



August 2021

DARKSIDE RISING CIC

IMPACT REPORT

January 2020 - June 2021

DEVELOPED BY

Shantelle Svarc

Annabel Hunt

Robert Willmington

The purpose of this document

To summarise the activities of Darkside Rising CIC from inception in January 2020, through our first 18 months to June 2021.

To understand the impact of our projects on participants, particularly on their mental health and wellbeing.

To decide what comes next for Darkside Rising CIC and those we support.



We have co-created this document through:

Qualitative data collected at the end of the project, such as interviews, questionnaires and narrative storytelling.

Quantitative data collected throughout the project, such as anxiety, depression and wellbeing scores.

We would like to thank...

- The Lincolnshire Community Foundation and National Emergencies Trust for providing the support and funding necessary for this Impact Report to be developed.
- Rachel Boydell, final year Health and Social Care undergraduate at the University of Lincoln, for conducting the interviews and adding her impartial perspective to this research.
- Over 200 participants across the Heroes', Postnatal, Pelvic Floor, Spectrum and Untold Art Projects, who have offered their time and shared their experiences to be part of this.
- All those who have supported and guided Darkside Rising CIC as we found our way through our first 18 months and a global pandemic.
 - Dianne Slapp at Voluntary Centre Services and her Social Prescribing Team.
 - Rebecca McConville and her Neighbourhood Team.
 - Sarah Grundy and the Improve Network.
 - Caitlin Pointon, Sophie Deeks, Kate Cook and Linda O'Hara at Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust.
 - And countless more who have referred into our projects, shared our dreams and helped us create something truly incredible.



Background

Pre-Darkside Rising CIC

Darkside Training, a women-only and strength focused gym, was formed in 2014 and became a partnership between Shantelle Svarc and Robert Willmington in 2016.

Over time, it became clear that many of the women who needed it the most were still not able to access strength training, often for financial or mental health reasons.

In order to address these inequalities, and after securing initial project funding under Darkside Training, Darkside Rising was born.

Darkside Training donates their gym facilities, ensuring that Darkside Rising's overheads are minimal.

Our Mission

Darkside Rising CIC was founded on the 7th January 2020, a creative vision shared between its 3 directors, Shantelle Svarc, Annabel Hunt and Robert Willmington.

Darkside Rising seeks to challenge the perception of female strength, resilience and power through innovative physical training and mindful arts projects.

Based in Lincoln, we are dedicated to supporting women's strength, health and empowerment and are primarily grant funded through organisations such as the National Lottery, LPFT and Lincolnshire County Council.

The Directors



Shantelle Svarc

Autistic entrepreneur and project manager, Shantelle is dedicated to transforming the cultural paradigms surrounding autism, feminism and strength.



Annabel Hunt

Specialist in art-based mindfulness, Annabel is an innovator in art, strength and mental health. She coached on the Heroes', Spectrum and Untold Art Projects.



Robert Willmington

Mindfulness instructor and feminist ally, Robert is working towards social equity for all people. He coached on the Heroes' Project and provided mindfulness supervision.

The Team



Rachel Height

**Heroes' Project
Postnatal Project
Pelvic Floor Project
Mental Health First Aider
Paediatric First Aid
Level 3 PT / Pre-Postnatal**



Emily Eady

**Heroes' Project
Postnatal Project
Pelvic Floor Project
Spectrum Project
Pelvic Floor Specialist
Level 3 PT / Pre-Postnatal**



Hannah Riley

**Heroes' Project
Postnatal Project
Pelvic Floor Project
Untold Art Project
Paediatric First Aid
Level 3 PT / Pre-Postnatal**

The Pandemic

Covid-19

The first UK case of the novel coronavirus was identified on the 31st January 2020, just weeks after Darkside Rising was formed.

On the evening of the 20th March 2020, gyms were instructed to close immediately and by the 23d March, the nation was in lockdown.

This continued for 127 days, until the 25th July 2020, when gyms were allowed to re-open.

As cases began to rise again, a 2nd national lockdown was ordered in November, additional restrictions in December (with indoor exercise groups closed) and a 3rd lockdown from 6th January 2021 until 17th May, when indoor classes were allowed to resume.

How we adapted

As the severity of the pandemic became clear in early 2020, we began to consider how we could continue our work, particularly when gyms were closed.

We wanted to continue to support those who desperately needed it during lockdown.

Investigating our online options, we settled on Zoom, which we had seen other providers successfully moving to.

And so our provision was continued, online during restrictions, in order to maintain a sense of routine and structure for our participants during lockdown, and help to alleviate the burden of social isolation.

The Projects

January 2020 - June 2021

Heroes' Project

Background

As the pandemic progressed and hospitals came under pressure, we knew we wanted to support our incredible key workers. We bid for National Lottery Coronavirus Community Support Funding.

The Heroes' Project offered 14 online classes per week, including exercise, meditation and art, to 70 female Lincolnshire key workers. It ran from July 2020 to January 2021.

This project aimed to help key workers recover from the mental demands of their work and the trauma that they faced on a daily basis.

Offering a safe space to process, recover and take 45 minutes for themselves.

Delivery

We had a strong response from local key workers, including enrolments from Social Prescribing Link Workers, Carers First, Social Workers, CAMHS and LPFT.

Participants were not confined to attending set classes each week as we wanted to accommodate shift workers. Participants were therefore able to drop into different classes each week that suited them.

This increased accessibility, though it did also lead to sporadic attendance for some.

Part of our learning for Heroes' was to embed greater evaluation into our work, such as mental health scales, to help measure impact.

Heroes' Project

It stopped me going too dark with my mental health...that was probably the most beneficial.

It was help and support and just having someone there. Someone to chat to and talk to. It helped me with mental health and being physically active.



The meditation and mindfulness helped me deal with the anxieties of lockdown.

It helped my mental health, gave me the courage to speak out loud in front of people.



