



# North Tyneside LIFE Student Survey



*Ethos...*

*"from our people, for our people, by our people"*

[www.voda.org.uk/ntlif](http://www.voda.org.uk/ntlif)



# Contents

Page 3	Introduction
Pages 4-10	Survey Results
Pages 11-14	Case Studies
Page 15	Conclusion and Acknowledgements



# Introduction

Recovery Colleges were introduced in the UK during 2010 with the aim of supporting people's recovery from mental health difficulties through learning and education that is co-produced by people with lived experience and people with professional expertise.

The North Tyneside LIFE Recovery College (NT LIFE) was established in 2019 thanks to funding from NHS North Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group and is managed by VODA (Voluntary Organisations Development Agency). NT LIFE commenced delivery of sessions via co-production in September 2019.

NT LIFE is a volunteer-led service offering a programme of free courses and workshops aimed at the self-management of mental health and wellbeing. On enrolment students complete a wellbeing scale and are also encouraged to complete a keeping well plan.

NT LIFE is led by Ali Donkin, Senior Worker and supported by Alice Holliday and a host of dedicated volunteers. Find out more at [www.voda.org.uk/ntlif](http://www.voda.org.uk/ntlif).

There are five CHIME factors within the framework for personal recovery;

## **Connectedness**

Having good relationships and being connected to other people in positive ways.  
Characterised by: peer support and support groups; support from others; community.

## **Hope and Optimism**

Having hope and optimism that recovery is possible and relationships that support this.  
Characterised by: motivation to change; positive thinking and valuing success; having dreams and aspirations.

## **Identity**

Regaining a positive sense of self and identity and overcoming stigma.

## **Meaning**

Living a meaningful and purposeful life, as defined by the person (not others).  
Characterised by; meaning in mental 'illness experience'; spirituality; meaningful life and social goals.

## **Empowerment**

Having control over life, focusing on strengths, and taking personal responsibility.

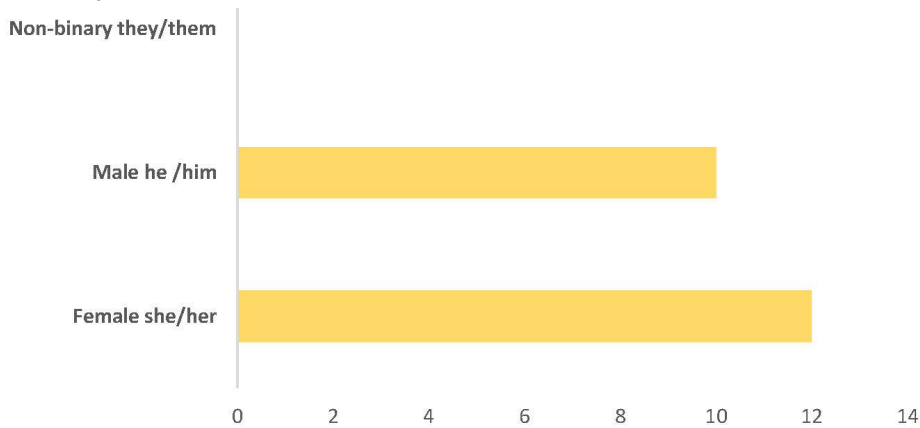
# The Survey

This survey was carried out in 2021/22 to give students and volunteers of NT LIFE the opportunity to feed back about their experience. The survey was undertaken on behalf of NT LIFE by Michele Spencer, Chief Officer, North Tyneside Community and Health Care Forum. 22 people took the time to complete the survey and some of the students were happy to meet me and share their personal journey.

The survey covered the traditional demographic questions as well as courses students attended, how long they waited and most importantly what benefits they had and continue to have from attending.

## 1) What is your gender and preferred pronouns? (e.g. female - she/her, male - he/him, non-binary - they/them)

22 Responses



Knowing and using a person's correct pronoun ensures inclusion, respect and value, NT Life acknowledges the importance of this.

