

# Redefining Mental Health Wellbeing and Prosperity for the Workplace, Students, and the Next Generation:

## The Clinical and Scientific Evidence of Lived Experience and Determination in Utilizing TriggerHub

February 5, 2024

### Defining the Public Health Problem

Mental illness, particularly untreated mental illness, is a significant public health problem. The experience of mental illness is highly prevalent across the globe and many barriers to treatment exist, which lead to worsening mental health, disability, and in some cases, death.

**Prevalence of Mental Health Problems.** In 2019, one out of every eight people worldwide were living with a mental health condition ([Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2019](#)). Estimates suggest the COVID-19 pandemic brought a rise in anxiety and depressive disorders globally by 25.6% and 27.6% respectively ([World Health Organization, 2022](#)). Other studies report that 1/6 to 1/4 people in the UK have a diagnosable mental health condition (McManus et al., [2009](#); [2016](#)), and more than 1/5 U.S. adults live with a mental illness ([SAMHSA, 2022](#)). Every year 703,000 people across the globe take their own lives, and even more attempt suicide ([WHO, 2023](#)).

**Mental Health Treatment Seeking and Participation.** The global mental health treatment gap between those in need of care and those who receive care is wide, with only 29% of people with psychosis ([Mental Health Atlas, 2020](#)), and a third of people with depression receiving formal mental health treatment ([Moitra et al., 2022](#)). U.S. data suggest that the average time to treatment after the initial onset of a mental disorder is a decade ([Wang, Berglund, Olfson, & Kessler, 2004](#)). This procrastination in treatment-seeking is of critical importance as the duration of untreated illness is a predictor of the onset of disability ([Ghio et al., 2015](#)), the success of treatment ([Ghio et al., 2015](#)), and the heightened risk for suicide ([Sher, 2020](#)). In the U.S., self-harm, substance use disorders, and depression are among the top 10 leading causes of disability-adjusted life years (DALYs; years lost to disability), and in the UK depression is in the top 10 causes of DALYs ([WHO, 2020](#)).

**Barriers to Treatment.** Barriers to treatment for mental health conditions are numerous and complex. Data from the WHO World Mental Health Surveys, which asked about barriers to treatment across 24 different countries, suggests that low perceived need and attitudinal barriers (i.e., stigma, beliefs about the helpfulness of mental health treatment) are the top reported barriers to treatment seeking ([Andrade et al., 2014](#)). The WHO recommends increasing mental health literacy (understanding of mental health conditions and existing treatments) as an important endeavor worldwide to address the suffering, disability, and loss of life due to untreated mental health conditions. The WHO also suggests that this vast treatment gap for common mental disorders like depression means that countries need to find innovative ways to scale up

mental health services, including the use of non-specialist psychological services and digital self-help ([WHO, 2022b](#)).

## **Bridging the Treatment Gap and Addressing Procrastination with Lived Experience Narratives**

For the two-thirds of people with diagnosable mental health conditions who are not engaged in treatment, and who will likely wait a decade to receive any professional care for their mental health, a critical source of support lies in the lived experiences and recovery narratives of others who have found their path to recovery. These narratives provide a blueprint for those who are suffering in silence to better understand their symptoms and available treatment options. They serve as a testimonial to the fact that the experience of mental illness is common and that there is hope for recovery. Hope is a crucial force in the recovery journey and a core component of the definition of recovery ([Ellison, Belanger, Niles, Evans, & Bauer, 2018](#)). Hope is often lacking among people living with mental illnesses ([Hayes, Herrman, Castle, & Harvey, 2017](#)), particularly those who feel alone in their struggles with mental illness and see no way forward through their suffering. For those who know or love someone who is living with a mental health condition, these narratives can provide useful information on how to best support that person and provide hope that recovery is possible. For organizations, amplifying these narratives can create a culture where mental health is viewed as just as valid as physical health and not shrouded in stigma and shame.

