



SUFFOLK
Community
Foundation



**Suffolk and
North East Essex**
Integrated Care Board

Equity in Mind Programme

End of Grants Impact Report 2025



The Equity in Mind Fund (EiM), was established in 2021 as a partnership between Suffolk Community Foundation and the NHS Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB).

The funding was aimed at further developing community-based mental health provision delivered by local organisations for the benefit of adults and young people with severe mental health illness including psychosis, eating disorders, and severe depression, as well as providing support for those with complex emotional needs.

Over time the focus shifted slightly to encompass a wider range of providers and include a preventative element targeting groups particularly at risk of mental poor health.

This fund was created with the intention of enabling voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) organisations to work alongside and in partnership with one another, as well as with statutory health providers, to bring a localised community-based approach which is responsive to local needs. Events bringing funded organisations together for learning and exchange of ideas was a part of the design of the fund.

Caribbean and African Community Health Support Forum



Organisations to whom grants were awarded

Organisation	Award	Round	Project Summary
Gatehouse Caring in East Anglia	£49,063	1	Mindfulness support for those with severe mental illness.
Inside Out Community	£49,961	1	Creative Lives project.
Suffolk West Citizens Advice Bureau (CABWS)	£49,995	2	Supported Advice - Young People Project.
Green Light Trust (GLT)	£50,000	2	To support the Enablement programme.
Noise Solution Ltd	£49,916	2	To offer music groups for those in the LGBTQIA+ community.
Inspire Suffolk	£50,000	2	To support the Inspire Wellbeing service (rural).
ActivLives	£50,000	2	To support the Gardening in Mind project.
Families Together Suffolk	£50,000	2	To support young rural families with poor mental health.
Art Branches CiC	£38,780	2	To support a young persons creative recovery programme.
Outreach Youth	£45,454	2	LGBTQIA+ young people mental health & wellbeing focussed project.
BME Suffolk Support Group	£46,270	2	To support the Equity in Mind health project.
Disability Advice Service (East Suffolk) (DASES)	£48,579	2	To support those with disabilities and in crisis to improve their life chances.
Ipswich Community Media and Learning CIO (ICM)	£44,180	2	To support the Pass it on Collective programme.

Organisations to whom grants were awarded, continued

Organisation	Award	Round	Project Summary
Rock Paper Scissors Arts CIC	£49,627	2	Towards the Creative Practice for Wellbeing programme.
Caribbean and African Community Health Support Forum (CACHSF)	£30,000	2	To support the Unity Men's Health and Well-Being Project.
BME Suffolk Support Group	£1,000	Circle of Care	Supporting Wellbeing for those delivering Equity in Mind programme.
Art Branches CiC	£1,000	Circle of Care	Supporting Wellbeing for those delivering Equity in Mind programme.
Families Together Suffolk	£1,000	Circle of Care	Supporting Wellbeing for those delivering Equity in Mind programme.
Rock Paper Scissors Arts CIC	£1,000	Circle of Care	Supporting Wellbeing for those delivering Equity in Mind programme.
Gatehouse Caring in East Anglia* [^]	£25,000	1+	Supporting Mindfulness for Later Life
Citizens Advice West Suffolk (CABWS)*	£20,987	1+	Supported Advice Project - People aged 65+
Inside Out Community*	£44,800	1+	The Arts for Health & Wellbeing – Foundation Programme & Open Studio.
Total	£796,612		

*Round 1 additional funding

[^] Final report not due until Feb 2026

Executive Summary

The Equity in Mind Fund (EiM) was established in 2021 as a collaboration between the Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care System (SNEE) and the Suffolk Community Foundation (SCF) to benefit individuals with, or at risk of, serious mental health issues.

The fund aimed to promote a local community-based approach to mental health, encouraging collaboration among voluntary, community, faith, and social enterprise (VCFSE) organisations, as well as with statutory health providers.

Although some EiM organisations developed effective working relationships with public health providers, many faced challenges in finding effective ways to engage initially.

The lack of understanding of VCFSE services made it hard to create clear and robust referral pathways from public agencies for individuals with, or at high risk of, serious mental illness (SMI).

In response, funded organisations worked to diversify outreach methods and to enhance long-term relationships and collaborations within the VCFSE sector, particularly among those in the EiM group, leading to a range of successful outcomes including increased referrals.

Many EiM organisations noted that referral processes from public bodies improved over time and they particularly valued 'warm handovers' that ensured a seamless transition of support for clients.

EiM funded organisations worked with a range vulnerable beneficiary groups from older and isolated people, to those younger, disabled or at risk of stigma. Some provided group activities and learning opportunities, while others offered practical help in resolving problems.

Across all these groups, there was a noticeable increase in wellbeing, confidence and self-worth as a result of the programmes. Enhanced life skills and resilience contributed to breaking negative cycles of behaviour, with activities and social interactions providing safe spaces for building new friendships and fostering a sense of belonging and community.

Ipswich Community Media



Executive Summary, continued

The two-year funding enabled organisations to plan for the future which increased organisational confidence and resilience.

Improvements in staff and volunteer recruitment, retention and training all directly enhanced their capacity to sustain better support to clients.

The supportive and relatively hands-off approach of EiM enabled organisations to focus on the services they provided, promoting innovation and maximising positive impacts for their clients. The benefits of the work went beyond the client groups into the wider community, as increased discussion and visibility fostered a greater understanding of stronger mental health and wellbeing.

EiM funded organisations felt that VCFSE mental health services did eventually gain credibility as an effective intervention, although it too often took very significant time and effort. With the demand for free mental health services far exceeding provision, they advocate for a better and more complete information-sharing partnership across all health care systems, ensuring those with SMIs are at the heart of decision making.

Many also suggested that a longer-term funding cycle could both encourage public bodies to treat them as an integral component of health provision and help them to embed and more fully understand the longer-term impacts of their interventions.

All EiM organisations expressed gratitude for the funding, support and networking opportunities, with many feeling more sustainable as a result. Some were able to secure additional funding for ongoing work but inevitably some projects will cease with the conclusion of this funding.

