



'Detailed Labels' Final Report



"Coming out of prison and into the hostel we are often just sat in our rooms. We look at it in a different way to you - we go on punishing ourselves. For us who have committed crimes you feel like you're going to be hated forever. To be treated normal and accepted means all doors are not closed and there are ways forward. Doing this art project with Men's Room and the gallery is the best thing we've done."

Introduction

This project delivered by the Manchester Men's Room with the support of NHS Manchester CCG and has been developed under the auspices of the Manchester Homelessness Charter's Arts and Heritage Action Group, which aims to increase opportunities for people with lived experience of homelessness to engage in the arts, through the city's arts and cultural institutions, artists and industries.

The Arts and Heritage Action Group is part of Manchester's Homelessness Charter, which aims to eradicate homelessness in the city. The Manchester Men's Room is proud to be a leading active supporter of the Manchester Homelessness Charter.

Look at this because I've been there and done it
Look at this because I'm still there now
Look at this because we care
Look at this because it didn't just happen
Look at this because it might help you
Look at this because it might help someone you know
Look at this because it could change your life
Look at this because my eyes are in it

The project had 4 key aims:

Project Aims

- 1) To encourage young men in temporary accommodation or social housing to take a positive approach to addressing poor mental health, isolation and loneliness
- 2) To develop a deeper understanding of the needs of young men in temporary accommodation or isolated young men in social housing in relation to their mental health and well-being
- 3) To work with temporary accommodation and social housing providers to develop asset based approaches to supporting young men at risk of isolation and poor mental health
- 4) To strengthen and develop partnership approaches and build arts based pathways to support young men at risk of poor mental health or isolation in temporary accommodation or social housing

Overview

The project was co-produced with participants who were resident at Wilson Carlile House (WCH), lead artists Harriet Hall and David Judge and staff and volunteers from the Men's Room.

The project was envisaged as a series of art, writing and spoken word workshops on the theme of the labels others gives and we give ourselves and others. This theme was developed as a basis for exploring issues of identity, relationship and location/dislocation within the fabric of wider society. It was particularly felt to be relevant in the context of the WCH as a temporary accommodation hostel for men with complex needs leaving prison with no accommodation.

This is a group of men who often experience quite negative labelling and stereo-typing. The project offered an opportunity for the men to conceptualise themselves in ways they rarely or never have opportunities to. It was also envisaged as opportunity for the men to engage with Manchester's cultural offer in a supported, welcoming and non-threatening way, igniting and re-igniting often latent artistic talent and sensibilities and offering positive self-affirmation.

Men's Room staff and volunteers brought skills and experience both in delivering high quality co-produced arts engagement and supporting, advocating for and empowering men with multiple and complex needs. Harriet and David brought a wealth of experience in delivering high-quality artist engagement and outcomes. The participants brought humour, open-mindedness, honesty, amazing skills and a willingness to engage.

The project began with a series of weekly sessions at WCH, getting to know the men and introducing them to a number of different artistic approaches. Beginning by exploring and express ideas through words, colour, shapes, basic print making, photography and marks leading to conversations and the creation of art and words that reveal us as multifaceted human beings with the capacity to be self reflective; and explore how we can be empowered to embrace the positives.

This was the launch-pad for exploring ideas of participants' own location, society's and our own 'labels', and their relationship to the city.'

Having built trust with the participants and begun to explore labels and their role in well-being over a period of weeks the participants began developing their own response and creating images and spoken word responses. Across a series of multi-disciplinary workshops the participants were offered the chance to experience other artistic responses to labels in a formal 'Arts' setting. Over a period of weeks the participants visited Manchester Art gallery and reacted and responded to art in a traditional setting. In particular the group drew inspiration from the exhibition 'New North South' (which presents art and culture from South Asia and the UK) probing understandings and senses of place, identity, society.

4 of the men had never been in art gallery before and none of the men could recall visiting a gallery or museum in their adult lives.

A total for 18 men were involved in the project over 3 months, representing just under half the total number of residents in the hostel over that 3 month period. This clearly illustrates the appetite there is for this kind of project. Six men attended nearly all the sessions. A

number of men moved on to other accommodation during the project, and while they were encouraged to continue attending, not being resident at WCH made continued attendance difficult.

