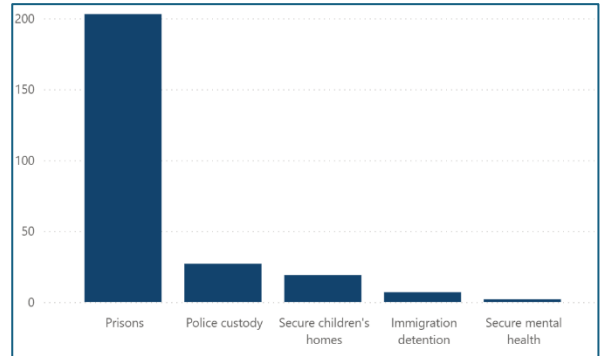




Good Practice: Wellbeing Support

World Wellbeing Week, 24-30 June 2026, is a global initiative focusing on improving health and wellbeing in society. It encourages taking meaningful steps towards wellbeing that help people feel healthier, supported and more engaged. For people deprived of their liberty, wellbeing should not be the subject of reflection for one week alone – it should be an everyday consideration, embedded in the culture and practice of all establishments in which liberty is restricted.



Number of wellbeing-related good practice examples by setting

Wellbeing encompasses both physical and mental wellbeing as well as social connection. It is shaped by whether a person has purpose, human contact, access to activities, and opportunities for creativity. Small features of daily life can have a powerful effect on how a person experiences deprivation of liberty.

This paper highlights examples of positive practice from across the UK deprivation of liberty landscape that recognise wellbeing as something more than clinical treatment or risk management. It brings together approaches that support people not only to be safe, but to feel connected, respected and engaged.

Supportive Relationships and Compassionate Care

Wellbeing in deprivation of liberty settings is not only shaped by formal programmes or interventions, but – perhaps more fundamentally – by how people are treated day to day. Dignity, kindness and genuine human connection are the foundation of improved wellbeing.

The quality of relationships between staff and those in their care is foundational. Across young offender institutions (YOIs), officers described deliberate efforts to set up games or activities when children arrived on the wing to create a sense of ease and warmth. One officer reflected that there is “no us and them”. This relational approach creates the safety that enables children, and any other population, to open up and engage. At Kyloe House secure children's home, staff sustained this attentive, meaningful care, especially with children who were struggling to settle, helping to build a harmonious and trusting atmosphere over time. Independent Custody Visitors in Scotland have similarly and frequently noted custody officers going out of their way to treat detainees with care and respect, with those in custody having reported positive experiences of how they were treated. Across all these examples, the message is consistent: the relationship itself can be the intervention that improves wellbeing.

Compassionate care improves wellbeing most effectively when it is responsive to the specific person and situation, rather than applying a uniform approach. Examples of this vary, but they are unified in the attentiveness to individual need that they entail. At Derwentside IRC, the introduction of weekly management welfare checks for those held for more than six months directly acknowledged that prolonged detention in immigration detention poses particular risks to wellbeing. In Cheshire police custody, the movement of a detainee to a quieter wing recognised that the physical environment had a direct bearing on the individual's sense of calm and safety. At HMP Polmont, the Inclusion Team tailored support for those at risk of social isolation: personal gym tuition, individual escorted visits to the



Learning Centre and work sheds, and therapeutic activities such as the Paws for Progress dog handling programme. This outreach addressed a significant threat to wellbeing in custodial settings: the withdrawal from connection and activity that can entrench poor mental wellbeing. Across these examples, being seen and responded to as an individual is precisely what makes the difference between poor and improved wellbeing.

Faith and pastoral care also consistently emerge as among the most valued sources of support for detained people. At HMP Thameside, the chaplaincy team consistently saw all new arrivals within 24 hours and maintained a proactive presence elsewhere – making daily visits to separated prisoners and those on ACCTs. This consistent, non-clinical contact reaches people at vulnerable moments and offers a relationship that is not contingent on risk management or behaviour. At HMP Leyhill, high quality faith facilities, including an outdoor Buddha garden and Pagan grove, provided peaceful areas for contemplation and worship, recognising that spiritual wellbeing is a distinct dimension of a person's overall welfare.

Staff at all levels, and across all settings, should be supported to invest time in genuine human connection with those in their care, and should understand that informal moments of warmth and dignity can be as impactful as any formal programme. Deprivation of liberty settings should ensure that these relationships and compassionate care reach those in the most vulnerable circumstances, and that individualised responses to needs are embedded in everyday practice as far as possible.

Meaningful Activity, Creativity and Expression:

Wellbeing in detention is shaped by whether people have access to purpose, stimulation, and opportunities for self-expression. Meaningful activity is not just about keeping people occupied; it is about enabling them to experience enjoyment, build confidence, develop skills, and maintain a sense of identity. Where people can create, learn, and contribute, they are better equipped to cope with the stresses of detention and to sustain their mental and emotional health.

