

What Matters to Us:

Gathering stories and ideas with children about their own health and wellbeing



A What Matters to Me Map, Soham, March 2025

“We have been so inspired by the children’s ideas and creativity. Their maps and these six principles are prompting many useful reflections amongst ourselves at school but also, and really importantly, with parents and carers. There is so much we can all be doing to support our children in ways that matter to them.”

Jane Segust, Headteacher, The Shade Primary School



Fullscope
Changing systems,
improving young lives

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Summary



This resource shares with primary schools an approach to creating space and time to listen to children's stories about their own health and wellbeing. It encourages a whole-school approach and enables schools to gather vital information to inform both their own mental health and wellbeing strategy and the wider planning of services for children by the statutory and voluntary sectors.

Two creative activities are described in detail to support you as a community to document and learn from these experiences:

- Making maps of 'What Matters to Me'
- Writing prescriptions for ways to be well as part of creating a story together.

A suggested approach to a community sharing event is also outlined. The key is to take your time and recognise this is just the beginning of a conversation your community can have.

“Hearing what matters most to over 1,000 children in East Cambs is hugely powerful. Our learning from the innovative Mapping Soham Stories Project is helping us ensure that children’s voices are integral to codesigning local support.”

Ashling Bannon, East Cambridgeshire Integrated Neighbourhood Programme Manager, June 2025

Why do this?

Putting children's voices at the heart of planning for a culture of health and wellbeing is critical. They are the experts in their lives and making time to prioritise listening to their ideas and perspectives is recognised to bring significant benefits.

In particular, it can:

- Nurture children's imagination and creativity
- Celebrate individuality, friendship and community
- Help educators gain a deeper understanding of children's worlds
- Strengthen community connections and relationships
- Contribute to the co-creation of environments and services that are supportive and enabling.

"I had a pride of joy inside me because I was able to make a piece of art with my friends."

Soham pupil, March 2025



"I saw a different side to the pupils. It was good for the children to have this time to release their inner thoughts and feelings. I particularly noticed how three of the boys worked together as a team. They were writing from their hearts. It was just amazing to see them being safe and sensible and to hear and see what they wrote about friendship and sad memories. They had time and a safe space to say that to each other. I don't hear that in the playground. Children need time to be open and honest and share in a positive space."

Soham Teaching Assistant, March 2025

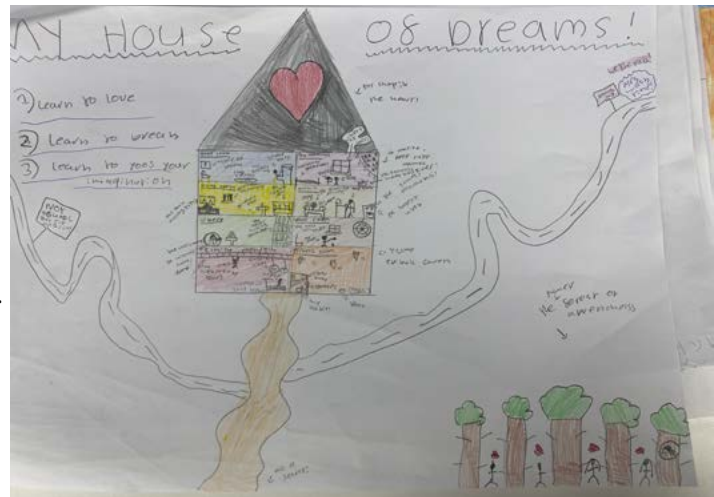
Background

Developed by Fullscope

This resource has been developed by a team from Fullscope, a collaborative network of leading charities working to improve the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, with the support of Cambridgeshire County Council's PSHE team.

