



The Hugs Foundation

Youth Well-Being Impact Report

Charity Year 1st June 2022 to 31st May 2023



The Hugs Foundation. Registered Charity Number: 1175633

Tel: 07948 404986 www.hugsfoundation.org.uk

Company Registered Address: Higher Whitley Farm, Helland Road, Bodmin, Cornwall, PL31 2NT



The Report

This report summarises the impact of the youth well-being project, Hugs Helping Hands, for the charity year 1st June 2022 to 31st May 2023. Due to staffing restrictions (we had a staff member off sick for several weeks), interventions have been at a reduced capacity from 150 (our usual annual capacity) to 127. However, after such huge demand and success in additional funding, we are now in the process of recruiting another staff member to reach more children and young people in need.

Introduction to The Hugs Foundation

The Hugs Foundation was founded in 2017 as a horse rescue centre, however it soon became apparent that our calm, nurturing environment would really benefit humans as well. As the charity has evolved, we now also provide well-being support to children and young people, the elderly, military personnel and veterans (although sadly our veterans project has been on hold this year due to staffing levels and funding). We provide a safe space for respite and healing to help service users to lead positive, fulfilling lives through a range of holistic nature-based interventions at our horse rescue centre and farm. Our unique mix of support includes; animal assisted services alongside our rescue animals, nature activities, therapeutic outdoor learning, teambuilding, arts and crafts, forest based activities and practical skills, such as growing vegetables and learning about the environment and sustainability.

Our animal rescues each have their own rehabilitation plan and many work alongside our service users. This creates a circular relationship where they both benefit from spending time together and caring for each other, generating opportunities for healing and growth and making a positive difference to both lives. We cater for a huge range of complex needs including; social, emotional, physical and mental health support, low self-esteem, social isolation, learning and developmental needs e.g., poor communication skills, school transitions, general life challenges, special educational needs and disabilities, trauma, adverse childhood experiences, self-harm, bereavements and those at risk of suicide.

We are active members of the Human Equine Interaction Register UK (HEIR). There have been no regulations in the UK to protect the service users that access organisations for support and the equines that work in therapeutic sessions. The register has been created to ensure all people involved in the field of human equine interactions operate credible, high quality, safe and ethical practice standards for their service provision. This is something we are incredibly proud to be part of. We have continued to work collaboratively with the National Equine Welfare Council (NEWC), the Federation of Horses in Education and Therapy International (HETI) UK, and attend the South West Equine Assisted Practitioners Regional Meetings to ensure we provide the best services possible to both humans and equines.

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The Need

Mental health referrals for children aged 11 and under have increased by nearly 50% with a young person now being referred to the NHS every 30 seconds. 70% of children and adolescents who experience mental ill health have not had appropriate interventions at a sufficiently early age. Hugs recognises the importance of early intervention and the urgency of reaching children to offer respite and put in place coping mechanisms to reduce their present and future distress.

In addition to these national statistics, our local community has a multitude of challenges due to being in one of the 10% most deprived areas in England, negatively impacting their mental health, anxiety, depression and social involvement. We witness young people every day who are experiencing a multitude of complex needs and are in desperate need of support. Animal assisted services are growing and achieving results in line with traditional psychotherapies. The setting also reduces anxiety, stress and any stigma attached to accessing these services in traditional settings, enabling young people to begin to open up, process their challenges and discover coping mechanisms for a more positive future.

Demand for our services has increased by over 50% as our reputation reaches our community and beyond and other mental health services have extensive waiting lists. Referrals evidence a huge range of needs including; young people who have witnessed or been subject to domestic abuse and/or sexual exploitation, self-harm and suicide ideation, non-school attendance, bereavements and physical and emotional neglect. Sadly, many of these needs stem from the impact of the deprivation in our area and lead to reduced opportunities in later life.

Many of our young people find traditional talk therapy ineffective or difficult to access and worry about the possible stigma of needing this help. NHS CAMHS refers young people to Hug's services as an additional support to their therapy, due to the positive impact it has. With overwhelming pressure on mental health services and many traditional talk therapies being ineffective, inappropriate or inaccessible for young people, our charity is helping fill a vital gap to support those in need.