SNEE is eager to ensure that the insights and benefits gained from this funding are recognised and integrated into future public/mental health and wellbeing services' planning and strategies.

“ *Equity in Mind was a concept that I had often thought about through my work with the VCFSE over the past 10 years, because so often system partners believe there is no alternative to service delivery and that VCFSE organisations lack the clinical knowledge to support people with serious mental illness. This programme has demonstrated the power of localities, trusted community organisations and finding that spark that can change a person's perspective for the better.*

I am immensely proud of the work that the funded organisations have delivered but most importantly thankful that over 4000 people reached out and connected with something that made their days lighter, gave them courage and mostly importantly filled them with hope for a brighter future.

Jason Joseph

”

Suffolk Head of Mental Health System Change
SNEE ICB/NSFT/SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL

Connections & Partnerships

The EiM funding and group events that were an integral part of the funding, galvanised many of the organisations to form new or strengthened partnerships and collaborations from within the group, with referrals made from one to another.

“During a Suffolk Community Foundation sharing event in Stowmarket, we met grant recipients Ipswich Community Media (ICM) who expressed a willingness to partner with us. We agreed our objectives, organised joint training sessions which resulting in boosted confidence of the participants and a new sense of community engagement, as well as new participants for ICM.”

– Caribbean and African Community Health Support Forum

Valuable connections were made and strengthened with other agencies including NSFT and other statutory health partners, local and County Councils, Suffolk Information Partnership, police and probation service, education providers, social prescribers, and many charities, advice bureaus, supported housing projects/ associations, green partners like RSPB, parks and nature trusts.

“We have strong relationships with primary and secondary mental health services, local councils, other charities and local groups. This year our team have attended over 25 events to share with other organisations and members of the public information about our advice work. We have secured funding from two sources, that will enable us to continue with specialist advice work including from the NHS Suffolk & North Essex ICB, to take referrals from the Social Prescriber Teams at the West Suffolk Alliance PCN’s.

– Citizen’s Advice Bureau West Suffolk

Citizen’s Advice Bureau West Suffolk



Connections & Partnerships, continued

Many funded organisations struggled to establish clear contact routes with what were anticipated to be primary sources or to find ways to engage with teams working directly on the front line – NSFT, NHS, midwives, Mind, college welfare teams etc. This limited their ability to increase these teams' knowledge and understanding of the services being offered by VCFSEs which affected the referral-rate. This challenge highlighted the importance of direct communication, warm handovers and the need to advocate for better and more complete information sharing within healthcare systems. To counteract the problem, many organisations expanded and strengthened their connections outside of statutory health care services including in their local communities, as well as direct outreach through a range of appropriate PR tools to raise awareness of their services.

Referrals came from many sources including schools, GP surgeries, local authorities, police, probation, other mental health organisations, young people's charities and carers organisations. Many beneficiaries were self-referrals and it was indicated that a very effective way of connecting with beneficiaries was through word of mouth and other local organisations.

"We have been disappointed by the lack of engagement from the NHS Primary Care sector. We presented to the Suffolk GP Federation who were very positive about our proposed approach but none out of the 10 surgeries we approached have even replied to us."

– Disability Advice Service (East Suffolk)

For most organisations it was only rarely or towards the end of the funding that referrals also came from statutory health care bodies. A few organisations built strong, effective and lasting relationships with primary care providers but there was a strongly held view of many of the funded organisations that both health and education services took a long time to recognise and then refer patients to them, even after many awareness-raising activities and attempts to elicit referrals. Some felt this could be due to the short-term nature of the funding for their activities or due to the quite prescriptive way in which public sector bodies work.

"Our work for the NHS pilot Children in Crisis has strengthened our relationship with mental health support teams and allows us to complement the professional support teams by offering support to the parents of young people who have severe mental illness."

– Families Together

Profile of Beneficiaries

The total number of beneficiaries from this funding (to date) is 4,095.

As expected, all the groups funded identified mental health or health, wellbeing and serious illness as the primary issue but with a very wide range of secondary issues including poverty and disadvantage, supporting family life and stronger communities, social inclusion, discrimination and fairness, reducing isolation, refugees/asylum, education and employment, disability and access. As projects came to know and understand their clients better, many became clear that the challenges presented were often not the only or even the main one.

These organisations worked with those with mental impairments and severe mental impairments (SMIs), many from very vulnerable groups including children and young people, LGBT*Q+ people, refugees/asylum seekers, older people, people with disabilities, young mothers, people from minority communities and those living in poverty. While the organisations identified primary beneficiaries within one identified group, most of them described also working with a range of other beneficiary groups.

A separate report entitled produced by the ICB – ***“Insights from VCFSE organisations supporting mental health needs in Suffolk”*** contains a more detailed analysis of the demographic data and outcomes reporting by the EiM grantees.

“We are grateful to have received this grant to enhance the lives of those young families affected by poor mental health. Communication and opportunities for giving feedback on successes and challenges has been good – it has felt that there has been someone who has a real interest in the project involved, and approachable at all times if necessary. This has been reassuring when delivery might not be going smoothly, and encouraging in the sense that we know that funders believe in the projects and are fully vested in the success of the project.

It has also been enjoyable and informative to have the opportunity to meet with teams from other organisations who have been funded, and to learn about what they have set out to do, and what they have achieved.”

– Families Together

Families Together



Confidence and Resilience in Beneficiaries

All the organisations noted a rise in the confidence and resilience of individuals in the groups they served and they noted that the enhanced life skills often transferred from the project into other areas of the individual's lives.

Although working with vulnerable and at-risk individuals can be difficult, slow, and often derailed, organisations reported positive outcomes, with most participants showing improved wellbeing scores and a greater sense of belonging and hope for the future.

