



The Recovery Project 2021

Evaluation Report

May 2021 - July 2021

'No one was really talking about the struggle of lockdown until now, so it was nice to relate to everyone' - Year 8 Student

'You have got the buzz back in our school about Drama after a long time of not being able to do these extra- curricular activities. From the workshops a student is now receiving help from our school support staff as they feel more able to open up.' - **Teacher, Crofton School**



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1. Executive Summary

The Recovery Project aimed to give young people aged 11 - 16, support with ways to improve their physical and mental wellbeing, providing positive coping mechanisms that may have been lost during lockdown and that have suffered during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The need for the project was highlighted in several Charity reports with Young Minds stating that *'many young people with mental health problems are struggling to cope as they return to secondary school, after months of living through the COVID-19 crisis'*. In addition we put together our own steering group, made up of clinical and education professionals to get a more local viewpoint with one local teacher stating her students mental health was at a *'crisis point'*.

Recruitment for the project was lower than expected but the project took place in five different schools across South East England between May 2021 - July 2021 and worked with 280 young people. The project ran in schools over four practical, three hour, theatre based workshops, all COVID-19 safe and delivered by specialist youth arts practitioners. Each workshop focused on a specific topic, Isolation, Loss, Coping and Emergence that supported the rebuilding of friendships and social engagement.

The Recovery Project had a positive impact on the majority of young people taking part and levels of wellbeing amongst young people have risen as a result. We know that the project has given many young people the opportunity to stop, reflect and process their thoughts and feelings in relation to their experiences of Covid-19 and the project has had an important role in providing schools with data to use in highlighting and dealing with mild and moderate mental health problems before they are exacerbated. Data collected has shown that on average after the project had taken place only 1 in 5 children showed levels of low wellbeing, compared to 1 in 3 before the project started showing that our intervention had a positive increase on young people's wellbeing. Additionally 85% of young people said that the project has had a positive impact on their mental health and 77% of young people said that they now feel more able to understand and process their feelings, anxieties, worries and actions.

The Recovery Project was the first project Fluid Motion had run since the Covid-19 Pandemic had closed everything down. Therefore there was a lot of learning that took place over the course of delivery including not mixing year groups, not to leave too much of a gap in between workshops and the importance of having a member of school staff with the team at all times.

This learning has identified several opportunities for the development of the project over the next few years to ensure its continued success which includes creating a new 'Community Producer' role', extending the amount of workshops, providing additional theatrical resources and developing clearer project information.

2. About the project

The Recovery Project was specifically designed by Fluid Motion Theatre Company to aid in the recovery of young people's mental health after the COVID-19 pandemic. The project is a development of earlier education projects, specifically the *1 in 10 Project* which Fluid Motion ran in schools between 2017 and 2019.

The Recovery Project aimed to give young people support with ways to improve their physical and mental wellbeing, providing positive coping mechanisms that may have been lost during lockdown and that have suffered during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The project ran over four practical, three hour, theatre based workshops, all COVID-19 safe and delivered by specialist youth arts practitioners. Each workshop focused on a specific topic, Isolation, Loss, Coping and Emergence that supported the rebuilding of friendships and social engagement.

The Recovery Project was part of a wider programme of activities created under Year 1 of Fluid Motion's new three year programme plan (2021 - 2023) which was themed around *Resilience*. This programme work responded directly to the mental health challenges that everyone had faced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. The Need

The Charity Barnardo's conducted a nationwide study of young people and children in 2020, *finding that over a third had experienced worsening mental health during lockdown*. In addition, a survey in Autumn 2020 from youth mental health Charity Young Minds showed *that 'many young people with mental health problems are struggling to cope as they return to secondary school, after months of living through the COVID-19 crisis'*.

The challenges and impact on young people across the Country looked increasingly dire as the second and then third national lockdowns came into force. Fluid Motion wanted to better understand the local need for The Recovery Project in schools and held a steering group in November 2020. The group was made up of two secondary school teachers from Bitterne Park School in Southampton and King's School in Winchester, two local GPs, one a clinical lead for mental health in North Hampshire and the other the Paediatric Clinical Lead for North Hampshire, a representative from Hampshire CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) and a youth counsellor. Alana from Kings School explained that within her school young people's mental health was at a *'crisis point'*, adding, *'there is a limited amount of support for their mental health'*. Jade, the youth counsellor, also echoed this viewpoint, explaining that there was *'now a 6-12 months waiting list for young people to access mental health support, when before the pandemic hit, the average waiting time was 4 months'*. Sarah from Bitterne Park School also emphasised that the *'level of emotion has been heightened and that teachers do not have the skill set to support this level of emotion'*. She further explained that the wellbeing

services at Bitterne Park School had seen a dramatic increase in the number of students accessing support services.

