



THE ROLE OF POETRY ON YOUNG BLACK PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH

Towards an evaluation framework for Poetic Unity
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Summary

Background and context

Evidence shows that about 1 in 5 children and young people aged 8 to 25 have a probable mental health problem (NHS Digital, 2023). In addition to this, young Black people face inequalities which impact on their mental health. These wider inequalities are reflected in how young Black people access mental health services. They are significantly more likely than their white peers to enter services through statutory routes rather than primary care. For example, research shows that Black children are ten times more likely to be referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) via social services, rather than through a GP, compared to white British children. These stark disparities underscore the critical need for more equitable access to mental health support within the community for young Black people.

Creative arts and group activities have served as interventions to improve young people's mental health. Research shows that children and young people who participate in group arts activities including poetry report improvements in their mental wellbeing, relationships with their peers, self-esteem and confidence. Young Black people have also found poetry to be a great tool for self-expression in their communities as well as a tool for raising awareness and advocating for racial justice.

In the last few years, there has been a decline in funding for the arts by local authorities in England and a decline in representation for Black creatives in the sector. Some initiatives have emerged to address this support of Black people's self-expression and advocacy using poetry across the country. For example, organisations such as Poetic Unity and YoungMinds are working toward improving and supporting the expression, identity, and wellbeing of young Black people as well as achieving racial equity.

What we did

Given the scale of mental health difficulties faced by young Black people, Centre for Mental Health along with Poetic Unity are aiming to understand what role poetry and creative activities could play in promoting and protecting their mental health. This includes:

- Carrying out a rapid literature review which provided insights about the impact of poetry/creative arts on children and young people's wellbeing and mental health
- Exploring various existing tools for measuring mental health and wellbeing, programme participation, and goal setting
- Carrying out an in-person workshop with young people from Black and Black mixed-heritage backgrounds who attended Poetic Unity programmes
- Using the findings from the literature review and workshops to create an initial evaluation framework and example templates.

What we found

For most of the young people, poetry was not seen as important when they were in secondary school and they were only taught set texts as part of GCSE. The poetry anthologies they were provided with did not include the work of racialised poets and were very eurocentric. The young people reiterated the importance of using simple questions that are easy for everyone to understand regardless of their literacy levels.

Conclusions and recommendations

This evaluation framework serves as a first step in coproducing culturally competent evaluation tools that measure the impact of poetry on young Black people's mental health and centres their experiences and perspectives. We recommend that Poetic Unity should collaborate with peer researchers, continue to codesign evaluation measures with young people, and apply this framework in different Poetic Unity programmes in settings such as schools, youth clubs, and universities over the course of one year.

What we did

We started with a rapid literature review which provided context and insights about the impact of poetry on children and young people's wellbeing and mental health. We extended the search to include creative arts as there was a limited number of studies that specifically explored the impact of poetry on young Black people. However, the main focus of this evaluation framework is to measure the impact of poetry on young Black people's mental health. We further explored various existing tools for measuring mental health and wellbeing, programme participation and goal setting.


We then carried out an in-person workshop with young people who have attended Poetic Unity programmes. We spoke to five young people from Black and Black mixed-heritage backgrounds. The findings from the literature review were used to inform the questions and facilitate discussions relating to the impact of poetry on mental health and how best to measure this impact.

Rapid literature review

Overview of children and young people's mental health

About 1 in 5 children and young people aged 8-25 have a probable mental health problem. Older teenagers aged 17-19 (23.3%) are much more likely to present with a mental health problem compared to pre-teens and younger teenagers aged 11-16 (22.6%). Young people aged 17-25 with a probable mental health problem were three times more likely to not be able to afford to take part in activities such as sports, days out, or socialising with friends, compared with those unlikely to have a mental health condition (26.1% compared to 8.3%) (NHS Digital, 2023).

Young Black people's mental health



Centre for Mental Health's *A Space to Be Me* report highlighted the mental health inequalities faced by young Black people in the UK (Abdinasir and Treloar, 2024). Black children and young people are over-policed and under-protected compared to their white counterparts, adversely affecting their mental health. For example, recent analysis of Home Office data by the Runnymede Trust found that Black children are 6.5 times more likely than white children to be strip searched by the police (Runnymede Trust, 2024).

These wider inequalities are reflected in how young Black people access mental health services. They are significantly more likely than their white peers to enter services through statutory routes rather than primary care. For example, research shows that Black children are ten times more likely to be referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) via social services, rather than through a GP, compared to white British children (Kapadia et al., 2022). Black people are also more likely to come into contact with mental health services at crisis point, often through the criminal justice system or emergency services (Bignall, 2022). Detention rates for the "Black or Black British" group are the highest of all ethnic groups, at 262.4 per 100,000 population — nearly four times higher than those for the white group (65.8 per 100,000) (NHS Digital, 2025).

At the same time, Black and Mixed-heritage children accounted for 36% of young people detained in mental health hospitals (based on unpublished data from NHS Benchmarking Network). Conversely, young Black people made up just 5% of those accessing community-based children and young people's mental health services (Thomas, 2022). The stark disparities highlighted in this section underscore the critical need for more equitable access to mental health support within the community for Black young people.

Overview of the creative arts sector in England

Despite the growing evidence of the benefits of creative arts on wellbeing, there has been a decline in the funding for the arts in recent years by local authorities in England (Di Novo and Easton, 2023). The investment in the arts through Local Authorities in capital and revenue expenditure in England has fallen by more than 30% in real terms between 2009/10 and 2019/20 (ibid). In schools, this reduced budget and availability of art subjects has also been observed in recent years. This was worsened by Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, when arts teaching was reduced or stopped during lockdown. (Evennett, 2021). This reduction has continued since the pandemic due to funding cuts, reduced number of arts teachers, and increased focus on core subjects (Cultural Learning Alliance, 2025).

