

# The Life Rooms Annual Report 2019

*“It’s a new world for me, but it’s a world I love and it’s all through The Life Rooms that I’m able to express myself in ways that I’ve never been able to express myself.”*



## Introduction

The Life Rooms prioritises a non clinical and community focused approach. The ethos of The Life Rooms is one that embraces informality and reduces barriers to access. Those accessing The Life Rooms do not have to meet any specific criteria and should feel that they can access as much or as little of The Life Rooms community as they like. The Life Rooms commits to side by side working with stakeholders, and the vision of The Life Rooms is that the community is co created through this continuing side by side process.

The broader aims of The Life Rooms relate to systemic change; shifting focus towards none standardised, socially focused service provision. The Life Rooms does not seek to replace clinical or statutory service provision, but to work alongside these services, contributing to seamless pathways of support. Human life is complex; therefore systems need to offer flexibility in their approaches. The Life Rooms has developed an offer that weaves between and comes alongside existing service provision, supporting those that are struggling to access services, those that fall through the gaps, those that seek more than standard interventions, and those that are moving away from services altogether. The Life Rooms supports people to take the next steps in their life, whatever they may be.

*The Life Rooms Social Model of Health* is the term used to denote the ethos of the service as well as the broader aim for system change. The Life Rooms Social Model of Health encompasses the practical offerings of the service in terms of support and environment, alongside the vision for a more effective framework for health provision more generally. There is a significant history of social perspectives and models, most notably, the social model of disability. Fundamental to the social model of disability is the need to acknowledge and challenge the significant role that society has in *dis-abling* (Beresford 2010; Oliver 2013). In the same way, The Life Rooms Social Model of Health acknowledges the role society plays in the wellbeing of the population. The Life Rooms offers a response that includes empowering people to understand and be supported with their individual social situation, as well as to mobilise change through challenging social systems and structures.

Policy developments within the UK explicitly acknowledge the value of social approaches to health (The Five Year Forward View for Mental Health 2016; NHS Long Term Plan 2019). This provides a ripe context for change; The Life Rooms Social Model of Health offers a way to practically realise some of these principles. Barnes and Mercer (2006) write that 'alternative spaces are where most effective change is enacted'. The Life Rooms offers an alternative reimagining of service provision; it aims to work with personhood and humanity over diagnosis and intervention.

A user of The Life Rooms states the following:

*"The Life Rooms has been able to achieve what others could not. First impressions are so important, and the non clinical and welcoming atmosphere has an instant calming effect. Its holistic approach to health and recovery makes it a convenient, centralised first point of contact. Pathways Advisors and courses are easily accessible - with no need for appointments, stressful waiting lists or referrals.*

*Their original approach breathes a breath of fresh air into Mersey Care and the NHS more generally, setting a good example for others to follow. Their friendly staff have done such a lot for me, and I try to give a lot back in return. The Life Rooms has literally saved my life."*

In practical terms, The Life Rooms operates in a number of different sites across Liverpool and Sefton. Following the opening of The Life Rooms, Walton in May 2016, a second Life Rooms site was opened in Southport in May 2017. A third site was opened in Bootle as a joint venture with Hugh Baird College in early 2019. Aside from these three main sites, The Life Rooms has also started to deliver a peripatetic service within Central and South Liverpool from the end of 2019. When setting up new sites for The Life Rooms, the aim is not to directly replicate provision within different geography or environments but to collaborate with the unique community and environment in which it is situated. In this way the offer continues to flex and change.

In order to give a picture of The Life Rooms offer, activity can broadly be captured within the following pillars:

- Learning
- Social prescribing
- Vocational and employment support
- Community.

A full description of each of these pillars can be found in the main body of the report. Following on from these descriptions will be an overview of the activity that takes place within each pillar, as well as a summary of associated impact data.

## **The Life Rooms: an overview of activity and impact**

This section of the report presents an overview of The Life Rooms activity and impact. In particular it focuses on the activity and impact that has taken place within the following:

- **Learning**
- **Social prescribing**
- **Vocational and employment support**
- **Community.**

The overall picture of visits for each Life Rooms site is shown below. Over 40,000 visits have been made to the Life Rooms between April 2018 and March 2019. This comprises of:

**The Life Rooms, Walton: 23,949 visits between April 2018 and March 19**

**The Life Rooms, Southport: 14,901 visits between April 2018 and March 2019**

**The Life Rooms, Bootle: 2,350 visits between April 2018 and March 2019<sup>1</sup>**

## **Learning at The Life Rooms**

The Life Rooms offers free learning provision within all sites. Courses and groups range from supporting people to understand and manage mental distress to more social and creative offerings. Within the learning offer at The Life Rooms, there is a strong focus on experiential and informal learning practices. The learning provision takes account of the value of lived experience

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<sup>1</sup> The Life Rooms, Bootle opened in January 2019

in terms of content and facilitation; it also harnesses the power of group approaches to distress, which prioritises sharing of experiences and relationship building.