**Defining Lived Experience and Lived Experience Narratives.** Recovery from mental illnesses requires contributions from both professional and “lived experience” bodies of knowledge ([Glover, 2007, p. 30](#)). Within mental health care, traditionally only professional knowledge has informed practice and service delivery, drawn from areas such as medicine, psychology, social work, and nursing. A recovery-oriented approach to mental health care calls for the integration of additional knowledge, that of “lived experience.” [Glover \(2007, p. 29\)](#), defines lived experience as follows:

*When the term ‘lived experience’ is used, it serves to acknowledge the whole experience of overcoming and coming through the experience of illness/distress, including the experience of external and internal stigma, numerous losses and the sense of disengagement and marginalization. Having a ‘lived experience/expertise’ encompasses more than just experiencing a mental illness/distress; it implies that a person is able to draw on and make sense of their own experiences, and those of others, in order that they can be informative and helpful to a broader base. This knowledge base is neither new nor owned by any particular person/s. It is constantly being formed and informed by those that have gone before and those that still struggle with the experience of distress.*

[Llewellyn-Beardsley and colleagues \(2019\)](#) conducted a systematic review of characteristics of mental health recovery narratives, defining a recovery narrative as “a first-person lived experience account, which refers to events or actions over a period and which includes elements of adversity or struggle as well as self-defined strengths,

successes, or survival.” Scientific data from a wide range of fields suggests that storytelling, such as lived experience storytelling about mental health journeys, is a critical tool for social change ([Falk, 2021](#)).

## **Evidence for the Effectiveness of Lived Experience Narratives in Promoting Wellbeing and Recovery**

[Rennick-Egglestone and colleagues \(2019\)](#) conducted a systematic review examining the impact of recovery narratives across the literature on recipients. They found recipients benefited from lived experience narratives by gaining a sense of connectedness, a better understanding of recovery, a reduction in stigma and shame, the validation of difficult personal experiences, and potentially beneficial behavioral responses (e.g. the initiation of more meaningful interactions with support workers). Next, to validate and expand upon their findings regarding the impact of lived experience narratives on recipients, they went on to interview 77 individuals who talked about their own mental health journeys and the impact of others’ mental health narratives on them ([Rennick-Egglestone et al., 2019](#)). They found that the helpful changes identified as a result of receiving lived experience narratives were perceptions of connectedness to the narrative or narrator (which they found to be the strongest mechanism), validation, hope, empowerment and appreciation, a reduction in stigma and self-stigma, and the initiation of a “turning point”, where accessing narrative content leads to a change in how recipients view what is possible for them. They also identified some harmful changes such as perceptions of inadequacy (eg, if a narrative describes a recovery that the recipient views as unattainable for them), disconnection (eg, from narrators who appear to have experienced less distress than the recipient), pessimism (eg, how much recovery is possible for the recipient), and emotional burden caused by empathy with the parts of a recovery narrative that describes adversity or struggle.

Using these systematic reviews as their guides, this group of scholars, led by Dr Stefan Rennick-Egglestone from the School of Health Sciences, and the Institute of Mental Health at the University of Nottingham, has gone on to develop and systematically test the Narrative Experiences Online (NEON) intervention, a web application that was home to a collection of over 600 recorded mental health lived experience narratives. Funded by the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR), the NEON study found that a lived experience narratives intervention was effective at improving quality of life, increased people’s perception that their life had meaning, and was a cost-effective use of NHS resources, even more so for those who were already receiving more costly NHS-funded services ([Slade et al., 2024](#)).

Similar findings to that of the NEON study have been documented by other scholars. For example, Dr. Kristin Kosyluk, Assistant Professor of Mental Health Law and Policy at the University of South Florida, has partnered with several community organizations and programs to study the effects of sharing stories of lived experience on the storytellers as well as the receivers of these narratives. One storytelling organization for which Dr. Kosyluk has served as the lead scientific evaluator for the past seven years, is the U.S.-based non-profit, [This Is My Brave](#). This Is My Brave’s mission is “To

empower individuals to put their names and faces to their true stories of recovery from mental illness in order to break down stigma and to let others know that they are not alone.” The organization does this through live and virtual storytelling events held across the U.S. featuring ordinary people sharing extraordinary stories of their lived experiences with mental illness and/or addiction, their recovery journeys, and their message of hope using the performing arts. A casting call is issued to the community, asking brave individuals to come forward and share their lived experiences through any means of creative expression, including monologue, poetry, song, and stand-up comedy. [Three peer-reviewed publications](#), disseminated through well-established journals in the field of behavioral health, show that audience members who witness these testimonies experience reductions in stigma and improvements in attitudes toward treatment-seeking (Conner, Kosyluk, et al., [2022](#); Kosyluk et al., [2018](#); [2021](#)). Preliminary data gathered from This Is My Brave storytellers indicates that they experience an increased sense of empowerment and righteous anger (the energy that fuels mental health advocacy) as a result of their Brave journey to the stage.

