



The Hugs Foundation Youth Well-Being Impact Report 2023 - 2024



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, Hooves, Hearts & Minds Aligned for the charity year 1st June 2023 to 31st May 2024. Due to staffing capacity, interventions have been reduced from 150 (our usual annual capacity) to 109. We are confident that we will be able to reach 150 children for well-being sessions in the coming year, along with delivering our new supported volunteering programme.

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 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 (sadly our veterans project has been on hold due to staffing capacity 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. Our unique mix of support includes; animal assisted services, nature activities, outdoor learning, teambuilding, arts, crafts, forest based activities and practical skills, such as growing vegetables, learning about the environment and sustainability.

Our animal rescues each have their own rehabilitation plan and many of these plans are integrated with the well-being support we provide, creating a circular relationship where both animal and human benefit from spending time together and caring for each other. This relationship building allows the opportunity for growth and healing, making a positive difference to both lives by supporting them to learn to cope with and move on from the trauma or challenges they are experiencing. Our qualified, experienced team cater for a huge range of complex and often multiple needs including; social, emotional, physical and mental ill health, low self-esteem, social isolation, learning/developmental needs, NEET, school transitions, general life challenges, SEND, trauma, adverse childhood experiences, self-harm, bereavements and suicide ideation.

We are very proud to be the first organisation in Cornwall to be accepted onto 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 or 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. 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

Recent NHS data found the number of children in mental health crisis at record levels with urgent referrals now more than 3 times higher than in 2019. A child/young person is now being referred to the NHS every 30 seconds. In May 2023 there were 466,250 referrals made nationally to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Thousands are having to wait months, even years to access support, we have seen referrals with a 3 year wait for CAMHS in our local area. 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.

The number of secondary school young people with emotional/behavioural disorders increased by 133% between 2012 and 2016 alone (Cornwall Council, 2017). Our schools are overwhelmed with the number of children needing additional support. There are also many deprived areas in Cornwall, 17 are in the top 10%. Hugs witnesses first-hand, the impact this has on well-being, leading to crisis situations, including suicide ideation and non-school attendance. We receive daily enquiries from a range of referral pathways we have built relationships with (see working in partnership section). All referrals come through word of mouth due to our reputation in our community. Referrals evidence a huge range of needs including; young people who have witnessed or experienced domestic abuse, self-harm, 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, leading to reduced opportunities in later life.

Therapeutic work alongside animals and nature is 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 brighter future. With overwhelming pressure on mental health services and many traditional talk therapies being ineffective, inappropriate (due to complex needs, such a neurodiversity) or inaccessible for many young people (due to overwhelming demand and costs), our charity is helping fill a vital gap to support our community.



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The Project – Hooves, Hearts & Minds Aligned

Hooves, Hearts and Minds Aligned, 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 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 an inclusive provision with sustainable results. All staff have an enhanced DBS and are trained in safeguarding, physical first aid and mental health first aid.

Support is delivered as a course of 6 x 1 hour 1-2-1 weekly sessions. We are not just a 'quick fix' so for those that need further support, we can extend 1-2-1 sessions and from September 2024 we have a new project starting with a progression route to supported volunteering with groups of similar ages and needs, enabling peer support and development of further skills.

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. This year we have enhanced our facilities by adding sensory equipment to our sensory garden, creating a quiet area for reflection, planting flowers and herbs for sensory exploration and creating a wildlife pond.





The Team



Sessions are overseen and facilitated by our Youth Well-Being Manager, Hazel Ashman, who has over 10 years experience working with children and young people with additional and complex needs. She holds qualifications including; BTEC Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development, First Aid, Mental Health First Aid, Forest Based Activities, Trauma Informed Practice, Safeguarding Level 3 and she is our Designated Safeguarding Lead. She is also one of the first people in the UK to be studying the Level 3 Diploma in Equine Assisted Services, the only qualification for the sector in the UK that is regulated by Ofqual and accredited through OCN London.



This year Julie has joined the Youth Well-being team at Hugs as a Well-Being Facilitator. Julie spent the early part of her career as a riding instructor before turning to vet nursing for equines and then small animals. Moving to Cornwall saw a change of career to teaching young people with additional needs about animal care. Julie is now our Deputy Safeguarding Lead and will be leading our new supported volunteering programme. She is also studying the Level 3 Diploma in Equine Assisted Services.