### **Learning at The Life Rooms in figures (April 2018 and March 2019)**

- 1,693 enrolments to learning provision
- 1,221 of these enrolments were new to The Life Rooms
- 159 different learning opportunities on offer
- 1,887 evaluation forms were completed which outline the elements of learning provision that users identify as most helpful.

### **The impact of learning at The Life Rooms**

A user of The Life Rooms shares his experiences of the learning provision:

*“I only got diagnosed three years ago, and I’ve been at The Life Rooms for two years so they’ve very much helped me through understanding of my condition. And it proves to me that I do not have a learning difficulty, I have a learning difference. And that The Life Rooms are teaching me in a way that people have never taught me before and so I’m learning things in a way that I never learned before. And so it’s the whole process of The Life Rooms that has been absolutely life changing.”*

During the period April 2018 and March 2019, 1887 evaluation forms were completed by those attending the learning provision at The Life Rooms.

**98 percent stated the course they attended covered what they need**

**98 percent stated that the learning environment was suitable for the course they attended**

**99 percent stated that the tutor facilitated the course they attended to their expectations**

**96 percent stated that they were able discuss further opportunities during the course they attended**

**99 percent stated that they felt valued in the course they attended**

Additionally, a thematic analysis of the comments that were submitted within these evaluation forms was undertaken. A summary of this work is shown below:

**Facilitation:** Facilitators were described positively. Particular reference was made to friendly and welcoming approaches, as well as acknowledgment of the value of facilitators with lived experience. Some respondents felt that the pace of facilitation was unsuitable for their learning needs; this is a common challenge within learning environments that are open to all.

**Environment:** Many respondents commented on the environment in which learning took place, making reference to particular rooms and spaces. The environment was frequently described as *nurturing* and *safe*. Negative comments about the learning environment were infrequent, however, the location of The Life Rooms sites was noted as inconvenient for some, particularly those who had to travel long distances to access the provision.

**Feelings:** Respondents described a range of feelings associated with their experiences of learning at The Life Rooms. Many described feeling satisfied by their experience, finding their course useful and interesting. Feelings of *gratitude*, *liberation* and *motivation* were frequently shared by respondents. A small amount of respondents cited feelings of instability or increased

emotion after completing learning at The Life Rooms. This serves to show the value of having the wider support provision that The Life Rooms offers so that these individuals can be supported after a course finishes.

**Course content:** Respondents expressed their satisfaction in relation to the types of courses that The Life Rooms offer. In particular, positive comments were common in relation to learning provision associated with music, cooking, comedy and art. A number of respondents outlined that the course content had been helpful for their recovery, or for specific experiences such as anxiety. One individual fed back that the learning provision was a 'stop gap' for them whilst they waited to be seen by other professionals. The majority of respondents said that they felt they were able to apply skills learned at The Life Rooms to their everyday lives.

**Hopes for the future:** Many respondents shared the desire to have further involvement with The Life Rooms, beyond the learning provision they had already accessed. Some individuals said they would like to repeat courses in the future, others stated they would like The Life Rooms to offer different courses or courses that were longer in duration.

**Mental health:** Respondents shared how the learning at The Life Rooms impacted on their mental health. Many stated that they felt more informed about their own mental health difficulties as a result of accessing the learning provision at The Life Rooms, and that this built their confidence and self-awareness more generally. The comments relating to impact on mental health were overwhelmingly positive. These comments ranged from experiencing the courses as a place for learning, a place to receive support from others, or as a distraction from ongoing distress.

**Group work:** Many respondents commented positively on the interaction with other group members as well as facilitators. Talking and sharing with others was a commonly cited positive experience of learning at The Life Rooms. In particular, talking and sharing with others that have similar experiences was identified as having a positive impact on people. Group dynamics were described as challenging for some respondents, particularly in groups where there were differing levels of confidence between group members.

## **Future developments in learning**

The learning offer at The Life Rooms continues to grow and develop. In particular, developments are underway in the areas of physical health, addictions and the arts. Working to respond to the communities in which they reside, the learning offer at each site is tailored to that particular population. Use of local data around community needs, as well as side by side working with those that use The Life Rooms, provides continued rationale for the development of the learning offer.

## **Social prescribing at The Life Rooms**

As outlined in the introduction of this report, social models within health systems are garnering significant political attention. Social prescribing is key to these discussions. Social prescribing offers support via a non-clinical worker; the aim of which is to link people into community based opportunities to improve their health and wellbeing.

Social prescribing support at The Life Rooms is offered through The Pathways Advice service. Pathways Advisors offer a wide range of support to users of The Life Rooms. The support on offer is provided by Pathways Advisors themselves or by external partners, largely consisting of community and voluntary organisations. Pathways Advisors commonly provide support in the following areas: mental and physical wellbeing, housing, employment, benefits, volunteering and developing social interactions.

