GIVE | Volunteering for Wellbeing
A National Lottery Heritage Fund project led by University College London on behalf of the Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance in partnership with the Horniman Museum & Gardens, The Natural History Museum, and Valence House Museum (Sept ‘18- Nov ‘19)

Natural History Museum Report
Tempe Nell, Learning Volunteer Engagement Manager

“The positive thing is that I’m so glad that not only for me, for my whole team, the museum team appreciated our ideas. This has been a good thing for us. I mean we created new things, we do have many ideas and they appreciated, and they came here and they developed it, they developed the ideas. I mean it’s a very good thing for me.” Wellbeing Champion Volunteer

“I think I felt useful to the community. I shared my ideas which may be useful for creating or developing new things.” Wellbeing Champion Volunteer
Introduction
The Natural History Museum has a strong history of engaging volunteers in mutually beneficial programmes including the Learning Volunteer Programme (LVP) that has been running for over 13 years. The LVP has over 80 volunteers actively engaged in the programme, typically volunteering once per week. The volunteers bring learning to life by facilitating specimen-based learning interactions with visitors in the Museum’s galleries that reach over 100,000 people a year including school students, families and adults. The volunteers receive regular training, development and enrichment opportunities and the Museum aims to fulfil the many individual motivations for volunteering from interest in natural history, gaining engagement experience, giving something back to making new friends and connections.

Through this project, the Museum was keen to explore the link between volunteering and wellbeing both as a motivation and an outcome in order to inform future wellbeing programming as well as integrating wellbeing measures into the volunteer programme. At the same time, the Museum’s aims were to enhance the diversity of volunteers, particularly attracting diverse volunteers from the surrounding boroughs of Kensington & Chelsea, Hammersmith & Fulham and Westminster and creating volunteer opportunities to support their health and wellbeing needs.

Project Aims
The overall consortia project aims were as follows:

- To support museum partners to pilot sustainable collections-led volunteering for wellbeing programmes
- To work with local people to address their health and wellbeing inequalities through the museum partners
- To diversify the museum volunteer base for each of the three London Boroughs
- To change the volunteer experience to make it more inclusive
- To make inaccessible heritage more accessible through volunteering programmes connected with previously hidden and unused collections
- To assess the impact on health and wellbeing across new and existing volunteers using quantitative and qualitative measures
- To create collections-inspired and object handling wellbeing resources
- To strategically embed wellbeing across the three museum partners
- To work with museum partners in three widely dispersed London Boroughs comprising the Natural History Museum, Kensington & Chelsea; the Horniman Museum & Gardens, Lewisham; and Valence House Museum, Barking & Dagenham
- To work with museum partners with different models of administration and funding i.e. independent, national and local authority

The Natural History Museum’s specific aims were

- To pilot a sustainable collections-led volunteering for wellbeing programme
- To work with local people to address their health and wellbeing inequalities
- To diversify the museum volunteer base
- To change the volunteer experience to make it more inclusive
- To make inaccessible heritage more accessible through volunteering programmes connected with previously hidden and unused collections
- To assess the impact on health and wellbeing across new and existing volunteers using quantitative and qualitative measures
- To create collections-inspired and object handling wellbeing resources for all visitors to benefit from and support their wellbeing
To strategically embed wellbeing

Project Design

Formative research
To inform the direction of the project, the team took the following steps to identify local audiences with health inequalities:

- Consulted with local volunteer groups and charities to identify volunteer target audiences including young offenders, unemployed adults and those at risk of social isolation.

Following this exercise, the Museum held several discussion meetings to identify a target audience of adults at risk of social isolation and what their support needs might be. It was felt that the Museum would be able to offer huge benefit in terms of new social connections and confidence based on the previous volunteer evaluations. Following consultation with existing Learning Volunteers and in order to support any new volunteers, six existing Learning Volunteers were recruited to become Volunteer Buddies.

The project team selected two partner volunteering charities in North Kensington to help with recruitment which were Volunteer Centre Kensington & Chelsea (VCKC) and NOVA New Opportunities

Volunteer roles
The WoW ‘Theory of Change’ model (below) helped to clarify the priorities and parameters of the project based on the identified aims.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Mechanisms</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Impact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who? -Diverse local volunteers at risk of social isolation -Volunteers from regular LVP -Museum visitors</td>
<td>-Recruit volunteers locally -Integrate training to support activities -Give volunteers creative freedom to co-develop wellbeing/collection-based resource for visitors -Wheel of wellbeing central to project -Capture wellbeing change (SWEMWB and UCL measures) -8 week project for in 3 phases -resource development by staff teams</td>
<td>-Social connecting -Experiential and reciprocal learning -Communication of science/theory/evidence -Using resources</td>
<td>For volunteers: -Increased understanding of wellbeing -Increased motivation to improve wellbeing -Identify what works for them For visitors: -Visitors engaging in wellbeing activities</td>
<td>-Wellbeing visitor resource -Sharing learning in GIVE Conference and project reports -Increased awareness of wellbeing at NHM</td>
<td>-Improved individual wellbeing (volunteers and visitors) -Wellbeing integrated into wider programme</td>
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On the back of the theory of change, two new volunteer roles were designed:

‘Wellbeing Champions’ – a role for volunteers recruited especially for the project with a target audience of adults at risk of social isolation. Wellbeing champions would work with the Museum team to develop a new collections-inspired wellbeing resource for the Museum

‘Wellbeing Buddies’ - a participatory support role recruited internally from the regular Learning Volunteer Programme

At the start of the project, when discussing and consulting on local health inequalities and target audiences, it quickly became apparent that the traditional learning volunteer programme whereby volunteers facilitate object based learning with visitors may not be appropriate or fit the interests of new wellbeing volunteers at risk of social isolation or with mental health and confidence challenges.

Instead the opportunity was taken to be much more open and work with any new volunteers to co-develop a wellbeing resource that was relevant and of interest to the participants. It was hoped that this would create a genuinely participatory experience and one which would empower volunteers and contribute to their confidence and wellbeing.

