

Single Parents Wellbeing

An evaluation of five Wellbeing Workshops in South Wales created and facilitated by Single Parents Wellbeing for single parents



Mental Health
Foundation



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“It’s like a community where you can be yourself and have friendships with people in similar situations... it can make such a difference.”

Single Parent attending wellbeing course

September 2019

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Introduction



Single Parents Wellbeing (SPW) is a Community Interest Company established by its Directors; Amy Holland and Rachel Cule, in 2017. They are both single parents who were employed as project officers for Creating Connections, a peer-led self management project for single parents funded by Big Lottery Cymru (now National Lottery Community Fund) and delivered by the Mental Health Foundation in partnership with Gingerbread.

SPW has built on the work of Creating Connections, maintaining a peer-led approach that involves single parents in the planning and delivery of a range of activities that aim to promote the health and wellbeing of single parents and their families. The organisation is open to any single parent living or working in Wales and it is free to join through the website or closed Facebook group. Activities are promoted by members via social media and word of mouth or advertised by partner organisations such as Women's Aid.

In 2017 SPW received an initial small grant (£5,000) from the Big Lottery to pilot a 'Brighter Futures' course specifically for single parents. The pilot was independently evaluated by the Mental Health Foundation and findings were used to inform a larger grant application of £50,000 to facilitate a series of Wellbeing Workshops and develop an interactive website. The grant application was successful and a series of five Wellbeing Workshops began in South Wales in September 2018, and ran until July 2019.

It was agreed that the Mental Health Foundation (MHF) in Wales would be responsible for overseeing an evaluation of the Wellbeing Workshops for SPW. MHF is a well-established mental health charity that holds a vision of good mental health for all and prides itself on quality, independent, peer-reviewed research. Prevention is at the heart of the work of the MHF, whose mission is to help people thrive through understanding, protecting and sustaining their mental health.

“We wanted to continue Creating Connections’ work and focus on the compassion and holistic element.”

Director of SPW



Evaluation design

The evaluation used the following mixed methods approach:

- Wellbeing information was collected using the nationally recognised Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS). Evaluation participants completed the scale at week one of the workshops and then again in the final workshop session (week six)
- An online survey collected participants' views of the Wellbeing Workshops
- In-depth telephone interviews established a deeper understanding of the impact of the project on single parents' lives.

Five Wellbeing Workshops were completed with a total of 58 single parents attending. Participation in the evaluation was voluntary and the process was explained to workshop participants at the first session of each course.

The evaluation consent form was completed by 48 single parents and data was collected from these parents only.

Content

This report considers whether the Wellbeing Workshops have made a difference to participants' wellbeing and presents the findings from the data collection. It offers a discussion of these in relation to the aims of Single Parents Wellbeing. Finally, the report looks at the strengths of the Wellbeing Workshops and, through the learning that has occurred, provides future recommendations and a conclusion.

Summary

Overall SPW is highly valued by the single parents that attended the Wellbeing Workshops. Many have gone on to use other resources and activities provided by SPW. The Wellbeing Workshops have met its aims of supporting single parents to take action to make positive changes in their lives that will improve mental health and wellbeing.

A peer-led approach that is compassionate and empowering is at the heart of all their activity and underpins the way the Wellbeing Workshops are designed and delivered. Combating stigma is an important aspect of the Wellbeing Workshops and is a factor in empowering single parents to look beyond the label and feel confident that they can work towards a better future.

Background



The 2011 national UK census identified 97,500 single parents with dependent children living in Wales (Public Health Wales, 2017), and yet they are an invisible group, often isolated due to issues of accessibility, poverty and the stigma of being a lone parent in society. Currently one third of children in working single parent families are living in poverty (Rabindrakumar, 2018) and single parent families have an eight times increased risk of becoming homeless compared to couples with children (Shelter, 2018).

Whilst research on the extent to which single parents experience loneliness and social isolation is limited, research by the Co-op and British Red Cross found that stigmatised groups and people living without a partner (including single parents) are more likely to experience loneliness (Hardeep, 2016).

This study also highlighted that social determinants such as low income, poverty, unsecure housing and employment are more likely to lead to social isolation (Hardeep, 2016). A recent survey of 900 single parents in Scotland found that 35% of those surveyed reported being lonely all or most of the time compared to just 6% of the UK population in general (McKendrick *et al.*, 2018).

There is an increasing awareness of the detrimental impact of social isolation on peoples' health and wellbeing. Social isolation describes infrequent

contact with others and a lack of ongoing relationships, whilst loneliness is the subjective feeling associated with isolation (Hardeep A, 2016). In a review of 148 studies it was found that lacking adequate social relationships was comparable to risk factors such as smoking and alcohol consumption and exceeds other risk factors such as obesity (Holt-Lunstad *et al.*, 2010).

As well as a negative impact on physical health there is a strong association between loneliness and depressive symptoms (Vanhalst *et al.*, 2012). The BBC Loneliness Experiment surveyed 55,000 people in the UK and found that loneliness was linked to higher levels of anxiety and lower levels of trust in others (University of Manchester, 2018). Persistent loneliness can lead to feelings of anxiety and reduce self-esteem leading to behaviours that may damage health (Griffin, 2010).

As a consequence of exposure to negative factors such as loneliness, isolation and stigma, single parents are at a higher risk of developing mental health problems (Griffin, 2010) and research has consistently shown that single mothers have roughly three times the prevalence of depressive episodes compared with other groups (Tragosz *et al.*, 2003).

Studies have found that a significant part of the association between single parent status and depression could be accounted for by differences in exposure to stress and social support (Cairney *et*



al., 2003). The presence or absence of social support networks appears to be critical to the wellbeing of single parent households. Studies indicate that single parents are less likely to engage with wider sources of informal support than mothers with a partner, and therefore miss out on the opportunity to expand their support network and share advice (Bradshaw, 2008).

