



RSA

RSA FOCUS

*Creating a
wellbeing
society*

*Discover how our
connections, mental health
and wellbeing shape our
society*



“Our research tells us that to flourish as a person and as a society we need more than just the provision of essential medical services; rather it’s our connections with others, our mental health and our wellbeing that really enable this ‘human flourishing’.

In this guide you’ll find key points from our research, for you as an individual – and for society as a whole.”

Charlotte Alldritt

RSA Director of Public Services and Communities

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) has been working to understand how our wellbeing, mental health and connections with others can have an impact on everything from our individual happiness to the way in which we live and work together as a society.

The time has come to acknowledge that wellbeing is not an indulgence but a fundamental indicator of a successful, enlightened economy. We are asking the question – is it time that governments, policy makers, civic society and all of us as individuals began to play a more active role in improving our wellbeing?

We’ve focused on a range of wellbeing issues including social connections, addiction recovery and using ‘big data’ to improve government accountability on mental health. Our research reveals that the connections we have with those around us and the extent to which services work with people can have a far-reaching effect on the health and wellbeing of everyone in society, driving down inequality and improving what we call ‘social productivity’.

In this guide you’ll find a summary of how we’re reimagining wellbeing. Discover the steps you can take individually and the things we can do together as a society to re-think wellbeing as a vital part of 21st century living.

WHAT WE CAN DO AS INDIVIDUALS

Get connected

Social relationships are essential to life satisfaction. Indeed, our research suggests that whether or not somebody has good social relationships has a greater effect on wellbeing than other life factors such as having a job, being a single parent, or having a long term health condition. Those who make connections locally and strengthen their social networks through becoming active in their community generally report increased wellbeing and happiness.

Information is power

Those who report the highest levels of wellbeing are often those who feel empowered to make change in their community – and understand the tools and networks that can help them. By understanding the web of local services, informal social groups and networks, individuals can make informed choices about their wellbeing and hold providers to account, rather than feeling like an isolated “service user”.

Find your peers

Peer-to-peer support is essential for our continued wellbeing. Our research shows that individuals who support- and are supported by – people who share experiences and outlook can dramatically improve reported resilience, prevent isolation and boost their wellbeing for years to come.

Take action

- ▶ Discover what's going on in your community with the **RSA Heritage Index**.
- ▶ Find out how your area supports mental health and wellbeing with our **web tool for patients and service users**.
- ▶ Visit our **wellbeing and mental health hub** for blogs, downloads, free events and interactive tools.

60percent

of people in our research knew nobody who had the power to change things locally

Our research showed that improving people's social connections boosted participant's life satisfaction by an average of

20percent

25percent

of people will experience mental health problems in some point of their lives

1-in-4

areas of England have significantly higher premature mortality for people with mental health conditions

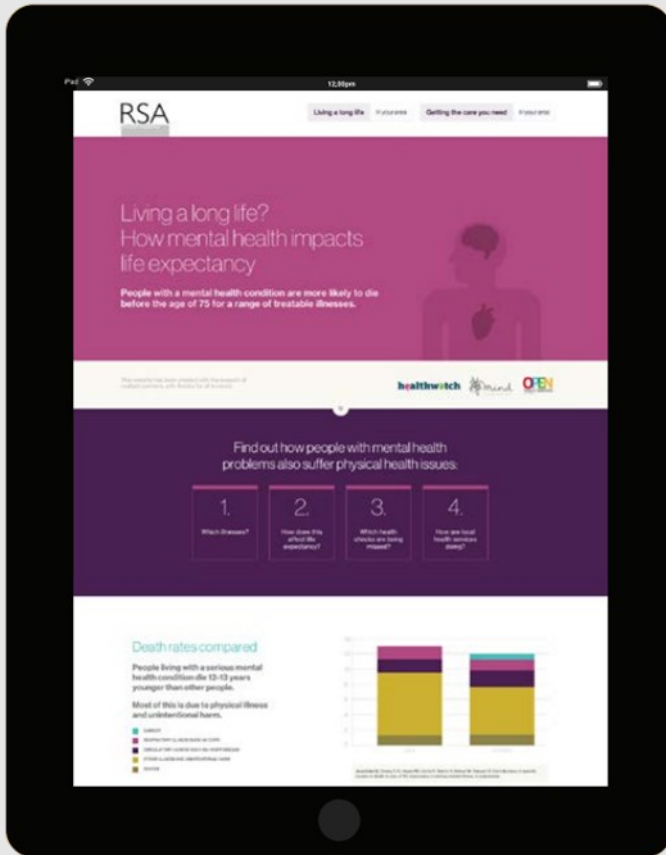
RSA FELLOWSHIP

Fellows around the country are working to develop capacity in their local areas and further afield.

