Wellbeing in the VCSE sector

January 2023

Mind Suffolk

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## Introduction

Suffolk Mind's research centres around the Emotional Needs and Resources (ENR) approach, which outlines 12 innate Emotional Needs that we must meet, in balance, in order to be mentally well. Through adopting the ENR approach to mental health, we can understand how stresses occur in response to unmet Needs, and the ways in which this can be addressed to improve mental wellbeing. This approach can be used to provide some useful direction to help improve mental wellbeing – if you know a specific Need isn't being met, it is easier to make changes to meet that Need and improve wellbeing. This idea applies to individuals, but also to groups of people, like workplaces and job sectors. If you'd like more explanation on each of the Emotional Needs, see the Suffolk Mind website.

The Emotional Needs Audit (ENA) is based upon this approach, with our Needs divided into fifteen questions – three questions on our physical Needs and twelve questions on our emotional Needs. These are scored on a scale from -3 (not at all met) to +3 (very well met). It's important to note that you can't expect all these Needs to be perfectly met all the time – that's simply not feasible – instead we look for them to be met in balance.

Purpose of this report

Throughout this report, we analyse the average wellbeing of those working in the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector, based on data gathered between 21st January and 20th May 2022. Analysing ENA responses from the VCSE sector allows us to identify where Needs are well met on average, and what factors support individuals to meet certain Needs well. It also highlights areas that could benefit from further attention, by identifying Needs that are less well met and the barriers to meeting these Needs. We received 170 responses from those in the VCSE sector. Of respondents who provided demographic information, 72.9% identified as women (including trans women) and 9.4% identified as men (including trans men). This disparity is not unusual, since women make up two thirds of the VCSE sector in the UK, but it is worth bearing in mind that our knowledge of men's wellbeing within this dataset is limited to that of 16 respondents' averages.

Legend: ■ Average Population ENA data ■ Average VSCE Sector ENA data ╱ 'Well Met' Need
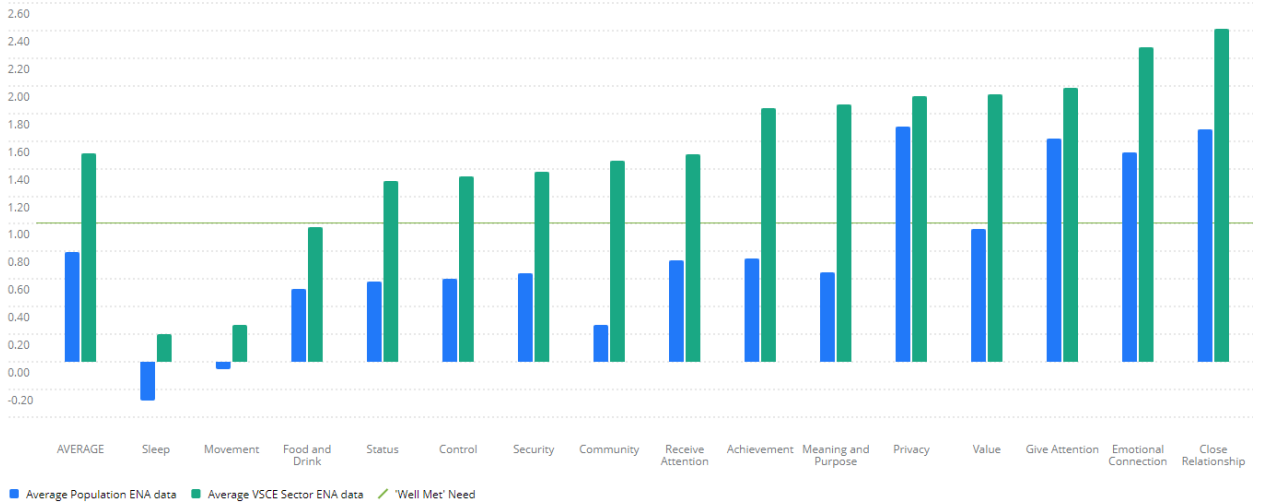
General findings

When analysing the data, we consider an individual to be meeting a Need well if they are 66% met or higher (i.e., having an average score of 1 or more). An overall measure of good mental wellbeing can therefore be estimated by an average of all Needs combined. Across the VCSE sector, Needs are very well met on average, with an average score of 1.51 overall. 72% of individual respondents are also meeting their Needs well overall (i.e., having an average overall score of 1 or more). This suggests that the majority of respondents are in wellbeing on the mental health continuum. When compared with the data we collected on the general population during the same timeframe, we can see that average wellbeing is much higher across the VCSE sector than the general population. Of 1,523 respondents from areas including, but not being limited to, Suffolk, Essex, and Scotland, just 49.4% were meeting their Needs well overall from 21st January to 20th May 2022.