Another program with which Dr. Kosyluk has partnered to document the power of sharing stories of lived experience is the Peer-to-Peer program, run by the largest U.S.-based grassroots mental health organization, the [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#). NAMI’s Peer-to-Peer program is led by pairs of people with lived experience with mental illness and includes sharing of stories of challenges and successful recovery strategies among groups of people living with mental illnesses. Dr. Kosyluk’s research shows that Peer-to-Peer program participants experience a reduction in the hurt caused by internalizing the stigma around mental illness, as well as improvements in empowerment and recovery (including goal and success orientation and willingness to ask for help) ([Kosyluk et al., 2020](#)).

## **How TriggerHub Addresses the Public Mental Health Crisis**

TriggerHub offers an array of lived experience content that leverages the insights and perspectives of courageous individuals living with a variety of different mental health challenges and sharing the many and varied pathways that lead to mental wellbeing. These narratives are proof that living well despite mental health challenges is possible, offer hope and connection to those who might be suffering in silence, and provide greater understanding and compassion to those who love, learn, or work with people with mental health challenges.

TriggerHub’s platform serves as more than just a crisis intervention tool; it plays a crucial role in promoting proactive mental well-being. By providing users with consistent daily interaction, the TriggerHub platform offers a continuous support system that fosters emotional resilience and coping strategies. Regular engagement allows individuals to cultivate self-awareness, learn effective stress management techniques, and build a sense of community. This ongoing connection helps users identify and address potential triggers early on, preventing the escalation of issues into crisis points. In essence, TriggerHub’s mental health platform becomes a proactive ally, empowering

users to prioritize their mental health in their daily lives and mitigate the risk of reaching critical moments.

## **The Value of TriggerHub to Your Organization**

With the above expectations for TriggerHub's impact on mental health and wellbeing, which are grounded in evidence on the power of lived experience content for promoting recovery from mental illness, if fully embraced by your organization, TriggerHub holds the potential to benefit your organization by reducing healthcare and overall costs to the organization, decreasing absenteeism and turnover, increasing productivity, transforming company culture, and improving employee wellbeing.

**Decreasing Absenteeism and Turnover of Employees.** In addition to reducing healthcare costs, corporate wellness programs can also help decrease absenteeism and turnover. When employees are healthy and engaged, they are more likely to show up for work and stay with their current employer. According to a study by the Society for Human Resource Management, companies with wellness programs experienced an average 11% reduction in absenteeism, and a 28% reduction in sick leave usage ([Palmer, 2023](#)). Similarly, companies with wellness programs also tend to experience lower turnover rates. When employees feel valued and supported by their employer, they are less likely to seek employment elsewhere. This can save a company money on recruitment and training costs, as well as help maintain a stable workforce. Through exposure to different recovery pathways highlighted in TriggerHub's lived experience content, individuals are likely to recognize their own mental health challenges or symptoms ([Morris, 2016](#)) and seek support more quickly, before they have reached a point of crisis leading to absenteeism and turnover.

**Increasing Productivity and Performance.** Perhaps one of the most compelling financial benefits of a corporate wellness program is its potential to increase productivity. When employees are healthy and engaged, they are more likely to be productive and produce high-quality work. According to a study by the Health Enhancement Research Organization, employees who participated in a wellness program reported an average 25% reduction in sick leave absenteeism, and an average 28% reduction in healthcare costs ([Palmer, 2023](#)). Additionally, companies that have wellness programs in place have reported increased productivity, higher employee engagement, and improved morale. A healthier workforce is a more productive one. Regular exercise, balanced nutrition, and effective stress management can enhance cognitive function and energy levels, improving job performance. Employees who prioritize their well-being are often better equipped to handle high-pressure situations and maintain focus throughout the workday. Therefore, the company usually sees a better investment return when implementing a mental health program.

One reason that wellness programs increase productivity is that employees are [generally happier](#), which reduces stress levels ([Coyle, 2017](#)). When employees are stressed, they are more likely to make mistakes, miss deadlines, and experience burnout. By providing resources and support to help employees manage their stress levels, wellness programs can help employees feel more focused, energized, and

productive. TriggerHub's lived experience content, through fostering hope among employees, can lead to more positive organizational behavior and outcomes ([Froman, 2010](#)).