To support this ambition, the team brought in the expertise of Kayte McSweeney who ran a training workshop on participation and co-creation which helped to establish the project approach.

Role descriptions were drawn up for volunteer buddies and champions aligning both roles with the ‘wheel of wellbeing’ and outlining the commitment required.

Recruitment

Six Volunteer Buddies were recruited first from the existing Learning Volunteer team and attended three training sessions to explore wellbeing, the project plan, their supportive role and volunteering with vulnerable adults. The training involved a mix of discussion, scenarios and information sharing with the third session led by VCKC’s Head of Core Services

North Kensington volunteer placement charities NOVA and VCKC provided support in the recruitment process of the Wellbeing Champion Volunteers

The role was advertised on the VCKC website, attracting 16 applicants, and on the do-it.org website attracting five applicants.
VCKC and NOVA staff shared for distribution, attracting four applicants from VCKC and none from NOVA.

The role was advertised at Kensington’s Job Fair ‘Meet the Team’ stand with face-to-face engagement of potential volunteer Wellbeing Champions, attracting two applicants plus one later, the friend of an applicant.

Wellbeing Champion selection was planned around two introductory activities called ‘Meet the Team’ and ‘See the Museum’ for interested and potential volunteers. ‘Meet the Team’ was a drop-in afternoon at VCKC in North Kensington including specimen handling led by buddies. This was attended by 9 people. ‘See the Museum’ was a two-hour morning session at the NHM incorporating a short Museum tour designed and led by buddies which was attended by 6 people.

This soft recruit approach allowed potential champions to informally meet the buddies and NHM staff involved and to learn more about the project without having to commit. The opportunities were designed to support the adults at risk of social isolation to feel able and confident to participate.

12 people were invited to complete a purposefully short application form (only 2 - 3 interest-based questions) including an equal opportunity form to capture the diversity of the group. Potential wellbeing champions were able to complete their applications during the ‘See the Museum’ event with assistance from staff and buddies available if required. Applications were followed up by an informal chat on the phone to help identify any characteristics of social isolation and therefore help selection.

Nine Wellbeing Champions were selected based on their responses and confidence levels. Three applicants were offered places in the Learning Volunteer Programme as a better individual fit. Two volunteers left the project due to sickness and another left to do more LVP volunteering, leaving 8 Wellbeing Champions and 4 Volunteer Buddies involved at project end.

Training
The team assessed the training needs of staff, Volunteer Buddies and Wellbeing Champions and the following interventions were delivered across the project:

- Project Team attended participation and co-creation training with external expert
- Project Team attended UCL-led wellbeing training
- Volunteer Managers attended Mental Health Awareness training
- Lead Volunteer Manager attended the ‘Cultures of Health and Wellbeing’ Conference, Newcastle, to engage with wellbeing projects across the wider sector
- Volunteer Buddies received NHM training to support the Wellbeing Champions
- As one of four sessions, Volunteer Buddies attended VCKC training on working with vulnerable adults involving:
  - The varying support needs of adults at risk of social isolation
  - Understanding wellbeing
  - Understanding and feeling confident
- Volunteer Buddies received object handling training as part of their Learning Volunteer role prior to start of project
- Five Wellbeing Champions received object handling training during a ‘Day in the Life of a Learning Volunteer’ enrichment
- Wellbeing Champions received NHM training embedded in their volunteering sessions
Project Delivery

The volunteer project was delivered over 8 sessions across approximately 3 months.

Each session was planned to follow a similar structure, incorporating opportunities to explore the Museum, meet other volunteers and staff and build knowledge, skills and confidence to propose and develop the content for a new wellbeing resource. Working with a new audience required flexibility to ensure their individual needs were being met.

Dividing the eight sessions into three phases helped with project planning but also enabled the volunteers to gain a sense of the direction in the project, giving them confidence that the resource development goal was achievable. Feedback was gathered in a variety of ways weekly and thus became a part of the structure of each session. A group agreement was established every session to help mitigate against any potential issues around communication and foster mutual respect within the group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session 1 and 2 (9 and 23 April)</th>
<th>Session 3, 4 and 5 (7, 21 May and 4 June)</th>
<th>Session 6, 7 and 8 (18 June, 2 and 16 July)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Get to know the Museum</td>
<td>Resource development: Initial ideas</td>
<td>Resource development: resource building</td>
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<td>9 April – What is wellbeing and do we experience the Museum?</td>
<td>7 May – What assumptions do we have about the Museum?</td>
<td>18 June – Longlisting and shortlisting with Design, Publishing and Digital teams</td>
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<td>23 April – What and who is the Museum for?</td>
<td>21 May – VISIT to Chelsea Physic Garden – What do other visitor attractions offer for wellbeing?</td>
<td>2 July – How do we want to change people’s experience?</td>
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<td>4 June – What does NHM already offer for Wellbeing? What can we offer?</td>
<td>16 July – Trial resource</td>
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Exploring behind-the-scenes, meeting scientists and museum specialists provided the inspiration for planning the wellbeing resource. It also helped the Wellbeing Champions feel invested in by the staff of the Museum, and that they were contributing something significant; and gave the buddies a renewed sense of pride in volunteering at the Museum. Through the project the volunteers had meaningful interactions with staff with specialisms ranging from Publishing to British Wildlife Identification.

The initial resource ideas were highly creative and far-ranging – from events to apps (see table below). Eliminating ideas and focusing on possible resources was challenging and benefited hugely from the focus-group experience of two Digital Media product managers and the Citizen Science Coordinator.

**Timings**

- 10.30am – buddy briefing
- 11am – collect champions
- 11.15am – SWEMWB, group agreement & ice-breaker
- 11.30am – activity 1
- 12.15pm – lunch
- 13.00 – activity 2
- 14.00 – discussion
- 14.30 – positives, challenges, evaluation
- 15.00 – finish (champions) / buddy debrief and clear up
- 15:30– finish (buddies)
During session 6 when the volunteers presented their ideas to a Dragon’s Den style Museum staff panel. This was a real achievement for those volunteers who found speaking in front of a group a huge personal challenge due to low confidence or language challenges. Bringing in Museum staff from several different teams created energy and excitement around the potential of the volunteers’ wellbeing resource ideas. In turn the volunteers felt listened to and this helped energise them for the final two sessions which involved tough decision making and determined teamwork.