The EiM programmes:

- drew in and valued people who would not normally have engaged.
- gave people stronger self-belief, confidence, resilience and a sense of achievement.
- created safe spaces to allow people to open up and share life stories, challenges and concerns.
- improved a range of life and social skills which, through shared experience and connection, helped them to make new friends and strengthen support networks. These peer support groups were evident during projects but also when some beneficiaries formed their own social group outside of the project
- reduced physical isolation
- enabled project users to take back control and manage setbacks and complex challenges through direct support and coping strategies
- helped resolve immediate problems
- helped to break negative cycles by offering positive routines
- gave people practical skills e.g. gardening and outdoor activities; creative - craft, art, music, digital; putting on local events
- improved prospects and helped people fulfil potential in education, employment and leisure time

Inside Out Community



Confidence and Resilience in Beneficiaries, continued

Organisations tracked and monitored these changes and agreed outcomes in different ways. Some used the more formal tools such as Outcome Stars, ONS4 and Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing measures and many devised their own wellbeing surveys appropriate for their users.

When it became clear that some organisations were struggling to get valid information using the more formal tools, the EiM programme encouraged all organisations to use evaluation and monitoring tools that felt appropriate to their beneficiaries. As a result we have a wide range of impact data captured through simple satisfaction and wellbeing surveys, to creative practice wellbeing surveys, creative journaling, videos, and audio capture alongside the more formal survey data.

“It’s improved my confidence and self-esteem, which has led me to be less self-destructive. I tend to care more for myself and others, I know I have friends that I can rely on, which is very reassuring. I also feel I’m part of something, less isolated!”

– Green Light Trust

“Offering the opportunity for the group to talk about real life issues and capturing these in podcast/audio format each week has seen a real boost of confidence in people where they have become more open to discussion as they have realised their voice matters.”

– **Noise Solution**, who designed and used an award-winning AI impact tool to capture real-time conversations and track impact. [Watch the video about the tool on YouTube.](#)

“As they gained confidence in the studio, they found it easier to carry this into other parts of their lives, like work, school, and social settings. Regular attendance gave them a positive routine that made everyday interactions feel more manageable and less intimidating.”

– **Rock Paper Scissors**

Confidence and Resilience in Staff, Volunteers and Funded Organisations

Funded organisations reported a considerable improvement in confidence across staff and volunteer groups, as well as organisationally. The funding meant they felt more resilient and their work more sustainable as they were able to plan into the future. Some were able to offer extra support to their staff through additional EiM 'Circle of Care' funding and others were able to secure other funding to continue their work after EiM funding ceased.

The EiM funding enabled:

- increased confidence in the organisational system through sustainable funding, longer term planning and activities, which encouraged increased volunteer and staff recruitment and retention.
- increased staff and volunteer satisfaction, confidence and self-value.
- additional/more in-depth training and support.
- greater understanding of the root causes of SMIs and better support their client group.
- the sharing of best practice across many organisations was valuable for staff and volunteers.
- staff to offer a more integrated, tailored approach for each individual client and more time enabled them to 'look behind' the presenting issue and provide a more holistic response. At times this involved working with partner organisations.
- organisations to encourage and support staff/volunteer self-care.
- an increase in professional resilience - for some it strengthened the capacity to face future challenges with greater confidence.
- organisations who used Health & Safety Executive wellbeing tool or Suffolk Mind training to benchmark staff wellbeing and resulted in positive results.
- a relative 'hands off' by the ICB which meant organisations could focus on services and ensuring impact rather than focusing on reporting.

Disability Advice Service



Confidence and Resilience in Staff, Volunteers and Funded Organisations, continued

“We can demonstrate the levels of confidence have grown within our staff and volunteers as in a recent survey as they expressed confidence in how the charity is managed, and grants such as yours give us the opportunity to plan more than 12 months ahead, this gives staff the confidence we are here for the long haul. This funding has also increased the resilience of the charity allowing us to recruit additional staff to cope with the extra pressure put on clients by the cost-of-living crisis.”

– Disability Advice Service (East Suffolk)

“The positive changes observed in our participants also had a ripple effect on the confidence and resilience of our organisation, staff, and volunteers. The funding enabled us to deliver a well-structured program that not only benefited our participants but also strengthened our team’s belief in the value and efficacy of our work. The measured improvements provided concrete evidence of our program’s effectiveness, which bolstered our resilience and determination to continue refining and expanding our services and contributed to a deeper sense of professional resilience. It has strengthened our capacity to face future challenges with greater confidence.”

– Art Branches

“The impact on our volunteers has been equally profound. We have a small team of volunteers, many of which have been service users wishing to give something back. They are the backbone of our workshops and their confidence in our charity’s operations is essential for sustained engagement. Many of our volunteers expressed concerns about the funding challenges. Our volunteers now feel assured and excited for the future. Over the past year our volunteer retention has improved and with our increased presence at events and network meetings we are receiving increased requests for people interested in giving their time to support our charity.”

– Inside Out Community

“Our knowledge and confidence as an organisation has increased and continues to do so.”

– Citizen’s Advice Bureau West Suffolk

Community and Wider Benefits

Additionally, there were benefits that went beyond those to client groups and organisations supporting people with SMIs.

Organisations and their beneficiaries saw an increase in visibility, understanding and conversations about mental health and wellbeing within their communities with projects that empowered the community to use innovative and sustainable approaches to leave a positive legacy.

This was achieved through such activities as events, podcasts, and radio presentations which promoted understanding and conversation. Some organisations expressed a hope that this would encourage future funders and promoters of stronger mental health within the broader community.

Through using local providers and businesses, organisations reported they had contributed to the local economy, widened contact with the community and encouraged community involvement and ownership of activity.

Some reported a reduction in NHS interventions.

Noise Solution



Successes

Referrals came from a wide range of organisations and beneficiaries gained from the EiM collaborations and partnership working. In many cases these links and collaborations will last long after the funding finishes and considerably strengthen and widen the offering to those with SMIs.

Many organisations felt that VCFSE Mental Health Services did eventually gain credibility as a viable intervention for SMI. Through shared information, events, networking, integration and referrals, both within EiM family and outside of it, the whole sector continually improved their understanding of the value and range of support available and were able to promote services and signpost on through their networks. Organisations valued the joint events run by the ICB and Suffolk Community Foundation that brought them all together and shared information. Through the strong links started here, the 'EiM-funded family' were able to learn from each other, signpost clients on, share and collaborate to build on best practice and on occasion to jointly work on specific issues or events.