Postnatal Project

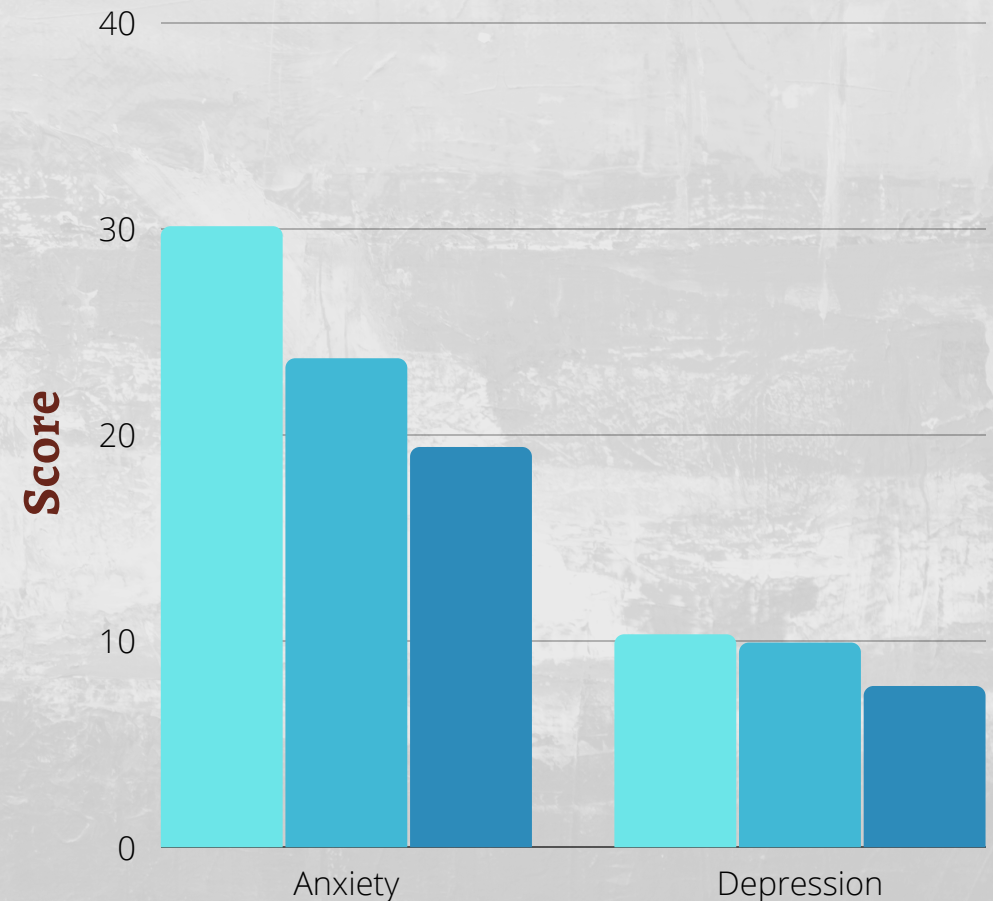
Background

Funding was awarded to Darkside Training through Wave 9 of the Mental Health Promotion Fund, we are including it here as it forms part of our funded provision and the inspiration for Darkside Rising CIC.

Delivered between October 2019 and September 2020 , 36 women attended specialist mum and baby sessions at the gym, and later via Zoom.

Coached by Rachel Height, Emily Eady and Hannah Riley, specialists in pre/postnatal training and pelvic floor health.

The Perinatal Anxiety Screening Scale and Edinburgh Postnatal Depression scale were used to measure the impact on mental health.



**Symptoms of Anxiety and Depression,
Measured at Weeks 1, 13 and 26.**

Postnatal Project

'This project was one of the few things I looked forward to in my maternity leave - I struggled significantly with my mental health for the first year, and just getting out of the house sometimes felt impossible. The project played a huge part in helping to lift me up to a place where I felt vaguely sane again!'

'Darkside helped me gain a confidence that had been forgotten pre pregnancy and my body gained a strength that had also been forgotten'

'The sessions have been extremely beneficial to me. Not only are they helping me get back into fitness in a controlled environment, but they have significantly reduced my anxiety'



29% reduction in postnatal anxiety



15% reduction in depression

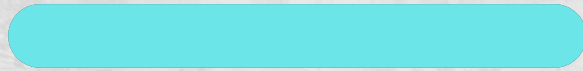
Scores finished just borderline for mild-moderate anxiety and were asymptomatic for depression.



