



End of Project Report – WiRE

Women in Empowerment
& Recovery

Abstract

End of project monitoring and evaluation report for The WiRE Project (ID: 20270463) at the end of Year One, from 20th May 2024 to 19th May 2026

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1. Executive Summary

This report presents an overview of the final year of the WiRE project and reflects on the grant period as a whole. Delivered by The Barn at Easington, the project set out to support women recovering from trauma-based addiction through nature-based wellbeing, creativity, food production, volunteering and enterprise development.¹ Over two years, the project evolved from a small-scale programme of women-only arts and nature-based sessions into a distinctive and influential model of recovery practice rooted in love, connection, safety, creativity and the land.

What stands out most strongly from the evidence is that WiRE created something that women repeatedly described as rare, necessary and life-changing: a safe female-only place where they could recover, grow, learn, belong and be seen differently. Across quarterly reports, self-assessment data, 479 end-of-session reflections, event evaluations and the final focus group, the same themes recur with remarkable consistency: peace, belonging, confidence, connection, hope, skill, and the transformative value of nature.

The project met its core aims and exceeded expectations in several areas. It developed strong evidence of impact for women participants, contributed to improved family and community relationships, supported volunteer and practitioner learning, strengthened The Barn's specialist practice, and generated more collaboration than originally anticipated. By 18 months, the project had worked with at least 53 organisations and 100 practitioners and artists, significantly exceeding the original target of 10 organisations and 80 practitioners. It also leveraged substantial additional funding and seeded follow-on work including Together We Heal & Recover, WISHED, and the emerging Growing Hope model.

At the same time, the project was honest about challenge. Women's recovery is not linear. The project worked in the context of relapse, exclusionary thresholds within treatment systems, trauma, poverty, stigma, unstable housing, and the emotional labour required to hold women safely through change. Those complexities did not invalidate the outcomes. Rather, they help explain why the project's strongest achievements lie not in quick or simplistic uplift, but in deeper changes: increased trust, stronger peer relationships, skill development, renewed identity, reduced shame, and the building of a community where women felt accepted, useful, creative and hopeful.

2. Project Overview.

2.1 The organisational context.

The WiRE project fits directly with the governing objectives of The Barn at Easington: organising and delivering outdoor educational, cultural and community activity; creating a sustainable centre in harmony with the natural environment; and promoting healthy lifestyles alongside a deeper understanding and enjoyment of the local area, landscape, wildlife and social history. From the outset, WiRE was not conceived simply as a programme of sessions, but as part of a wider place-based and relational practice model emerging through The Barn and the unanticipated development of Tina's Haven Nature Reserve on the East Durham coast at Horden.²

2.2 The purpose of WiRE

WiRE intended to support women suffering trauma-based addiction by promoting personal growth and recovery through connection with the land, each other and themselves. Women were offered opportunities to grow, harvest and cook food, participate in rewilding and gardening activity, and learn traditional and creative skills such as willow weaving, preserving, herbalism, natural product making, writing, photography and fabric craft. The project was delivered through a two-stage model that then developed into a broader ecology of recovery and progression:

- a) First, creating opportunities for women to be deeply connected to nature and creativity.
- b) Second, offering supported volunteering, training and employability pathways; and third, increasingly, incubating leadership, community presence and enterprise through the HOPE Box and public-facing events.

2.3 The intended outcomes

The original outcomes framed impact at several levels: for women in addiction recovery; for their families; for volunteers and practitioners; for The Barn as an organisation; for partner organisations and practitioners; and for the wider community. What is notable at the end of the grant is that these outcomes were not delivered in isolation from one another. Rather, the evidence suggests that WiRE worked because it built an interconnected system of change: women healed through safe relationships and nature-based practice; volunteers developed because they were trusted and included, families and communities were affected because women changed their relationships to themselves and others; and organisational and partnership development grew from the project's credibility, distinctiveness and relational ethic.

3. Delivery Across the Grant Period

3.1 Establishing delivery and engagement (Year 1)

The early phase of the project focused on establishing trust, rhythm and ways of working. In an early facilitated session, the women agreed a way of working and being with each other that was based upon the five essential elements of trauma intervention recognised by the Anna Freud Centre (Hobfoll et. al. 2007).³ See [Appendix 1](#).

In Quarter 1, seven arts and nature-based sessions and seven volunteer sessions had been delivered, and 28 women had already participated in six out of the first seven creative sessions. Activities included crafts, meditation, walking, making, cooking, foraging and gardening, and from the outset women described the space in terms of peace, acceptance and connection.



Figure 1: Making wild-flower headdresses and bouquets (10.7.2024)

By the end of Year 1, delivery had expanded to:

- 25 arts and nature-based sessions.
- 27 practical gardening sessions.
- Five HOPE Box enterprise workshops.
- Two family events.
- Two networking events.
- Three yoga and breath-work sessions.

At this stage, **64 women in addiction recovery had engaged with the project, alongside 10 volunteers, six of whom had begun to form a sustained core group.**



Figure 2: Work begins ahead of schedule to transform the horse-box into a mobile pop-up shop (Quarter 2, 2024)

A significant contextual change during the early phase was that many women accessing WiRE through *Addiction North East (ANE)* were no longer permitted to engage due to service-level restrictions on participation. This had a direct impact on the profile of early participants and required the project to adapt its delivery and recruitment pathways.

3.2 Transition and expansion of the participation model (Year 2)

In response to this change, and reflecting women's evolving needs, the project deliberately developed a broader, more independent and **grassroots network of engagement**. This included partnerships with women-led recovery and community organisations such as *Sangini*, *Her Circle*, *FREE Women's Community*, *Recovering Justice Women's Group*, *Recovery Church Newcastle*, and the *North East African and Caribbean Association*, including groups working specifically with Black and minoritised women.



Figure 3: Diwali in Nature (WiRE Networking with Sangini 16.10.2025)

By Quarter 6, the project had further expanded delivery to include:

- 40 arts and nature-based sessions.
- 37 practical gardening sessions.
- Seven additional HOPE Box sessions.
- Seven enterprise workshops.
- Three networking events.
- Six family sessions and three family stays.

Through this phase, WiRE evolved from a structured programme into a **multi-strand, relational model**, combining recovery support, volunteering, enterprise development, family engagement and community-facing activity.

3.3 Participation and engagement profile (two-year register)

Over the full two-year period, the WiRE register records **574 attendances across all activities, alongside 479 completed evaluations**, representing a strong overall evaluation return rate of **83%**, which gives confidence in the robustness of the project's wider evidence base.

Over the course of the project:

- **A total of 80–90 women were reached** through layered and flexible engagement pathways.
- **WiRE worked directly with 43 women across the two-year project**, including 29 women who engaged in sustained and meaningful participation over time.
- **WiRE worked intensively and meaningfully with at least 29 women.**

Analysis of participation shows a **clear three-tier engagement model**:

- a) **Sustained engagement (core group)**
29 women participated in three or more sessions, with an average engagement of **13 sessions**, representing the group with whom the project worked most meaningfully over time.
- b) **Extended engagement (regular but less frequent participants).**
A wider group of women attended between approximately **5 and 12 sessions**, often balancing recovery, family responsibilities and instability, but maintaining ongoing connection to the project.
- c) **Light-touch and networked engagement.**
A further cohort of women attended **1–5 sessions**, including those at earlier stages of recovery, those experiencing relapse and return, and those accessing WiRE through partner organisations or community events.