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The Project – Hugs Helping Hands

Hugs Helping Hands, enables an average of 150 children and young people every year to access support in their time of crisis or need, increasing well-being, social inclusion and optimism for more positive futures. Due to staffing capacity, this year has been slightly less. The project has been developed and shaped over the last 5 years by the young people who attend Hugs sessions and have lived experience of the complex needs that Hugs supports. This combined with input from our expert staff in well-being, learning and development, has provided an effective, unique provision to continue delivering.

We aim to support recovery from trauma, improve resilience, teach coping mechanisms and build family bonds for lifelong impact. Working in a child led, holistic way gives our service users the autonomy they need to make their own positive changes to their lives and ensures our young people are the centre of their own recovery. Our staff support the individual to find their own answers, giving them tools and mechanisms to keep the positive changes going once they have finished their time with us. This way of working allows different personalities and perspectives to be acknowledged and worked with, creating sustainable results. All staff have an enhanced DBS and are trained in safeguarding, physical first aid and mental health first aid.

Our support is delivered as a course of 6 x 1 hour 1-2-1 weekly sessions, with the option to extend if needed. Our unique mix of support includes; animal assisted services alongside our rescue animals, nature activities, therapeutic outdoor learning, teambuilding, arts and crafts, forest based activities and practical skills, such as growing vegetables and learning about the environment and sustainability. We work in partnership with a number of schools, social workers, NHS CAMHS, our local council and hospices. We feel partnership working is the way forward to ensure we can offer the best service possible to our service users. This year we have enhanced our facilities by adding sensory equipment to our sensory garden, planting flowers and herbs for sensory exploration and creating a wildlife pond.



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The Team



Sessions are overseen and facilitated by our Youth Well-Being Manager, Hazel Ashman, who has years of experience working with children and young people with additional needs. She holds qualifications including; a BTEC Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development, First Aid and Mental Health First Aid, Forest Based Activities, Trauma Informed Practice, Safeguarding Level 3 and she is our Designated Safeguarding Lead.



This year Liz has also joined the Youth Well-being team at Hugs as a Well-being facilitator. Her background is within the arts and she holds a master's degree in psychology. Liz has worked in the charity sector previously and has run outdoor activities for children and young people.

On occasion, our young people will also work alongside an equine staff member for health and safety reasons. This means that there is another expert in the equine's behaviour and body language to ensure the equine is happy participating in the session and that the sessions remain as safe as possible for both the participant and the animals. Our equine staff all have years of experience working with equines and are all qualified in equine behaviour e.g., degree in Animal/Equine Science, Behaviour and Welfare. All our team hold Mental Health First Aid, First Aid and Safeguarding qualifications and receive regular training to ensure they keep up to date with relevant legislation and best practice, including enhanced DBS checks.

Working in Partnership

The team has built up many partnerships over the years with organisations including schools, social workers, NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Cornwall Council, care homes (to help the senior citizens well-being and increase social inclusion), hospices (e.g., Little Harbour) and other charities (e.g., Cornwall One Parent Support).

Working with other professionals and experts in the field creates a support network for service users, improving the outcomes achieved and positive long-term impact on lives.