In England, 42% of schools are no longer entering pupils for GCSE music, 41% are no longer entering pupils for GCSE drama, and 84% are no longer entering pupils for GCSE dance (James et al., 2025). Young people from low economic backgrounds are also not able to access existing creative spaces due to the high cost of transportation. This lack of access to creative activities reduces young people's self-expression, innovation and skill development. It also reduces opportunities for young people to build their self-

esteem, confidence, problem-solving skills and critical thinking skills (Rahanaz, 2025; James et al., 2025).

It is important that local authorities, stakeholders and organisations in the sector invest in creative arts programmes to improve the mental wellbeing of children and young people. There is also emerging evidence that investing in arts and culture programmes provide strong value for money in terms of improved confidence and wellbeing of young people (Rahanaz, 2025).

Creative arts and mental health

Studies found that children and young people who engage in creative arts had improved mental health and wellbeing (Efsathopoulou and Bungay, 2021; Zarobe and Bungay, 2017; Macpherson et al., 2016; Morison et al., 2022; Hugh-Jones et al., 2025). These positive impacts include:

Improved mental health and wellbeing


Fancourt et al. (2023) reported that young people aged 11 to 21 who were more engaged in activities and groups such as a book club, drama club, band, cheerleading/dance, chorus/choir, orchestra, or newspaper had fewer behavioural problems, such as antisocial or criminal behaviours compared to the young people who did not take part in these activities. It was also found that reading for pleasure was associated with healthier behaviours in young people. This included decreased odds of cigarette and alcohol use and greater fruit consumption at age 14. However, it also corresponded with lower levels of physical activity. The authors attributed these associations to factors such as demographics and child development as well as child mental health, family relationships, and peer influence (Fancourt et al., 2023).

Increased confidence, self-esteem and resilience

Studies that explored the use of arts on prescription (AoP) programmes (Efsathopoulou and Bungay, 2021) and art activities such as drama, theatre, music, visual arts, and dance (Zarobe and Bungay, 2017; Macpherson et al., 2016) found evidence that these activities increased confidence and self-esteem and helped to build resilience – the capacity to withstand or recover quickly from difficulties – in children and young people. However, it should be noted that the term resilience could be controversial because it is deficit based and can root structural inequities in young people themselves, thus shifting blame onto them.

Improved relationships with peers

Research has found that building social connections and peer support has a positive impact on young people's mental health. This is because young people in this age group are heavily influenced by their peers (Birrell et al., 2025). Extracurricular arts activities such as drama/theatre, music, visual arts, and dance led



to improved social support between children and young people. This included opportunities for young people to build strong bonds with their peers, develop friendships, and increase their sense of community and belonging (Bone et al., 2022; Zarobe and Bungay, 2017).

Reduced trauma, anxiety, and depressive symptoms

Morison et al. (2022) explored the use of creative arts-based interventions (art, music, dance, drama, and poetry) on young people who have been exposed to traumatic events. This included exposure to disasters, their experiences in refugee camps in areas affected by conflicts as well as those who experienced Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms and abuse. The systematic review found evidence which suggested that creative interventions reduced PTSD symptoms and negative mood in young people (Morison et al., 2022). In addition, Kassab et al. (2025)'s systematic review of poetry-based interventions also showed evidence of reduced PTSD symptoms and significant improvements in depressive symptoms, anxiety, and stress.

Poetry and mental health

Several studies show that poetry can be a great tool for improving mental health (Xiang and Yi, 2020; Caleshu et al., 2023; Zhang, 2022; The National Literacy Trust, 2022). Writing about traumatic, stressful or emotional events can lead to improvements in both mental and physical health, in both non-clinical and clinical populations (Baikie and Wilhelm, 2005).

One study explored the impact of a poetry course on Chinese college students and found that appreciation for poetry grounded in Chinese culture improved the mental health of students. This study can be used as foundational evidence for poetry courses to be incorporated into college curriculums (Zhang, 2022).

Another study discusses how university students with mental health conditions in the UK use reading, writing, and the use of texts to manage mental health distress and promote wellbeing. The students did this through relaxation, expression of emotions, and recording their mental health. The study found that these practices helped the students with processing their emotions, engaging in supportive relationships, developing a sense of self, and reflecting on the progress of their mental health (Peach, 2023).

In addition, studies highlighted the positive impacts of poetry on people's mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic (Xiang and Yi, 2020; Caleshu et al., 2023). During the pandemic, a website allowed people around the world to read pandemic-related poetry and publish their own poetry. The website supported the health and wellbeing of its users and many participants felt more connected to the wider community, had increased self-worth, and reduced feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and isolation (Caleshu et al., 2023).

Poetry as a tool to advocate for racial justice

In response to a number of unjust killings of Black people by the police which led to the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, multiple studies have explored the impact and importance of poetry on Black people's mental health

Sciurba (2021) explored Black youth poetry and how young people tackle literary creation as a form of critical activism. It found that by engaging with language to contest oppression, reframing identities, and calling for societal change, the young poets demonstrated the importance of critical literacy in promoting agency and justice (Sciurba, 2021). Baxley and Sealey-Ruiz, (2021) expressed that poetry was a tool to bare their souls, release pain and sadness, and restore themselves. The writing and sharing of poetry were seen as a form of healing for themselves and their readers. The authors highlighted the need for educational systems to encourage youth-led literacy practices within literary spaces and educational practitioners to provide spaces for young people to utilise poetry as a tool for healing, affirmation, and liberation (Sciurba, 2021; Baxley and Sealey-Ruiz, 2021).