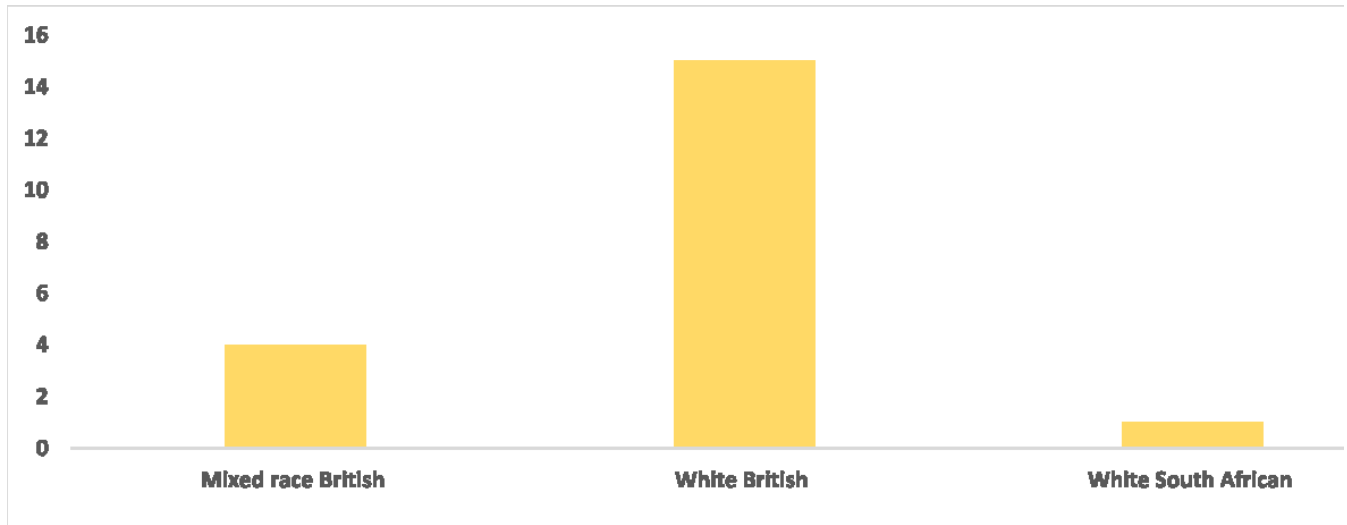
**2) The age of respondents.** Answers range from 27 to 74, this demonstrates there are no age barriers to involvement. Anyone over the age of 18 is welcome to be involved and there is no upper age limit.





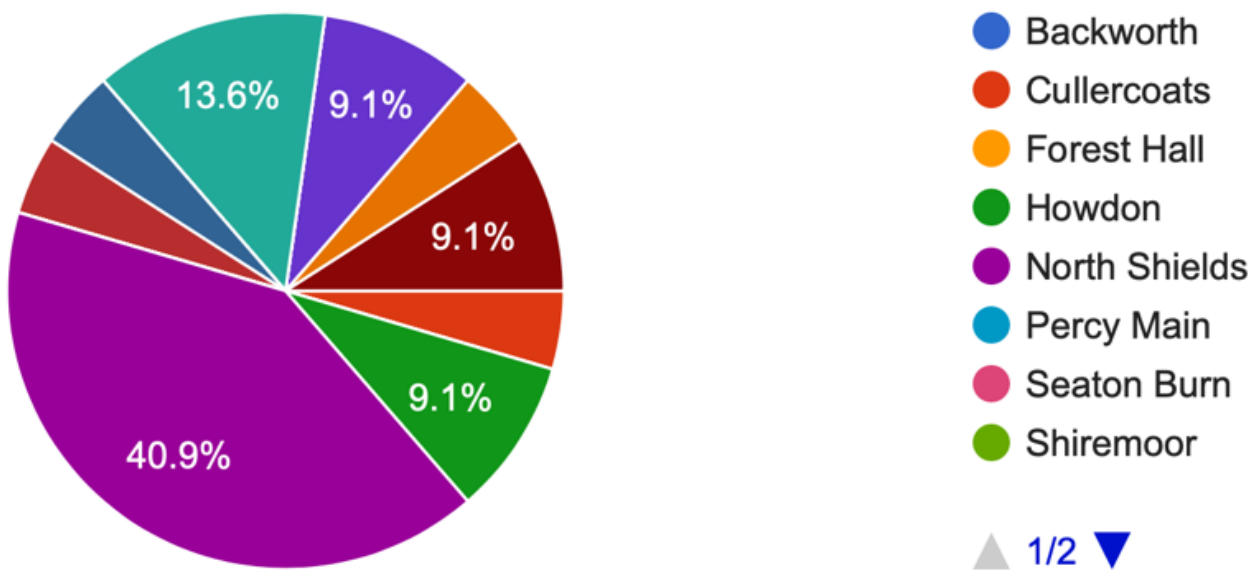
**3) Would you like to share your ethnicity?** If so, please write below.