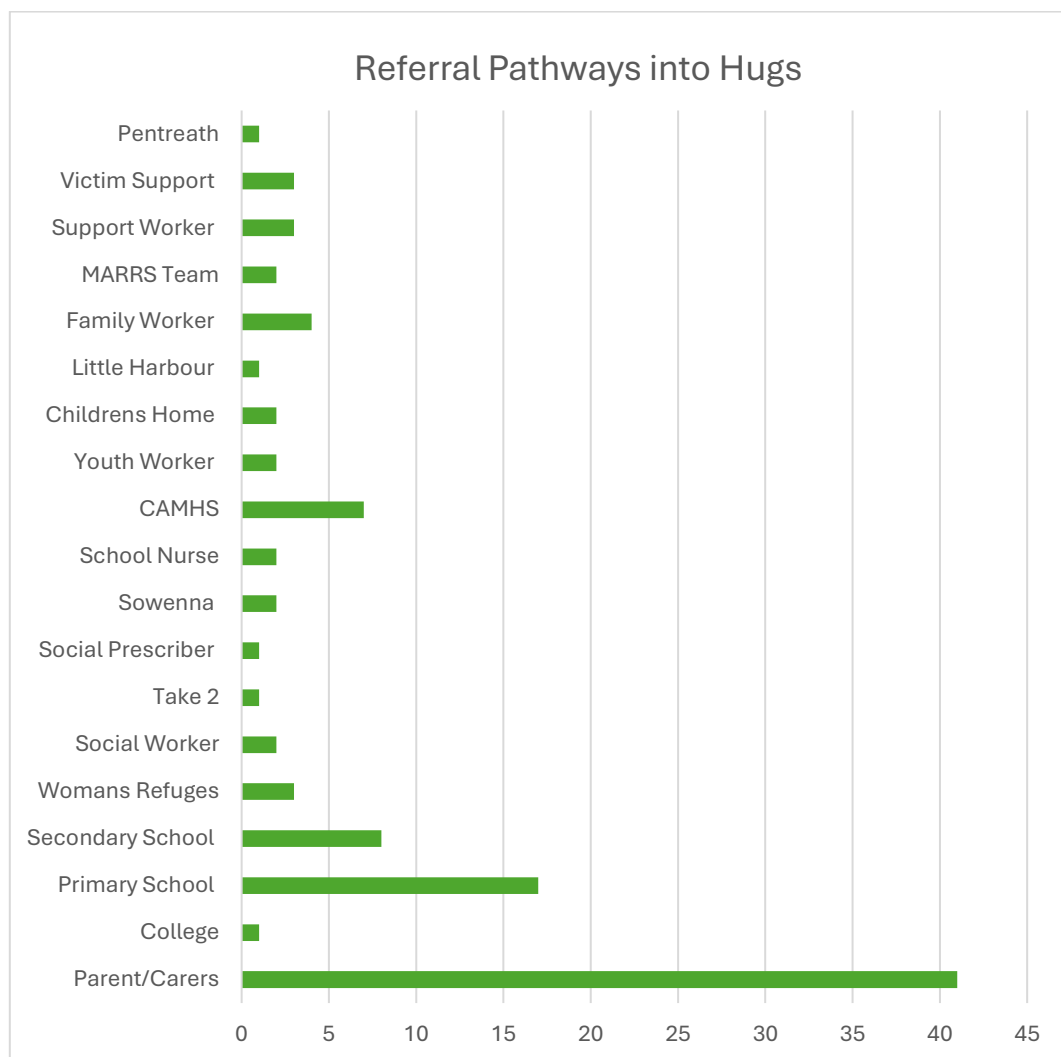
On occasion, our young people will also work alongside an equine staff member for health and safety reasons. This means that there is another expert in the equine's behaviour and body language to ensure the equine is happy participating in the session and that the sessions remain as safe as possible for both the young person and the animal. Our equine staff all have years of experience working with equines and are qualified in equine behaviour e.g., degrees 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

