

TRANSITIONS: A Qualitative Evaluation Report

Introduction

Collective Encounters. The Transitions programme is part of the portfolio of Collective Encounters which is a Liverpool based professional arts organisation and registered charity specialising in Theatre for Social Change. Working with professional artists and local people the charity engages those on the margins of society through theatre within which a process involving the telling of untold stories and personal and social change are facilitated [1]. Collective Encounters is a Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation. The Charity also receives funding from Big Lottery, Children in Need and Liverpool City Council as well as private trusts and foundations such as the Baring Foundation. The Charity works in partnership with voluntary and statutory services and agencies, which include the Imperial War Museum, St Helen's Public Health, The Whitechapel, Looked After Children's Services, Adult Health and Social Care, Unitas and Local Solutions.

Collective Encounters provides three strands of output and activity:

1. Participatory workshops and performances. These are designed to explore issues and problems faced by participants, to build confidence and develop skills, whilst actively seeking opportunities for participants to engage directly with decision makers and service providers to raise awareness of their experiences and to facilitate change.
2. Professional productions. Professional theatre productions are mounted that explore social and political issues in non-traditional performance spaces. Through theatre we explore national and international concerns of our time.
3. Research. Academic and practical research are used to continually improve our own work and contribute to the wider national and international field of theatre for social change.

Collective Encounters maintains a deep commitment to equality and diversity, the latter of which includes those who experience socio-economic disadvantage. Since 2007 programmes have been offered incorporating regular activity for young people, older people including working with people with dementia and adults with experience of homelessness, mental health problems, ex-service personnel, alcohol addiction and those in recovery. All of the work is free – to participants and those who attend performances. For those in most need engagement is facilitated by reimbursement of bus fares. There are no auditions or entry requirements. Touch tours, audio description and sign language interpretation are offered to assist those who attend performances.

Evaluation reports are produced for all Collective Encounters projects and these assessments are guided by the Charity's Quality and Evaluation Framework which include quality and social change indicators against which success can be measured. Evaluation models in current use in the political theatre sector are used to inform bespoke evaluation processes for each individual

project, for example, Transitions Evaluation Report [2], Creative Theatre Hubs [3], Out of Service Evaluation Report[4].

The Transitions Programme. The Programme was developed for homeless people in Liverpool and began in February 2012 and is ongoing in 2016. It grew out of a research project begun in 2007 ('Streetscape') which sought to uncover the day-to-day realities of homeless people and whether theatre for social change was something they wanted to engage with. The research included: formal and informal interviews with homeless people; with established organisations and individuals working with the homeless community; workshops in hostels and workshops at the Whitechapel Centre (one of the leading homeless charities in Liverpool) which culminated in a performance and led to the Whitechapel group performing at the National Theatre in London. Liverpool Council became interested in the work of the Whitechapel Centre and Collective Encounters and in partnership these two charities successfully applied to the Big Lottery in order to achieve sustainability and growth of Theatre for Change for homeless people in Liverpool.

Over the past four years Collective Encounters has developed four 'hub partners' (Bosco House, Spider Project, CRI Knowsley, St Helen's YMCA with the Hope Centre and Hope House) whilst continuing to work with the Whitechapel Centre, Crisis Skylight and Merseyside Activities Forum. The creation of hub partnerships was designed to make the work more sustainable and to facilitate opening up access to adults with addiction issues, mental health issues, adults who had been in prison, adults in recovery, veterans, as well as adults who are homeless and at risk of homelessness. At various times workshop participants have performed in a variety of venues, including the National Theatre (London), the Bluecoat, 'The Brink' as part of Light Nights Festival, the Royal Opera House (London), the Imperial War Museum North, and the National Practitioners Support Service Annual Conference.

Since 2012 the Transitions Programme has offered the following activities and services:

- Accredited (through Open Awards[5]), and non-accredited workshops in Hostels, temporary accommodations, support settings for homeless people, rehearsal space in Collective Encounters offices, and hub partner venues.
- Weekly sessions for homeless people held either within Collective Encounters' workshop space or The Whitechapel;
- A two-year mentoring programme;
- A work placement and volunteering scheme matching arts and cultural organisations with homeless participants;
- Governance training for one participant;
- Mounting of performances and events exploring participant life issues (chosen by them and including social, economic and political perspectives) and challenging perceptions and stereotypes.