Due to limited project delivery time, the volunteers worked up the brief for the wellbeing resource which was then handed to the Museum team to work up to then present to the volunteer team for feedback and finalising during a final extra volunteer session in October.

Measuring wellbeing
The Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) measure was collected from Volunteer Buddies and Wellbeing Champions at every session, and the UCL Museum Wellbeing Measure (MWM) collected at the start and end of four of these sessions, where additional feedback was requested using the ‘Thoughts and Comments’ page from the UCL Museum Wellbeing Measures Toolkit.

In-depth demi-structure interviews were carried out by a UCL researcher at the end of the project with Wellbeing Champions, Volunteer Buddies, and staff including senior managers. Other means of evaluation initiated included:

- ‘Capturing reflections’ (positives and challenges from the day) shared at every session around a circle that were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed
- ‘Wellbeing Personal Meaning Maps’ and ‘Personal Wellbeing Journeys’ completed by the Volunteer Buddies
- ‘Wellbeing Personal Meaning Maps’ completed by the Wellbeing Champions
- A ‘Reflective Diary’ kept by the Lead Volunteer Manager
Project Outputs and Outcomes
A new wellbeing resource for the Museum

Following the ideation stage and subsequent analysis of feasibility, budgets, timescales etc. against the ideas, The ‘Guide to Feeling Good in the Museum’ was chosen.

The guide is a free printed booklet for visitors to help them locate quieter spaces in the Museum for reflection and to enhance their wellbeing through sensory activities. The concept was based on one of the volunteer’s personal experiences of the Museum with the primary aim to reduce barriers to visitors who find the Museum environment stressful, thus helping enhance access to a broader Museum audience.

The Wellbeing Champions worked with NHM’s Design team to create a design brief. This refining process involved the group assessing noise levels, crowds, ease of finding exits and seating in different spaces around the Museum in order to select six spaces. The volunteers suggested possible sensory activities to enhance wellbeing in those spaces; and they considered the imagery, layout, format and size of the booklet. Time constraints meant that the Museum team then took over the production at the end of the 8 sessions. An extra volunteering session was arranged in the October to trial the drafted resource and select the illustrator.

The final design was printed in November and trialled by 40 delegates at the GIVE project conference with very positive feedback. The resource was officially launched the same week at the end of project celebration and the final product, ‘Finding Calm’ is free for visitors to pick up at the Welcome Desks. With a limited run of 750 copies, in time, it is hoped to develop the guide as a digital download.

Resource feedback
One of the outcomes of this project was to create collections-inspired and object handling wellbeing resources for all visitors to benefit from and support their wellbeing as well as for volunteer to enhance accessibility to particular collections by selecting objects which are relevant to specific audiences. The Museum will conduct formal evaluation of the resource to measure this outcome when it re-opens following Covid-19.

Anecdotal feedback suggests a positive response to date.
‘It has a calm feel to it, it feels lovely to hold and I love the empty pages at the back’ (Give Conference delegate, November 2019)

‘I love it, I gave one to a family with an autistic child the other day, they seemed really pleased’ (Visitor assistant, December 2019)

The volunteers involved have been delighted with the resource:

‘Positive was feeling really proud of the guide that came out of quite a small idea but I’m really proud to have contributed to it and that everyone is now bringing it, their own ideas and everything.’ (Wellbeing Champion)

“The wellbeing book is lovely, a very gentle tour of some of the museum’s less well known places, and the artwork is beautiful and soothing.” (Wellbeing buddy volunteer, November 2019).

We have also received attention and promotion of the resource on Twitter

Impact on Volunteer Wellbeing

“It was a great opportunity to be in this project. I felt so active today.” Wellbeing Champion, Week 8 (End of session reflection)

The Wellbeing Champion volunteers came to the project with very different personal experiences, expectations and motivations for volunteering. Several volunteers reported previous or current state of poor mental health as a motivating factor.

A mixture of quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods were used to understand wellbeing impact of the volunteering.

Quantitative evaluation

The NHM assessed the wellbeing of these volunteers using SWEMWBS over seven workshops (Sessions 2-8), and UCLs Museum Wellbeing Measure (MWM) pre-post four of these workshops (Sessions 4 and 6-8). Eight Wellbeing Champions and three Buddies completed both sets of measures. SWEMWBS data means and standard deviations were calculated for all volunteers, and for Champions and Buddies separately.
Plotting the mean scores showed little difference across eight sessions for all 11 volunteers. Scores remained within a narrow range showing medium level mental wellbeing. SWEMWBS mean scores showed less variability in Wellbeing Champion scores than Buddy scores. Buddies showed increased wellbeing between Sessions 5-6 though Wellbeing Champions tended not to show any increase.

There were no significant differences in MWM pre-session scores for all volunteers (pooled Champions and Buddy scores). Although post-session scores appeared to drop between Sessions 6-7 for all volunteers, it was the lower Buddy scores that reduced the overall average. As with the SWEMWBS, the scores for Buddies showed more variability than the scores for Champions. The SWEMWBS also showed an increase in scores for Session 6 and a decrease in scores for Sessions 7 and 8, though this difference was more evident for the MWM.

For each of the six MWM mood word items, there was an increase in post-session wellbeing in Session 6 and a decrease in post-session wellbeing in Session 7. For all volunteers, items Enthusiastic, Excited, Happy and Inspired produced higher post-session scores than Active and Alert that were more accentuated for Champions than for Buddies (for specific analysis details, see Evaluation Report Section 6).

To explain why Sessions 7 and 8 might have been more physically and mentally demanding for volunteers, facilitators’ notes and post-training interviews were consulted. The notes implied that Sessions 4 and 6, which were concerned with enrichment, might have been more relaxed than Sessions 7 and 8, which were concerned with resource development, intensive work and decision making. Further reflection from the Wellbeing Champions revealed that although those sessions were challenging, their sense of achievement outweighed the pressures of these final two sessions.