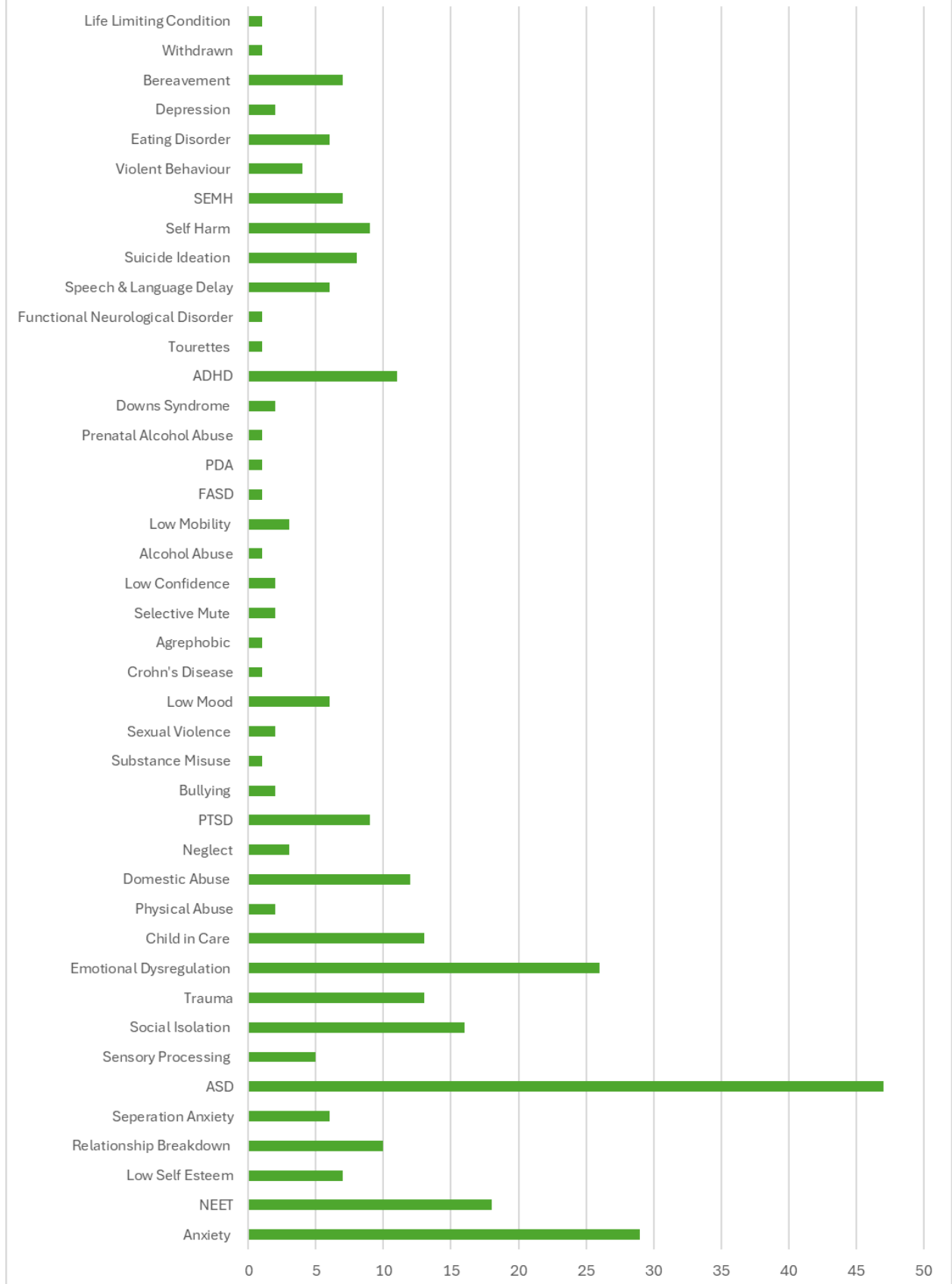
The team has built up many partnerships in the local community over the years with organisations including; mainstream and specialist schools, social prescribers, social workers, NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Cornwall Council, hospices (e.g., Little Harbour) and other charities (e.g., Cornwall One Parent Support). Working with other professionals and experts in the field creates a holistic support network for service users, improving the outcomes achieved and positive long-term impact on lives.



