; children with eating disorders and self-harming behaviours as well as adults living with poor mental health. In phase 2, all Health Boards focusing on supporting young people's mental health, partnering with artists, arts organisations and CAMHS teams.

Kathryn Lambert then gave a presentation on the award-winning *Arts Boost* programme was launched in 2022 by Hywel Dda University Health Board in response to the rising number of young people seeking mental health support from S-CAMHS.

Now in its fourth year, and based on a growing body of evidence, *Arts Boost* underscores the essential role of the arts in healthcare—enhancing wellbeing, self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-expression, while fostering recovery and resilience.

Kathryn talked about [The Programme](#) highlighting its benefits and the profound impact it has had on those who have participated in the scheme. Evidence demonstrates that it enhances wellbeing, boosts confidence, fosters a sense of safety and acceptance, strengthens positive relationships and alleviates distress. By empowering young people, The Programme helps them find contentment and resilience in their lives.

Kathryn noted that those interested in learning more about the scheme could contact her for further details and shared her contact email: Kathryn.Lambert@wales.nhs.uk

Molly Leonard stated that this kind of programme would have helped her enormously during her illness. Having access to such facilities could provide a lifeline for many young people who are experiencing mental health challenges currently.

Kathryn highlighted that both funding and geographical limitations posed significant barriers to accessing the scheme. Heledd emphasised the importance of ensuring equal access for all young people and stressed that the programme should be made available to all rather than treated as an additional service. While Kathryn acknowledged that access to the programme has improved, she noted that challenges persist. She underscored the ongoing need to advocate for its value and continuously provide evidence of its benefits to secure wider support and accessibility.

4. Discussion, questions and actions arising

Nesta Lloyd Jones described Molly's experience as both powerful and encouraging and asked Molly how the staff at the unit had responded during her time there? Molly shared that whilst the staff did recognise the benefits, especially the occupational therapist who supported her in using arts and creativity and provided access to a dedicated space for the activities, they didn't actively get involved with the workshops.

Jo Whitfield asked if there are any similar challenges in implementing programmes such as Arts Boost across Wales? Angela Rogers, WAHWN, noted that the learning emerging from Arts Boost was helping other Health Boards who are in the process of developing their programmes. Angela emphasised how vital it was to develop the longevity of the programmes and avoid them ending due to a lack of funding. Angela felt it was important to get the message out to the public about the benefit of arts and creativity on mental health and cover this widely in the media. Kathryn added that the timescales for applying for funding can be challenging due to the limited window provided. Heledd emphasised the opportunity to place culture and the prevention of ill health at the forefront in the coming year, particularly with the upcoming elections. Over time, this focus could reduce the need to continually having to justify their importance.

Emily van der Venter reminded everyone that there was already a strong body of evidence that could be used to demonstrate impact and advocate for this work.

Andrea Davies, Betsi UHB, reported that artists had previously delivered activities on a ward for young people with eating disorders, yielding significant benefits including a noticeable increase in early discharges. She emphasised the need for the further roll-out of artist training and the selection of appropriate, safe materials for activities.

A question was put to Kathryn about whether reported cases of eating disorders had increased since the pandemic due to isolation. She responded that Hywel Dda saw a significant surge in young people experiencing mental health disorders during the pandemic and worked diligently to reduce those numbers.

Nick Horn, Betsi UHB, emphasised the importance of challenging what is measured or recognised as valid evidence in relation to Arts & Health emphasising that it wasn't just quantitative data that the NHS should be focused on. Meaning is what matters to people and what the arts can offer in abundance.

Heledd asked Molly what message she would like everyone in the room to take forward. Molly emphasised that recovery is not a one-size-fits-all process, sharing that craft had been deeply healing for her personally. However, she acknowledged that other young people would have their own passions and interests that can support their recovery in unique ways. A patient-centred approach was therefore essential.

Heledd reflected on the discussions and expressed gratitude to everyone for their contributions. She proposed the following actions:

- Extend an invitation to Sarah Murphy, Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing, as well as the shadow spokesperson, to attend the next meeting.
- Emphasise the need to integrate arts and health into the new Mental Health Strategy.
- Identify and address key barriers such as funding, geographical limitations, and training requirements.
- Encourage collective thought on developing a short list of asks for Arts & Health to put to the political parties for inclusion in their manifestos.
- Reinforce the importance of funding for arts and health, highlighting its positive impact on patient recovery.

5. Tabled Partner Updates and Any Other Business

Heledd expressed gratitude to everyone for sharing their partner updates and noted how inspiring it was to see the impactful work happening across Wales.

AOB: Angela Rogers informed the group that the WEAVE Conference, sponsored by Public Health Wales and supported by the Arts Council of Wales, would take place in Wrexham on the 8th and 9th of September. There were still some tickets available.

Jo Whitfield shared that several dietitians had hoped to attend today's meeting but were unable to due to Dietitian's Day. She emphasised the importance of celebrating the day and recognising the vital role dietitians play in beating eating disorders.

It was agreed that it would be useful to have a joint meeting with the Mental Health Cross Party Group again in the future.

Date of next meeting: TBC.