The graph above shows how well Needs are met on average for the VCSE sector, compared to our general population data, with all Needs shown. The individual questions are on the X axis, going from least to best met on average from left to right, and an overall average of all the questions on the far left. The Y axis then shows the average score for each Need and has a range of -0.5 to 2.5, as all the averages fall within this range. Above the green line indicates what we determine to be a 'well met' Need - when its average score is 1 or more.

We can see that Needs are better met, on average, within the VCSE sector than in the average population data. 12 of the 15 Needs are well met overall within the VCSE sector, compared with 4 out of 15 across the average population data. There are some similarities between the data sets, for example, Sleep and Movement are the least well met Needs on average across both. Although there are some similar trends, the best and worst met emotional Needs on average are different for those in the VCSE sector compared with the general population. This report will explore how well the VCSE sector is meeting its emotional Needs on average, with a particular focus on the least and best met Needs.
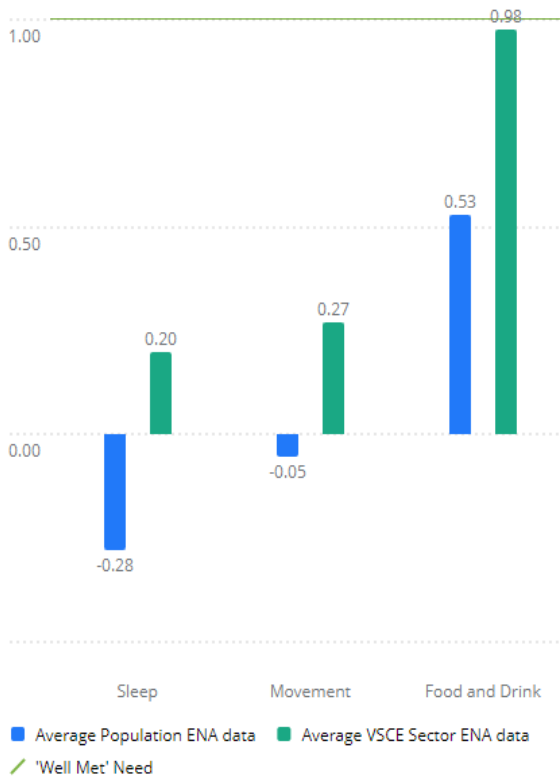
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SLEEP   MOVEMENT   FOOD & DRINK

Sleep, Movement and Food & Drink

Of the fifteen Needs, the physical Needs of Sleep, Movement, and Food & Drink are often the least well met on average. In line with our average population data, the Need for Sleep is the least well met on average amongst the VCSE sector, with a score of 0.20.

We can see that 81 individuals have a score of less than 1 for Sleep, meaning that 47.65% are meeting their Need for Sleep less well.

Movement is the second least well met Need on average, with a score of 0.27. Like Sleep, however, the Need for Movement is better met amongst those in the VCSE sector on average, compared with the average population.

Food & Drink is much closer to being well met than the other physical Needs, with an average score of 0.98.

Chart showing Average Population ENA data and Average VSCE Sector ENA data against 'Well Met' Need line of 0.98, with values:
- Sleep: -0.28 (Population), 0.20 (VSCE)
- Movement: -0.05 (Population), 0.27 (VSCE)
- Food and Drink: 0.53 (Population), 0.98 (VSCE)

Physical needs are **the least well met**

Barriers and supporting factors

71 individuals who weren't meeting their Need for Sleep well identified barriers that prevent them from doing so. The biggest barriers given were individuals' physical and/or mental health (66%, n47), followed by their home or personal lives (56%, n40). Interestingly, these were also the biggest supporting factors for those who were meeting their Need for Sleep well. 83% (n15) identifying their home or personal life as a support factor, and 67% (n12) attributed sleeping well to their physical and/or mental health.

The VCSE data reveals that there's a positive correlation between Sleep the Need for Control, therefore feelings of a lack of control over one's life may be impacting upon quality of sleep.