From setting up a community Ideas Hub in Chelmsford, to creating equitable opportunities in global health, we're supporting Fellows to improve wellbeing and build stronger communities.

Our research shows that there's often latent power within communities – we want to continue supporting Fellows to realise this power in their own communities. Get project support from the RSA, and connect with other Fellows to develop your idea.

Discover more about RSA Fellowship and how you can get involved



► Access the RSA OPSN Mental Health Interactive Tool



MAPPING MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT IN ENGLAND

"Our Open Public Services Network (OPSN) report mapped mental health inequality across England and found some stark differences in the way people with mental health conditions were treated."

By working in partnership with Mind and Healthwatch, funded by the Cabinet Office, we aimed to enable people – particularly mental health service users – to answer four important questions:

- 1. How well is my GP looking after my physical needs?*
- 2. How likely am I to get the psychological therapy I need and what happens if I don't?*
- 3. Am I more or less likely to be prescribed anti-depressants in my area?*
- 4. How well am I helped to live with my condition?*

By getting the answers to these questions, citizens can be empowered to challenge and advocate for the approach that suits them best – rather than accepting what they're given. By mapping mental health outcomes in this way, we've shown that public health leaders need open access to health data and to urgently re-prioritise the way they approach the physical health of mental health service users."

Tom Harrison

Emma Lindley Mental Health and Wellbeing Researcher

WHAT WE CAN DO TOGETHER

The power of networks

Over 60 per cent of people we surveyed at the beginning of our research could not name anybody they knew who had the power or influence to change things locally. However, our report shows that some people are particularly adept at using their day-to-day networks to make positive change in their communities. By using the latent power of our personal networks we can overcome local obstacles.

Power is with people

Working with people to reflect upon their social relationships and the under-used assets in their communities and social networks has led to substantial positive effects on personal empowerment, higher levels of civic participation and people learning to take control of what matters to them in their local community. By uniting around a cause you really care about, groups of people can make a real difference.

The power of shared experience

Our Whole Person Recovery project shows how support groups, recovery groups and peer-to-peer networks are vital. The true experts at recovering from poor wellbeing are those who have already done it – we need to utilise their hard-won experience so that people who are in danger of poor mental health or wellbeing can benefit from it.

Take action

- ▶ Public policies aimed at boosting health, wellbeing and a community's capacity to solve its own problems should think first about the networks that already exist. Local initiatives should work to support the people and groups that are already passionately involved at a local level.
- ▶ Professionals and service-delivery practitioners should look at a person holistically, building on their strengths, skills and resources.
- ▶ Coproduction is key for people to own their own wellbeing, and feel a valued and empowered part of their Community.



► Discover more about the
Connected Communities
project



MURTON MAMS, COUNTY DURHAM

"In Murton, East Durham, one of our seven Connected Communities project sites, we examined how social networks approaches might influence mental wellbeing and social inclusion.

Our partner, UCLan worked with a local community organisation East Durham Trust (EDT) to recruit and train local people to become volunteer community researchers.

These volunteer community researchers administered our social network survey and the results revealed that single parents in Murton were most at risk of isolation and low wellbeing, frequently reporting feelings of loneliness and exclusion. A group of single mothers worked with our partners to create a new approach to supporting people like them. Hence, Murton Mams was born - a peer-support group mixing a crèche, kitchen and social club to provide an enjoyable and relaxing setting, to provide support and build the self-esteem and confidence of attendees, free of the negative associations of more 'institutional' services.

Today Murton Mams continues to make a positive difference to the wellbeing of participants, with those involved reporting improved levels of empowerment, confidence and wellbeing. The 'Mam Zone' model is now being rolled out to neighbouring communities supported by Tees Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Trust."

Dr Manjit Bola

Senior Lecturer, University of Central Lancashire & Centre for Citizenship & Community

WHAT THE GOVERNMENT CAN DO

Build capacity

Local authorities, housing associations and adult social service providers should place a high value on community engagement by trained staff. This engagement should aim to boost social networks within communities and especially around vulnerable or isolated people. By supporting and building these social network, interventions can have a real impact on people's lives.

