

Optimising health and social care through community wellbeing hubs

Juliet Anderson, Karen Buckwell-Nutt, Melanie Hayward, Korinne Leney, David Sines and Claire Tilson

Buckinghamshire Health and Social Care Academy (BHSCA) represents a landmark initiative aimed at advancing the education, training, and skill development of the health and social care workforce in Buckinghamshire. The Academy is a collaborative venture involving Buckinghamshire Council, Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust, Buckinghamshire New University, University of Bedfordshire, NHS England, Buckinghamshire economy and investment service, Buckinghamshire College Group, and FedBucks. As a non-profit partnership, BHSCA is dedicated to ensuring the highest standard of care for the community through innovative and collaborative efforts. The primary mission of the Academy is to enhance the education, training, and skill development of the health and social care workforce through strategic partnership-working across various systems. This collaborative approach aims to deliver the best possible care to the residents of Buckinghamshire.

Community wellbeing hubs: a joint initiative

One of the significant projects under BHSCA is the establishment of the Buckinghamshire Community Wellbeing Hubs, in partnership with Buckinghamshire New University (BNU) and initially funded by NHS England. These hubs are designed to be vibrant centres of activity, support, and education, based

on BNU campuses in Aylesbury and High Wycombe. The objectives for these hubs are multi-faceted and centred around community and student wellbeing. The development of the hubs aligns with the university's Public and Community Engagement Strategy, which focuses on improving health and wellbeing, social inclusion, economic prosperity and environmental sustainability.

The wellbeing hubs are envisioned as physical spaces where learners and residents can engage in a variety of activities aimed at enhancing their wellbeing. These spaces are developed collaboratively to ensure they meet the needs of the community. The hubs provide a venue for health and social care professionals, as well as voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) providers, to work together, forming communities of practice to deliver integrated services. This opportunity for collaboration and sharing a space is intended to streamline support and improve the health and wellbeing outcomes for citizens, while providing a rich learning environment for all types of learners.

Complementing existing wellbeing services at BNU, the hubs offer additional resources to support the mental health and overall wellbeing of students. This includes providing a supportive environment where students can experience the local community, and providing numerous opportunities for students to develop practical skills and gain valuable work experience. Activities such as

volunteering, placements, job shadowing, and training are integral to the hubs' function, helping to prepare students for future careers in health and social care.

Achievements in the first year

The first year of the Buckinghamshire Community Wellbeing Hubs has been marked by significant achievements, not least a high level of engagement. Most data available so far relate to the Aylesbury hub, which has been operational for longer and is open for more hours during the week; 1046 individuals have participated in activities, including professionals, residents and students.

A notable 402 residents regularly access the hub, benefiting from its resources and support. This consistent usage indicates the hub's integral role in the community. The presence of 30 BNU Hub Champions has been instrumental in promoting and supporting the hubs' activities. These champions play a crucial role in ensuring that the hub's services are well used and meet the needs of the community.

The wellbeing improvements reported by the residents are particularly encouraging. According to feedback, 96% of residents experienced improved wellbeing from accessing activities at the hub, highlighting effectiveness of the hub's programmes in enhancing community health. Similarly, 65% of professionals involved with the hub have reported improved wellbeing, indicating that it also serves as a valuable resource for those working in the health and social care sectors.

Community and professional support have been robust, with 25 total community groups and events taking place. These events foster community engagement and provide valuable opportunities for social interaction and support. In addition, the hub has conducted 18 training and awareness sessions, attended by 302 people. These sessions are crucial for building capacity and enhancing the skills and knowledge of participants.

Juliet Anderson, Director, Buckinghamshire Health and Social Care Academy, juliet.anderson2@bnu.ac.uk

Karen Buckwell-Nutt, Associate Pro Vice Chancellor (student experience) and Director of the Institute for Health and Social Care, Buckinghamshire New University

Melanie Hayward, Associate Professor of Education - Quality Assurance and Enhancement, Buckinghamshire New University

Korinne Leney, Senior Programme Manager and Head of Faculty (volunteering), Buckinghamshire Health and Social Care Academy

David Sines, Chair of Board and Strategic Adviser, Buckinghamshire Health and Social Care Academy

Claire Tilson, Community Development Manager, Buckinghamshire Community Wellbeing Hubs

The hub has also been proactive in offering 22 volunteering, placement, and work experience opportunities. These opportunities provide participants with valuable real-world experience and help to build a skilled workforce for the future. Furthermore, the hub has offered 14 regular health promotion activities to residents on a weekly or monthly basis. These activities are essential for maintaining and improving public health.

