

The Nidd Creative Wellbeing Project

End of Project Report

Funded by Two Ridings Community Foundation

Spring - Summer 2025

*A celebration of creativity, wellbeing and community
across rural Nidderdale*

Introduction

The Nidd Creative Wellbeing Project was a celebration of creativity, wellbeing, and community, running across rural Nidderdale from Spring to Summer 2025. Funded by the Two Ridings Community Foundation, the project brought together children, parents, carers, and wider local community members through a series of imaginative, inclusive workshops designed to support emotional and social wellbeing through creative practice.

From worry dolls to windmills, mindful mandalas to community singing, each session offered more than just creative activity - it created space for people to pause, connect, and express themselves in safe, playful, and often transformative ways. Whether gathered around a real-life table or an online screen, participants were invited to explore creativity as a gentle tool for mental health and social wellbeing, and ultimately, joy.

This report shares the journey of each workshop, the voices of those who took part, and the ripples of wellbeing, connection, and inspiration that continue to spread as a result. It is a testament to the power of creativity - and community - to uplift, connect, and care for ourselves and one another in simple, meaningful ways.

Workshop 1: Worry Dolls

Thursday 22nd May 2025

Group / Participants: Mums & children from The Dales Home Education Community Group

Number of participants: 5 mums and 8 children

Location: Dacre

What We Did

This joyful, hands-on workshop invited children to create their own worry dolls - small, colourful characters inspired by the Guatemalan tradition of sharing your worries with a doll, then gently letting them go. Using wooden pegs, wool, buttons, fabric, felt and ribbon, the children brought their ideas to life with boundless imagination!

Children were invited to dip in and out, go at their own pace, and create as many as they wished! Each child left with their doll tucked inside a soft organza pouch for safekeeping. The space was playful, calm, and full of creative curiosity - not just for the children, but also for the mums, who got involved in the making too.

Why We Did It (Creative Wellbeing in Action)

The workshop gently drew from creative therapeutic principles - offering space for symbolic expression, sensory focus, and emotional connection. Crafting worry dolls allows children to:

- Externalise emotions through imaginative play
- Build sensory self-soothing tools
- Engage their senses in calming, grounding ways
- Work autonomously, building confidence and emotional agency

More broadly, creativity itself is a powerful tool for wellbeing. It allows us to express what words can't, encourages playfulness and curiosity, and helps regulate our nervous systems. In a group setting, it also creates a gentle sense of belonging and shared experience - all without pressure or expectation.

Participant Feedback & Outcomes

The words the children used to describe the session?

"Fun", "Colourful", "Messy", "Creative", "Calm"

Parents told us:

100% wanted more workshops like this

"Fun, colourful and exciting", "Calming, fun, enjoyable"

"Lots to do, great materials!", "Very helpful and friendly facilitator"

"Making our worry dolls was very therapeutic", "Everyone was so lovely"

"My son loved being able to make his own design and was very attached to it emotionally"

"Matched the needs of the group very well"

"The choices of materials were brilliant - so much to explore."

Community Connections

We were delighted to be invited to work with The Dales Home Education Community Group, who we connected with via social media. The families were curious, open-hearted and incredibly welcoming.

What we learned

- That children respond beautifully when given creative freedom and emotional permission.
- That worry dolls are a gentle and engaging way to talk about big feelings in small, safe ways.
- That parents, when offered a non-pressured space, connect deeply through shared creative and playful time too.

Workshop 2: Brew & Breathe

Thursday 22nd May 2025

Group / Participants: Mums from The Dales Home Education Community Group

Number of participants: 5

Location: Dacre

What We Did

This workshop began almost by accident - or perhaps by magic! While the children made worry dolls nearby, the mums naturally gathered around the creative table too. Initially curious, they began making their own dolls... and then, as the children drifted off to free play, the parents stayed. We extended the workshop for over an hour, they talked, shared stories, and gently connected. Some had never met before; others hadn't had a chance to connect properly with other grown-ups in a while. The craft became a quiet companion - something to do with your hands while your heart speaks. It was unplanned, but it was powerful. Each mum left with their own handmade dolls and, perhaps more importantly, a sense that they'd been seen, heard, and held in community with likeminded souls.

Why We Did It (Creative Wellbeing in Action)

This session may not have been planned but its impact was profound. For many parents, particularly those home-educating, moments of rest, reflection and social connection with other adults can be rare. We stayed and extended the workshop because something magical was happening. Crafting together gave space to:

- Slow down and pause, access calm through tactile and sensory creative making
- Connect with others through shared experience in a gentle way without the need for eye contact
- Experience being nurtured - not just nurturing

Creativity offers a bridge between our inner and outer worlds. In this setting, it created space for emotional regulation, validation, storytelling, and quiet joy. The dolls became symbolic not just of worries, but of self-care.