"The networking with other funding recipients, was good. Being part of a community of like-minded organisations provided both inspiration and practical support to our Lead Counsellor."

– Inspire Suffolk

EiM funding allowed organisations to extend their SMI work, using their experience to work with more vulnerable groups and across more localities. It also allowed them to try working in different ways. Empowering them to use innovative approaches and develop sustainable projects that can leave a positive legacy.

The confidence that longer-term funding gave organisations enabled a virtuous circle – more specialised and regular training, support and feedback to staff and volunteers who consequently felt better valued and more able to support clients. This built confidence and resilience in the workforce and in turn meant the organisation was able to offer a more sustained and improved service to their clients.

Many were able to recruit, train and retain more volunteers and, in one case, working with trainee BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy) counsellors provided mutual benefit, reducing waiting times for beneficiaries while giving valuable real-life experience to trainees.

Inspire Suffolk



Successes, continued

Many organisations identified the value of participant-led and -run activities. Giving those with, and at risk of, SMIs the authority, skills and tools to design and run their own projects had a huge impact on confidence and self-esteem as well as giving them a range of life and coping skills.

For a few organisations, the original proposed activity did not work and they went out to their client group and worked with them to design a project which fulfilled their needs and achieved the desired impact.

There was appreciation that the funding allowed for these changes.

For many with mental health issues, social and physical isolation and resulting loneliness is often a debilitating problem. All the organisations identified that bringing people together to eat, to talk, to take part in activities, to make new connections and friends has been a critical factor in the success of the EiM programme, bringing a sense of belonging and community to many who felt they were eternally on the outside.

Many have been able to join circles of shared interest and support networks where they have thrived; others have valued connecting with people they would not otherwise have met.

A number of organisations identified the severity of SMIs and the resultant chaotic lifestyles, and different treatment schedules as problematic for continuity of attendance. They found ways to encourage people to join and continue to stay with the programmes through such measures as pre-programme support measures, intervening earlier, recognising continuity of support and providing safe spaces (sometimes green spaces).

They all noted the critical importance of building connection, particularly for the most vulnerable groups.

Inside Out Community



Challenges

This is a difficult and challenging area to work in and the projects faced many issues. There is a huge demand for free mental health services and for support services which far exceeds provision, particularly post Covid and through the cost-of-living crisis. The lack of support, hope of support and lack of trust puts huge pressure on organisations, emergency services, staff and volunteers.

The range of SMIs is wide and long waiting lists meant early intervention was difficult. Increasing demand for a range of advice and support was experienced by many of the organisations.

One of the greatest challenges experienced by almost all organisations was the struggle they had to establish clear contact routes with what were anticipated to be primary sources or those working directly on the front line. This and the resulting actions are discussed in the Connections and Partnerships section above.

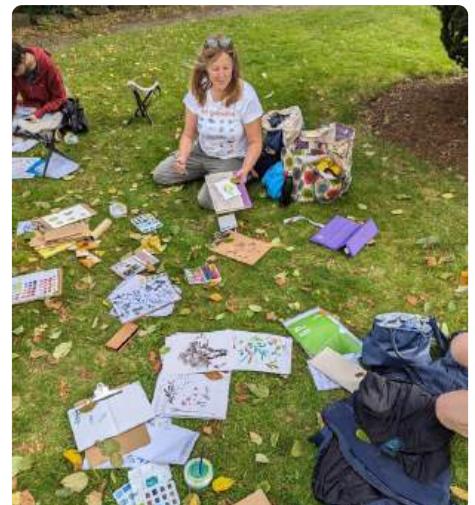
Some of the greatest challenges became the successes as organisations found solutions and ways to work together. Some of these are covered in the Successes section.

In addition:

- The stigma around mental health and asking for help remains an obstacle.
- Lack of trust where many with SMIs have been promised and let down in the past.
- Lack of structured flow of information to discharged individuals about the projects offering support from referring organisations.

- The gap between referrals and attendance was often lengthy for a range of reasons, including hospitalisation, housing challenges, relapse and long waiting lists.
- Lack of 'warm handovers' resulting in a gap in support and provision.
- Avoiding overlap of existing interventions - working together raised awareness of what others were doing and supported collaborative work and signposting to partner providers.
- For some small organisations understanding the 'system' was difficult.

Art Branches



Challenges, continued

- Insufficient local trained counsellors meant organisations struggled for staff. Increased training of staff and volunteers and use of professional trainees helped some organisations.
- Access - transport costs are high particularly in rural and coastal areas. This has a significant impact on service users and on service use
- For some the trend of the profile of beneficiaries changed over the grant necessitating a refocus of their work.
- While some organisations had informal information about a reduction in NHS interventions for clients, they received no data about this or about their client's referral or readmission to frontline mental health services.
- Some potential service users failed to turn up (some homeless people went missing and others went into hospital or had extreme anxiety). It was usually very difficult to track users.
- It was difficult to maintain contact with individuals when their mental health was deteriorating or when it improved (but could decline again).
- Decision timescales (e.g. at the DWP) have lengthened, and other organisations closing meant more desperation and longer waiting times for people seeking help.
- Formally recognised impact/outcomes tools were difficult to impose and were often felt to give unreliable data as they were not well suited to some participant groups. Many innovative ways were found around this as described above.
- For those relevant organisations, transitioning participants from their safe space elsewhere, such as into education or employment, was challenging. They provided earlier support by introducing more structure and including other organisations at an earlier stage to support 'moving on'.
- Busy jobs and wide areas of operation means lack of time for meaningful network building. The EiM networking events helped to establish contact and support collaboration and partnership.