**Stress Reduction and Mental Health Support.** With higher stress, longer workdays, and constant multitasking, it is more difficult to find the time to act on wellness goals. A wellness program is important because most of an employee's time is spent at the workplace. Workplace stress can lead to burnout, decreased productivity, and negative impacts on mental health. A wellness program can offer stress reduction techniques such as mindfulness sessions, meditation, and relaxation techniques. Providing mental health resources and counseling services can create a supportive environment where employees feel comfortable seeking help when needed. Long working hours and a lack of psychological safety resulted in a threefold increase in risk of depression for employees, based on research at the University of South Australia ([Zadow, Dollard, Dormann, & Landsbergis, 2021](#)). When workers had more flexibility and control over their work content and working hours, they reported greater wellbeing and job satisfaction, according to a study of 20,000 employees by the University of Birmingham ([Wheatley, 2017](#)).

**Improved Employee Health and Well-being.** Healthier employees are generally more productive, take fewer sick days, and experience fewer chronic health issues, reducing healthcare costs for the organization. Lived experience narratives have been shown to improve the recipient's overall Quality of Life ([Slade et al., 2024](#)).

**Overall Economic Benefit.** Starting with the big picture, employee mental health costs the economy at least as much as physical health, according to a study by Penn State, published in the *Review of Regional Studies* ([Davlasheridze, Goetz, & Han, 2018](#)). Specifically, a single extra poor mental health day in a month was associated with a 1.84% drop in the per capita real income growth rate, resulting in \$53 billion less total income each year.

Organizations that invested in wellbeing—both physical and emotional—saw a 5% increase in productivity based on a meta-analysis by the University of California, Riverside ([Gubler, Larkin, & Pierce, 2017](#)). And each dollar spent on wellness programs saved \$3.27 in health care costs and \$2.73 in absenteeism costs. Organizations that addressed physical health and mental health experienced reduced absenteeism, reduced presenteeism (people who were present at work, but not productive), and increased job performance, according to a study published in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (JOEM)* ([Shi, Sears, Coberley, & Pope, 2013](#)).

Programs that enhanced people's ability to manage work and life responsibilities saw a positive ROI of \$1.68. In other words, for every dollar spent on programs to reduce work-life time conflicts, organizational costs dropped by \$1.68 based on reduced employee turnover, reduced presenteeism and reduced health care use. This was according to a study by the [American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine \(ACOEM\)](#).

Healthcare costs are rising year after year. Employers, especially those at small companies, can simply not afford to take on this burden any longer. As a result, they are passing the costs on to their employees through higher deductibles. But healthier employees can actually help their own bottom line. Some employers are now lowering employee's contributions with rebates if they do participate in a wellness program.

**Reducing Healthcare Costs.** One of the most significant financial benefits of a corporate wellness program is its potential to reduce healthcare costs ([Sherfinski, n.d.](#)). By promoting healthy behaviors and lifestyles, such as exercise and proper nutrition, wellness programs can help employees avoid costly medical treatments and procedures. For example, according to a study by the National Business Group on Health, employers who implemented a wellness program saw an average healthcare cost trend that was 3.7 percentage points lower than those who did not have a wellness program in place. The NEON studies cited in this paper suggest that lived experience narratives implemented in the UK resulted in cost savings for the National Health Service (NHS) ([Slade et al., 2024](#)).

Another way that wellness programs can reduce healthcare costs is by encouraging preventive care. When employees receive regular check-ups and screenings, they are more likely to catch health issues early, when they are easier and less expensive to treat. This can help avoid the need for more costly and invasive treatments down the line. TriggerHub's lived experience content provides information on symptoms that may help individuals identify that they are struggling with a mental health condition earlier on in that journey before they experience reduced functioning, disability, or a mental health crisis, and provides a blueprint for engaging with various sources of support, including professional mental health treatment ([Morris, 2016](#)).