Members of the steering group also made suggestions for the content they would like to see included in the workshops. Jade stressed the importance of *'allowing teenagers to feel empowered by giving them the skills to discuss mental health'* and Tim, one of the GP's, explained that it is vital to address with young people that *'It has been a terrible year, it's ok to acknowledge that and to open up conversations about this.'* Alana also emphasised the need for the workshops *'to not always focus on the negatives that have come from the lockdown and young people should continue to look positively into the future'*.

Based on the feedback from the steering group as well as other research that was conducted, it was evident that there was a clear need for The Recovery Project and that it could provide some early intervention support for young people, as a half of all lifetime mental health problems are established by the age of 14 (Kessler R.C., et al in CYPMHC annual report 2020). The project was a timely, focused, well researched and professionally delivered intervention that could act as a proactive step rather than a reactive step in supporting young people's mental health at a time when they potentially needed it the most.

4. Aims & Objectives

- To improve young people's physical and mental wellbeing, providing positive coping mechanisms that may have been lost during lockdown and that have suffered during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To better equip young people to process their feelings, anxieties and actions, so that they can start to rebuild, recover and thrive again.
- To provide a safe space where young people can reflect on the lockdown periods.
- To support the rebuilding of friendships and social engagement.

5. Who took part

The Recovery Project was publicised as an opportunity for all young people in secondary schools to be able to take part in. This meant that all of the participants would be between the ages of 11 - 16.

Fluid Motion worked with a total of 280 young people over the length of the project which began in May 2021 and finished in July 2021 and at five different schools across South East England, they were:

- 100 Year 7, 8 and 9 students at Henry Cort, Fareham, Hampshire.
- 76 Year 9 students at Crofton School, Fareham, Hampshire
- 18 Year 8 students at Homewood School, Tenterden, Kent
- 46 Year 8 students at Bridgemary School, Gosport, Hampshire
- 40 Year 8 students at Everest School, Basingstoke, Hampshire

Fluid Motion did not specify which young people should take part, that decision was made by the schools themselves. School wellbeing leads or pastoral team staff identified young people who either were known to them as in need of some mental health support, those interested in the arts or drama or both.

The young people chosen to take part were predominantly from Year 8 across all schools.

6. Collecting Evidence

Fluid Motion's three year programme plan includes new methods of evaluation which are aimed at making a stronger, more robust and detailed case for the need for our work and the impact it has on the people and communities who take part. The Recover Project was the first project to embed these new methods.

Each young person was required to complete the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale two weeks before their first workshop. This method of evaluation allowed us to gather important baseline data on the general wellbeing of the group. The young people were then asked to complete the scale again during the last workshop. This data was hugely important as it provided Fluid Motion with clear statistics on the impact on wellbeing the project has had. In addition it provides schools with a snapshot of the health and wellbeing of their young people, which they may not have had before and can then act upon, improving the chances for early mental health intervention before a young person reaches crisis point.

Each young person taking part in the project was allocated a code, for example A1, A2 and A3. The letter corresponded with specific schools and the number corresponded with the individual young person. The codes were then written on their wellbeing scales allowing the young people to keep anonymity. Each young person taking part was given a notebook that they could use to draw or write down their thoughts and feelings throughout the workshops and these codes were also used to identify them. The notebooks were collected at the end of the project and provided a wealth of qualitative evidence about how young people were feeling during the four workshop sessions.

The project leader kept a reflective journal which they wrote in after each workshop. The journey was a useful way of tracking what was working well and what wasn't and was used to record and note down the thoughts, reflections and creative ideas that the young people expressed and that might otherwise be missed.

Fluid Motion carried out a number of case studies of young people during the project, overseen by a Trustee, local GP Dr Tim Cooper. The case studies show in detail how the project has supported young people in understanding their feelings better as well as how their peers may be feeling. The case studies are separate documents that can accompany this report.

Young people were asked to complete a written feedback questionnaire at the end of the fourth workshop. This captures general thoughts about the project, levels of satisfaction, ideas and suggestions for the future.

Local film company Millstream Productions were commissioned to create a short documentary of the project that included interviews with young people and school staff. This documentary can be found here: <https://youtu.be/Yb0YdEdtarg>

Lastly, after all four workshops had been completed, a feedback form was sent to the lead teacher at each school to get their thoughts on the delivery of The Recovery Project. This feedback ensures that Fluid Motion can continually improve and enhance the workshops for the participants who need it the most.