Single Parents Wellbeing (SPW) was created to address the impact of social isolation on the mental health and wellbeing of single parents in Wales.

It has built on the members' peer-developed experience to create a range of activities that are accessible in terms of time, location, cost and that are relevant to single parents' lives.

Wellbeing workshops



The Wellbeing Workshops were developed as a core activity for SPW, influenced by the Creating Connections project that ran in Cardiff and Newport 2014 – 2017. The aims of the Wellbeing Workshops were to:

- Use compassionate and empowering approaches to bring together single parents to discuss issues that impact on their mental health and wellbeing
- Equip single parents with a range of tools and skills that promote self-care and support mental health and wellbeing
- Provide a single parents-only social network that can continue to offer peer-led support, information and activities beyond the life of the workshops.

Five Wellbeing Workshops were delivered over eight months from September 2018 to April 2019. Each workshop consisted of six sessions that were held on Fridays or Saturdays based on consultation with single parents about the best days to run such an activity. Whilst the Friday workshops were held weekly, the Saturday workshops took place once a fortnight.

This was requested by single parents during consultation to facilitate the attendance around shared child care with their ex-partners. The budget from the National Community Fund grant allowed SPW to cover the cost of travel and child care where necessary.

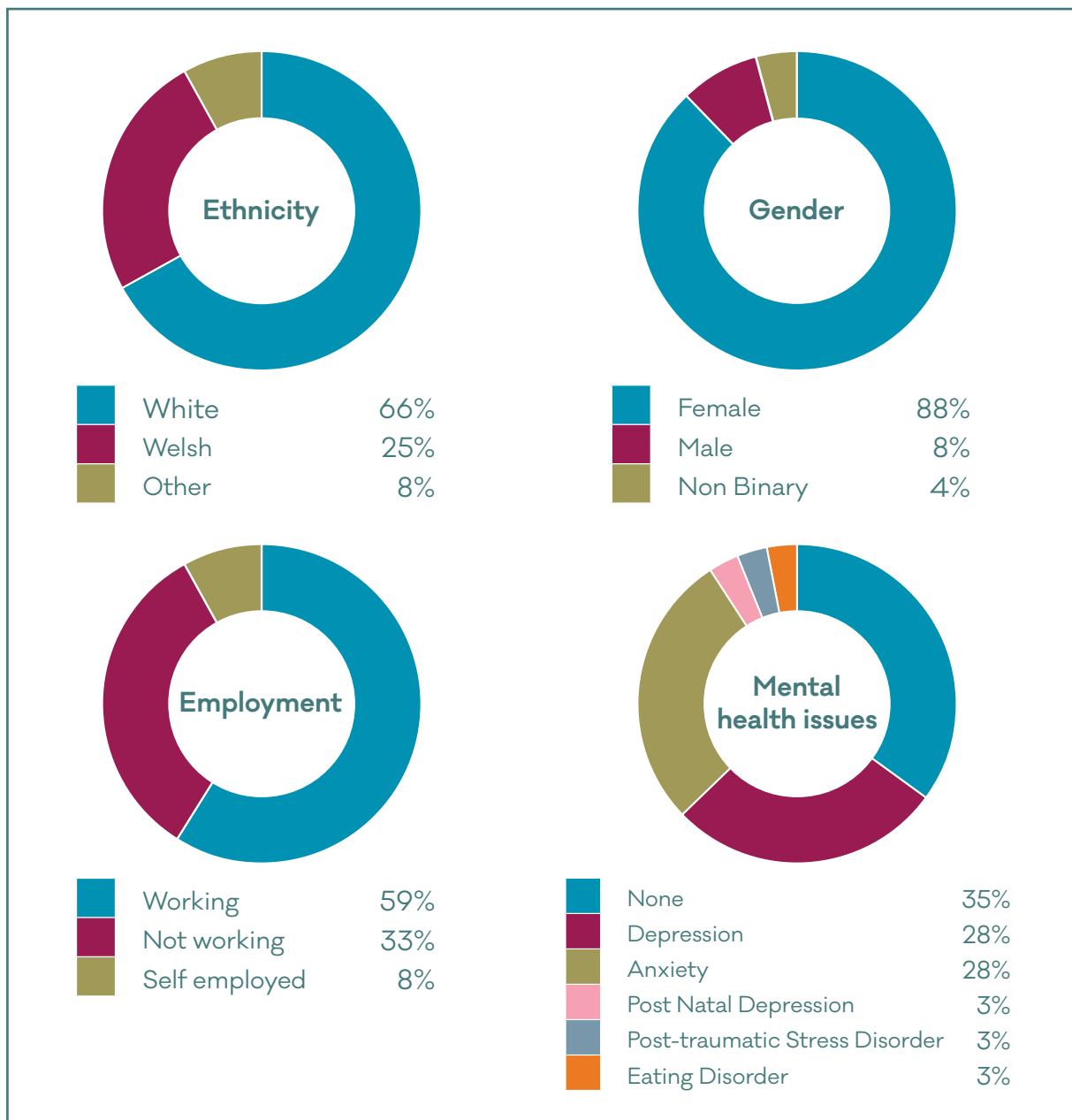
The Wellbeing Workshop sessions were themed as follows:

Session	Theme	Issues covered
1	Becoming a single parent	Introductions, evaluation explanation and consent, wellbeing scale, challenges and benefits of being a single parent.
2	"I'm not good enough" (all about confidence)	Activities and discussion covering self-care, self-esteem and confidence, breaking negative thought cycles and the power of positivity.
3	Managing difficult relationships	Characteristics of relationships, tools for constructive communication, building healthy relationships, impact on children.
4	Reacting positively	Understanding personal values, triggers and behaviours, stress, assertiveness, dealing with emotions.
5	My mental health	Session led by 'Human Givens' counsellor.
6	Me time	'Must look after ourselves well in order to look after others well' Activities and exercises that help; Shiatsu, Mindfulness, etc.