Transitions: outcomes and indicators.

- Outcome 1: Adults with experience of homelessness and/or mental health and/or addiction problems will have increased self-confidence.

- Indicators:
 - Undertaken an independent research task
 - Participation in performances
 - Undertaken to report in a workshop
- Outcome 2: Adults with experience of homelessness and/or mental health and/or addiction problems will have improved skills resulting in greater employment, further training and volunteering opportunities.
 - Indicators:
 - Participation in the mentoring programme
 - Achievement of a nationally recognised qualification
 - Undertaken a work placement
- Outcome 3: Adults with experience of homelessness and/or mental health and/or addiction problems will have an increased understanding of the issues they face and will be more empowered to tackle them.
 - Indicators:
 - Successfully set a positive, life-changing goal
 - Made significant positive life changes.

Purpose of evaluation. The purpose of the evaluation was to discover whether the three Outcome Indicators of the Transitions Project had been realised by participants.

Methods

Design. Qualitative research methods were used to elicit and analyse views of twenty four participants in the Transitions programme. Interviews were conducted within three focus groups which are an efficient means of qualitative data collection, allow for an increased sample size and are widely used for evaluation purposes[6].

Sampling strategy Time constraints, accessibility and willingness of participants to take part determined recruitment through convenience sampling[7]. However, within this context the sample was purposively selected and maximum variation sampling[8] was used to ensure a diverse range of age and gender. (Note: the gender weighting is reflective of national statistics In England, where women make up 26% of clients of homelessness services[9], though not of national statistics for mental health where 31% of women compared with 17% of men were said to be diagnosed with a mental health problem[10]. Statistics estimate around 9% of adult men in the UK and 4% of UK adult women show signs of alcohol dependence[11]). In addition three geographical sites within Liverpool were chosen to enhance socio-economic diversity (the Wirral, Sefton and Collective Encounters central Liverpool offices). However, it emerged during interview that the eight participants at one site were a pre-existing drama group with Transitions participation of three sessions. On coding of the data it was not possible to determine if responses were from their established drama group experience or from Collective Encounters and it was reluctantly decided not include this data in the evaluation. However great thanks is due to these participants for generously giving their time and interest in taking part in the evaluation. Sample participation in Collective Encounters ranged between

first session to four years. All interviewees were given an evaluation information sheet and a consent form to sign.

Data collection. A semi-structured interview schedule was developed to address the outcomes and indicators. The full schedule can be seen in Appendix A. As the Transitions participants were known to refer to the Programme as 'Collective Encounters' the questions referred to the latter in order to elicit responses. The interview topics included: what Collective Encounters activities had been taken part in; had anyone found taking part in these activities boosted their confidence; what are some of the main issues you face; has anyone found taking part in the Collective Encounter activities has led to increased skills/being able to do more things. Interviews varied between 1-2 hours in length and were recorded and transcribed in full.

Data analysis. Interview data was organised using NVivo qualitative software. Interview transcripts were analysed by organising and describing categories, themes and patterns within the data[11] with the aim of identifying common patterns/shared views that cut across the heterogeneity of the sample.

Results

The population characteristics of the sample recruited are described in **Table 1**:

Table 1
Participant characteristics, interview (hub) sites and time with Transitions Programme