**Wellbeing Personal Meaning Maps**

For the first, introductory workshop at the NHM, nine Champions and five Buddies were asked to draw ‘Personal Meaning Maps’ to explore prior knowledge and attitudes towards the concept of ‘Wellbeing’. A content analysis was conducted on 148 words and phrases that the 14 volunteers associated with wellbeing. ‘Physical health’ occurred the most frequently at 10 times, ‘happiness’ at nine times, ‘mental health’ at six times and ‘good food’ at five times. Six of the remaining 118 words occurred three times each, 17 words twice each and 66 words once each. The analysis identified eight main themes, each with two sub-themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>• Keeping physically healthy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Keeping mentally healthy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive emotion</td>
<td>• Experience of positive emotion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Freedom from negative emotion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Living well</td>
<td>• Eating well</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Living safely and securely</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presence of others</td>
<td>• Family, friends and animals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caring about others</td>
<td>• Making connections with others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Looking forward</td>
<td>• Showing kindness</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Contributing to society</td>
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<td>The self</td>
<td>• Self-worth</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Self-efficacy</td>
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<td>• Positive outlook on life</td>
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<td>• Managing expectations</td>
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Qualitative evaluation

In-depth, semi-structured one-to-one interviews took place directly after the course of training with three members of staff, including one at director level, and 10 volunteers (7 Champions and 3 Buddies). Inductive thematic analysis was undertaken with the 13 interview transcripts from the NHM and another 13 from the other two partner museums.

The main themes that emerged that contributed to wellbeing from the experiences of the volunteers were:

1. Social interaction and the forming of connections between volunteers helped to create a network which increased social inclusion and confidence.

2. Volunteer support through buddies and staff enabled the building of relationships and fostered cohesion

3. Learning appeared to increase volunteer feelings of being valued, consolidate volunteer confidence and bolster feelings of agency. Offering appropriate training for staff to support volunteers and other staff working with volunteers increased the ability and confidence of everyone working in the museums and helped to embed wellbeing

4. When volunteers dedicated their time and effort to the Museum, it helped them develop a sense of belonging and of being valued which in turn, led to feelings of purposeful fulfilment from giving of themselves in a rewarding way.

5. Volunteering provided a routine and structured way for volunteers to spend time within that routine. The commitment to and regularity of the voluntary position gave volunteers a sense of purpose and helped them integrate into the Museum. Routine also established regular social interaction and engagement with other volunteers, staff and visitors to the museum.

A key enabling factor contributing to the above was inclusivity. Key training for staff in working with different audiences and making recruitment more accessible resulted in diverse volunteer cohorts. One of the Wellbeing Champions commented about appreciating the diversity of the group and how it led to everyone involved in the project gaining new perspectives.

The experiences of the volunteers involved varied greatly. For at least two of the Wellbeing Champions, the volunteering experience was truly transformative.

For one volunteer, the experience reminded them of the importance of the bigger things in life such as nature and connecting with people and gave them a renewed sense of calm. This same volunteer also gained huge amounts of confidence in speaking in front of a group. They found public spaces stressful and had the idea to create a resource to help other people who might be challenged in the same way.

Another volunteer was keen to be involved with the project to build social contact, to return to normality and to help other people. They were passionate about contributing their experiences around mental health and other personal challenges to help others understand the importance of wellbeing. Whilst they were enthusiastic about volunteering, they initially had low confidence in
their ability to contribute. However, they saw this project as an opportunity to challenge themselves in a safe space. They grew in confidence through the project and even designed and presented to their local councillor a redevelopment ‘Wellbeing Garden’ in an empty unused piece of land near their home.

“I start in September at the [***] University I am going to study interior architecture... my life change started with you and I will never have enough words to appreciate the fantastic opportunity to participate in wellbeing champions.” (Wellbeing Champion)

Two volunteers’ changed career aspirations towards science, two volunteers changed plans to go into further study; and one volunteer succeeded in achieving a career goal and gaining a fellowship. Whilst these successes cannot be attributed to the project, the volunteers all acknowledged some influence from their volunteering with the project, whether as a catalyst or as something useful on their CV, towards this success. For other volunteers involved, having the Museum as a familiar place to go and feel proud of having volunteered there, is also a mark of improved wellbeing and social connection. Five volunteers attended the GIVE conference in November, demonstrating a continued sense of pride and ownership over their volunteering with the Project and one Wellbeing Champion became a Learning Volunteer in the autumn recruit. Many of the wellbeing champions have maintained contact with the Learning Volunteer Management team.

In the interviews with the UCL researcher, volunteers were asked to assess the impact of the project overall on their wellbeing. Most found this difficult to answer and reflected that there were other life circumstances that held more influence over their general wellbeing but participating in the sessions had led them to greater awareness of their and others’ wellbeing, and the skills, connections, experiences and knowledge they had gained from participating had had a positive impact overall.

Appendix 4 describes two volunteers’ detailed journeys through the project, from the project lead’s reflection diary, produced with their permission.

### Buddies

The intention for the project was to utilise existing experienced volunteers to support and mentor new volunteers. When working with new audiences, this can prove challenging if the buddies do not have experience or confidence in working with different audiences or indeed working on a research/development project that also sits outside their regular volunteering. However, buddy volunteers from the Learning Volunteer Programme shared their knowledge and experience of the Museum, from wayfinding to giving a tour of their favourite specimens in the Museum for the potential champions during the ‘See the Museum’ day held during recruitment. They also provided valuable insight into both how the Museum works and the collection, sharing their immense enthusiasm for specimens with the Wellbeing Champions throughout the project.

Buddies benefited from a wider array of training than normally available through the LVP including working with vulnerable adults and social isolation.

