

How-to Guide

This guide offers more detailed information and advice for those who may be interested in adopting or adapting the initiative in their local area.

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Networks of Wellbeing



Title	Networks of Wellbeing
Organisation	Networks of Wellbeing
Category	Promising
Poverty Impact	Prevention, Mitigation, Awareness
Introduction to the Project	
<p>Networks of Wellbeing (NoW) is a Huntly-based charity focused on improving mental health and community wellbeing. Rooted in the <i>Five Ways to Wellbeing</i>, it offers free counselling, peer support, mindfulness, gardening, walking groups, veterans’ breakfasts, and more—both in person and online. NoW works with local GPs, schools, care homes, and organisations to reduce isolation and build resilience. It also supports broader wellbeing through initiatives like the Share Shed tool library and Hope in Action events. NoW promotes a people- and planet-centred approach, aiming to embed wellbeing into everyday community life.</p>	

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Initial Idea

Who had the initial idea?		
Foundation Scotland		
How did the idea for the project come about?		
Networks of Wellbeing were one of 19 charities across Scotland that Foundation Scotland approached, the initiative was influenced by Foundation Scotland's collaboration with the Wellbeing Economy Alliance.		
Were plans informed by any published reports / papers / research evidence or practice from elsewhere?		
	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Was anyone else involved in developing the initial idea of the project?		
	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Were those with lived experience of poverty involved in developing the initial idea of the project?		
	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Yes. Staff at Networks of Wellbeing have lived experience of both poverty and mental health issues, which directly shapes how services are designed and delivered. The organisation also listens closely to recurring themes that emerge in community settings and uses that insight, rather than formal consultation exercises, to develop activities.		

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Was funding required to support the development of the initial idea of the project?			
No	✓	Yes	
Were specific resources – other than funding - needed when developing the initial idea of the project?			
No'		Yes	✓
Please provide details of the resources that were required when developing the initial idea of the project.			
Staff/Volunteer Time	Staff and volunteers played a key role in shaping the project, drawing on lived experience and existing relationships to guide development.		
Facilities / Workspace	The project uses Networks of Wellbeing's Huntly base, offering a familiar and welcoming space that supports easy access.		
Equipment	Minimal equipment was needed beyond existing materials and occasional digital tools already in use.		
Local Knowledge	Deep local knowledge informed the design, with insights gathered through day-to-day community contact and trusted relationships.		
Food and Drink	N/A		

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Did any barriers have to be overcome when developing the initial idea of the project?	
<i>No</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>There weren't significant barriers during the idea development stage. The project builds on existing ways of working at Networks of Wellbeing and was a natural evolution. The partnership element with Gordon Rural Action provided an opportunity to extend outreach but was also a continuation of ongoing approaches.</p>	
Did anything in particular enable development of the initial idea of the project?	
<i>No</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
What, if anything, helped enable development of the initial idea of the project?	
Nothing in particular.	
How long did it take between having the initial idea and starting the project?	
N/A	
Who made the decision to introduce the project?	
Foundation Scotland decided to fund the project, but within the organisation, Fiona Alderson and her team at Networks of Wellbeing decided to progress with the work.	

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Early Development – Pilot Project or Feasibility Study

Was there a pilot project or feasibility study?	
No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Yes, a pilot project	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes, a feasibility study	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Accessing the Service and Engaging with Service Users

Is there a referral process?	
No	✓
Yes	
<p>There is no formal referral process. People can self-refer, walk in, or be signposted by GPs and other local services. Staff encourage autonomy, ensuring any introduction to the service belongs to the individual, not imposed by others. Staff may offer quiet visits or accompany people if they feel nervous. A zero-tolerance policy applies only to aggression or active substance use on the premises, though individuals are welcome to return when safe to do so.</p>	
Other than referral, how do potential clients come to know about the project?	
<p>Fiona Alderson stated "We're not amazing at advertising because we haven't any time. So, we predominantly use posters in local shops and also local shops in other communities and rural communities. Facebook and a website, which isn't as up to date as it should be because I do the website as well. Also, a lot through word of mouth."</p>	
What is the most common way through which users typically access the service?	
<p>There is not a single way through which users access the service. Some people make initial contact by phone, especially if they are struggling with mental health and find it hard to walk through the door. Others attend a group activity with a friend or call ahead to ask if they can join an activity. For those who feel nervous or unsure, staff may arrange to meet them first, offer a quiet visit to familiarise them with the space, or personally accompany them to a group. While the initial point of contact varies, what remains consistent is that the environment aims to be welcoming, supportive, and non-judgmental, which encourages users to return.</p>	

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Do you take steps to keep in touch / reach out to service users?	
No	
Yes	✓
Mailing lists and WhatsApp group chats tailored to different activities are used to share updates and to encourage to stay connected. Additionally, a member of the team, who is not a counsellor, provides one-to-one support for individuals who are waiting for counselling or are not yet ready to join group activities. This ongoing contact helps users feel supported and ensures they remain connected to the service during transitional periods.	

