

# Does Building a Community Promote Wellbeing within an Undergraduate Medical Education Centre?

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## Background

Studying Medicine has been shown to have a negative effect on students' wellbeing(1). Not only is there a higher prevalence of mental health conditions amongst these students, they are also less likely to seek support (2,3). During their clinical attachments, students regularly rotate amongst NHS Trusts within their University region, necessitating relocating or travelling some distance away from their main University city. This removes students from their established support networks, and can increase levels of anxiety and stress. Undergraduate Medical Education Centres have an increased responsibility to support the wellbeing of their students on clinical placement, within their new community.

Gloucestershire Academy, based within Gloucestershire NHS Foundation Trust, acts as an Undergraduate Medical Education Centre for the University of Bristol. The Academy is responsible for over 100 medical students between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> years of their medical degree. Previous research completed within the Academy has shown that students are apprehensive about moving away from Bristol and that by introducing out of hours activities for the students, this can help improve the collegiate culture(4).

## Aim

To create a 'wellbeing toolkit' to build our community and review its impact upon our students' overall wellbeing.

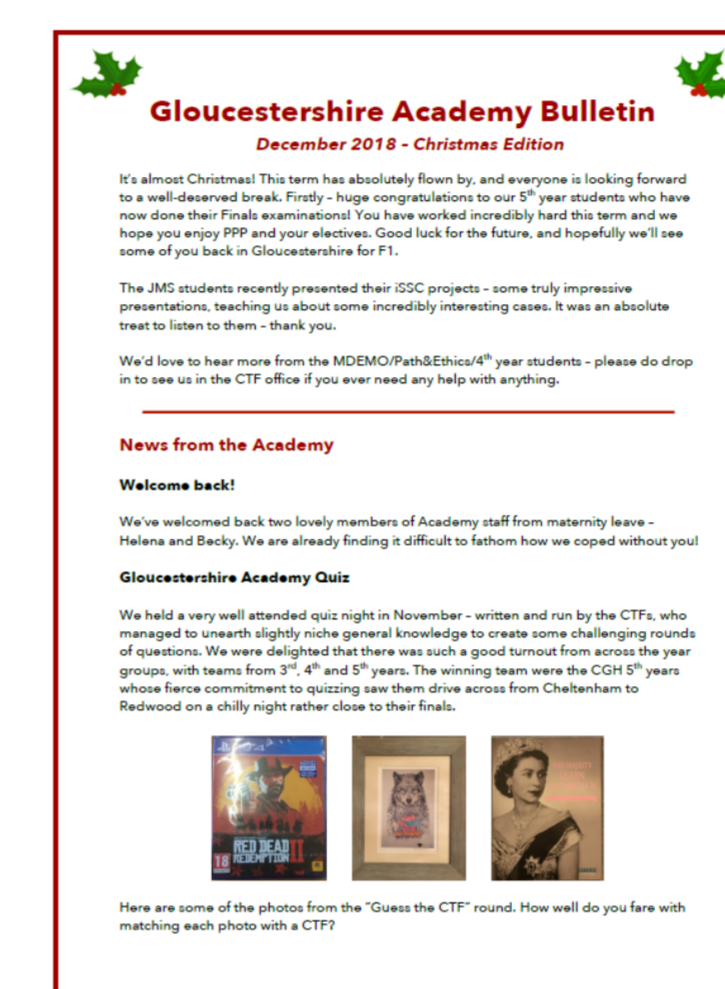
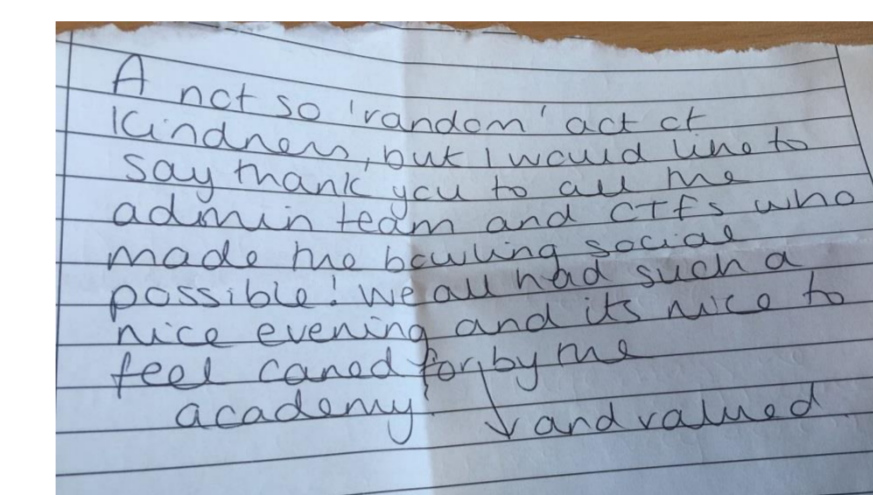
## Method

