

Senior Community Group Project was an attempt to identify and work with older people (50+) based on people's mental health and wellbeing.

Report

Senior Community Group Year 3



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Senior Community Group

Senior Community Group Project is a project using community development approaches, including the creative arts, to learn from senior people (50+ years old) based on;

- Attitudes to, and experiences of, mental health
- What helps maintain well-being
- Effective ways of challenging issues affecting people's lives

Introduction

Photography is a versatile and accessible form of creative expression, and offers opportunities for truly meaningful inclusion that few art forms can. In particular, photography enables anyone to share their perspective or experience in a way that is instantly engaging and accessible to someone presented with the resulting photos, since it uses the real world as its raw material. The combination of the real, which provides the link with a viewer's own experiences, and the choices made in taking a photo, allowing the unique perspective of the photographer to shine through, allow photographs to create a space for communication and discussion regardless of the extent to which someone engages on a technical level. This means that photography is particularly well suited as a tool to allow people with mental illness to explore and capture their perspective in their own time and in their own way – including but not restricted to the aspects of it that are uniquely related to their mental illness –while also providing a powerful way to share that perspective when conventional communication may be more difficult.

This report is intended to provide an overview and analysis of the Senior Community Group Project and its process. For the purpose of outlining the development of the project, brief background information is given followed by the aim and objectives of the project. An outline and analysis of the process of running the project is given. Finally, the outcome of this project, followed by summary and exploration of possible ways forward will be elucidated.

Background - Aim and objectives

Initially, the aim of the project in general was to identify and work with older people, invite them to join informal activity sessions and to facilitate engagement amongst them in conversations /

discussions and other relevant activities to help group participants to have a voice in MH and feel they have heard more than before.

This was to help older people to participate in social affairs, identify issues affecting their lives and their mental health and wellbeing, and exchange experiences/information/ideas. Moreover, through the process and the sessions helping them to raise their awareness and increase their knowledge on mental health issues and understand the impact of such issues on their overall health and wellbeing. The idea was that as well as the group improving their own mental health and wellbeing, they could also find out more about available services or groups/organisations for continued help and support. Additionally, the establishment of the project involved a combination of perspectives such as mental health promotion, community involvement and development.

Hence, the first and second years of the project led to the development of action plan for the third year of the project. According to the devolved action plan, the project continued its work to assist older people in collaboration with MHNGG. MHNGG is our partner organisation in supporting people to challenge mental health difficulties towards wellbeing - service user organisation. This on-going cooperation helped maintaining strong partnerships with health and community planning supports, building the capacity of partners to contribute to and develop mental health improvement actions, and embedding initiatives into sustainable mainstream programmes in process of helping people who needed support.

Therefore to achieve community empowerment, the continuation of the project's principles and efforts to attain desired outcomes, the third year of the work started by;

- Updating MHNGG - meeting with key contacts
- Assessing the group strengths
- Putting strengths into action
- Designing focus group methodology to develop detailed project plan
- Planning the workshops and artworks
- Reflecting and monitoring
- Planning the evaluation

Analysing process of running the project

Research shows that using pictures helps people to identify and describe information that they might not otherwise remember or be able to discuss freely. Photographs also help people think about their motivation for taking each picture, and ideas or emotions that surround it. Research also shows that people find it easier to discuss abstract concepts such as “hope,” “mental health recovery,” or “peer support” when using their own photographs to share their thoughts and experiences with others. With this in mind the third year of the project continued with older people (50+) to hear from their issues and to take a step forward in recovery over photography sessions.

Moreover, the project continued its cooperation between Voices of eXperience (VOX) and MHNGG.

Networking between VOX and MHNGG directed the project towards its aim in respect of continuing work with the identified group, capacity building within network members in the form of partnership, sustainability and access to the needed resources like venue.

This project used the technique of “community photography” to give participants the chance to practice photography and engage in discussions which allowed the participants to share their work with other group members and open a dialogue on the themes they photographed.

Therefore, after having introductory sessions about photography; how to use cameras; and the ethics of taking pictures, group participants were given cameras to take pictures of the people, places, and things that represent their feelings to promote wellness and recovery.