All of the evidence collected across the project forms the ideas and inspiration for a brand new piece of outdoor visual art that premiered at Fluid Motion's All In The Mind Festival on Saturday September 2021. The sound installation *Listen Up!*, gives further voice to the young people's lived experiences and provides a platform to the young people who took part.

7. What happened and how it went

7.1 Recruitment

The recruitment for schools to take part in The Recovery Project started in November 2020 and was led by the Project Co-ordinator with the support of a volunteer. Fluid Motion already has good relationships with several local secondary schools as well as a detailed database of hundreds of schools across the South East.

The Project Co-ordinator created a recruitment mailout to be emailed to all schools on our database. Secondary schools in Hampshire were the first ones we emailed in November 2020 and we sent another seven campaigns to schools in Dorset, Somerset, Sussex, Surrey, Wiltshire, Kent and Berkshire up until December 2020. This campaign had varying success with open rates of the email campaign being between 12 - 20%. Whilst this method may have increased the awareness of the project we feel it didn't make any meaningful contribution to schools signing up.

Of the five schools who took part only one (Homewood) signed up via our mailout campaign. Bridgemary did a Google search and found out about the project that way. The other three schools (Crofton, Everest and Henry Cort) all had pre-existing relationships with Fluid Motion and responded to a personal email.

7.2 Delivery

The Recovery Project is split into four separate workshops, each one has a specific theme that was developed from the responses given in the steering group session. The workshop

plans were devised by the Artistic Director and the Project Co-ordinator and followed a clear structure of 'Warm Up', 'Main Tasks' and 'Cool Down'. Each workshop has specific creative tasks that are themed around the topic for that session and each one is designed to follow on from the next, developing the young people's trust and confidence as well as building resilience.

Below is an overview of each workshop plan that was written up and sent to schools in advance of their first workshop as well as being made available on our website:

Workshop 1- Isolation

Young people will be given an introduction to The Recovery Project and staff will talk through their expectations and answer any questions they may have. They will be given their own notebooks which they can use to record ideas, thoughts and feelings and to help them with tasks and exercises throughout the project. They will be introduced to our wellbeing spectrum and asked where they feel they sit on a scale of 1 - 5 in order to give them a moment to check in with themselves and the group as a whole. The young people will take part in a series of physical warm up exercises and games in order to continue building trust and develop group cohesion.

The young people will then explore the topic of Isolation and will talk about what they feel they have been isolated from, how it feels and what it means. They will then come up with their own group definition. They will be led through a series of exercises, both as a group and in pairs, that gives them the opportunity to express their experiences of isolation, including putting physical actions to their feelings and emotions. They will assume the roles of 'self help guru', a theatre exercise designed to encourage them to identify their own strengths and self care techniques. The young people will do an exercise called 'Relaxation Station' which empowers them to think about ways in which they can deal with stressful or anxious situations and they will be given a selection of resources to help them articulate their feelings and emotions which includes our 'Wheel of Emotions'.

The workshop will finish with a reflection and cool down period which includes a moment for the young people to write their thoughts and ideas of the session in their notebooks. They will also do a couple of basic mindfulness exercises which includes a short breathing exercise.

Workshop 2: Loss

The young people will be welcomed back to the project and asked to think about how they are feeling using the wellbeing spectrum and marking that in their notebooks. The young people will take part in a series of physical warm up exercises and games in order to continue building trust and develop group cohesion.

The young people will then explore the topic of Loss and will talk about what they feel they have lost over that past twelve months. They will then come up with their own group

definition. They will take part in a group movement exercise that allows them to express something significant they feel they have lost recently. The group will spend some time discussing what loss means, what it feels like and how people deal with it. The young people will be given six factsheets that explain '6 tips to feel happier' and will then be put into groups to explore these tips more practically. This is a theatre exercise and the young people will be presenting their ideas through drama techniques such as movement, sound and use of props.

The workshop will finish with a reflection and cool down period which includes a moment for the young people to write their thoughts and ideas of the session in their notebooks. They will also do a couple of basic mindfulness exercises which includes a short breathing exercise.

Workshop 3 - Coping

The young people will be welcomed back to the project and asked to think about how they are feeling using the wellbeing spectrum and marking that in their notebooks. The young people will take part in a series of physical warm up exercises and games in order to energise and focus the group.