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Working with People with Lived Experience of Poverty

Are those with lived experience of poverty involved in <u>delivering</u> the project	
No	
Yes	✓
<p>Yes, individuals with lived experience of poverty are actively involved in delivering the project at Networks of Wellbeing. Several service users volunteer, including one man in his 50s who has shared his story publicly, contributed to a local community radio show, and even delivered his own peer support group from the premises. Networks of Wellbeing supported him through the final stages of his recovery when others had not, and he is now thriving, he was recently offered a full-time job. Others also help facilitate group activities, participate in outreach work, and contribute ideas or resources to support Networks of Wellbeing’s programmes. Their involvement is not only welcomed but valued as central to how Networks of Wellbeing operate.</p>	
Are people with lived experience of poverty involved in <u>managing</u> the project or project governance?	
No	✓
Yes	
Are people with lived experience of poverty involved in <u>any other aspect</u> of the project? <i>If so, please describe below.</i>	
No	
Yes	✓
<p>Yes. People with lived experience regularly contribute to the running of activities, suggest ideas, support others through peer involvement, and take part in outreach with partner agencies. One participant, now in recovery, volunteers, co-facilitates sessions, and has been invited to speak publicly. These contributions are central to how Networks of Wellbeing builds trust and relevance.</p>	

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Leadership, Governance and Partnership Working

Who is responsible for managing the project?	
Fiona Alderson oversees the operational management of the project, including staffing, safeguarding, funding applications, and partnership working. The Board has strategic oversight. Fiona also acts as a buffer between external pressures and her staff team, ensuring communication is supportive and morale is prioritised.	
Is this the only responsibility of the person managing the project?	
Yes	
No	✓
Fiona Alderson is also responsible for writing funding applications, reporting (although Foundation Scotland handles reporting for this particular project), and working closely with a colleague who oversees the financial aspects. They also handle staff recruitment, management, and training, with a strong emphasis on staff wellbeing. As leaders, they act as a buffer between the board or external pressures and the staff, ensuring communication is handled in a way that supports and protects the team. Positive feedback and morale are also prioritised. Overall, the role involves a wide range of responsibilities that go far beyond project management alone.	
What proportion of the manager's overall workload is given over to this project?	
Most of it	
About half of it	✓
Just a small proportion of it	
Is there a Project Steering or Advisory Group?	
No	✓
Yes	
However, if needed, they can make contact with Foundation Scotland for advice on any element of the project.	

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Are any other governance arrangements in place to review strategy and performance?	
No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Links to Wider Policies, Strategies and Statutory Requirements

In your opinion, is the project aligned with national and/or local anti-poverty strategies and priorities (e.g., local authority or health board priorities)?	
Don't know	
No	
Yes	✓
<p>Networks of Wellbeing aligns its projects with both national and local anti-poverty strategies in Scotland. While their primary focus is on mental health and community wellbeing, their initiatives contribute to broader anti-poverty efforts by addressing social isolation, promoting community resilience, and supporting vulnerable groups.</p> <p>Scotland's commitment to a wellbeing economy emphasises preventative, community-led solutions to social issues. Networks of Wellbeing's focus on mental health and community engagement aligns with this approach. Aberdeenshire's Local Outcomes Improvement Plan prioritises reducing poverty and inequalities, enhancing mental health, and building resilient communities. Networks of Wellbeing's services, such as peer support groups and community activities directly support these objectives by enhancing social connections and improving mental wellbeing.</p>	
In your opinion, has the project benefitted from being part of this anti-poverty strategy?	
Don't know	
No	
Yes	✓
<p>Fiona argued that while the phrase "cost of living crisis" may have faded from public discourse, its impact is still very real and visible in the community. Being aligned with a broader anti-poverty and inequality strategy, rather than one focused solely on poverty, has allowed Networks of Wellbeing to take a more holistic approach (focusing on needs related to problems of poverty, and not just financial wellbeing). This approach enables Networks of Wellbeing to respond to the wide range of ongoing challenges people are facing. This framing also helps others better understand the continued relevance and urgency of the issues we address.</p>	