It should be noted that, by having asset based approaches and Community Development, the whole project was based on the group members' needs and interests and to find out what was important for the group members and what they wanted to achieve as the project progressed.

Furthermore, a visit organised to the People's Palace and Glasgow Green Park which treated the group to not just a photography day-out but also delicious soup, coffee and cake, as well as many interesting facts about the story of the people and Glasgow city from 1750 to the end of 20th century, a wonderful insight into how Glaswegians lived, worked and played in years gone by.



Group members' words about the third year of SCG project and our photography sessions;

“Gives you a chance to express what you feel without fear and stigma.”

“I found it really interesting, learning about our history and how there is a difference now in the quality of life. These sessions provided me with a better vision of the world and hopefully a better job in the future.”

“I found the history of Glasgow interesting and the poverty and heart breaking citizens of Glasgow’s past and present times they have lived through.”

“I haven’t been in People’s Place for years, I enjoyed visiting the palace and learning about the good and bad times of Glasgow. I enjoyed the fountain, thought it was spectacular; it was nice to go with the group and share the knowledge of Glasgow’s past. I also enjoyed my soup today since I was with other people, I am usually alone and can’t enjoy my time when I am eating out.”

“Sometimes it’s all about perspective. Not everybody sees the same obvious. You cannot walk a mile in my shoes, but I can let you look through my eyes for a moment and even describe what these images mean to me.”

Outcomes of the project; Group activities shaped the whole aspect of the group work and fulfilled the expected outcomes of the project.

These sessions were processes of listening, observation, reflection, action and evaluation.

Regarding the group, the meetings had a social component and were a suitable means of identifying issues affecting the members as well as sharing information and making positive contribution towards change in group members’ emotional wellbeing. Moreover, sessions and group activities helped participants to realise their strengths to deal with their MH issues, to realise how these changes affect their family and wider community and to think positively to find solution for problems. The issue of wellbeing came through in the process of group discussion and photography activity, as their views were listened to with due consideration to diversity, dignity and human rights. The project provided an opportunity to move from individualistic health education to a community development-led health promotion. It helped in building group members’ confidence and self-esteem, reducing isolation, building a social and support network, raising awareness about mental wellbeing and the services and resources available to people.

The project also made a difference to the VOX and its wider membership network. For instance, the project helped raise awareness through some of the artistic work that group members had produced which is going to share with wider communities in Glasgow over the Art and Film Festival 2015.

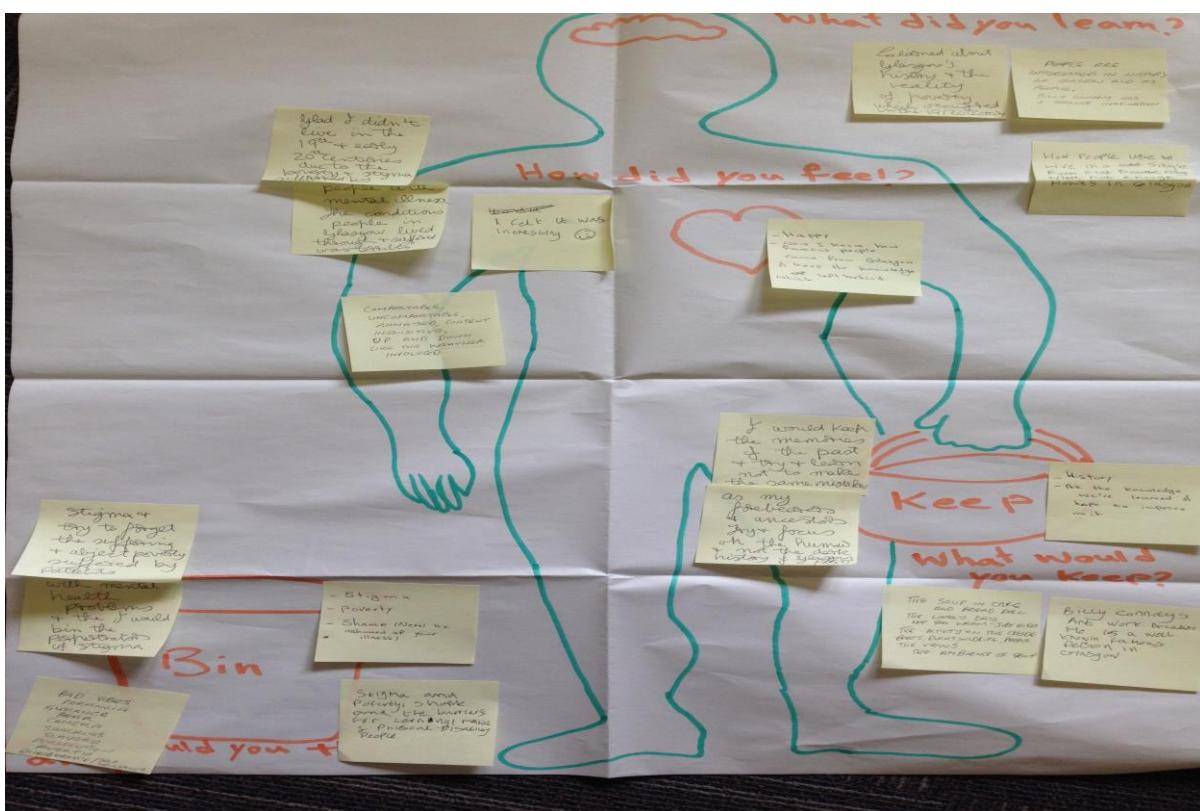
The project helped to sustain partnership between VOX and MHNGG. The project helped to gain access to interest people to voluntarily help further development of the project. Also, helped to promote VOX membership.