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 sessions for them, which in turn, creates child-led support for the service user.



Needs Supported in 2023/2024



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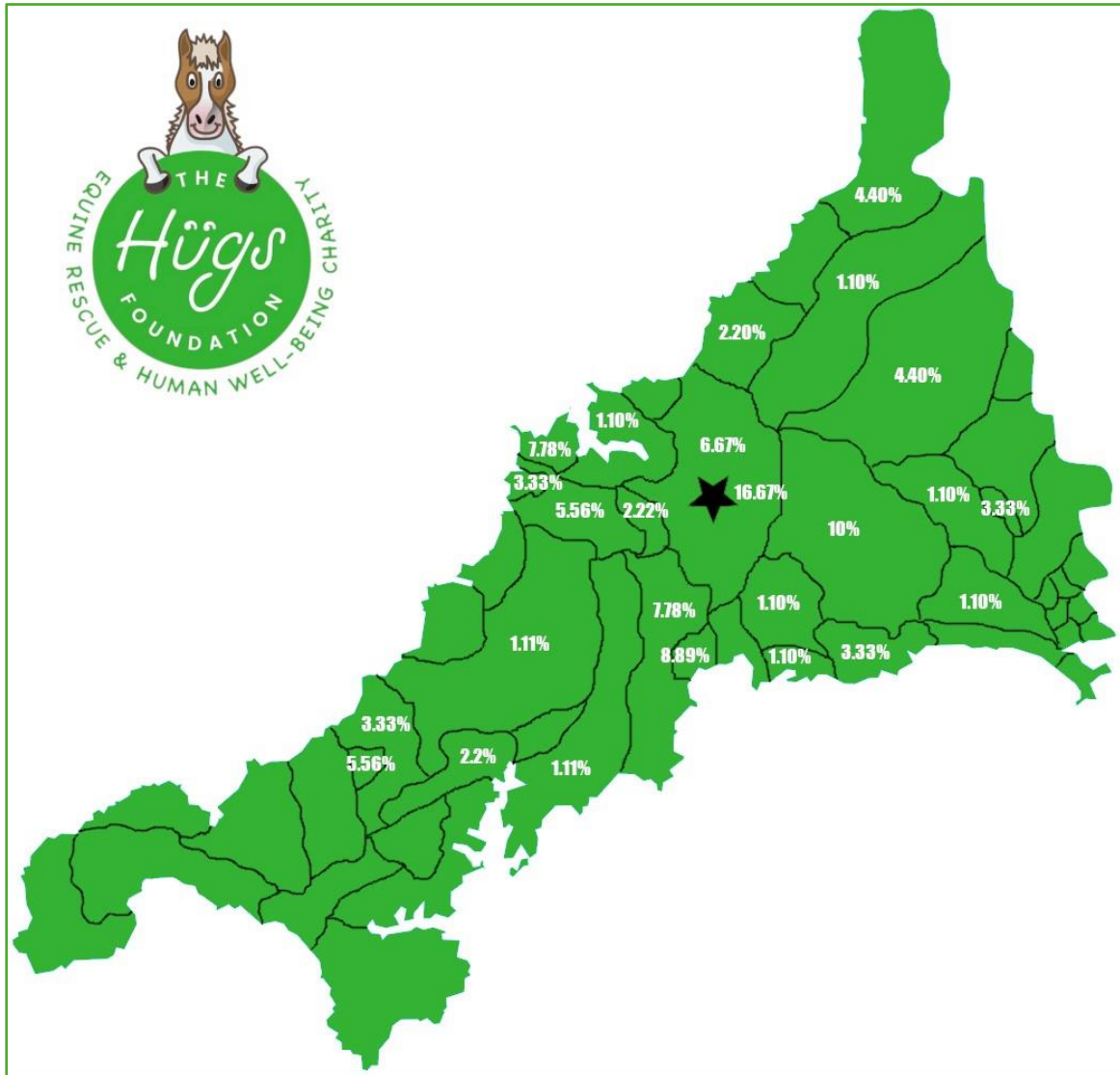
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Areas Covered by Referrals

The graph below shows the wide catchment area that Hugs has supported this year, with the star marking where Hugs HQ is situated.