20 Responses



**4) Which area of the Borough do you live in?**

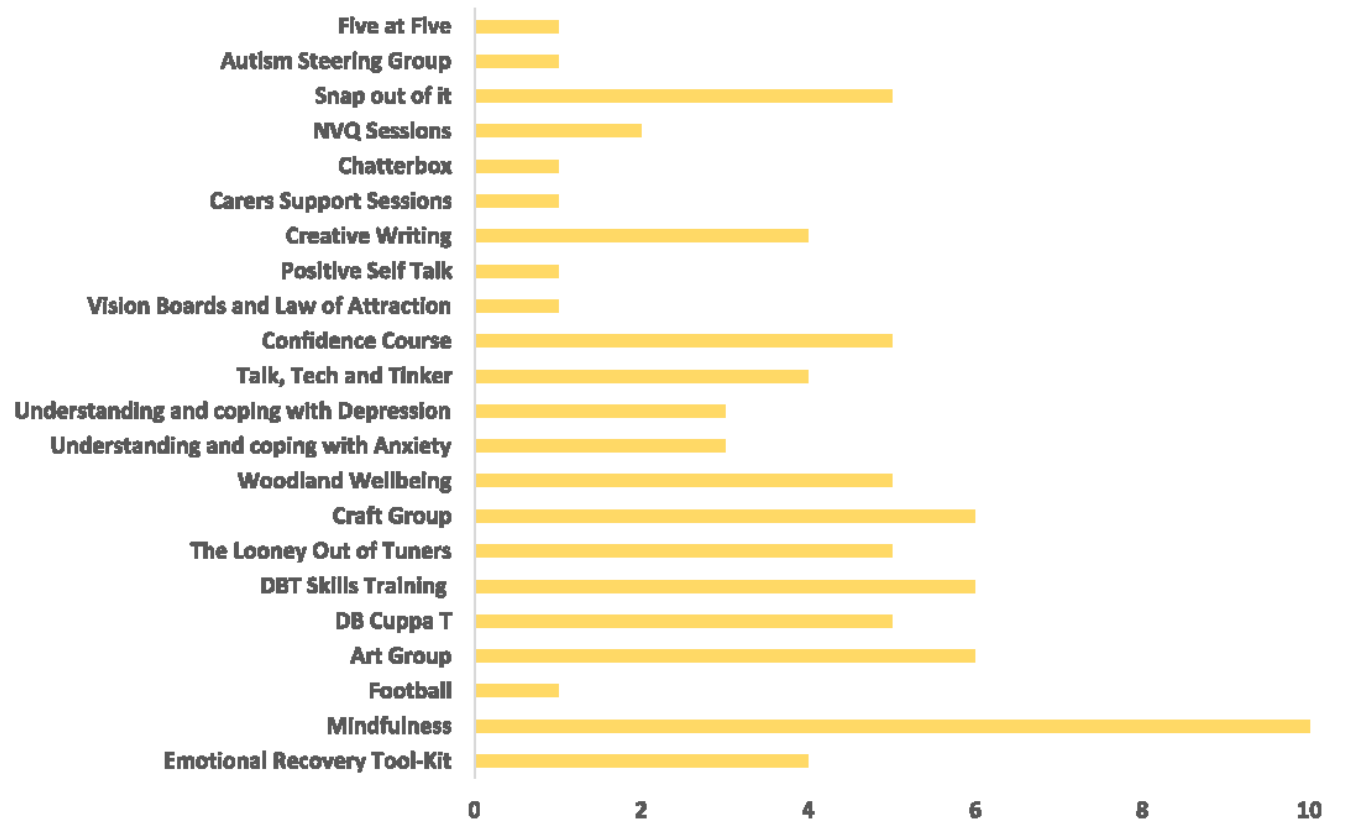
22 Responses



NT Life offers courses and workshops to residents 18 years of age and over on a boroughwide basis. At the time of this survey NT Life was based in North Shields and you will see most students live in that part of the borough, this may be coincidental or for ease of access.

## 6) Which course/courses and workshops did you attend?

22 Responses



Students are able to attend more than one course, and this was the full list at the time of the survey.

The Understanding and Coping courses cover anxiety and depression, the Vision Boards and law of attraction and Looney Out of Tuners demonstrate the creative course names.