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Is the project part of any other strategy?	
Don't know	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
In your opinion, has the project benefitted from being part of this strategy?	
Don't know	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the project delivering a service that is a statutory commitment?	
No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Funding

Has external funding been secured to support the work?	
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please provide details of the external funding that was used secured to support this work?	
Which organisation provided funding?	Foundation Scotland
What was the specific funding stream/source/scheme?	Tackling Inequalities, a fund administered directly by Foundation Scotland
How much funding was secured?	£30,000 per year
For how long has funding been secured?	Till 2029 - The funding is unrestricted, allowing flexibility in how it is used to meet community needs. This includes core delivery costs, staff time, and partnership working with Gordon Rural Action. The fund supports an experimental, trust-based model to explore the impact of flexible funding on local service delivery.
Is future funding from the same external source a possibility?	
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

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Is future funding from the same external source based on pre-agreed outcomes or outputs being delivered from this work?	
No	✓
Yes	
Has a specific sum been secured from the host organisation to support this work?	
No	✓
Yes	
What are the future - longer-term - prospects for this work if existing funding sources were no longer available?	
<p>If all other funding were to end, this particular project is the only one that would likely be able to continue, though in a much-reduced form. Networks of Wellbeing would no longer operate from a physical building and may be limited to one staff member working remotely. However, it is not a straightforward situation. In that scenario, a responsible and fair approach would be to engage in a discussion with the funder to reassess whether the project could still be delivered. It may even result in returning any unused funding if the infrastructure and capacity to deliver the work no longer existed. Ultimately, this would be a matter for the board to decide.</p>	

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Staffing and Resources

Do existing staff from the host organisation contribute toward the work of this project as part of their broader work for the organisation?	
No	
Yes	✓
There are 14 ongoing projects at Networks of Wellbeing, (moving up to 16 at the end of 2025) this project in particular is integrated into all of them.	
Are existing staff from the host organisation paid extra (for example, taking on extra hours) to contribute toward the work of this project?	
No	✓
Have additional paid staff been employed to contribute toward the work of this project?	
No	✓
Are volunteers involved in delivering the project?	
No	
Yes	✓
<p>Volunteers play a vital and active role in the delivery of this project. One volunteer with lived experience, previously mentioned, now runs his own peer support group and regularly supports Networks of Wellbeing during outreach sessions delivered in partnership with Gordon Rural Action. His involvement strengthens the project's community presence and allows for peer-led connection during rural outreach.</p> <p>During school holidays, a second volunteer runs craft sessions for children at these outreach events, enabling parents and carers to participate fully in the main activities. As the first volunteer prepares to start full-time work, a third volunteer has stepped in to support logistics, driving and helping to transport equipment for sessions.</p> <p>In addition, a dedicated volunteer helps deliver the women's support group in Keith, working alongside the same staff member who is involved in this wider project. These roles are hands-on, meaningful, and help expand the project's reach while supporting the confidence and development of those who volunteer.</p>	

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Are specific resources – other than staff/volunteer time and money - needed to support the delivery of the project?			
No		Yes	✓
Please provide details of the resources that are required to deliver the project?			
Facilities / Workspace	The Huntly base is central to delivery, offering a safe, welcoming space for activities, drop-ins, and counselling. Outreach sessions also use local community venues in rural areas.		
Equipment	Basic equipment such as art materials, seating, and digital tools (for remote sessions) is needed. Additional items like pop-up banners and transport containers are used for outreach.		
Local Knowledge	Staff and volunteers rely heavily on lived experience and deep local understanding to shape delivery and respond to emerging needs. Relationships built over time are key to engagement.		
Food and Drink	Light refreshments are provided at most sessions to support a relaxed, welcoming environment. At some events, food plays a bigger role in encouraging participation and social connection.		
Are any of the resources needed to deliver the project provided in-kind, rather than budgeted from project funds?			
			No
			Yes
Ingredients for the Soup and a Sweet project, either made by local school children or bought from local businesses.			

