

# **An evaluation of the *Performing Local Places* project**

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# Executive summary

## Background

The *Performing Local Places* project is based on an approach to performance practice developed by Professor Sally Mackey to help groups of people explore the concept of place. It uses performance and other arts activities to disrupt previous associations people might have with a place. The focus of *Performing Local Places* was to work with clients who lived in St Mungo's 24 hour supported accommodation in the London borough of Camden. The project also worked with a number of clients from other St Mungo's residences in the area, where clients were living more independently and were supported by staff only during normal working hours. All clients have experienced mental illness and some may have experienced homelessness. Many clients had experienced having very little control over where they lived or for how long and had negative associations with the local area because of the circumstances that led them to live there. The aim of *Performing Local Places* was to support clients to think about 'moving on' through creating a body of performance work in the local area and beyond over 15 weekly sessions.

## Evaluation aims

The aim of our evaluation was to explore:

- The impact of taking part in *Performing Local Places* on individuals' wellbeing, feelings of belonging and narratives of home, moving home and personal recovery
- How clients experience taking part in *Performing Local Places*
- The role of supported living staff in *Performing Local Places*
- Who participates and why

## Methods

This evaluation used qualitative methods to understand the impact of *Performing Local Places* on St Mungo's clients. We used a Theory of Change methodology as a framework through which to look at the *Performing Local Places* project. This involved participant observation methods and in-depth interviews. Our findings are based on 4 sources of data:

- Observational notes from project sessions made by McPin researchers
- Interviews with clients who formed the core client group
- Interviews with staff working at St Mungo's
- Interviews with the core *Performing Local Places* team

The study team consisted of two researchers, one of whom had personal experience of living with a mental health problem and used this experience in her research work. This researcher conducted the majority of the observational work throughout the project, and conducted all the interviews with clients and staff at St Mungo's. We adopted this approach to help build trust with participants and encourage dialogue within interviews.

## Key findings

### The meaning of 'moving on'

The initial project aim of helping clients think about physically 'moving on' from 24 hour supported accommodation to more independent forms of supported living proved to be too ambitious for the particular set of clients who were most engaged with the project. Interviews with staff and clients from St Mungo's, however, revealed different understandings of what 'moving on' could mean, including clients coming to accept some aspects of what has happened to them, and provide the platform from which some clients may be able to build a meaningful life.

### Improved sense of wellbeing

Clients reported several outcomes related to wellbeing, including improved mood and being more relaxed as a result of taking part in the sessions. Some clients also reported gaining confidence as a result of engaging with the project.

### New sense of connectedness among the clients

Participating in the project allowed clients to create relationships with others living in the house that they did not engage with previously. The core group of participants felt more confident to talk to and support each other and spent time with each other outside of the project. Some clients attributed this development specifically to the nature of the arts activities.

### Changes in the way clients feel about being resident at St Mungo's

Taking part in the project made several of the clients feel more settled and more comfortable with living in St Mungo's supported accommodation. For clients who had only been at St Mungo's a short time, it helped ease their transition from inpatient services to supported accommodation.

### New sense of having a place within local community

Engaging with the project allowed clients to establish a sense of place and feel more connected to the local community. Clients reported having built new positive associations with the local area and developed a feeling that they could have a place within the local community.

## Conclusions

As a result of the *Performing Local Places* team's flexible working style and responsiveness to clients who engaged with the project, the team adapted the aims during the course of project to work more closely with clients around the idea of 'moving out' into the local community. This change in focus allowed clients to explore how they felt in their local community through creating a series of physically marked trails and site-based small performances, and to explore ways in which they could make a contribution to the community through 'gifting' art in their local environment. Through these activities some of the clients spoke about gaining a different sense of what their place in the local community could be, and in some ways expressed a kind of psychological, if not physical, 'moving on'. The project's strength was therefore using creative and indirect ways of enabling clients, who might have otherwise been resistant to it, to engage with the local community.

## Recommendations

### Time

Creating more time at the outset of the project would allow facilitators to work with clients and St Mungo's staff. This would enable them to build relationships with the staff and clients, which may enable clients to feel more confident in participating in some of the more demanding activities. From a practical perspective, planned activities took longer to complete than initially expected, including the formation of a group who consistently attended sessions. Only once a core group was established, were the facilitators able to do work that was more challenging to participants, effectively meaning that work that was potentially more useful received less time. We would recommend running this project over a longer time period in this type of setting.

### Supervision

Because of the permeable boundaries of this work and the deep emotional engagement required by the facilitators, it would be a recommendation that appropriate clinical supervision is put in place to ensure there is ongoing active space for reflection. (In the follow-up project, facilitators have arranged clinical supervision.)