Within the sustained group, a core group of six volunteers attended between **35 and 59 sessions each**, demonstrating exceptional continuity, commitment and progression into informal leadership and peer support roles.

The two-year resister is tabulated in [Appendix 2](#).

3.4 Community, family and partnership participation

The register also evidences:

- Participation from multiple partner organisations, particularly in Year 2, strengthening the project's reach and relevance across different communities.
- Small-scale but consistent **family and children's involvement**, particularly linked to family sessions and community events.
- **Peak participation at exhibitions, seasonal events and community activities**, demonstrating the importance of public-facing moments in extending reach and reducing stigma.

3.5 Overall delivery reflection.

This trajectory matters because it shows that the project did not simply grow in size; it **deepened in quality and diversified in delivery**.

It developed:

- From a small programme into a **layered model of engagement**,
- From reliance on a single referral pathway to a **broad grassroots network**, and
- From participant engagement to **participation, contribution and leadership**.

In doing so, WiRE moved beyond delivering sessions to establishing a **sustained, relational recovery environment**, capable of supporting women at different stages of recovery while maintaining depth with those most committed to the work.

4. How the project impacted on women

4.1 A safe and accepting female-only space

The strongest and most consistent outcome across all the evidence is women's experience of safety, support and acceptance in female-only space. Baseline self-assessment scores were already relatively high in this area, suggesting women came into the project recognising the value of trusted female relationships and safe spaces. However, those scores improved further by Year 1 and remained high by Year 2. At baseline, the weighted average for "I have access to safe and accepting female-only spaces whenever I need them" was 3.33, rising to 3.78 in the Year 1 sample and remaining at 3.73 in the Year 2 sample. Trust in female workers rose from 3.42 at baseline to 3.78 in Year 1 and 3.80 in Year 2. Support for personal growth rose from 3.26 at baseline to 3.67 at both Year 1 and Year 2.

The qualitative data explains what these figures mean in lived experience. Across 479 end-of-session reflections, women repeatedly used words such as "safe", "accepted", "calm", "peaceful", "welcoming", and "able to be myself". One participant wrote:

"The session made me feel calm and at peace. I felt safe and able to be vulnerable."

Another said:

"This place is my safe space."

In the final focus group, a participant described the project as "essential to woman's healing", arguing that "being in a safe place allows people to be honest". Another spoke of:

"Acceptance what we all had for each other, no one feeling like more or less than anyone else".

This was not incidental to the project. It was the condition that made change possible. As one of the participant-volunteers reflected at the end of the project:

"Being here has been life changing, I've met amazing woman and made me a stronger person".

An artist-practitioner described watching "women heal" in nature, while another described how the women had transformed into:

"A committed, caring and effective team... self-organised and confident, able to pass their knowledge onto others".

These reflections suggest that the safe female-only nature of WiRE was not simply therapeutic. It was generative: it enabled honesty, reciprocity, collective strength and action.



Figure 4: Arts and nature-based session - Our Hopes and Dreams event, 23 April 2026.

Case study 1: From surviving to belonging.

One of the clearest patterns across the qualitative data is women's movement from isolation and guardedness towards belonging, confidence and sustained participation. In the final focus group, one participant said:

"Being able to follow things through, in my life I've always been a quitter. being able to follow something through and still be here and see how things have grown it's been beautiful."

She described the impact of collaborative creative work over several weeks, where others held the thread when someone was absent, and reflected that:

“Life skills and people picking things out that you are good at, had a massive impact on my life.”

This account is consistent with the session reflections, which contain many references to wanting “to keep coming”, “to come back”, “to continue with the sessions”, and not wanting the project to end. Women repeatedly described the Barn as a place they longed to return to, rather than a one-off service encounter. One participant wrote:

“Love the fact that this feels like home.”

Another wrote, “To keep connected, love to feel I have a forever family.”

The emotional significance of this consistency is especially important in the context of addiction recovery, where rupture and instability are common.

4.2 Personal growth, confidence and self-worth

The project generated substantial evidence of increased confidence, agency and personal growth, although not in a simplistic or linear way. In the Year 2 self-assessment sample, “confidence in self”, rose from a baseline weighted average of 2.07 to 2.60, while “I feel like I have power and control over my own life” rose from 2.14 to 2.80. “I often do activities and tasks that I find rewarding” rose from 2.42 to 2.87. These are meaningful shifts in a context where women were often living with entrenched experiences of trauma, stigma, poverty and systems that routinely diminished their sense of power.

The final focus group gives these shifts texture. One participant-volunteer described how the project enabled her sons to see:

“A confident mam who they can rely on now; they can be proud of me.”

Another said:

“My daughters have their mam back. My dad is so proud of me.”

Another reflected on no longer being “the odd one out”, saying that being at the Barn had made her “overall be a more confident person”, more grounded at home and better able to talk openly with her children. For one participant, the most striking change was not just feeling different, but being publicly visible in a new way:

“The project is recognised by other people, allowing the public to view our exhibition. personally, being able to work together to be confident.”

This confidence was not performative. It grew through doing, making, being trusted and being seen. In the May 2026 exhibition celebration at National Trust Gibside, participants described the event as “powerful”, “inspiring”, “thought provokingly beautiful”, and “a chance to shine”. One wrote:

“To see my work on display is amazing... I’ve come a long way... to a strong person I am today.”

Another said the event had given:

“Women who would not normally have a voice the opportunity to shine”.

These public moments of recognition mattered because they turned internal change into social acknowledgment.

Case study 2: The exhibition as public recovery and collective voice.

The project’s creative and exhibition work provides a powerful example of how personal growth, confidence and anti-stigma practice came together. The November 2025, “Our Story Isn’t Over” exhibition involved 42 participants over two days, represented 14 organisations, and generated 34 feedback forms, an 81 per cent response rate. Participants described the exhibition as “profound, moving”, “made of love, warmth and hope”, “an incredible celebration of healing”, and an opportunity to share “honest words” and “glimpses of insight of the women’s minds, both positive and negative”. One Syrian woman participant said simply:

“Life is so hard I love the Barn and I love Nicola.”

The significance of the exhibition was not just aesthetic. It made women’s recovery visible on their own terms. It broke with stigma by showing women as artists, photographers, poets, organisers and narrators of their own lives. In the focus group, one participant described the impact of seeing a man take a photograph of her poem and ask if he could use it in a support group. She said:

“It made me feel very special,”

Another participant described being “very nervous” about the exhibition but also recognised that it had enabled the public to see their work and confidence. This kind of testimony shows that artistic practice was not an optional extra to recovery. It was a means of re-authoring identity in public.