Demographics



Over the lifetime of the workshops, 58 single parents attended, 48 of those consented to take part in the evaluation. The average age of single parents attending the workshops was 37 years whilst the average age of single parents in the UK is 39 (Rabindrakumar, 2018). A majority of evaluation respondents (73%) had 1 or 2 children. Further information regarding the participants who engaged in the evaluation can be seen below:



Findings



Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale

The Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) was developed by researchers at the Universities of Warwick and Edinburgh to enable a quantitative measurement of wellbeing of adults in the UK (Putz *et al.*, 2012).

It is a 14 item scale of mental wellbeing covering both subjective wellbeing and psychological functioning. Participants are asked to comment on 14 statements that are worded positively and address aspects of positive mental health.

The scale uses a five point Likert scale from 'none of the time' to 'all of the time' and responses are summed together, making the minimum scale score for each respondent 14 and the maximum 70.

Single parents taking part in the evaluation completed the WEMWBS form early in the first session of the course and repeated the process at the final session. There were 38 WEMWBS forms that were fully completed pre and post the course.

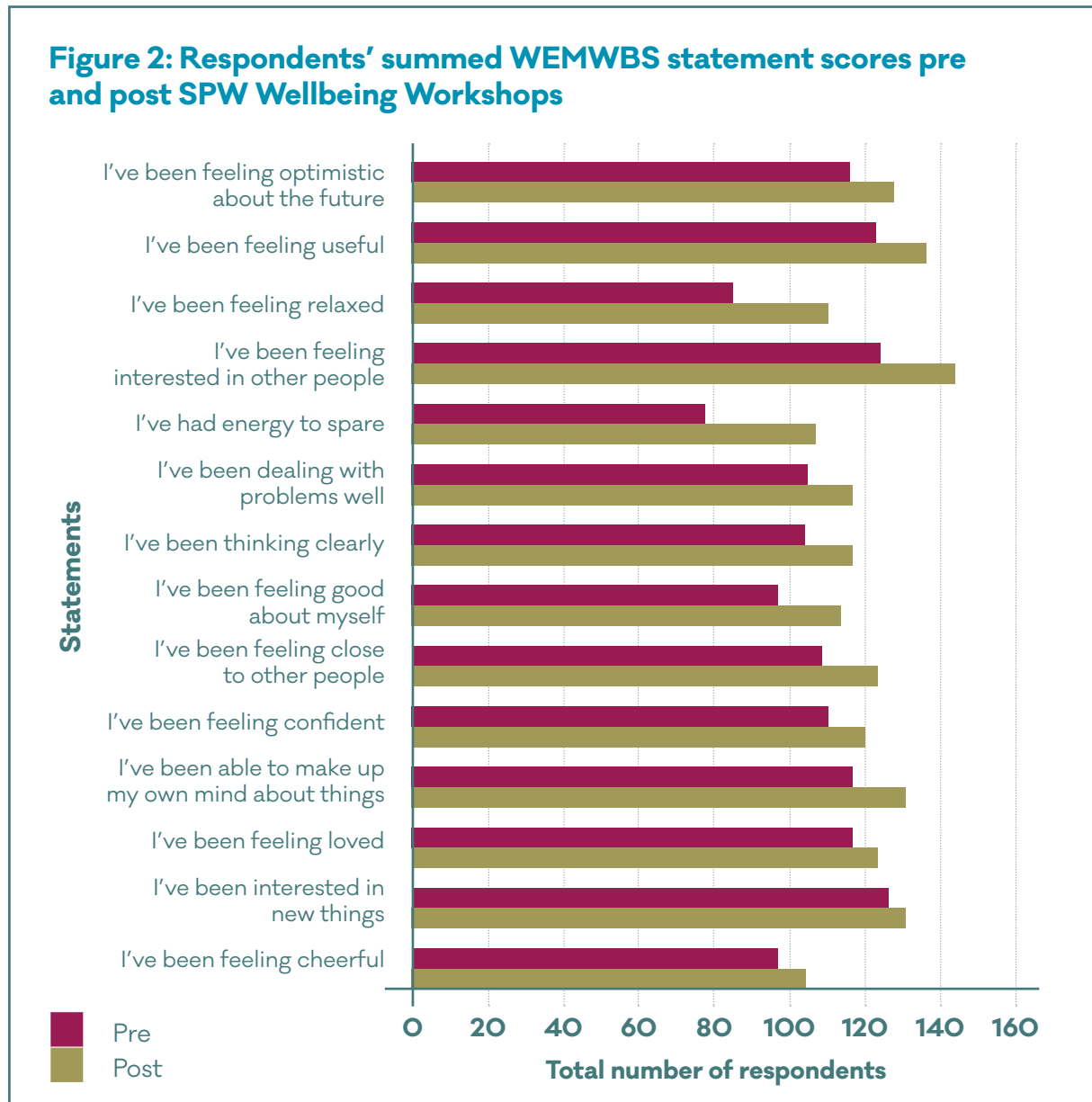
Figure 1 below shows the evaluation respondents' WEMWBS pre-course and post-course scores totalled for all statements and all five workshops:

Figure 1: Summed respondents' WEMWBS scores Pre and Post Wellbeing Workshops





Figure 2 shows the evaluation respondents' pre-course and post-course scores for the 14 WEMWBS statements across the five workshops:



The results show that the totalled evaluation respondents' WEMWBS score over all the statements as well as for individual statement, was greater on completion of the SPW Wellbeing Course than the score before starting the course. However, although these results represent the experiences of the participants involved in this project, the small number of respondents make it difficult to generalise from these findings. Using a nationally recognised measure such as the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale means that data from future courses can be added to data held to create robust evidence of how course participants' wellbeing may improve by attending the course.