The Pathways Advice service runs as a 'drop in' facility within each Life Rooms site. A Pathways Advisor will assist the individual on a 1 to 1 basis, helping to address any urgent support needs and working with the individual to navigate them to appropriate opportunities. The support offered is person centred, empathetic and has empowerment at its core; ensuring each individual that attends the service is treated with respect and experiences validation. Pathways Advisors are not limited in their caseload; therefore individuals are able to access the social prescribing support whenever a need may arise, providing a flexible and responsive approach to changing circumstances.

## Social Prescribing in figures (April 2018 to March 2019)

- 1,057 new registrations with the service
- 44 percent of these new registrations were Mersey Care service users
- 1,891 Pathways Advice contacts<sup>2</sup> took place in this time period
- 2,676 signposts for onwards support were made, these were made up of 1,038 signposts into Life Rooms services (including Life Rooms learning provision, Life Rooms Support Workers), 224 signposts into employment support, 60 signposts into volunteering support and 1,331 signposts for social support (including housing, debt, benefits).

## The impact of social prescribing at The Life Rooms

This Pathways Advice client shares their impressions of the Pathways Advice service:

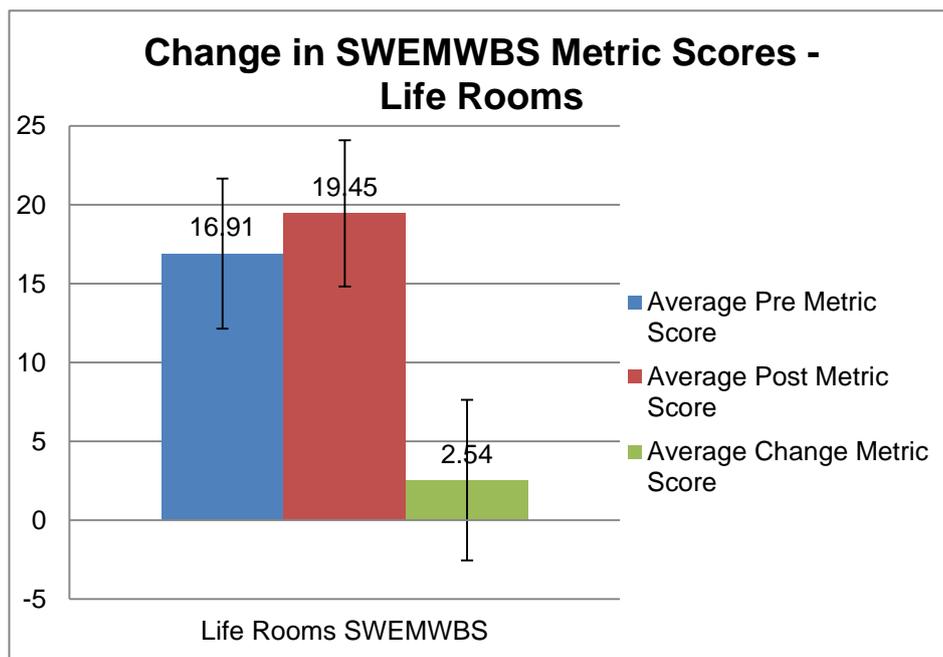
*“You go to the doctors and you’re just waiting in line. You don’t feel personally taken care of, you feel more of a statistic than you do a patient. And I think when you come to The Life Rooms, you’re no longer a statistic, you’re no longer a number, you’re actually a person with a name, an identification, and I think everyone treats you like that. I don’t think anywhere in the NHS does that.”*

Presented below is the most recent analysis of SWEMWBS data (Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale) associated with the Pathways Advice service. Out of 303 initial SWEMWBS scores taken by Pathways Advisors, reviews were obtained for 59 Pathways Advisor clients (19 percent). This data collection took place between June 2018 and December 2019. Over 60 per cent of SWEMWBS reviews demonstrated an improved score. The average change in score was an increase of 2.54. Using a standard effect size calculation, we can say that this shows a medium improvement in wellbeing for the 59 pathways clients that completed review scores.

Measure	Pre-	Post-
Mean average metric score	16.91	19.45
Standard deviation score	4.76	4.64
Mean average change	N/A	2.54
Maximum negative change in metric score	N/A	-4.5

<sup>2</sup> The majority of Pathways Advice clients only have one contact with an advisor, before being signposted to further opportunities or support.

Maximum positive change in metric score	N/A	12.25
Pooled standard deviation	N/A	4.70
Effect size	N/A	0.54
		Medium Improvement
Percentage with improved score (0.5 point improvement)	N/A	61.02%
		36
Percentage no change	N/A	18.64%
		11
Percentage with worse score (0.5 point deterioration)	N/A	23.73%
		14



Presented below are the responses to a survey that was sent to all Pathways Advice clients. The survey was sent by email in September 2019. In total, 29 people responded to the survey.