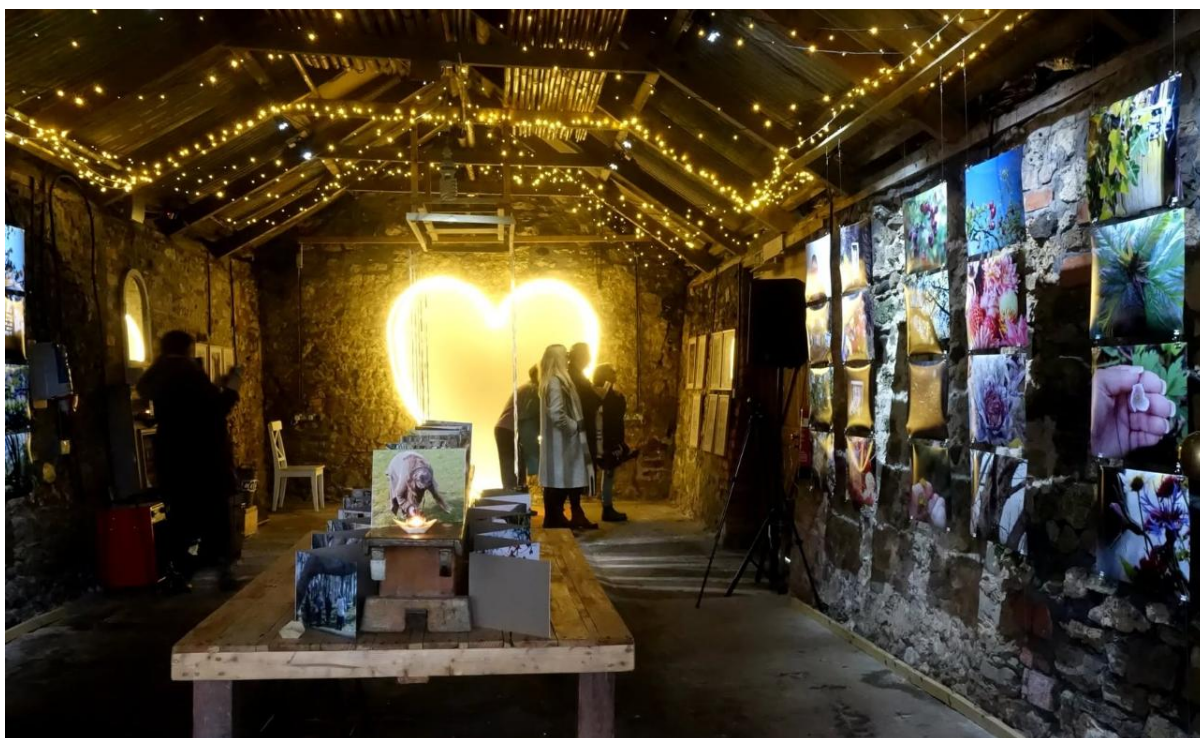


Figure 5: “Our Story Isn’t Over” debut, The Barn at Easington, 27th and 28th November 2025

4.3 Nature, healing and recovery

One of the most distinctive features of WiRE is that women did not simply receive support in nature-based settings; they actively interpreted nature as part of recovery. Across the reflections dataset, women repeatedly wrote about peace in the woods, connection at the beach, the calm of the labyrinth, fresh air, flowers, gardening, sowing, harvesting and making things from what had been grown or foraged. They did not describe nature as scenery. They described it as healing, grounding, regulatory and restorative. One participant wrote:

“Today was healing. I hugged a tree and felt peaceful and so much lighter.”

Another wrote:

“Really enjoyed the walk, the peace within the woods and a change to recover in nature.”

In the focus group, a participant-volunteer described one of the project highlights as:

“To be able to sit back and watch people relax in nature and watch women heal”

Linking that directly to learning about foraged wild garlic, the benefits of plants, and:

“Understanding how to calm the nervous system.”



Figure 6: Walking the Labyrinth, Solstice Women's Circle Event, 22nd June 2025

Another participant-volunteer described the “Three Sisters” bed as bringing “so much joy” because of growing “something from nothing but a seed”, while using the analogy of plants that encourage each other to grow.⁴ An artist-practitioner noted visible physical change, stating that women had become “fitter and flexible” through the gardening sessions, with likely positive mental health effects too.

This integration of nature and healing is also visible in the exhibitions and public events. At Gibside, participants explicitly recognised:

“Nature and creativity as tools for recovery.”

And described:

“The healing power of nature and how grounding that can be”.

In the November exhibition feedback, participants referred to:

“The healing power of community and nature.”

And spoke of wanting these kinds of experiences for other women who had lived through trauma. Nature, then, was not merely therapeutic context. It was part of the project’s epistemology: a way women made sense of themselves, each other and the possibility of growth.

4.4 Skills, creativity and employability

The project has generated strong evidence of skills development in food production, gardening, creativity and traditional crafts. In the Year 2 self-assessment sample, food production skills rose from a baseline weighted average of 2.02 to 2.67, and creativity/traditional craft skills rose from 1.98 to 2.80. **These are among the clearest quantitative improvements across the outcome framework.**

The qualitative evidence helps explain why. Women did not simply say they had learned skills; they described specific practices they had taken up and carried into daily life: cooking soup, making chutney, writing down recipes, foraging wild garlic, gardening at home, taking photographs, making books, creating body butter, painting and learning to use the camera.

In the reflections, women regularly said they wanted more cooking, more art, more photography, to start their own gardens, or to recreate recipes with family. Several responses in the “take away” section show the combination of practical and emotional gains: “knowledge, love, lettuce”, “a full belly and connection”, “a sense of achievement and hope”, “better able to use the camera”, and “that I can garden”.



Figure 7: Harvesting apples, Autumn 2025

Skills were also linked to employability and progression, particularly through the volunteer and HOPE Box strand. Women participated in training in food safety, mental health awareness, safeguarding, first aid, social enterprise development, herbalism, social media and marketing, and community gardening.

In the final six months alone, volunteers accessed social media and marketing training and networking/products training through The Millin Charity, mental health training through Mind, training through Growing Through Communities, a writing for mental health workshop, a wild medicine course, and a three-day residential herbalism course. The reports also show that two women gained Level 3 first aid, three gained Level 3 safeguarding, and four took part in social enterprise training with Argus.

Case study 3: The HOPE Box as progression, visibility and possibility

The development of the HOPE Box captures the project's progression pathway particularly well. What began as a horse-box conversion became a mobile expression of recovery, skill, community presence and enterprise imagination. In the focus group, one participant-volunteer said that:

"Taking the HOPE Box out and spreading awareness of recovery shows there is life after addiction."

Another described how taking the HOPE Box into public spaces had inspired her to apply for a volunteer role with the National Trust. Another artist-practitioner reflected on the dramatic transformation of the team over two years, describing the women as "committed, caring and effective", capable of passing their knowledge on to others.



Figure 8; The HOPE Box in action – serving hope at Tina's Haven Nature Reserve (31.3.2025)

This matters because the HOPE Box did not only provide enterprise activity. It enabled women to be visible in the community in ways that contradicted stigma. It placed them in relation to customers, visitors, funders and the wider public as confident contributors. That is why so many of the project's later reflections speak not only about personal healing but also about wanting to grow the HOPE Box, expand it, make it known, and build a future around it.



Figure 9: The HOPE Box at National Trust Gibside, “My Story Isn’t Over,” 1st May 2026

5. Impact on families and the wider community.

5.1 Families

The original project design anticipated direct family outcomes for 120 family members. In practice, this strand developed more slowly and differently than first planned. The reports are open about this. Formal extended-family engagement was not what the women most wanted in the early phase, particularly as the project adapted following changes in its relationship with Addictions North East. However, by the second year the Barn had developed a more grounded and realistic family strand through family sessions, family stays, exhibitions and community events. By Quarter 6, 12 children from nine families had participated in WiRE networking and family sessions, alongside six family sessions and three family stays in Quarters 5 and 6 supported by Barbour Trust funding.