Wellbeing workshops online survey

An online survey using Survey Monkey was made available to single parents who attended the Wellbeing Workshops. A total of 20 parents completed the survey; below are the questions and responses:

1. How did you find out about SPW's wellbeing course?

	Percentage	Number of respondents
Through a friend	25%	5
Through Social Media	60%	12
Through another SPW activity	20%	4
Other (Eventbrite)	5%	1

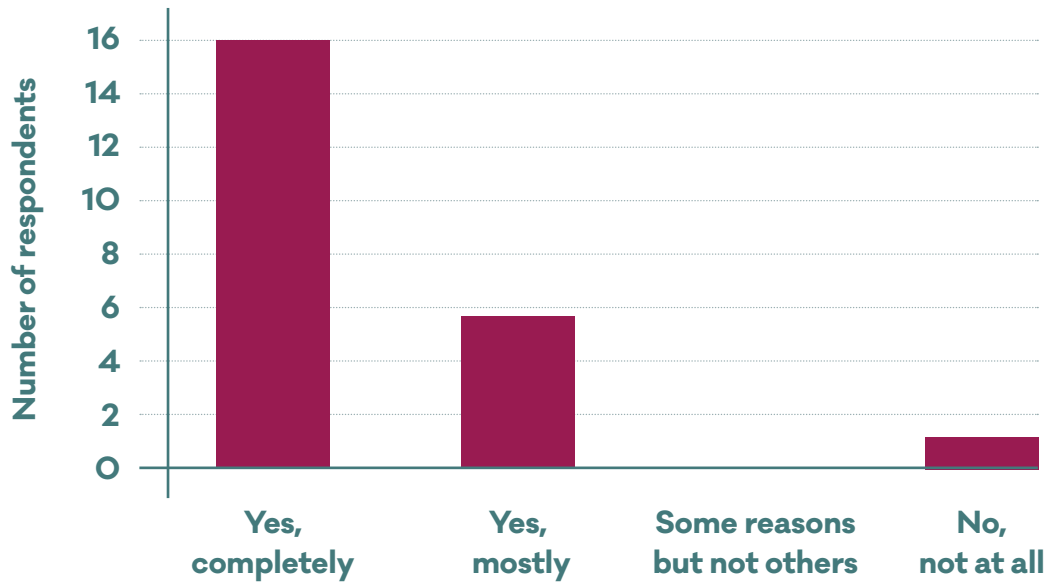
2. Why did you decide to attend the workshops?

(N.B. Respondents could select more than one)

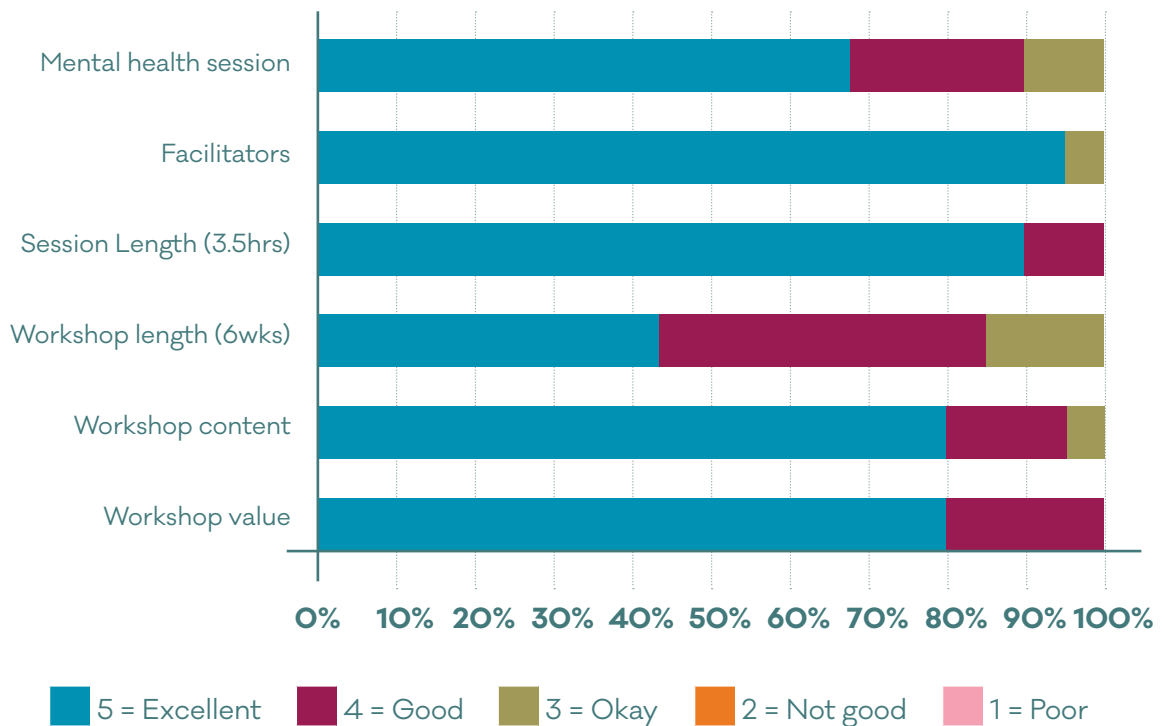
	Number of respondents
To help me meet other single parents	13
To improve my health and wellbeing	16
To help me make plans for the future	8
To help combat loneliness	9
To help with relationship issues	9
Other (included 'how to deal with issues' how to deal with ex-husband's behaviour' and 'to meet with people in the same situation')	4