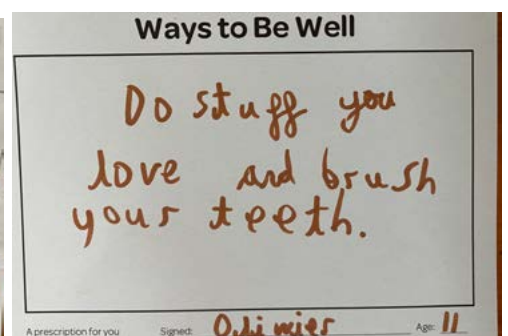
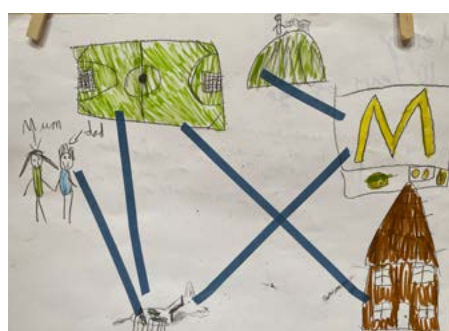
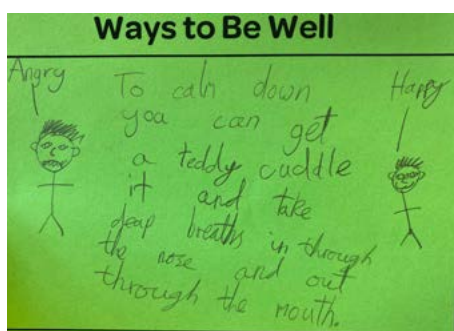
Working with health colleagues

Fullscope's approach was tested through a project called 'Mapping Soham Stories'. This was commissioned by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough's NHS team for East Cambs as part of the commitment for local services to be more holistic and integrated. It was understood that children's social, emotional, psychological and educational needs should be considered alongside their medical needs. Ideas were gathered from 1,169 primary school children from three Soham Primary Schools in March 2025. This extended earlier work by Cambridge Acorn Project (CAP) in the county where 1,429 Cambridgeshire children explored what makes a 'happy mind'.

