The Life Rooms Annual Report 2020

"I believe there has been a massive impact for me by being in a better place now than I ever was and I know that it's because I attended The Life Rooms."

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Introduction

It is widely recognised that social factors such as housing, education, employment and social connection have a significant impact on health and wellbeing. Working within a social model offers opportunities to address such factors and prevents (further) deterioration in health. Additionally, for those people receiving clinical support, providing access to a social model that focuses on increasing confidence, skills and connection, promotes recovery and a life beyond services.

The Life Rooms aligns with both the prevention and recovery approach; by providing people with support to address social need, as well as opportunities to develop skills and build community and belonging, individuals and communities become healthier and happier. 'The Life Rooms Social Model of Health' is the term used to denote the work of The Life Rooms service as well as the broader aims of The Life Rooms to encourage change within the health system to acknowledge the value of social model principles.

The Life Rooms commitments align to the aims of national guidance documents such as the NHS Long Term Plan 2019 and the Community Mental Health Framework 2019. These documents focus on approaches to health that include a dynamic focus on health inequalities, preventative care, and proactive and flexible services. The Life Rooms offers opportunities for people and communities to improve their health by becoming more activated in their own health journey; this lessens the opportunities for deterioration as they are supported to keep healthy and happy in the context of their own lives and communities.
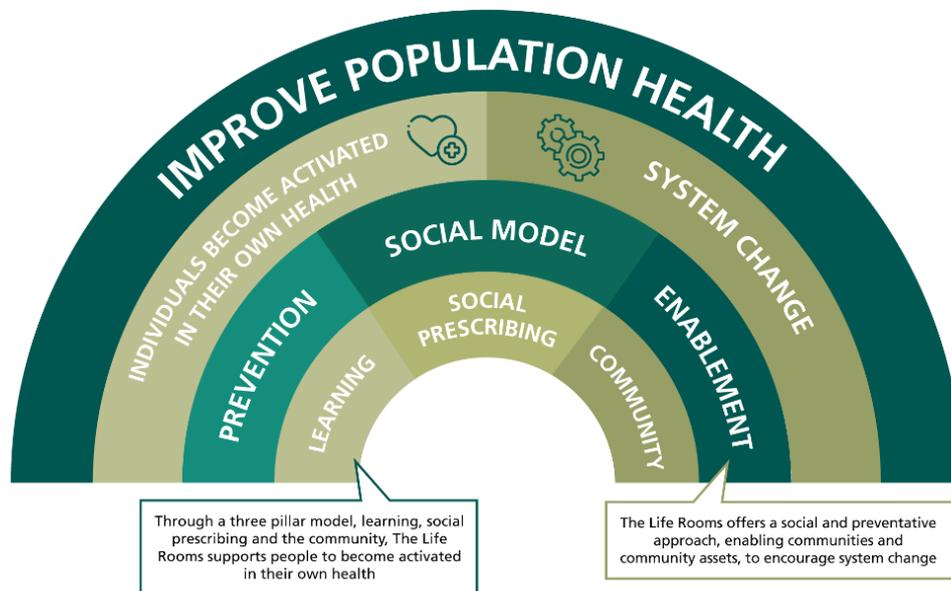
Key to this approach is the aim to improve population health. Focusing on the health and wellbeing of populations leads to proactive and collaborative ways of working. Wider determinants of health and wellbeing are taken into account as well as the role of communities themselves, which means less pressure on clinical responses. The Life Rooms offers a service model that promotes the role of the wider system, not just clinical services, and therefore allows people to access support that works with their needs and wishes, as opposed to fragmenting support offers.

This report will outline The Life Rooms Social Model of Health, as well as drawing attention to the more recent activity of the service, particularly in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. It will share the key service developments that have taken place during 2020 and describe some of the outcomes that have been achieved.

The Life Rooms Social Model of Health

The Life Rooms Social Model of Health is designed to support the prevention and population health agendas by activation through a three-pillar model; learning, social prescribing and community. The three-pillar model enables people to become more activate in their own health; it operates within a social approach that focuses on prevention and the enabling of community and community assets to encourage system change. Through health activation and system change, population health is improved and pressure on clinical services are reduced.