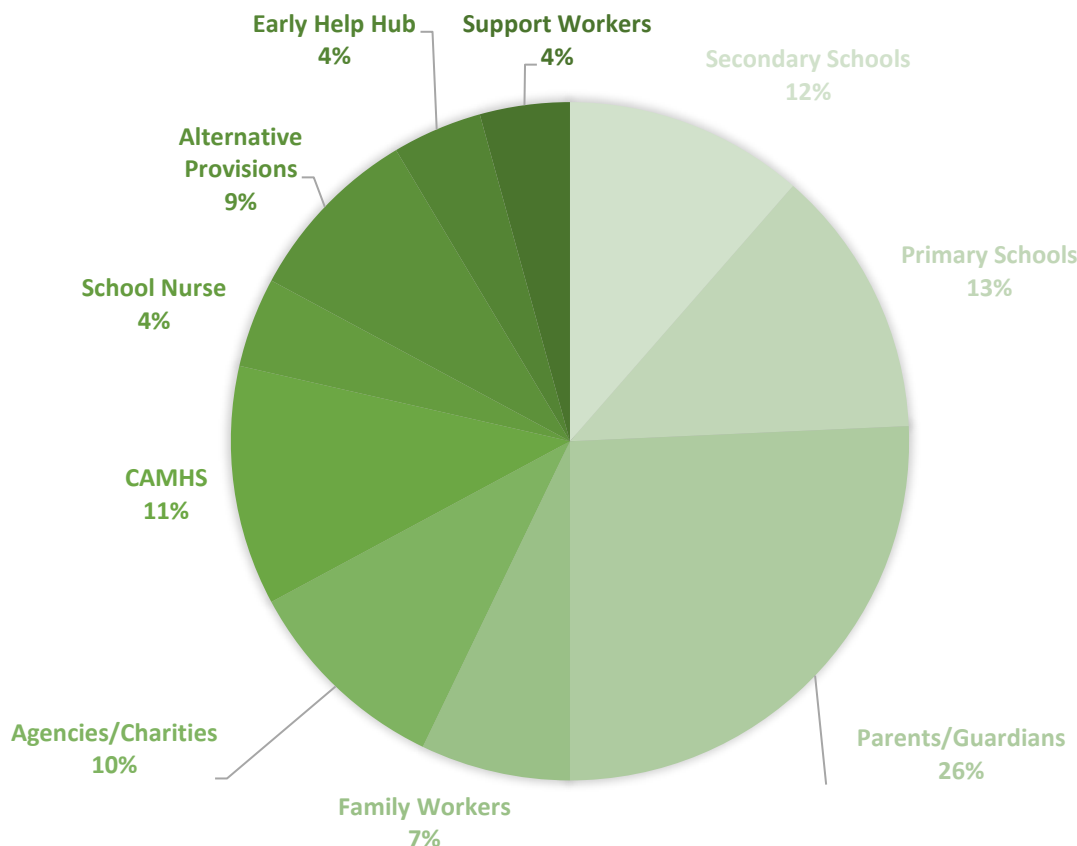
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REFERRAL SOURCES 22-23



Needs Supported June 22 – May 23

Many of the service users who attend Hugs sessions come with more than one need. As part of the support offered, we aim to get to know each service user as an individual, including their likes and dislikes. This then enables us to look at their needs alongside their preferences to create bespoke session blocks for them, which in turn, provides support and confidence for the service user.



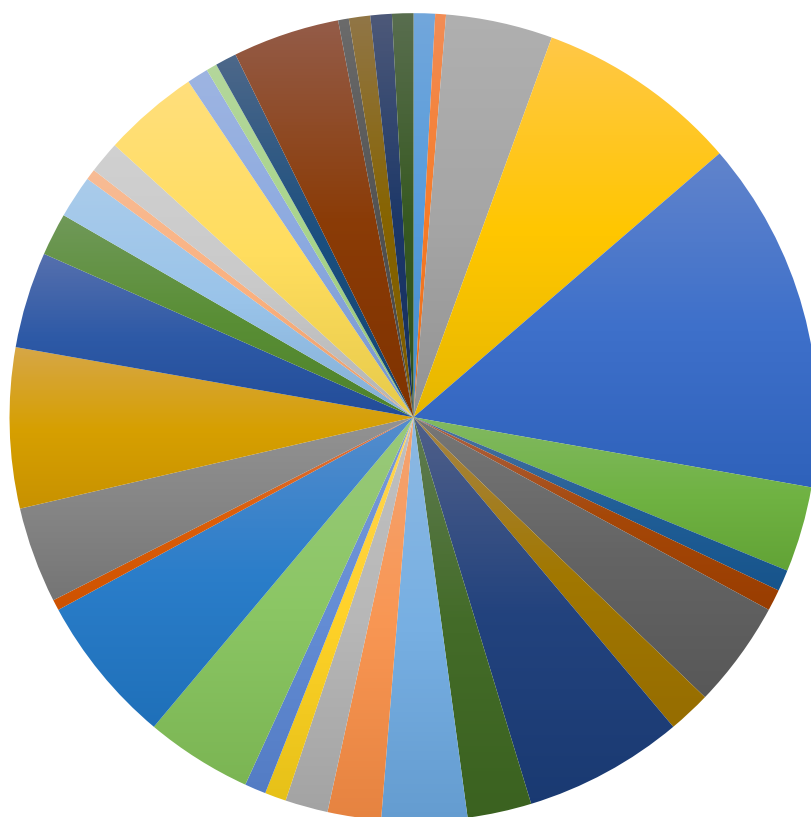
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Need supported by Hugs in this charity year



- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| ■ Non Verbal | ■ Deaf |
| ■ NEET | ■ Anxiety |
| ■ Autism | ■ Sensory Processing Disorder |
| ■ Pathological Demand Avoidance | ■ Bereavement |
| ■ Emotional Dysregulation | ■ Language Delay |
| ■ Social Isolation | ■ Relationship Breakdown |
| ■ ADHD | ■ Neglect |
| ■ OCD | ■ Separation Anxiety |
| ■ Dyspraxia | ■ Trauma |
| ■ Self Harm | ■ Depression |
| ■ CIC | ■ Low Self Confidence |
| ■ Low Self Esteem | ■ Bullying |
| ■ Eating Disorder | ■ Downsyndrome |
| ■ Low Mood | ■ Domestic Abuse |
| ■ Substance Abuse | ■ EAL |
| ■ Sexualised Behaviour | ■ Suicidal Tendencies |
| ■ Sexual Abuse | ■ Medical Anxiety |
| ■ Returning to Education | ■ Young Carer |

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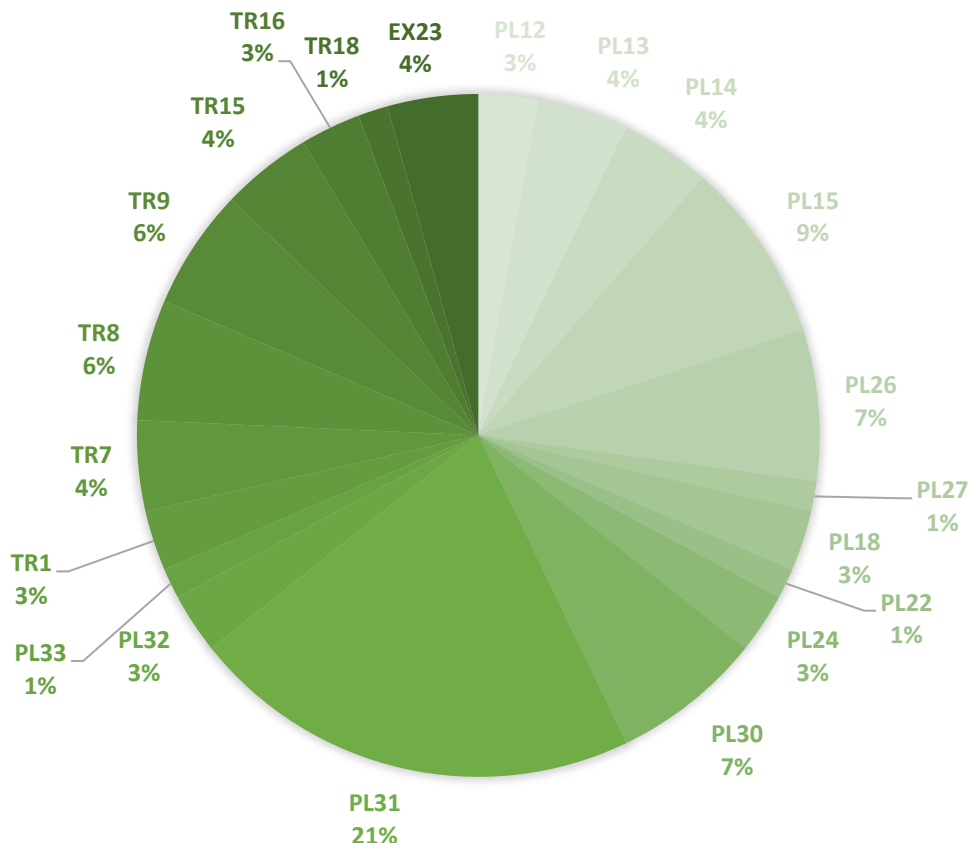
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Area Covered by Referrals June 22 – May 23

AREAS COVERED



This graph shows the wide catchment area that Hugs has supported this year.