The biggest barriers to meeting this Need were individuals' workload or work/life balance (58%, n42), followed by their physical and/or mental health (53%, n38).

For Food & Drink, one of the biggest barriers was individuals' physical and/or mental health (63%, n29). This was also the most significant barrier to Food & Drink amongst the average population data, during the same timeframe (47%, n154). Of those in the VCSE sector who were meeting this Need well and provided information on supporting factors, 94% (n33) felt that their home or personal life enables them to get enough energy, nutrition, and pleasure from their diet.
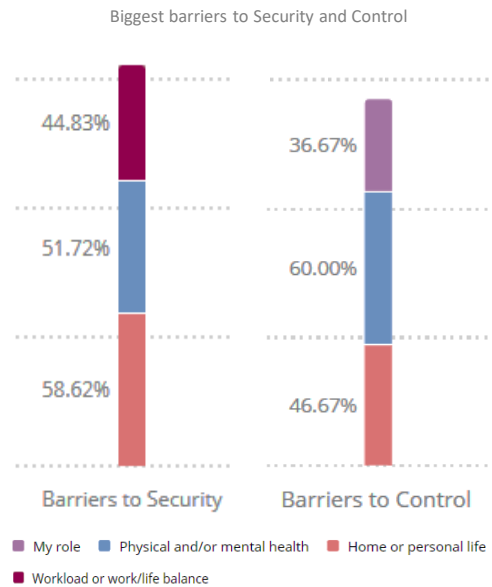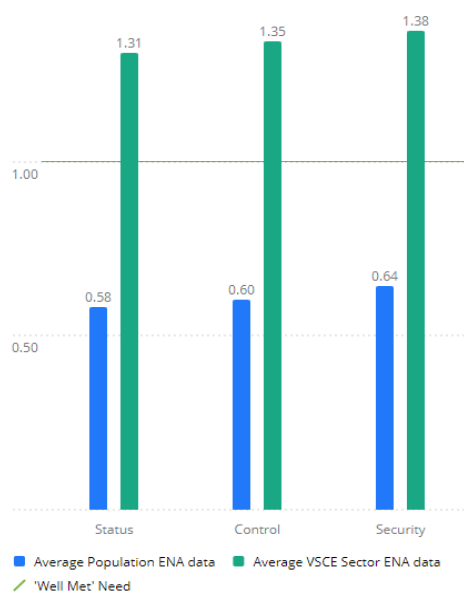
STATUS CONTROL SECURITY

Status, Control and Security

Aside from physical Needs, the least well met Needs across the VCSE sector, on average, are Status, Control and Security. Although, these Needs are well met on average, all having scores above 1, and are much better met than our population average. For example, Security is well met by 80.6% of respondents.

The Need for Status is the least well met emotional Need, on average, amongst those in the VCSE sector. With an average score of 1.31, it is still a well met Need, suggesting that respondents are feeling like they are respected, and their status is acknowledged, on average.

If we compare Status and Value, we can see that Value is much better met on average. Status indicates how much people feel others appreciate them as a person, whereas Value indicates how much people feel others appreciate them for their actions and contributions.

Chart (left): Bar chart comparing Average Population ENA data and Average VSCE Sector ENA data across Status, Control, Security.

- Status: 0.58 (Average Population ENA data), 1.31 (Average VSCE Sector ENA data)
- Control: 0.60 (Average Population ENA data), 1.35 (Average VSCE Sector ENA data)
- Security: 0.64 (Average Population ENA data), 1.38 (Average VSCE Sector ENA data)

Reference lines at 1.00 ('Well Met' Need) and 0.50.

Legend: ■ Average Population ENA data ■ Average VSCE Sector ENA data ╱ 'Well Met' Need

Chart (right): Stacked bars for Barriers to Security and Barriers to Control.

Barriers to Security: 44.83% (Workload or work/life balance), 51.72% (Physical and/or mental health), 58.62% (Home or personal life)

Barriers to Control: 36.67% (My role), 60.00% (Physical and/or mental health), 46.67% (Home or personal life)

Legend: ■ My role ■ Physical and/or mental health ■ Home or personal life ■ Workload or work/life balance

Barriers and supporting factors

Those working part-time are meeting their Need for Security less well than those working full-time or those in volunteering roles – with an average score of 1.09 compared with 1.51 and 1.71, respectively.