The young people will then explore the topic of Coping and will be told that these last two sessions are all about building resilience, confidence and focusing more specifically on giving them coping strategies and skills that they can use themselves to feel better and happier. They will then come up with their own group definition. They will take part in a group exercise that gets them to think about what they did to keep themselves active and mentally well during lockdown and will summarise that using theatre techniques. They will also do a group movement exercise that explores the idea of good mental health. The last half of the session will introduce mindfulness techniques and give the young people the chance to come up with their own mindful mantra to call upon whenever they might need it to feel better. The workshop will finish with a reflection and cool down period which includes a moment for the young people to write their thoughts and ideas of the session in their notebooks. They will also do a couple of basic mindfulness exercises which includes a short breathing exercise.

Workshop 4 - Emergence

The young people will be welcomed back to the project and asked to think about how they are feeling using the wellbeing spectrum and marking that in their notebooks. The young people will be told that this is the last session so they are going to be looking ahead, celebrating achievements and looking to the future. The young people will take part in a series of physical warm up exercises and games in order to energise and focus the group.

The young people will then explore the topic of Emergence and will then come up with their own group ambition, something they all collectively want to achieve in the future. They will be put into groups and told to use all of the skills and techniques they have gained and learnt throughout the workshops to come up with a 2-3 minute theatrical representation of their hopes and ambitions for the future. They will then be asked to think about what they feel they have achieved, gained or learnt during the last year. This could

be a skill, viewpoint or feeling. They will share this and write it down in their notebooks. They will then have a chance to celebrate all of their achievements in the project in a task called 'Positive Party' which is a group improvisation exercise designed to showcase the strengths and skills of every single young person in the group. The last part of the session includes some time to fill in project feedback and evaluation sheets.

The workshop will finish with a reflection and cool down period which includes a moment for the young people to write their thoughts and ideas of the session in their notebooks. They will also do a couple of basic mindfulness exercises which includes a short breathing exercise. The young people will be thanked for their engagement and involvement in the whole project.

7.3 The project at individual schools

It is important to summarise how the project ran in each school because each experience was different and offered several ways to learn and develop the project for the future.

7.3.1 Henry Cort School

The school had chosen a group of 30 students that were from year 7,8 and 9, described by the school as *'quite shy and group dynamics may be tricky because some don't know others. In addition there are some that are tricky regards to behaviour'*. Immediately the first workshop proved to be challenging as firstly, some of the students arrived 20 minutes late to class and back after the break, reducing the delivery time by 40 minutes. This therefore heavily impacted on the delivery of the workshop, it also meant that gaining momentum in the workshop proved difficult. Whilst the practitioner did appreciate that behaviour had been impacted by the pandemic, this could have been managed better by having a staff member actively present in the room to manage behaviour and ensure the whole group was back in on time.

Secondly, by having a mixture of year groups, students were nervous to be in a room with participants they didn't know and therefore reluctant to join in with the group discussions. For the majority of the creative tasks the group did not want to engage and share any of their work to the rest of the group. Also, because of Covid restrictions in schools during this time, students were required to stay and work within their year group bubbles, therefore there was not the opportunity for the year groups to mix and get to know each other better.

The Artistic Director of Fluid Motion expressed these concerns back to the deputy head of school, specifically addressing the lateness of the students and the lack of support staff for the practitioner, particularly when it was highlighted that there would be challenging behaviour. The deputy head's suggestion was to split the group into two groups, year 7s and year 8s and year 9s and run an hour and a half workshop with them, so this would still fit into their school timetable. The Artistic Director and practitioner had strong reservations

about this, as it meant the practitioner would have to reduce the content of workshops and the young people would not get the full benefit and experience. However, in order to ensure that the young people could benefit from part of the project it was agreed that years 7 and 8 (12 in total) would be combined and year 9s (15 in total) would have a session by themselves. The workshop times were significantly reduced to an hour and a half for each group to accommodate for the split.

The young people at Henry Cort had not actively engaged with drama before and so they needed to be guided more by the practitioner through all of the warm up games and creative tasks, a lot of the creative suggestions came from the practitioner and there was a clear lack of motivation to work together in small groups to complete the task. However as the workshops went on both groups became comfortable in standing up and sharing in the space and by the last workshop every young person was able to creatively share their personal thoughts to the rest of the group and were able to look positively to their futures and share their hopes and ambitions.

There was a noticeable boost in confidence from the young people that had turned up each week which had allowed a strong sense of trust and rapport to have been built up between the group and the practitioner. By the end, both groups were more willing to give all the warm up games and drama activities a go and share some of their creativity ideas. Further they gained more confidence in sharing their thoughts and this was also highlighted in one young person's feedback form as they wrote it '*helped me open up a lot more*'.