Black Lawrence Press (2023) also highlighted that writing poetry can be used as an act of advocacy and poetry has been used by communities as a place of social resistance. Poetry and storytelling are important for creating empathy, which can then lead to changing attitudes (Black Lawrence Press, 2023).


Racial injustice in publishing and poetry initiatives

According to The Guardian UK, publishing is less accessible to Black authors now than it was five years ago. There was an increase in interest for Black authors during the peak of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, but these numbers have dipped and only 3% of the British publishing industry workforce are Black people (Bakare, 2025).

In response to this lack of representation, initiatives have emerged across the country to support Black people's self-expression and advocacy using poetry . In 2024, Leeds and York Partnership NHS Trust created a new poet in residence opportunity for Leeds-based, emerging poets of Black and South Asian heritage who wish to centre lived experience narratives of mental health and amplify racial justice (Leeds and York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, 2024). In addition, organisations such as YoungMinds and Poetic Unity whose poetry programmes are carried out in settings such as schools, prisons, youth clubs, colleges, and universities, are also working towards improving and supporting the expression, identity, and wellbeing of young Black people as well as achieving racial equity (Poetic Unity n.d; YoungMinds, n.d.).

Other creative arts and poetry initiatives

In the UK, NHS Trusts and other organisations have created programmes that explore poetry and creative arts. For example, Camden Young Writers is The Poetry Society's latest opportunity for local young writers in the London Borough of Camden.



The aim of this free programme was to introduce a group of young people to the skills needed in creative careers via workshops (The Poetry Society, n.d.). Additionally, in 2021, the New Poets Collective was launched. The programme is a free year-long scheme that has so far nurtured and developed four cohorts of poets from across the UK (Southbank Centre, n.d).

Furthermore, in a mental health trust, The Hope Collective was launched by researchers in the North of England in collaboration with the National Poetry Centre. An open invitation was sent to staff, service users, and stakeholders to submit a poem via a Microsoft form over eight weeks. Analysis of the feedback from participants found that writing poems made them feel more positive and helped them connect with other people. It was also reported that writing poetry allowed them to process their emotions and organise internal thoughts (Marino et al., 2025).

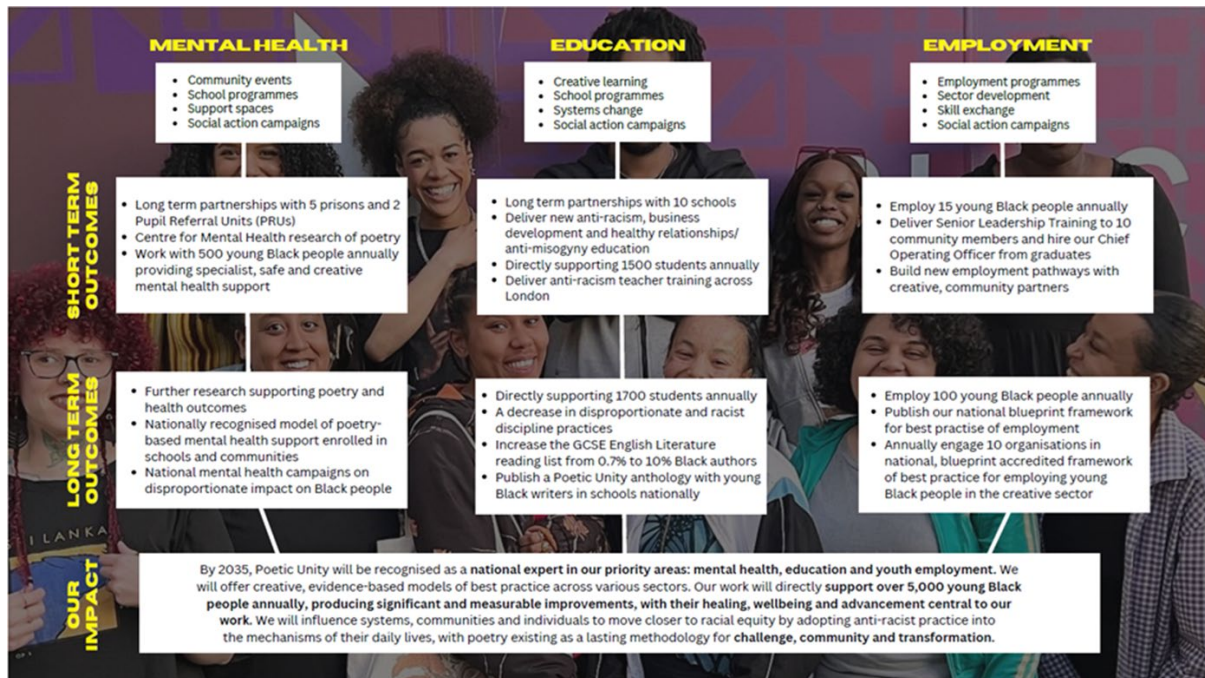
In 2024, The Arts4us project, a £2.5M Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project in collaboration with integrated care systems and community organisations that focused on the mental health of young people aged 9 to 13 was launched. The aim of the project was to create an easy-to-use digital platform where evidence-based local arts activities can be made accessible for children and young people, their families and relevant organisations and services (Edge Hill University, n.d.)