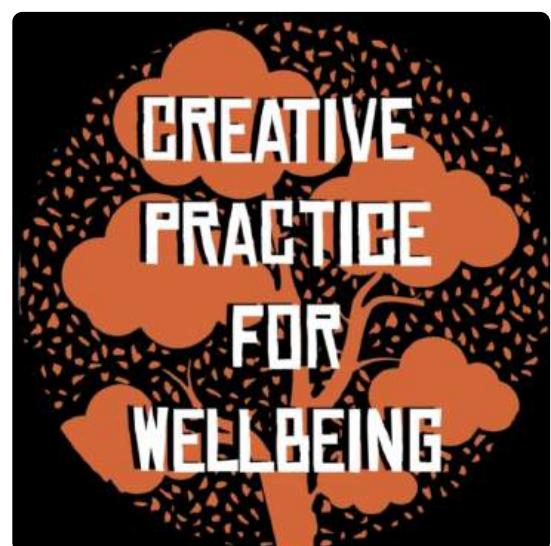
"Challenges taught us the importance of flexibility, persistence, and the need to continuously adapt our services to meet the evolving needs of our participants. We learned that overcoming such obstacles often requires creative problem-solving and a commitment to providing ongoing support."

– Art Branches

The learning points from this EiM programme were many and varied:

- It is often a long, difficult journey to become accepted and used as a trusted partner of statutory providers. Perseverance paid off for some EiM funded organisations.
- When expected referral methods were slow or lacking, diversification of outreach methods was successful. These including direct community outreach, presentations, broadening networks and collaborations, direct communication to potential individuals, and providing information through multiple channels. Word of mouth was particularly successful.
- The value of a 'warm handover', including ongoing support from one organisation to another, with no long gaps and good information, supported successful, positive outcomes.
- The power of empathy and listening – hearing and if necessary, re-evaluating what was needed or the method of delivery.
- Lived experience within the staff group is invaluable, as is the consistency and authenticity of facilitators. Trust builds into meaningful relationships with more positive outcomes.
- Sometimes it is different support rather than more support that is required.
- Safe spaces, the right activities and considered group dynamics help to open up conversations to share experiences and opinions.
- An 'open door' policy/model is recommended as interaction can be very long-term. Beneficiaries must know the support is there for the long haul and that they will be assisted to move on to other programmes or signposted to different support.
- Offering support over immediate barriers e.g. giving food, company, benefits or other advice can help uncover the root cause of the SMI.
- The network of support is valuable - taking time to make connections and support each other (staff/volunteers and partner organisations).
- There is immense value in longer funding and on-going funder support.
- Reporting should be focused on outcomes and impact, not outputs.
- Some organisations sat on various boards, alliances and groups across their locality and found this valuable.

Rock, Paper, Scissors



Sustainability

When a long-term programme ends there will be organisations who have planned and successfully found funding and others who will have not been so successful. Some of the organisations were using the EiM funding to support and expand ongoing programmes and others used it to start new activity.

Some organisations are looking ahead with positivity - they have new funding sources and will continue to offer programmes for people with SMIs. Others are unable to continue the new activity without further funding or dropping an existing activity. Several organisations suggested that a considerably longer funding cycle would have been more sustainable, giving them the stability to properly establish their programmes and better understand the impact.

To best offer an insight into the thinking around sustainability, below are quotes from some of the final reports:

“The EIM funding was incredibly helpful to keep our joint services going over 2 years and we are extremely grateful for the support and without it we are certain many more people would have ended up in crisis, dependent on the emergency services. However, we are still spinning plates and jumping from one funding stream to another.

We believe ongoing funding and an authentic partnership between the grass roots voluntary sector and the NHS is required to make real progress.

We would hope that following the completion of the EIM projects there is a move to ongoing commissioning of services and the development of genuine partnership working between

the voluntary sector and the NHS, which puts mental health service users at the heart of the decision-making process.”

– Ipswich Community Media

“While the funding was generous, as a free service we will always struggle with sustainability without even longer-term funding being available. It would be great if funding like this was available for 4-5 years and/or more collaboration with the NHS to create an official ‘overflow’ from the NHS services where we get paid to deliver what we are already doing for free, again to become a sustainable model. Maybe it would have been useful to have more of an understanding of how this bit fits the bigger picture and if the picture changed over the two-year period.”

– Inspire Suffolk

Ipswich Community Media



Sustainability, continued

“A decent amount of funding over 2 years helped us plan and deliver to a high standard and felt like we were being taken seriously by mental health services. It helped us develop a quality service and improve our delivery model. We need more visibility and further embedding with mental health/ NSFT staff and a better, more robust referral process.”

– ActivLives

“Thanks to this funding and our improved financial stability, we are now in a stronger position to broaden our impact. With this solid foundation in place, we are reviewing and revising our business plan to expand our services into outreach work, to bring our support and services to more underserved communities in and around the Ipswich area. This new focus will help us reach even more people and make new connections with stakeholders to provide networking and partnership opportunities.”

– Inside Out

*“We became more aware of the breadth and the complexity of the needs of the young LGBT*Q+ people we have contact with, and at times, their lives are particularly challenging and the importance of relational practice, which takes time and the importance of a setting that is focussed on them and starts where they are”*

– Outreach Youth

“The Creative Recoveries program has profoundly impacted both participants and our organisation, demonstrating significant achievements in fostering social connections, enhancing confidence and resilience, and addressing the complex needs of individuals experiencing significant mental health challenges.

Through our innovative approaches, such as the development of a supportive online community and the adaptation of existing projects to better serve young adults, we have seen tangible improvements in participant well-being and sustained engagement.

The collaborative partnerships forged during this project have enriched our services and established a solid foundation for future initiatives. As we move forward, the insights and successes from Creative Recoveries will continue to inform our approach, ensuring that we build on this momentum to create lasting positive change for the local community. The experiences and data collected not only highlight the program’s impact but also underscore the vital role of continued innovation and partnership in advancing mental health support within our community.”

– Art Branches

Further analysis of the learning and sustainability issues for EiM projects and beneficiaries is available in the separate report produced by the ICB entitled *“Insights from VCFSE organisations supporting mental health needs in Suffolk”*.

NB: **Gatehouse Caring** (received additional funding in early 2024) is not due to complete and report until early 2026 so outcomes from this project are not included in this report

Concluding thoughts:

NHS Suffolk & North East Essex ICB

We thank the grantees for the quality of the outcomes data and case studies that they reported to Suffolk Community Foundation, which has informed this evaluation report. We also thank Suffolk Community Foundation for the support, guidance and encouragement they gave to grantees throughout the Equity in Mind programme.