Among those who were not meeting their Need for Security well, and provided information on barriers to this Need, 45% (n13) viewed their workload or work/life balance as preventing them from doing so.

Similarly, work was presenting an obstacle to some feeling as though they have enough control over their lives and the decisions they make. As 37% (n11) of those who identified barriers to Control believed their role prevented them from meeting this Need well.

In fact, we can see that the top two barriers for Security and Control are the same. Respondents' physical and/or mental health was a primary barrier to them meeting their Needs for Security (52%, n15) and Control (60%, n18). People's home or personal lives were also among the biggest barriers to meeting these Needs (59%, n17 for Security, and 47%, n14 for Control).

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Supporting Factors for Security | Supporting Factors for Control

48.08% | 45.10%
51.92% | 56.86%
65.38% | 68.63%

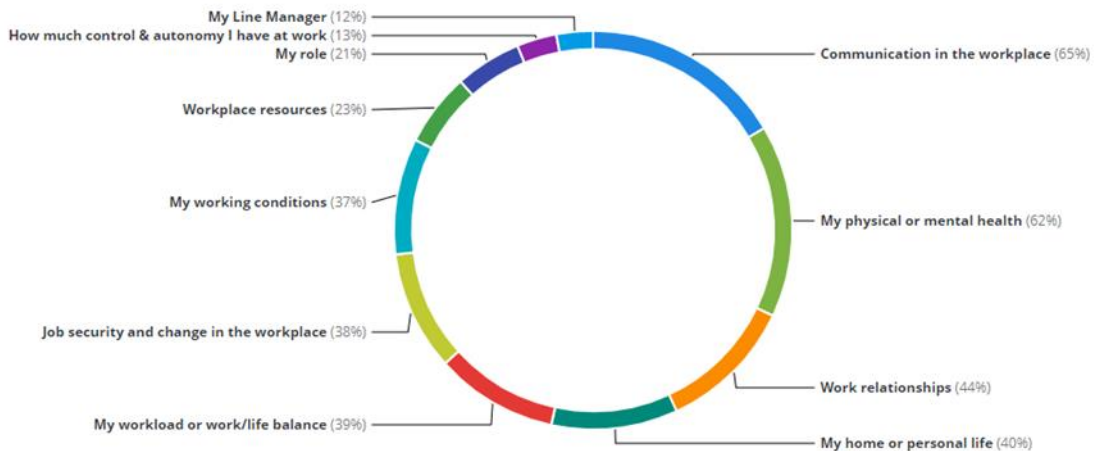■ My role   ■ Control and autonomy at work   ■ Home or personal life

The **biggest barrier** to individuals **meeting their Need for Status** was **communication in the workplace**

If we look at supporting factors for Security and Control, we can see that the top three factors are the same across both Needs. Home or personal life was the top supporting factor for those meeting their Needs for Security (65%, n34) and Control well (69%, n35). This is followed by individuals having control and autonomy at work (52%, n27 and 57%, n29, respectively).

We can also see from the data that, on average, Security and Control have a strong positive correlation. Therefore, if we see Security being less well met, we may in turn also except to see Control being less well met (and vice versa).

Among the 25% of respondents who were meeting their Need for Status less well, their work was the biggest obstacle. The biggest barrier to individuals meeting their Need for Status was communication in the workplace (40%, n14), followed by job security and change in their organisation (34%, n12) and their physical and/or mental health (34%, n12).

Respondents' work roles are amongst the top supporting factors for those meeting the Need for Value well, suggesting that many individuals (n46) working in the VCSE sector are feeling appreciated for their actions at work. However, this may always not be translating to them feeling valued as an individual. Since communication in the workplace is the biggest barrier for Status, workplaces in the VCSE sector could support employees to better meet this Need by verbalising recognition and praise, particularly in front of people's peers.

My Line Manager (12%)
How much control & autonomy I have at work (13%)
My role (21%)
Workplace resources (23%)
My working conditions (37%)
Job security and change in the workplace (38%)
My workload or work/life balance (39%)
Communication in the workplace (65%)
My physical or mental health (62%)
Work relationships (44%)
My home or personal life (40%)

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has also made it harder for the VCSE sector to meet its Needs well, having exacerbated some environmental barriers to wellbeing. COVID-19 made communication in the workplace a more significant barrier to meeting Needs well, according to 65% (n61) of those who identified barriers worsened by the pandemic. 62% (n58) believed that their physical and/or mental health became a greater barrier to wellbeing because of the pandemic, while 44% (n41) attributed it to worsening barriers relating to their work relationships.