Attendance and lateness were a challenging factor throughout. Unfortunately the majority of the group did not always turn up on time, therefore making it difficult for the practitioner to start on time and get through all the creative tasks and discussion. Further, it was hard to keep consistency and momentum due to an average of only 8/9 young people turning up to each session.

7.3.2 Crofton School

The project group was made up of Year 9 students who were selected by their tutors. The majority of the young people taking part were drama students but also had or were still facing challenges because of the pandemic.

The project at Crofton took place across one week and workshops ran in the mornings. Delivering the project across one whole week seemed to be a successful way of running the project as it gave students enough time to reflect away from the workshops but also allowed the practitioner to gain momentum and build a strong sense of trust, confidence and respect with the young people.

As the group were confident in drama and movement activities it meant that the young people were open to sharing their thoughts and ideas immediately. They were confident

to work with everyone in the room and work on creative tasks and therefore the practitioner could challenge them further to talk and present ideas in more detail. The group was really enthusiastic and creative in designing their own relaxation station and explaining that they had chosen these elements for either enjoyment or as a way to relax. In workshop two the group described Loss as *'to lose someone or something that means something to you. This can cause significant emotional harm and distress'*. The group were also happy to share their thoughts on things they felt like they had lost due to the pandemic such as 'Happiness', 'Hobbies', 'Family members', 'Respect for yourself' and 'Motivation'. This topic was extremely emotive for a couple of the young people and so at points during the workshop they stepped outside and were supported by their teacher.

In workshop three, Coping, the group shared some of the ways they had coped and kept mentally well during the lockdowns and they identified Coping as *'dealing with the situation in a healthy or unhealthy way'*. However none of the young people expressed in the discussions any unhealthy ways of coping during the lockdown.

In workshop four, Emergence, the positive party exercise was a stand out moment for the group. The task was initially designed so that the practitioner would guide them through the party and bring back some of things that the young people had already created, for example their mindfulness mantras. However, the party did not need the practitioner to take charge in this instance, it just needed to be a safe space for the young people to let go. They were confident in socialising with each other, either talking or dancing in the space. The drama teacher explained that *'it was great to see the students be provided with a space where they could just have fun with their friends'*. This was extremely significant given that over the past year, young people had identified that they had been isolated from their friends and felt like they had lost a sense of normality of being a teenager.

The group also shared their hopes and ambitions for the future, such as 'Creating healthy relationships', 'Happiness', 'Wanting to travel', 'Passing their GCSEs' and 'Wanting to work in the arts'. The group also created their shared ambition which was *'to be happy, diligent and make time for the people that matter'*.

7.3.3 Bridgemaury School

The project group consisted of 17 Year 8 students who were selected to take part by staff at the school. Initially they were very shy and uncomfortable with the idea of performing in front of everyone else. However, they did enjoy being allowed to have creative freedom and throughout each of the workshops they felt less intimidated to share their creative ideas because they felt like they had been given a safe space to do so.

The group were happy to share what they felt like they had been isolated from such as friends, family, hobbies, fun, school and education. The group were also creative in designing their own relaxation stations. Students at Bridgemaury were the only group across the whole project to not discuss the loss of a friend or family member. Their loss

was focused on losing their 'education', 'freedom', 'energy' and 'rights'. They also described their feelings of loss as 'horrid', 'overloaded' and 'purplexed'.

The group were able to come up with some creative freeze frames for what they thought mental health looked like. One group showed a 'celebrity' crying on her own and then quickly wiping away her tears when the cameras were in front of her and smiling at them. Another group acted out a football game to show their happy place. The young people also shared some of the things that they had done during the lockdown to stay well. The group were quite confident in coming up with positive changes they would each like to make to their daily routines such as 'Limit phone time', 'Good healthy Breakfast', 'Do not waste energy on bad situations or people', 'Make the most of school break times', 'Reward yourself' and 'Make more time for yourself'. In the last workshop the group were positive in looking ahead to their future. Their hopes and ambitions were more focused on their long term goals and examples included 'Taking up boxing', 'Joining the navy', 'Having a family', 'Becoming a geologist' and 'To go travelling.'

The practitioner reflected on the group's positive party exercise and said that the group felt and looked awkward and it was the only exercise that they felt didn't work for this group of young people.