Stakeholder and professional satisfaction with the hub's services has been very positive. An impressive 100% of professionals reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the services and support provided. This high level of satisfaction indicates that the hub is meeting the needs of its users effectively. Moreover, 75% of professionals indicated high or very high levels of collaboration at the hub. This collaboration is vital for ensuring that services are integrated and that the best possible outcomes are achieved for the community.

Activities at the hubs

The Buckinghamshire Community Wellbeing Hubs host a diverse range of activities designed to foster community engagement and support. Some of the key activities include Knit and Natter Aylesbury, a social knitting group that encourages community interaction and reduces social isolation. Lunch clubs provide meals and social opportunities for community members, while Community Games Tuesdays offer interactive sessions that promote physical activity and social bonding through games.

Board games and community crafts are activities that encourage creativity and social interaction. The Buckinghamshire Huntington's Disease Carer Support Group offers support and resources for carers, and Dementia Advisor Sessions and Carer Support Groups provide specialised support for those affected by dementia and their carers. Tea and chat sessions are informal gatherings that encourage conversation and connection, and smoking

cessation programmes aim to help individuals quit smoking and improve their health.

The importance of community wellbeing hubs

Projects like the Buckinghamshire Community Wellbeing Hubs are crucial in aligning with national health and social care initiatives in the UK. The hubs support the objectives of *The NHS Long Term Plan*, which emphasises the need for integrated care systems to improve health outcomes through collaborative approaches (NHS England, 2019). By co-locating services and encouraging collaboration among health and social care providers, the hubs contribute to creating a more cohesive and efficient care system.

In 2018 the Department of Health and Social Care published its vision for more preventive care and addressing social determinants of health (Department of Health and Social Care, 2018). The variety of activities offered at the hubs, such as health promotion and support groups, directly address these social determinants by providing accessible support and developing community engagement.

The Social Ecological Model support the effectiveness of community-based interventions such as the wellbeing hubs. This model suggests that individual behaviour is influenced by multiple levels of interaction, including individual, interpersonal, community, and societal factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). By creating an environment that supports positive health behaviours through community engagement and accessible services, the hubs effectively operate within this framework.

Furthermore, contemporary approaches such as the 'Making Every Contact Count' (MECC) initiative align with the principles of the wellbeing hubs by encouraging all health and care staff to use everyday interactions to support individuals in making positive changes to their physical and mental health (Public Health England and Health Education

England, 2018). The MECC framework emphasises the role of health professionals in leveraging routine consultations to deliver brief interventions that promote healthier lifestyle choices (Public Health England et al, 2016).

The hubs also embody the concept of active citizenship, where community members are empowered to take control of their health and wellbeing. This approach is integral to building resilient communities and aligns with modern public health strategies that emphasise community wellbeing as a shared responsibility. By fostering environments that support health promotion, disease prevention, and holistic care, the hubs not only address immediate health concerns but also contribute to long-term community resilience and wellbeing.

Conclusion

The partnership working behind the community wellbeing hubs exemplifies the power of collaboration in improving health and social care services. By bringing together education, practical experience, and community support, these hubs are making a tangible difference in the lives of students and residents alike. The achievements in the first year are a testament to the success of this initiative and provide a strong foundation for future growth and development. **BJN**

Bronfenbrenner U. The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design. Harvard University Press; 1979

Department of Health and Social Care. Prevention is better than cure: Our vision to help you live well for longer. 2018. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevention-is-better-than-cure-our-vision-to-help-you-live-well-for-longer> (accessed 31 July 2024)

NHS England. The NHS Long Term Plan. 2019. <https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk> (accessed 31 July 2024)

Public Health England, Health Education England. MECC Implementation Guide. 2018. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c338375e5274a65a5da03d6/MECC_Implementation_guide_v2.pdf (accessed 31 July 2024)

Public Health England, NHS England, Health Education England. Making Every Contact Count (MECC): Consensus statement. 2016. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/making-every-contact-count-mecc-consensus-statement> (accessed 31 July 2024)