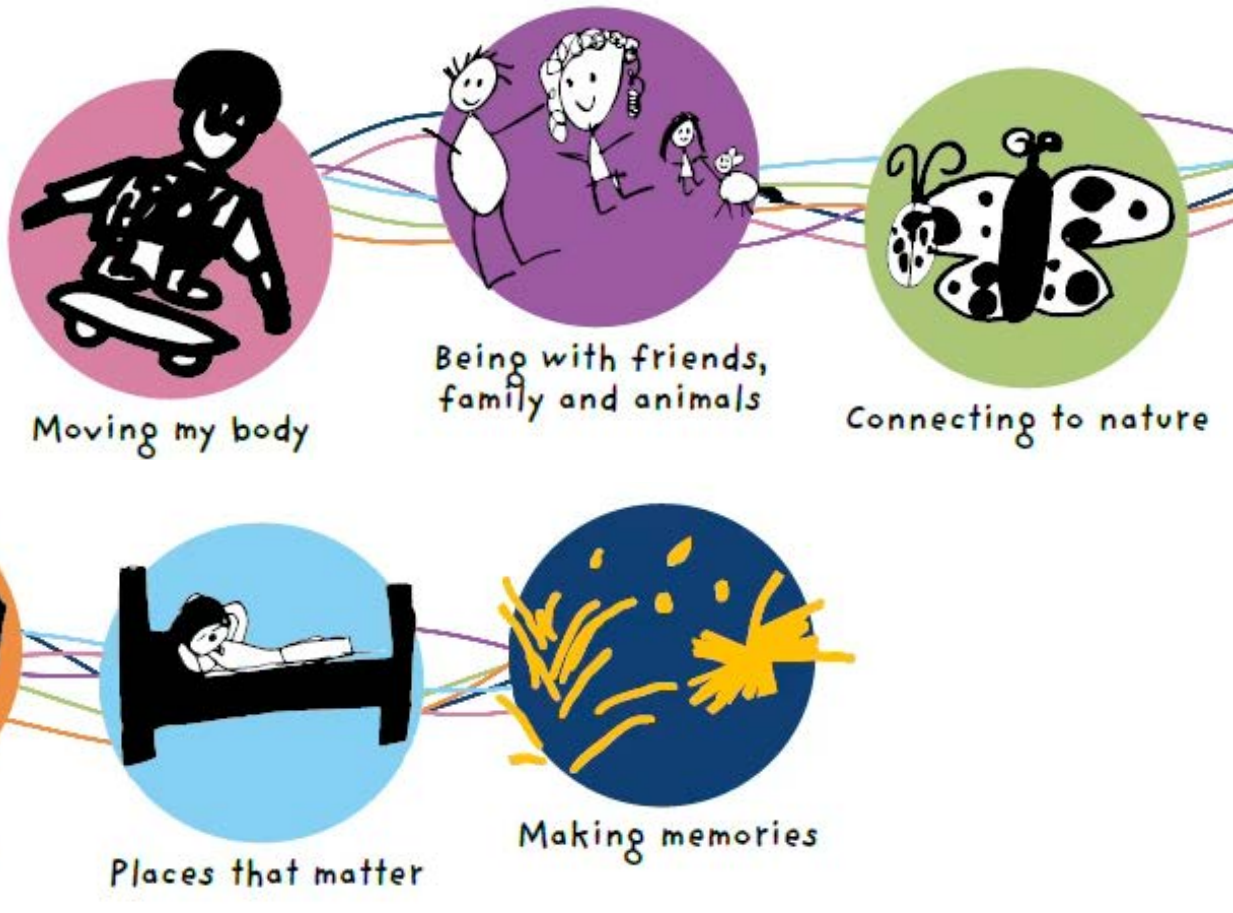


Children created maps and prescriptions about what mattered to them during the 'Mapping Soham Stories' days. Each approached the activities in their own individual ways and the creativity and wisdom we saw was breath taking. Their work contained many beautiful stories, for example:

- Journeys to school and all the places on the way
- Bedrooms and everything in there
- The moments that they were born
- Memories of people who had died
- Countries across the world they had connections to
- Other galaxies and what can be found there
- Many different animals and places in nature they like to spend time in
- One even described the walk that they used to do with their dog who is now dead



We identified six ideas across all the children's work that best describe what they feel is important for their health and well-being:

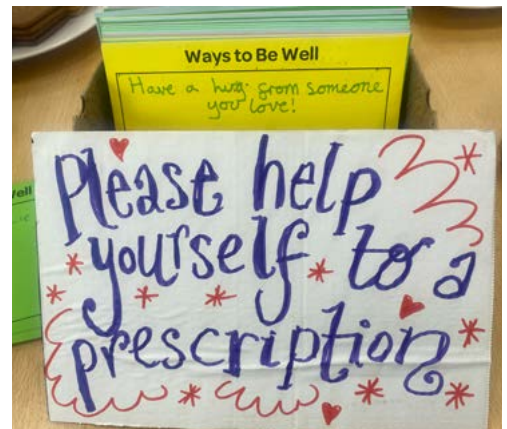


Their prescriptions for ways to be well were also beautifully varied and detailed. A flavour of those gathered in Soham work is illustrated below.



An infographic that presents all the learning alongside recommendations has been published by East Cambridgeshire Integrated Neighbourhood, Fullscope, Cambridge Acorn Project and Cambridgeshire County Council Public Health team. This is available [here](#) alongside a short film created with the Soham children.

CAP has also created '[A Children's Charter for Therapy](#)'.



Planning your first 'What Matters to Me' day

This document shares an approach to a whole school wellbeing focused day to help you begin this conversation in your community: beginning with an assembly, then helping a team of KS2 children to work as map ambassadors, inviting every class in the school to make maps and share ideas, and finally sharing the creative work as an end of day exhibition.