Figure 10: Butterflies and Bees Family session, 1st August 2025

The focus group evidence is especially important here. Several participants spoke very directly about changed family relationships. One participant-volunteer said:

“My sons are happy with a confident mam who they can rely on now; they can be proud of me.”

She also described the “Three Sisters” bed helping her communicate with her mother, acting as:

“A good bridge and something I could talk to my mam about”.

Another said:

“I couldn’t speak to my kids about feelings and emotions and now I can... we have a very good open relationship.”

Another participant said, “my daughters have their mam back”, while another artist-practitioner described how the project had changed her understanding of mental health in ways that helped her support her daughters at home.

These are not universal or uncomplicated family stories. Another participant said she was unsure of the impact on family because they “tell me I look sad and drain them” and did not always feel able to share because of negative family dynamics. Yet even in this case, she described how support from women in the group had helped her support her daughter, and how taking her daughter to Gibside had boosted her daughter’s mental health and led her to buy a bike.

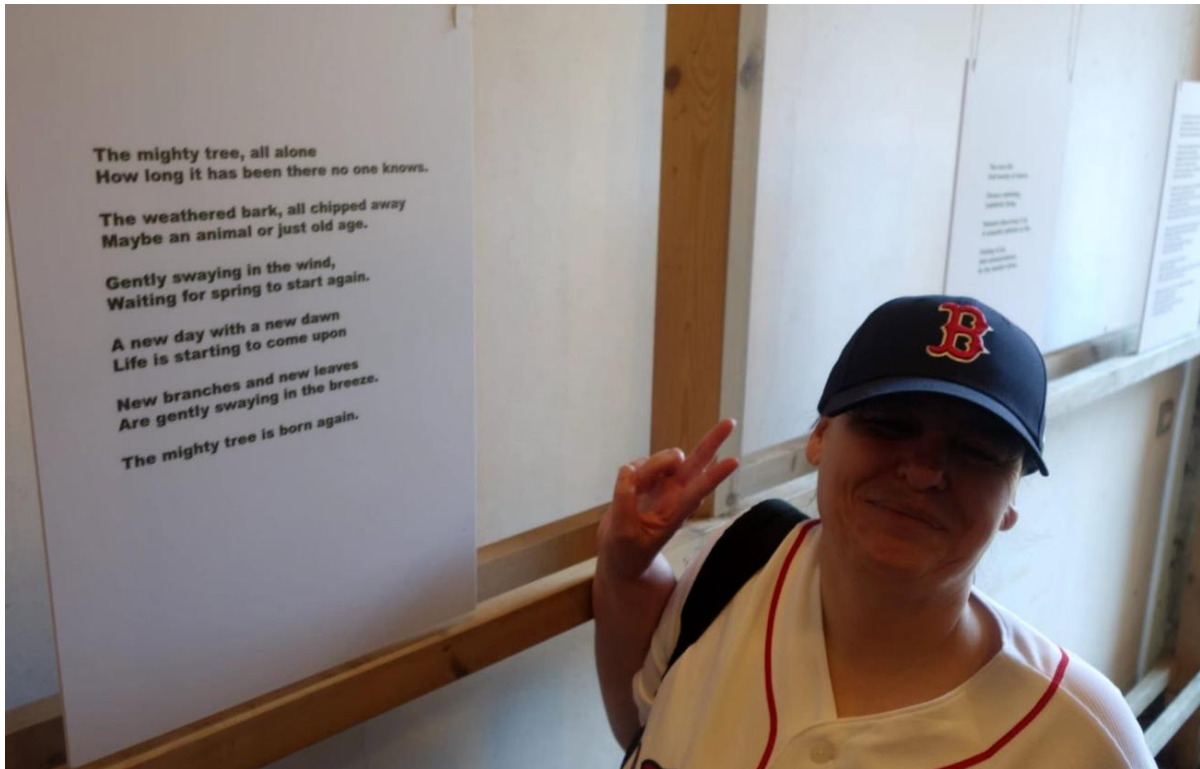


Figure 11: WiRE poet, showing one of her exhibits at National Trust Gibside, “Our Story Isn’t Over”, 1st May 2026

The project’s family impact, then, was not one-dimensional. It lay partly in improved communication and partly in wider shifts in how women showed up as mothers, daughters and carers. It also lay in the fact that women had somewhere to process their own needs, boundaries and peace, which in turn altered family life.

Quantitatively, the relationships domain in self-assessment data shows modest but meaningful improvement at Year 1 and a more mixed picture by Year 2. This is consistent with what might be expected in women’s lives marked by trauma, family fracture, child removal, violence and stigma. The strongest family-related gains appear in qualitative narratives rather than large statistical shifts. That is important in understanding the character of the outcome: family change seems to have been real, but uneven and often mediated through women’s own growth in confidence, openness and emotional regulation.

5.2 Wider community

If family work developed gradually, community impact accelerated strongly in the second phase of the project. By Quarter 6, the project could evidence at least 250 wider community participants through a sequence of events and public activities, including the Horden community walk, the debut of the HOPE Box at Tina's Haven tree planting, the Community Nature Festival, public film and food events, and the November exhibition. The festive event to celebrate the planting of the Sycamore Gap Tree of Hope had 60 participants made up of 42 adults and 18 children, while the Our Story Isn't Over exhibition involved 42 participants across two days and the final exhibition celebration at Gibside drew approximately 40 attendees.



Figure 12: Planting the Tree Of Hope (Sycamore Gap Sapling), 29th November 2025

The significance of these events is not just that people attended them, but the story they told about women in recovery. Participants in the festive Tree of Hope event described:

"The sense of togetherness and creation of hope."

"Strangers became friends, friends became family."

And the event as:

"Welcoming, supportive inclusive perfect for everyone".

They spoke of being filled with “hope for future healing and connection”, and of adversity being transformed into something collective and meaningful. In the “Our Hopes and Dreams” event, participants emphasised the role of community, diversity and emotional safety, taking away “friendship”, “community”, “love”, “kindness and possibilities”, and “what can be achieved when you bring nature and nurture together”.

These narratives show that the community impact of WiRE was not simply representational. It was cultural and relational. Through public exhibitions, the HOPE Box, Tina’s Haven events, and cross-sector gatherings, the project shifted how women in recovery could be seen. It made them visible not as problems to be managed, but as people with creativity, insight, skills, humour, histories and futures. That is central to the anti-stigma outcome. The project reports cite wider media coverage and public recognition, including Living North, BBC and ITV coverage, the naming of Tina’s Haven by the National Trust, and the use of WiRE-informed research in wider discourse on resilience and relational recovery (Placek, Adair, Baker and Robson, 2025).⁵

In this sense, WiRE can be understood as actively challenging hegemonic narratives around addiction, which position women through deficit, stigma and control. Drawing on Collins’ matrix of domination (2000), the project enabled women to reshape intersecting experiences of marginalisation through collective visibility, voice and agency.

From a Gramscian perspective, these practices disrupted dominant cultural norms by creating alternative narratives rooted in lived experience, creativity and community, shifting how women in recovery are recognised and valued in the public sphere (Gramsci 1971).