Partici- Pant	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Education	Income source	Hub site	Time with Transitions
P1	51	Male	Irish	School and NVQ	PIP*	Wirral and HQ#	4 years
P2	50	Male	British	Secondary School (Sec Sch)	JSA**	Wirral	1 year
P3	63	Male	British	Sec Sch	PIP	Wirral and HQ	1 year
P4	46	Female	British	Sec Sch	PIP	Wirral	2 months
P5	30	Male	British	?	?	Wirral	First session
P6	40	Female	British	?	?	Wirral	First session
P7	40	Male	British	Sec Sch	PIP and Employment	HQ	1 year
P8	35	Male	British	Sec Sch	PIP and Employment	HQ	6 months
P9	35	Female	Mixed Heritage	High school	Employment and working family tax credit	HQ	1 year
P10	41	Male	Mixed Heritage	Sec Sch	PIP and Employment	HQ	8 months
P11	41	Male	British	Sec Sch	PIP and employment	HQ	9 months
P12	65	Male	British	Sec Sch	PIP	HQ	9 months
P13	60	Female	British	Degree	PIP	HQ	2 months
P14	21	Male	British	Sec Sch	JSA	HQ	6 months
P15	34	Male	British	Sec Sch	JSA	HQ	1 year

*PIP is Personal Independence Payment. #HQ = Collective Encounters central office and rehearsal space. **JSA = Job Seekers Allowance

NOTE: All participants were housed, with three in temporary accommodation.

Participant engagement in the Open Awards accreditation scheme are presented in **Table 2**:

Table 2
Participants engaged in the Open Awards programme*

Participant	Completed Entry Level 1	Completed Level 1	Completed Level 2	Completed Level 3	Post level three activity	Paid work
P1	√	√		√	Volunteer co-facilitator; work placement; CE Board Member; NVQ in social care; applying for jobs	Voluntary
P2	√	√			Volunteer group facilitator; applying for jobs	
P3	√	√		√	Running a recovery group; volunteer with the Reader; on a peer mentoring course with CRI	Voluntary (Organisation seeking funding for paid remuneration.)
P4	Begun Entry Level 1					
P5	√	√				
P7		√		√	Setting up a group for people with OCD; performing poetry (Everyman Theatre)	Voluntary (Organisation seeking funding for paid remuneration) Paid and voluntary
P8				Planning to train in facilitator skills	Volunteer; Auditioning for theatre parts.	Paid work
P9	√	√		√	Volunteer group facilitation work; .	Paid group facilitation work; applying for facilitation posts
P10	√	√		√	Volunteer; Performing poetry.	Paid and voluntary.

Table 2 Continued....

Participant*	Completed Entry Level 1	Completed Level 1	Completed Level 2	Completed Level 3	Post level three activity	Paid work
P11	√				Auditioning for place in professional orchestra.	Works for NHS and for Centre of Expertise in Personality Disorder.
P12	√	√				
P13				√	Volunteer facilitator.	
P14	√	√		Planning to train in facilitator skills		
P15		√		√	Running groups; volunteering; NVQ in Social Care;	Voluntary Applying for jobs.

*Open Awards: Pre level 1 – basic performance skills; Level 1 – Introduction to performance and improvisation skills; Level 2 – Mentoring course which trains people to work with others inside and outside the Transitions group in accessing mainstream arts; Level 3 – Effective facilitation training which may lead to shadowing a Transitions facilitator followed by setting up and running independent workshops.

1. Outcome 1: increased self confidence

To set the scene for results under this heading it may be useful to note participants reports on confidence levels prior to taking part in Collective Encounters, which were reported to be low by seven participants. There was also the feeling of being ‘lost’ ($n=1$), ‘self absorbed’ ($n=3$), ‘low mood’ ($n=1$) and ‘mortified’ or ‘petrified’ at the idea of engaging in Transitions ($n=2$):

P11: *...I was on the street like, and I'd not played in such a long time...And I was absolutely petrified because there was no music like there is in classical music...and I've never experienced that kind of music before...and very nervous...*

1.1 Indicator 1: independent research task undertaken

Some participants ($n=9$) had been prompted by their participation in Transitions to research interests in their own time. These included developing a character they were going to rehearse and then perform ($n=6$) and the ‘back story’ to a character ($n=2$):

P14: *...if I'm going to create a character, that I'm going to have some kind of a connection to...I'm going to develop that back story, I'm going to develop the feelings...even if it's all like irrelevant to what a character's going to say in a play like, that back story is important to me.*

Other tasks were: a poem ($n=2$); practising a new musical tune ($n=1$); preparing for an audition ($n=1$); planning in preparation for facilitation training ($n=2$); using media to research - and question - information about the local community and wider world ($n=5$):

P1: I think that errr to come into Collective Encounters, I think about things already, but it makes me question where they're coming from and why they're saying this and what are they doing...in the local community...And nationally as well...it does make me...d'ya know, more politically aware.