The Life Rooms Social Model of Health:

Through a three pillar model, learning, social prescribing and the community, The Life Rooms supports people to become activated in their own health

The Life Rooms offers a social and preventative approach, enabling communities and community assets, to encourage system change

Through this social model of health, The Life Rooms provides enhanced support for the mental and physical health and wellbeing of service users, carers, their families and local communities. The non-clinical approach provides integration of public, private, voluntary and community sector services through the facilitation of existing and developing community-based assets. As such, the end user does not have to navigate the complexities of a heterogeneous system but rather experiences a seamless pathway of advice, support and care.

Fundamental to fulfilling this model is working 'side by side' with users, communities and stakeholders. The Life Rooms approach to 'side by side' working is as follows:

> The Life Rooms aims to design, develop and evaluate services in a side by side way. This means the service is shaped by everyone in The Life Rooms community; this includes people who access, work and volunteer within the service, as well as partners and the wider community.

Working side by side means The Life Rooms continuously changes according to the needs and experiences of stakeholders; whilst the fundamentals of the model remain static, how this manifests is flexible. This flexibility allows for a truly responsive service with population health at its core.

Opportunities for side by side collaboration with users and stakeholders are built into The Life Rooms infrastructure. Staff and volunteers working as part of the service, many of whom have lived experience of services (including The Life Rooms), are encouraged to share their own experience to inform service development. Each area of The Life Rooms has developed side by side forums to work with The Life Rooms community to design, develop and evaluate the learning, social prescribing and community offers. The Life Rooms Advisory Group (LRAG) provides an overarching forum for The Life Rooms community to meet and work together to develop the service. There will always be more work to do when it comes to fulfilling The Life Rooms 'side by side' aim, and The Life Rooms commits to engaging with this concept genuinely and with accountability.

Above: The Life Rooms 'charter' designed by The Life Rooms Advisory Group (LRAG)

April 2019 to March 2020 in figures

The last financial year saw an increase in Life Rooms activity compared with the previous period. This is unsurprising with the delivery of two new peripatetic sites during this time, as well as the increasing profile of the service. Some key figures from this time period are presented below:
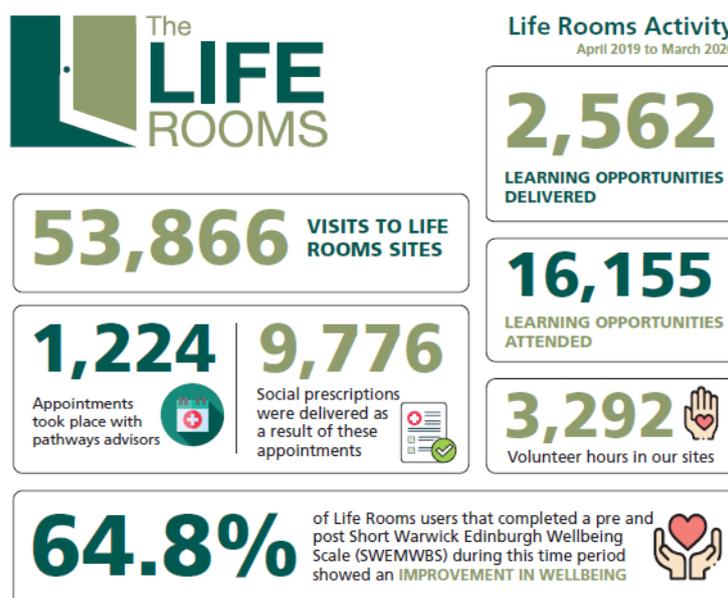
Covid-19

The 2020 annual report for The Life Rooms could not be written without reference to the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic serves to highlight the importance of The Life Rooms Social Model of Health in improving population health, with the overall demand for mental health and clinical services increasing, as well as the economic and social costs associated with Covid-19.