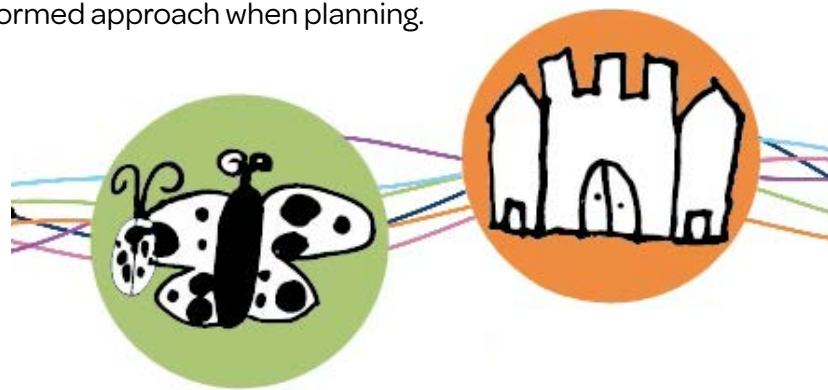
It is possible to take elements from the options and compress this if time is limited but each element contributes to an experience substantially greater than the sum of its parts. Remember this is only the beginning. You will gain so many wonderful ideas and insights from the children to continue into other areas of your PSHE curriculum and beyond.

This resource has been guided by the principles of good practice from the [PSHE Association](#) which advocates for activities that:

- Emphasise learning opportunities that are interactive, where adults involved are facilitators and companions
- Provide a safe and supportive environment where children can draw on their own experiences and express their own ideas
- Make time for reflection and connection to other aspects of children's lives and their community
- Provide opportunities that empower children and build their sense of agency and self-confidence
- Take a positive and strengths-based trauma informed approach when planning.

“We think it's really important that adults who work in children's services hear what we have to say.”