How our Impact is Measured

Every young person that attends Hugs is an individual, so recording outcomes through benchmarking is not appropriate as it can dishearten the individual and give inaccurate data. One person's achievement level can also be hugely different to another. What we do, is establish where the individual has progressed on their own journey at the beginning, end and throughout their course. We use the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS), a widely used scientific measurement for well-being, designed to record if there have been significant improvements in the individual's well-being. For younger children, we use age-appropriate scales, such as traffic light systems, to discover if a meaningful positive change has occurred over their course of well-being sessions. These methods provide us with quantitative data.

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We also use open questions through session feedback forms, interviews and questionnaires to allow us to delve further into each individual's experiences and to provide further insight into how our sessions have helped and how we can further improve what we offer. This produces qualitative evidence and when paired with our quantitative data, ensures that our project is truly making a difference to lives. In addition, we go out into our local community and visit other service providers and professionals to research and compare our services and ensure what we offer is both needed and as effective as possible to help those in need. We are looking at all our feedback forms to see if there is another method that is more engaging and accessible for your people.

The Impact

In this charity year, we have reached **127** children and young people, **70** of which were new to Hugs and **57** attended an additional block of sessions. Hugs delivered **697** hours of well-being interventions this year. This brings our total number of individual children and young people supported to **704** and over **6,520** hours of well-being sessions conducted. This doesn't include the educational animal care and human well-being visits undertaken in schools.

Our project is evidencing a positive increase in health and well-being, social inclusion, life skills and optimism for our young people. The long-term impact of this project is contributing to more successful futures, including reintegration and accomplishment in education, leading to employment and positive community values. The project is enabling service users to access help and support in a timely manner, instead of waiting months for help or treatment.

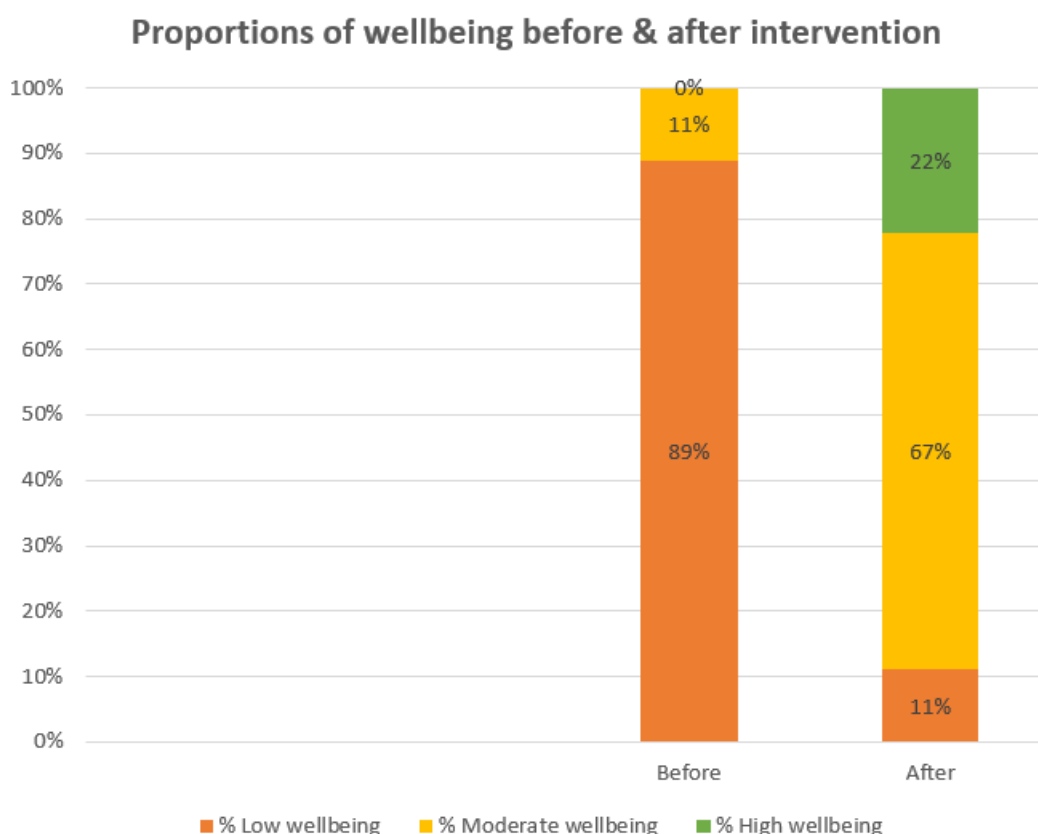
Male	Female	Non-Binary	Aged 4 - 10	Aged 11 – 16	Aged 16 - 18
50 (39%)	76 (60%)	1 (1%)	50 (40%)	61 (48%)	15 (12%)