The Life Rooms, as a service sitting within Mersey Care, is appropriately placed to support the management of this increase in demand for mental health services, as well as the associated health impacts of an economic downturn.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, The Life Rooms has restructured its offerings to include a full suite of online and telephone support services. Online learning opportunities have been supporting people to manage their mental distress and the remote social prescribing service has been helping people get the social and practical support they need. Volunteers have provided much needed social contact to the most isolated people and proactive contact has been made with Life Rooms communities to understand and respond to current need. Additionally, the social inclusion team has delivered focused efforts to support asylum seeker communities during this period.

> "It reinforces the need for a system response, as this is not just about mental health providers and increased demand for their services but rather all organisations that may be presented with rising numbers of people seeking help due to mental and behavioural distress."[1]

As the above quote directs, a system response is required to address this surge in demand. The Life Rooms collaborates with third sector organisations (largely voluntary organisations supporting people with practical and social issues, for example, housing or benefits), clinical and statutory services (for example, primary care teams, integrated care teams, community mental health teams, social care practitioners), as well as people and communities to deliver its offer. It is therefore ideally placed to be part of a system response to the health impact of the pandemic.

An overview of The Life Rooms activity during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 is shown below:

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[1] Rafferty, J. (2020) 'Population health modelling is essential in driving effective pandemic response', *Health service journal*

The LIFE ROOMS

Life Rooms Activity
April 2020 to December 2020

5,511 CONTACTS took place with pathways advisors, delivering...

2,860 SOCIAL PRESCRIPTIONS

95% of people accessing learning around mental wellbeing were SATISFIED OR VERY SATISFIED with course content.

224 ZOOM sessions delivered (started 5 October 2020)

1,872 HOURS of companionship delivered by 35 volunteers

18,385 VIEWS on The Life Rooms online learning videos since March 2020.

256 people signed up to The Life Rooms online learning platform (launched 10 October)

1,907 proactive contacts were made by The Life Rooms support workers to identify support needs within our communities

Advisor was **very understanding easy to talk to**... I felt more calmer when I did speak to her I feel **she really understood me** what I was going through I am really grateful for the people who got in touch thank you.

The communication with other people who have similar experiences was pleasant and **The Life Rooms workers were helpful and kind**... which made them easy to talk to.

The impact of Covid-19 will likely have long term and severe consequences; we therefore need long term strategies. In particular, to address the needs of asylum seekers, refugees, BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) communities and other excluded groups, we need to develop culturally competent services and reconnect with our communities, which can be even more challenging in the context of Covid-19. The Life Rooms is committed to understanding community needs and creating services that can reflect those needs. In order to do this, we need to 'work with communities and not for communities, and address areas of digital exclusion as a priority'[2].

Development of services at The Life Rooms in 2020

The first Life Rooms site was opened in Walton's former Carnegie Library in May 2016. Two additional sites in Southport and Bootle have since opened in 2017 and 2018 respectively. At the end of 2019, The Life Rooms also started to deliver a peripatetic service within central and south Liverpool. 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.

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[2] 'Covid-19 and health inequalities' paper produced by The Social Inclusion Team, 2021

The year 2020 saw a great deal of development of The Life Rooms services, not in least part due to Covid-19. The tradition of a new Life Rooms environment each year was sustained through the commencement of 'The Life Rooms online'. A summary of this and some of the other main service developments of 2020 are highlighted below.

The Life Rooms online

It is important to acknowledge the significant online development of our Life Rooms learning offer during the pandemic. For example, over 100 online film courses have been released via The Life Rooms YouTube channel. The digital team within The Life Rooms has played a pivotal role in supporting the service to deliver remotely.

The Life Rooms online learning platform launched on World Mental Health Day, October 2020 and offers a wide range of online learning opportunities for users to access[3]. The Life Rooms key physical environmental design factors are reflected within the online presence. Key to The Life Rooms physical success has been the beauty of the environments that support the creation of community. These same principles apply to the creation of the online communities.

Social inclusion team

The social inclusion team within The Life Rooms is a key part of The Life Rooms community pillar. This team is commissioned to support asylum seekers, refugees, BAME communities and under-represented groups to access health services and wellbeing opportunities. During the pandemic the team has developed considerably in order to serve our most vulnerable communities in a remote capacity. From delivering predominantly community-based face-to-face interventions prior to the pandemic, the team has now moved to providing virtual needs-based advocacy and support, including virtual health sessions for BAME community members online.