Participant Feedback & Outcomes

100% said they'd like more workshops like this

"It matched the needs of the group really well"

"Calming, encouraged social talk, encouraged emotional discussion"

"I didn't know I needed this"

"It was so good to talk with others in the same boat - we don't often get to do that"

Community Connections

This session evolved organically during our first workshop with The Dales Home Education Community Group. While the children played after their workshop, the parents remained at the table - and what emerged was a spontaneous peer support space, gently held by craft and conversation. Following this, we developed the **Brew & Breathe** strand of the project, recognising the deep value in offering creative wellbeing spaces for parents and carers, whilst their little ones played nearby.

What We Learned

- That sometimes, the most powerful wellbeing spaces are unplanned. Go with it!
- That parents and carers need creative support too - not just their children
- That simple acts of making and sharing can connect
- Led to the creation of dedicated Brew & Breathe workshops

Workshop 3: Creative Wellbeing at Home

Friday 6th June 2025

Group / Participants: Open to all – adults of all ages, joining from home

Number of participants: 5

Location: Online (Zoom)

What We Did

This gentle online session invited participants to take a little pause for themselves - a quiet hour of creative wellbeing practices designed to reset, reconnect, and breathe. Together, we explored mindful doodling (relaxing into the moment with patterns and lines), gratitude journaling (using simple prompts to shift focus toward what truly matters), and gentle breathing exercises (anchoring into calm, even amidst daily busyness). Despite a local power cut (we were prepared with a charged laptop and toggled to mobile phone data!), the session went ahead smoothly, with participants arriving open, warm, and ready to connect. There were moments of quiet, laughter, thoughtful sharing - and a real sense of presence, even through the screens.

Why We Did It (Creative Wellbeing in Action)

This session was designed to remind people that even small creative acts can have a big impact – and they don't need equipment or money to engage in creative wellbeing. Each activity was chosen for its evidence-based wellbeing benefits and easy accessibility at home. Mindful doodling helps focus the mind and calm the nervous system by engaging the brain in repetitive, relaxing motion. Gratitude journaling has been shown to reduce anxiety, increase optimism, and improve sleep. Breathwork supports emotional regulation and grounds us in the present moment. Doing these things in community adds the healing power of connection, even when we're physically apart.

Participant Feedback & Outcomes

100% said they were interested in joining another online workshop like this

100% said they felt relaxed, happy and connected to others during the workshop

"The breathing exercises really instilled in me new ways to tackle anxiety. I also enjoyed the writing exercise as the prompts allowed me to distill my thoughts and focus on what is important! I found myself writing down the names of people who are important to me (friends, loved ones) and that clarity was especially helpful."

"We were guided in a very careful, relaxed way, making sure we were comfortable at every stage. There was no pressure, and it was a very fulfilling hour."

Community Connections

This session was promoted through Bloom's social media. It offered an accessible creative wellbeing space for those unable to attend in-person events - whether due to location, access needs, cost, or personal preference. It also created an inviting gateway for new participants to become part of the Bloom community. This online space beautifully complements our **Teapot Talk** group, which offers informal, online meetups centred on sharing a cuppa and a chat, creative activities, and warm companionship.

What We Learned

- People are craving simple, accessible practices to support their emotional wellbeing – lots of people don't know how
- Creativity and connection can thrive online
- Small acts of creativity can have a lasting impact
- Participants expressed interest in future online sessions - this led to the development of our next online offering: Creative Self-Care Sunday

Workshop 4: Creative Self-Care Sunday (Online)

Sunday 29th June 2025

Group / Participants: Open to all – adults of all ages, joining from home

Number of participants: 5

Location: Online (Zoom)

What We Did

This joyful Sunday morning workshop invited participants to pause, reset, and nourish themselves with gentle creative wellbeing practices - all from the comfort of home (and preferably with a cuppa in hand!), and it was at the weekend following requests for a weekend session. Together, we explored mindful mandalas (calming, circular drawings that help us centre and unwind), creative writing for wellbeing (prompts that invited reflection, self-expression, and playfulness), gratitude practice, and a 'seed-to-bloom' guided relaxation – a calming visualisation designed to ground and uplift and written especially for this workshop. The session was full of warmth, smiles, and quiet creativity. It was a lovely reminder that small, intentional acts of creativity can shift our mood and mindset - and that connection can thrive online too.