Therefore, the pandemic may have made it harder for VCSE sector employees to feel respected and appreciated as individuals at work – particularly as the shift to remote working impacts upon regular communication, which may reduce the verbal praise people receive at work.

Achievement and Meaning & Purpose

Despite Status being amongst the least well met Needs, on average, it's clear that VCSE sector employees are feeling a lot of internal achievement about their actions and are feeling stretched – as Achievement is well met, on average, at 1.84. We can also tell that they're feeling purposeful about their actions as Meaning and Purpose is very well met on average, at 1.86. This can generally be maintained through continuous growth, feeling needed by others, and feeling part of something bigger than ourselves. Status is also strongly positively correlated to Meaning & Purpose and Achievement, on average, amongst those in the VCSE sector. Therefore, if VCSE organisations help employees to meet their Needs for Meaning & Purpose and Achievement even better, this may in turn help them to feel that their Status is more acknowledged.
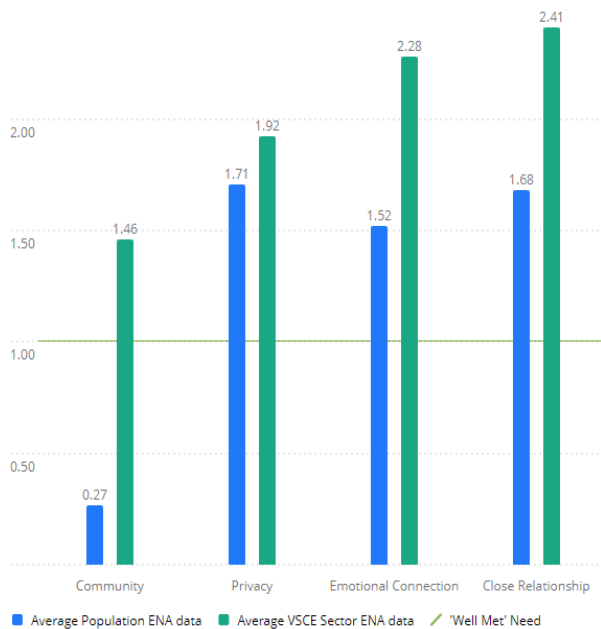
Barriers and supporting factors

The biggest supporting factors for Meaning & Purpose and Achievement are individuals' home or personal lives (75%, n51 and 59%, n38) and their roles (75%, n51 and 72%, n46, respectively). For those meeting their Need for Status well, their role is also the most significant supporting factor by far (68%, n34). It's therefore clear that people's work can play a pivotal role in keeping them well, or preventing them from maintaining their wellbeing.

Emotional Connection and Community

The best met Needs within the VCSE sector, on average, indicate that individuals are well feeling connected to those around them. Close Relationships is the best met Need, with an average of 2.41, suggesting respondents feel accepted for who they are by at least one person in their lives. Emotional Connection is also very well met, with an average of 2.28, showing that people are feeling connected in smaller, more intimate groups.

An interesting comparison here is between these two Needs and the Need for Community, as it highlights the difference between feeling connected in small groups compared to feeling connected in bigger groups. Community is still a well met Need on average, but, with a score of 1.46, it is significantly lower than Close Relationships and Emotional Connection. This suggest that the VCSE sector is feeling less connected in larger groups, on average.

Chart axis values: 2.00, 1.50, 1.00, 0.50

Community: 0.27, 1.46
Privacy: 1.71, 1.92
Emotional Connection: 1.52, 2.28
Close Relationship: 1.68, 2.41

Legend: ■ Average Population ENA data ■ Average VSCE Sector ENA data ╱ 'Well Met' Need

Barriers and supporting factors

Since the pandemic, we have seen a decline in how well the Need for Community is being met amongst the general population. From 21st Jan 2020 to 20th May 2020, we can see that the average score for Community was 0.54. But two years later, it has become even less well met on average – falling to 0.27.