The social inclusion team has also remotely coordinated with the voluntary and community sector, and communities themselves, to provide Covid-19 information and support to BAME communities. The team has been integral in the work to prevent outbreaks in Liverpool 7 and 8, areas with the highest percentage of BAME communities in Liverpool.

During these challenging times, the team has remotely engaged and empowered individuals, families, carers and communities to be actively involved in their health and wellbeing journey with the ultimate goal of tackling health inequalities for our most vulnerable communities.

The Life Rooms business team

The purpose of The Life Rooms business team is to provide a support and governance function to the operational teams within The Life Rooms. The Life Rooms has undergone significant growth and this has brought an increasing need for internal governance functions to ensure The Life Rooms Social Model of Health is being delivered effectively. During 2020, the business team set about creating frameworks for Life Rooms operations in relation to project management, quality assurance and improvement, and research and evaluation. They will ensure that The Life Rooms development and expansion will be delivered in a well-governed and timely fashion. The development of a specific governance function within The Life Rooms is an indicator of the significant expansion that has taken place in the service over recent years and the service requirements that have followed from this.

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[3] https://liferooms.learnworlds.com/

Digital platform

The partnership that exists between The Life Rooms and its digital partner Elemental provides a clear operating infrastructure with requisite governance in support of the voluntary sector's participation within the wider health eco-system. This partnership enables GPs and other statutory services to create interoperability between social and community offerings and clinical information systems. This has the net effect of creating a number of key outcomes within our local health economy:

- Simple and seamless referral pathways between clinical and social offers that allow uninterrupted patient journeys through local networks and systems
- The ability for individual citizens to self-refer to key social and community assets in a way that puts them in the driving seat of their own health and wellbeing as well as alleviate pressures on clinical services
- The ability to measure and evaluate the impact of social interventions within clinical pathways so as to create a robust commissioning evidence base for the VCSE sector
- Robust governance and safety mechanisms to manage and sustain services and partnerships across the community as well as support staff to work safely and productively.

The Life Rooms and Elemental currently deliver this infrastructure within two primary care networks in south Liverpool and will mobilise a service in a third network in April 2021. Mersey Care aspires to extend this across the wider Mersey Care and Liverpool City Region.

Mental health outreach and demand management service

In September 2020, Mersey Care's executive team approved a proof of concept business case for The Life Rooms to deliver a mental health outreach and demand management service in order to support the current winter pressures period. This service fully integrates with the reset clinical model for community mental health teams; it uses MaST (Management and Supervision Tool) to stratify risk and positively identify those in most need of social support. During the Covid-19 pandemic The Life Rooms has proactively contacted clinical service users who are not actively engaged with services to link them in with The Life Rooms or escalate clinical need, where appropriate.

Commissioned services

During 2020, The Life Rooms has expanded to include the commissioned provision of social prescribing services to the following primary care networks (PCNs):

- Speke, Woolton, Allerton, Gateacre, Garston, Aigburth (SWAGGA)
- Childwall and Wavertree Network (CWN)
- Innovative General Practice Collaborative (iGPC).

In addition, SWAGGA PCN has commissioned The Life Rooms to employ three health and wellbeing coaches and one senior health and wellbeing coach. They will be working alongside health care professionals, local voluntary and community organisations and the social prescribing support already in place in SWAGGA PCN to focus on physical health and wellbeing support.

Looking forward in 2021, there are a number of continuing and additional developments on the horizon. The Life Rooms online will continue to develop alongside the recommencement of face to face services when it is safe to do so. Similarly, the reestablishment of peripatetic services within central and south Liverpool when it is safe to do so is also a priority for 2021. Building further connections with clinical services using the digital platform, Elemental, will be a significant work stream for Life Rooms teams in the coming months in order to further embed The Life Rooms Social Model of Health within the wider health system. Longer term aims include the establishing of permanent Life Rooms locations within central and south Liverpool, as well as Liverpool 7 and 8.