1.2 Indicator 2: Taken part in performances

Increased self confidence following participation in performance was enthusiastically discussed by twelve interviewees. Enacting a character in front of an audience was reported to have challenged and pushed the individual beyond their 'comfort zone', expanding experiences of competence and ability:

P9: And we did that...Emma's Story. Erm and that pushed me...that was completely different, that pushed me out of my boundary...the biggest challenge was singing! Singing that Can Can was the hardest song in the world and I..kept..I..nailed it...I nailed it!

Participants conveyed surprise and elation at their experience of success in a performance and the impact this had on their confidence:

P4: ...my life has been, not tickety boo...but you think 'ah come here you little sausage, off you pop, new friends for ya, go on a stage'. That has transformed my whole life, I can't stress the importance of that.

1.3 Indicator 3: Report in a workshop and then report an increase in confidence

The independent research and exploration undertaken by participants described in 1.1 was reported back to a Transitions workshop ($n=6$). This included: sharing the development of a character and/or back-story in a workshop ($n=4$); playing a new, difficult piece of music or singing a new, difficult song in a workshop ($n=2$); reading a newly written poem ($n=2$) - and which the following interaction shows gave a confidence boost (or inspiration) to both reader and listeners:

P6: ...it was inspired that poem you wrote and you read out last week...

P4: Oh yeah, thank you...

P2: And I think it inspired everyone else, actually, when you read that poem out. Everyone left the group going 'aah yeah...'

P4: Awww, thank you...

1.4 Factors that increased self confidence

Before moving on to Outcome 2 and Outcome 3 it is worth reporting participants views of the factors within the Transitions Programme that led to an increase in their self confidence. This would, as it were, add a 'back story' to participants' responses to questions regarding indicators within the three Outcomes.

1.4.1 A Safe environment

This was associated with Transitions workshops and a factor participants needed in order to push the boundaries of their experience, skills or knowledge ($n=13$). It enabled 'progressing', taking small steps, facilitated expressions of anger or fear, or 'feeling stupid' or being 'daft':

P8: *And it's like last night I went and we were doing all these daft things. I didn't care 'cos... I'd done it in a safe environment so then when I had to do it in the real world I was just, you know, smiling...it was the other ones that seemed awkward...*

1.4.2 *Facilitator skill* was connected by ten participants with the experience of Transitions as a *safe environment*. Feeling welcomed, accepted and encouraged helped build confidence, 'It gives you that...You just get a bolt of confidence' (P11). There was no sense of the facilitator wanting anything from participants so that individuals were able to learn drama without feeling under pressure, enabling each to explore and develop within the drama context. Support continued for those either in, or seeking paid or voluntary work using skills learnt at Transitions:

P15: *You know if you've got a problem that...that you can't quite work out to do with the group or that, I know I can always pick up the phone...and ask 'what do you think I should do here?'*

1.4.3 *Facilitation learning* was described as key to enabling participants to build confidence and progress ($n=8$). This 'teaching' method was contrasted to negative experiences of learning through being told what to do; in Transitions an experience of guided learning and of developing through 'doing'- for example warm ups, acting and workshops - helped individuals to discover or expand skills and knowledge:

P10: *It's roomy, it's broad, it's expansive, it's not stiff, it's not rigid...it's a great...it's a great process to learn things, to be shown and to do and to get proactive.*

1.4.4 Group process

(i) Like-minded. The experience of group members as being 'like-minded' gave individuals ($n=11$) a positive sense of 'togetherness'. They contrasted this to personal, often lonely, experiences of negative responses from people due to addiction, homelessness or mental health problems. 'Background' and 'class' ($n=5$) were said not to matter in Transitions and in consequence individuals within the group felt confident to be themselves and to support each others' development:

P11: *...if somebody's struggling, you just give them a little hand or a vote of confidence...we are all in the same boat...we're better at certain aspects in life...each person can offer something different to the group.*

These experiences could give individuals ($n=5$) a 'feeling of belonging' (P15) and of being part a family and were associated with building confidence.