There were lessons learned in terms of buddy role descriptions and managing expectations given that the output of the project was purposefully not defined. Some buddies commented that the experience was not what they were expecting but often, the sense of responsibility for the champions’ welfare and progress with their wellbeing was a huge motivation in continuing to be involved with the project, with one buddy postponing the start date of a new job so that they could volunteer through to the end of the project.
Diversifying volunteering and inclusion

One of the aims of the project was to work with local people to address their health and wellbeing inequalities. The local borough strategic wellbeing assessments informed the audience target and project design to meet their needs. Four of the nine Wellbeing Champions were from Westminster or Kensington and Chelsea but due to the lack of referrals and time constraints geographies were widened whilst still retaining the focus on social isolation. Three volunteers were from other parts of London and two were from outside London.

The project aim of increasing diversity in the volunteer base and to make the volunteer experience more inclusive led to a change in recruitment process. Working in partnership with gateway organisations that have existing relationships with a variety of audiences enabled access to volunteers that might not traditionally seek to volunteer in somewhere like the NHM. Also creating opportunities for the NHM team to meet people where they are to introduce the project and then setting up an introduction to the Museum before committing helped to excite people about the project and also provide a friendly and welcoming face to what can be perceived to be an austere organisation.

Changes to the application form to radically simplify and to only draw out the most crucial information from applicants and remove barriers to volunteering worked well as well as the opportunity to assist people with their applications in person. Follow up conversations over the phone helped to draw out mutual suitability and confirmation of the target audience.

Through the project, a new equal opportunity form was created to capture volunteer diversity which is now being used across other volunteering initiatives in the Museum.

Following this project, the subsequent recruitment drive for Learning Volunteers repeated this process, successfully bringing new audiences to the programme.

Having a diverse cohort of volunteers with a range of needs led to changes in the scope of training offered to volunteers and Volunteer Managers. In offering skills’ training to support diversity, museums empowered volunteers to learn and inform, thereby enriching social connections with visitors and colleagues. It was clear from early conversations with the new Wellbeing Champions that mental health training would be vital. The project strengthened the case for rolling out Mental Health First Aider training across the Museum. The first group of Mental Health First Aiders were trained in February 2020 alongside a wellbeing training series for museum staff and volunteers.

Embedding wellbeing

A workshop was held at the Museum to explore the question ‘How can volunteering for wellbeing be embedded organisationally’. The outcomes, mixed with the experience of this project, included change recommendations in three areas – Institutional, local (learning volunteer programme) and inclusive practice.

In terms of institutional change, discussions centred around pooling wellbeing initiatives across the Museum, cultivating partnerships with local community-based organisations museums and the suggestion to work on smaller-scale but longer-term projects centred around volunteering for wellbeing. Local programme changes included enhancing training amongst the volunteer management team and volunteer team including mental health awareness, safeguarding and working with different and vulnerable audiences. The importance of daily volunteer debriefs was noted as a mechanism to regularly measure wellbeing and to tease out wellbeing needs and support.
Finally, more inclusive practice measures were discussed such as minimising formal/written application processes, optimising informal meet the team and see the museum opportunities for new audiences and building relationships with organisations specifically set up for different types of audiences to reach diverse audiences. The team intend to utilise volunteer buddies more regularly as part of the recruitment and induction process to benefit new and existing volunteers. Creating a variety of volunteering roles within and across teams in the Museum that have a variety of time commitments and require different skill sets will help to include more diverse audiences and personalise volunteering experiences.

An ambition of this project was to retain 5-10 new volunteers to continue to facilitate wellbeing outputs and have sustained relationships with the Museum. Six of the volunteers elected to become a wellbeing advisory panel for the Museum and met in October to feed into the Urban Nature Project. They shared their unused resource ideas and advised on wellbeing good practice.

Separately, two champion volunteers connected with the Gender Diversity group at the Museum in November 2019. Before the project end, the champion volunteers were encouraged to apply for other volunteer roles at the Museum. Both Learning Volunteer and Wildlife Garden Volunteer programmes recruited in Autumn 2019 with one wellbeing champion joining the Learning Volunteer Programme. Two other wellbeing champions expressed interest but did not apply due to changes in their circumstances. The other wellbeing champions expressed an interest in volunteering with other parts of the Museum, and with shorter-term projects, particularly behind the scenes volunteering.

Wider project benefits

**Direct involvement of NHM staff** from twelve Museum teams beyond the Learning Programme meant that the profile of the LVP was raised, greater connections were established between staff, and skills were utilised to benefit volunteers, project and resource.

**Wayfinding and access** – the floor plan adapted for the wellbeing resource has been used as a basis for school group wayfinding and the resource itself has been promoted by the Museum’s Access team for families attending Dinosaur – a regular event for families with neuro-diverse children. The resource will be shared on the Access page of the Museum website following Covid19 Lockdown.

**Access to expertise.** Working with staff from across the Museum with different expertise e.g. digital media, design, visitor experience etc. benefited this project and supported a better awareness of wellbeing, the volunteering programme and collaboration.

**Built better relationships.** The team have remained in contact with VCKC throughout the project, encouraging volunteers to attend their training sessions and representatives came to the UCL wellbeing training, the GIVE Conference and the Celebration party at the end. The relationship continued in the further recruits for the LVP, holding an outreach days in one of their partner sites in North Kensington.

**Project Budget**

In total, the NHM project cost £5732.27. This was an underspend of £267 of the project budget (£6000). The original forecast barely correlated with the actual costings. This was due to the end output developed was not an activity to be delivered by volunteers but instead a take-away resource.
for visitors. This meant the purchase of handling specimens wasn’t necessary but instead the main costs were around the (external) illustration and printing of the booklet (68%).

The other main costs were catering for the volunteers (14%), travel (6.5%) and the volunteer celebration at the end of the project (5.4%).