Soham pupil, March 2025

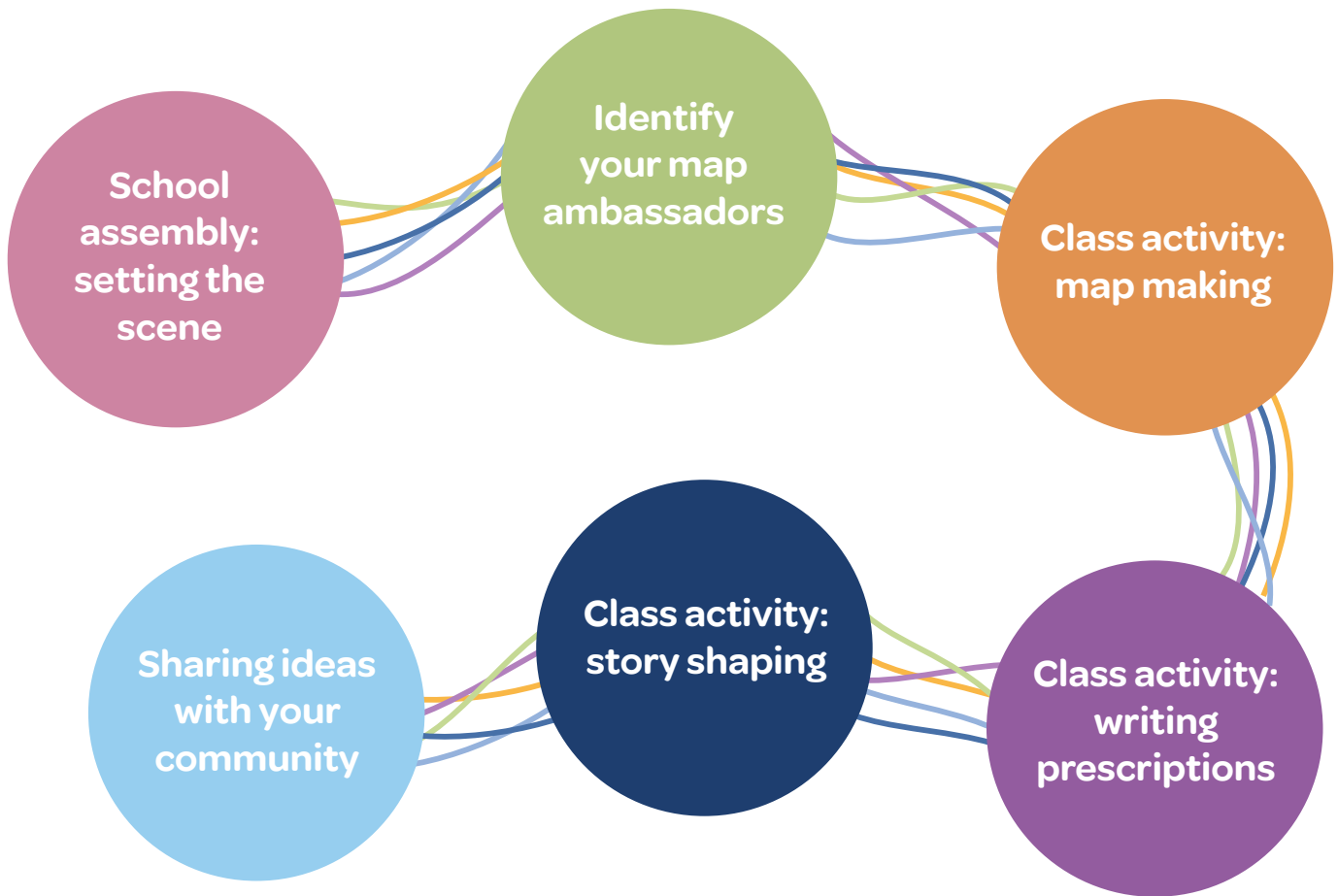


It is important to draw on your usual PSHE ground rules or establish some for this session. We would recommend talking about these for example with the children:

- We will celebrate how we all have different views and how with these activities there are no 'wrong answers' or 'wrong ways' to do this.
- We can ask any questions if we are not sure. There is no such thing as a silly question.
- We can choose what we put on our maps or in our prescriptions and do not have to share anything personal if we would prefer not to.
- If we want to tell a story about someone, we won't say their name. We'll just say 'someone I know.....' for example.
- We will listen to and encourage each other.

We would also recommend that the activities are supported by adults the children are familiar with.

How to structure



School assembly: setting the scene

Take the time to talk about:

- How to be well, we must care for our bodies, our minds and our hearts. Think about examples from your own lives to offer here – one of us described how that morning she had eaten a bowl of porridge to care for her body, made notes of all the things she wanted to talk about in the assembly to care for her mind and help her not feel nervous about meeting new people, and also stroke her dog before she left to care for her heart.
- If you use the Five Ways to Wellbeing model with the children you could remind them of that or other resources you might have shared from [Mentally Healthy Schools](#).
- How people like doctors help us think about how to be well but we can learn from each other too. What do we each do to be well? We are all different, so we are going to learn lots of new ideas today. How we are going to explore this today by making maps about 'what matters to us' and writing prescriptions for each other about ways to be well (you might need to check everyone understands the word prescriptions).
- How this information will be helpful to everyone in your community: staff, parents and carers. How as a school it can help you think about how the spaces and opportunities that are offered, and how the ideas might help others in your community plan services that support children. You might have examples here of who you think would like to hear about the children's ideas in your local area – your GP surgery perhaps or your local district councillor or even MP.

Identify your map ambassadors

We then spent an hour with a group of older children from across the school (year 4,5 and 6), inviting them to experiment with creating their maps and writing prescriptions (see instructions below). We spent time with them thinking about how they can encourage the other children, helping them notice the qualities of the experience that were important so that everyone could feel comfortable and confident. They then went off in pairs to join classes across the schools, feeling confident that they could support and encourage the other children.

The rest of the school used this time to talk about the assembly and gather their ideas and materials.