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

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(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.

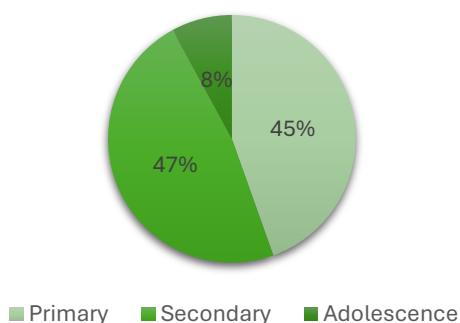
We also use open questions through session feedback forms, interviews and questionnaires to allow us to delve further into each individual's experiences and to provide further insight into how our sessions have helped and how we can further improve what we offer. This produces qualitative evidence and 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 always reviewing our feedback methods to see if there is another method that is more engaging and accessible for our young people and are currently applying for funding for this.

The Impact & Learnings

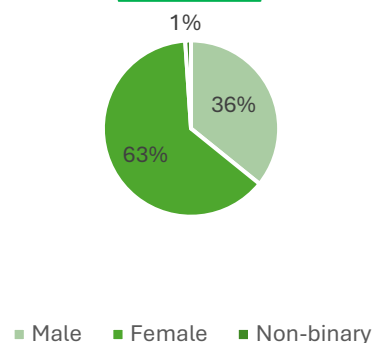
In this charity year, we have reached **109** children and young people, **64** of which were new to Hugs and **43** attended an additional block of sessions. Hugs delivered **642** hours of well-being interventions this year. This brings our total number of individual children and young people supported to **813** and over **7,162** 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 continuing to evidence 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 and more positive family relationships. The project is enabling service users to access help and support in a timely manner, instead of waiting months for help or treatment.