Why We Did It (Creative Wellbeing in Action)

This session was rooted in the idea that self-care doesn't have to be grand, expensive or perfect to be powerful. Each activity was chosen for its proven impact on wellbeing:

- Mandalas are known to support mindfulness, reduce stress, and enhance focus by engaging the brain in soothing, repetitive pattern making
- Creative writing allows emotional expression and helps clarify thoughts, which can improve mood and resilience. Prompts provide a helpful framework or structure for expression.
- Gratitude practices shift attention away from scarcity and towards abundance, which has been shown to improve sleep, optimism, and connection
- Guided relaxation supports nervous system regulation, reduces anxiety, and invites calm. Most importantly, taking time for ourselves, even briefly, helps us return to our lives feeling more centred and resourced. And when we do so alongside others, we're reminded we're not alone.

Participant Feedback & Outcomes

"I didn't realise how much I needed this - thank you."

"What a lovely thing to do on a Sunday morning"

"The mandalas were so calming. I'm going to keep drawing after this."

"The relaxation helped me feel peaceful in a way I haven't in a long time."

"Just wanted to say how much I enjoyed the session. I will be trying some of the breathing exercises and gratitude journalling in my own time."

Community Connections

This session followed on from our previous Creative Wellbeing at Home workshop following requests for a weekend workshop for people unable to attend during the week. For those who might feel unsure about joining in-person groups, or who live more rurally or face accessibility barriers, these online sessions offer a gentle, inclusive way in. Whether you're sitting around the Zoom screen or a real-life table with a cup of tea, the values remain the same: connection, kindness, creativity, and a moment to just *be*.

What We Learned

- Sunday mornings are a great time to invite quiet, reflective creative practice
- A 'pic n mix' taster experience of creative wellbeing practices worked well
- Interest in joining more online events
- Some shared their creative work after the session, continuing the ripple of wellbeing
- Affirmed the value of keeping an online strand as part of Bloom's future offer

Workshop Pair 5 & 6: Windy Wands & Whirligigs and Brew & Breathe

10th July 2025

Group / Participants: Home-educated children (including returning and new families)

Number of Participants: 5 mums and 7 children

Location: Summerbridge

What We Did

Windy Wands & Whirligigs! (for the children):

The children enjoyed a hands-on afternoon creating breath-inspired crafts: windmills that spin in the breeze, ribbon wands to dance with, and calming hand art that encourages mindful breathing. They also made breathing sticks from pipe cleaners and wooden beads, tactile tools to help focus on the breath in moments of stress or overwhelm. The session was designed to be playful, sensory-rich, and flexible, allowing children to dip in and out as they wished.

Brew & Breathe (for the mums):

While the children crafted and then played with the toys, a dedicated Brew & Breathe space was created for the mums - a calm corner with warm drinks, mindful colouring, inspirational affirmation cards to choose from, and a cozy atmosphere to pause and recharge. Each parent also received a small goody bag, reinforcing the importance of self-care and gentle encouragement to continue to take mindful moments in their day.

Why We Did It (Creative Wellbeing Evidence)

Creativity supports wellbeing by encouraging mindfulness, reducing stress, and fostering emotional regulation. Making and manipulating tactile crafts stimulates sensory processing, which is especially beneficial for neurodivergent children, helping them to feel grounded and focused. The act of creating breathing tools offers a physical anchor for self-soothing and emotional regulation, empowering children to manage feelings of anxiety in a playful way. For parents, having a designated space to relax with creative activities like colouring and affirmations promotes calm, reduces stress, and nurtures self-compassion. Shared creative experiences also foster social connection and reduce feelings of isolation, which are vital components for mental wellbeing.

Outcomes and Feedback

The words the children used to describe the session?

"Fun", "Calm", "Colourful", "Creative", "Relaxing", "Silly"

100% said they felt happy during the workshop

One child said, "I loved making my giant flower with pipe cleaners and beads."

Parents described the session as:

"Relaxing", "Friendly", "Colourful", "Welcoming", "Fun", "Empowering"

"Loved how relaxed it was"

"Loved the freedom, creativity and welcoming atmosphere"

100% said "more please!"

Community Connections

This workshop built on relationships formed during earlier sessions with home-educating families in the area. Word-of-mouth and returning participants helped grow the group organically, with new families welcomed warmly into the creative wellbeing circle. The Brew & Breathe space responded directly to mums expressed need for dedicated moments of calm amidst busy family life, reflecting ongoing listening and co-creation with the community.