Class activity: map making

Making Maps of 'What Matters to Me' (we suggest at least an hour for this activity)

Actions	Notes
<p>Encourage the children to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Remember the maps shared in the assembly and talk about how these differ from the maps they usually see.Think about the question 'what matters to me' and all the different aspects this might include such as memories, stories, dreams, people, animals, things and places. <p>Invite the map ambassadors to say what they included in their map.</p> <p>Introduce the materials and remind them how they can choose to use them.</p> <p>Remind everyone:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">You can choose what you put on your map.You might want to put people.You might want to put places.You might want to put memories.You might want to put things you like doing there.You might want to put things you wish you could be there.You might want to add words.Remember it's a map to find out more about what matters to you – and you are the expert on that – so there are no wrong answers.	<p>You could have maps of your local area here as examples.</p> <p>Perhaps you could give examples from your own life here.</p> <p>Some children might want to close their eyes and quietly think about the maps they want to make.</p> <p>Take the time to just allow everyone to go to the special places they want to record in their minds. Invite everyone to think about where you are in the world - your local village or town or area. Ask them to notice where they feel their most comfortable selves. This might be inside or outside. It might be one place or lots of places. As everyone starts to think about these places, you can suggest they notice who is normally there with them? What can they see? Hear? Feel? What is around them?</p> <p>Materials needed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Large plain paper sheet for each child (A3 is ideal but we also had some much larger sheets as sometimes groups wanted to work at a bigger scale)Mark making materials such as felt-tips, coloured pencils and pastelsTracing paper and tape for adding layers or connecting maps together if children want to work in groupsScissors

Class activity: writing prescriptions

(allow at least 10 minutes for children to write/draw and talk about their prescriptions)

Actions	Notes
<p>Start by checking in that everyone understands the word 'prescription'. We talked about how doctors write these when telling us what medicine to take, but now we are going to prescribe (by writing or drawing) ideas for what we know helps us to feel better and care for our bodies, our minds and our hearts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The children might like to include how often their prescription should be done and where to do it. It is fun to sign it too, like a real doctor.•• Encourage the children to think about what matters to them, what they like doing at the moment and that they think other people might like to try.

Class Activity: story shaping

Co-creating the story of 'The What Matters Pharmacy' (allow at least 30 minutes)

Actions	Notes
<p>Invite the children to create a gallery of the maps so that everyone can look at them.</p> <p>Ask the children to help you create a new story for your school inspired by their ideas.</p> <p>Start by checking in that everyone understands the word pharmacy and prescriptions – we described it as the place in a town where people went to get the medicine that doctors tell them to take to make them feel better.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This could be a long line across the floor or as a grid of images across the desks – wherever you have space so that you can walk around and look at all the different drawings that have been made.•• You can encourage them to notice how different they all are and ask each other questions.•• Storyteller Marion Leeper created the 'What Matters Pharmacy for Soham' story drawing on all the children's ideas from the original project and she has created this framework to help you do the same with your children. The story offers a possible script as a guide with highlighted areas in green where you invite the children to add their ideas inspired by the maps they've just created. This is just a starting point and offers one approach to creating a story. Please experiment and develop as you feel appropriate – you are the experts in your children. You are inviting them to fill in ideas for what happens on these planets, and you will know best how to help them do this. We'd love you to share this story with us too – could one of the map ambassadors who are helping you write all the lists down for you perhaps?•• You're going to be creating six lists with your children based on what they've put on their maps.

Script and prompts to write your own 'What Matters Pharmacy' story

Let's look at all these wonderful maps and prescriptions you've created. They are full of incredible ideas which we can gather up as a story we can share with others. Lots of other children in Cambridgeshire have been doing the same, so there are going to be many versions of this story. Today we are creating our own special version.

This story is about a space creature who is exploring an extraordinary galaxy of planets, each of which celebrates children's ideas about what matters to them.

Today we're going to create a version of the story that shares your ideas of what happens on these different planets.

This story is called the 'What Matters Pharmacy for _____ (add name of your town here)

There is a distant galaxy where there is a planet where everything was grey



All the creatures on the planet were grey and dull and miserable and nobody felt quite well.