Our feedback forms are completed on a voluntary basis as for some service users, compulsory completion may expose them to additional pressure and/or could be a barrier, causing a service user to shut down. In addition, some service users have such complex needs that completing the form is impossible, unethical or their needs are such that the form would not provide for accurate data. Some service users just do not wish to complete the form and we respect their wishes. We do also try to encourage a verbal quote, to see if we have made a positive difference to them and gather feedback from the parent or carer that attends sessions with them. Of the 127 service users, 17 (13%) completed a feedback form in this charity year.



Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS)

Nine individuals completed the 7 item Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS) with **89%** recording a positive change in their well-being. When using the Wilcoxon Sum Ranking test this produces a p value of **<0.05** which supports our hypothesis that significant positive change is attributable to our AAS intervention.



Individual WEMWBS Statements (n = 9)	% Reporting Improvement
Feeling Optimistic About the Future	89%
Feeling Useful	89%
Feeling Relaxed	89%
Able to Deal with Problems Well	78%
Able to Think Clearly	67%
Feeling Close to People (Improved Social Inclusion & Relationships)	67%
Able to Make Mind Up About Things (Make Decisions Clearly)	78%



Traffic Light Feedback Form

Eight service users completed the traffic light feedback form. **100%** reported an increase in their well-being with one service user scoring the same before and after their Hugs sessions.

Theme Identified Through Feedback (n = 8)	% Reporting Improvement
Felt Calmer	88%
Increased Confidence	88%
Reduced Anxiety	88%
Increased Happiness	100%
Better Communication	88%
Increased Social Inclusion	88%
Improved Focus	75%

From additional analysis we found trends in:

- Mirroring and reflection in behaviours and emotions between animals and young people.
- Feeling comfortable to open up, discuss problems and feeling happier through talking to animals.
- Learning about the animals helped service users to feel more confident around them and in themselves.
- Finding it easier to talk to new people.
- Reduced suicide ideation and self-harm.
- Improved confidence and knowledge for parents/carers to recognise mental health ill in young people and knowing how/where to access additional support.
- Improved access and work between professionals to support young people e.g., Hugs support created more positive treatment developments with services such as NHS CAMHS.
- Improved ability to control, cope with and grow from life's challenges.

Case Studies

"My daughter never had the closure of leaving primary school thanks to covid. She didn't have any settling in visits in secondary school and when she did start it was all with heavy rules and much separation of classes and year groups again, due to covid. I don't think this generation of children were really considered when the lockdowns were imposed. It had lots of knock-on effects and I know many children around my daughters age (14 now) who are also suffering anxiety and maybe even depression.

My daughter (let's call her Emma) was already suffering from anxiety that was stopping her enjoying life, particularly school life, when her two best friends dropped out of school and

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eventually transferred to a new one. She was left without a friendship group and while the school did try to help they were overwhelmed with similar students on a daily basis. We were being called in to pick her up from the well-being centre and there were many other kids having panic attacks and unable to cope. This got worse, no matter what we tried and we did try everything we and the school could think of. It became so that Emma was hysterically crying before school, having to be physically dragged and manhandled to go there and after a few hours being called to come pick her up as she was inconsolable. She was getting no work done and at home she begged to be home schooled as she had been in lockdown. We resisted and used bribery, threats, being nice, being hard but nothing worked. We looked into home schooling and felt that Emma wasn't getting any education the way she was going on and home education would be better than nothing.