**Lessons Learned**

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<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Lesson</th>
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| Engaging new audiences     | 1. Identifying those at risk of social isolation was extremely challenging. Referrals were not available and so proxy indicators were gathered through informal interviews.  
2. Social isolation was too broad a group leading to extreme variability in support needs of the team, stretching capacity and capability. Training in working with vulnerable audiences is essential. More training and safeguarding measures/training were needed than anticipated. A narrower audience focus may have worked better but potentially any audience like this will always present with a variety of complex and cross-cutting needs.  
3. Participatory practice e.g. a project to co-develop a resource or activity is an excellent mechanism to empower audiences and create something genuinely relevant and owned. The process contributed towards wellbeing and pride. It is, however, resource intensive and can be difficult to manage group dynamics and opinions.  
4. Creating a variety of audience appropriate volunteer opportunities to cater for different interests, experience, availability and needs is important for inclusivity and wellbeing.  
5. Attracting new audiences requires different approaches to find and interest people who would not normally look to museums to volunteer such as job fairs and recruitment partner activities/events. This is essential but resource intensive.  
6. Short term, project-based volunteering can be difficult for individuals when they finish and can appear to be tokenistic. Measures to support the volunteers to continue growing their social network beyond the project is a necessary consideration and needs to be built in at an early stage. Signposting options for future volunteering, linking individuals with relevant training and social meetups helps to build a structure that goes beyond the project. Building in an opportunity to experience regular core volunteering beyond the project was successful. |
| Recruitment & Selection   | 7. Whilst intended to recruit hyper local volunteers from K&C, H&F and Westminster, in order to fulfil quota, the geography had to be extended. Having more recruitment or community partner relationships may have helped.  
8. Opportunities to meet the NHM team in their community space as well as at the NHM before committing worked well and supported volunteer confidence  
9. Short, focussed application forms and support to complete worked well in reducing barriers to volunteering and has influenced recent core volunteer recruitment practice. However, this method is more resource intensive. |
| Volunteer Buddies         | 10. Volunteer Buddies fed back that their role description lacked clarity around expectations of the buddy role and their regular volunteering. Not identifying
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wellbeing</th>
<th>a concrete output from the project i.e. the nature of the resource was also ‘vague’. More explanation and rationale re any necessary vagueness may have helped.</th>
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<td></td>
<td>11. Clear expectations in the role description are important. The emphasis on the buddy role to support wellbeing as opposed to training/supporting the wellbeing volunteers in the expertise around the core object-based learning volunteer programme led to lower satisfaction with one buddy volunteer.</td>
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<td>12. Managing group dynamics and some challenging behaviours was not anticipated and problematic for some. This could be built into future training for buddies.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>13. The wellbeing experiences of the buddies needs to be considered. More than one buddy reflected that they were now more aware of their own social isolation leading them to doubt their own abilities to support other volunteers. Throughout the project it was necessary to build the confidence of the buddies as well as the champions around the importance of their contribution.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>14. Buddy support roles can be emotionally exhausting. It is important not to overlook the wellbeing support for the buddies</td>
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<td>15. It is important that buddies attend all the sessions in a time-bound project otherwise they can quickly feel out of the loop and demotivated.</td>
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<td>16. Continuing to capture wellbeing measures as part of volunteering programmes is important to increasing the understanding of the wellbeing benefits attached to volunteering which organisations can evidence and use to attract participants and deliver wellbeing benefits. However, not everyone wants to talk openly about wellbeing or think about the wellbeing of others.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>17. Volunteers invested more because the project felt personal to them which, in turn contributed to wellbeing.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>18. Wellbeing feedback from volunteers was varied and comparisons between the SWEMWBS, Wellbeing Umbrellas and verbal feedback were sometimes contradictory. Levels of tiredness and challenge during sessions reflected on post session feedback and across sessions. Volunteers fed back that on reflection, satisfaction from those more difficult sessions contributed to pride and positivity.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>19. Tracking volunteer learning journeys is incredibly time consuming but hugely rewarding</td>
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<td>20. Existing Learning Volunteers were concerned about how this project would impact on the security of the ongoing learning volunteer role and the future of the programme. More regular project activity of this nature will reduce this anxiety</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project</td>
<td>21. Formative planning and consultation and the decision to co-develop activity took longer than anticipated and squeezed the delivery. In addition, there was a narrow window for volunteers to be able to commit before the summer holidays when childcare responsibilities would impact on availability.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>22. The many and varied support needs of the volunteers impacts on time available so projects like this need to factor in more time rather than less.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>23. The Museum’s access protocols created logistical issues e.g. enabling short term volunteer access passes which would need to be worked out for future projects to avoid having to have multiple staff members present to enable secure access.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
24. It is important not to underestimate the amount of time that this kind of project can take to do well. The impact was felt across the wider volunteer manager team, impacting on workload and wellbeing. Involving the volunteer managers at an earlier stage and starting the project earlier may have reduced this strain.

25. A partnership manifesto outlining roles, responsibilities and timelines across the partnership would have been beneficial in workload planning and greater clarity.

26. More cross partner communication and time to discuss learnings across the partnership following the evaluation would have helped to develop consensus and how to embed project learnings across the organisations involved.

27. For future evaluation, it would be beneficial to have interview and audio recorded reflections transcripts transcribed professionally and built into project costs.

28. Evaluation responsibilities were not clearly defined at the start.
Appendix 1: Useful resources for wellbeing projects

Useful information for future wellbeing projects

- **CHWA (Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance)** is a responsive organisation with case studies and advice for cultural organisations interested in wellbeing
- **Participation and co-creation training** with external participation expert, Kayte McSweeney attended by NHM GIVE Project team (November 2018). The training helped establish a common language and understanding across teams feeding into the project.
- **What Works Wellbeing training: Wellbeing Impact Measurement Training** attended by project lead NHM Volunteer Manager attended and fed learnings into project planning (December 2018)
- **Cultures of Health and Wellbeing Conference** attended by project lead NHM Volunteer Manager to engage with wellbeing projects across wider sector (March 2019)

Essential reading for wellbeing in museums

Museums as Spaces for Wellbeing: A second report from the National Alliance for Museums, Health and Wellbeing (2018)

Calm and collected Museum and galleries: the UK’s untapped wellbeing resource
Role Description: Wellbeing Buddy
Natural History Museum GIVE Project

Summary
We are seeking a warm and friendly team of Wellbeing Buddy volunteers. Wellbeing Champions volunteers and to help develop a special new role for the Natural History Museum.