One day, the child of one of those space creatures found an old telescope in a forgotten corner. The space child – Nova by name (Nova is the Latin word for new and is the name of a star that was dim and then suddenly burns brightly) – looked through the telescope at the grey ground, the grey buildings and trees, and the grey people: and then pointed the telescope upwards.

There, glowing in the sky, were six colourful planets.

It made Nova wonder: 'What if things could change?'

After that question came many more questions:

'Why is everything here grey?

Why is everyone miserable?

Why don't people feel well? I'm so bored of just grey - could there be something else?'

Once Nova had started having ideas, it was hard to stop!

'I wonder what it is that really matters. I think people have forgotten! I want to be an expert on what matters to children. I need to go on a journey! I'm going to visit some of those planets and find out what is interesting. Then, perhaps, we would start to feel well.'

Nova set off into space, wearing a grey spacesuit, in a grey spaceship, with a grey notebook and pencil to visit them.

The first planet Nova arrived at was the purple planet. It was full of people of all ages and many many animals too.

Let's look at our maps we've just made. Who have you put on your maps? Let's make a list of all the friends and family and animals you've got on your maps.

On the red planet the Nova found children moving their bodies in all sorts of ways

Can you tell me what you've put on your maps today about ways to move your bodies?

The green planet was full of wild green spaces, and many people outside in nature.

What have you put about nature on your maps?

The yellow planet, the planet of imagination, was a wonderful colourful place. There were people painting, and singing, and reading, and playing games.
What have you included on your maps that are about imagination and all the different ways you expand yours?

The blue planet was full of places that people knew mattered.
Tell me about all the places have you included in your maps?

Nova came to a planet that was all about remembering.

What have you included in your maps that might be found on a planet like this? Are there holidays you included? Or special times or experiences?

Nova wrote down all the answers, till the notebook was half full, thinking, each time 'Is this the right answer? Which is the right one, the one that really matters?'

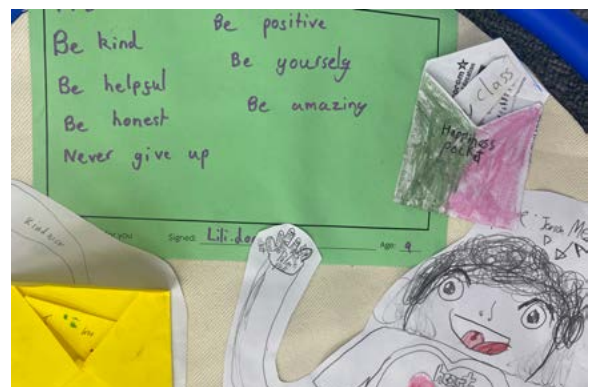


Next Nova landed on the edge of a new town. There was a sign outside saying' (insert name of your town here) – the town of caring for others'. Walking through the town, the space creature noticed that this was a place where people mattered to each other and cared for each other. Everywhere Nova saw friends having a good time together. There were people taking dogs for walks and caring for animals. Nova noticed people playing games together but also others sitting peacefully in a field, looking at the sky or stroking a piece of grass.

Finally, Nova arrived at the most unusual building of all, with a sign, written in rainbow colours: the 'What Matters Pharmacy'. The building was full of pharmacists in white coats - and every colour of coat! They were writing prescriptions on pieces of paper: these were suggestions for how they might be well and happy.

Nova saw so many different ideas. Here's just a few:

- Touch some grass
- Watch the moon
- Take a bath
- Get a warm blanket
- Do hula-hooping
- Ride a bike
- Make an imaginary friend
- Look at old photos
- Stroke your neighbour's cat



'Excuse me!' said Nova. 'I've seen all these ideas from the planets I've visited about things that really matter. Can you tell me which is the right one?'

All the children (did I tell you the pharmacists were children?) stopped what they were doing and looked at Nova. Then they started to laugh.