A 'wellbeing toolkit' was introduced which included the following:

- Additional **out of hours activities** such as film nights and quiz nights
- A **'random acts of kindness'** reporting system to encourage students and faculty to report any acts of kindness or achievements that they believe merit special recognition
- A **monthly newsletter** featuring articles from both faculty and students

These interventions were evaluated using a mixed methods approach at the end of each student's clinical placement. 64 students were given a **questionnaire** which utilised both quantitative and qualitative elements. A **focus group discussion** was also held with our third year students following their 18-week placement.

## The Wellbeing Toolkit



## Results

All students responded to the questionnaire - 16 second year students, 17 third year students and 31 fifth year students.

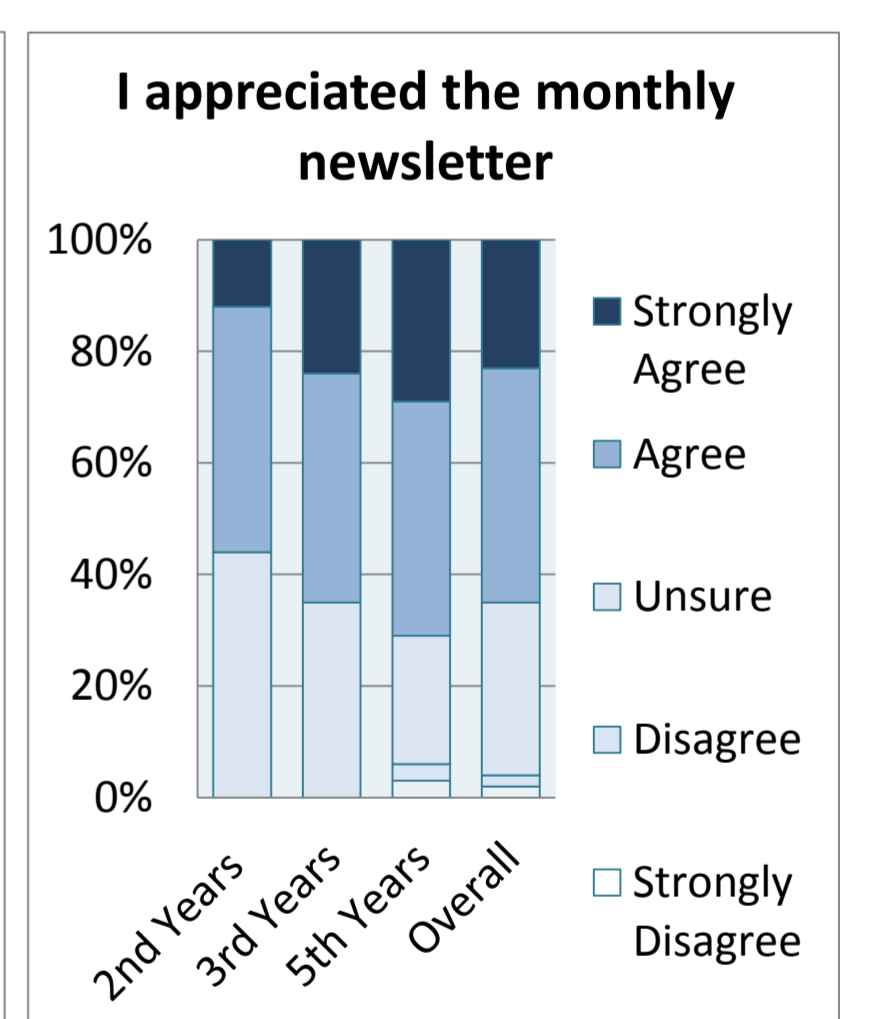
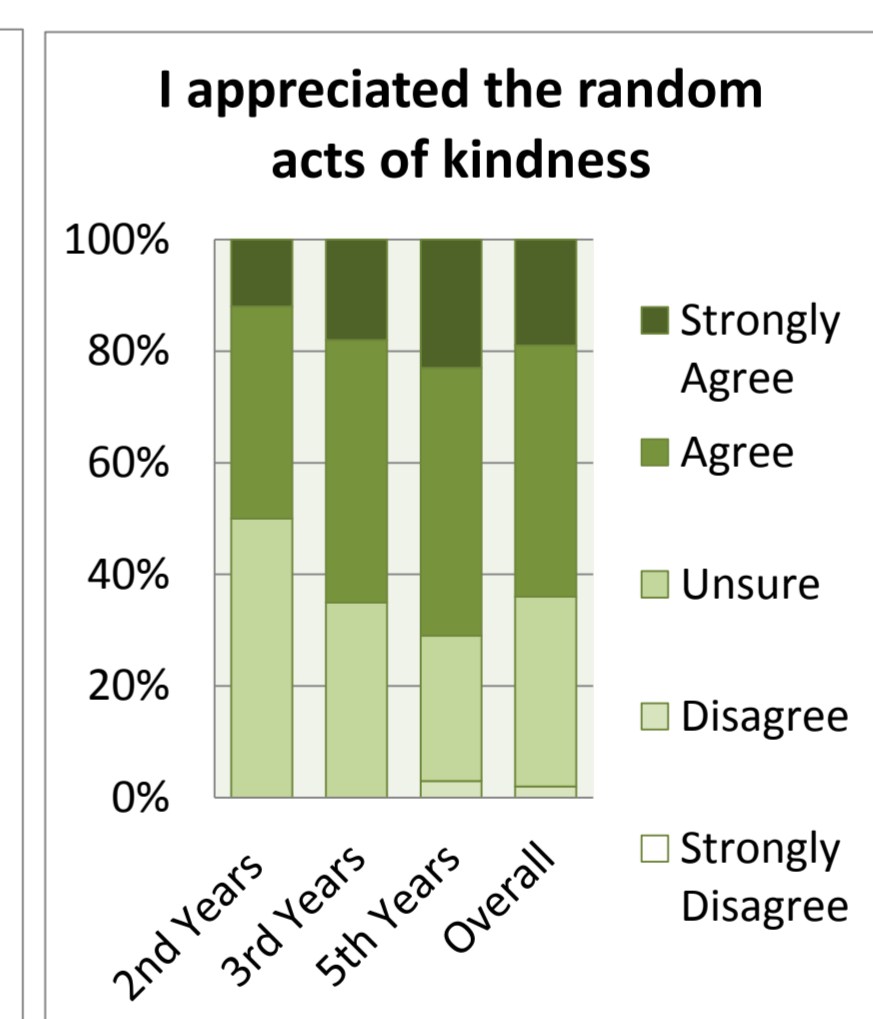
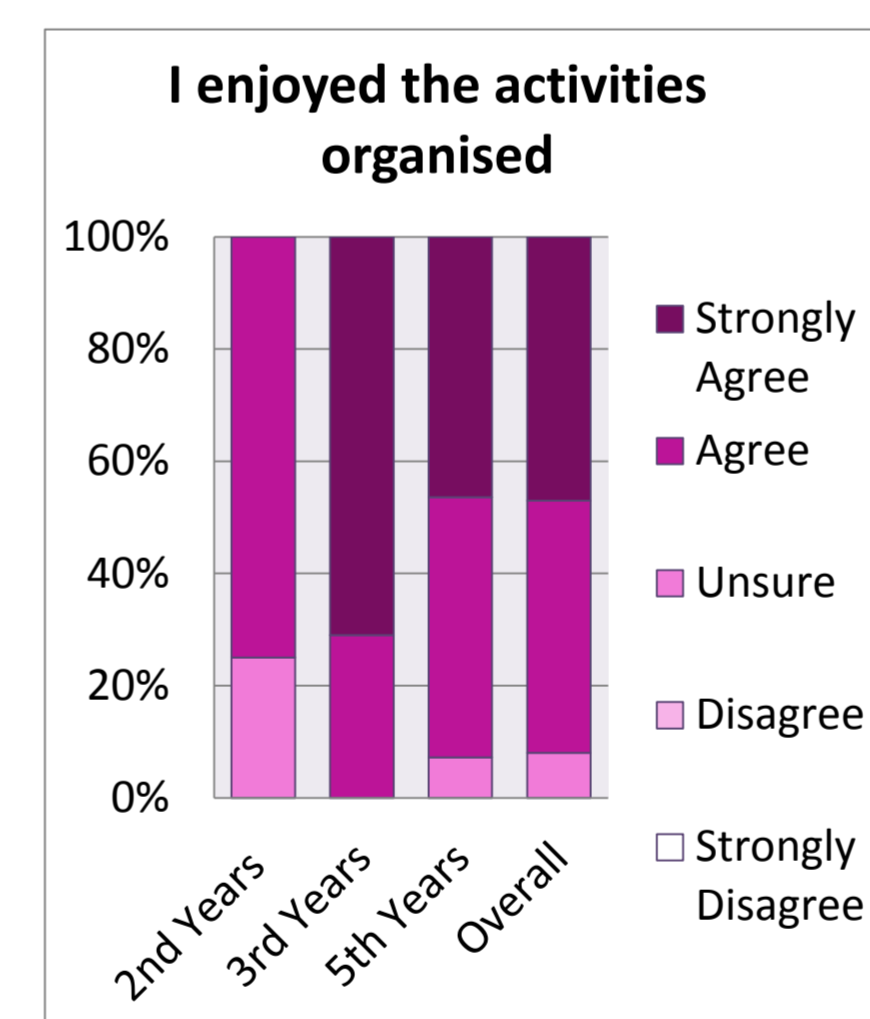
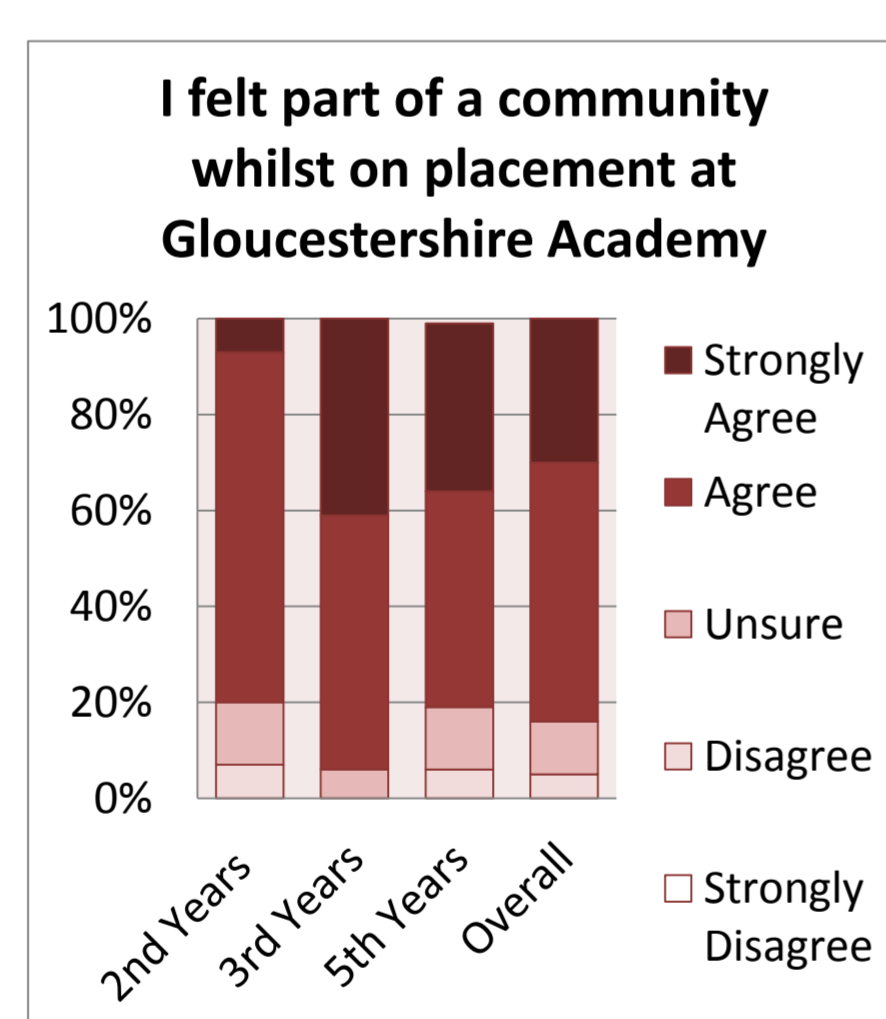
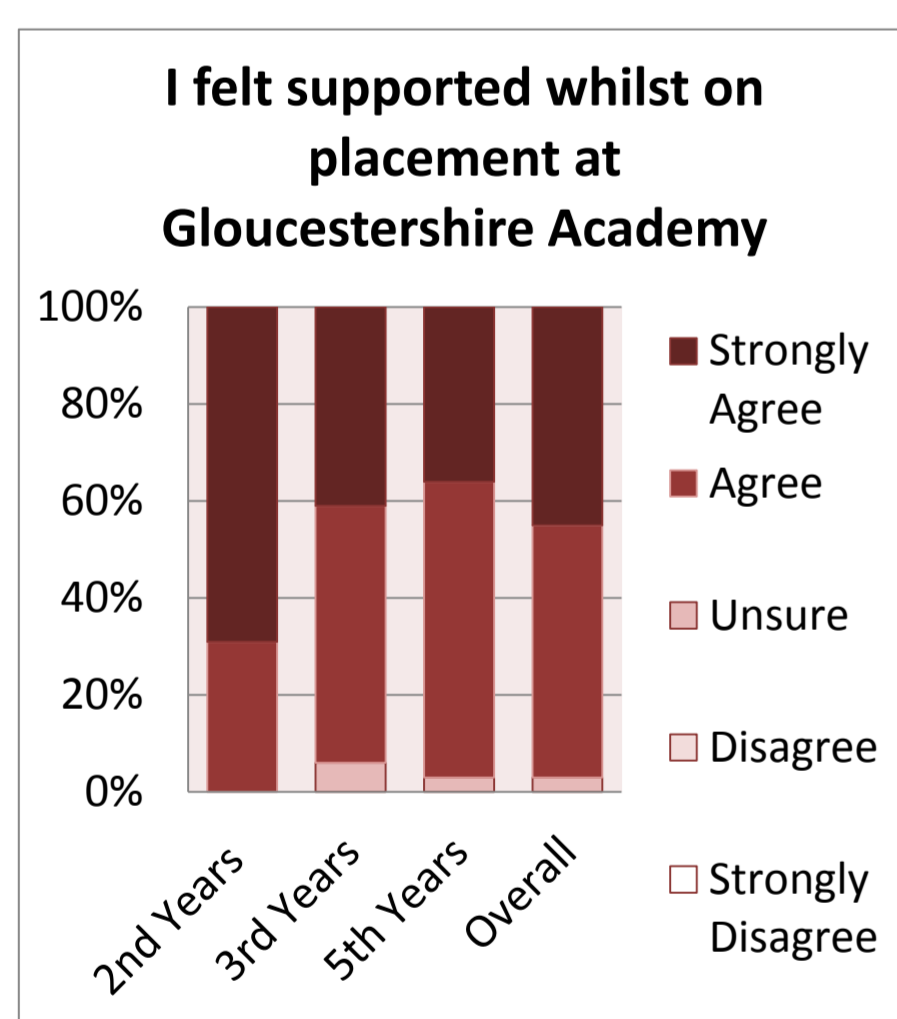
**97% of students felt they were supported** during their placement. **84% felt as though they were part of a community.**

