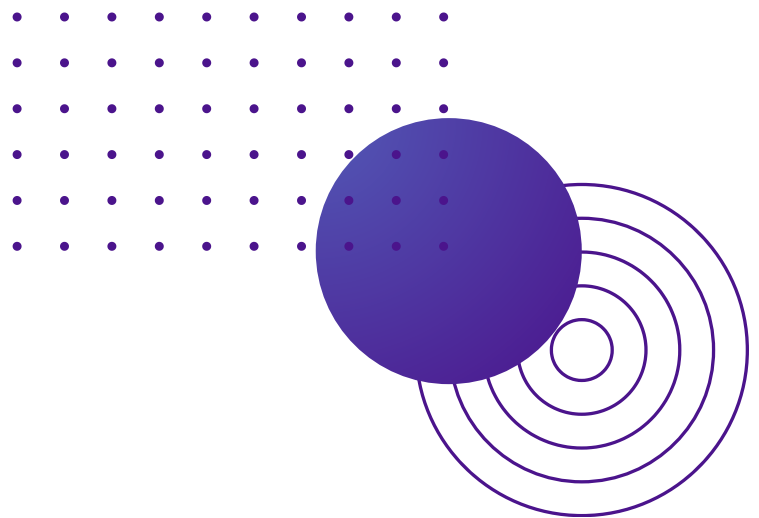




WELLBEING THRU SPORT

PROJECT REPORT



2025



The Thru Life '*wellbeing thru sports*' project provided a structured, community-based intervention using football as a tool. It offered a safe space for young people affected by trauma and grief, fostering peer support, mentorship, and personal development, while promoting well-being, trust, and positive coping strategies through sport and discussions.

This analysis aims to offer insights to inform future youth interventions addressing trauma and grief.

ABOUT THRU LIFE



ABOUT US

Thru Life is dedicated to supporting young people and their families, particularly those living in and around the outskirts of London. We offer a wide range of programmes designed to help young people develop essential life skills, make better choices, and create positive futures for themselves.

OUR APPROACH

Our approach is dynamic and practical, often drawing on personal experiences to inspire and guide young people towards making positive decisions. We believe in the power of partnership and work closely with local organisations to provide additional support and opportunities.

OUR MISSION

At Thru Life, we aim to empower young people by equipping them with the skills, knowledge, and experiences needed to navigate life successfully. Through mentorship, leadership training, and access to valuable opportunities, we help young people build confidence, resilience, and a sense of purpose.

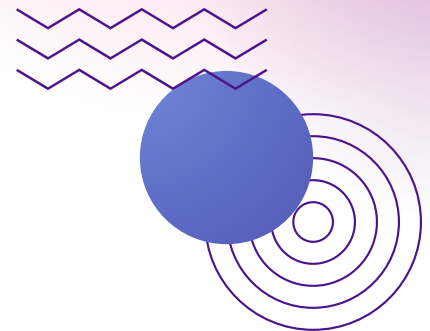


WHAT WE DO

OUR PROGRAMMES

Our programmes are tailored to meet both group and individual needs and include:

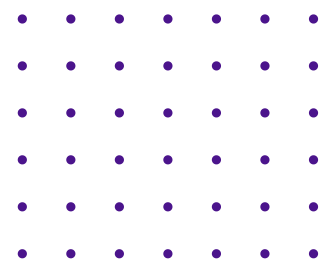
- **One-to-one mentoring** – Providing guidance and support to help young people overcome challenges.
- **Work experience placements** – Creating opportunities for young people to gain practical skills and explore career paths.
- **Sporting activities** – Encouraging teamwork, discipline, and a healthy lifestyle through various sports.
- **Bespoke leadership programmes** – Helping young people develop essential leadership and decision-making skills.



OUR PARTNERSHIPS

Collaboration is at the heart of our work. We partner with various organisations to ensure young people have access to the support they need. These include:

- Housing associations
- Further education colleges
- Jobcentre Plus
- Youth offending services
- Council regeneration programmes (both socioeconomic and capital developments)



OUR JOURNEY

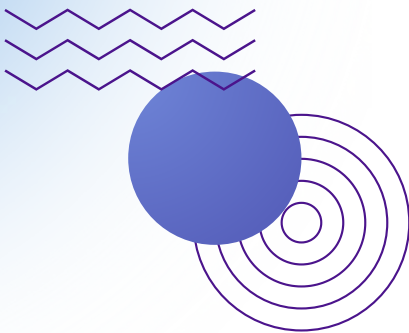
- **2004** – Thru Sport launched to develop grassroots sports initiatives and steer young people away from crime.
- **2020** – Thru Life CIC established to expand our work into mentoring, leadership training, and wider youth development opportunities through our growing network of partners.