Having reflected on the learning, challenges and successes, we see these key themes/recommendations as a guide for ourselves, and other statutory funding organisations that will shape future commissioning arrangements and partnerships with the VCFSE sector:

- The importance of facilitating collaboration and partnerships between VCFSE organisations
- Recognising the value and expertise of VCFSE providers as a key partner with statutory provision in supporting people with mental illness in their communities and neighbourhoods.
- Embedding co-production and lived experience into programme delivery to improve outcomes for beneficiaries and sustain service user engagement.
- Lengthening funding cycles to enable VCFSE providers to gain confidence, to develop knowledge, to sustain specialist resources, and to better demonstrate impact.
- Aligning evidence-based outcomes in the different evaluation frameworks used for grant-funded programmes to enable a more systematic evaluation of mental health provision effectiveness across the integrated care system.

ActivLives



Concluding thoughts: Suffolk Community Foundation

The Equity in Mind Fund has been a powerful initiative, created to address serious mental health challenges and reduce health inequalities in Suffolk.

Suffolk Community Foundation (SCF) was proud to deliver this programme on behalf of the ICB and we recognise the importance and impact of this work not only for our partners and communities, but for our own values and mission as a grant-making organisation.

Mental health and tackling inequality are causes close to our hearts at SCF, and the Equity in Mind programme provided an opportunity to make a real difference – especially for those most vulnerable and often excluded from traditional support routes.

We were pleased to receive and support applications from a wide range of organisations, reflecting a diverse demographic and geographic reach. This breadth has enriched the programme's learning and made its impact varied and far-reaching.

As experienced grant makers, we were well positioned to run a programme of this size and complexity.

Our responsibilities included designing and refining the fund's focus – originally centred on severe mental illness, and later incorporating preventative approaches – carrying out due diligence, assessing grants, maintaining close relationships with funded organisations, and coordinating valuable networking events and project visits.

In addition, our knowledge of the local VCFSE landscape enabled us to play a key role in connecting grassroots organisations with the ICB, bridging parts of the system that had not traditionally worked together. This role was especially valuable in a landscape where collaborative working proved vital.

BME Suffolk Support Group



Concluding thoughts: Suffolk Community Foundation, continued

Throughout the programme, the collaborative ethos has been a cornerstone of its success. We saw the value of organisations coming together – to learn from one another, to refer into each other's services, and to share in their achievements and challenges. The networking events and visits were not only enriching, but vital in creating a legacy of continued connection that we believe will continue well beyond the life of the fund.

This has been a significant learning experience for Suffolk Community Foundation as well. While the programme has not been without challenges, we've witnessed the incredible innovation and adaptability of funded organisations. Their feedback has shown that they felt supported – both by us and by the ICB – and this speaks to the strength of the partnership at the heart of Equity in Mind.

We are especially grateful to Jason Joseph, Maggie Luton, and Marisa Batson from the ICB for your commitment, openness and collaborative spirit throughout.

Your continued involvement, thoughtful insights, and willingness to engage at every stage made this programme stronger, more responsive, and more impactful.

The Equity in Mind Fund stands as a testament to what is possible when trust is placed in the community, when systems work together, and when funding is paired with empathy, connection and learning.

We are proud to have been part of this journey and will carry the lessons forward as we continue to support Suffolk's communities.

Appendix 1

CASE STUDIES: Young Adults and Young People

Noise Solution

Ol* spent years feeling trapped in their own home, isolated by fear and anxiety. That only changed when they saw a flyer for the Express Yourself podcasting sessions and although Ol was nervous about joining, they were interested in the idea of a safe, non-judgmental space to express themselves.

In their first session, Ol kept to themselves, observing but seldom speaking. The group was welcoming, and there was no pressure to speak - for the first time in a long while, they felt like they had a space where they didn't have to hide. As weeks went by, Ol started to speak on the podcast recordings, offering brief reflections or anecdotes, with the group's positive reactions slowly building their confidence and a sense of connection and belonging. The sessions became a pivotal part of Ol's week, a space where they could explore their thoughts and feelings without judgment.

Gradually, this new sense of self-worth spilled over into other areas of Ol's life. They started leaving their home more often and engaging with the world outside. Inspired by the empathy and understanding they found in the sessions, Ol decided to pursue a career in social work, focusing on child services.

Today, they work with children who are facing struggles of their own, taking on the ethos of our podcasting sessions to create safe spaces for others. Ol credits the Express Yourself sessions as a turning point in their life - a space that allowed them to rediscover their voice, build confidence at their own pace, and ultimately find their path.

Group from Noise Solution creating podcasts



CASE STUDIES: Young Adults and Young People, continued

Art Branches

Sara* had been struggling with chronic pain and PTSD, which led her to move back in with her parents. This transition triggered a decline in her mental health and to addiction. Signed off from work for two years, Sara found herself feeling lost and struggling to find her place in the world. Before her struggles, she had regularly engaged in various forms of art, but as her confidence and motivation waned, she gradually stopped doing what she once enjoyed.

Her Social Prescriber at her GP practice referred her to Art Branches' Creative Recoveries program. Immediately, the project manager reached out to Sara, ensuring she was prepared to start the group the following week. She immediately felt welcomed into a warm, understanding and non-judgmental environment - a space that quickly began to feel like a supportive family.

The program creativity provided intense therapeutic value for Sara. She learned new skills, reconnected with her love of art, and forged long-term friendships. Art Branches also gave her the confidence to join a Narcotics Anonymous (NA) group, which has been a crucial part of her recovery journey. For Sara, Creative Recoveries was an invaluable resource that came into her life at exactly the right time.

"When I first started counselling, I was nervous, I knew I wanted something to change but was not aware of what or how. Counselling allowed me to speak freely and have someone listen to me. My counsellor helped me understand what was happening in the situations I found myself in. I learned about how I could be more in control and that I did not have to continue to act in the same way that I had always acted - the ways that caused people to react badly to me and me to them.

After this I changed areas in my life that had been a problem for me. I got a new job in an area that I wanted to work in and got a new place to live. I now feel very confident about my future."