(ii) Observation. Confidence gained through observation ($n=7$) was important on two counts. Firstly, when participants ($n=4$) first attended the Transitions group they might sit outside observing what group members did until they felt confident enough to join

in. Secondly, participants ($n=3$) learnt to 'read' the 'body language' of group members in relation to their depiction of a character, and this learning also enabled 'assessing' if someone in the group was not 'feeling too good' (P1) on the day. The latter observation was associated with a skill learnt within the dramatic process:

P1: *Definitely you do become more aware...And then d'ya know just to look at the group and know...I think everybody gets that d'ya know. If you're involved in drama you read other people don't you.*

(iii) Listening. Concentrating and listening to individuals whilst they were enacting a part was a means by which group members could learn all sorts of things about each other, different characters – and people generally ($n=8$). This in turn was associated with learning more about yourself, improving 'interpersonal skills' and becoming more 'receptive', 'tolerant' and 'accepting'(P4). At the same time, the motivation to learn more and develop within the dramatic context could drive the wish to listen:

P3: *...you have a better out-view. You know, you're looking at different things entirely different. And you're also...you're listening intently now because you want to gain something. Whereas before if you weren't interested you really weren't listening anyway.*

(iv) Communication. Listening to others went together with a desire for most group members to communicate with each other ($n=11$) on both a personal level and in terms of responding to individual rehearsal performances. Giving feedback and engaging supportively with other group members enhanced individual confidence through the realisation that they were contributing to the growth of fellow participants:

P8: *I was growing as well but I don't sometimes focus on me but see in some of the other members and realising, I'd been a part of that, without even realising it...(P3) was like struggling...and then he was brilliant...and I thought back to when he was just asking me and I think 'well I gave him a little piece of advice and look at him now' and I get something out of that.*

It was said that in drama 'everyone is responsible for themselves. And as a group as well'(P11).

(v) Equality. Some participants ($n=6$) spoke of gaining confidence through knowing each role in a play was weighted with the same importance. This equality reassured participants and enabled them to immerse themselves in a part, and they took this with them when performing in front of an audience.

P4: *And the more advanced ones who are, you know, a bit thesbian-ish, erm, they don't lord it over you...there's no hierarchy within the group you know, it's nice that when you know that...there's none of that playground vileness...Or my meds are that good I don't see it.*

(vi) Character, story, masks, self. The creation of characters and story were key activities in the building of confidence ($n=12$). They occupied participants minds and kept them busy ($n=2$) with the focus on their own and other peoples' lives, transforming these into external roles that formed the structure of a play. This structure acted as safe 'platform' making it possible to take risks and experiment with expressions of thought and feeling that may or may not have been part of participants experiences:

P15: *And some of it's at the rawest level... 'cause sometimes you put a lot of yourself into these characters...and to give you that freedom to express that and er, and then it just moves on, you just...it moves on to something else. There's no dwelling on it...*

The degree to which participants occupied a character within a Transitions play meant they did not consider these to be 'masks'. Equally, they did not feel the need to wear a 'mask' at Transitions as they were confident being themselves ($n=6$). Masks were something you wore on a day-to-day basis going out into the world:

P9: *...but you know when you're going out everywhere day to day...you're going to put a mask on...But when you're here (Transitions sic)...everyone's like 'Are you alright?'...you don't have to go 'Oh, I've got to be happy now'...Which is good.*

(vii) Repetive engagement. The point was made that Transition group members' confidence increased with repeated attendance ($n=2$) with the potential result of using this confidence to move on:

P1: *it was difficult and I had to push myself and I came out of that and I went on and I kept doing the drama and i got confide...I got more confident and I thought to myself that 'I'm not too bad at this now d'you know'? And it gave me self-esteem to move on.*