In 2025, Bradford Poetry Slam recruited 25 Bradford District schools to participate in an inter-school poetry slam competition delivered by Bradford-based company, Authors Abroad. Pupils in Years 5 to 8 took part in full-day workshops where professional poets talked about poetry, performed with them, and gave them writing tips and techniques. The aim was to build confidence in literacy skills and self-expression, particularly in schools across the district with lower progress scores in these areas. It was reported that the children enjoyed participating in the workshops (James et al., 2025).

What we want to understand, measure and why

Given the scale of mental health difficulties faced by young Black people, Centre for Mental Health and Poetic Unity are aiming to understand what role poetry could play in promoting and protecting their mental health. This includes identifying suitable evaluation tools, and codesigning an initial framework aligned with Poetic Unity's new Theory of Change (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. Poetic Unity's Theory of Change





What we found

Overall, there is some evidence that supports the benefits of creative arts/poetry on children and young people. This included benefits such as improved mental wellbeing, peer relationships, self-esteem and confidence.

However, it should be noted that there are limitations to assessing the impacts of creative arts/poetry on young people. This includes a lack of appropriate or standardised methodologies, lack of use of appropriate evaluation studies, small sample sizes and inconsistent outcome measures. It is important that further high-quality research studies that make use of standardised methodologies and assessments of the cost effectiveness of these interventions are carried out in the future to strengthen the evidence base.

In terms of the impact of poetry on young Black people specifically, we found some evidence of poetry as a tool for self-expression and advocating for racial justice as well as existing creative initiatives that support mental health. However there was not enough evidence on the impact of poetry on young Black people specifically. Therefore, further research is still needed to explore the impacts on this demographic in the context of the UK. We also found that there are not many accessible evaluation tools for poetry-based programmes and its impact on young people's mental health.

Feedback from young people

For most of the young people, poetry was not seen as important when they were in secondary school and they were only taught set texts as part of GCSE. The poetry anthologies they were provided with did not include the work of racialised poets and were very eurocentric. The young people also expressed that some of their teachers saw poetry developed by young Black people as just 'rap.' In addition to this, within racialised communities, poetry and arts are not always promoted by families because they are not seen as stable employment opportunities that could earn an income in the long run. Young people at the workshop told us that they would like there to be more research on the experiences of young Black people specifically.

Quantitative data collection

Summary of existing evaluation frameworks

As part of the rapid literature review, we identified the following existing evaluation tools for measuring programme quality, mental health and wellbeing and have highlighted the strengths and limitations of each tool.. See Appendix one for question details.

- 20 ITEM TEPPS (Tiffany-Eckenrode Program Participation Scale)
- ONS4 Wellbeing Questions
- The Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS) Scale

- My Journey (Culturally appropriate evaluation tool for young Black men)
- Goal Based Outcomes (GBO) tool.

20 ITEM TEPPS (Tiffany-Eckenrode Program Participation Scale)

This evaluation tool measures the quality of programme participation in adolescents and young people. The scale is made up of 20 questions and four subscales - Personal Development, Voice/Influence, Safety/Support and Community Engagement. Responses to the participation items are measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from “not at all true for me (1)” to “very true for me (5)”.

Strengths

- Has been tested and found to be a valid and reliable measure of quality programme participation by young people. This means that it gives the same result every time you use it and it provides accuracy
- The TEPPS assesses the quality of youth participation experiences as well as structural elements of the programmes they engaged in, rather than simply the amount of time spent in or variety of the activities
- The scale was tested on people from racialised communities in the USA.

Limitations

The non-random selection of young people in the study may have led to bias in the data, the reason for this type of sampling was the authors’ interest in examining whether participation measures would work effectively and generate useable findings in different programme settings.

ONS4 Wellbeing Questions

This is a tool for measuring wellbeing. It has been applied to both healthy populations and those with diagnosed conditions, older and working age adults, and specific population groups including women, racialised groups and people living in deprived areas.

Strengths

- High reliability and validity – the standard in most UK evaluations
- High flexibility - ONS4 measures have been applied to both healthy populations and those with diagnosed conditions, older and working age adults, and specific population groups including women, racialised groups and people living in deprived areas
- The measure covers important aspects of wellbeing – life satisfaction, worthwhile, happiness, and anxiety.

Limitations

- Missing data – there is a lack of control group
- Many versions of the tool
- Some people find the questions to be too intrusive.

The Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS) Scale

This scale measures mental wellbeing and there are two versions: The Short WEMWBS (7 questions) and the WEMWBS (14 questions).

When using the WEMWBS measure, you sum the scores for each of the 14 items which are from 1 to 5. Scores range from 14 to 70, and higher scores indicate higher positive mental wellbeing. Similarly, for the SWEMWBS measure, you sum the scores of the 7 items. Scores range from 7 to 35 and higher scores indicate higher positive mental wellbeing.

Strengths

- High validity, reliability, consistency and credibility. The scale has been used internationally
- The scale can be used in a range of settings such as healthcare, workplace, and clinical settings
- The scale covers key aspects of psychological functioning such as optimism, autonomy, agency, curiosity, clarity of thought and positive relationships
- The scale can be used with whole populations and with targeted groups.


Limitations

- Lack of cultural sensitivity
- Respondents who do not speak English fluently may find it difficult to complete
- Statements such as 'feeling close to other people' could mean different things to different people depending on how they interpret it
- There is no validated clinical cut-off scores.

My Journey (Culturally appropriate evaluation tool for young Black men)

Centre for Mental Health worked with young Black men (aged 17-30) to coproduce a measure which tracks their journeys and experiences of attending a community, wellbeing and mental health programme (Centre for Mental Health, 2022).