The Need for Community is, however, much better met amongst those in the VCSE sector on average – with a score of 1.46. The primary supporting factor for those meeting their Need for Community well is their home or personal life (75%, n40). The same applies to those meeting their Needs for Close Relationships (85%, n78) and Emotional Connection (90%, n79) well.
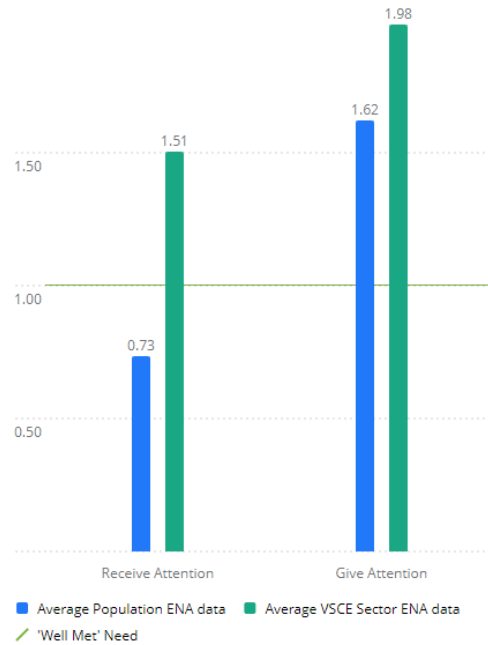
Attention

Giving Attention is the third best met Need amongst the VCSE sector, on average, with a score of 1.98. Yet, Receiving Attention is not as well met on average, at 1.51. Although both Needs are better met amongst the VCSE sector, this disparity between Giving and Receiving Attention is reflected in the average population data. Yet, unlike in the average population data, Receiving Attention is still a well met Needs amongst the VCSE sector on average.

Barriers and supporting factors

Attention is a finite resource - we only have a certain amount that we can give before having to recharge (by making time for Privacy, for example). Therefore, it's important to identify what helps us to better meet our Needs for Attention and what may be obstacles to doing so.

People's home and work lives have been helping them to meet these Needs well. The biggest supporting factor for Giving and Receiving Attention is individuals' home or personal life (55%, n42 and 74%, n39, respectively). This is followed by their role (51%, n39 for Giving Attention) and their work relationships (50%, n38 and 49%, n26, respectively). Yet, these same factors also present the biggest barriers to those meeting their Needs for Giving and Receiving Attention less well. The biggest barriers to these Needs are people's home or personal lives (53%, n16 and 56%, n5), their physical and/or mental health (42%, n13 and 67%, n6), and their workload or work/life balance (35%, n11 and 44%, n4, respectively).

Demographics

On average, men (including trans men) are meeting their Needs slightly better overall than women (including trans women). Women have an average overall score of 1.55, while men have an average score of 1.84. This is different to wellbeing amongst the average population, with women meeting their Needs better than men on average – with an overall average of 0.95 compared to 0.76, respectively. Although, it is worth remembering that our sample size for men was much smaller for the VCSE sector data. We had just 16 responses from those who identified as men (including trans men), compared with the 263 responses from women (including trans women) in the average population data.

Food & Drink is much better met by men than it is women, with an average score of 1.69 for men and just 0.97 for women. The biggest barrier to women meeting this Need is their physical and/or mental health (72%, n26), followed by their home or personal lives (50%, n18) and their workload or work/life balance (44%, n16). Yet, these same factors help to support men to better meet their Need for Food & Drink – with 100% (n3) attributing this to their home or personal life.
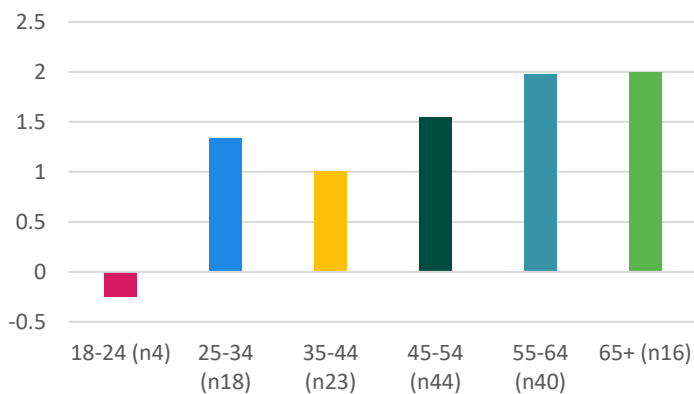
Average Wellbeing by Age
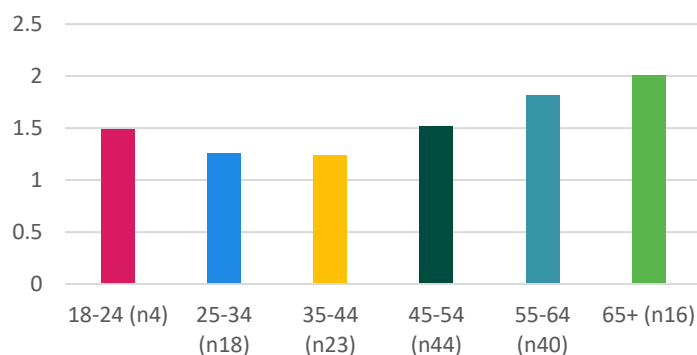
If we look at average wellbeing by age, amongst the VCSE sector, we can see that all age groups are meeting their Needs well overall. Those 65 and over are meeting their Needs the best on average, whilst those aged between 35 and 44 are meeting their Needs the least well, on average, of all age groups.