An economic boost

There is evidence that investing in policies and activities which build social relationships can improve employability, boost personal health (which has positive economic impacts) and create savings in healthcare and welfare expenditure. Any government programme looking to increase efficiencies in health, local government of social policies should consider the power of connected communities first!

Take mental health seriously

Our OPSN open data research tells us that there is a huge disparity in the way in which different regions in England approach issues of mental health and wellbeing. Some areas rush to medication, others fail to apply basic physical health checks. We're calling for a better, more consistent preventative approach from both physical and mental health services.

A whole-person approach

Policies designed to boost wellbeing and mental health need to understand how a person is embedded in their community – and how enhancing their wellbeing – or preventing mental illness – requires a network of social, physical, cultural and personal support, rather than just an intervention from the health services.



CASE STUDY: WHOLE PERSON RECOVERY, WEST KENT

Social relationships have value. Our research has sought to grow this value, boosting wellbeing by connecting people to one another in their local area, helping them to overcome the challenges they face.

Our Whole Person Recovery project in West Kent focusses on helping people to build recovery capital to help them achieve better wellbeing on their journeys to recovery from drug and alcohol addiction. The project is designed around three principles:

1. Coproduction is an essential part of every service user's personal recovery process.
2. A 'whole person' approach enables services to tap into the strengths and networks an individual already has - sustaining their recovery in the long term.
3. Social connectedness - within the recovery community and wider local community - creates a network of support and opportunities for individuals, enhancing the sustainability of recovery beyond treatment.

The aim of the project is to foster recovery through the collective effort of the individual, service providers and the community as a whole.

► **Discover more about the Whole Person Recovery Project**

BUILDING A WELL-BEING SOCIETY

Take action

How can government and policy makers work with communities to boost their wellbeing? Our research indicates that a process of deep engagement from the very start is the best way to gain lasting benefits for everyone.

► Understand

The first step to supporting the connections and wellbeing of a community is to understand and map them. Where does the power to make change lie?

► Involve

Work with local individuals and networks to co-produce interventions that empower people to work together, share what works and create solutions themselves.

► Connect

Support and develop ways for people to make social connections – ensure individuals have access to sources of support; or weave networks between people and groups.



“No matter where we researched, the key point was always to involve local communities from the word go – even recruiting local volunteer researchers to help us understand the social networks that shaped a place’s identity.”

Policies designed to boost wellbeing must work with, and build up, these local connections if they’re to have maximum impact.”

Matthew Parsfield
RSA Researcher

WELLBEING — A CALL TO ACTION

Those who face the challenges of poor wellbeing are often not the loudest people in the room. Creating bridges between individuals and networks helps them to find their voice. We're calling for a new, more 'human' approach to mental health and wellbeing, one which enhances our connections to others, reduces isolation and seeks to empower individuals and communities to find the solution that's right for them.

Individuals

- ▶ Take control: by understanding the network of tools and services that support wellbeing, you can make the choices that are right for you.
- ▶ Share your experience: connecting with people who share your experience can boost wellbeing and build connections.
- ▶ Make change locally: by joining together in local networks we can collectively support the wellbeing of everyone in our communities.

Society and professionals

- ▶ Coproduce services: an essential step to ensure people truly have the power to create the solution that's right for them.
- ▶ See the whole person: by drawing on a person's social, cultural and personal networks, services can become more effective in enhancing wellbeing.
- ▶ Make full use of a community's assets: support groups, informal networks, heritage and more - each is an important asset.

Government

- ▶ Understand, Involve, Connect: empower citizens at every stage for real social change in their communities.
- ▶ See the big picture: by using open data we can improve outcomes, enhance referral processes and learn from best-practice.
- ▶ Build capacity: improving a community's capacity to boost social networks can have a range of positive economic and civic impacts.



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WHAT NEXT?

Visit the RSA **wellbeing hub** to find a wealth of data on wellbeing, mental health and connected communities.

Get the research behind this guide:

- ▶ **RSA OPSN Comparative Mental Health Data**
- ▶ **RSA Connected Communities**
- ▶ **RSA Whole Person Recovery**

For more about the RSA and our mission to enrich society through ideas and action visit our **website** or join the conversation on **Facebook** or **Twitter**, **#RSAWellbeing**.

All our work is made possible by RSA Fellows, an international community of 27,000 people from all walks of life who share our values and are inspired by the brightest new ideas. For more about how you can get involved visit our Fellowship pages **here**.

With thanks to our partners:

UCLan, Big Lottery, LSE, Centre for Citizenship

Mind, Healthwatch, the Cabinet Office