Postnatal Project

Feedback forms designed by the funder

100% Agreement



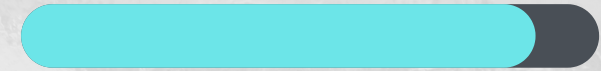
I feel better about myself

I feel supported by others

I feel my mental health as improved

I feel my physical health has improved

89% Agreement



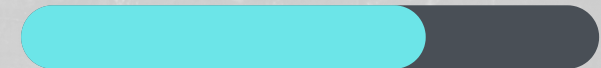
I feel more hopeful about the future

I get information and advice

Overall Wellbeing Scores



4.3 / 10



7 / 10

Postnatal Project

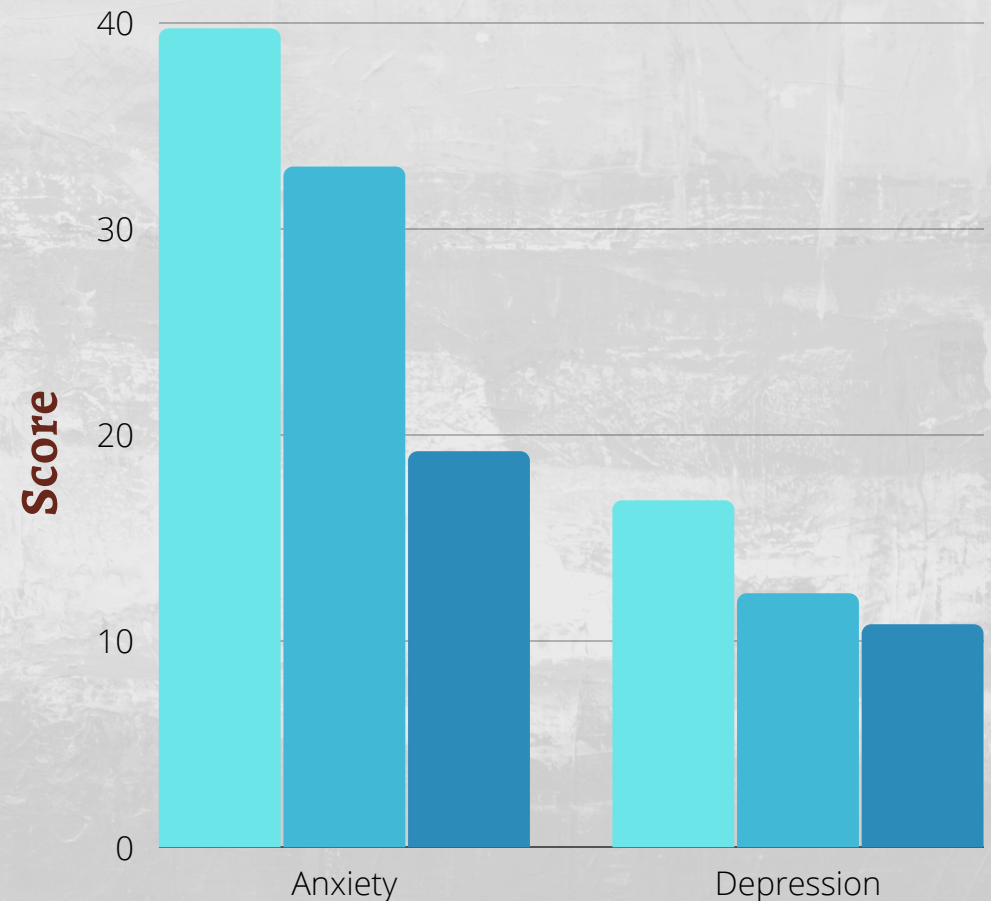
Further funding

We were grateful to receive funding to continue the Postnatal Project through the Comic Relief Community Fund, between October 2020 and April 2021. It was held entirely online via Zoom due to the pandemic and supported 8 women.

Scores of depression and anxiety were initially higher than in the previous round of funding, we surmise due to the effects of lockdown, school and nursery closures and social isolation.

We are pleased to report however, that by the end of the 26 weeks of training, their final scores were comparable with the final scores of the previous cohort.

The same screening tools were used for both.



**Symptoms of Anxiety and Depression,
Measured at Weeks 1, 13 and 26.**

Postnatal Project

'Being able to have my son watch me and be part of it, I think that's really, really important'

'Improved my confidence no end, helped me realise my own strength and has been a valuable support during lockdown. Also gave me something different to focus on other than being a mum and going to work'

'We did a few (different) Zoom sessions prior to this and everything was very child related, it was all about her needs. Whereas with these classes, it was about me. It was time for me to be me, not just a mum'

'It feels more like a family than a group'



52% reduction in postnatal anxiety



36% reduction in depression

Scores finished just borderline for symptomatic depression and were asymptomatic for anxiety.

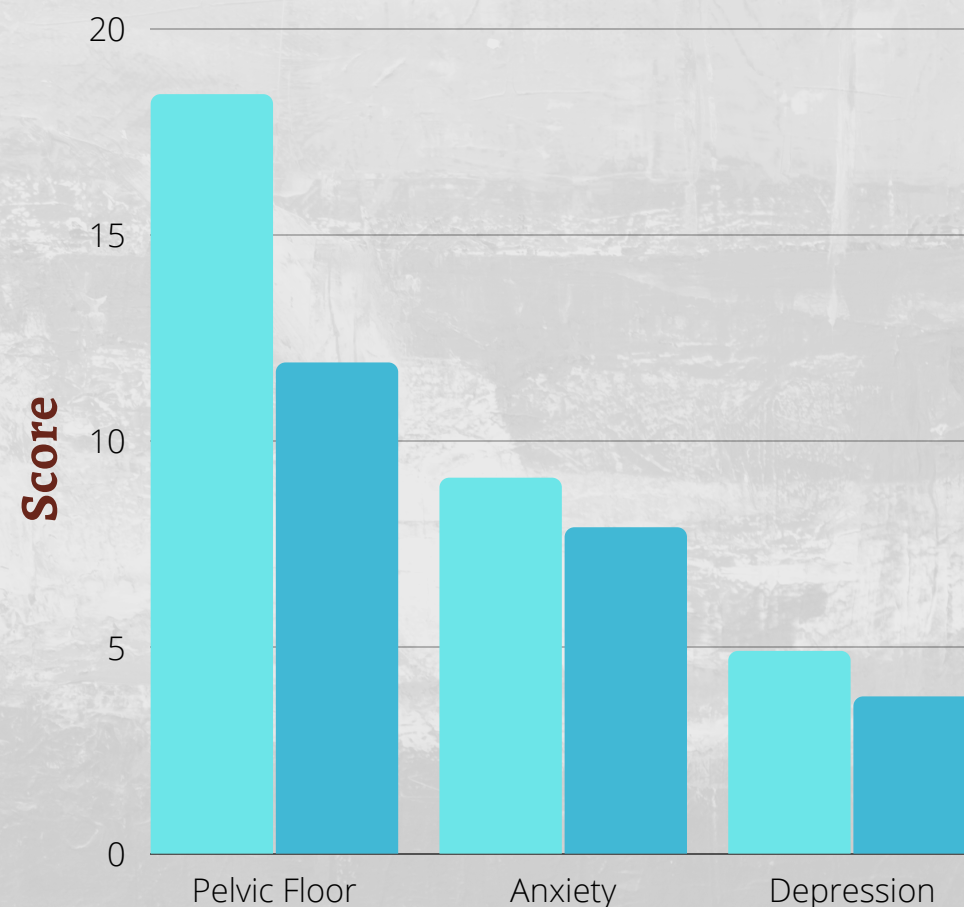
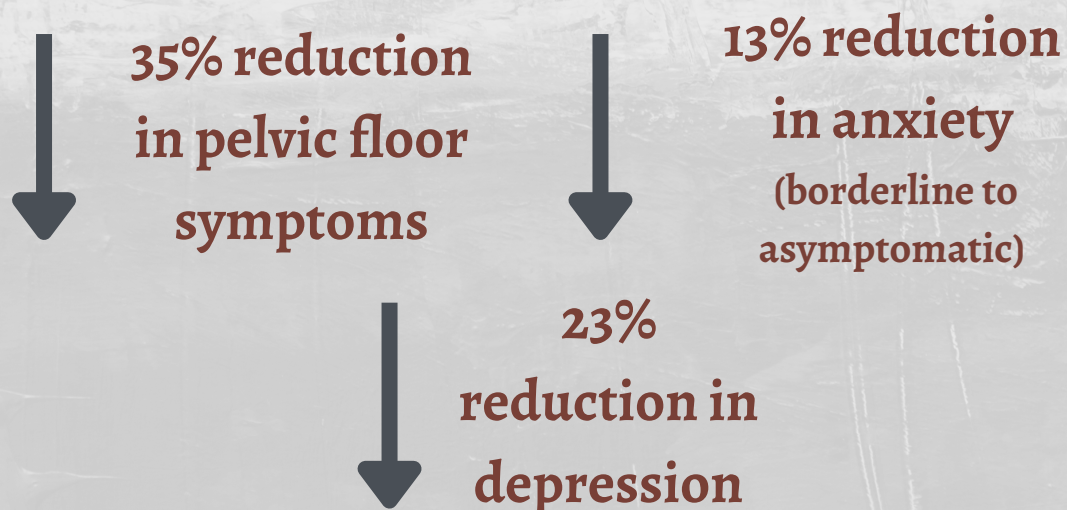