Artistic Outputs



'Label' Sketchbooks

Every participants created their own sketchbook across the project. The sketchbooks were inspired by the notion in society we often 'label' people or feel 'labeled'. The sketchbook included a variety of art based on different art/word techniques including watercolour, collage, letter stamping, written word, photography.

'Snapshot' Postcards

After in the final weeks of the project participants were invited to select their favourite pieces of work from what they had created. These pieces were then worked on jointly by the participants and the lead artists to create a series of professionally produced postcards which functioned both as an embodiment of a positive, self-affirming 'label' the men gave to themselves and as a work of art they themselves had produced and could be proud of. The labels are snapshot details, created by individuals in a moment in time – not always saying anything in particular or making a big statement but a permanent reminder of their own positive, creative capacity.

The labels as art works serve a multi-function. A key element of the project is that the participants create works of art that they keep, but also that these small works of art are added to the men's case files at WCH and TMR, serving as a permanent reminder to social care staff work with the men their positive creative capacity and form a counter point to formal case-notes.



Assessment: How well did the project meet its aims?

1) To encourage young men in temporary accommodation or social housing to take a positive approach to addressing poor mental health, isolation and loneliness

Over the duration of the project a total of 18 men participated all the men were currently resident in WCH. WCH is a temporary accommodation hostel for prison leavers with mild mental health issues and a risk of re-offending. Even within the hostel setting the men are isolated and suffer high levels of loneliness.

As part of our initial engagement the men reflected on what makes them feel connected and positive. For many of the men this was initially difficult as they felt they had little positive in their lives. Using a variety of media the men were encouraged to revisit this throughout the project and began to identify and conceptualise positive approaches.

Focussing on labels and how we label ourselves and other enabled to men to begin to positively self-label. The act of creative group-work in itself directly addressed feeling of isolation and loneliness. The creative process encouraged the men to see beyond merely functional responses, to begin to connect, be active, to notice, to learn and to share. The creative process implicitly embodied the '5 Ways to Well-being'. The response from the men was unanimously positive. All 18 said their participation had reduced their isolation and feeling of loneliness and that participation had a positive impact on their well-being.

2) To develop a deeper understanding of the needs of young men in temporary accommodation or isolated young men in social housing in relation to their mental health and well-being

A key element in the success of participatory arts approaches to addressing well-being is the planned 'incidental' nature that enables self-expression. At various points throughout the project individuals, either consciously or unconsciously voiced deep-seated feelings relating to their personal experience of wellness and well-being.

This allowed the group, participants, staff, volunteers and artists to explore these feelings as equals and to legitimise discussions of feelings while also exploring positive responses. It will come as no surprise that most of the discussion started from reflections on very negative past experience and referenced a perceived lack of opportunities to engage with positive life-affirming activities for young men in their situation.

The key message from the success of this project is that whole-person, strengths-based, participatory arts have an important role to play in supporting and empowering people. The men told us they didn't feel there were any opportunities to make positive connections and to learn and to share. Addressing people's fundamental needs is crucial but unless their higher social needs are addressed their well-being will continue to suffer.

3) To work with temporary accommodation and social housing providers to develop asset based approaches to supporting young men at risk of isolation and poor mental health

The positive response to the project and the high level of engagement illustrate the appetite for this work. The obvious next step is to support staff and management to embed this approach in their accommodation models. Given the current funding climate this is

likely to prove difficult. However, TMR is committed to continue to develop this work (see below).

4) To strengthen and develop partnership approaches and build arts based pathways to support young men at risk of poor mental health or isolation in temporary accommodation or social housing

The success of the project has led to very positive developments with the social housing provider that manages WCH. Riverside Housing is very keen to develop the project further and to work in partnership with TMR to deliver similar work across the rest of their temporary accommodation estate in Manchester.

In April we are planning to start delivering a similar piece of work in Brydon Court the main temporary accommodation hostel from people rough-sleeping in the city and have plans to expand provision to other Riverside managed hostels over the next year.

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