2. Outcome 2: improved skills resulting in greater employment, further training and volunteering opportunities

2.1 Indicator 1: Take part in mentoring programme

(Mentoring training is the Level 2 of Open Awards – see Table 2 above on p.6.) Five participants mentioned taking part in the mentoring programme and valued the skills they had developed such as being able to put others at ease and use appropriate responses to different situations:

P3: *Because me and (P15 sic) work with people in recovery...therefore to have the confidence to talk to someone who's, you know, on the edge of their chair...how to relax them...how to diffuse the situation is...how to be funny at times, how to take things serious, how to come across. And that's helped us in our way.*

2.2 Indicator 2: Achievement of a nationally recognised qualification

In addition to becoming qualified peer mentors (see 2.1 above) seven participants spoke of successfully undertaking facilitation training with Collective Encounters – although one participant noted that in fact nine had achieved this. ('Effective Facilitation' is Level 3 of the Open Awards programme - see Table 2 above.) There was marked enthusiasm for the training and for the opportunities this qualification has given:

P1: *The errr, the thing that...with Collective Encounters as well is that they've trained us, to err, for us to be able to facilitate other people, lead...D'ya know...and that's been going really well, d'ya know, people are starting to get their own groups together... within the community, that started off from getting people trained with that in mind and...was, I think, it's a really good thing that's going on.*

The success of their facilitation training was reported by three participants to have so increased confidence and 'self-esteem' (P1) (P15...*it works on you every day.*) they have undertaken further study or training. For example, P1 undertook A levels and went on to do Community Development and is doing an NVQ level 3 in Health and Social Care. Similarly P15 had undertaken further training:

P15: *...in the last year, I never ever thought i'd ever do...passing...passing my NVQ...in Health and Social Care...Level two...A twelve month course in three months and I never ever thought I'd do anything anywhere near that because I've never been confident to do it...thinking that my skills could add anything like that. But...I have done it and I've loved it.*

2.3 Indicator 3: Successfully undertake a work placement

Participants spoke about their paid ($n=3$) and voluntary ($n=4$) work with one example given of a work placement. (See table 2 for full details) They also referred to applying for work ($n=2$) and to interviews and auditions ($n=3$) as part of their job seeking process. It was commented that '*Every drama session is like a bit of work experience in a way*' (P2). Paid work included facilitation, mentoring, work for the NHS and Centre of Expertise in Personality Disorder. Voluntary work was focussed on facilitation ($n=3$) with one participant recruited for public speaking for the Reader. The work placement was working one-to-one with people with Alzheimer and Dementia in a care home. Participants emphasised that the training courses they had undertaken with Collective Encounters had given them the confidence to undertake paid work, voluntary work, work placements plus apply for jobs and go to interviews and auditions. Learning to put on 'a mask' appeared to be one of the key skills they had acquired to enable taking on these activities in the wider world:

P8: *I went to an audition yesterday, I've got an audition tomorrow...and without Collective Encounters I wouldn't have been there last night, never mind doing what I'm doing and for me, like I say, it gives me confidence to go out there and put the mask on that I have to do and then come back just go "Do you know what, it was great".*

3. Outcome 3: Participants will have increased understanding of the issues they face and will be more empowered to tackle them.

3.1 Indicator 1: Successfully set positive, life-changing goals.

It has already been seen in 2.2 and 2.3 above that participants set and achieved life-changing goals both in relation to training and qualifications and also in relation to the achievement of paid work. In this section it will be seen that some participant's goals related to personal, positive life changes primarily concerned with becoming effective contributors within various external contexts. Some goals had been achieved and some were being worked towards ($n=6$) but all of which were commented upon as resulting from '*...a better outlook on life as it is...*' (P3) after participation in Collective Encounters. For example, goals could be to successfully:

- (i) create a character and be able to perform this in a show with a resulting sense of purpose to life ($n=4$) (in addition see 1.2 above);

P4: *...it's completely transformed...I was in a performance, I never thought I'd say those words erm apart from at work...I couldn't believe it was me, and I've carried on with drama...it changes my whole day, it changes my life, that I have a purpose...the most important thing is, that it's reminded me that I matter. That's a whopper like.*