Workshop 7 & 8: Stories, Stones & Sparkle and Brew & Breathe

24th July 2025

Group / Participants: Home-educated children and their mums

Number of Participants: 6 mums and 8 children

Location: Summerbridge

What We Did

Story Stones and Sparkle! (For the children):

In this magical session, children created their own story stones - small painted stones decorated with characters, symbols, and objects that sparked imaginative storytelling. They began by selecting from a delightful collection of story prompts: animals, superheroes, magical items, and even unexpected props like shopping trolleys and tea strainers! The children then designed colourful storyboards before painting their story stones. Some of the children enjoyed reading their stories aloud to the group. They then brought their stories to life through role play and performance, using wigs, crowns, and wings to bring extra sparkle and theatrical fun!

Brew and Breathe (for the mums):

While the children immersed themselves in creativity and storytelling, the Brew & Breathe space offered mums a chance to unwind with a warm drink, mindful colouring, gentle conversation, and the opportunity to create their own affirmation stones. Many mums joined in the story-making too, enjoying the shared joy of theatre, storytelling, creativity and connection.

Why We Did It (Creative Wellbeing Evidence)

Storytelling and imaginative play are powerful tools for wellbeing. They promote cognitive flexibility, emotional expression, and social connection. Creating story stones combines tactile craft with narrative development, supporting memory, language skills, and self-expression - all of which contribute positively to mental health. For children, particularly neurodivergent children, the multi-sensory, open-ended nature of this activity allows them to engage at their own pace and style, fostering autonomy and confidence. For parents, the calming environment combined with creative affirmation practices nurtures mindfulness and self-compassion. Sharing stories and laughter in a supportive space helps reduce stress and fosters a sense of belonging. The combination of child-led play and adult mindful pause creates a holistic experience supporting whole-family wellbeing.

Outcomes and Feedback

Children described the workshop as “joyful,” “imaginative,” “messy,” and “magical.”

One child’s story even featured the Loch Ness Monster - delighting everyone present!

Parents said:

“Loved everything! The chosen crafts are thoughtful and fun, so imaginative, creative and calming”

“I enjoyed connecting with others who have been through the same experiences”

Community Connections

This workshop was shaped by ongoing collaboration with home-educating families. Many participants had attended previous sessions, helping to deepen relationships and trust.

What did Participants Want Next?

100% said more family workshops just like today

75% said more arts and crafts activities

75% said retreat-style, longer immersive experiences

100% said support groups with gentle creative activities

Workshop 9: Brew & Breathe for Carers

29th July 2025

Group / Participants: Dancing for Wellbeing's 'Care-Free Space' carers group

Number of Participants: 4

Location: Knaresborough

What We Did

This beautiful afternoon was spent gently creating space to pause, breathe, and share stories with a wonderful group of women. We crafted simple yet meaningful breathing sticks - tactile tools designed to help bring focus back to the breath in stressful moments, (or whilst waiting for the kettle to boil!). Next, we made lavender-filled teabags to hold in the palm and inhale deeply when things feel overwhelming. Finally, we created special bath teabags filled with soothing epsom salts and calming botanicals - small rituals to invite calm, comfort, and self-care into everyday life. The atmosphere was filled with laughter, stories, and thoughtful hands crafting tokens of self-kindness and gifts for loved ones. Each participant left with their creations and a goody bag to carry this gentle, nurturing energy home.

Why We Did It (Creative Wellbeing Evidence)

Creative making offers a chance to slow down and be present, activating sensory pathways that soothe the nervous system. The repetitive, focused nature of crafting supports mindfulness and reduces anxiety. Creating tactile objects linked to breath, our senses, and relaxation acts as a tangible reminder to pause and care for oneself. Sharing this process within a supportive community builds connection, reduces isolation, and fosters emotional resilience - vital components for sustained wellbeing.

Outcomes and Feedback

Most felt "just okay" before the session, then "relaxed" "happy" "content" during and after.
"Really enjoyed making things while chatting with people going through similar experiences"
"I loved that we could really take our time – there was no rush. I loved the sensory experience of making the things with lavender, for me it is such a calming scent"
"Thank you! I think this is a really lovely calming activity and so needed for people who don't often get that opportunity to do something for themselves"
100% said they would like to come to another workshop like this.

What We Learnt

- Exploring practical and easy self-care into the workshops helps participants translate this into daily practice.
- Combining creativity with community connection creates a powerful wellbeing experience.
- Small, portable crafts enhance the practical impact of workshops beyond the session.
- People enjoy a chat together – we need to provide spaces for this to happen.

