

HEALTH AND WELLBEING REPORT



APRIL 2024 – MARCH 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents an overview of Proper Job's health and wellbeing work in Manchester from April 2024 to March 2025. It captures the impact of our LAB and LAB Life programmes, which engage marginalised individuals through creativity and therapeutic methods.

Key findings include a 94% progression rate into positive activity and a wellbeing value of £24 generated for every £1 invested. The report also introduces two new proposals:

LAB Working Well, supporting those recently signed off work with mental health issues; and *The Boys Done Good*, a targeted intervention for young men aged 18–25. These proposals aim to address rising mental ill health and economic inactivity through innovative, inclusive practice.

OVERVIEW

Based at Brunswick Parish church in the centre of Manchester Proper Job delivers health, wellbeing and employability projects through creativity, the arts, and psychotherapy-informed approaches. This report is a snapshot of the work that has taken place over the past year – alongside our emerging ideas for the future.

The GM Working Well system change vision statement highlights the goal for residents to:

Move from programmes, processes and outputs to pathways, people and outcomes to create a GM wide system that supports our residents and is locally enabled, employer responsive and enhances equalities.

Proper Job share this vision for moving people to outcomes and finding the right pathways to engage and progress, is an integral part of our approach. Our workers, who live and work in Manchester, understand the unique pressures of our dynamic, caring, yet unequal communities and it is this knowledge that we take into the development of our innovative inclusion and wellbeing work.

25% of working-age residents in GM are inactive, the highest in five years. This includes 31% of 50-64-year-olds For 8.9% this is due to ill health, significantly higher than the UK rate.



TACKLING INEQUALITY IN MANCHESTER

Our LAB programmes are designed to support those most affected by these inequalities – reaching people who are often excluded or hidden from mainstream support. Over 59% of our participants come from the most deprived communities in Manchester and we work extensively across referral partners to access those that need most support.

Participant Breakdown (Index of Multiple Deprivation):

- Decile 1 (Lowest 10%) – 41.7%
- Decile 2 (Lowest 20%) – 14.2%
- Decile 3 (Lowest 30%) – 13.2%

Our projects use the arts and creativity to bring people together to build confidence, improve health and reduce isolation. After taking part in LAB 90% of our participants report that they are eating more healthily, increasing physical activity, and reporting better overall wellbeing. Most importantly almost all our participants report feeling that they are less lonely. This is in the context of more than one third of Manchester residents aged 45 and older reporting that they feel lonely some or all of the time and Mancunians have some of the poorest health in the country, (life expectancy in some areas is below 58 years and there are high deaths from cancer, heart and respiratory illnesses).



I did 17 years of warehouse work. I got made redundant in 2020 due to the pandemic. To be honest my mental health was going down already, I was bullied in the workplace in 2019. When the redundancy came, I thought, could put my name at the top of the list, but I realised I would be out of work. It was the initial, 'how am I going to cope?' Eventually I went into sales in 2022-2023. The atmosphere in that job ended up being horrible, my confidence was shattered. It was really bad; it was super cliquey. Towards the end I couldn't stand being near other people. By that point I had had enough. I was doing 6 days a week, 12/13-hour shifts. I also had to walk an hour there and back. Then on top of all of that I was getting bullied.

When I got to LAB I was anxious all the time, constantly worrying. I wasn't really sleeping. My head was on a completely different planet. I was that anxious about going anywhere near people. I couldn't go shopping or even take my cat to the vets.