Wellbeing Buddies will support Wellbeing Champions (volunteers from the community) to explore different parts of the Museum’s fascinating collections and informal discussion, handling of Museum specimens, behind-the-scenes scientists and sharing what Learning Volunteers do each week. You will lead activities, for example leading a tour of a part of the Museum, and be there to help ensure Wellbeing Champions feel welcome and included during project sessions. During the course of a series of workshops and experts’ visits, you will help develop a brand new resource on the theme of Wellbeing. You’ll also have the chance to trial the resource.

This is a very different opportunity to our regular Learning Volunteer role, and we don’t expect you to attend every week; it is important for this project that you commit to both Wellbeing Buddy training sessions, a minimum of four and ideally at least one of the ‘Meet the team’ and ‘See the Museum: the Wellbeing Champions’. The project sessions will run on Tuesdays in March and July 2019 (please see all dates listed below).

You will be volunteering alongside adults who identify as socially isolated or socially isolated by classmates, tutors or family members. Social isolation is an objective state. Social isolation is the absence of an individual’s social network. Inclusion may be defined broadly at an individual’s social isolation. We do not expect you to attend every week; it is important for this project that you commit to both Wellbeing Buddy training sessions, a minimum of four and ideally at least one of the ‘Meet the team’ and ‘See the Museum: the Wellbeing Champions’. The project sessions will run on Tuesdays in March and July 2019 (please see all dates listed below).

When: March – September 2019
Where: Natural History Museum, South Kensington (and Volunteer Centre, Chelsea for one session)
Department: Learning (Learning Volunteer Programme)
Project lead: Tanya Neill
Application closing date: 16.00 on 26 February 2019

What do you need to apply for this role?
- Have an interest in improving your and other people’s wellbeing
- Be comfortable sharing your thoughts and opinions with others as and respecting other people’s views
- Be friendly, approachable and enjoy talking to people of all ages
- Have an interest in helping others to learn and talk about nature
- Be willing to be flexible, try new challenges and contribute as part of a team
- No previous experience or qualifications are necessary

What the role involves
- Training and opportunities to further and share your passion for the Museum
- Helping Wellbeing Champions feel welcome and included
- Providing support during workshops through getting involved and others in discussion and activities
- Supporting Wellbeing Champions to explore the Museum
- Sharing what Learning Volunteers do each week
- Opportunities to lead activities for example leading a tour of a part of the Museum
- Together help develop a brand new resource that is inspired by the Wellbeing.
- Working as part of a team to shape, develop and trial a new well
- resource for the Natural History Museum Learning Volunteer Project
- Developing confidence and new skills in research and resource creation
- Support from Learning Volunteer Engagement Managers

What will you get from this role?
As the core of this project are the ‘Five Ways to Wellbeing’ listed below:

Connect
- Help others to grow in confidence and feel part of the Museum
- Build communication skills through meeting new people, men and
- women
- Share your personal skills and knowledge to help create a special
- resource

Be active
- Share the Museum you know with new volunteers

Take notice
- Learn about wellbeing
- Reflect on your experiences to shape the wellbeing resource

Keep learning
- Learn more about the benefits of the natural world
- Try something new and challenge yourself
- Build your confidence in a friendly environment
- Receive training and one-to-one support from experienced Learning Volunteer Engagement Managers

Give
- Contribute towards developing an activity that can make a difference
everyday lives in Kensington and Chelsea
- Contribute to the making of a new Museum visitor resource

Volunteer Expenses and Benefits
As an NHM volunteer you will continue to receive our usual expenses including discounts.

This position is entirely voluntary and is therefore unpaid. Any offer of a placement is intended to create a legally binding contract between an agreement may be cancelled at any time at the discretion of either party intends any employment relationship to be created either
now or at any time

20
Appendix 3: Staff training

- **Participation and co-creation** – training run by external provider Kayte McSweeney (November 2018) attended by staff from across Learning, Evaluation, Access and Communities Teams. This training helped the project team:
  - develop a shared language around participation
  - define the parameters of volunteer participation in the project
  - address concerns around tokenism, mutual value through participation and accountability towards all stakeholders.

  It was also flagged that pulling together disparate project development strands into a shared manifesto for internal and partner usage would help (although a ‘participation manifesto’ wasn’t developed due to a lack of time across the already stretched project team).

- **Developing and Measuring Wellbeing Impact** – What Works Wellbeing at the Museum of London (December 2018) attended by NHM project lead – really excellent grounding in research around wellbeing including better understanding wellbeing in relation to different demographics (particularly in relation to age) and exploring tools and methods of how to best to design wellbeing projects and capture wellbeing outcomes.

- **Cultures of Health and Wellbeing Conference** – Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance, Newcastle (March 2019) attended by NHM project lead. Useful to hear about the methods, successes and challenges of other wellbeing projects across the cultural sector for peer-comparison and to gain a greater understanding of the changing landscape of wellbeing, particularly research around social prescribing. Notes shared across project team. In future it would help to have a standard post-conference ‘interview’ for staff to share core learnings with other staff.

- **Volunteering for Wellbeing** – workshop led by Linda Thomson and Helen Chatterjee (June 2019) introducing their research across volunteering for wellbeing in UK Museums; challenging staff to consider how to embed volunteering for wellbeing across programming; and including an open conversation between two Wellbeing Champions and NHM project lead. Attended by representatives of teams from across the NHM including Science and the Urban Nature Project as well as representatives from VCKC.

- **Mental Health for Volunteer Managers** – workshop run by ‘Well at Work’ trainer from Hammersmith and Fulham MIND (June 2019) attended by all Learning Volunteer Managers. This workshop followed a request from the project lead in April for the volunteer manager team to receive Mental Health First Aid training following the flagging of several concerns around supporting volunteers with various mental health issues across the Learning Volunteer programme including the GIVE Project. Because of the huge operational remit of the HR team, the Museum is not able to be dynamic in response to new training needs. As a result, this training was organised two months after the request when most of the project had already taken place. The training received was more of a consultation process rather than specific training for practical application.
Appendix 4: Volunteer Wellbeing Journeys

Volunteer Wellbeing Journey: Wellbeing Champion Volunteer Z.