Libraries are among the most versatile resources available in detention settings, offering not only access to reading and learning but also functioning as social spaces that bring people together. At Derwentside IRC, the library served as a community hub for the women there, providing a range of well-attended activities and facilities. At HMP Swansea, the library went further still – organising competitions, celebrations, mental health and wellbeing sessions, a weekly over-50s group, and reading challenges, as well as becoming the first prison library to receive a Library of Sanctuary award, recognising its role as a place of safety and inclusion. The library at HMP Thameside, too, had coordinated several activities including sound, music and art therapy. These examples illustrate that a library can be an active site of wellbeing provision.

Creative activity is especially important because it gives people a means of expression beyond formal conversations, assessments or interventions. Art, music, writing and performance can allow individuals to process emotions, communicate aspects of themselves, and experience enjoyment and pride in what they have produced. Across a number of prisons, including Magilligan, Drake Hall and Bedford, people had access to a wide range of creative activities, such as creative writing, poetry, painting, sketching, scratch art, pottery and cooking. These activities matter because they support wellbeing in multiple ways: they provide structure, encourage focus, offer an outlet for emotion, and create opportunities for personal achievement. At HMP Bronzefield, work with Pimlico Opera to stage a theatre performance offered prisoners a creative outlet not only through acting, but also through hair and make-



up and wider involvement in the production. This kind of collective creative endeavour can support confidence, teamwork and a sense of shared purpose, all of which are important protective factors for wellbeing.

Enrichment does not always need to be explicitly therapeutic or artistic to support wellbeing. Practical information, life skills and broader opportunities for development can reduce anxiety, help people prepare for the future and give them a stronger sense of control. At Werrington YOI, the introduction of regular enrichment weeks provided a break from the standard timetable and enabled young people to hear from outside speakers and prepare for independent living. A wellbeing hub at HMP Cardiff had plans to incorporate activities including financial wellbeing, social connection, building positive relationships, understanding the broader social determinants of health, and managing workloads. Even simple processes, such as giving a welcome pack to children arriving at Werrington, helped support wellbeing in a new and anxiety-inducing environment. These activities recognise that wellbeing is connected not only to how someone feels in the moment, but also to whether they feel equipped to manage life's relationships and responsibilities.

For children and young people, opportunities for achievement, celebration and play are particularly significant. In some secure children's homes, children spoke positively about a wide range of activities like graduation ceremonies, climbing walls and events such as "Britain's Got Talent". These opportunities can help children create positive memories in settings that can otherwise be dominated by uncertainty or distress. They also reinforce the importance of seeing children as children: individuals who need encouragement, creativity and opportunities to grow, not only supervision and risk management.

Across these examples, the strongest practice is that which treats meaningful activity as central to wellbeing rather than as an optional extra. Activity supports wellbeing most effectively when it is varied, accessible and responsive to the interests, abilities and needs of the people in the setting. Deprivation of liberty settings should therefore ensure that opportunities for learning, creativity, cultural participation, practical life skills and social connection are embedded into daily life wherever possible.

Physical Activity and Fresh Air:

Physical activity does not only support physical health – opportunities to exercise and spend time outdoors can help people calm and engaged in daily life.

Football matches at HMP Birmingham created healthy competition and promoted positive relationships and a sense of community between the men there, while a targeted PE programme at HMP Berwyn successfully engaged individuals with a history of violence, helping them develop communication and interpersonal skills. Magilligan prison was also the second prison in the UK to establish a regular Parkrun, enabling prisoners to participate in a community event and enhance their social skills, as well as improve their health and their wellbeing.

Physical activity has also proven to be an effective vehicle for learning, reaching those who may otherwise disengage. At HMP Frankland, the "Get Fit with Maths/English" courses had helped prisoners improve their skills in maths and English by using health and fitness



examples to ground learning and approach it more practically. This kind of integration reflects a person-centred approach to supporting people in custody.

Even in settings with limited infrastructure for physical activity and time outdoors, good practice is possible. In the Scottish Highlands and Islands, detainees in police custody were offered opportunities to exercise – evidence that commitment to wellbeing support does not require dedicated facilities.

Therapeutic outdoor spaces represent a particularly valuable provision. The therapeutic garden at Magilligan's Care and Supervision Unit offered those separated from the mainstream population a positive and calming environment. At the Atkinson Unit secure children's home, staff received specific training to support children in using the therapeutic garden for self-regulation. These examples demonstrate that access to green space, with the right support, can be a genuine clinical and developmental tool that can aid wellbeing.

Deprivation of liberty settings should treat physical activity and access to fresh air as essential components of a wellbeing strategy. Where possible, activity programmes should be designed to serve multiple purposes: building relationships, supporting learning, and developing social skills. Establishments should also consider the therapeutic value of outdoor spaces, and ensure staff are equipped to use them purposefully.

So what does wellbeing mean when liberty is taken away?

Wellbeing is not a single service, intervention or event, but something that is built through the everyday culture of settings of deprivation of liberty. Relationships, meaningful activity, creativity and physical movement all help people retain dignity and connection in circumstances where these can easily be diminished. The positive practice highlighted in this paper demonstrates that even small, practical steps can make a meaningful difference to how people experience deprivation of liberty. Embedding wellbeing into daily life should be central to humane, respectful and effective care.