We looked around for any kind of counselling or therapy we could get for Emma to help her through whatever she was experiencing and found The Hugs Foundation online. They offer support to young people experiencing difficulties with their mental or emotional health, amongst other things. Emma was lucky enough to get a 6 week course, fully funded. This has been one hour a week on the farm with a well-being intervention support worker. Hugs has two parts to their work; they rescue and rehome animals, such as horses, ponies (including those set to be culled on Bodmin moor), goats, pigs, chickens, guinea pigs etc. some have been abused and some are abandoned. All get an amazing new chance at life with some awesome facilities. The rescued animals are tended to by staff and volunteers and the children go along and get involved with their care. Emma was almost completely non-verbal by the time we got her there. She wouldn't speak for days on end and would get upset if we pushed her to talk.

Being with the Hugs workers and animals she relaxed and her focus was taken away from her issues as she was told about each animals background and given the opportunity to spend time with her favourite ones each week. She's fed, groomed and walked ponies and goats, helped out feeding the pigs and had cuddles with her favourite guinea pig, Frankie. We've sponsored two of her other favourite animals, a donkey and a pony called Oscar and Dude, who are best friends. Dude goes out to nursing homes to see the residents and brings much joy to them too! Emma has also painted some horseshoes and drawn one of the horses. She really enjoyed the art side of being there. I since found out that not only did they know Emma enjoys art (they asked a lot about her before she arrived) but they do this with a lot of the children and young people to help them express their feelings and learn coping mechanisms.



After each session Emma was more talkative, noticeably happier and relaxed. Whilst at Hugs Emma opened up to us about self-harming and that she was contemplating and even planning suicide but put it off until because she wanted to go to her last Hugs session. Hugs kindly offered more sessions so we are hoping that will continue to be a protecting factor to stopping her and supporting her through everything. The sessions have helped Emma so much and made life better for all of us as a family. We are delighted that they have offered us further sessions to continue these positive changes."



Video Case Studies

In May 2023 we were incredibly lucky to win the National Lottery's People's Projects, which will enable us to continue our project for another year (alongside some funding already secured). ITV created a video for people to see our project, which includes feedback from service users and their parents. You can watch the video here:

<https://www.thepeoplesprojects.org.uk/projects/view/hooves-hearts-minds-aligned>

Feedback from Service Users

"I feel happy when I am at Hugs, the animals help me to forget about all my worry thoughts."

"I feel on top of the world."

"I just want to thank you for making my time at Hugs really amazing! From my first week there I instantly liked it so much! Every time I go to Hugs, I feel really happy and even when I'm leaving, I feel happy just reflecting on what I did, whether it be seeing the horses and learning about them or cuddling Frankie the guinea pig or even just being there, it has been really spectacular! Thank you so much for making it the highlight of my summer holidays!! I'll be sure to always remember Hugs and all the good times I had. It has really helped to gain confidence with the outside world again and get rid of that fear. Thank you!"

"I like Hugs because I love having cuddles with Frankie. I love feeding and giving straw to the pigs, I love giving the goats a walk and brushing them. I love to see the horses, I also love brushing them. I love to give Bing and Tom the rabbits grass, I love the new baby guinea pigs and giving them hugs and I love the mummy guinea pigs too. Hugs makes me happy."



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Hugs is the place I like to be, as I've struggled with my mental health and that's been tricky for me.



Hazel and Liz are always there, and it makes me feel like people do care.

I've done lots of things since I've been there, some I never thought I'd dare!



I was nervous of horses before I went there, but the ones at Hugs like me need gentle care, I was so proud of myself for helping to groom their hair!



Arthur and Merlin are mischievous goats, but it does make me happy grooming their coats!



Dewey and Lewey all ways greet us with a quack, but it does make me laugh when they take a splash!



Feeding the pigs is always fun to do, when I first met them I never thought I could do, but with tasty treats and a scratch on the back, they always roll over and I love it when they do that!



Lighting a campfire with flint and steel, I never thought I could do it but I could not believe how happy it made me feel!



Cuddles with Frank makes me feel calm inside, But Bing just likes to hop away & Hide!



Hugs has been a great help to me, as I feel happy again and that's good for me!

I look forward to seeing you again next year and when I do it will make me cheer!



from



HUGS 2022



Feedback from Parents

“My daughter started her sessions today and she came home a different kid. Thank you.”

“My daughter’s anxieties have reduced since she’s worked with Liz. Her biting fingers still remains but we don’t have blood or raw fingers as we did when she started. She is much happier in herself and she even won the KS1 trophy for Kindness award! You’ve really helped both my daughter and our family as a whole so much. We can’t thank you enough.”