6. Impact on volunteers, practitioners and the organisation

6.1 Volunteers and practitioners

The original project intended that 25 volunteers and practitioners would increase their knowledge and skills, gain qualifications, develop trauma-responsive understanding and experience solidarity with participants. By the end year two the project had worked with 14 volunteers in total, with eight active core volunteers and one on maternity leave.

In addition, volunteers, practitioners, artists and growers participated in a range of training and development opportunities. The practical and qualitative evidence shows that this strand of the project was especially generative, not only in equipping women with specific skills but in enabling them to become organisers, peer supporters, makers, hosts and ambassadors.

The focus group gives perhaps the clearest sense of what this meant. One participant-volunteer said that being part of the project had taught her:

“How to form meaningful and lasting relationships with people. I know how to talk to people and consider feelings.”

Another said she had been:

“Two years clean.”

And did not believe she would have achieved that without the people around the table. Another reminded the group that:

"I never forget to put my need first and it's not selfish."

These are not narrow training outcomes. They are examples of women developing forms of emotional, relational and reflective competence that matter both personally and organisationally.

For practitioners, the learning was equally profound. One artist-practitioner said that the project had:

"Made us re-think about how we want to run this place."

And had been:

"Life changing"

While also demanding balance because the Barn is both a workplace and home. Another said the project had given her a "greater understanding" of trauma, addiction and mental health, enabling her to "stand up and talk about things" within her own family. Another reflected that the work had required her to "look at self with wider eyes". In this sense, the project did not only train practitioners; it changed them.



Figure 13: Final volunteers gardening session, WiRE, 20th May 2026

6.2 Organisational development

The Barn at Easington as an organisation has clearly developed deeper knowledge and specialism through WiRE. This is evident in the reports through the articulation of a distinct practice model, the increasing sophistication of evaluation, the quality of public and cross-sector work, the development of Tina's Haven and the HOPE Box, and the ability to leverage follow-on projects and funding. It is also evident in the critical honesty with which the reports reflect on challenge, including group size, relapse, boundaries, risk, emotional labour and the need for full cost recovery.

The organisation's learning has not remained internal. It has been shared outwardly through workshops, practice development sessions and cross-sector events, including critical conversations on professionalism, anti-racist practice and trauma-responsive work. The report on the 6 May 2026 Together We Heal & Recover – sharing, learning, conversation & brunch event shows the project operating as a convening space capable of influencing dialogue across community, voluntary, statutory and academic sectors. Participants described the event as creating safe and welcoming conditions in which their “nervous system relax[ed]”, enabling action-oriented reflection on inclusion and organisational change.



Figure 14: WiRE final celebration event and Women's Circle, May 2026

7. Collaboration, networks and systems influence

One of the areas where the project most clearly exceeded its original ambitions was in collaboration. The target of 10 organisations and 80 practitioners benefiting from more collaboration and stronger networks was surpassed by a wide margin. By Quarter 6, the project had worked with at least 53 organisations and around 100 practitioners and artists, including universities, grassroots organisations, statutory services, community groups, funders and cultural partners.

However, it is not only the number that matters. The project's quarterly and event reports show that collaboration was not tokenistic. It involved shared events, mutual practice development, co-delivery, strategic dialogue, and the seeding of new pathways. The project's partnership with Sangini and the North East African & Caribbean Association in Together We Heal & Recover is particularly important here because it extended WiRE's practice into anti-racist and intercultural work in East Durham.



Figure 15: Collaboration between FREE Women's Community and National Trust that grew from WiRE (Photo credit to FREE)

The collaborative learning event on 6th May 2026, as part of “Together we Heal and Recover,” brought together 48 participants and five facilitators from 25 organisations, generating strong evidence of movement from reflection to organisational and institutional action. One participant said the event created:

“A safe and respectful space where people could share lived experiences.”

Another said:

“Not being racist is not enough... this challenges my inner self.”

This shows that WiRE’s impact was not confined to supporting individual women. It also helped create the conditions in which professional practice, organisational culture and local networks could shift. In that sense, one of the project’s major achievements has been to demonstrate that relational, women-led, nature-based work can carry credibility not only with participants, but with partner organisations and institutions.

8. Monitoring, evaluation and the strength of the evidence base

The project’s monitoring and evaluation methods were wide-ranging and well aligned to its theory of change. They included baseline and follow-up self-assessment, session reflection forms, collective journals, interviews, conversations, observations, photography, focus groups, skills audits, event evaluations and desk-based learning. One of the strengths of the overall evidence base is that it does not rely on a single source. Where survey return rates were partial, they were triangulated by rich narrative evidence and repeated reflective data across the life of the project.

The session reflection dataset is especially important here. In 479, end of session reflection responses there were 462 “say” responses, 455 “dreams” responses, 449 “take away” responses and 439 “bin” responses. Across these, certain patterns recur with remarkable force: women valued peace, friendship, love, hope, nature, being accepted, feeling safe, and learning practical and creative skills. They wanted to return, continue, keep growing, keep creating, and carry the feeling of the sessions into their lives at home. The “bin” responses are particularly striking because the most common answer was some version of “nothing”, with the most frequent named things to leave behind being anxiety, fear, self-doubt or negativity, rather than criticism of the activities themselves.

The end-of-project focus group is also critical qualitative evidence because it offers retrospective and relational analysis rather than one-off post-session reaction. It confirms many of the project’s core claims: that women changed over time; that the project affected families as well as participants; that the Barn model enabled honesty and confidence; that creativity and gardening offered ways to follow things through; and that the project helped practitioners as well as women re-think how trauma-responsive spaces can work. Because these reflections came from both participant-volunteers and artist-practitioners, they provide unusually strong insight into what changed, for whom, and why.

In addition to the qualitative and self-assessment data, a detailed two-year participation register was maintained, recording all attendances and engagement across sessions, activities and events. This register provides a robust quantitative record of engagement, demonstrating both the depth of sustained participation and the breadth of wider reach. It underpins the participation analysis presented in Section 3 and strengthens confidence in the interpretation of outcomes across the report.



Figure 16: Community Nature Festival, Tina's Haven Nature Reserve, 26th July 2025

9. Financial reflection and value for money

Across the grant period, the project delivered a high level of activity and impact while also leveraging substantial additional funding. By Quarter 6, the reports state that the project had leveraged an additional £84,658 from the original Community Fund investment, with the potential to go further through pending applications. This included funding for family activities, anti-racist and community cohesion work, exhibitions, Point North activity, and the WISHED project. In practical terms, this means the WiRE project did not simply spend grant funding well. It generated confidence, partnerships and visible outcomes that attracted further investment and extended the life and influence of the work.

Value for money also needs to be understood through the project's methodology. WiRE did not work by delivering high-volume low-intensity contact. It worked by creating the depth of safety, continuity and relational consistency required for women in recovery to feel and act differently. The reports make clear that smaller numbers often produced better quality, and that future work should be costed on a full recovery basis with greater recognition of administration, reflection, development time and emotional labour. That is an important learning point rather than a weakness. It reflects a mature understanding that transformative work with traumatised women cannot be sustainably delivered on invisibilised labour.

A conservative proxy Social Return on Investment (SROI) model was developed to assess value for money in relation to the public investment of £110,040. Using UK Government wellbeing valuation guidance and volunteering valuation frameworks, the project is estimated to have generated between **£0.79 and £1.47 of social value for every £1 invested**, with a cautious central estimate of **£1.13 per £1 invested**.