Community Connections

We first connected with Dancing for Well-Being at an event hosted by Nidderdale Plus, where we had the chance to experience each other's work. After attending one of Bloom's workshops and enjoying the experience, they suggested a future collaboration - and once funding allowed, we were delighted to bring it to life.

It was a real privilege to be welcomed so warmly by this wonderful group of women. Their openness, honesty, and shared wisdom made the session deeply meaningful. The collaboration was a beautiful example of how creative wellbeing can offer gentle support, connection, and breathing space for those who care for others every day.

Workshop 10: Summer Singalong

31st August 2025

Group / Participants: Nidderdale Community Choir and local community members

Number of Participants: Over 60

Location: Pateley Bridge

What We Did

What a magical night we shared! Over 60 people joined us for an evening of joyful singing, laughter, and community spirit. Together, we sang summery feel-good favourites alongside heartfelt songs about belonging, friendship, and connection. There was harmony, welcome imperfect notes, and plenty of cake to sweeten the atmosphere. The room buzzed with joy and warmth as we celebrated creativity and togetherness.

Why We Did It (Creative Wellbeing Evidence)

Group singing is a wonderful wellbeing practice - it releases endorphins, lowers stress hormones, and enhances feelings of social connection and joy. Singing together helps build community, fosters emotional expression, and creates a shared sense of achievement and belonging. This uplifting experience supports mental health by nurturing connection and providing an outlet for creative expression in a welcoming environment.

Outcomes and Feedback

100% wanted to do it again!

"Loved singing and eating cake and good company!"

"Loved everything, very touching, quite emotional singing with all our lovely friends"

"Everything was brilliant!", "Enjoyed the togetherness!"

"My face is aching with smiling! Thank you!"

"A really super evening, a very connected singalong"

"Brilliant evening – we need more of this!"

"Amazing atmosphere, really good leadership, well-chosen songs"

"It was great – thank you. A real tonic for the soul ☺"

"Loved all of it – gave joy to lots of people"

"This was a great evening. Open to all, everyone enjoyed themselves. An inspiration! Thank you!"

"JOY!"

"Well worth their funding!"

"Louise and Iain were so amazing – more of this please"

"Great experience, fun, excellent!"

"That feeling of togetherness through music is utterly joyful! Thank you so much!"

"Singing – nice feelings"

What We Learnt

- Large community creative events can deeply boost collective wellbeing and social cohesion.
- Embracing imperfection and fun enriches the experience and encourages wider participation – it gives people permission to be their wonderful imperfect selves without judgement.
- We needed to print more lyrics sheets and feedback forms – or purchase a projector to beam the words on to the wall - we didn't expect such high numbers!

Community Connections

This event was inspired by and in partnership with the Nidderdale Community Choir, of which we are members. It was incredible to see so many familiar and new faces come together to celebrate creativity, music, and community. The spirit of Nidderdale truly shone through in every note sung!

Follow-on Impact

- Nidderdale Community Choir, In Harmony, and Nidd Chorale all shared information on their choirs - several new members have since signed up to join the choirs
- We gathered extensive feedback about what the community wants and needs
- We have booked our next Community Singalong (by popular demand) for October to mark World Mental Health Day, with more to follow in 2026.

What did Participants Want Next?

More singing and music-based workshops: 90%,

Themed singalongs: 72%

Arts and crafts activities: 41% | Musical instrument tuition: 41% | Wellbeing workshops: 41%

Open mic night/afternoon: 34%

Support groups (e.g. bereavement, wellbeing): 31%

Dance/movement workshops: 28%

Drop-in informal groups with a cuppa: 24%

Drama workshops: 21%

Retreat-style experiences: 17% | Family creative wellbeing workshops: 17%

Closing Words

As The Nidd Creative Wellbeing Project comes to a close, what remains is not just a series of workshops, but a rich tapestry of shared stories, laughter, quiet moments, and growing connections. Across living rooms, church halls, community centres and Zoom screens, we witnessed what happens when people are given the permission, tools, and time to create – alone and together - and to simply be.

The impact of the project has extended far beyond the craft tables and song sheets. Parents reconnected with themselves and each other. Children explored big feelings through small, safe acts of making. Isolated individuals found warmth in new circles of community. And creative wellbeing - once unfamiliar to many - is now firmly rooted in the hearts and rhythms of those who took part.

This report not only documents what we did, it also celebrates what we *shared*: creativity as care, connection as medicine, and community as the container that holds it all. With new relationships formed, follow-up events planned, and a growing appetite for creative wellbeing across Nidderdale, this feels like a beginning, not an end.

Let's keep blooming!

*Louise Bloomfield
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August 2025*