This somewhat mirrors our average population data, with those aged 65 and over meeting their Needs the best, on average. In fact, over 65s are the only age group to be meeting their Needs well, on average, with a score of 1.35. This is considerably higher than those aged between 18 and 24 years old, for which the average overall score is just 0.37. Overall, just 37.50% of 18- to 24-year-olds were meeting their Needs well between 21st January and 20 May 2022, compared with 67.15% of those 65 and over.

All age groups, aside from 18- to 24-year-olds, are meeting their Need for Community well on average, within the VCSE sector. Of those aged 18 to 24 who provided information on barriers to meeting their Need for Community, 100% (n3) viewed their home or personal life as an obstacle.

Yet, this is still a considerably better met Need amongst most age groups in the VCSE sector compared with our average population data – for which, only those 75 years and above are meeting their Need for Community well on average.
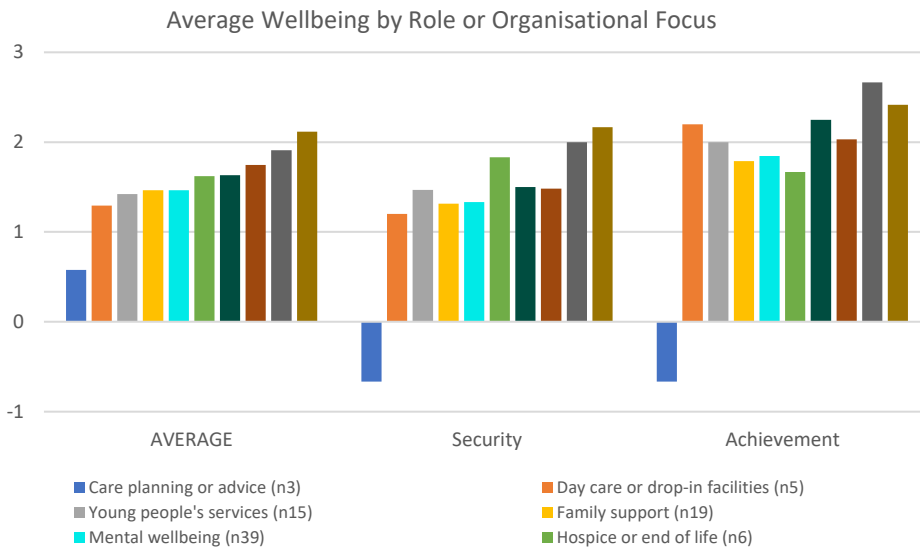
Community Needs by Age

If we look at wellbeing by individuals' roles or organisational focus, we can see that everyone is meeting their Needs well overall, on average, aside from those in care planning or advice. Those in advocacy are the most well on average, with 92% of respondents meeting their Needs well overall. Those in care planning or advice, however, are meeting their Needs the least well on average – with just 33% meeting their Needs well overall.

Two emotional Needs that are particularly worse met by those in care planning or advice are Security and Achievement. However, due to having fewer than three responses on the barriers to meeting these Needs for this group, we cannot report on them to ensure we maintain anonymity.

However, our ongoing research with Suffolk County Council seeks to better understand the wellbeing of carers – both personal and professional carers. Therefore, we will gain greater insight into the wellbeing of those involved in care roles, including the barriers and supporting factors to them meeting Needs well.

Average Wellbeing by Role or Organisational Focus

Legend:
- Care planning or advice (n3)
- Day care or drop-in facilities (n5)
- Young people's services (n15)
- Family support (n19)
- Mental wellbeing (n39)
- Hospice or end of life (n6)