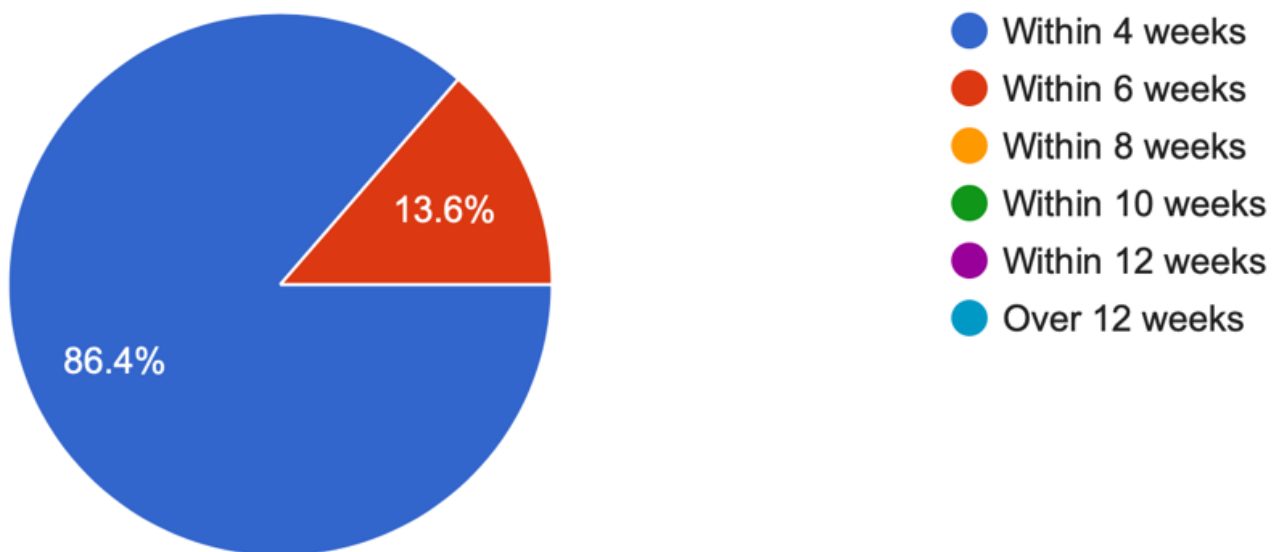
All of the courses are co-produced which means that all of the courses have been inspired or requested by volunteers or students, then researched, developed and co-delivered by staff and volunteers.





## 7) How quickly did you access the course?

22 Responses



The length of time students wait to access a course is minimal and a strength of NT Life.

## 8) What was your most favourite part about attending a session with NT LIFE?

### SAFETY

- Knowing I can be me and the help and support from others. I have and still am more able to manage my mental health better. I found the sessions interesting; I was surprised that I was able to get into it.
- Feeling comfortable
- The people and the safe environment

### PEOPLE AND COURSES

- The helpful friendliness and welcoming staff, the relaxed atmosphere, the learning process and how much I have learned about things I'd never done before and the fact that it focuses the mind on what I'm doing and takes away from any problem I might have.
- The survivors and thrivers that participate in the organisation
- Learning new crafts in a relaxed environment with a small group of other lovely people
- Talking with others
- People who understand, friendly
- Meeting other students and volunteers and having a good laugh
- Everyone at NT Life treat each other like family

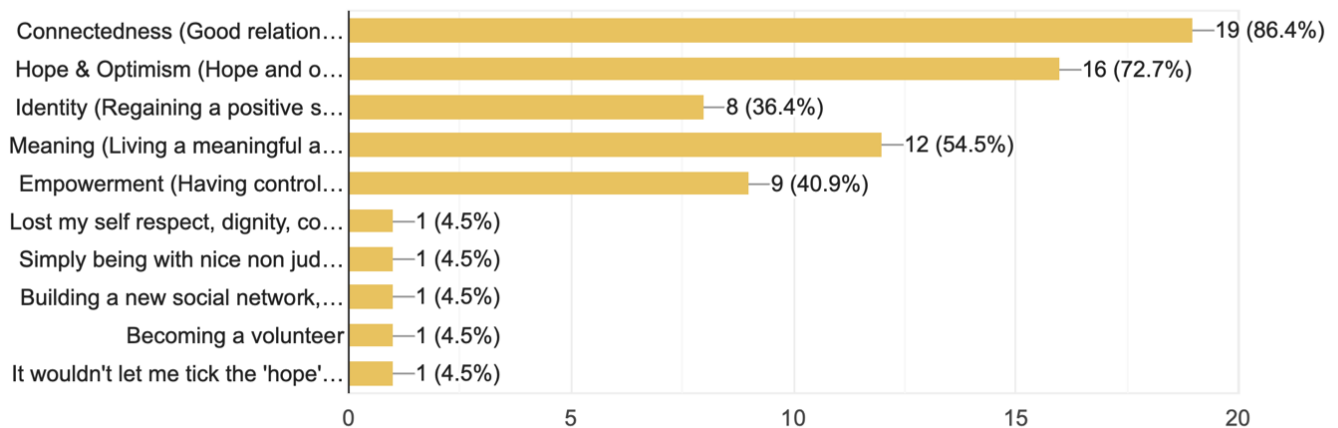
- Feeling welcome and learning new ways to live my life better
- Relaxed atmosphere and the knowledge of the teachers.
- Meeting people and sharing life skills
- Making friends and being creative
- Meeting new people, being outdoors, learning new things
- Expanding social contact, sharing skill and finding new friends
- Love art