- Over two thirds of respondents stated their Pathways Advice appointment lasted between 0 to 30 minutes. One respondent stated their appointment lasted more than 60 minutes
- The vast majority of respondents stated they were seen by a Pathways Advisor within 10 minutes
- Half of respondents selected 'mental wellbeing' as the reason that they accessed the Pathways Advice service. 'Benefits and money', 'employment' and 'Recovery College' made up the other reasons for access. One respondent selected 'social interaction' as their reason for accessing the service
- The majority of respondents felt that the Pathways Advisor was able to support them during their appointment

- There were many positive comments relating to the support that was received by respondents. Some of these are included below:

*I felt listened to and supported and was given the advice and information I needed*

*General advice and employment information, that helped me with my worries*

*(There was) ... genuine concern and interest in my needs, supporting my recovery.*

## **Future developments in social prescribing**

As The Life Rooms Social Model of Health expands, the Pathways Advice service will continue to evolve according to the communities and stakeholders associated with each Life Rooms site. In particular, future developments relating to the social prescribing offer at The Life Rooms will involve developing this offer within the wider health system, including public health, primary and secondary care services. Additionally, the social prescribing offer at The Life Rooms will work towards building a more effective evidence base for the service, including further development of outcome measure work.

## **Vocational and employment support**

There are a number of different opportunities available at The Life Rooms relating to vocational and employment support. Users of The Life Rooms seeking support with vocational or employment needs will often see a Pathways Advisor, where they can be supported to access community and voluntary organisations that meet their needs. Further, the Individual Placement Support (IPS) within Mersey Care is delivered by The Life Rooms. This service supports secondary mental health care service users with their employment needs. Whilst much of the IPS activity happens outside of The Life Rooms, the fact that IPS sits within The Life Rooms provision means that IPS service users are supported to access The Life Rooms, where appropriate, to address their wider social needs to support their employment journey. Additionally, the learning provision at The Life Rooms includes opportunities relating to vocational support, for example customer service and basic maths and English courses.

### **The impact of vocational and employment support at The Life Rooms**

A user of The Life Rooms shares his experience of accessing vocational and employment support:

*“Since I’ve come to the Life Rooms... I’ve started to be educated for the first time. I left school when I was thirteen with no education. I could read and write and that was it. Now I’m on a computer course and I’ve just done the A-Level teaching course.”*

### **Future developments in vocational and employment support**

Moving forwards, the realisation of a vocational pathway within The Life Rooms Social model of Health will focus on supporting individuals to gain accredited vocational learning qualifications, while offering work experience opportunities within The Life Rooms environment. As outlined above, ongoing support around employment and vocational opportunities will continue to be provided to users of The Life Rooms. However, the vocational pathway will allow for a more focused route towards paid employment for those that wish to explore this option.

## Community

One of the significant successes of The Life Rooms Social Model of Health has been the way it collaborates with community organisations in order to provide more effective support and shift the traditional care provision model. This is key to The Life Rooms; building cross sector pathways of support in order to strengthen the wider health and care system. In this sense, The Life Rooms contribution to community can be evidenced in the way it allows for communication and connectivity between different agencies within the same environment.

Community is also created and maintained through the environment within The Life Rooms. Each site offers spaces for *being* rather than *doing*, allowing visitors to make their own way through the service and build their own relationships and connections. This is supported through community resources (IT facilities or café facilities, for example) and social groups within the community spaces.

Further, there are forums within The Life Rooms to facilitate side by side working. For example, The Life Rooms Advisory Group (LRAG) operates as a forum where The Life Rooms service can be co-developed by users, staff, partners and professionals together. Such forums create the context for engagement across different stakeholder groups. In this way, community is created and sustained by a continuing process of *co-production*, which offers on-going contribution and ownership for those at every level of the service.

A member of LRAG states the following:

*Being a member of LRAG has made me feel valued, included and helped me gain confidence. Previously I had felt isolated and lacked confidence in my ability. It was good to be listened to. Co developing the Life Rooms services has really helped me gain a more positive outlook on life by being made to feel welcome and valued by the group and included in the discussions.*

## Conclusions

This report has outlined the ethos and principles of The Life Rooms Social Model of Health. It has also articulated the four main pillars of the service; learning, social prescribing, vocational and employment support and community. Within the description of each pillar, the aim was to provide an insight into how this model manifests within the day to day reality of the service, as well as to provide any related activity and impact data. The Life Rooms Social Model of Health continues to flex and change in line with the communities it operates within as well as the continual learning that comes with embarking on new ways of working.

Further information about The Life Rooms can be obtained through the contact details on the final page of this report.

## References

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