WELLBEING THRU SPORTS

INTRODUCTION

Thru Life piloted '*Wellbeing Thru Sports*' a new programme to support young people aged 12 – 18 who have experienced trauma or grief in their life.



PROJECT AIMS

This programme aims to ensure young people:

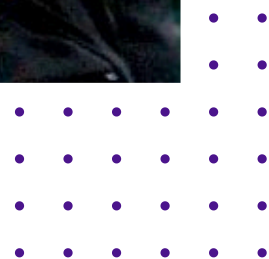
- Are better supported through the grief process
- Feel better able to channel their emotions through sport
- Can identify and convey the type of support they need



SESSIONS

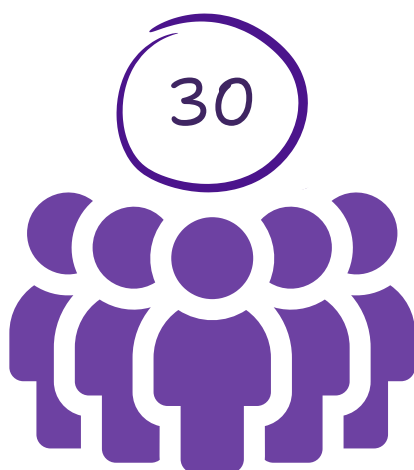
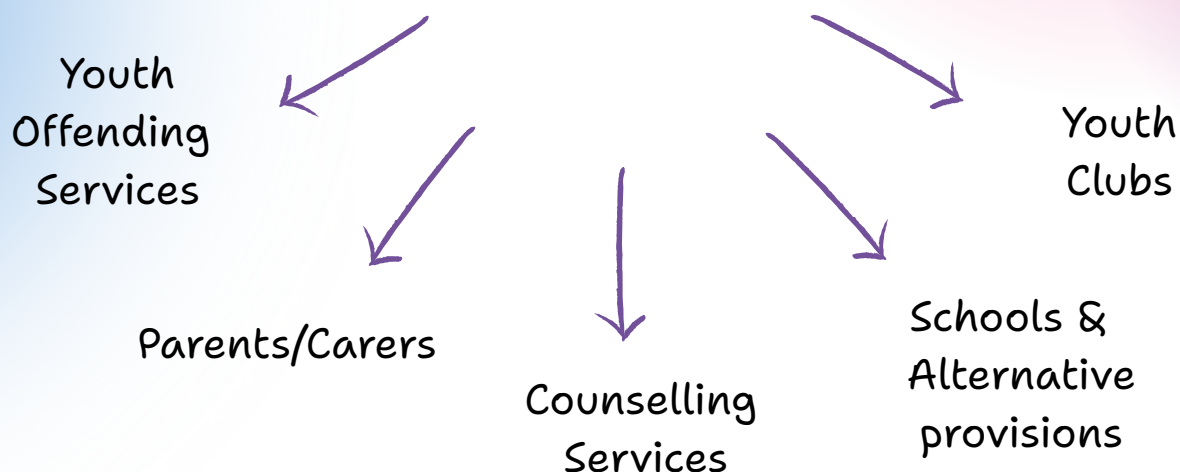
Sessions will feature:

- One-to-one mentoring
- Multisports sessions
- Football competitions
- A 'Call to Action' event to raise awareness about the impact of violence on youth



PROGRAMME ENGAGEMENT

REFERRALS



PARTICIPANTS

The initial goal was to engage 10 young people in the 'Wellbeing Through Sports' programme, but due to increasing demand and needs within the community, participation was expanded to include 30 young people. Out of the 30 young people, 25 remained consistently involved, demonstrating a strong retention rate and a positive response to the program's impact.

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to analyse interviews with the young people. IPA focuses on understanding how individuals make sense of their lived experiences, particularly in emotionally significant contexts. The participants' narratives reveal shared themes related to grief, emotional regulation, masculinity, and the role of community in processing trauma. The emerging themes are below:

- 01 **Football as a Means of Emotional Regulation and Escape**
- 02 **The Role of Community in Grief Processing**
- 03 **Barriers to Emotional Expression: Masculinity and Vulnerability**
- 04 **Knowing How and When to Seek Support**

- 05 **Therapeutic Engagement: Building Trust and Emotional Expression**

This account provides a subjective, lived experience of facilitating bereavement support through sports-based intervention. The facilitator's reflections offer insight into relationship-building, adaptation in therapeutic practice, and the long-term nature of grief processing.

- 06 **Escaping Reality through Football and Music**

The young people wrote and recorded a rap as a reflection of their time on the project. The lyrics provide deep insight into personal experiences of struggle, resilience, and identity, revealing emotional and cognitive processing through storytelling. IPA allows us to explore how these young people make sense of their reality, trauma, and aspirations within their lived experiences.