– Participant, Inspire Suffolk

"You are an organisation who helped to save me. When I was at the lowest point of my life the one thing I would look forward to would be the Trans online group"*

– Participant, Outreach Youth

Drawing & painting in nature at Art Branches



CASE STUDIES: Adults

"I think I have C-PTSD - there are huge chunks of my childhood which I can't remember, but I know lots of very bad things have happened to me - my mum has hinted at some of them, but I have only the vaguest recollection.

ISO has helped me in ways that I cannot describe; it has become my saviour, the only outside place where I feel safe to come, where I can be creative and express some of my inner dramas."

– Participant, Inside Out Community

Rock Paper Scissors

Lesley*, now in her late 40s has struggled with Bipolar Disorder since her late teens. Lesley was already incredibly accomplished in various creative disciplines, much of it self-taught. Initially quiet and reserved, Lesley soon came out of her shell, inspiring the group with her talent, compassion, and humour. Lesley had always wanted to attend art college, an aspiration dismissed by her parents when she was a teenager, one which she now felt was too late to pursue it and worried that her mental illness might be a barrier. We quickly realised she was very talented yet lacked self-esteem and confidence, so gently supported her to give it a go.

With step-by-step support Lesley first applied, then compiled her portfolio, then interviewed. Each step felt almost impossible for her, but she gradually accepted our support and trusted us to guide her through it. Our Creative Practice for Wellbeing workshops provided Lesley with long-term, consistent emotional support and reinforced her belief in her ability to achieve this goal. Lesley earned a place on the course and, despite some challenges over the academic year, completed it with a Distinction. She was then offered a place at the University of Suffolk to study Fine Art, which she accepted. The entire RPS team is so proud of her achievement!

"I am in my early forties and about ten years ago I had a break down and was diagnosed with schizophrenia. On leaving hospital, I moved into supported housing and had a couple of relapses. I struggled with feeling

Getting creative at Rock, Paper, Scissors



CASE STUDIES: Adults, continued

overwhelmed by life and had a terrible time where I couldn't sleep properly for a month and the voices I had in my head were relentless. I had struggles with gambling and excessive use of alcohol and drugs. This was a dark time in my life, but I do remember that music really helped me and gave me some respite and the hope that things would change.

This project has helped me with my personal growth, I feel that I have a voice within the group, that I am listened to and it is good to share and hear other people's ideas. I feel the project reinforces the direction I had already decided to take in maintaining my wellbeing. The mindfulness and meditation have been so helpful and I like to use my notebook to record my thoughts and remind myself of my purpose, objectives and what I am trying to achieve, what are my priorities? I am pleased to say that with support for the last 4 years I have been keeping well."

– Participant, Ipswich Community Media

BME Suffolk Support Group

Jay* is from Nigeria, an overstayer in the UK with no right to stay in the UK. She is a lone parent with a 10-month-old baby, evicted from a friend's house, about to be homeless and was mentally stressed. Through a range of activities BME was able to effect some positive outcomes for her. We secured free legal advice and supported her to apply for leave to remain, achieved a place to live and gave ongoing support with food, toiletries and nappies, plus vouchers and money for other needs. When she joined our baby and toddler group, she felt physically, mentally, emotionally and financially better off - less isolated and lonely. She said for five years she felt stuck and is shocked to know there's a community group like BME who would listen to her regardless of her immigration status and support her with so much care and empathy. She is no longer ashamed to tell her story and has been given the confidence to move on in her life with positivity.

Community connection & awards night at BME Suffolk Support Group



CASE STUDIES: Adults, continued

Families Together

The following individual example illustrates how we have been able to help secure a positive outcome for a young family through collaborative working. The young mother confided in our Group Worker about how low she was feeling and how she was experiencing thoughts of taking her own life. She had not disclosed this information to anyone else and her husband, a service man in the military, was due to be leaving the country within a few days for a new posting.

Due to the close working relationship with the welfare teams on base, our Group Worker was able to liaise with them and the family, and the posting was postponed, allowing dad to support his wife and children. Our coordinator was also able to secure an appointment for mum at the GP surgery immediately, enabling a professional to provide the care/medication required. The situation, which could have escalated with tragic consequences, was managed in the best possible way, with all parties able to play their part in securing the safety of all family members and support for the young mum to get better.

Caribbean and African Community Health Support Forum

A significant story of change unfolded during the 'Tell Your Story' collaboration with Ipswich Community Library. The event provided participants with a blank book encouraging attendees to begin imagining their own stories. Denzel* shared his deeply personal narrative of being a single dad in a world that often overlooks his challenges, and his experiences navigating everyday situations, from the intricacies of visits to play parks, to the delicate task of styling his daughter's hair. His story also revealed the emotional strain he faced from living in a country far away from his brother who had contemplated suicide.

Highlighting the importance of a holistic approach to well-being, Denzel recounted how a visit to his doctor led to a transformative recommendation: a 'book list' provided by the Ipswich County library aimed at promoting resilience and boosting confidence.

Play time at Families Together



CASE STUDIES: Adults, continued

Inspiration flowed from his words, his brave honesty and the inclusive space encouraging other men in the room to begin sharing their own journeys, one talking openly for the first time about the loss of his son and afterwards expressing thanks at being listened to. This.

Meeting regularly allowed the men to form friendships differently. While many of them have said hello to each other for decades, they had never talked about their challenges, triumphs, struggles, how they felt, who and why they love and their dreams and desires for the future. By creating a healthy, open space and honest conversation, they have built their own culture of a non-judgmental space to talk, breathe, sit quietly and be seen. For some, this is the first time in their life they have been able to explore who they are and how they feel spiritually, emotionally/mentally, physically, creatively and innovatively.

ActivLives

Sam* was recommended to ActivGardens by Suffolk Mind. He joined our Gardening In Mind programme after a period of depression and anxiety, when he rarely left the house and spoke to no-one except his parents. He then moved on to Grow Your Future – to build skills and confidence towards employment. He became not only a regular volunteer, but one of our Key Volunteers, stepping up to look after parts of the garden and mentor others, while making new friends and feeling part of the team. He also started volunteering for another outdoor-based programme, then gained part-time work for a small gardening business, and he has just started a Level 2 horticulture course at Suffolk Rural. Not only that, he's so hooked on the benefits of fresh veg, he's taken up his own allotment plot.

