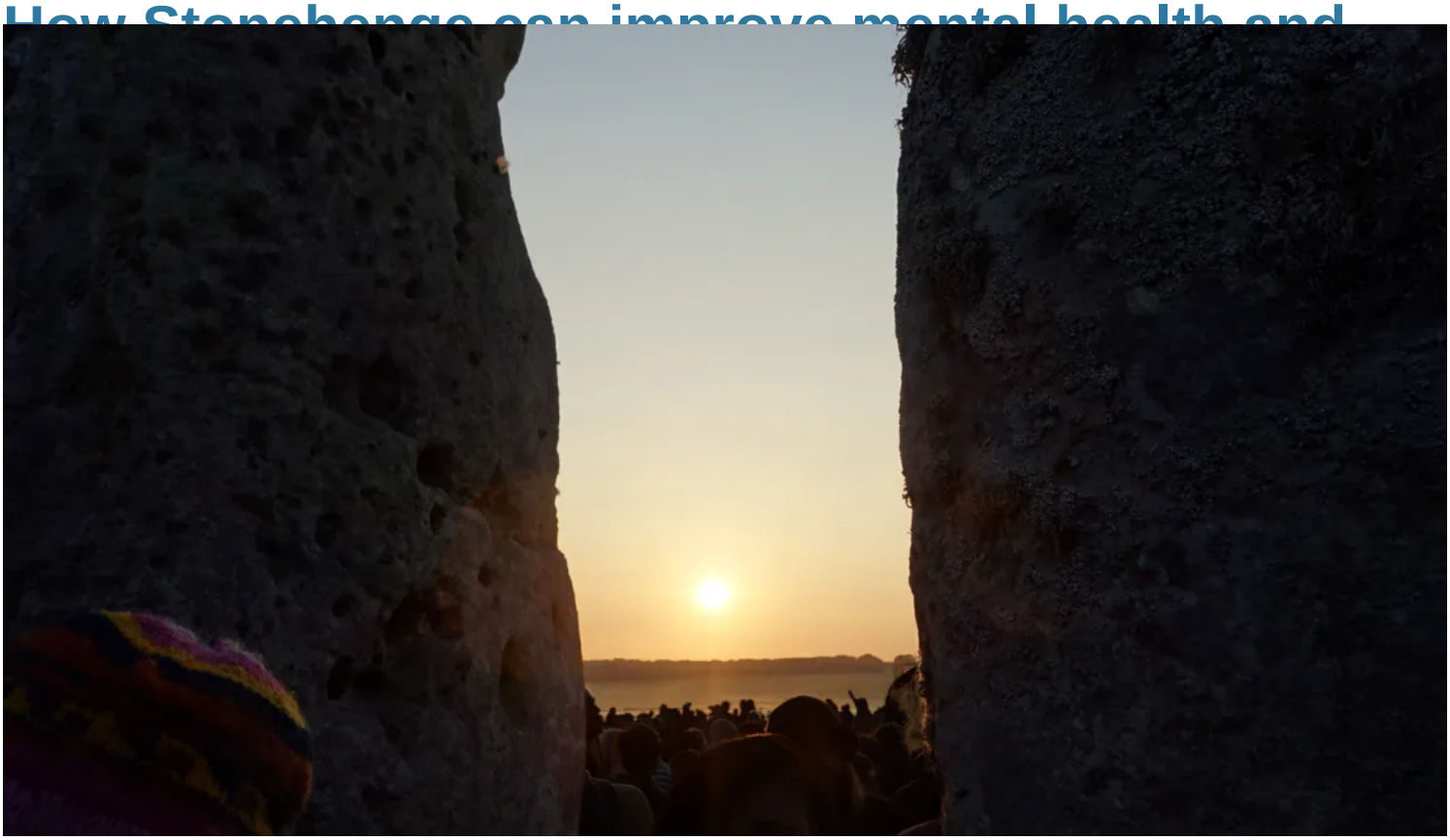
How Stonehenge can improve mental health and



Sunrise on the summer solstice at Stonehenge

The worshippers and revellers who come together each mid-summer to commune with the ancient stones in Wiltshire are onto something.

An HLF-supported project has found that creative exploration of historic landscapes can have a positive impact on health and wellbeing.

Human Henge, which received £63,000 in National Lottery funding, ran four programmes at Neolithic sites Stonehenge and Avebury between autumn 2016 and spring 2018.

Linking historic environments and wellbeing

The project's aim was to enhance and improve the wellbeing of participants with mental health issues by doing activities and exploring places connected with the historic environment.

The New Economic Foundation has defined five ways to wellbeing:

- Connect
- Be active

- Take notice
- Keep learning
- Give

“Human Henge hits them all quite comprehensively,” says Laura Drysdale, Director of Restoration Trust, one of the charities behind the project.

Exploring with intent and expanding minds

Each 10-week Human Henge programme involved participants exploring the landscape “with intent”.

> "Human Henge allowed [participants] the space to use their imaginations and expand their minds." – Laura Drysdale, Director of Restoration Trust

“Sometimes there was something special – a professor would talk to them about archaeology, for example – and sometimes they just walked and talked, had a sensory experience, or lay around on the barrows and thought about time.”

Other activities included singing and dancing, making clay sculptures and baking bread. It culminated with an event “inside the stones”.

“One of the things people with mental health issues say is that their mind feels so compressed. Human Henge allowed them the space to use their imaginations and expand their minds,” Laura says.

Measuring the impact

Participants were recruited via the Richmond Fellowship, a charity specialising in supporting individuals with long term mental health needs in Wiltshire.

After the programme they recorded an increase in positive response rates to all seven dimensions of mental health and wellbeing that were measured.

> “I’ve actually been a human being for three months, rather than (being seen as) an illness or a condition or a client or an end user." – Female participant in the project

For example, at the start of the programme 43.5% said they never or rarely felt optimistic, but this reduced to 30.4% by the end.

One female participant commented: “I’ve actually been a human being for three months, rather than (being seen as) an illness or a condition or a client or an end user, y’know.”

Long-term effects and plans for the future

One year on from the two programmes at Stonehenge, evaluators said “it is evident that for the majority of participants there was a positive impact upon their mental health and wellbeing which they attribute to the programme and

associated activities.”

Laura Drysdale is keen to run more projects and collect more robust data.

“If we can really prove that this model of a project works for people's mental health, there’s a possibility of it being used for social prescribing, and then you can make a real impact on social provisions for mental health problems.

“There are hundreds of under-used historic landscapes and they're just ripe for these kinds of projects.”



View from the east of Stonehenge at sunrise



und for Stonehenge

Gardeners at Lloyd Park in Walthamstow

Heritage and positive mental health