Volunteer Z came to hear about the project through a friend (who also became a wellbeing champion) who met the NHM London Partnerships Manager at the Kensington and Chelsea Job Fair. Z attended the ‘Meet the Team’ and ‘See the Museum’ sessions and in Z’s ‘informal chat’ they spoke about having loved visiting the Museum for years, particularly early in the morning to avoid crowds. Getting to know the Museum was a particular draw for Z:

“...it’s why I volunteered here in the first place. I wouldn’t have done this project were it anywhere else. Even if it were the same project exactly.” Volunteer Z, August (Project end interview with UCL researcher)

Z was looking for a contrast from their university course which had a narrow focus and provided little to no connection with the natural world. Their wellbeing journey through this time was interwoven with the stresses of the degree and completing the project was an achievement considering the challenge of balancing the final year of their university studies alongside the project:

“And I would get so consumed by [my degree]. And not really be leaving the house very much. And whenever I came in here, it was not just the project and the people but also just the place and the subject matter and the things that we were doing and talking about. I especially felt this towards the beginning when we were doing lots of tours around the museum and visits to places like the Chelsea Physic Garden. It just reminded... it took me right out of that, really, all-consuming head space and just made me realise life... It sounds very dramatic but life is really not about meeting someone’s expectation and getting a numerical grade. There’s nature. There’s other people. There’s fascinating things from millions of years ago. They’re literally right in front of you in your city. And that calmed me down so much. It really did help.” Volunteer Z, August (Project end interview with UCL researcher)

Often a more quiet and reflective member of the group, Z gained confidence in participating more vocally as the project progressed. For Z, spending prolonged amounts of time in the Museum space was sometimes a real challenge and during the project they frequently found the noisy dynamic of the group frustrating or overwhelming:

“I became more comfortable speaking in front of the group :-)” Volunteer Z, Week 4 (UCL Thoughts and Comments form)

“My positive was I think I got better at speaking in front of the group and the negative was just like dealing with noise”. Volunteer Z, Week 8 (end of session reflection)
A particular personal achievement was articulately and compellingly presenting their idea for a wellbeing resource to Museum professionals from the Digital, Publishing, Audience Research and Design teams:

“Yes, I think my challenge was obviously presenting. Even when I know what to say, sometimes just like having to speak in front of groups of people, just can’t do it really. But I think the positive is really good considering we had to do that same presentation again about our own ideas in front of a bunch of professionals we’d never met before and even though [volunteer buddy] did most of the heavy lifting for me by speaking, like she said by the third time I did manage to get a word in edgeways and contribute.” Volunteer Z, Week 6 (end of session reflection)

From the start, Z had advocated for adults who find public spaces stressful. It was Z’s resource idea, specifically catering for this group, that was developed into the final Wellbeing Resource. Z was very clear about elements of the design and content – for example prioritising the clarity of the way-finding, needing to have honest descriptions of what to expect in the spaces, avoiding infantilising visitors, not dictating a route and emphasising the importance of this being something beautiful and calming to hold and keep.

“I feel that I got to contribute my own experiences to the resource development and that they were helpful” Volunteer Z, Week 8 (UCL Thoughts and Comments form)

After the project had finished, Z got in touch with the project lead to explain their new decisive step towards taking ownership over their future:

“I’m pleased to announce that I’m officially done with my degree and also that I’m officially a science student, which is extremely exciting.” Volunteer Z, August (email to project lead)

Volunteer Journey: Wellbeing Champion Volunteer X.

This champion volunteer heard about the project later than the others and so missed the ‘Meet the team’ and ‘See the Museum’ introductory sessions as well as the application deadline. However, a VCKC team member phoned to share this volunteer’s interest and it was immediately clear that X would benefit a lot from but also bring a lot to the project. In their ‘informal chat’ they explained their motivation for getting involved was social contact, to return to normality and to help other people. X was keen to contribute their experiences around mental health and other personal challenges to help others understand the importance of wellbeing. X’s enthusiasm for getting involved was huge:
“every second has more joy, I feel rejuvenated … the perception, everything, it is something special. You have the feeling you are part of something, a little person in this magnificent place.” Volunteer X, Week 1 (end of session reflection)

Whilst X was enthusiastic about volunteering, they initially had low confidence in their ability to contribute. However, they saw this project as an opportunity to challenge themself in a safe space:

“I am very scared when I speak English I have my limitations and I am very conscious of my memory... but I am confident inside of this room and I take this issue on board and put myself and try to speak.” Volunteer X, Week 2 (end of session reflection)

“I discovered that every [time] I feel more confident.” Volunteer X, Week 8 (UCL Thoughts and Comments form)

As the project progressed, X contributed more to team discussions, finding the creative elements particularly stimulating and encouraging others to be serious about developing a wellbeing resource for visitors. X attended every session, conducted extra research between sessions, and even designed and presented to their local councillor a redevelopment ‘Wellbeing Garden’ in an empty unused piece of land near their home. X put themself forward for every extra opportunity, including ‘A Day in the Life of a Learning Volunteer’ during which they had a revelation when a learning volunteer shared their experience of going to university in their 50s:

“That’s for me very emotional day, that’s inspirational, inspiring. I'm 45 years old and this, for these experiences all finished.” Volunteer X, June Volunteering for Wellbeing UCL-led training session for NHM staff (in open conversation with project lead)

X shared their experience of volunteering with the project to a room of NHM Museum staff in June and then in November at the GIVE Conference movingly shared their personal wellbeing journey to 100 delegates, championing the rich potential of volunteering for wellbeing in Museums. For X, volunteering for wellbeing has been a life-changing experience:

“I start in September at the [***] University I am going to study interior architecture... my life change started with you and I will never have enough words to appreciate the fantastic opportunity to participate in wellbeing champions.” Volunteer X, April 2020 reflection by email to project lead

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1 Results taken from Give NLHF Evaluation Report Final 28Feb2020