**Saving Money in the Long Run.** While the initial costs of implementing a corporate wellness program may seem daunting, the potential long-term financial benefits can more than make up for it. By reducing healthcare costs, decreasing absenteeism and turnover, and increasing productivity, [a well-designed wellness program](#) can save a company money in the long run. For example, according to a study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the average [ROI for a corporate wellness program was \\$3.27 for every dollar invested](#). This means that for every dollar a company spends on a wellness program, they can expect to save \$3.27 in healthcare costs, absenteeism, and productivity losses. Again, the NEON studies demonstrated the cost-effectiveness to the healthcare system of utilizing lived experience narratives to promote recovery ([Slade et al., 2024](#)).

In addition to these direct financial benefits, there are also other indirect benefits to consider. For example, a well-designed wellness program can help enhance a company's brand reputation, making it a more attractive employer for job seekers. Additionally, a healthier and more engaged workforce can help improve customer satisfaction, as employees are more likely to provide excellent service when they feel valued and supported.

**Positive Organizational Culture Leads to Enhanced Employee Engagement and Morale.** Toxic leadership was found to increase depression on the part of workers, according to [British Psychological Society \(BPS; 2017\)](#). On the flip side, leadership

characterized by empathy, trust, integrity, and positive relationships with employees was linked with retention and productivity according to a meta-analysis of 130 studies by University of Exeter ([Lee, Lyubovnikova, Tian, & Knight, 2019](#)). Employees who feel that their organization cares about their well-being tend to be more engaged and motivated. A wellness program demonstrates that the company values its employees beyond their work. Engaged employees are more likely to stay with the organization, leading to reduced turnover rates and the associated costs of recruitment and training. The average company spends \$1,252 to train a new employee. Most employees receive 33 hours of training when newly hired.

A wellness program contributes to developing a positive company culture by fostering community and camaraderie. This positive culture can attract top talent, improve teamwork, and create an environment where employees feel valued and empowered. Additionally, creating a professional physical setting that takes employees' mental and physical well-being in mind, for example, providing office furniture that supports proper ergonomics or a [sound masking system](#) that can transform a loud and busy work environment into even a spa-like atmosphere, can further help support employee wellness on the job.

Investing in TriggerHub and fully embracing its implementation within your organization is a tangible way to transform the organization's culture and perceptions of the priorities of the leadership.

## Benefits of TriggerHub for Your Organization

Based on the literature reviewed in this paper on the evidence that lived experience narratives play a powerful role in wellbeing, and the existing research on the impact of workplace wellbeing programs, it is expected that employers and educational institutions investing in TriggerHub as a resource for their employees or students will see these same benefits including:

- **Decreased levels of stigma** (both among people living with mental health conditions and the entire organization)
- **Increased perceptions of connectedness** to others with lived experience
- **A sense of validation**
- **Increased hope**
- **Increased empowerment and sense of appreciation**
- **Increased willingness to seek treatment** should one experience symptoms, potentially significantly reducing time to treatment gap of, on average, a decade
- **Improved quality of life**
- **Increased sense of meaning in life**, a central component of hope
- **Decreased claims, healthcare, and employee leave costs**
- **Increase in employee engagement**
- **Increase in productivity**
- **Reduce employee turnover**
- **Enhancement to EVP & Wellness Strategies**

## **Make Mental Health and Wellbeing a Strategic Business Priority**

The evidence presented in this paper suggests that TriggerHub's content from brave lived experience sources will benefit your organization in all of the ways outlined above. But, TriggerHub is not a "magic bullet" or "tick the box" exercise. For TriggerHub to have these impacts within your organization, there must be an investment in this powerful tool from all levels of the organization. The Harvard Business Review published an article titled "[What's the Hard Return on Employee Wellness Programs,](#)" which suggests that the ROI on comprehensive, well-run employee wellness programs can be as high as 6 to 1 ([Berry, Marabito, & Baun, 2010](#)). In this article, the authors lay out the six essential pillars that the most successful employee wellness programs have, and engaged leadership is among these core pillars. TriggerHub holds great potential to benefit your organization if you embrace it fully and communicate this to your organization.

The evidence supporting the use of lived experience narratives for promoting mental wellbeing among employees, students, and the next generation was compiled by Dr. Kristin Kosyluk. Dr. Kosyluk received her Ph.D. in Psychology from Illinois Institute of Technology's Rehabilitation Counseling Education program in 2014. Dr. Kosyluk's research agenda is defined by a focus on mental illness and psychiatric disability, with a special interest in social justice issues and stigma.