This model is intentionally conservative and includes only monetised impacts relating to sustained wellbeing improvements among women with regular engagement and the social value of volunteering. It does not include wider value generated through family outcomes, community impact, stigma reduction, partnership development or long-term legacy assets, all of which are evidenced elsewhere in the report. This indicates that even on a cautious estimate, the project is operating at or above a break-even point in social value terms, before accounting for its wider and longer-term impacts.

Detailed project expenditure for the 2-year WiRE project is in [Appendix 4](#).

10. Overall reflection on the grant period

Looking across the two years as a whole, the evidence suggests that WiRE achieved what it set out to do, although often in richer and more layered ways than first imagined. It clearly created safe and accepting female-only space. It increased skills in food production, gardening, cooking, preserving, creativity and traditional craft. It strengthened relationships and support between women. It increased confidence, hope and purpose. It contributed to better family communication and improved family dynamics for some women. It developed volunteer pathways and qualifications. It increased organisational capacity and specialism. It greatly expanded collaboration. And it affected the wider community by reducing stigma, creating hopeful public narratives and making women visible differently.

At the same time, the project did not claim impossible transformation. Family relationships remained complex. Some wellbeing indicators in Year 1 were flatter than hoped. Many women were still navigating trauma, poverty, relapse and systems that cut them off from support at the point of greatest need. The project could not solve all of that. **But it did show what becomes possible when women are met not through punishment, suspicion or professional distance, but through connection, creativity, land, trust and time. That is perhaps the project's most important contribution.**

This assessment is strengthened by the project's participation profile, which demonstrates both depth and reach. As set out in Section 3, WiRE worked intensively and meaningfully with at least 29 women through sustained engagement, while maintaining broader access through flexible and networked participation pathways. This layered model is critical in understanding how outcomes were achieved, particularly within the context of trauma, relapse and instability. **WiRE did not merely deliver activities; it offered a different recovery logic based on relationship, trust, nature and participation over time.**

One participant-volunteer said in the final focus group:

"I am two years clean – genuinely don't think id have achieved that if it wasn't for you people."

Another said:

“Being here has been life changing.”

Another said:

“The WiRE sessions are essential to woman’s healing.”

These statements should not be romanticised or universalised beyond what they are. But they are powerful evidence that for at least some women, this project made a profound difference. Taken together with the quantitative shifts and the broader body of evidence, they strongly support the conclusion that WiRE has been a successful, impactful and highly distinctive Community Fund project.

11. Legacy and next steps

A significant strength of the WiRE project is that it does not end with the conclusion of the Reaching Communities funding. Instead, it has already translated into a sustained and resourced next phase. On 15 April 2026, The Barn at Easington was awarded £250,727 over three years from the National Lottery Community Fund to deliver the next stage of this work through the Growing Hope Project. This is a clear indicator of both funder confidence and the strength of the evidence generated through WiRE.

Growing Hope has been directly shaped by the learning and outcomes of WiRE. It builds explicitly on what has been proven to work: women supporting and empowering each other to sustain recovery through connection, creativity, and working collectively on the land. It also responds to what women themselves have consistently asked for across the life of the project: more opportunities to grow, make, learn, earn, and remain connected within a safe and purposeful community.

Where WiRE established the foundations of recovery, belonging and skill development, Growing Hope will deepen and extend this into longer-term sustainability, enterprise and ecological practice. The project will maintain and expand the existing market garden, further embedding food production as both a wellbeing activity and a practical skill base. It will also continue to develop the HOPE Box mobile shop, which has already become a visible and valued symbol of recovery in the community, enabling women to distribute and sell produce and engage directly with the public.

A key development within Growing Hope is the design and creation of a new nature-friendly apothecary garden. This development reflects a deepening of the project’s integration of nature, learning and enterprise. The garden will serve a dual purpose:

- a) It will act as a safe and sensory sanctuary, where women can find peace, reflection and emotional regulation within a carefully designed natural environment.
- b) It will also function as a productive growing space, where plants are cultivated for herbal tinctures, teas, wellbeing products, natural dyes for textiles and materials for willow crafts, all of which will be processed and sold through the HOPE Box.

This next phase therefore represents a shift from participation to co-production and value creation, where women are not only recipients of support but active contributors to a living system of recovery, land stewardship and enterprise.

The legacy of WiRE is particularly evident in how this new project foregrounds skills, progression and sustainability. Throughout the two-year project, women consistently demonstrated both appetite and capacity for learning: engaging in gardening, cooking, preserving, herbalism, cooking, craft, photography and marketing.

The final six months of training, including social media and marketing, mental health training, herbalism, wild medicine and writing for wellbeing, reflect an emerging pathway towards confidence in enterprise and employment.

Growing Hope will build directly on this by continuing to provide:

- Supported volunteering opportunities aligned with individual development.
- Access to structured training in areas such as marketing, communication, social enterprise and business planning.
- Opportunities for women to apply their skills in real-world contexts, particularly through food production, product development and sales via the HOPE Box.



Figure 17: The Horse Box debut, Tina's Haven Nature Reserve (31.3.2025)

Crucially, this approach is not only about employability in a traditional sense. It is about building the confidence, capability and collective infrastructure required for women to contribute meaningfully to a shared project that has both social and economic value. It also reflects the project's ambition to move towards self-sustainability beyond the three-year funding period, embedding income generation, skills retention and community ownership within the model itself.

The qualitative evidence suggests that this transition is both timely and necessary. In the final focus group, participants spoke not only about recovery, but about following things through, contributing to shared projects, and being recognised for their strengths. One participant described the importance of:

“Being able to follow something through and still be here and see how things have grown”,

While another spoke about the HOPE Box as a way of:

“Spreading awareness of recovery”

And showing that:

“There is life after addiction.”

These reflections demonstrate readiness for the next stage: one in which recovery is sustained not only through support, but through participation, skill, purpose and shared endeavour.

There is also a clear demand for continuation. Across session reflections and event evaluations, women have repeatedly expressed a desire “to keep coming”, “for this to continue”, and for the work to “grow stronger”. Community participants and partners have echoed this, with comments such as “every town needs a Barn” and calls for expansion of this model beyond the local area. The award of Growing Hope funding therefore represents not a new beginning, but a continuation of an established, trusted and valued approach.

In this sense, the legacy of WiRE is multi-layered. It includes:

- A proven model of nature-based, trauma-responsive recovery for women.
- A cohesive and committed network of women participants and volunteers who have grown in confidence, skill and responsibility over time.
- A strengthened organisational identity and specialism for The Barn at Easington.
- Established partnerships and increased sector recognition and collaboration.
- A body of robust qualitative and quantitative evidence supporting the effectiveness of the approach.
- Tangible assets, including the market garden, HOPE Box and emerging Tina's Haven landscape.

Growing Hope provides the structure and resource to carry this legacy forward. It also offers the opportunity to address some of the limitations identified in WiRE, particularly the need for longer-term engagement, deeper skill development, and clearer pathways into sustainable livelihood and community contribution.

Ultimately, the transition from WiRE to Growing Hope reflects one of the most important findings of the project as a whole: that recovery is not a short-term intervention, but a process that requires time, space, trust, skill and meaningful participation. The next phase builds on that understanding by embedding recovery within a living system of land, community, creativity and enterprise, ensuring that the impact of WiRE is not only sustained, but continues to grow.