Pelvic Floor Project

Background

This was an extension of the Wave 9 funding and we supported postnatal women with pelvic floor problems such as stress and urge incontinence and mild-moderate prolapse.

The demand for this project was extraordinary, with 30 spaces filled in 3 days, a mix of new mums and older women who had been suffering for years after the birth of their children.



Symptoms of Pelvic Floor Dysfunction, Anxiety and Depression, Measured at Weeks 1 and 12.

Pelvic Floor Project

- “ —
1. I don't wear a pad daily now
 2. I have started jogging
 3. I'm not in pain all the time
 4. No pain after sex
(bit personal but a big thing).
- ” —

— “ —

My stress incontinence has improved greatly now, and I will only use pads if I am doing a very strenuous or jumpy workout. I barely leak and sometimes not at all during running now. Before there were occasions when I was completely soaked.

— ” —

— “ —

I feel more confident now, I don't notice my prolapse so much.

— ” —

— “ —

This course should be offered to every woman who has had children.

— ” —

— “ —

Overall I feel much better and have had my second pain free period EVER!

— ” —



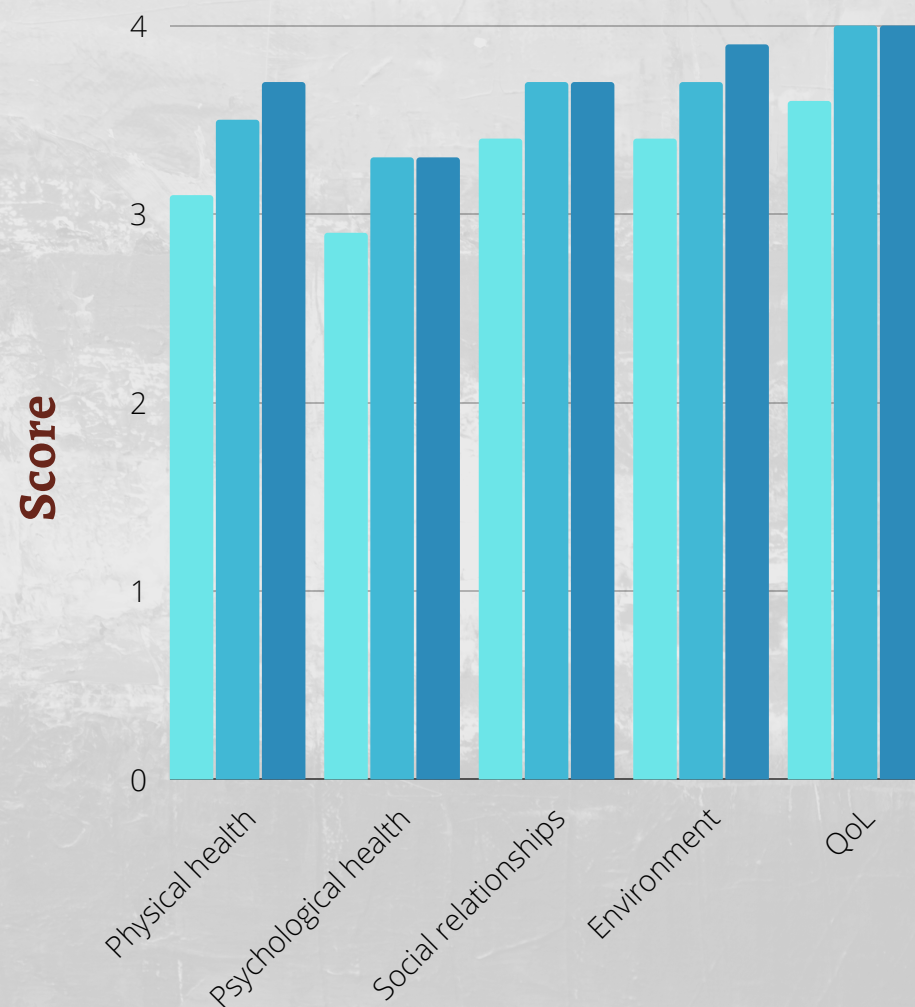
Spectrum Project

Background

'Diagnosed' at the age of 31, Shantelle is passionate about developing services for autistic women, building confidence, strength and self-worth.

The Spectrum Project was funded through the Autism Support Network, a 26 week programme of strength training and mentorship for autistic women, pre and post diagnosis, initially under Darkside Training.

The wellbeing questionnaire, WHOQOL-BREF, was used to measure physical and mental health, social relationships and environment, in weeks 1, 13 and 26, on a scale out of 5. Quality of life was also measured in the same manner.