"You got to know people more, felt more of a sense of community"

"It's important that the academy are proactive and interested in promoting student wellbeing"

"Made you aware of what was happening in the academy. Made you feel like part of a team"

We received positive feedback about all elements of the 'wellbeing toolkit', the activities being the most popular element with **92% agreeing that they were enjoyable**. Almost all students felt that the toolkit activities **contributed positively to overall wellbeing**. Over 50 random acts of kindness were submitted and students engaged well, in addition to contributing to the monthly newsletter.



11 third year students participated in the focus group discussion. Following **thematic content analysis**, the emergent themes were **familiarity**, **environment** and **fear of missing out**. The first two were key factors in developing a sense of community, whilst the third related to social anxiety incurred by leaving their central University city. They reported positively about all aspects of the wellbeing toolkit.

### Familiarity

- Clinical teaching fellows
- Feeling known, and knowing people
- New friendships

"Feeling like people care about you"

"A nice change to have people who actually know who you are"

### Environment

- Friendly
- Informal
- Safe space, trust
- Caring

"You can trust people"

"You do feel like you've missed out on quite a lot of stuff"

### Fear of missing out

- Social events
- Inclusion
- Bristol versus out-placement

## Discussion

We have found that building a sense of community is important to our students, and has been a key factor contributing positively to their experience and promoting their wellbeing whilst on placement in Gloucestershire. The two overarching themes that led to this were the familiarity within Gloucestershire Academy amongst our students, and a friendly, caring atmosphere with an emphasis on psychological safety. Ensuring our students felt included, through a variety of methods such as social events, a newsletter and an acts of kindness reporting system, was fundamental to this. Furthermore, the 'wellbeing toolkit' promoted an appreciation of inter-year collaboration.

Taking students out of their central University environment can be disruptive to their work-life balance and thus their learning may suffer. This study underlines the importance of creating a supportive environment at a local level. Students are able to rely on each other and their tutors to take a holistic approach to their education. We believe that this straightforward intervention to create a sense of community within Gloucestershire Academy will be transferable to other Trusts. We hope that our students are more equipped to seek support, enjoy their placement and maximise their educational experience as a result of our toolkit.

References:  
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 Thank you to all University of Bristol students involved in the project, who have also given permission for us to use their images on this poster.