Age Groups Supported



Gender

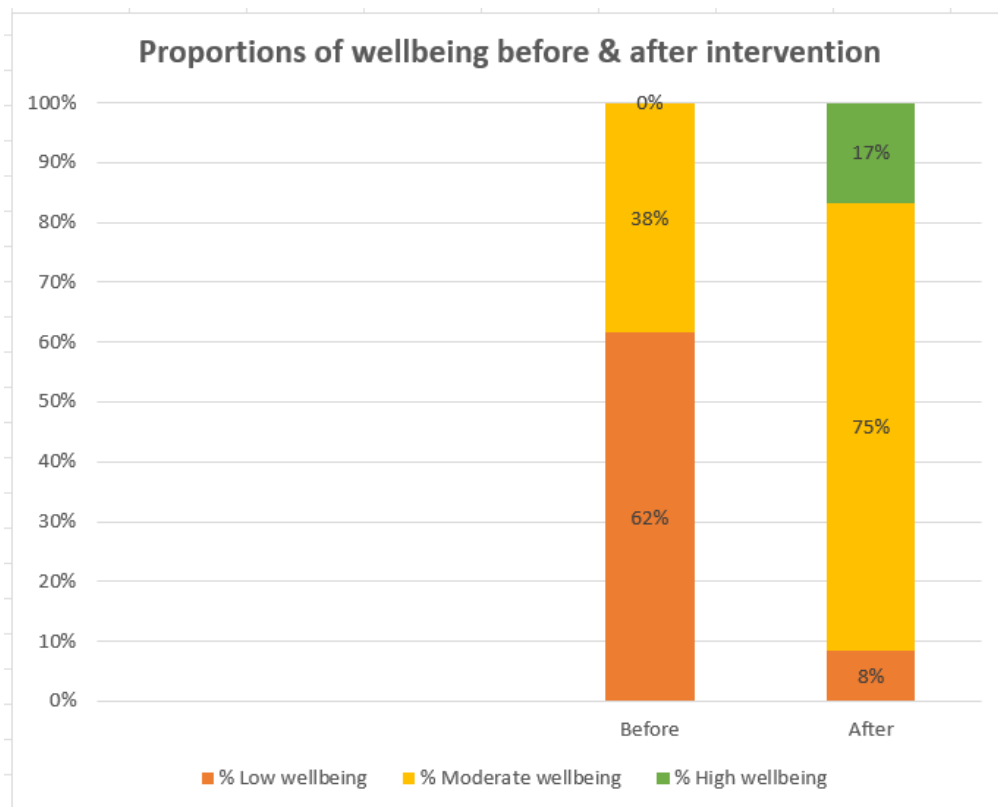




Our feedback forms are completed on a voluntary basis as for some service users, compulsory completion may expose them to additional pressure and/or could be a barrier, causing a service user to shut down. In addition, some service users have such complex needs that completing the form is impossible, 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 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 109 service users, 20 (18%) completed a feedback form.

Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS)

Twelve individuals completed the 7 item Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS) with **83%** recording a statistically significant change in their overall 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 Hugs support.



Individual WEMWBS Statements (n = 12)	% Reporting Improvement
Feeling Optimistic About the Future	42%
Feeling Useful	83%
Feeling Relaxed	75%
Able to Deal with Problems Well	67%
Able to Think Clearly	75%
Feeling Close to People (Improved Social Inclusion & Relationships)	50%
Able to Make Mind Up About Things (Make Decisions Clearly)	67%



Traffic Light Feedback Form

Eight service users completed the smiley face/traffic light feedback form. **100%** reported an increase in their overall well-being after their Hugs sessions.

Theme Identified Through Feedback (n = 8)	% Reporting Improvement
Felt Calmer	88%
Increased Confidence	63%
Reduced Anxiety	75%
Increased Happiness	75%
Better Communication	50%
Improved Focus	38%

We have had 5 feedback forms completed with questions asked to the supporting adult who attended with service users (e.g. parents/school). Results are below.

Do You Feel Hugs Supported Your Child/Young Person (n = 5)	% Reporting Yes
In Their Time of Need or Crisis?	100%
To Improve Their Confidence and Self-Esteem?	100%
To Improve Their Resilience and Empowerment?	100%
To Improve Social Inclusion	100%

This year we have noticed that certain activities are able to support specific needs. For example, grooming/brushing our ponies and encouraging a gentle, repetitive rocking movement with brush strokes enables us to hold the space for them and this has supported:

- help with emotional regulation
- learning grounding techniques and calming the mind
- rocking movements can help stimulate the release of oxytocin
- understanding the feeling on 'in the moment'

We have worked with a greater number of children that are NEET and often Hugs is the only activity that they are leaving their homes for. Consequently, gross motor skills have been impacted along with being able to identify risk and the ability to safely risk take. We have also noticed a greater need for some additional facilities for our young people. This includes a swing to aid emotional regulation. Combining these learnings, we are now applying for funding to install a natural climbing frame area, including a swing. This is to aid emotional regulation and to help with strength, coordination and safe risk taking. It has been more difficult to gather feedback, due to how complex needs are becoming and parents/schools not returning forms. This may also be because we are so passionate about hearing how the child is feeling over what an adult perception is, so we get less physical data and more comments about their feelings. To improve the number of people completing feedback, we are looking at recruiting a volunteer to concentrate specifically in this area. We are also applying for funding to undertake an external evaluation to discover if there is a more suitable measuring tool that would remove more barriers and be more engaging for service users.



Case Studies

"My daughter has accessed Hugs over the last two years, and I cannot stress enough how important their work is. My daughter is in Autistic burn out and has been through many traumas and as a result is unable to access mainstream education. Hugs has been the only provision that she has managed to attend and the difference it has made is amazing. The therapeutic effect of animals is truly incredible but not only that, the whole team at Hugs, especially Hazel the Youth Well-Being Manager, are so good at what they do and seem to really understand young people and how to help them. My daughter has tried other equine therapies, but none have come close to Hugs in their understanding and activities."

On another note, I work as a nurse specialist and refer young people to Hugs on a regular basis. Most of these young people are vulnerable and have behavioural and/or emotional difficulties. These young people almost always rely on funded sessions and this is so important as without it, these 'hard to reach' families would almost certainly be unable to access this vital therapy. Without Hugs there would be a huge gap in this kind of therapeutic provision. We are in the midst of a mental health crisis for young people currently and Hugs provide a much needed service that must continue."