Measured at Weeks 1 and 13 and 26

Spectrum Project

Evaluation

There was only a modest increase in wellbeing over the 26 weeks of this project, attributed to the disrupting effects of the pandemic.

The project contract was signed just days before the first lockdown, and so the start date was delayed until July 2020, when outdoor gym sessions could start.

The project moved onto Zoom in November, during the 2nd lockdown, and there is stayed due to additional restrictions in December and a long 3rd lockdown from January 2021.

With this interruption to established routines and the overall anxiety and social isolation of the pandemic, any increase in wellbeing is positive.



17% increase in physical health



11% increase in psychological health



7% increase in social relationships



13% increase in physical health

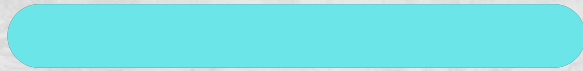


9% increase in quality of life

Spectrum Project

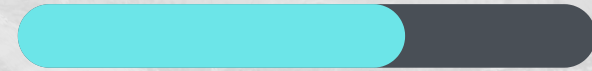
Feedback forms designed by the funder

100% Agreement



I feel supported by others
I get information and advice

67% Agreement

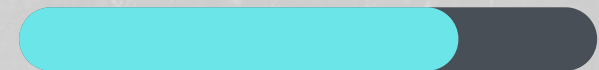


I am more involved in social activities
I feel my mental health has improved
I feel my physical health has improved

Overall Wellbeing Scores



4.8 / 10



7.6 / 10

— “ —
*The spectrum project gave me
 somewhere to belong and
 something to focus on, with
 people who understood how I
 was feeling. I was proud
 to be a part of it.*

— “ —
*It has really increased
 my confidence and has
 given me opportunities
 that I would not
 have had.*

Spectrum Project

— “ —
*I absolutely love the spectrum project
 and everyone involved. Never in my
 life have I experienced such a positive
 support group and with something
 physical you can take from it. I have
 such incredible women around me
 and it makes me so proud to
 have been a part of this.*

— “ —
*There should be a
 Darkside programme
 in every city!*

— “ —
*My physical and
 mental well-being have
 improved through
 strength training.*

Spectrum Project



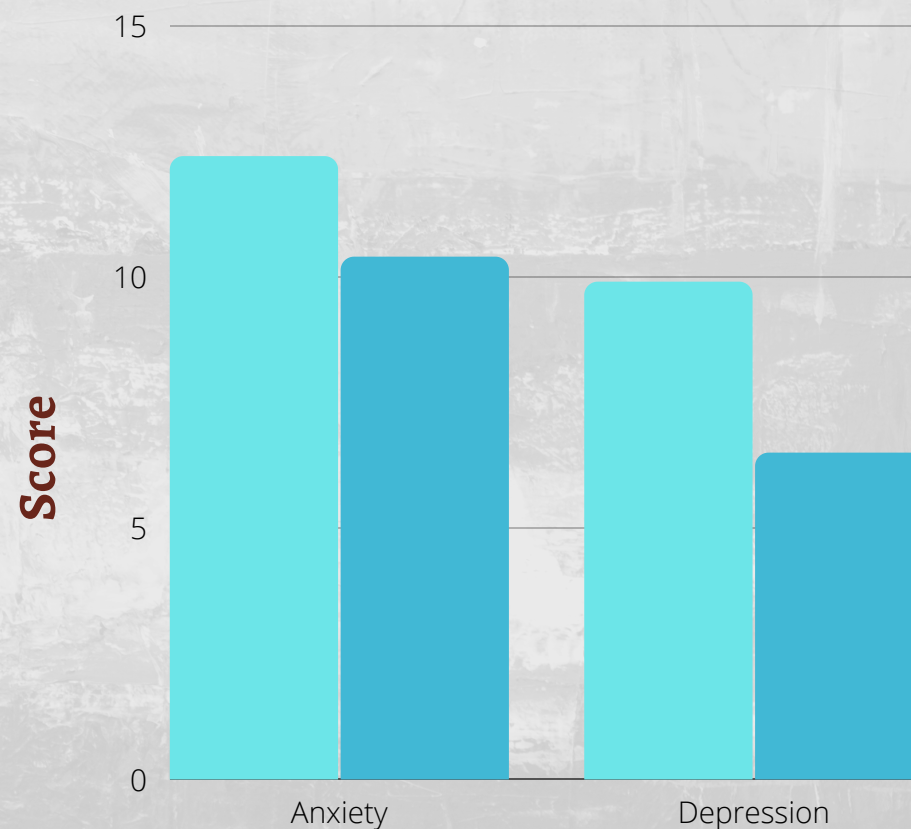
Untold Art Project

Background

Inspired by the success of the art sessions on the Heroes' Project, Untold Art was a 12 week exploration of art-based mindfulness, held exclusively over Zoom.

48 women participated and HADS (Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale) was used to measure symptoms of anxiety and depression.

The Untold Art Project was funded by the Lincolnshire County Council Covid-19 Community Response Fund, administered by the Lincolnshire Community Foundation.



Mental Health Scores Measured at Weeks 1 and 12

Untold Art Project



20% reduction
in anxiety



38% reduction
in depression

Anxiety scores decreased from
symptomatic to borderline.

Depression scores decreased from
borderline to asymptomatic.