My Journey tracks how far key outcomes are gained because of young men's involvement with a community wellbeing group. There are two versions of this so they can be asked before the start and again at the end of the programme.



How Are We Doing?/How Did We Do? explores how far a community wellbeing group provides the right environment to help young Black men thrive. There are two versions of this so they can be asked during the middle and again at the end of the programme.

Strengths

- Coproduced with young Black men
- Use of direct and simple statements
- Culturally sensitive.

Limitations

- The experiences of some young men who have been criminalised due to a range of intersectional challenges were not explicitly explored
- There was some difficulty with recruiting Black boys from younger age groups (11-16 years)

Goal Based Outcomes (GBO)

The Goal Based Outcomes (GBO) tool is widely used and valued in children and young people's services. It works well at individual and service levels because it can capture personal and meaningful progress. The content of goals varies widely and are directed by young people. For example, a young person could have a goal of feeling more confident about a friendship, to securing safe housing, to leaving a violent home or reducing their drug use.

Strengths


- The GBO tool can be used with individuals of any age. It can capture the perspective of children and young people, their families, teachers and professionals in mental and physical health settings
- It allows for shared decision making and more personalised care in children and young people's mental health and wellbeing settings.

Limitations

The GBO tool is very challenging to aggregate quantitatively at system level

Feedback from young people

During the workshop, we asked the young people who attended Poetic Unity programmes to provide feedback on the existing tools identified from the literature review. The young people expressed that the number of questions and use of a Likert scale could feel overwhelming to them. The young people reiterated the importance of using simple questions that are easy for everyone to understand regardless of their



literacy levels. The young people further highlighted the need to consider adapting measures for different age groups. For example, children who are younger could make use of games that involve physical movement. Young people also told us that surveys should be engaging and there should be interesting themes and topics. Young people expressed that they are more likely to complete a survey if there is an incentive and this could be in the form of vouchers or skill development. Finally, young people believe that feedback should be digital and confidential.

In terms of ranking the measures we showed them (TEPPS, SWEMWBS, GBO, ONS4, My Journey), most of the young people liked My Journey's culturally appropriate intervention for young Black men the most, although they did say that the questions were still too complex and could be made easier to understand. They also appreciated that it was culturally appropriate and believed that a similar measure will give results that are most likely more authentic and give room for fewer assumptions. It is important to consider including questions for young women as well. The GBO was the second in terms of preference, with young people liking the open question format and having the freedom to express themselves. However, they asked if it could be simplified further. The SWEMWBS and ONS4 were next, and the TEPPS appeared to be the most unpopular because of the length (20 questions) and because some young people believe that it is quite dense and intrusive. *"Trying to find objectivity with subjective claims."*

Qualitative data collection

In addition to quantitative approaches, we explored how best to collect qualitative data on the impact of poetry on young people. Existing qualitative approaches include gathering data from interviews, focus groups, personal diaries, maps, photographs, and other printed materials or observations.

Feedback from young people

The young people suggested the use of word clouds and audio media to collect data. The young people also suggested writing poems/stanzas using a mental health related prompt at the beginning, middle, and end of the programme to review how their feelings and confidence changes over time. The involvement of peer researchers and trusted mentors was also highlighted. They could help to facilitate survey collection by explaining questions to other young people and facilitate workshops or focus groups with other young people.

Evaluation framework for measuring the impact of poetry on young Black people

The young people were asked about what impact means to them. Words such as 'safety,' 'empathy,' 'trust,' 'bravery,' and 'representation' were used to describe it. The young people also expressed that impact can be felt and seen in relation to membership. For example, a young person who attended earlier Poetic Unity



programmes was able to serve as a mentor to other young people in the neighbourhood.

Based on existing tools and feedback from young people, we have put together an initial framework for measuring the impact of poetry on young Black people.



Table 1. Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to measure impact of poetry on young Black people’s mental health (aged 10-30) (Adapted from Charities Evaluation Services, 2005)

Specific aims	Outcomes	Outcome indicators	Information collection methods	When and by whom
To improve young people’s confidence and self-esteem	Young people are more confident when speaking about poetry	<p>Frequency and proportion of young people being able to talk about and present poems they wrote</p> <p>Number and proportion of young people able to talk to their friends and family about poetry</p>	<p>Quant - survey (My Journey, bespoke survey)</p> <p>Qual – writing poems/stanzas using a mental health related prompt</p> <p>Qual – interviews and focus groups with young people</p>	<p>Survey disseminated and collected by staff – before and after programme</p> <p>Staff/peer researchers present mental health, and poetry prompts to young people at the start and end of the programme</p> <p>Interviews and focus groups carried out by staff/peer researchers with young people</p>



			Qual – interviews and focus groups with staff and peer researchers	before and after the programme Interviews and focus groups carried out by programme lead with staff and peer researchers
To improve young people’s mental wellbeing	Young people have improved mental wellbeing	Number and proportion of young people who show signs of improved mental health and wellbeing	Quant – survey (GBO tool, bespoke survey) Qual - Word cloud - using questions related to poetry and mental health, ask young people to suggest words that they associate with the prompts and group words based on frequency Qual - interviews and focus groups with young people	Survey disseminated and collected by staff – before and after programme Staff provide young people with qualitative materials (e.g. prompts) after the programme Interviews and focus groups carried out by staff/peer