Outcomes

Evidencing The Life Rooms approach involves engaging with a wide range of data sources. A summary of outcome and evaluation data collected in 2020 is shown below using The Life Rooms three pillar structure:

- **Learning** – what are the outcomes for those that access The Life Rooms learning provision?
- **Social prescribing** – what is the experience of those using The Life Rooms social prescribing service?
- **Community** – what is the value of The Life Rooms work with community organisations?

Learning

Learning at The Life Rooms continues to be a significant part of The Life Rooms offer as the activity infographics show above. Covid-19 has meant a large part of 2020 involved delivering learning provision online. The impact of these online sessions is strongly felt for some of The Life Rooms community. The person below wrote about their experiences of accessing online drama sessions run by The Playhouse Theatre during lockdown as part of The Life Rooms case study collection work:

> "The Life Rooms enabled me to get involved. It improves my mood by going to the sessions at the Playhouse. I used to be distracted, like I was riding the storm, but then I started enjoying the sessions rather than just being distracted.

> Life Rooms at the Playhouse has added to my life as I feel more organised, more sociable, I can think clearly and I listen to others.
>
> The digital creative programme was important as you know the way I have done so well in the last few months – well, I would have fallen back in my PTSD stress. I would have been left in the lurch and would have fallen back."[4]

The importance of digital engagement during lockdown is evidenced here through the imagining of what could have happened had this provision not been available. Clearly, being involved in these sessions brought enjoyment and meaning to this person's life, at a time that could have yielded the opposite.

Routine feedback collected as part of learning provision evidences a similar message. Feedback from those accessing online learning videos during the pandemic shows 85% were very satisfied with the content of the videos and 92% felt these videos had a positive impact on their wellbeing. In terms of learning provision being delivered in an interactive way using online video conferencing, 95% of people accessing learning related to mental wellbeing were satisfied or very satisfied with course content and 84% felt that this learning had a positive impact on their mood.

Social prescribing

Early in 2020, alongside academic partners, The Life Rooms published an article on the value of social prescribing for people with mental health needs[5]. This article adds weight to the growing evidence base for social prescribing, in particular how it can positively impact those experiencing mental distress. The article detailed how The Life Rooms provided social belonging, accessible resources, connectedness, and self-development opportunities to people accessing the social prescribing offer.

During Covid-19 the social prescribing offer has been well utilised, as the earlier infographics show. During this time, the need for practical and social support has never been greater. The person below writes about their experiences with The Life Rooms social prescribing support during Covid-19:

> "I've accessed pathways advice for food bank vouchers, electricity grants through Salvation Army, charities… I've accessed benefits advice, financial advice… There's probably more – I've had generic telephone support whilst in crisis. People have dealt with me in all kinds of states and have been emotionally supportive and helpful.
>
> The impact has mostly been in practical ways. It's been the difference between having access to food and not having access to food, access to electricity and not having access to electricity so it's made the difference between being able to eat and stay clean."[6]

Alongside individual testimony, outcome measure data is also available to evidence the improvement in wellbeing that individuals experience through using The Life Rooms social prescribing service. During 2020 around 57% of Life Rooms users that completed the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) before and after their Life Rooms

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[4] A user of The Life Rooms learning provision delivered by The Playhouse Theatre, obtained through The Life Rooms case study collection process

[5] https://bmchealthservres.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12913-019-4882-7

[6] A user of The Life Rooms social prescribing support during lockdown, obtained through The Life Rooms case study collection process

experience demonstrated an improved mental wellbeing score. Whilst this is a lower wellbeing improvement rate than previous annual reports for The Life Rooms show, this is likely to be reflective of the particularly difficult circumstances many people faced during 2020.

Community

The experiences of those organisations working with The Life Rooms are also relevant when considering outcomes. A recent qualitative evaluation exploring the value of The Life Rooms work with community organisations evidences community partners sharing that working with The Life Rooms was a cost-effective and sustainable way of working.