7.3.4 Homewood School

The group was made up of 10 students from Year 8 who were selected by the wellbeing officer at the school. The group had not engaged with drama or movement before. For the first workshop, Isolation, there was a sense of nervousness but after the practitioner explained the project, emphasised that there was no right or wrong answer, the group seemed to relax a little. Also the warm up games helped with this. The group expressed their feelings of isolation, describing it as 'stressful', 'devastating', 'lonely' and 'controlling'. Also when asked to share what they felt like they had been isolated from, 'friends', 'family' and 'hobbies' were the common themes. Their definition for Isolation was '*the feeling of being alone*'.

The group seemed to lack the confidence to be creative. This was highlighted in the relaxation station task. The group didn't seem to not know how to use their imagination in order to design their own relaxing space. They also worried too much about their ability to draw their space and '*it looking correct*'. Furthermore, not everyone in the group knew each other and there seemed to be smaller friendship groups forming, consequently at times there was hesitation amongst the young people to work with others outside of their friendship groups. The practitioner did emphasise the importance of working with everyone in the room throughout the workshops.

The second workshop themed around Loss, was the first time in the project that the majority of the group had expressed losing friends or family members due to COVID - 19. They also expressed that they felt like they had lost the '*ability to love themselves*' and '*lost a sense of emotion*'. The group defined Loss as '*losing a part of yourself and feeling detached*'. Although this seemed to be a tough subject to discuss with the group, it appeared that the confidence of everyone taking part had grown and by the end of the workshop, the atmosphere seemed to be a lot lighter and happier and they were more

willing to work with each other and give everything a go. Even certain individuals who were originally quiet to start with, were requesting to play certain games at the end of the workshop.

However, when the practitioner returned to deliver the next two workshops, it seemed that all the skills and knowledge built up by the group had been lost and the group were almost back at the beginning, not willing to share both verbally and creatively. Unfortunately it is felt that the gap between the first two sets of workshops and the last two appeared to have been too long for the young people. In addition, their teacher had explained that a lot of the young people taking part had been dealing with a lot of difficult issues in between these workshops taking place.

Attendance also became an issue as the number of young people in the group dropped from 10 to 5 by the last workshop and in addition it was not the same young people returning for workshop three and four. Consequently this made it difficult to measure the level of impact the workshops had had on the group. The young people that did turn up definitely felt deflated after realising that not everyone had returned for the third workshop and therefore morale was low.

During workshop three, Coping, they were the only group across the whole project to discuss that they felt there were good and bad ways of coping, particularly as they defined Coping as '*doing something good or bad to help you get through*'. The group expressed that not talking to anyone and harming yourself were bad ways of coping whilst acknowledging that good ways of coping included, writing your thoughts down, talking to family members and to not avoid difficult situations. The group also shared their ways of keeping well during the lockdowns, such as 'walks', 'gardening with family members', 'listening to music' and 'writing their thoughts down in the style of a letter'.

Workshop 4 focused on the young people looking to the future. Their ambition as a group was to '*always end the school day with a clear mind and then we can start the next day with a clear mind*'. The group were also able to think about their hopes and ambitions for their futures. The range of hopes and ambitions expressed by the group suggested that they were able to look positive to their futures both in the short and long term.

During the final positive party exercise the group felt awkward and were very reluctant to dance or socialise with everyone in the room. Even though the practitioner encouraged the group to come together and have fun, the young people still did not feel comfortable enough to do so.

7.3.5 Everest School

The Everest school project group had 20 Year 8's who were chosen to take part by school staff and were a mixture of young people who had and had not engaged with drama and movement before. The group embraced the creative tasks throughout the project and enjoyed this way of expressing themselves.

The workshops at Everest followed the same pattern as Crofton School and took place in just one week during a morning session. Like Crofton School this seemed to be a successful format of gaining momentum, trust and confidence with the young people.

The group were instantly happy to join in during group discussions. The group shared what the word isolation had meant to them with examples including 'Trapped', 'Torturing', 'Prison', 'Nervous', 'Alone', 'Unsafe' and 'Restricted'. The group then defined Isolation as '*A period of being alone, either physically or mentally*'. They were also willing to share what they felt like they had been isolated from.

The group were then happy to pair up and create physical actions that reflected how they think the Isolation of the last 12 months has made them feel and then share what they had created with the whole group. The group enjoyed creating their own relaxation station and this was reflected in their level of creativity and attention to detail. The theme of Loss was again a particularly emotive theme for some of the young people. Some of the young people expressed that they had lost family members during the pandemic, and that it had also brought up a lot of feelings from their pasts. Consequently at times a couple of the students stepped out of the workshop to talk to their teacher. The group described Loss as '*the disappearance of something you love and having an uncomfortable feeling that never quite goes away*'.