Untold Art Project

— “ —
*The course has been fantastic,
 thank you to everyone involved.
 It's given me an hour to focus on
 'me' once a week, something I
 wouldn't usually do if it wasn't
 planned into my week.*

” —

— “ —
*I have really enjoyed the art project,
 it's given me something to look
 forward to each week. I have taken
 the ideas from each week's class and
 have created pieces of work I never
 thought I could do. I make time for me
 to just sit and draw or paint and just
 cut myself off from everything else.*

” —

— “ —
*It's meant a lot to
 me and kept me
 company when I
 feel lonely.*

” —

— “ —
*The techniques we've
 learnt are amazing,
 whilst creating and
 doodling I feel much
 calmer and focused.*

” —

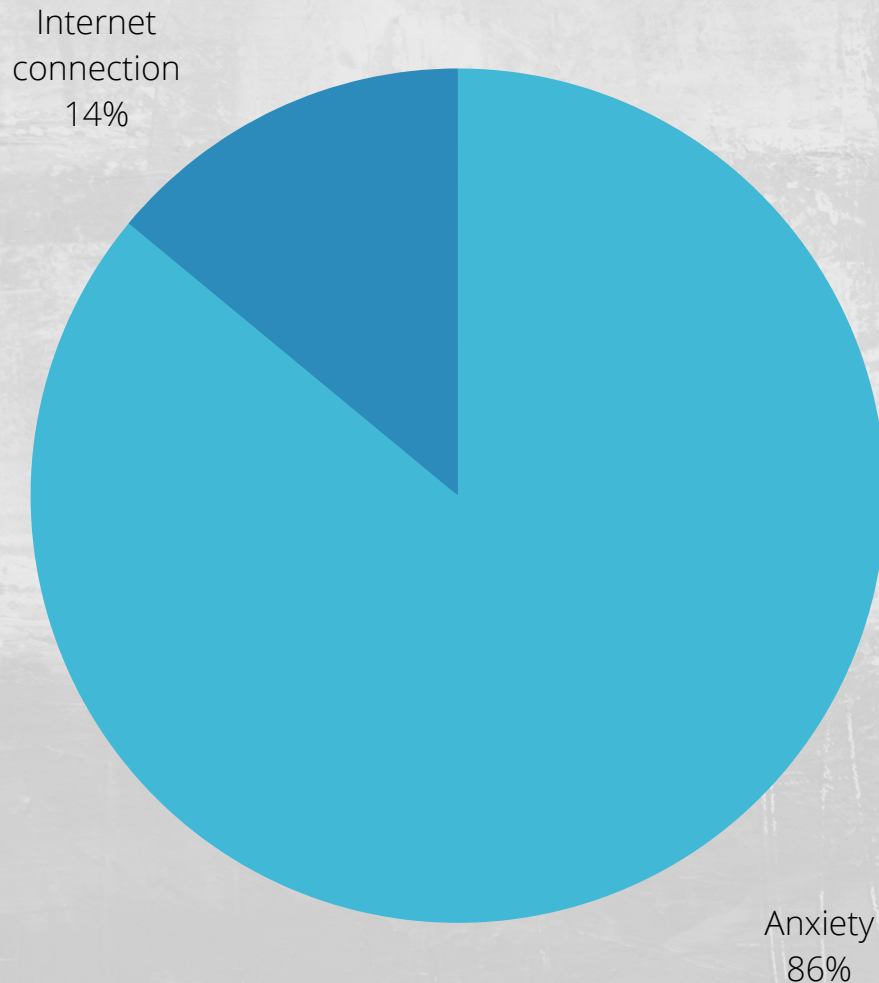
— “ —
*It has really helped me
 to cope with my mental
 health issues during
 lockdown.*