01 FOOTBALL AS A MEANS OF EMOTIONAL REGULATION AND ESCAPE

For all participants, football emerged as a crucial coping strategy for processing emotions, particularly grief and anger. Ramario described football as *“an escape from reality”*, suggesting that engagement in sport at Thru Life allows him to momentarily disconnect from emotional distress. Tyrese echoes this, stating that football provides *“relief”* and serves as a retreat from stressors such as school. Similarly, Yakub articulated that football provided *“a platform to release emotion in a positive way”*, reinforcing the therapeutic impact of structured physical activity. Mohammed expanded on this, highlighting the communal aspect of the sport: *“we all kind of came together through football”*, illustrating how sport serves as a collective healing tool, reinforcing social connection and emotional resilience (Holt et al., 2017).



Research on sport psychology, highlights how physical activity contributes to emotional self-regulation and resilience (Reardon et al., 2019). Participation in football enables the players to process grief in a socially accepted, non-verbal way, offering emotional release without requiring direct discussion of their pain.

02 THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY IN GRIEF PROCESSING

A consistent theme throughout the accounts is the significance of peer and mentor relationships in navigating grief. Mohammed, for example, notes that *“one way we all came together was through football”* following their friend’s murder. Similarly, Yakub reflects on the importance of not isolating oneself in grief, stating that community offers a way to *“mitigate negative circumstances.”* Tyrese noted that *“through football, we were meeting up more... that got me closer to a lot of guys”*, indicating how shared experiences foster stronger social support networks. Yakub acknowledged the importance of trust, stating that Thru Life provided *“a platform without shame”*, which was particularly crucial for young men facing social barriers to emotional disclosure.



This aligns with research in community psychology, which stresses the role of shared experiences and collective resilience in coping with trauma (Prilleltensky, 2003). The sense of belonging provided by the team fosters emotional safety, allowing participants to feel understood and validated in their emotions.

03 BARRIERS TO EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION: MASCULINITY AND VULNERABILITY

Several participants reflected on the difficulty of expressing emotions due to societal expectations placed on young men. Mohammed acknowledged, *“as teenage men, we’re not really taught to talk about our emotions... we’re just meant to get on with it”*, underscoring the cultural stigma surrounding emotional vulnerability. Yakub described how Thru Life helped *“lift that barrier”*, demonstrating the program’s role in reshaping traditional gender norms around masculinity and emotion. However, trusted role models within Thru Life appear to play a transformative role in breaking down these barriers. Several participants mention Richard, describing how his shared lived experiences created a sense of relatability and trust. Mohammed explains that *“Richard has been through scenarios like ours... knowing that he made it through gives us hope.”*



This is supported by research in youth justice and trauma-informed mentoring, which suggests that having mentors with lived experience fosters emotional openness and a sense of possibility for the future (Buck, 2021).

04 KNOWING HOW AND WHEN TO SEEK SUPPORT

Many participants acknowledge a greater awareness of support systems since joining Thru Life. Yakub highlighted the importance of structured support, stating: ***“We knew that we could talk to Richard or Terry at any time if we were struggling.”*** Similarly, Mohammed emphasised how relatable mentors create a sense of safety, noting: ***“Richard told us about his past experiences... we know he can relate.”***

Tyrese, however, highlighted the role of peer-based support networks, explaining: ***“We’ve got Richard and Terry, but also my friends... if anything, I just go to them and talk casually.”*** Whilst Ramario acknowledged the value of knowing multiple avenues of support stating: ***“There’s a lot of coaches at Thru Life that I’ve met... and obviously Richard.”***



Trusted mentors and peer connections are essential for adolescent well-being, as young people often seek support from those with shared experiences, fostering emotional security (Moses, 2017). Whilst access to multiple support options, builds independence and confidence, key to developing emotional resilience (Stein, 2005).

05 THERAPEUTIC ENGAGEMENT: BUILDING TRUST AND EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION

The therapist's reflections emphasise the importance of creating a safe and adaptable space for young men to process grief. Recognising that traditional therapeutic approaches may not resonate, he notes, *"it's not so much sitting down and saying how does that make you feel"*, instead embedding emotional discussions within sports, peer interactions, and informal conversations. This method allows for organic emotional expression, as he describes, *"in between the laughter and the giggles, they have serious moments where they can really come together."* Trust-building emerges as a gradual process, with young men initially guarded but later opening up—*"once they got used to me, they were more able to let me in a little piece of how they were feeling."* The facilitator's experience highlights the value of non-traditional therapeutic engagement, ensuring that grief is addressed without pressure or scrutiny, fostering long-term emotional resilience within a peer-supported environment.