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Were new IT systems, additional software, or upgrades existing software (databases, Apps) required to deliver this project?	
No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Was additional training – for staff or volunteers - required to deliver this project?	
No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Monitoring and Evaluation

Is there baseline data to describe what things were like before the start of the project?		
	No	✓
	Yes	
Is the difference that the project is making measured or monitored by the host organisation?		
	Yes	
	No	✓
Has an external organisation been employed to formally evaluate the project?		
	No	
	Yes	✓
<p>Foundation Scotland are an external evaluator specifically to assess projects funded under the current <i>Tackling Inequalities</i> funding. As part of this, an evaluator engaged directly with all funded organisations, including ours, through a combination of online and in-person meetings. She asked questions, gathered responses, and compiled the findings into a formal report, which is now publicly available on Foundation Scotland’s website.</p>		
Has the insight from the external organisation’s evaluation been used to adapt the way the project works?		
	No	✓
	Yes	

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Is there an intention to employ an external organisation to evaluate the impact of the project in the future?	
Don't know / no current plans	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there an intention to undertake your own formal evaluation in the future to estimate the impact of the project?	
Don't know / no current plans	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Impact

To what extent have the aims of the project been achieved?	
Fully met	
Making progress toward meeting Aims	✓
Not making progress	
What difference has the project made?	
<p>Networks of Wellbeing believe the project has made a meaningful and lasting difference by creating safe spaces for empowerment, recovery, and social connection, particularly for people facing complex challenges such as mental health struggles, poverty, and isolation in rural Aberdeenshire.</p> <p>A key outcome has been the genuine partnership with Gordon Rural Action, made possible by both the funding and relational support provided through Foundation Scotland’s Tackling Inequalities Fund. This fund didn’t just provide money, it facilitated collaboration between the two organisations, enabling joint outreach into under-served rural communities. As a result, residents can now access a broader range of support in one place, including services for veterans and those in the farming community.</p> <p>The project has led to tangible personal transformations. One woman who rarely left her home except for essential trips began attending a group, accessed counselling, and now holds a full-time job. Another man, referred just before Christmas 2024 after experiencing emotional and psychological domestic abuse, was quickly supported by the NoW team and housing services, resulting in safe accommodation within days. He now attends sessions for social connection rather than crisis support, what staff describe as a “Christmas miracle.”</p> <p>Beyond individual stories, the project has offered something more enduring: hope. Hope that someone cares, that support exists, and that progress is possible. That hope is reflected not just in the services offered, but in the fact that a funder trusted the organisation and its community enough to invest in it.</p>	

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Have conditions or demand changed since the project was introduced?	
No	✓
Yes	
Has the project had the capacity to meet these changing conditions and demand?	
Yes	
No	
Has the project changed through time?	
No	
Yes	✓
What changed	Only minor changes have been made. For example, session times for the partnership outreach project were adjusted from 12–4pm to 10:30am–2:30pm in response to feedback from local communities.
Why has it changed	The change was made to better meet community needs and increase attendance, particularly in rural areas where morning sessions are more accessible due to transport and other commitments.

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Has the project had any unexpected or unintended outcomes?	
No	
Yes	✓
<p>One of the most notable unintended outcomes of the project has been the growth in the charity's reputation, which has occurred largely through word-of-mouth and informal networks rather than through any formal advertising or publicity campaigns. Due to the high level of demand for services, staff have focused their time and energy on direct service delivery, leaving limited capacity for promotional activity. Despite this, the organisation has seen a significant increase in referrals from GP surgeries across a 40-mile radius, indicating a growing trust and recognition among healthcare professionals and other community partners.</p> <p>Additionally, the outreach work carried out through the partnership with Gordon Rural has extended the visibility of the charity's services into new areas. Information shared at local hubs has been passed on by attendees to their own networks, contributing to wider regional engagement. Organisations supporting these events have also played a role in spreading awareness.</p> <p>These developments were not part of the charity's original aims but have proven to be valuable indicators of the project's wider impact. The recognition from professionals and the community has affirmed the quality and relevance of the support being provided and reflects positively on the charity's ethos and approach.</p>	

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In your opinion, is the project having an impact on tackling poverty?	
No	
Yes	✓

While the organisation does not explicitly define its work under the label of “tackling poverty”, it recognises that the support it offers provides valuable, indirect contributions to individuals experiencing poverty. The team is cautious not to make assumptions about the lived realities of people in poverty, acknowledging that only those experiencing poverty can fully articulate the impact of any intervention. Although the project was funded under the umbrella of “tackling inequalities,” and not poverty specifically, it offers cost-free support services that users consistently report as beneficial to their wellbeing. These include access to warm, welcoming spaces, peer support, counselling pathways, and meaningful social interaction, none of which come with a financial burden to participants. The organisation notes this type of accessible provision can be especially valuable during periods of financial hardship.