Denise - SCPHN, BSc Hons, RN and a very grateful parent.

Feedback From Service Users

"I feel happy when I am at Hugs."

"My favourite thing about Hugs is I can be myself and talk about any issues I have in a non-judgemental way."

"Hugs made me feel happy and I feel like I have achieved a lot."

"I've not just learnt a lot about the animals, I've also learnt about myself."



Feedback From Parents and Carers

"My daughter has been to settings where they have not been able to meet her needs and have given up on us. Hugs have been a lifeline of therapeutic support and solace for both of us."

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“My 11 year old daughter attended Hugs during the summer holidays to help with her emotional health and wellbeing and anxiety before transitioning to secondary school. From start to finish, the staff were lovely with her. They were approachable and friendly and made all the sessions interesting and varied from being involved in artwork, to exercising the ponies. She even got to create and take home a little scrap book of photos as a keepsake. My daughter has grown in confidence since visiting Hugs and this helped her with her transition into secondary school. She is more verbal than she used to be and has more confidence in talking with new people as well as genuine love of horses and ponies! We hope to visit again in the future, a friendly, relaxing place to be!”

“My son is happy at Hugs but is also a lot happier at home.”

“I just wanted to let you know just what an impact Hazel & Yilly made with my son on Friday. We popped to Aldi afterwards and when we got out of the car his words were 'I feel on top of the world for what I achieved today, I'm so proud of myself' so a BIG thank you Hazel & rescue pony Yilly, as a parent of a child that struggles so much with his mental health it filled me with joy hearing and seeing the achievement he made.”

“My daughter was anxious about starting sessions because of all of the unknown factors. She has been unable to face any group activity since being de-registered from school in September 2023. She has loved the sessions! Her confidence has grown quickly around the animals, she now never wants to leave! She is noticeably calmer and chose to take part in a Hugs group session, even though it was a group! This is a huge development.”



“I just wanted to send a quick email to say thank you so much, my child had a really wonderful time at Hugs this morning and I'm so grateful to Julie. I don't think I've ever seen my child relax in a new environment as quickly as she did today. She felt safe enough to let go of my hand many times and although other people were around, no one focused on her or surprised her with questions, which so often happens at other settings, we've tried over the years. Julie told her so much about the different animals and she's remembered every word, telling her sisters about every animal. It's a very special place and I'm just so grateful for the opportunity to bring her there. She's been very low and so very anxious for such a long time; I can't tell you what it felt like to see her smile!”

“My son is autistic and has a learning disability. He suffers with anxiety and sensory difficulties and so he and we as a family have difficulties access activities within the community. It was wonderful to be able to share in our sons' experiences over the six weeks and to observe how relaxed he felt at the Hugs farm. Our son has a history of self-injurious behaviour which has definitely lessened a little recently and may well be as result of his sessions at Hugs. Julie was so gentle, sensitive and Intune with him, understanding that he may not wish to engage with activities in the same way as other children may want to and giving him the space and freedom to find his own enjoyment at the farm. He loved seeing the chickens, he had a fascination with them, he was a little scared due to their unpredictable noises yet intrigued! Our son loved walking the boundaries of the farm and climbing over the gates, scuffing his feet in the sand and gravel, petting Arthur the goat and stopping for frequent picnic breaks. We observed how relaxed he felt there one day when he found a spot



in the barn to lay down and play with some dinosaurs, tracing the chicken footprints in the floor and letting Julie play alongside him, something he doesn't always find easy. Our son rushed through his school tasks on a Wednesday morning as he was excited to get to Hugs. Thank you for allowing him the opportunity to be a part of a truly wonderful place.”