3. Did the course fulfil your reasons for attending?



4. Please rate the following elements of the course





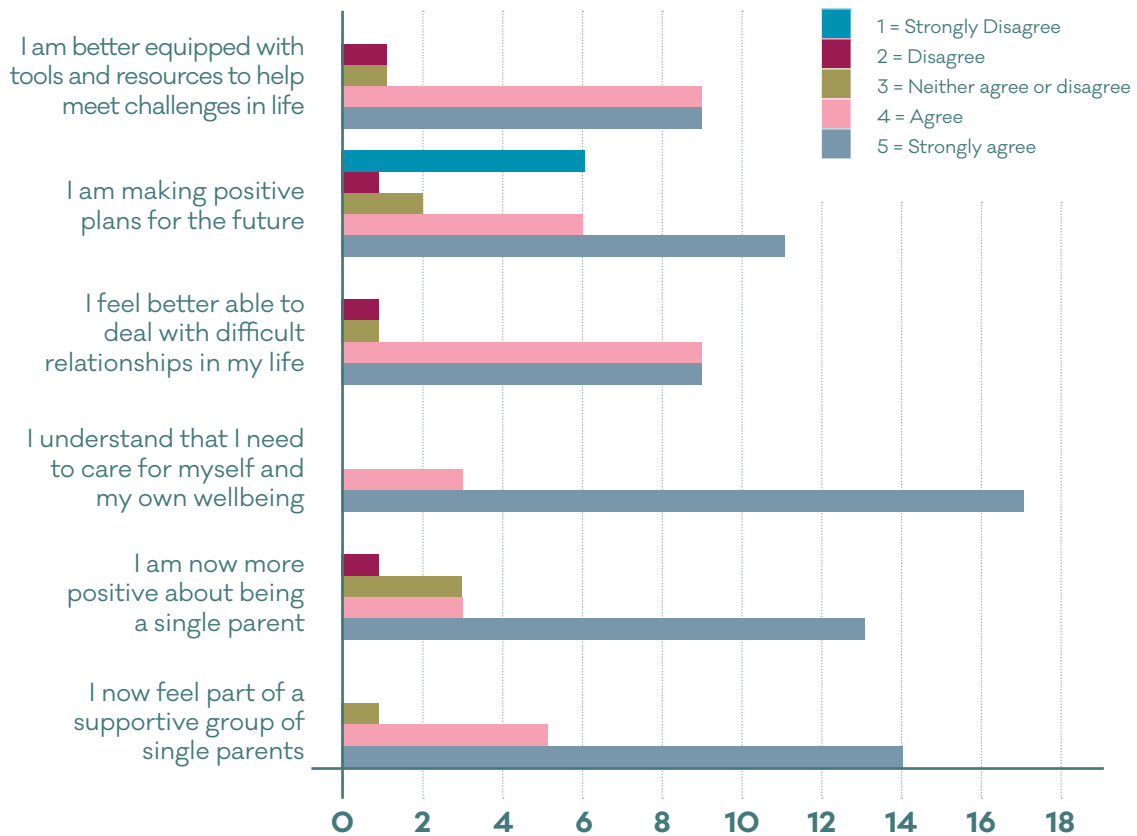
Respondents also left comments on this question: two respondents suggested that the workshop length could be longer than six weeks and one parent said that they could not fault anything about the workshops.

5. The wellbeing course provides a sandwich lunch at the end of each session and financial support for course participants' transport costs and childcare costs

All the respondents rated the provision of lunch, transport costs and child care costs as Important or Very Important. Comments made by respondents included:

- "I feel that for some people it would be impossible without this financial support"
- "Without it I wouldn't have been able to attend, so really appreciated the help"
- "I was glad the course was held every other week as it fell on my child free weekends"

6. Has the wellbeing course made a positive difference to your life? Please rate the following statements. As a result of the course





Respondents' comments included:

- "the course was good but I am too depressed to get any value out of it and eventually gave up going which isn't the facilitators fault"
- "The most valuable part of the course for me was learning how to temper my own reactions to other peoples' behaviour"
- "I was muddling through life a bit and needed a safe place to review and focus on positives".

The online survey has provided a useful insight into why single parents joined the Wellbeing Workshops with the majority of respondents reporting that it has made a positive difference to their lives. One single parent said that she felt too depressed to continue with the course, which may indicate that the parents may have to have a certain level of good mental health to gain from the course, whilst others would like it to continue for a longer period.

When asked what they would tell other single parents about the workshops, several respondents commented that they had already recommended them to a single parent friend.

Respondents also commented that the workshops:

- Help build confidence and skills
- Has a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing
- Feels like a safe place
- Gives a great sense of empathy from everyone
- Offers the opportunity to make lots of new friends
- Helps you to feel that you are not on your own.

One of the respondents said that it was one of the best things they had ever done for themselves, another described the workshops as 'life changing' whilst yet another respondent described the workshops as an important milestone in her progress.

Qualitative findings: interviews with single parents



“It’s like a community where you can be yourself and have friendships with people in similar situations... it can make such a difference.”

Respondent J

Of the 48 parents that consented to take part in the evaluation for the wellbeing course, 12 single parents were interviewed by telephone (11 female and one male). It was agreed that semi-structured telephone interviews provided the most accessible format for the qualitative element of the evaluation as the researcher could contact single parents at times convenient to them (e.g. whilst children were at school or had gone to bed).

As a significant number of parents had requested not to be recorded on their evaluation consent forms, written notes were taken during the telephone interviews. A semi-structured interview schedule was developed (Appendix 1) which provided a framework for participants to reflect on their experiences of the workshops allowing them to express their thoughts and perceptions in their own words.