By embedding therapeutic support within familiar and meaningful activities, the approach fosters authentic engagement, trust, and long-term emotional processing. The insights gained further validate the importance of adaptive, non-traditional therapeutic approaches in reaching young people who may otherwise struggle with conventional modes of emotional expression (Pearson & Wilson, 2009).

06 ESCAPING REALITY THROUGH FOOTBALL AND MUSIC

The lyrics reflect pain, survival, and ambition, offering insight into how young people process grief, exclusion, and resilience. Loss is deeply embedded, with lines such as *"Missing my boy but he's laying in his coffin"* and *"I feel the tremble in my heart while my brother departs"* illustrating the emotional weight of bereavement. This grief is met with frustration and longing, as seen in *"Late nights crying on the floor of my kitchen, all I really had was a dream and ambition."*



Football provides an escape from reality, as *"Kicking ball, escape from reality"* reveals a reliance on structured activity for emotional release. However, experiences of exclusion and instability emerge in *"Kicked out of school, then my guys start switching"* and *"Kicked out of college, man I keep on wishing"*, reflecting displacement and uncertainty.

A strong awareness of surveillance and external judgment is apparent in *"I gotta look over my shoulder, jealous ones be watching me"*, reinforcing hyper-vigilance and distrust. Yet, resilience surfaces in *"Hard work just makes me boss"* and *"I'm building up my future, gotta build myself some pillars,"* showing determination to break negative cycles despite adversity. The lyrics capture a constant battle between trauma and self-empowerment, with football, ambition, and community serving as coping mechanisms for emotional survival.



Creating trust-based, adaptable environments for emotional expression is essential in grief support, particularly for young men who find vulnerability challenging. Alternative therapeutic methods, such as engaging in discussions within familiar activities, enhance emotional regulation and social connection (Ungar, 2011). Sustained, flexible support fosters resilience, ensuring long-term coping strategies beyond structured interventions.

PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS



WEEKLY FOOTBALL AND FITNESS SESSIONS

Regular sessions encouraged physical well-being, discipline, and teamwork, providing participants with a structured and supportive routine.

LOCAL GRASSROOTS COMPETITIONS

Strengthened local networks and developed a sense of community and belonging.

CREATIVE MUSIC CASE STUDIES

Participants shared their journeys and reflections through music, offering an innovative medium for emotional expression and storytelling.

OPEN BEREAVEMENT DISCUSSIONS

Safe and structured opportunities allowed young people to share their personal experiences with loss, both in group settings and one-on-one.

NATIONAL FOOTBALL TOURNAMENTS

Participation in high-profile events boosted confidence and widened the horizons of young people, promoting personal growth through competition.

EMPLOYMENT TRAINING WORKSHOPS

Focused on equipping participants with employability skills, these workshops empowered them to explore career opportunities and build self-confidence.

THERAPIST INTEGRATION

A therapist's regular presence ensured immediate emotional support during sports sessions, making mental health resources more accessible to participants.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION ADVISORY AND VOICE (YPAV)

Participants engaged with their peers to discuss the programme's impact, providing valuable insights for continuous improvement.



CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *'Wellbeing Thru Sport'* emerges as a vital project, offering young people a sense of structure, emotional release, and connection. Through the sport, they make sense of their reality, processing grief and the profound impact of losing loved ones. A holistic approach to grief support centered on trust, peer relationships, and ongoing mentorship—is essential in fostering resilience. Recognising grief as a continuous process, is crucial to provide long-term, sustainable spaces for reflection and emotional expression, ensuring young people receive the support they need to heal and grow.

KEY FINDINGS AND BEST PRACTICES

Three critical areas emerged as essential for effectively supporting young people through grief:

Sport as a Therapeutic Outlet

Sport provides emotional relief and structure, helping young people cope with grief.

Integrating trauma-informed coaching and therapeutic activities can enhance its impact.

Community Connection and Long-Term Engagement

Ongoing involvement in community sports fosters belonging, self-worth, and long-term well-being.

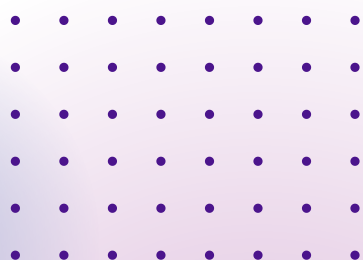
Strengthening collaborations with mental health services ensures comprehensive support.

Mentorship and Emotional Support

Trusted mentors offer stability and guidance, significantly improving resilience and emotional processing.

Bereavement training for mentors can further support young people navigating loss.

By integrating these best practices, the *'Wellbeing Thru Sport'* project can continue to evolve as a transformative initiative, using sport and therapeutic interventions as a tool to support young people through grief. This approach ensures that young people are equipped with the tools, relationships, and opportunities necessary to cope, heal, and build meaningful futures.



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CONTACT INFORMATION

We value your feedback and insights. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to us.



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