” —

Summary

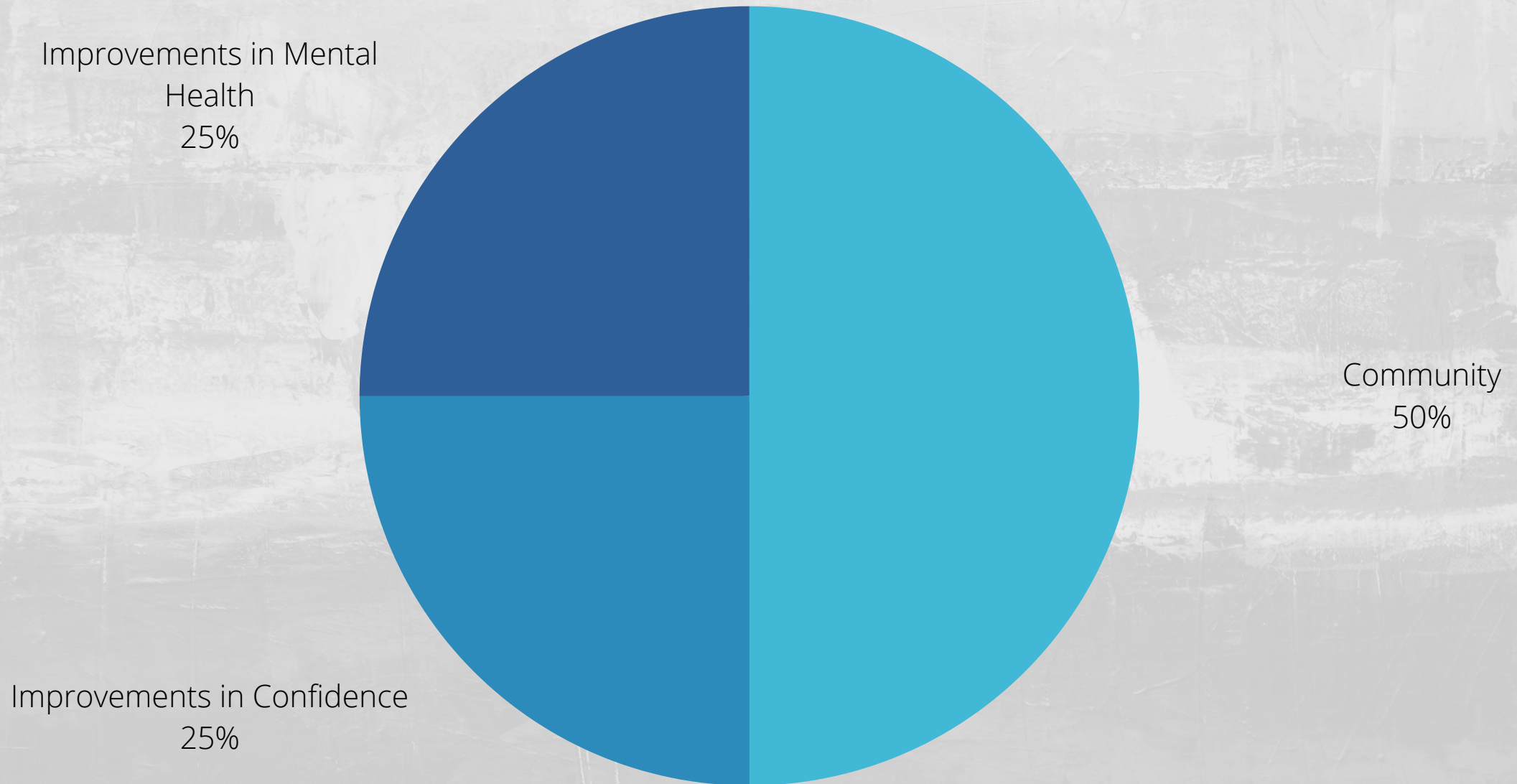
Barriers to participation

Overcoming these barriers

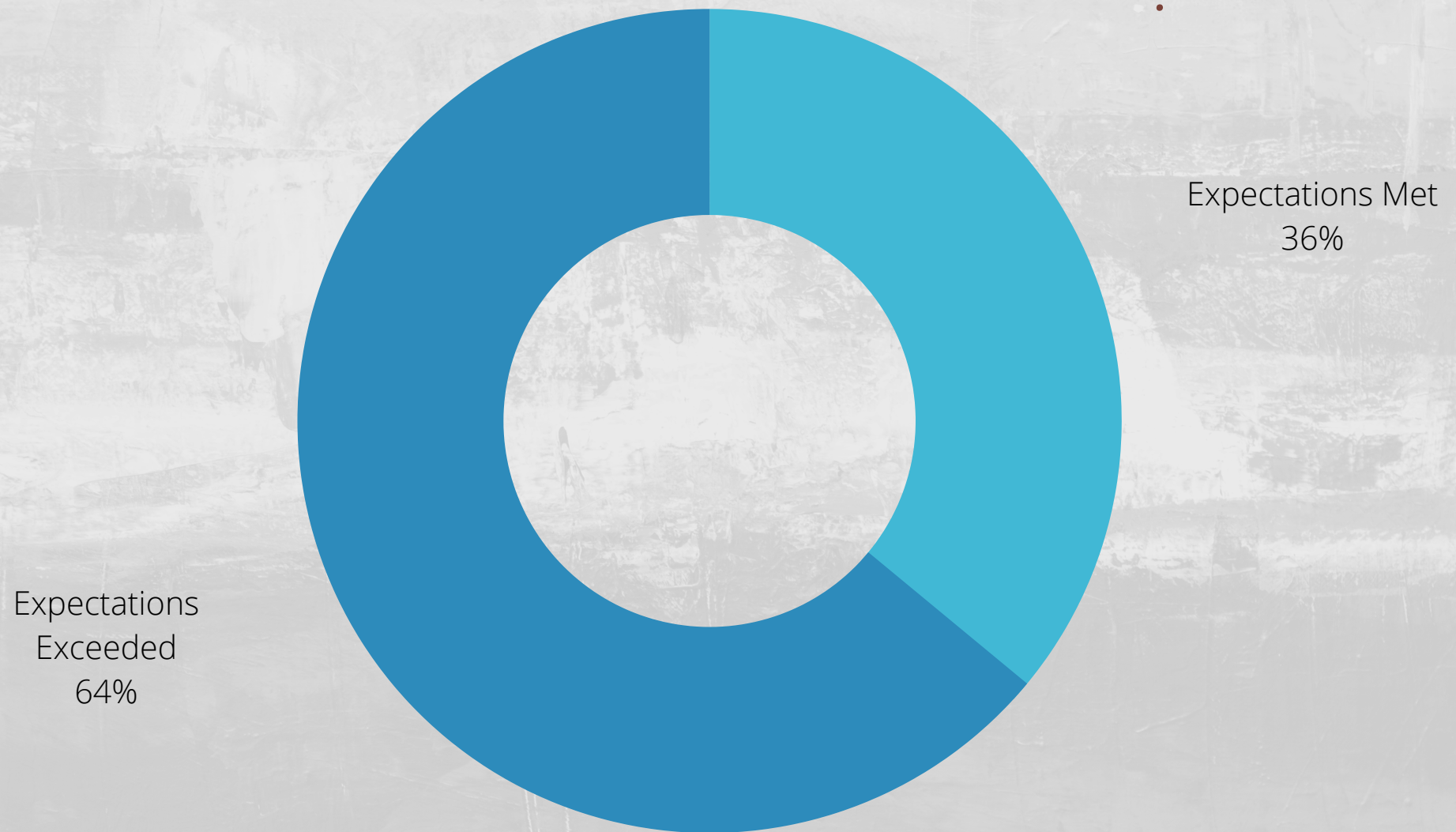


- Offer a range of participation options, including face to face and online.
- Develop video courses to support those with social anxiety.
- Promote the wider benefits of mindfulness and physical activity for mental health.
- Promote the mental health results of our projects.
- Offer empathetic and supportive participant contact.
- Develop trusted referral networks.

Most enjoyed aspects



Were expectations met?



Recommend Darkside to others?



100% YES!

Fundraising

Sources

A range of fundraising methods were utilised:

- Group events
- Raffles
- Challenges
- Lincoln Community Lottery

Yielding a total of £3,440 to June 2021.

We would especially like to thank Ink Factory, for their generous donation of £500.



Spending

This fundraising was predominately spend on providing subsidised postnatal mum and baby sessions for women who had finished the Postnatal Project and couldn't afford the full cost of training.

A total of £1,491 has been spend so far, subsidising 229 sessions.