These are seen as the strength of the project. Moreover, the project provided older people the opportunity to participate in social activities and talk about the strains, stresses and hardships in their lives as well as trying to explore the reasons behind those issues and effecting change in group members' attitudes towards their emotional wellbeing.

The project was another step in supporting public mental health movement, driven by community development principles, values, theories and practices. A number of principles shaped all aspects of the project including the importance of valuing different perspectives and working through enabling the voices of those who were most marginalised to be heard.

The work has shown it is possible to tackle the complexities involved in the process of enabling the views and experiences of older people being heard whilst ensuring the programme addresses inequalities in mental health and promotes community empowerment and social justice.

Project's Evaluation; participants were asked below questions after the workshops and here is some of their answers;



What did you learn?

- How people used to live in a single room flat because there were not enough houses in Glasgow
- People are interested in history of Glasgow and its people. Billy Connolly has a strong imagination.
- Learned about Glasgow's history and the reality of poverty which occurred in the 19th/ 20th century.

How did you feel?

- Happy, now I know how famous people came from Glasgow and keep the knowledge which left behind.
- I feel it was interesting ☺
- Comfortable, involve, up and down like the weather.
- Glad I didn't live in the 19th and early 20th centuries due to the poverty and stigma suffered by people with mental illness. The conditions people in Glasgow lived through and suffered was terrible.

What would you keep?

- History, all the knowledge we've learned and hope to improve it.
- Billy Connolly's art work because he is a well-known and famous person in Glasgow.
- The soup in café' and bread role, the lovely day not too warm- just right.
- The activity on the Clyde, boats, ducks, wildlife, people, the views
The ambience of group.
- I would keep the memories of the past and try and learn not to make the same mistakes as my forbearers and ancestors. Try and focus on the hummer not the dark history of Glasgow's past

What would you throw away?

- Stigma, poverty, shame (I will never be ashamed of my illness).
- Stigma and poverty and the barriers for learning about mental and physical disability
- Stigma and try to forget the suffering and abject poverty suffered by patients with mental health problems, and that would I throw away the perpetrators of stigma.
- Bad vibes, paranoia, ignorance, fear, camera (as it was disposable ☺), shake-less, slavery, persecution, poverty, exuberance, self indulgence



Finally, The group were a great group to work with. They fully engaged in the workshops, and worked well together. Additionally, the support of George Brown, volunteer also assisted in the coherence, and support of the group.

The success of the project has shown that by expanding the scope of the project in future, we can increase recovery potential in helping people and providing opportunities for community members to learn something new, improve self-confidence, being active, and reduce isolation, etc.