> "The support that they are able to provide, the help that they are able to give to people with managing their mental health conditions in that setting, that sort of non-clinical setting, it's been fantastic for us. It's helped us minimise the FTA (Failure to attend) rate that we have so a lot of people come in and they will engage with us when we are based in there."[7]

Many of the organisations participating shared their experiences of this partnership approach as one that broadens opportunities for communities and increases wellbeing:

> "I think The Life Rooms really encourages partnerships because they see their members as being with them for a while but also they want their members to move on and be involved in community activities outside of The Life Rooms... I don't think they (The Life Rooms) have a sense of they are my client and you can't have a look in. They are very much about getting people out and engaging people with the community and engaging people in things to make positive life changes so I think they are a really effective organisation."[8]

Learning is required in order to ensure the equity of partnerships, particularly as The Life Rooms is part of a large NHS organisation. However, as a model for effective cross-sector working, there is clearly a lot of positive practice to build on.

Conclusions

The Life Rooms service has continued working in 2020 to enable people to become more activated in their own health, supporting people to build knowledge, skills and confidence to help them live happier and healthier lives. The Life Rooms is a well utilised service within Mersey Care and those who use it report powerful impacts on their lives. The Life Rooms evidences how a preventative, flexible, socially focused model can be realised within an NHS organisational context; this model encourages the health system to shift focus to social determinants of health and towards collaborative and cross-sector responses to population health.

Covid-19 has lead to further pressure on clinical services; a whole system approach is needed in response to this, and The Life Rooms is a key part of this response. With this in mind, the year 2020 has seen a number of significant developments for The Life Rooms. In particular online and digital service developments have meant The Life Rooms could continue operating and serving communities throughout Covid-19. Additionally, integration with secondary care clinical services to support with demand management, and commissioned activity within primary care, has meant

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[7] A partner organisation of The Life Rooms, quoted from Corcoran, R. and Worsely, J. (2021) *An evaluation exploring The Life Rooms model of partnership working*, University of Liverpool
[8] A partner organisation of The Life Rooms, quoted from Corcoran, R. and Worsely, J. (2021) *An evaluation exploring The Life Rooms model of partnership working*, University of Liverpool

continuing developments in terms of embedding The Life Rooms Social Model of Health in the wider health system. The Life Rooms will remain committed to this journey of integration and development moving forward with sustained passion for social and preventative approaches to health.
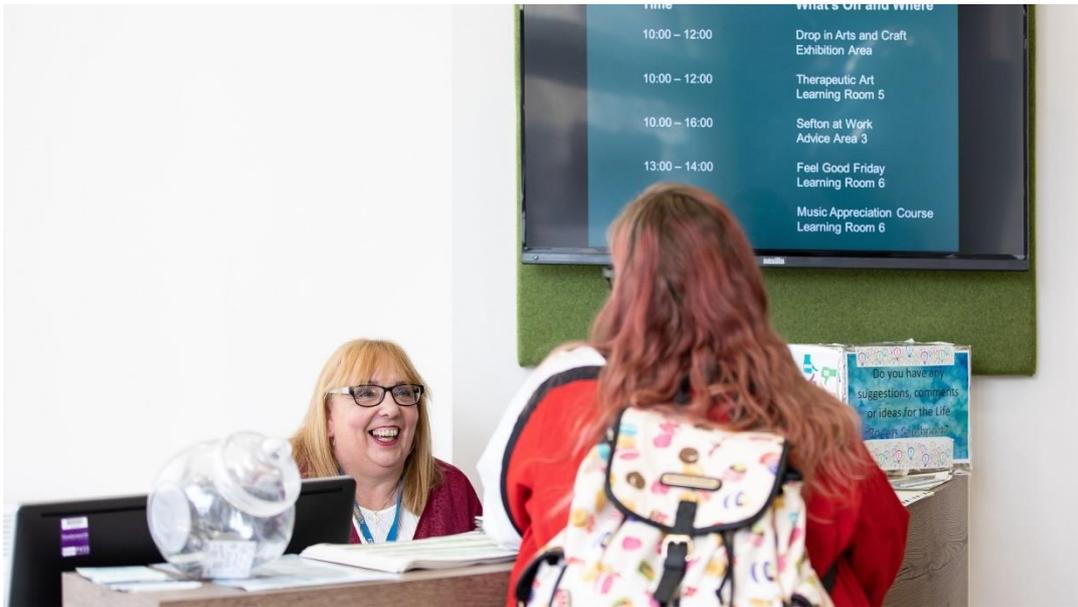
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