'But all of them are right!' said the children. 'Different things that matter to different people at different times. We have 700 prescriptions in this pharmacy alone!' '700 prescriptions?' gasped Nova. 'Could I have a few of them?' Which prescriptions should we give Nova? Let's gather them together here.

And so, a long time later, as the grey spaceship once more orbited the grey planet, a hatch opened and out dropped hundreds of prescriptions that Nova had gathered up. As each one touched the ground, colour rippled across the surface of a rainbow planet. It was the first time Nova had ever seen the planet any other colour but grey. All around the planet there were now children playing and trying out different things together. Nova thought 'I want to have a go at doing all these things. I'm going to make a list.'

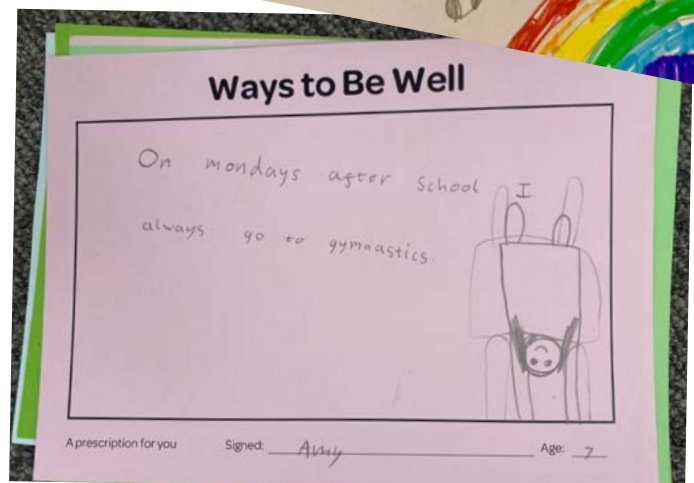
Imagine the colour rippling out across the planet as your piece of paper touches the ground. Who do you think will pick it up? How will your words make them feel? What might you like to try now you've heard all these different ideas? Would you like to make a list?

What might you like to try now? Shall we create a list of all the different prescriptions you have created so that we can share them?

Are there other planets altogether that your children might include?

This is just one possible way to collect a story about what matters to your children. It was inspired by the approach we tested out in the Soham project and the principles we learned from the Soham children. There are many others.

What other story can be told that works with your children's ideas?



Resources and research

The team carried the principles embodied in [The Companionship Compass](#), a resource to support creative ways of working with children and young people, into all the planning and interactions. The Compass was co-created with children as part of arts and well-being charity [Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination](#)'s work (CCI) to connect communities with the world on their doorsteps. It is free to read online here, (paper copies are available for a small fee). CCI is partner organisation of Fullscope.

The Mapping Soham Stories team were influenced by two leading educators Diane Rich and Mary Jane Drummond, writers of the [What Matters to Children](#) education books. Designed for educators working with children from birth to age 11, and published in 2006, 2008, and 2014, their research has been widely valued and shared across the UK and beyond. What makes them so important is their child-centred approach and celebration of how children learn best through play, exploration and meaningful experiences: they remind teachers to observe and respond to the richness of children's actions, rather than impose rigid curricula and they work with the metaphors of providing children with the right food and exercise for them to flourish. With vivid learning stories and practical insights, the series helps educators craft environments that nurture curiosity, creativity, and deep engagement. Copies of these books were shared with the schools in Soham to support their ongoing commitment to continue listening to their children.



The team were inspired by the work of [Sara Fanelli](#) and especially My Map Book, illustrations from which we shared with the children to open their eyes to some of the ways that maps can be made.

With thanks to all the children, staff and families from St Andrew's Primary School, The Shade Primary School and Weatheralls Primary School in Soham (East Cambs), artist Hilary Cox Condron and storyteller Marion Leeper for embracing the Mapping Soham Stories project so wholeheartedly.

You can read more about original project and watch a short film narrated by some of the children [here](#).