12. Concluding statement

In relation to the original outcomes set out at the start of the project (see [Appendix 3](#)), the evidence presented throughout this report demonstrates that WiRE has broadly achieved, and in several areas exceeded, its intended outcomes across women participants, families, volunteers, organisational development, partnerships and the wider community.

WiRE has shown that when women in recovery are offered a genuinely safe, non-judgemental, creative and nature-based space, they do not only feel better for a few hours. They begin to build trust, confidence, community, skill and a different sense of future. They reconnect with children, parents, memories, places and aspirations. They learn to grow things and, in doing so, often begin to grow themselves. Practitioners learn too. Communities see recovery differently. Organisations collaborate differently. A horse box becomes a symbol of hope. A nature reserve is named for a woman who died too young.

Taken together with the outcomes and outputs achieved across all areas of delivery, **this demonstrates that WiRE has successfully delivered a holistic and relational model of recovery that addresses individual, familial, organisational and community change.**



Figure 18: A toast to the future, gardener and grower and a WiRE volunteer sipping Rose Petal Glycerol on 3-day intensive herbal medicine course run by Solidarity Apothecary in Somerset

Appendix 1: WiRE Ways of working and being with each other

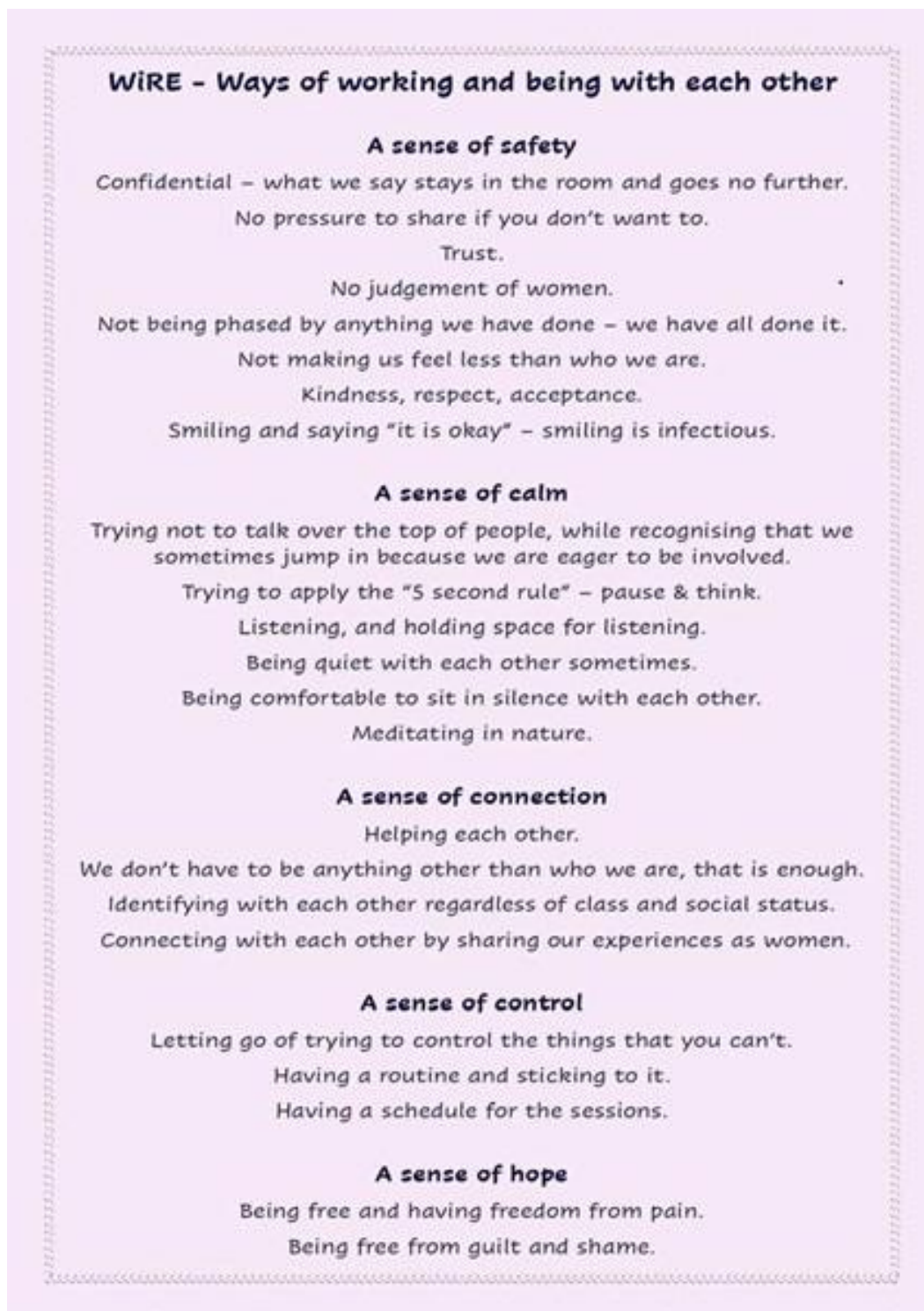


Figure 19: WiRE Ways of working and being with each other (22.5.2024), based on Hobfoll et. al. 2007.

Appendix 2: Key Participation Statistics (WiRE Register, 2024–2026)

The register data demonstrates a **layered participation model**, combining meaningful sustained engagement with 29 women, broader reach to 43 women overall, and extended engagement through community networks, underpinned by a strong volunteer base and high evaluation response rates.

Table 1: Key Participation Statistics (WiRE Register, 2024–2026)

Category	Measure	Value
Overall Engagement	Total attendances across all activities	574
	Total evaluation responses	479
	Overall evaluation response rate	83%
Women Reached	Total individual women participants	43
	Women engaged in sustained participation (3+ sessions)	29
	Estimated total reach including wider engagement pathways	80–90 women
Engagement Depth	Average number of sessions attended (sustained group)	13 sessions
	Highest level of individual attendance	35–59 sessions
Volunteer Engagement (V)	Total volunteers engaged	13–14
	Active core volunteers	~8
	Volunteers with highest engagement	35–59 sessions
Participation Model	Sustained engagement cohort	29 women (3+ sessions)
	Extended engagement cohort	5–12 sessions (approx.)
	Light-touch engagement cohort	1–5 sessions (approx.)
Partnership Engagement	Partner/community groups engaged	Multiple (including 6 core groups)
Family Participation	Children participating in sessions/events	Small cohort (recorded across multiple sessions)
Programme Structure	Total activities delivered (2 years)	100+ sessions/events (approx., across strands)

Appendix 3: Outcomes and Outputs for the Two-Year WiRE Project (Final Position at End of Grant)

Overall, the evidence demonstrates that WiRE achieved or exceeded its intended outcomes across most areas, particularly in relation to women's recovery, organisational development and partnership working, while achieving substantial and meaningful progress in family and community outcomes through a relational and emergent model of delivery

Table 2: Outcomes and Outputs for the Two-Year WiRE Project (Final Position at End of Grant)