"I really like the social aspect of it, meeting and speaking to people is a big deal for me. At my worst I wasn't leaving the house. The physical aspect helps with my sleep patterns. Getting stuck in and feeling you've achieved something is really good. It's a relaxed environment, there's no pressure. For people with mental health issues, pressure is a thing. Now I've got paid gardening work - I've carried over the skills and confidence I gained here."

– Sam, ActivLives

On the allotment at ActivLives



CASE STUDIES: Seniors

Gatehouse Caring

Lou* is a widow (76 years), who had been suffering poor mental health after caring for her husband for many years attended the course 3 years after her husband's death.

"Nobody said how are you? Is there anything I can do to help you? Nobody, it's all about the patient and I was wiped out".

When her husband died, Lou had looked for and tried various support agencies to help deal with the grief

"I was...absolutely devastated. I could no longer cope."

She was suffering panic attacks and suicidal thoughts

"I was just ready to die. I was so bereft."

When asked 'where do you think you'd be [without the course]?' Lou said:

"In the graveyard? I know that sounds so dramatic, but I think I would have got to such a state and there's nothing for me. Nothing. There isn't any help - I felt I'd tried all the people that were meant to be there for me, or, you know, could be there for me. I'm an absolutely great believer in the course - it really got me through. It allowed me to take control of my mental health. The relaxation techniques, which I still do, really helped me in quite a profound way. I didn't have to go anywhere. I didn't have to wonder what you wore, or go into a room full of strangers, didn't have to wonder what's where."

Community Wellbeing at
Gatehouse Caring



CASE STUDIES: Seniors, continued

Citizen's Advice Bureau West Suffolk

This older client lives with enduring mental health issues and also has dyslexia. They are aware of Citizens Advice via a local organisation that we have strong links with. The client is struggling with the stairs in their current rented home and they needed our help with their housing application process to move.

Our adviser arranged an in-person meeting with them in our local office as they told us that they find it easier to talk in person. When we met we talked about their issues and problems so we fully understand how their health is causing them difficulties in their existing rented home. We assisted with an on-line housing application to the local Home-Link choice-based lettings scheme.

We also talked about their income followed by a benefit check, which identifies that the client may be entitled to pension credit. Our adviser made a claim for this on the client's behalf, and it is awarded. This is great help to the client and reduces the day-to-day stress about money. We continue to support the client with their housing application for a housing transfer to a home that will meet their current needs. Citizen's Advice Bureau West Suffolk

Helping you find a place to call home – housing support from Citizens Advice West Suffolk



CASE STUDIES: Organisation, Staff & Volunteer

Green Light Trust

The funding has played a crucial role in enabling Green Light Trust (GLT) to develop its delivery model for the longer term. GLT works with participants who have significant mental health issues. This means that coming to GLT activities is an integral part of their week, supporting positive mental health - we quite literally became their lifeline. It is also a place where they meet their friends, learn new skills and grow in confidence. Because of this, many participants want to stay with GLT for the longer term. This has caused a bottle neck for new participants coming through and it can also be problematic with funding as it is difficult to show participant life progression, which many funders are looking for.

This funding has allowed us to test and develop a model that does not create long term dependency on GLT for participants. We now set a clear pathway and expectations for individuals, which goes at the right pace, supporting positive mental health, but is time-limited with the right and consistent level of support for people to find the right 'what next' for them. This improved delivery model has meant better staff training and clear staff roles at the beginning and the end of a participant's time with us, more in-depth assessment at the beginning, a full review after each course and more intensive support to move on at the end. This gives us the opportunity for wider funding opportunities in relation to work experience and employment programmes, which will build longer term sustainability and resilience for us.

"For myself personally, being a volunteer and working my way into a paid position has been extremely beneficial in my self-improvement. As a sole parent to 4 children, getting back into the workplace has been a big step for me. So as with our participants I've also grown in confidence and my life improved by the experience."

– Lead volunteer, Rock Paper Scissors

Camp site at Green Light Trust



CASE STUDIES: Organisation, Staff & Volunteer, continued

Green Light Trust

Archie* has been leading on this programme and has shown great resilience and empowering skills. He has had to coach, mentor and support participants remotely, and face to face, which has seen him grow in confidence with these skills. There have been times, where participants needed very high levels of interaction from Archie, which could have led to him being too involved with the day-to-day issues; however, his confidence in ensuring that he empowers participants has shone through to give the participants far greater autonomy and problem-solving skills.

Caribbean and African Community Health Support Forum

We wanted to take a moment to express our sincere gratitude. During this time, we were afforded numerous opportunities to explain our services to key stakeholders within the NHS, further enhancing our visibility and collaboration potential.

Attending various sharing events allowed us to meet potential community partners who were instrumental in expanding our network. Both sharing events proved to be incredibly beneficial, facilitating valuable introductions and connections that significantly advanced our project. These interactions not only allowed us to pool our resources but also broadened our audience reach, ultimately leading to greater outcomes for the communities we serve.

The notifications we received provided essential moments to pause and think innovatively about our approach. Collaboration is key in the healthcare sector, and the opportunities for connection have sparked new ideas and strategies for upcoming ventures and experiences. The insights gleaned from these discussions have been pivotal in refining our services and improving our overall impact. We believe that by working together, we can achieve far more than we could individually.

Meeting at the Caribbean and African Community Health Support Forum



* All case study names have been changed to protect individuals

To all who took part, thank you.

To the organisations who gave their time, creativity and compassion.

To the staff and volunteers who went the extra mile.

To the funders and partners who believed in a different way of working.

And above all, to the 4,000 individuals who trusted these projects with their stories and hopes.

Your courage and collaboration have made Suffolk a place where mental health support feels closer to home, more human, and more hopeful. Equity in Mind has been the beginning of something bigger – and its spirit will continue to shape our communities for years to come.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP



SUFFOLK
Community
Foundation



NHS
Suffolk and
North East Essex
Integrated Care Board