The interview aimed to understand the parents’ motivations for attending the course, their experience of taking part in the course and whether they felt that it had made a difference to their wellbeing in general. A thematic analysis of the responses identified six key themes that relate to the aims of the project (Evans, 2018).

Feelings of isolation and loneliness

By far the most common motivation for joining the SPW Wellbeing Course that was expressed by single parents interviewed in response to a sense of isolation and loneliness.

Single parents interviewed found their social contact restricted by lack of access to child care and a sense of “having to manage on your own”. Single parents said that they struggled to find or afford babysitters which prevented them from attending activities in the evenings and at weekends. Half the parents interviewed said that they received little support from ex-partners or family. Four parents said that weekends and holidays highlighted their sense of isolation as this was a time when friends in couples were occupied with each other.

Respondents felt “dragged down” by having to do things on their own, most said that they did not know any other single parents amongst their friendship group. They felt that people did not understand their situation and therefore would judge them as not being able to cope. All the single parents interviewed made reference to feeling alone with their situation prior to joining the SPW wellbeing course. One interviewee said that they had contacted the Samaritans on a couple of occasions because there was “no-one to talk to about my situation”.



“I joined (the course) because I am on my own – don’t know anyone who has been through what I’ve been through. I wanted advice and support from people who had been through the same.” Respondent C

Peer support

Interviewees said that they valued the way the SPW wellbeing course brought single parents together to share experiences. Meeting others who were in similar situations, at different stages of single parenthood had a strong positive impact on their sense of worth. One interviewee said:

“Sharing personal stories reinforced that you’re alright, they’re normal reactions.” Respondent D

Respondents also commented on the importance of maintaining contact outside of the course through the wider SPW activities and a dedicated WhatsApp group set up after each course. These have provided emotional support at times when single parents have felt particularly low mood or vulnerable.

“There have been times where I’ve not been having a good day or have to do something but don’t have the motivation to do it on my own with the children. One time I was feeling like that and I put a message on and straight away messages came back ‘we’re doing such and such, come and join us’. It’s a very positive group... no matter what your problem is, no matter what’s going on – rather than being criticised for

how you’re thinking or what you are doing – everyone is always positive.”
Respondent E

Experiencing stigma

Interviewees reported that stereotyped views continued to influence how single parents are judged by society in general. Most of the respondents said that they felt others held a negative opinion on them because they were single parents. One respondent felt “bullied” by the attitude of those around her towards her single parent status. Several said that this led to them hiding away or not telling family or friends when they were struggling. One parent commented;

“I’m tired of feeling ashamed about myself – sometimes people make me feel like that. People feel they have the right to ask judgemental questions – stereotypes everywhere.”
Respondent G

Parents interviewed used language such as “guilty” and “a failure” to describe how their single parent status sometimes made them feel. They reported that the wellbeing course gave information that helped to dispel myths about being a single parent and also encouraged them to look at single parenthood from a more constructive perspective. A number of respondents commented on how helpful it was to look at the positive aspect of being a single parent such as being able to make your own decisions or living in a calmer environment after domestic abuse. They appreciated the way the course encouraged them to question the stereotype and feel proud of their



achievements. The facilitators would refer to participating parents as “super-heroes” who were doing the work of two parents. This made a positive impact on those interviewed.

The course provided a single parent-only environment and took a non-judgemental and open-minded approach which allowed people to “be themselves”. Single parents said that sharing experiences and strategies for coping boosted self-esteem and confidence.

“It’s given me more confidence and it’s taught me lots of things about being a single parent. Yes there’s going to be stigma around being a single mum – it’s just not accepting it, brushing it away and not accepting that label for yourself. SPW’s given me the confidence in breaking the barriers of the label.”
Respondent A

Difficulties with mental health and wellbeing

Nine out of twelve single parents interviewed mentioned difficulties with mental health and wellbeing. Respondents felt caught up in a cycle of trying to cope on their own with finances and housing difficulties, managing work and home, sick children, child care, and difficult relationships.

They described how these obstacles led to high stress levels, anxiety and / or depression, feelings of anger or being “out of control” and conversely, what impact poor mental health had on managing day to day.

“I’m on anti-depressants and suffer from fibromyalgia. I’ve had my benefits stopped twice. It’s a battle, I work hard for my daughter. I neglected myself and made myself ill.”
Respondent F

Parents said that the wellbeing course created a well-structured “safe” environment that allowed them to express emotions with their peers that they hadn’t necessarily dealt with before. One respondent described her course group as a “security blanket”.

A central focus of the workshops was to promote good self-care. The facilitators used an analogy of an air steward explaining the flight safety drill, telling parents to put the oxygen mask on themselves before they put on their children’s mask, to explain the importance of self-care. Most parents said that this felt counter-intuitive but understood the need to take this action. They said that recognising the need to look after their own health and wellbeing in order to better care for their children was a fundamental learning point for them.

The course encouraged parents to focus on their self-care, to understand how their attitudes and behaviours have a negative impact on situations and relationships. It also provided tools and skills that offered a constructive approach to finding positive solutions to difficulties they may be facing. One of the sessions was led by a counsellor who worked with course members on how to build good mental health. Some interviewees said that, because they had long term mental health conditions a lot



of the information was not new, however the activities were a useful reminder and discussion with their peers was helpful and affirming.

An example of the activities given was “Naming your Inner Critic”. The premise being, that by giving your inner critical thoughts a name and regarding them in the same way you would regard a bully, allows you to address and dispel them. Workshop participants were encouraged to “be kind to yourself” and not “be frightened of the bully”.