- (ii) be ambitious in having a positive impact now and in the future on a group through the use of effective drama facilitation skill ($n=5$):

P15: *So it's not just about ...now, it's about the future as well. I mean in theory I could develop twenty, thirty, forty people in a year's time by helping one, d'ya know, and to me that's a brilliant feeling;*

- (iii) regain motivation to continue an abandoned, but previously successful, musical career ($n=1$);

P11: *(the facilitator sic) helped with the warm ups...it's took away my shyness a bit. So it was very, very petrifying and very nervous and very unpredictable. And I've learnt...that you just go for it. And being in this situation with the Halle (Orchestra sic)...It's...it's the final audition and I'm down to the last ten people to take their second clarinet player...*

- (iv) achieve competence as a member of Collective Encounters Board ($n=1$);

P1: *...I've been a member of the Board for quite a while...I thought they were all suits and boots, and they're not, so it's changed my mind you know....from being homeless to...you know...But it's been a process, d'ya know?*

3.2 Indicator 2: Make significant positive changes to their lives

The emergence of significant positive changes to participants lives appeared to begin with a rediscovery of a '*childlike...and kind of playful side..*' (P10) to themselves ($n=7$), which they developed through engagement with each other and in the dramatic process over a period of

time. This 'opening up' to others and new experiences could be seen in examples given of enthusiasm for connecting to family and audiences (n=5):

P3: *...the audience and the stage was there...and they sat through it, they were cracking, the involvement that they got into...they were buzzing, you know, they were going out on a high...it gives you, you know, you felt "look at them"...But to actually do that and to see family...*

In addition, an expansion of connection with others was seen through a pursuit of new friendships and social life outside of the drama context (n=3):

P8: *...over the last five years, I've hid away and what coming here (Collective Encounters sic) has taught me is that I don't need to hide away...and I've taken that sort of out with me and my life outside of here is flourishing...you know I've got friends...I don't have to hide what I've been or who I am and I've taken that out and I've realised that I can be me out there as well and be liked...*

This opening up process was extended to greater interest in political issues and a wish to gain knowledge (*...it opens your mind up...(P3)*) that helped participants to understand what was going on in the world at a local, national and international level (n=7):

P15: *I'm more interested in life now....whereas before I was more self-absorbed...Now it's...I want to know everything...I want all that knowledge...I want to know what's going on in the world...in my local neighbourhood...I want to know all those sort of things...*

Discussion and conclusions

The results show that all three Outcomes were achieved as set against the eight indicators. Outcome 1 of increased self confidence was apparent through participants involvement in undertaking an independent research task (Indicator 1), in performance (Indicator 2) and reporting in a workshop (Indicator 3). Specific factors leading to increased self confidence within the Transitions Programme included a safe environment, facilitator skill, facilitation learning and the seven elements they identified within the group process, for example listening and communication.

Outcome 2 of improved skills resulting in greater employment, further training and volunteering opportunities could be seen in interviewees engagement in the mentoring programme (Indicator 1), achievement of a nationally recognised qualification (Indicator 2) and successfully undertaking a work placement (Indicator 3). Of particular interest were the number of interviewees training for, or having achieved, a qualification, and also the number who were involved in volunteer work and paid work. They made a clear connection between the training courses undertaken through the Transitions Programme embuing them with the confidence to apply for, and undertake, voluntary or paid work. There was a particular enthusiasm for mentoring and facilitation training and how the skills participants built through

this process then enabled them, on qualification, to contribute towards the well-being of others through running their own groups.

Outcome 3 of increased understanding of the issues participants face and being more empowered to tackle them were realised through success in setting a positive life-changing goal (Indicator 1) and making significant positive changes to their lives (Indicator 2). It was seen that goals could be of a personal nature, for example, where participation in Transitions could lead to a renewed sense of purpose in life, or of having sight of an ambition to become an effective facilitator or to regain motivation to forge ahead in relation to a musical career. A rediscovery of a 'childlike' side to themselves, seemed at the heart of participants opening up to other people and of this growing to include family, audiences, the growth of friendships and social lives and of a reinvigorated interest in political issues and to gaining knowledge and understanding about the local, national and international world – and how these may all impact on their own lives.