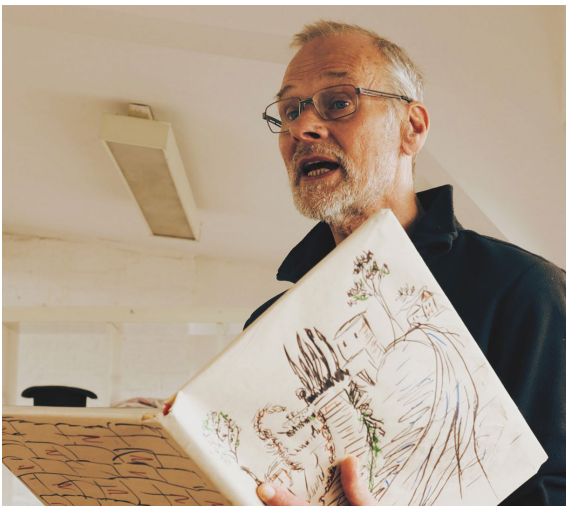
I found the LAB courses to be a safe environment, I know you can't always be 100% safe, but I felt really safe. I found I was quite relaxed; the staff were really encouraging me to get that confidence. They asked me questions to engage in group discussions and share my ideas. That really helped me, my head was a bit all over but just having the support to come and try to be around people really helped improve my mood. I got support from the tutors.

This has boosted my confidence and mood. I think I am now a lot more confident, I have been able to help other learners to complete their journals and even speak in front of the entire group. The LAB courses are definitely something I would recommend to other people who have been struggling.

LAB Project participant and volunteer

A PROVEN MODEL OF IMPACT

Our model combines innovative group-based activities with sensitive, targeted community engagement to reach the most isolated and most marginalized. This combination helps people build confidence and wellbeing, and from there, progress into volunteering, employment or education.



94% of participants move on to positive activity.

This approach is a proven springboard for the development of new innovative practices to tackle issues of economic inactivity and unemployment.

PROGRESSION IN MANCHESTER

In 24/25 Proper Job progressed over 16% of its participants to employment. We are particularly successful with inactive individuals, with 89% of all this group progressing onto positive activity.

This statistic for inactive individuals is particularly startling when considering the multiple barriers to participation that many of our participants have. It suggests that a more holistic approach to working with those individuals, from engagement to inclusive group work, to a warm, welcoming centre where participants can feel at home, has real impact. This alongside a series of interventions and approaches which encourages participants to stretch and challenge themselves results in high levels of progression into employment, education and volunteering.



Main thing [I wanted from LAB] was to be confident communicating. I thought people would judge me. When I was standing in queue at KFC for example I would just stand and look at the menu, I would get my wife to order for me. Now the confidence I have comes 100% from the LAB.

There was a particular day on the LAB Wellbeing course where we talked about things you could and can't control in your life. It was that day I started applying for work. I started looking for other jobs that are outside of my comfort zone. Meeting the kids in the drama workshop made me think I could do some work in a school as a Teaching Assistant. I have just had a job interview with Opulent Worldwide for a Sales Executive role.

I am now following a routine. Before coming here, I would go to sleep late and wake up in the afternoon. This has given me a proper life cycle, I am 80% there. Sometimes the fear gets me. I try to use my past work experience and experience from the LAB to stand up and try.

LAB Project participant

DEMOGRAPHICS OF PARTICIPANTS IN MANCHESTER

GENDER

Cis Male - **21.9%**

Cis Female - **74.6%**

Trans Male - **0.5%**

ETHNICITY

Total BAME 55.7%

Arab - **2.99%**

Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi - **0.50%**

Asian or Asian British – Chinese - **1.49%**

Asian or Asian British – Indian - **1.00%**

Asian or Asian British – Pakistani - **9.95%**

Asian or Asian British – Other - **2.99%**

Black or Black British- African - **25.37%**

Black or Black British – Caribbean - **3.98%**

Black or Black British – Other - **1.00%**

Mixed – White and Black African - **0.50%**

Mixed – White and Asian - **1.00%**

Mixed – White and Black Caribbean - **3.48%**

Mixed – Other - **1.49%**

White – British - **31.84%**

White – Irish - **1.49%**

White – Other - **4.48%**

Other - **1.49%**

QUALIFICATIONS

Total Below Level 2 - 46.3%

None - **32.84%**

Entry - **13.89%**

Level 1 - **8.96%**

Level 2 (Full English and Maths GCSEs) - **19.9%**

Level 3 (A' Levels, Btec) - **13.93%**

Level 4 (Diploma) - **1.99%**

Level 5 (Diploma, Non Honours Degree) - **1.99%**

Level 6 (Honours Degree, Post Grad Diploma) - **10.95%**

Level 7 (Masters) - **4.98%**

EMPLOYMENT

Employed - **5.47%**

Unemployed - **74.63%**

Refugee/Asylum seeker - **13.43%**

Retired - **4.48%**

CHANGES IN WELLBEING

Measuring wellbeing is challenging, – but vital. In 2019, we worked with Josh Meek (then of The Big Issue, now Chief Impact Officer at Unity Trust Bank) to develop a robust approach using the NHS-approved Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale to measure changes in wellbeing for our participants.