### INCLUSIVE

- The little but really significant moments of personality discovery. Sharing experiences with a group and seeing things in a new way that I won't be able to un-see. This has helped me move on personally and to be mindful of my boundaries and maintaining those. We have an insightful, positive and resourceful coordinator (Ali-always near a kettle) and the variety of experienced facilitators on hand to make sense of different aspects of the courses. It is a safe feeling space.
- Sociability and acceptance
- Communication
- Social phobia
- Being able to bring my support dog which enables me to attend groups

**9) What have been the benefits of attending a session with NT LIFE?** Tick all that you feel apply to you.

22 Responses



\*See pages two for a full breakdown of options for Q9



## 10) As a result of attending, what changes have you made to your life?

### CHANGE

- I have lost lots of weight and become much fitter I have gained lots of confidence and self-esteem and learned coping strategies to help me cope with life changing events and life changing circumstances in future and have learned to deal with challenging behaviours in the future in a positive way. Also how to deal with narcissists and sociopaths in future in a positive way. I have increased the amount of positive activity into my weeks I've volunteered to facilitate
- I practice every day that I survived the previous day so that means I can manage this new day
- Hoping to begin volunteering more in the group
- Tried different coping strategies to cope
- More open mind and organisation
- Being more confident in myself
- Opening myself up to more creativity
- More personal projects have been completed as well as ones that were left for a while
- Motivation

### CONTROL

- More mindfulness and more understanding
- I have taken more control of my own recovery

### LEARNING

- Commitment to attend every week
- More sociable
- I have learned not to be downtrodden and have learned to walk away from negative situations more quickly and easily and handle things in a different perspective
- Have more enthusiasm and learn new skills
- Use DBT more
- I've gained a structure to my days by getting involved in volunteering and a sense of purpose and belonging
- I have been alerted to the fact that I am worthy of having boundaries, and the importance of using assertiveness to maintain these. I have also questioned the value that having people in my life that constantly disregard those values. It's been gradual, but I have opened up my life to people and opportunities that support my growth and have moved away from those who acted to stifle it. I would have let the old cycle continue if I hadn't had it pointed out to me by other students. It seemed obvious in retrospect, but I wouldn't have got there on my own.

## 11) How could your NT Life experience have been improved?

- **I had a very positive experience** I felt my experience was good for me and I was able to access support if I needed it
- For me it has been everything I have needed and more, it would be difficult to pinpoint how to improve it I think it is great the way it is
- **The facilities and facilitators at NT Life have been amazing** so I can't think of any improvements, but much more choice of courses and courses to do with finance, how to contact the right people in times of crisis, and advice on how to access vital services in terms of crisis. Also courses about mental health wellness and physical wellness and nutrition with free access to fitness facilities and healthy nutritious food. Also more voluntary opportunities would be very welcome.
- **It could not be improved!** (Seven people said this)
  - Always be there
  - Nice coffee machine
  - More confidence
  - **More awareness of shyness**
    - Not as many breaks between learning different skills
  - **More classes to do**
    - Maybe a newspaper to show what's on
    - If I had joined in more groups as a student
    - Sometimes I can't get to sessions because of work but it's not really an NT LIFE thing
    - A little more focus in snap out of it, more hints on photography, otherwise everything is great



# What students think...

## NT LIFE: Miss L

I found out about NT Life through my practice mental health team. I was one of the first students. They made me very welcome and the facilitators are always happy to hear students ideas for other courses or how to change things.

I was always interested in art but was nervous to take it up, nervous of the unknown I suppose. I need not have worried though it was an excellent experience.