“My daughter has faced some challenges already in her childhood and we were signposted to you through First Light. We had been seeking external help through the 'GP', the School - 'Trauma Informed Schools' and 'Reconnect' through Barnardos. My daughter has some challenges with her relationship with her father and sadly has had a tricky time at school. We worked hard with the school but due to additional external factors we were unable to turn the situation around for my daughter. Since coming to The Hugs Foundation the difference in my daughter was incredible. She really began to flourish both within the school system (she had started at a new school) and she was better equipped in her challenges she was facing with her relationship with her father. The positive impact of The Hugs Foundation is hard to describe. It has been truly amazing and my daughter is always so delighted to attend. The expertise of Liz and Hazel alongside their kindness and the animals combine to be very special therapy. It gave my daughter confidence and she began to be self-assured again. I would like to thank you all again and for you to know just how invaluable you are as a therapy centre!”

“My son has been attending Hugs session this year and they are definitely the highlight of his week. His is autistic and struggles with many aspects of everyday life, but Hazel is brilliant and puts him at ease, he has opened up about his difficulties whilst there. Hugs is the most amazing place with the most amazing people. I don’t know what we would do if my son couldn’t go. The impact it has is outstanding, my son can be calm and happy for a small part of the week, just be himself and stop worrying about everything else for a time.”



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Feedback from Professionals

"Hugs has been an amazing, enriching experience for our student. Until he attended the sessions his interests were mainly limited to gaming and watching programmers on YouTube. Hugs has given him multiple opportunities to engage with animals - helping to care for them and interacting with them. When the chicks were born and he saw and held them for the first time, he later told me that it was the 'best experience of his life.'

It has been wonderful to see him outside, in nature, throwing a stick for Bluebell (who he loves) running over (but mainly through) the jumps, inventing games on the coloured blocks and splashing in muddy puddles. It is obvious that, with some of these activities, this is the first time that he has experienced them.

He has built up a great rapport with Hugs staff member, Hazel. He has listened to instructions given to him by her and I know that he feels safe and comfortable with her. I truly feel that Hugs has brought out his nurturing, caring side and he has had lots of fun - it's so great to see him collapse into fits of giggles on occasions." Feedback from School Headteacher

Other Services Provided

School Visits

In addition to the Hugs Helping Hands project, the team has continued to visit schools to educate in animal welfare and human well-being. We have supported over 60 school children in this charity year and had school and college groups come to visit Hugs rescue centre.



"My learners, all with additional needs ranging from physical disabilities, learning difficulties and autism were completely engaged with the visit, from walking through the stables to the seating area to listen to the introduction to meeting the animals. The addition of items they could touch and hold really made a difference. Each student met a range of animals in a way that they felt safe, and for some the touching of animals from the horses and guinea pig was the first time they had ever touched an animal. The photos that we took on our visit were used to make a display which the learners still love to talk about the day. We very much look forward to visiting again." Kirsty Robertson Study Program Manager for Independence Pathway Foundation Learning at Cornwall College, St Austell

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Care Home Well-Being Visits

We have been able to carry out 19 care home visits with our rescue pony, Dude. This project was kindly funded by the Persimmon Charitable Trust and the Anton Jurgens Charitable Trust. Our visits incorporate animal interactions which include talking about well-being for both animals and humans. These visits lower blood pressure, increase 'feel good' endorphins, reducing stress and anxiety. The project has continued to be a huge success with visits now booked up 6 months in advance.



To All the staff at the Hugs foundation.
This is a card of appreciation for you all, to let you know when you bring Dude to visit us, it makes us feel very happy to see him. cheers us up. we really appreciate you bringing him it does us all good.
from All the residents at Windmill Court ↓



Animal Rescue

We have rescued 25 horses and ponies, 3 sheep and a number of rabbits and guinea pigs. We have rehomed 31 horses and ponies. This now brings the total amount of equines rescued since Hugs opened in 2017 to 187 and 139 rehomed, along with over 200 other species of animals.



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HEATHCLIFFE

BEFORE & AFTER



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Thank You to These Amazing Funders Who Have Supported Our Youth Well-Being Project



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