“My mental health is improving but it’s a journey... I honestly believe that had I accessed this earlier things may not have been so tough for me and my recovery may have been faster.” Respondent L

Reflecting on relationships

Participants were single parents due to a variety of circumstances; some had chosen to be lone parents from the start and had very little contact with the other birth parent, whilst others had experienced a relationship breakdown.

None of the parents interviewed had been widowed. Nine out of twelve of those interviewed were experiencing difficult relations with their ex-partner. These difficulties manifested as experiences of domestic abuse and violence, court battles over custody or wrangles over the division of financial assets or child support.

In a number of cases ex-partners were seen as unreliable in their commitment to parenting or, conversely, still tried to impose their wishes or expectations on the parent even though the relationship was over. Some parents interviewed also mentioned difficult relationships and communication problems with parents and siblings.

“The week on ‘difficult relationships’ was cathartic and really useful. I have used the tools in my relationship with the ex and even at work – don’t react in anger, give it 24 hours... I found all the weeks really helpful.”

Respondent E

For most respondents it was the first experience they had of being able to talk openly and honestly about their experiences of dealing with difficult relationships. The course took a pragmatic and positive approach to dealing with difficult relationships by introducing useful tools to deal with difficult situations, allowing people time and space to talk issues through but not allowing things to develop into ‘name-calling’ or insulting ex-partners. Parents interviewed said that the fact that course participants were at different stages of single parenthood enabled them to see the whole process as a journey; it was possible to “move on”.

Parents said that, holding the workshops once a week or fortnight over a period of six weeks gave them time to practice and give feedback on how they used the tools in their communications with ex-partner. They felt better equipped than before the course.



“I realised how I am sabotaging the relationship with (child’s) father... I didn’t know how to communicate with the ex; I learned techniques and tools to work on these things. Everything made sense.”

Respondent I

Parenting alone

All the single parents interviewed talked about the great sense of responsibility they felt for the welfare of their children. Few of the respondents felt that they had a true co-parenting relationship with the other parent. A number of interviewees were trying to cope with babies and toddlers, there were two parents with sets of twins and several respondents were parenting children with physical or learning disabilities or mental health issues. Most of them said that they came to the course feeling that being a single parent meant that they were “deficit” and not “good enough”.

A number of parents voiced their anxieties over the logistics of managing a household and being an attentive parent. Simple tasks such as taking a shower or putting the bins out can become a logistical challenge when you are on your own with a small baby. One parent described having to go through her pregnancy, having a caesarean section and recuperating with a new baby, completely alone.

Single parents interviewed said that the workshops provided a forum for peer support that enabled them to realise that everyone was going through, or had been through similar experiences.

This had led them to feel less alone and isolated. They became their own ‘learning circle’. A number of them said that just having two or three hours a week at the workshops without the children, focusing on their own needs helped them to continue to cope with being a single parent.

“When I’m recharged, I want to ‘lift’ the children and have more energy to do it. The mood in the house is much nicer.” Respondent D

Respondents said that the workshops have helped them to look at things from a different perspective. Parents interviewed felt that the course had made a positive difference to their relationships with their children.

“The biggest thing... I always saw me and (daughter) as a team, but didn’t see us as a family. I quite often say that now; we’re a family of three (that includes the dog!).”

Respondent H

“I feel definitely different – more aware of the importance of looking after my mental health. I didn’t feel like that before... I understand how I react to things, it changed my approach with regard to looking after myself... recognise when you’re not feeling right and knowing what to do. If I’m more positive then that affects my child.” Respondent B



Below are some of the ways respondents described the benefits of the course approach and how it has made a positive difference to their lives:

- "I have lots of useful tools to deal with situations."
- **"I have used techniques positively with my daughter."**
- "I have changed the way I am with my daughter – focus on her behaviour, not see it as her."
- **"I feel less anxious – learned to let go."**
- "Cousin says I'm a different person"
- **"It's changed my attitude, I realise I am strong."**
- "Better awareness of feelings before they get out of control. I use the tools before I get overwhelmed."
- **"I feel more positive... more confident to speak up."**
- "My daughter got a really good report at school, felt that was down to my care."
- **"The 'listening lines' (activity) made a big difference, I feel valued and we discussed some sensitive issues."**

Discussion



The Wellbeing Workshops run by SPW focus on improving single parents' mental health and wellbeing by offering a forum that provides peer support and space to share experiences, equips parents with the tools and resources to address the challenges of lone parenting and extends their social networks.

In order to determine whether the Wellbeing Workshop aims were met, this section of the report will discuss their impact on (1) single parents' mental health and wellbeing, (2) how tools and skills used during the workshops enabled parents to take positive steps for themselves and their families and (3) the development of peer support and single parents social networks.

1. Single parents' mental health and wellbeing

Two thirds of the single parents who participated in the evaluation self-reported as having a mental health problem. The WEMWBS findings, responses from the online survey and the qualitative interviews all point to the Wellbeing Workshops meeting its aim of improving single parents' mental health and wellbeing.

An important focus of the workshops was to encourage parents to see the importance of looking after themselves so that they were better able to care for their families.

The small supportive group environment was an essential element in helping parents' to feel safe. Single parents surveyed said that their motivation for joining the workshops was to meet other single parents and because they felt isolated.

The interviews helped highlight how parents had little contact with other single parents before joining the workshops and how the strength of their isolation and loneliness led to calls to Samaritans or withdrawal from social groups. The evaluation has shown how the strength of peer support is a major factor in reducing feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Whilst there was a low drop-out rate from the workshops (less than 5%), it is important to note that one survey respondent said that their poor mental health prevented them from fully accessing the course. It is possible that at times a single parent may find that the workshops evoke thoughts and feelings that they cannot manage and this should be taken into account by the facilitators and SPW.

All the single parents who were interviewed commented on the strong friendships that were developed during the course of the workshops.