I have also been involved with the Woodland Wellbeing course and now coordinate the sessions; I get a lot out of doing this. I am also involved in the singing group it's really good fun.

When I first started coming to NT LIFE I wasn't sure if I was supposed to talk about my health with the people there because I didn't know them. I quickly found there was no pressure to.

The positives I have gained from coming here has meant I can carry them over into my home life. I've grown in confidence and my family can see that.

The courses are structured in such a way to encourage you and you relate and bond with people over the same set of skills.

For new students or anyone thinking of joining I would say just come, you have nothing to lose and everything to gain, you will get to know people and hear about their experiences and most importantly you gain each other's trust.



*"You grow in confidence when you come here."*

# What students think...

## NT LIFE: Miss M

My GP practice is in Wallsend and the mental health nurse made me aware of NT LIFE and referred me. I hadn't heard of it before then.



I wouldn't call it a service or a project even, it is a coming together of people who have a lot on their mind with lots of encouragement to explore your issues, and support to help you feel better about yourself. There are plenty of courses to choose from, something for everyone is what I would say to other people anxious about attending.

I loved the creative writing it helps bring a different perspective to your worries and poems encourage you to write things down, that is so therapeutic. Art and photography were also on offer but most of all the singing group was brilliant and I am now a facilitator.

Singing is good for wellbeing and how well you sing is not the point, we can all sing and choose songs with meaning to ourselves. This means you can reflect, remember happy times and put yourself back in that place, which is excellent for taking control of your own situation.

The courses are structured in such a way that help you look at things differently. I supported NT LIFE with their Little Boxes of Hope initiative, this was such a good idea and a positive thing to do for people during the pandemic.

The great thing about NT LIFE is you can enrol again and that means you keep the links you have made and can build on your progress.

For people anxious about making the first move to enrol I would say, as soon as you are through the door you feel as if you belong.

I can't praise this enough; they are all lovely people and support you to feel better about yourself in a very nurturing way. It's been a life saver for me, and humour is a key part of the courses.

*"The coordination of the service is from the heart."*

# What students think...

## NT LIFE: Miss H

I found out about NT LIFE from a Linskill Centre leaflet. I signed up for a six-week course, you're made to feel welcome and comfortable. It's non-threatening and very relaxed.

I'm not crafty really but decided to sign up to the craft course and give it a go. I found the whole experience to be supportive, kind and have made some good friends.

The crafting is the process you go through, developing skills that you didn't know you had, but through kindness and encouragement you can make and do anything. You get to keep your crafts, and this helps you remember moments and find solutions.

It is such a safe space and easy to talk if you want to, to people who aren't family or in close circles to you.

The facilitators support you in such a way that makes it a very positive experience.

Be kind to yourself and give these classes and courses a go, you have nothing to lose but you can gain so much more.



*"You're welcomed with open arms."*



# What students think...

## NT LIFE: Mr J

I first discovered Linskill through the Art Studio who were quite supportive and offered a lot of interesting classes, however at the time I needed something a little more personal.

I found Talk, Tech and Tinker and really enjoyed that and through those sessions I discovered NT LIFE.

With NT LIFE I have tried photography, Woodland Wellness and a more closely knit art group. To be honest I have got something out of each one, you couldn't put a price on the service it's brilliant.

NT LIFE has been a massive help to me, the companionship is wonderful, their support is without equal and my confidence has really improved thanks to their help.

The coordination of the service is from the heart, there's no waiting list and that really helps us get involved and not have time on a waiting list to worry about and cold on the idea.

Knowing the benefits of coming here I would be happy to recommend and support someone new to come and be involved.



*"The facilitators are wonderful people, they create a safe space and the world would be a better place with more of them!"*



# Conclusion

NT LIFE is designed for and run by people who understand how to support, encourage and empower. Students are at the heart of all of the courses and workshops and the design of what is on offer.

It is confidential, inclusive, informal and non-judgemental and this was echoed in many of the responses.

For most people there was a very short waiting time, and this is so important to the students. The impact from enrolment was clear, students felt in a safe place, nurtured and encouraged.

The responses from students reflect what they think of NT LIFE, how it is coordinated, how they feel and what they get out of attending. *"...it's a lifeline"*.

# Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks go to the students who completed the survey and especially to those who so willingly shared their life experiences during the case studies meetings. Each one of you demonstrated strength, talent and compassion, thank you I learned a lot!

**Michele Spencer**

Chief Officer

North Tyneside Community and Health Care Forum

February 2022