			Qual – interviews and focus groups with staff and peer researchers	<p>researchers with young people after the programme</p> <p>Interviews and focus group carried out by programme lead with staff and peer researchers</p>
To improve young people’s self-expression through poetry	Young people are able to express themselves through poetry	Number and proportion of young people that self-identify as being able to express themselves as desired/intended through poetry	<p>Quant – survey - GBO tool, bespoke survey</p> <p>Qual - interviews and focus groups with young people</p>	<p>Survey disseminated and collected by staff – before and after programme</p> <p>Interviews and focus groups carried out by staff/peer researchers with young people after the programme</p>



			Qual – interviews and focus groups with staff and peer researchers	Interviews and focus group carried out by programme lead with staff and peer researchers
To improve young people's knowledge of anti-racism	Young people are more knowledgeable about anti-racism	Level of knowledge about anti-racism (e.g. awareness and depth of how poetry can be used to raise awareness about racism and how poetry can be used to advocate for racial justice)	Quant – bespoke survey Qual – interviews and focus groups with young people at the end of the programme	Survey disseminated and collected by staff – before and after programme Interviews and focus groups carried out by staff/peer researchers with young people after the programme



<p>To see the impact of Poetic Unity programmes on young people</p>	<p>Young people are positively impacted by Poetic Unity's programmes</p>	<p>Level of satisfaction expressed by young people about the programme</p> <p>Frequency of young people returning to future programmes/workshops</p> <p>Number of young Black people attending the programmes</p>	<p>Quant – bespoke survey demographics data</p> <p>Qual – interviews and focus groups with young people</p> <p>Qual – interviews and focus groups with staff and peer researchers</p>	<p>Survey disseminated and collected by staff – before and after programme</p> <p>Interviews and focus groups carried out by staff/peer researchers with young people after the programme</p> <p>Interviews and focus group carried out by programme lead with staff and peer researchers</p>
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Note, evaluation results will be used for annual reports for funding and impact of the programme.

See Appendix two for example templates for collecting and analysing qualitative and quantitative data based on this evaluation framework.

Conclusions

This report has explored the evidence that supports the benefits of creative arts/poetry on children and young people. This included improved mental wellbeing, relationships with their peers, self-esteem and confidence.

However, it should be noted that there are limitations to assessing the impacts of creative arts/poetry on young people. This includes a lack of appropriate or standardised methodologies, lack of use of appropriate evaluation studies, small sample sizes and inconsistent outcome measures.

There is also a need for more research that focuses specifically on the impact of poetry on young Black people in the UK because of the mental health inequalities and experiences of racism and exclusion they face. It should be noted that funders, especially from the public sector tend to favour quantitative (preferably money-based) measures which do not always work for young people. There is a need for a wider conversation in the research community which considers other ways to collect data from young people about their mental health. This evaluation framework serves as a first step toward achieving this goal and contributing to the evidence base for the impact of poetry on young Black people's mental health. This involves coproducing culturally competent evaluation measures that centres young Black people's experiences and perspectives. We have used the evidence from the literature review and feedback from young Black people as a foundation for this initial evaluation framework. It is important that further high-quality research and interventions are carried out in the future to strengthen the evidence base.

Recommendations to Poetic Unity

Apply this framework in different programmes and settings over a one-year period: In order to track the effectiveness of the proposed evaluation framework, the framework should be reviewed after being applied in different Poetic Unity programmes in settings such as schools, youth clubs, and universities over the course of one year.

Collaborate with peer researchers: Young people expressed that having peer researchers co-facilitate interviews/focus groups could be helpful. Our peer research guide provides some useful tips to consider.
(https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/CentreforMH_YoungChangemakers_PeerResearchGuide.pdf)


Co-design evaluation measures with young people: The example templates outlined above are initial evaluation ideas that can be adjusted and refined by continuing to work with young people on how best to measure the impact of the programme and potential adjustments. This is a useful guide from the British Psychological Society on how to go about coproduction:
(<https://cms.bps.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-10/Co-production%20with%20young%20people%20-%20a%20quick%20reference%20guide.pdf>).

Pay young people for their contributions: This includes providing incentives which could be in the form of vouchers or skill development opportunities. It is also important to consult young people about different ways of compensating them for their time.

Ensure privacy, confidentiality and anonymity: Use a safe platform such as Google forms. Be clear about how the young people's personal data and demographics data will be processed and stored, with the choice to opt out and the right to be forgotten.

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Appendix One: Existing evaluation measures

This appendix sets out in tabular form the questions for the measures explored in the report.

20 ITEM TEPPS (Tiffany-Eckenrode Program Participation Scale)

<i>Please pick out the responses that best describe the program and your involvement with it.</i> How true are each of these statements for you?	Not at all true for me	Not really true for me	I'm neutral about this	Sort of true for me	Very true for me
1. Adults in the program listen to what I have to say.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
2. I help decide things like program activities or rules.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
3. I feel I have a lot of voice/power to influence decisions about the program.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
4. I am very involved in program activities.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
5. The program's activities are challenging and interesting.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
6. I learn a lot from participating in the program.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
7. I think that participating in the program will help me to get a job.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
8. I think that participating in the program will help me to continue my education.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
9. Adults at the program respect me.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
10. Staff at the program pay attention to what's going on in my life.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
11. It was easy for me to get involved in the program.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
12. I feel close to at least one staff member at the program.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
13. There's at least one staff member that I can go to for support or help with a problem.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
14. I have friends who also take part in the program.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
15. The program finds ways to involve my family.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
16. The program and my school work together to offer activities and services.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
17. The program has had a positive influence on how people in my community treat me.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
18. The program has had a positive influence on how I treat people from my neighborhood.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
19. I usually feel safe when I am involved in program activities.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
20. I plan to work on community issues after I stop participating in the program.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

Tiffany Eckenrode Program Participation Scale (TEPPS) © 2012 Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research, Cornell University

ONS4 Wellbeing Questions

Table 1: Four measures of personal well-being

Next I would like to ask you four questions about your feelings on aspects of your life. There are no right or wrong answers. For each of these questions I'd like you to give an answer on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is "not at all" and 10 is "completely".