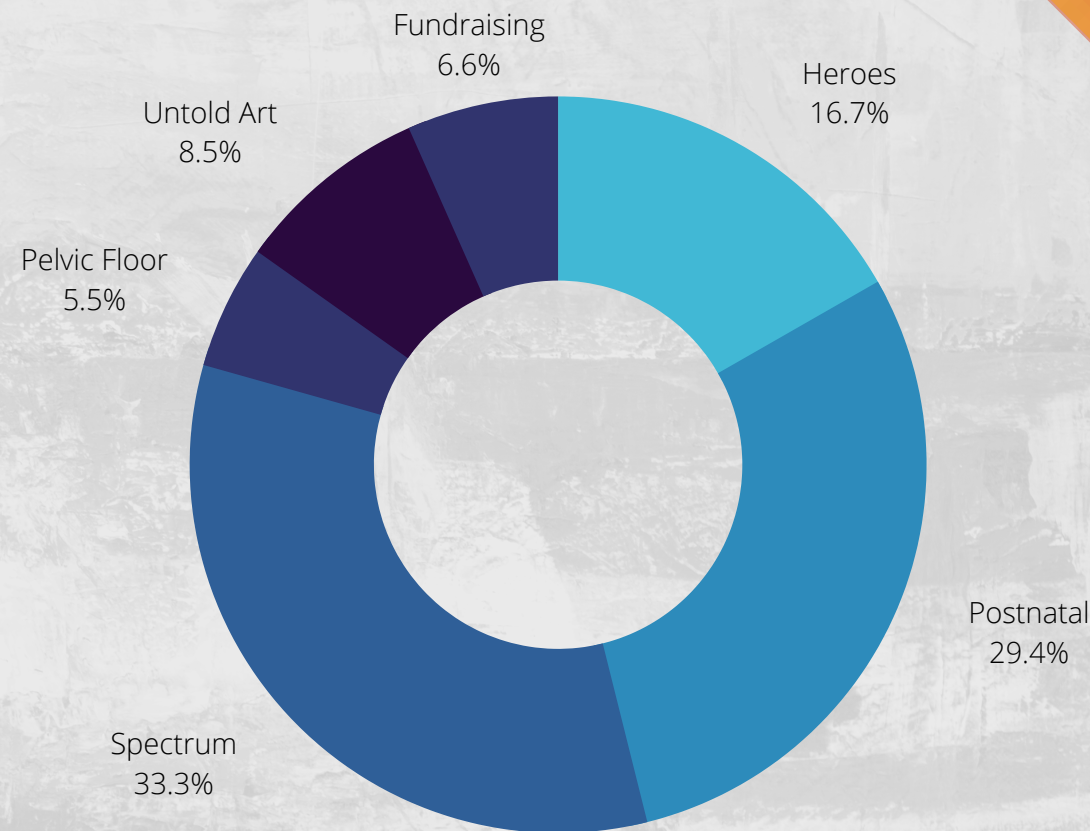
Two years of insurance has been bought at a cost of £1,177.

And there has been a small cost associated with Zoom fees, medals and printing.

No director fees have been charged.

Grants

- **Heroes' Project - £8,659**
 - National Lottery Coronavirus Community Support Fund
- **Postnatal Project - £11,307 (DT)**
 - Wave 9 Mental Health Promotion Fund
- **Postnatal Project Extension - £3,910**
 - Comic Relief Community Fund
- **Pelvic Floor Project - £2,825 (DT)**
 - Wave 9 Gap Funding
- **Spectrum Project - £17,224 (DT)**
 - Autism Support Network
- **Untold Art Project - £4,420**
 - Lincolnshire County Council Covid-19 Community Response Fund, through Lincolnshire Community Foundation



Total income: £51,785
Unrestricted reserves: £500

— “ —

The impact of this gym,
on the women in this
county, is phenomenal.

Actually. It's
phenomenal.

— ” —

What comes next?

July 2021 - December 2022 and beyond

Our Vision

— “ —

We each have a social imperative
to effect meaningful change in
our communities. To support,
empower and understand the
differences that make us
uniquely human.

— ” —

Shantelle Svarc
Director

Priorities

Darkside Rising has made a great start, but there is still so much to do over the next 3 years.

- **Secure further funding for continuation of existing projects.**
 - Participants routinely stated they would be unable to afford sessions when funding ended.
- **Develop additional art-based mindfulness courses.**
 - We are awaiting a funding decision for Mindful Clay, a pottery based mindfulness course.
- **Integrate Zoom options where possible.**
 - Zoom has increased accessibility for participants who live across the county, and those who have health considerations.
- **Increase our unrestricted reserves to ensure sustainability for the future.**
 - Developing and selling products such as 28 Days of Mindful Art (online video course) and Follow the Bird (child-friendly mindfulness book).
- **Explore options to support men's mental health, particularly postnatal depression.**
 - Secure funding for men's baby massage group.
- **Develop our autistic provision, supporting organisations to become neurodivergent friendly.**
 - Develop online CPD courses on autism integration for organisations and businesses.
 - Empower entrepreneurial and self-employment skills in neurodivergent individuals.

Autumn Projects

- **Real Autistic Women (RAW)** - a continuation of the Spectrum Project, a 52 week programme funded through the National Lottery Leaders with Lived Experience Fund. Mentoring the next generation of autistic lived experience leadership in sports and physical activity through strength training, mindfulness, a social media campaign and supporting two participants to become personal trainers.
- **Strength in Cancer** - 26 weeks of exercise classes for women living with and beyond cancer, through Wave 10 of the Mental Health Promotion Fund. Evaluated by the University of Lincoln through the Productivity Programme.
- **28 Days of Mindful Art** - inspired by the success of the Untold Art Project, we were awarded funding through Wave 1 of the Community Asset Development Fund to create an online video course, piloted with 3 groups of young, autistic and adult women, then offered to local Social Prescribing Link Workers for any referrals until the end of March 2022.

Autumn Projects

- **Family Mindfulness Project** - following the success of the Untold Art Project, the Anglian Water Positive Difference Fund, administered by the Lincolnshire Community Foundation, awarded us funding to offer a short mindfulness course to families with vulnerable children. Co-creating 'Follow the Bird' a child-friendly book of art-based mindfulness inspired by birds and nature.
- **Project Inspire** - a 26 week programme of employability and education support for neurodivergent women, through the Greater Lincolnshire LEP Employment & Skills ESF Grant Programme and administered by Bishop Grosseteste University.
- **Mum Fit** - in partnership with Children's Links and funded by Sport England under This Girl Can, we are offering postnatal sessions at the Lincoln Toy Library.

Coming early 2022
The Menopause Project!

Thank you

We wouldn't be here without the tremendous support of our participants and funders.





Contact

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