**Using this model, we've been able to show clear social value:
In 2024/25, every £1 invested in Proper Job's projects
has generated the equivalent of £24 in improved mental
wellbeing.**



I had not been out of my house alone for 5 years before the LAB Project. I had lost all confidence in myself and felt completely outcast from society.

The LAB Project has helped with my confidence much more than anything else ever has. It has given me the opportunity to be involved in activities that I never thought possible for myself.

I graduated from university 8 years ago but have never been employed. This has affected my mental health and confidence so much that I started to doubt that I would ever know how it feels to have a job.

I'm really impressed with how much all of this has changed me in such a short amount of time, and it is thanks to the support I received during the course.

I now feel positive about my future for the first time in my adult life.

LAB Project participant

FUTURE DIRECTION: INNOVATION AND NEXT STEPS

Based on more than 25 years of experience in Manchester, we believe there is now an opportunity – and an imperative – to take bold next steps to genuinely address some of the critical issues facing our communities. Rather than simply continue with business as usual, we'd like to explore two new targeted interventions, designed to tackle rising mental ill health, economic inactivity, and social disconnection.

These proposals are rooted in our proven methods – but shaped by emerging challenges.

1. LAB WORKING WELL

Using creative practice to support people experiencing mental ill health to remain in or return to meaningful work.

OVERVIEW

Building on our successful LAB wellbeing model, this new strand supports people recently signed off work with mental health issues. We aim to intervene within the first six weeks of absence – a period shown to be critical in preventing long-term detachment from the labour market.

We will work closely with local employers, GPs, job centres and mental health providers to identify participants ideally within the first 6 weeks of leaving employment.

Each cohort of 8–15 people will take part in a focused programme totalling 25–30 hours over one week, using creativity to build resilience and develop practical, personalised coping strategies. The peer support of a group with shared experiences is central to the approach.

At the end of the week, participants will assess their own readiness to return to work and set goals with the support of Proper Job staff. Ongoing one-to-one follow-up will help ensure these goals are met or exceeded.

Individuals may also be identified who are at risk of leaving work due to mental illness. In these cases, we can also offer weekly 3-hour sessions to offer support to keep these individuals in work.

2. THE BOYS DONE GOOD

A creative intervention to support young men aged 18–25 into meaningful futures.

OVERVIEW

We know that once young people finish mandatory education at 18, they are becoming more likely to enter their bedrooms rather than the labour market. This is more likely with young men. Accessing this group is particularly difficult as they may still be supported by parents.

We want to pilot innovative approaches to engage this group – from working with local influencers, musicians and gamers to partnering with colleges to identify those at risk. We recognise the engagement phase will be the most intensive and resource-heavy.

Once engaged, participants will begin online wellbeing and personal development activities, delivered by staff trained during the COVID-19 pandemic. Online delivery acts as a bridge into face-to-face sessions, helping break down initial barriers.

The group will then take part in a creative process using the techniques of Augusto Boal and the Theatre of the Oppressed, creating characters through whom they can safely explore feelings, beliefs, and decisions. This approach helps develop confidence, insight, and agency.

The characters' behaviour can be explored in multiple contexts and the outcomes discussed by the group, considering the most positive options for the character, and so in turn, themselves.

After this process of self-development and affirmation, we will support participants to access real opportunities. At our “progression events,” we invite 10–15 employers and partner organisations to meet participants and offer next steps – from volunteering and training to employment.

CONTACT

For more information on any of the above or to explore bespoke options Chloe@properjob.org.uk or visit www.properjob.org.uk/the-lab-project