Measure	Question
Life Satisfaction	Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
Worthwhile	Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
Happiness	Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?
Anxiety	On a scale where 0 is "not at all anxious" and 10 is "completely anxious", overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

Source: Office for National Statistics

Table 2: Personal well-being thresholds

Life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness scores		Anxiety scores	
Response on an 11 point scale	Label	Response on an 11 point scale	Label
0 to 4	Low	0 to 1	Very low
5 to 6	Medium	2 to 3	Low
7 to 8	High	4 to 5	Medium
9 to 10	Very high	6 to 10	High

Source: Office for National Statistics



The Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS)

STATEMENTS	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
I've been feeling optimistic about the future	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling useful	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling relaxed	1	2	3	4	5
I've been dealing with problems well	1	2	3	4	5
I've been thinking clearly	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling close to other people	1	2	3	4	5
I've been able to make up my own mind about things	1	2	3	4	5

My Journey (Centre for Mental Health)

My Journey

[To be asked by confidential survey]

Your initials (First letter of name; first letter of surname):

Your date of birth (in the format DD/MM/YYYY):

Before the first session:

Thinking about your life currently, rate the following statements between 5 and 1, where 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree

	5	4	3	2	1
1. I am generally happy with my life as a young Black man in Britain					
2. I feel safe as a young Black man in Britain					
3. I feel empowered as a young Black man in Britain					
4. I have aspirations for my future					
5. I have good access to the resources I need to do well in life					
6. I feel connected to the support of brotherhood					
7. I understand mental health and how it affects my wellbeing					
8. I have someone I trust who I can express my mental health and wellbeing to					
9. I think this group will have a long-term impact on me					
10. Is there anything else you would like to add?					

How Are We Doing?

[To be asked by anonymous survey]

During/after the middle session:

Thinking about the sessions you have been to so far, rate the following statements between 5 and 1, where 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2= disagree, 1= strongly disagree

	5	4	3	2	1
1. The facilitator is knowledgeable about topics relevant to me as a young Black man					
2. The sessions are relevant to me					
3. I feel comfortable and safe in this group					
4. I can express myself and feel understood in this group					
5. Is there anything else you would like to add about how you find the programme?					

- A group discussion on the statements would follow after young men had submitted their responses on their phones (excluding question 1 about the facilitator if the facilitator is present)
- As part of the group discussion, the facilitator would ask questions which explore issues important to the group. They would design this conversation based on the results young men gave to My Journey before beginning any sessions. For example, if young men had rated low on feeling empowered before the programme started, the facilitator could ask 'What does empowerment mean to you?' or 'What helps a young Black man to feel empowered?'

How Did We Do?

[To be asked by anonymous survey]

After the last session:

Thinking about the sessions you have been to, rate the following statements between 5 and 1, where 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2= disagree, 1= strongly disagree

	1	2	3	4	5
1. The facilitator was knowledgeable about topics relevant to me as a young Black man					
2. The sessions were relevant to me					
3. I felt comfortable and safe in this group					
4. I could express myself and felt understood in this group					
5. Is there anything else you would like to add about how you found the programme?					

Goal Based Outcomes (GBO)

This is one of up to three goals to track.
You can turn this chart on its side for a quick look at progress over the sessions.

Goal No:

GOAL:

Session | **Date** | **Today I would rate progress to this goal:** (please circle the appropriate number below)

Remember a score of zero means no progress has been made towards a goal, a score of ten means a goal has been reached fully, and a score of five is exactly half way between the two

1		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
12		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Whose goal is this (tick below):

- Child/young person
 Parent/Carer
 Practitioner

Service ID/NHS number: _____



In coming to this service, what are some of the problems you want help with or goals you want to get to? *(List up to three goals)*

Goal Number	Goal Description
1	
2	
3	

If you have any other goals, please list them here

Goals and goal-based outcomes (GBOs) Goal rating sheet



How close are you to the goals you want to get to?

On a scale from zero to ten, please circle the number below that best describes how close you are to reaching your goal today. Remember a score of zero means no progress has been made towards a goal, a score of ten means a goal has been reached fully, and a score of five is exactly half way between the two

YOUR FIRST GOAL

Enter brief description of goal and goal number as recorded on the [Goals Record Sheet](#)

Half way to reaching this goal

Goal not at all met

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

 Goal reached

YOUR SECOND GOAL

Enter brief description of goal and goal number as recorded on the [Goals Record Sheet](#)

Half way to reaching this goal

Goal not at all met

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

 Goal reached

YOUR THIRD GOAL

Enter brief description of goal and goal number as recorded on the [Goals Record Sheet](#)

Half way to reaching this goal

Goal not at all met

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

 Goal reached

Completed by (tick below):

Child/young person

Parent/carer

Other (please specify):

Service ID/NHS number: _____

Name: (optional) _____

Date _____

Appendix Two: Example evaluation templates

This appendix sets out example templates for collecting qualitative and quantitative data based on the evaluation framework in the report.

Topic guide for interviews/focus groups with young Black people

Please make sure that you have received consent from the young people and where relevant, consent from their parents, guardians, and carers via completed consent forms. Also make sure that they understand the purpose of the interview/focus group before you start.