In workshop three, Coping, the group appeared to have quite a negative viewpoint of the word, compared to the other schools who took part in the project, associating the theme with words and images such as 'Struggle', 'Grief', 'Crying', 'Challenge', 'Holding onto a cliff' and 'Holding lots of bills and an eviction notice'. However, when asked to share some of the things that they had done to keep well during the lockdown, they gave positive examples like meditation techniques, writing down their days, walking, painting and listening to music. The group also defined the word Coping as '*something that you're going through and that you are understanding and managing*'.

The group wanted their collective ambition to be '*strive for confidence and support other people's emotions and mental health*'. The group also shared their hopes and ambitions for their futures.

8. The Impact

The Recovery Project had a positive impact on the majority of young people taking part and levels of wellbeing amongst young people have risen as a result. We know that the project has given many young people the opportunity to stop, reflect and process their thoughts and feelings in relation to their experiences of Covid-19 and the project has had an important role in providing schools with data to use in highlighting and dealing with mild and moderate mental health problems before they are exacerbated

Fluid Motion has measured the project impact in several ways, these methodologies are based on Public Health England's framework for evaluating arts and health projects and each one is presented below:

8.1 Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale Data

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scales (WEMWBS) were developed to enable the measuring of mental wellbeing in the general population and the evaluation of projects,

programmes and policies which aim to improve mental wellbeing. The 14-item scale has 5 response categories, summed to provide a single score.

Every young person was asked to complete this scale two weeks before the first workshop session and then on the last session itself. Data collected has shown that on average after the project had taken place **only 1 in 5 children showed levels of low wellbeing, compared to 1 in 3 before the project started**, showing that our intervention had a positive increase on young people's wellbeing.

Highlights of the WEMWBS data by school is as follows:

8.1.1 Henry Cort School

- Before the project 65% of young people reported low wellbeing compared to 44% after the project had finished
- Before the project 55% of young people reported medium wellbeing compared to 44% after the project had finished
- Before the project 0% of young people reported high wellbeing compared to 11% after the project had finished

8.1.2 Crofton School

- Before the project 33% of young people reported low wellbeing compared to 22% after the project had finished
- Before the project 61% of young people reported medium wellbeing compared to 67% after the project had finished
- Before the project 6% of young people reported high wellbeing compared to 11% after the project had finished

8.1.3 Bridgemy School

- Before the project 39% of young people reported low wellbeing compared to 18% after the project had finished
- Before the project 56% of young people reported medium wellbeing compared to 82% after the project had finished
- Before the project 6% of young people reported high wellbeing compared to 0% after the project had finished

8.1.4 Homewood

- Before the project 83% of young people reported low wellbeing compared to 67% after the project had finished
- Before the project 17% of young people reported medium wellbeing compared to 33% after the project had finished
- Before the project 0% of young people reported high wellbeing compared to 0% after the project had finished

8.1.5 Everest

- Before the project 5% of young people reported low wellbeing compared to 10% after the project had finished
- Before the project 90% of young people reported medium wellbeing compared to 75% after the project had finished
- Before the project 5% of young people reported high wellbeing compared to 15% after the project had finished

8.2 Case Studies

Fluid Motion carried out two case studies during the project, overseen by Trustee, local GP Dr Tim Cooper. The results showed that since returning back to school, both the students interviewed needed the time and space to reflect on the consequences of the pandemic on their health and wellbeing. The case studies show in detail how the project has supported young people in understanding their feelings better as well as how their peers may be feeling. They said that the project has given them the tools and the confidence to start asking questions of themselves about how they are feeling inside and the case studies also highlight how important an arts based project was, allowing the young people to approach difficult topics in a relaxed and open way. One Year 8 student said it was hugely beneficial in giving her other ways in which she can express herself and her feelings as she doesn't know how to do that with words. She said *'sometimes you don't actually realise how you are feeling. **You don't know because you can't put it into words and sometimes I will be like "I am fine" but I am not fine but I don't know how to tell people. This has just kinda given me the words and the description and how I can show people that I am not actually fine.**'*

The full case studies can be found in a separate document which should accompany this report.

8.3 Student Notebooks

Since returning back to school, it was vital that students were provided with a safe space in school to reflect on the consequences of the pandemic. Each young person was given a notebook to chart their personal experiences of the project and time was set aside in the workshop delivery for them to do this. One student from Crofton explained that *'**no one was really talking about the struggle of lockdown until now, so it was nice to relate to everyone**'*.