Outcome Area	Original Target	Outputs Achieved	Outcomes Achieved (Evidence)	Assessment
Women participants	40 women accessing safe female-only space	- 40+ arts and nature sessions delivered - 37 gardening sessions - 7 HOPE Box sessions and enterprise workshops	- 43 women directly engaged - 29 women sustained engagement (3+ sessions) - 80–90 women reached overall through networks - Strong evidence of: • Increased confidence and agency • Skills development (food, craft, creative) • Improved relationships between women • Sustained recovery and wellbeing improvements	✓ Exceeded (reach) ✓ Achieved (depth)
Families	120 family members benefit from improved wellbeing and relationships	- 6 family sessions and 3 family stays delivered - Participation in community events and exhibitions	- 12 children from 9 families engaged directly - ~120+ community/family members engaged through events - Qualitative evidence of: • Improved communication with children	✓ Partially achieved (direct) ✓ Achieved (wider impact)

Outcome Area	Original Target	Outputs Achieved	Outcomes Achieved (Evidence)	Assessment
			• Rebuilding family relationships • Increased parental confidence and stability	
Volunteers and practitioners	25 gaining skills, qualifications, trauma-informed understanding	- 13–14 volunteers engaged - ~8 core volunteers sustained - Training delivered across: • Mental health • Safeguarding • First aid • Social enterprise • Herbalism	- Volunteers gained qualifications: • Level 2 mental health • Level 3 safeguarding • First aid certifications - Strong qualitative evidence of: • Increased skills and confidence • Trauma-informed practice understanding • Peer solidarity and leadership development	✅ Achieved (depth) ⚠️ Below numeric target but higher intensity and progression
Organisational development (The Barn)	Increased knowledge and specialism	- Delivery of multi-strand programme - Development of HOPE Box - Expansion into Tina's Haven nature reserve	- Evidence of: • Clear model of nature-based recovery practice • Increased organisational expertise • Improved evaluation and reflective practice • Successful follow-on funding secured	✅ Exceeded
Collaboration and networks	10 organisations and 80 practitioners	- 53 organisations engaged - ~100 practitioners and artists involved	- Evidence of: • Cross-sector collaboration • Knowledge-sharing and co-delivery • New pathways and learning	✅ Significantly exceeded

Outcome Area	Original Target	Outputs Achieved	Outcomes Achieved (Evidence)	Assessment
			(e.g. anti-racist practice, recovery models)	
Wider community	400 community members benefit from reduced stigma and improved relationships	- Community events delivered including: • Exhibitions • Festivals • HOPE Box events • Film and public events	- 250+ community participants evidenced directly - Strong qualitative evidence of: • Reduced stigma and changed perceptions • Increased community connection and inclusion • Public visibility of recovery narratives	 Substantially achieved (with strong qualitative evidence)

Appendix 4: Project expenditure Year's 1 and 2

Table 3: The WiRE Project, Year 1 - Expenditure

Expenditure items	Yr 1 Budget	Yr 2 Actual spend	<i>Difference</i>	Year 2 budget forecast	Year 2 revised budget forecast
Activity cost (1,2,3)	£4,555	£3,544	£1,011	£3,633	£3,988
Sessional fees (4,7,5,6)	£19,260	£18,888	£372	£19,553	£19,198
Volunteer costs (8)	£1,800	£2,570	-£770	£4,883	£4,883
Rent/ venue costs (9)	£1,875	£1,875	£0	£1,969	£1,969
Training (10)	£4,000	£4,011	-£11	£3,760	£3,760
Travel	£1,860	£1,715	£145	£0	£0
Office costs (11)	£1,758	£1,787	-£30	£1,784	£1,784
Equipment (13)	£8,000	£7,200	£800	£0	£1,745
Marketing & promotion (14)	£1,800	£1,800	£0	£1,890	£1,890
Evaluation (15)	£3,500	£3,329	£171	£3,500	£3,500
Overheads (16)	£5,273	£5,360	-£88	£5,353	£5,353
Uplift for HOPE Box (12)	£4,075	£3,931	£144	£5,925	£5,925
Total	£57,755	£56,010	£1,745	£52,250	£53,995

Table 4: The WiRE Project, Year 2 - Expenditure

Expenditure items	Quarter 1/ Year 2 (QTR 5)	Quarter 2/ Year 2 (QTR 6)	Quarter 3 & 4 - Year 2	TOTAL SPEND YEAR 2	Total Year 2 revised budget forecast	% Variance across 2 quarters
Activity cost (1,2,3)	£627.21	£704.72	£2,638.32	£3,970.25	£4,000.00	29.8
Sessional fees (4,7,5,6)	£4,128.58	£5,391.63	£9,699.79	£19,220.00	£19,198.00	-22.0
Volunteer costs (8)	£1,206.76	£370.00	£60.00	£1,636.76	£1,636.82	0.1
Rent/ venue costs (9)	£492.25	£492.25	£984.50	£1,969.00	£1,969.00	0.0
Training (10)	£1,374.95	£0.00	£3,613.20	£4,988.15	£4,988.15	0.0
Travel	£618.74	£226.00	£1,108.26	£1,953.00	£1,953.00	0.0
Office costs (11)	£446.00	£436.79	£873.56	£1,756.35	£1,756.35	0.0
Materials to upgrade shed (13)	£0.00	£0.00	£1,800.00	£1,800.00	£1,800.00	0.0
Marketing & promotion (14)	£795.60	£0.00	£1,094.40	£1,890.00	£1,890.00	0.0
Evaluation (15)	£695.00	£525.00	£2,279.00	£3,499.00	£3,500.00	1.0
Overheads (16)	£1,338.25	£1,310.60	£2,621.20	£5,270.05	£5,270.05	0.0
Uplift for HOPE Box (12)	£491.35	£2,284.06	£3,293.90	£6,069.31	£6,069.31	0.0
Total	£12,214.69	£11,741.05	£30,066.13	£54,021.87	£54,030.68	£8.81

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Notes and references

¹ The Barn at Easington is a re-wilded 30-acre farm on the Durham coast. It is a beautiful, calm, safe and natural outdoor space. The farm is being transformed from a chemical dominant arable farm to species-rich grassland. <https://www.thebarnateasington.co.uk/>

² Creating Tina's Haven nature reserve - A new nature reserve at Warren House, Horden, is being created in partnership with local community groups. Named Tina's Haven in memory of a young North East woman, Tina Robson, it will be a place where people and nature can recover and thrive. <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/north-east/durham-coast/creating-tinas-haven-nature-reserve>

³ The Anna Freud Centre is a pioneering mental health charity transforming care for children and young people through science, collaboration and clinical innovation. <https://www.annafreud.org/>

⁴ The Three Sisters Bed is a traditional gardening method that combines corn, beans, and squash to create a mutually beneficial environment. Each plant plays a crucial role in supporting the others' growth and maintaining a healthy ecosystem. <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/grow-your-own/features/three-sisters>

⁵ "County Durham nature reserve to give hope to those recovering from addiction and trauma" (ITV News, 4th April 2025), <https://www.itv.com/watch/news/county-durham-nature-reserve-to-give-hope-to-those-recovering-from-addiction-and-trauma/8gw0h0p>

"Nature reserve created in memory of woman who lost her life to addiction opens to support others" (ITV News, 30th November 2025) - <https://www.itv.com/watch/news/nature-reserve-created-in-memory-of-woman-who-lost-her-life-to-addiction-opens-to-support-others/bf5vpq4>

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