Before you start

- Remind the young people that their participation is voluntary, and what they say will be anonymous.
- Remind everyone that their answers will not affect their involvement with the programme in any way
- Let the young people know that they can ask questions at any point

Remind everyone that the session will be recorded and start recording (if online). Explain to the young people that the data collected will only be used for evaluation purposes of Poetic Unity programmes.

Questions

Introduction

- Ask about participant's age, programme attended, and general check-in

Mental health

- Is mental health talked about enough within your community?
 - If yes/no, please explain reasons for your answer
- What impact has poetry had on your mental health?
- In what way has poetry impacted your confidence and self-esteem?
- In what way has poetry impacted your ability to express yourself?
- In what way has poetry impacted your day-to-day life?
- Are you able to talk about poetry to your friends and family?

Poetic Unity programmes

- Can you tell me a bit about the Poetic Unity programmes you have taken part in?
 - What was the most helpful?
 - What did you find less helpful and what can be improved?
- What has been the impact of Poetic Unity programmes on your mental wellbeing? Please give specific examples where you can.
- Has Poetic Unity helped you to find your voice?
- Have Poetic Unity programmes made you feel safe enough to say what you are thinking?
- Have Poetic Unity programmes improved your knowledge of anti-racism?
- Have Poetic Unity programmes improved your ability to set goals?
- Has your ability to read and write poetry that relate to the Black experience been impacted by Poetic Unity programmes?

To check out, make sure the young people are comfortable after the interview/focus group and check if further support is needed.

Example survey

Include GDPR and safeguarding information at the start of the survey

Introduction

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking part in this survey. This survey is designed to understand your experience of poetry and Poetic Unity programmes. We want to learn about what you think of the programmes and whether it makes a difference to your mental health and wellbeing.

- Feel free to be honest - there are no right or wrong answers.
- You don't have to answer any questions if you don't want to, and you can choose to stop the survey at any time.

This survey is voluntary. If you do not take part, it will not affect your involvement with your current organisation in any way.

Please read the instructions for how to answer each question carefully.

Your answers will not be shared outside of [Poetic Unity staff]

Thank you, we really appreciate you sharing your views with us!

Demographics

- Your age
- Name of Programme
- What gender do you identify as?

- Which of the following groups do you identify as belonging to? [select all that apply]
 - Lived experience of mental ill health
 - LGBTQ+
 - Black, Asian, and minority
 - Neurodiverse or learning disability
 - Lived experience of mental ill-health
 - Lived experience of physical disability
 - Care experienced or a care leaver
 - A young carer
 - Refugee or migrant
 - In contact with the criminal justice system
 - Currently receiving benefits or another form of financial support i.e., disability payments
 - Prefer not to say
 - Other (please specify)
- Are you currently in employment?
 - Yes/no
- Are you currently in education?
 - Yes/no

If using validated tools

To measure confidence and self-esteem

GBO tool

To measure wellbeing

My Journey (note that questions relating to young Black men specifically might need to be changed to young Black people in general)

If using bespoke survey

This survey has been created using the feedback from young people and other measures such as My Journey . Please note that has not been externally validated and standardised, and questions can be adjusted.

Mental health and wellbeing

Read each statement and indicate to what extent each statement best describes you [1= Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3= Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree]



Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I believe mental health is important to me	1	2	3	4	5
I believe mental health is talked about in my community	1	2	3	4	5
I can speak freely about mental health with my family and friends	1	2	3	4	5
I believe poetry has improved my mental health	1	2	3	4	5

Confidence, self-esteem and self-expression

Read each statement and indicate to what extent each statement best describes you [1= Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3= Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree]

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I believe poetry is a useful tool to express myself	1	2	3	4	5
I can express things in poetry that I can't in normal conversations	1	2	3	4	5
I believe poetry has made me feel better about myself	1	2	3	4	5
I am confident about writing poetry	1	2	3	4	5
I am confident about presenting/ performing poetry	1	2	3	4	5

Poetic Unity Programmes

Read each statement and indicate to what extent each statement best describes you [1= Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3= Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree]

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Poetic Unity has helped me find my voice	1	2	3	4	5
I feel safe to say what I'm thinking at Poetic Unity	1	2	3	4	5
Poetic Unity programmes are relevant to me	1	2	3	4	5
I am happy with Poetic Unity programmes	1	2	3	4	5
I am likely to return for future Poetic Unity programmes	1	2	3	4	5
I am likely to recommend Poetic Unity programmes to other people	1	2	3	4	5

Knowledge and awareness of racism

Read each statement and indicate to what extent each statement best describes you [1= Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3= Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree]

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I know about the impacts of racism on mental health	1	2	3	4	5
I believe poetry can be used to raise awareness about racism	1	2	3	4	5



I feel empowered as a young Black person in Britain	1	2	3	4	5
I feel safe as a young Black person in Britain	1	2	3	4	5
The facilitator was aware of topics relevant to me as a young Black person	1	2	3	4	5

Open ended questions (if applicable)

- Is there anything else you would like to add about how you find the programme?

Survey analysis

For the surveys using the set evaluation questions, follow the outlined analysis framework.

The bespoke surveys can be analysed by comparing the mean scores of each statement or all statements before and after the programme. A higher mean score at the end of the programme shows an improvement.

The proportion of young people agreeing versus not agreeing to certain statements can also be considered. For example, ten young Black people agreed that they are confident about writing poetry compared to five young Black people who disagreed. This gives a general sense of what the participants think.

Analysis of demographics data can help to identify data relating to number of young people from a specific demographic who attended the programmes and who benefited from it.



THE ROLE OF POETRY ON YOUNG BLACK PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH

Towards an evaluation framework for Poetic Unity

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