The methods of delivery for the project meant that the young people could explore and process any difficult thoughts, feelings, and experiences without always relying on verbal communication. The notebooks provided a good way to let the young people do this, reducing the sense of vulnerability to share their thoughts. One student from Homewood School explained that they enjoyed *'the acting to show how I felt'* and a student at Bridgemaury School said *'it helped me to express my issues and problems'* with a

student at Henry Cort explaining that the project ***‘helped me talk about things I would never talk about’***.

8.4 Student Feedback Forms

Young people were asked to complete a short project evaluation form at the end of the last workshop session. The form asked several questions about quality of delivery, enjoyment and satisfaction, impact on wellbeing and suggestions for the future.

- 60% of young people rated their enjoyment of the project as the highest score ‘5’
- 85% of young people said that the project has had a positive impact on their mental health
- 77% of young people said that they now feel more able to understand and process their feelings, anxieties, worries and actions

8.5 Teacher Feedback Forms

Teaching and pastoral staff connected with the project were asked to complete an evaluation form after all workshops had taken place. The form asked several questions about the quality of the project content, logistics, levels of satisfaction, quality of communication as well as overall impact.

- 100% of teachers said that they noticed a positive impact on their students mental well-being as a result in taking part in project
- 100% of teachers said that the number of workshops (four) was enough to make a significant impact on the students well-being
- 100% of teachers said that they would book Fluid Motion to deliver The Recovery Project again

In addition one teacher from Crofton School said:

‘You have got the buzz back in our school about Drama after a long time of not being able to do these extra- curricular activities. From the workshops a student is now receiving help from our school support staff as they feel more able to open up. Another student has changed their GCSE options to take Drama because they loved the workshops so much.’ One teacher at Everest school explained that ***‘The Recovery Project was the first time that students have been given a designated space in school to reflect on the lockdown periods.’*** Lastly, staff at Homewood School said ***‘the students have been much more open with each other than we thought they would and they now know where to go if they feel they need help.’***

8.6 Project Documentary Film

Fluid Motion commissioned production company Millstream Productions to create a short project documentary film which can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/Yb0YdEdtarg>

9. What we have learnt

This whole report, and Section 8 specifically, clearly articulates the impact that The Recovery Project has had on the young people and schools who took part. The project was a success and professionally managed, however it was the first year that Fluid Motion had delivered it and it was the first project it had run since the Covid-19 Pandemic had closed everything down. Therefore there was a lot of learning that took place over the course of delivery and those points are summarized below:

- That young people's mental health has been severely affected as a result of Covid-19
- That there is a difference in capacity and levels of teacher support at each school
- That we must always assume teaching staff understand how an arts or theatre project runs with young people
- That there needs to be a teacher or other member of school staff in the workshops at all times to support with behaviour
- That mixing year groups to take part in the project does not work
- That leaving too much of a gap in between workshops can undo what has been learnt and achieved so far
- That top up mental health training for project staff should be conducted before a new yearly project takes place
- That mass marketing campaigns to recruit schools don't work, time should be spent on getting to know teaching staff and encouraging word of mouth

10. What we will do differently next time

We have identified several opportunities for the development of the project over the next year and beyond. They are:

- Project information needs to be clear, concise and available to schools, well in advance of the project taking place. The project overview, its cost and what we require from schools needs to be made available earlier in the schools planning of the project. This can be done in a short PDF available on the website etc. What is really important is getting schools to understand how the project will be delivered and that it's an arts based project in which the young people will be asked to take part in creative tasks and exercises.
- Create a new 'Community Producer' role within Fluid Motion whose job it would be to nurture new and develop existing school relationships in order to sign more schools up to the project
- We need to be flexible in fitting in with school timetables, not all school breaks are at the same time and some have shorter mornings or afternoons. The preferred options for running the project in the future again would be either all in one week or a series of consecutive weekly sessions.

- There is the opportunity to increase the number of workshops from four to five. The content of the fifth workshop could include designing a self care pack that would inspire the young people to take charge of their own health and wellbeing and help to design a resource, using the knowledge they have gained, that can benefit not only the young people taking part but could be used by the wider school as a whole.
- Have a 'props/costume box' that could be used by the students to help build their early confidence in performing. The teacher from Bridgemaury School suggested this, '*to aid them to hide behind in the first workshop so they have more confidence to perform and then remove the props the following sessions*'
- Ensure all project staff have top up youth mental health training as well as bereavement training immediately before going into schools
- Establish a system of checking in with each school at 6 months and then a year after the project has taken place to measure any longer term impacts and to keep the relationship going
- Look at offering the project to Year 5 and 6 at Primary School