Feedback From Professionals

“Hugs has been an amazing, enriching experience for our student. Until they attended the sessions their interests were mainly limited to gaming and watching programmers on YouTube. Hugs has given them multiple opportunities to engage with animals - helping to care for them and interacting with them. When the chicks were born and they saw and held them for the first time, they later told me that it was the 'best experience of their life'. It has been wonderful to see them outside, in nature, throwing a stick for Bluebell (who they love) 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 our student has experienced them. They have built up a great rapport with their youth worker, Hazel. They have listened to instructions given to them by her and I know that they feel safe and comfortable with her. I truly feel that Hugs has brought out their nurturing, caring side and they have had lots of fun - it's so great to see them collapse into fits of giggles on occasions.” Feedback from Lynn Cox, Headteacher

Other Services Provided

School, College & Youth Group Visits

In addition to the Hooves, Hearts & Minds Aligned project, the team has continued to work with schools, colleges and youth groups, such as Scouts, Brownies and a visually impaired youth Guide Dog group for educational and well-being visits. We have supported over 70 school children in this charity year.

“My learners, all with a range of learning disabilities, came for a visit to Hugs. We were greeted with a smile and led into the barn where the learners had for some their first interaction with the horses. They were taught how to touch and go up to each animal, they were allowed time and not rushed. The introduction was pitched perfectly and allowed my learners to ask questions. Following this we went on a tour of the grounds and to see a range of the animals that live at Hugs. We saw animals, we got to ask questions, we even got to go in and pet the pigs before meeting the very friendly goats, chickens and small furry animals. While we were there, we felt welcomed, students that wanted to interact with the animals could, for those that were wary, they could hang back. Hugs is a fantastic place to visit and every time we do, we see the changes that have been made which make it just such a special place to visit.” Kirsty Robertson, Study Program Manager for Independence Pathway Foundation Learning, Cornwall College St Austell



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Care Home Well-Being Visits

We have been able to carry out 32 care home visits with our rescue pony, Dude. This is a 68% increase on the previous charity year, evidencing the demand for this service. This project was kindly funded by the Anton Jurgens Charitable Trust, The Hedley Foundation and public donations. 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 nearly 12 months in advance!



"Well, what an amazing afternoon! We have been very privileged to have the company of Hugs. The love and dedication of Hazel and Jane shone through, their caring approach with Dude and our residents was the best experience ever. Dude was rescued by the charity when he was 3 months old, he would not have survived without the kindness and dedication of the charity. Dude certainly showed his appreciation and gratitude. Please come back to see us soon!" Roseland Court Care Home



"The residents at Penrice House thoroughly enjoy the afternoons when Dude visits. Dude has such a calming influence and the residents love interacting with him. Whenever Dude and the team visit, I know that it will be a fun filled afternoon with lots of smiles. I cannot thank Hugs enough for everything they do for us." Penrice House

Volunteering

Since May 2023, The Hugs Foundation has focussed on increasing volunteer numbers across a variety of roles. Having more volunteers on board to support us, ultimately means we can rescue and rehabilitate more horses, assist more vulnerable people through our well-being services and support our local community via our community outreach programmes. This charity year we have recruited over 20 dedicated, hard-working and enthusiastic volunteers into our small charity, increasing our numbers from 5 volunteers up to 25 volunteers. We are currently onboarding volunteers into multiple areas of the charity to further grow and develop our organisation. Tasks such as cleaning, labelling and selling second hand equine tack, writing our monthly newsletter, running stalls and activities at events for fundraising and helping to grow fruit, veg and herbs for the animals in our care are all great ways of getting involved with the charity, having an impact on the lives of animals and people and helping to make a difference in the community.



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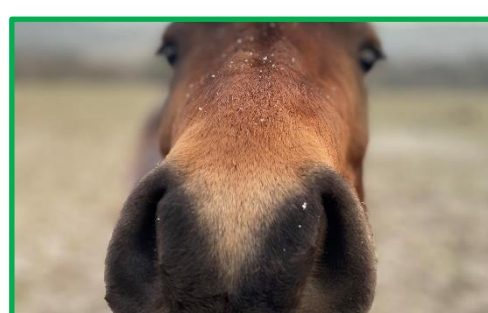
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Animal Rescue

We have rescued 24 horses and ponies and 3 donkeys in this charity year. We have also rehomed 28 horses and ponies. This now brings the total amount of equines rescued since Hugs opened in 2017 to 214 and 167 rehomed, along with over 200 other animals.



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



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