2. Tools and skills to meet the challenges of single parenthood

The combined components of the workshop's structure, content and approach all added to a warm, safe environment where single parents were able to play an active part in their own development. Most (90%) of the survey respondents felt that they were better equipped with tools and resources to deal with the difficult challenges in life, whilst 85% agreed that the workshops had helped them in making positive plans for the future.

Single parents who were interviewed talked about how practising different ways of thinking or directing their actions in a more positive way led to improvements in their confidence and self-esteem.

The Wellbeing Workshops take a 'self-management' approach that empowers individuals to have more control over the decisions and choices they make, seeing their lived experience as a strength that can be shared. In this way the workshops give parents time and space to work together on finding solutions to the challenges and difficulties they experience whilst developing new skills on the way (Crepaz-Keay, 2015)

3. Development of peer support and single parents' social networks

The online survey and qualitative interviews show that single parents felt a strong sense of connection with their peers during the Wellbeing Workshops. Parents talked of the value of a single parents-only space that allowed them to share their concerns and feelings with peers without fear of judgement.

As well as building friendships and networks during the six workshop sessions, parents are encouraged to maintain and build their connections through social media and ongoing face to face peer-led activities organised by SPW.

The fact that the Wellbeing Workshops are part of a wider framework of support and activities means that participants can build on these networks of ongoing support and continue to learn from each other. The majority of respondents to the online survey agreed that the workshops had given them a sense of belonging and therefore made a positive difference to their lives.

(I would tell another single parent to join the group): "If you are struggling with how you feel and what to do... can share with other people there and get the help you need – the understanding of what you are going through. Just attend 'cos at the end of the day it will be definitely uplifting and teach you skills with challenges and toxic relationships... it's okay to take care of me." Respondent E

Recommendations



The Wellbeing Workshops have been a valuable asset to the work of Single Parents Wellbeing and a positive resource in their aim to improve the mental health and wellbeing of single parents.

A peer-led approach that is compassionate and empowering is at the heart of all their activity and underpins the way the Wellbeing Workshops are designed and delivered.

Combating stigma is an important aspect of the Wellbeing Workshops and is a factor in empowering single parents to look beyond the label and feel confident that they can work towards a better future.

Based on the findings of the evaluation this section sets out a number of recommendations that Single Parents Wellbeing could take forward to develop any future Wellbeing Workshops as well as wider work of SPW.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Extending the Wellbeing Workshops programme

The success of the Wellbeing Workshops has led to a request by single parents for more workshops; for the programme to extend beyond six sessions; and for additional 'top-up' themed sessions that cover, in more depth, themes relevant to single parents (for example; difficult relationships).

It is recommended that SPW consider ways of extending the programme.

- a) It may be possible for SPW to develop the Wellbeing Workshops as a marketable training package that could be disseminated across organisations and wider areas of Wales.
- b) Short courses or one-day events could be developed to look at some of the themes in more depth.
- c) SPW could build on their peer-led approach by creating a volunteer 'Wellbeing Ambassador' role. Single parents could be trained in facilitation and leadership skills to take the Wellbeing Workshops into single parent communities thus extending the reach of their health and wellbeing programme.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Diversity and sustainability in recruitment

Single Parents Wellbeing has been successful in their recruitment to the Wellbeing Workshops using social media and word of mouth. The workshops were generally oversubscribed with only the final workshop falling below the target participant number of 12. The majority of participants were female (88%) and two thirds self reported as experiencing mental health difficulties. SPW could provide a valuable resource to a wide range of single parent groups and should extend its recruitment to vulnerable groups that may benefit from the workshops (such as single parents who are homeless, seeking asylum or seeking or have refugee status, or have experience of domestic violence).

It is recommended that SPW consider extending its recruitment success by:

- a) Undertaking a gap analysis to look at diversity of recruitment and whether there are specific communities of single parents that are not accessing SPW services.
- b) Developing partnerships with organisations that work with specific communities of single parents that have not accessed SPW services. Partnership working could also improve their sustainability through shared funding.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Building a body of knowledge and evidence

Whilst peer support appears to be beneficial to peoples' wellbeing there is still much to learn about how it works and what are the elements that are particularly effective. SPW has a unique position in Wales providing services that aim to improve the lives of single parents and their families.

It is recommended that they build their knowledge and skills by:

- a) Maintaining their focus on peer-developed and peer-led services which includes building their volunteer expertise and capacity.
- b) Taking opportunities to attend relevant courses and conferences that extend their knowledge.
- c) Developing partnerships with organisations that work in areas that are relevant to supporting single parents' mental health and wellbeing.
- d) Working with an organisation that specialises in evaluation and research to develop an holistic evaluation framework would ensure that learning what is effective and what could be improved, is part of SPW's everyday practice.

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Appendix one



Single Parents Wellbeing – Interview guide

Thank you for agreeing to talk to me today. The interview will not be formal – more like a conversation. I will take notes so please bear with me if I seem to quiet, I am just trying to get things down! Everything you say will remain anonymous. If I use any quotes in reports etc., they will be anonymous no names given.

Feel free to say as much or as little as you want and do ask me questions if you want anything clarified.

1. Can we start by finding out a little bit more about yourself and your family – your current situation?
2. How did you find out about the wellbeing course?
3. Why did you take part?
4. Can you remember how you felt on the first day when you arrived?
5. Was the course helpful to you? How?
6. What was the most helpful aspects of the course?
7. How would you describe your mental health before doing the course?
8. Now?
9. Has the course changed your view / attitude about being a single parent?
10. Do you have any plans for the future? Can you tell me?
11. Is there anything that you would change about the course?
12. What would you say/tell other single parents about Single Parents wellbeing and the course?

Thank you again.



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