The results of this evaluation suggest the Transitions Programme is highly successful in engaging participants with experience of homelessness, mental health or addiction problems in a dramatic process which builds confidence and self esteem. The Programme then builds on this confidence to enable interviewees to embark on complex education and training courses which lead to an enthusiasm, and success, in applying themselves to the job of acquiring voluntary and paid work. Perhaps the following quote succinctly sums up this conclusion:

P4: I love not knowing how big it could be. It could be something...this could all lead to something amazing. I mean even now, it's amazing but there's, you know, endless opportunities with it isn't there?

Limitations of the evaluation

As noted above under 'Sampling', the data from eight participants was excluded on the basis that it was not possible to determine whether their responses related to a recent previous drama group or from experiences from Collective Encounters. However the issue of focus group sample size is contentious [12] and includes recommendations of six to eight participants per group with at least two groups involved [13] with which this study complied. The primary consideration nonetheless was whether the remaining data provided sufficient depth to achieve adequacy in relation to the evaluation aims [14]. On consideration of the extent of in-depth data provided by the two focus groups, it is argued that the sample size was adequate to sufficiently answer the evaluation questions [15].

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Rosemary Ramsay
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Appendix 1

Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Introduction

I know that ____ has asked if you would take part in this interview and it is great that you have been able to come. I'm sure ____ has told you something of why Collective Encounters has arranged the interview, but I'll just say a bit more before we start. As you probably know any project these days has to report back to funders in relation to how their money is spent, and through doing this it enables programmes like Collective Encounters to receive further funding and continue running the activities you have all taken part in. So it is tremendous that you are happy to take part in this process – thank you. And I have copies of this introduction for each participant, plus a consent form which it would be great if you could sign and then we will go on from there.

I have been asked to conduct the interviews because I have been doing this work for a long time and have worked over the years with all kinds of people with all kinds of issues and who have taken part in all sorts of programmes – for example interviews with young people with mental health problems to see if a project designed to increase confidence really did so.

When the report on Transitions is compiled from our conversations only ____, ____ and myself will know who said what! So all of you will be 'anonymised' after our conversation. Are you all happy to start?

Questions

1. I see there are many activities offered by Collective Encounters and I wondered if you could tell me which ones you have taken part in? (No response - ask for a volunteer and go around from there).
2. Has anyone found taking part in these activities has boosted their confidence?
 - Can you say if this extra confidence has made a difference to you in your life generally?
 - Can you give an example/s of a specific time when you have noticed being more confident?
 - Did undertaking an independent research task increase your confidence?
 - What was it about this activity that increased your confidence?
 - Did taking part in a performance increase your confidence?
 - What was it about this activity that increased your confidence?

- Did reporting in a workshop increase your confidence?
 - What was it about this activity that increased your confidence?
- Have you noticed that this confidence has increased the longer you are involved with Collective Encounters.

3. What are some of the main issues you feel you face?

- Has your involvement with Collective Encounters increased your understanding of these (and other) issues?
- Has your involvement with Collective Encounters made it possible to tackle/have a go at tackling these issues/some of these issues?
- Has anyone set themselves a positive, life-changing goal and been able to achieve it?
 - If so – what was this?
 - If not – is this something you would like to do?
- Does anyone feel they have made significant positive changes to their lives?
 - If so – what was this?
 - If not – is this something you would like to do?

4. Has anyone found taking part in the Collective Encounter activities has led to increased skills / being able to do more things?

- (If yes) – what kind of things/skills would these be?
 - Do you think these came from taking part in the mentoring programme?
 -achieving a nationally recognised qualification?
 -successfully undertaking a work placement?
 - What other things do you think helped to boost your skills/helped increase things you are able to do?
- (If no) – would sort of Collective Encounter activities do you think would help you to improve your skills?
- Has participation in Collective Encounters activities led to anyone going on to greater employment, further training or volunteering?