The charity emphasises mental health is a key factor in poverty, citing evidence that poor mental health both contributes to and results from experiences of poverty. Despite being told by a local authority representative that mental health did not fall within the remit of tackling poverty, subsequent research by the Poverty Alliance confirmed a strong link between mental health and poverty (<https://www.povertyalliance.org/experiences-of-poverty-stigma-and-mental-health-in-the-uk/>). In this respect, Networks of Wellbeing views its work, particularly the creation of supportive, stigma-free environments, as a meaningful intervention that may not directly alter material poverty but, helps to mitigate its effects and support individuals in navigating it.

However, the organisation is clear that broader structural change, such as policy decisions on welfare and benefits, remains essential for meaningful and long-term poverty reduction. In their view, charitable or community action can provide immediate support and dignity, but lasting impact must come from systemic political change.

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Learning from Experience

What is working well?

The collaboration across various agencies is proving to be highly effective. All partners share the objective of providing timely information and support services to individuals in need. This unified approach has contributed to the smooth running of the project, with no significant issues arising in this regard.

The partnership with Gordon Rural Action is particularly successful. Although both organisations are very busy, leading to occasional challenges in coordinating efforts, there is a growing mutual understanding and respect between the teams. Despite the high demand for services, both organisations have managed to work together without requesting additional staff support, which has helped maintain efficiency.

Feedback from those using the services has been overwhelmingly positive. The organisation remains flexible, adapting and evolving based on the input received, ensuring that services continue to meet the needs of the community.

Furthermore, the stable funding provided by the funder has alleviated much of the emotional burden on the staff, providing them with a sense of security and empowerment. Knowing that funding is secured for the project allows the team to focus on delivering services without the added stress of financial uncertainty. This support from the funder plays a key role in the continued success and motivation of the team.

What, if anything, is working less well?

One of the main challenges faced by the project is the underperformance of the information pop-up hubs. While these hubs have been well-received and supported by the community during their establishment, there has been a low attendance and engagement at the hubs once they are operational. The team plans to revisit these communities after one year to assess whether the hubs should continue or if they should explore alternative locations based on interest from other communities.

Another area for improvement is the coordination with Gordon Rural Action. Although the formal quarterly meetings have been effective, the team struggles to meet more frequently due to busy schedules. The meetings themselves are helpful, allowing both parties to exchange important information. However, given the periods between meetings, there are times when communication could be improved. Overall, while the project is functioning well in many areas, the difficulty in engaging rural communities and the occasional delays in coordination with partners are the primary challenges reported by NoW at this stage.

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What are the key learning points that you'd like to share with other practitioners?

A person-centred, flexible approach builds trust and encourages return engagement. Staff with lived experience create a non-judgemental space that removes barriers to access. Outreach in rural areas must be slow, and consistent relationships take time to build. Partnerships thrive when built on shared values and an understanding of limited capacity. Data alone can't capture success—stories and relationships tell the real impact.

Are there plans to develop or expand the project in the future?

No	
Yes	✓

The project will continue developing in response to community needs. Some funding will be used to support the continuation of the Women's Group in Keith beyond summer 2025, which supports mental health and wellbeing. While there are no large-scale expansion plans, existing services will be refined and extended as demand grows.

How easily do you think this project could be replicated in another setting?

Some aspects of the project, particularly the information pop-up hubs, should be relatively easy to replicate in another setting. The model involves delivering services from a set location on a regular basis, with multiple agencies rotating through to provide support. The key components such as regular booking of the venue, a clear schedule, and a list of organisations involved, are straightforward enough to implement in different communities. However, while the concept is replicable, the success of the project depends on more than just the structure. It is crucial to be embedded in the community to ensure the projects are relevant to local needs. For example, if the project were to be moved to a different location, such as Banchory, it would need to be tailored to fit the specific requirements of that community. Simply transferring the existing model without adjusting it to meet the unique needs of a new area could lead to limited success. The project focuses heavily on social interaction, reducing loneliness, and offering peer support through skilled and qualified practitioners. So, while the concept is easy to replicate, its effectiveness will depend on local engagement and customisation.

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