### Working with St Mungo's staff

Staff working on a day-to-day basis with clients were not always best placed to explain the project to potential participants. There was also some suggestion that they felt repeatedly reminding clients about the project was not appropriate to the clients they worked with. We would recommend regular planning meetings between the St

Mungo's staff and the Performing Places team throughout any future extension of the project, to enable all parties to fully understand the aims of the project and how they could best work together to improve client engagement. (The *Performing Local Places* team held a post-project reflection and explanation day with the St Mungo's staff to explore with them, further, the underlying rationale for the work. This built upon the original staff taster session.)

### Documenting the project

Using video and photography to document the project caused some problems for some of the clients, and the presence of an extra observer could be difficult given the small size of the group. The *Performing Local Places* worked with clients to avoid taking photos/video of them, as appropriate. For projects of this kind, we would recommend careful consideration in project design about the forms of documentation that are suitable given the nature of the clients involved, including exploring options with potential clients, should documentation be needed.

# Background

## ***Performing Local Places***

The *Performing Local Places* project is based on an approach to place-based performance practices developed by Professor Sally Mackey from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (RCSSD), University of London. The project involves helping groups of people to explore the concept and physical reality of place and aims to support people to feel more comfortable *in place*. Within the context of this work, 'place' can have a number of levels of meaning including:

- How someone relates to the physical environment of a place.
- How someone relates to the people or community within a place.
- How someone may imagine a specific place to be.

The *Performing Local Places* approach involves people participating in activities which disrupt previous associations to a place *in situ*. The resulting 'performances' may not look like traditional forms of theatre, appearing more like performance or installation art or immersive theatre. They frequently involve game playing, placing selected objects around a room or outdoor space, and performing artistic activities within a place. In the past the *Performing Local Places* team have been particularly interested in working with people who have become displaced, or who may have felt uncomfortable in the location they live in, for example migrants or refugees (Mackey, 2016).

In her work Professor Mackey has been careful to work with aspects of the local environment that may seem small, ordinary or part of the mundane stuff of everyday living (Heddon and Mackey, 2012). Through using these elements in a performance practice people, can make new associations with the place that may result in them feeling more comfortable or more positive about that environment. A number of authors have written about the theoretical potential for theatre and drama based interventions (as distinct from drama therapy) to help people with mental health problems in their recovery. Some of the potential benefits include a growth in personal identity through adopting a valued role and an expanded sense of self, reduced social isolation and a sense of purpose, gained through working with others to reach a common goal, such as producing some form of performance (Faigin and Stein, 2010). The evidence base for these claims in relation to mental health is currently limited.

One study used applied theatre to see how drama and performance helped people 'move on' psychologically from traumatic childhood experiences (Bundy, 2016). It used performance practice as a way for participants to explore ways of being 'alive in the world' and build 'self-capacity'. Participants had opportunities to occupy roles associated with different levels of power, particularly in the context of domestic violence.

A further study involved asylum seekers living in Norwegian immigration centres, who were waiting to hear the outcome of their asylum applications, who felt isolated and 'invisible' as a result of not being able to make decisions about how to move forwards with their lives. Through taking part in the study, participants met others with similar experiences, learnt from one another and provided mutual support and 'become visible' through telling and performing their stories within that group (Horghagen and Josephsson, 2010). None of these studies focus on the practice of performing place specifically and using place as an external focus for individuals.

## ***Performing Local Places with clients living in St Mungo's supported accommodation***

The focus of *Performing Local Places* was to work specifically with clients living at St Mungo's Adamson Road supported living accommodation (comprising six flats, an office and communal space) to begin to think about 'moving on'. At the time of the intervention, there were 21 clients living at Adamson Road in five shared and one self-contained flat. Many of the clients had moved there after spending a period of time in hospital due to a mental health diagnosis. Clients living in the flats can access 24 hour support and are supported by key workers. Clients meet their key worker at monthly sessions and informally at least once a week. There are a number of group

activities available that are run by St Mungo's staff and volunteers, including walking, gardening and peer support groups, art and dance therapy. *Performing Local Places* also worked with a number of clients from other St Mungo's residences in the local area, where clients are living more independently and receive staff support only during normal working hours.

The initial plan was to work with clients from these residences over 17 weeks to create a body of performance-based work in the local area and beyond. Initial sessions consisted of 'making' activities where clients created simple improvised objects from tissue paper and similar materials, and placed them around the activities room where the project was taking place. Later sessions developed these 'making' activities, asking clients to create 'places' or 'scapes', often based around clients' positive memories. In the second half of the project, the focus shifted to getting clients outside to engage with the local area including leaving behind traces of the group's presence. These traces often consisted of trails made of ordinary everyday items such as flour, cake sprinkles, plastic daisies and paper tags with messages handwritten by clients. Other external activities included tying imitation autumn leaves in a nearby tree-lined walkway, creating a small 'performance space' in a nearby church garden and building a temporary 'party' site on a triangle of pavement. These activities often took on elements of performance. In one session, for example, the group re-created one client's positive memory of a tea party with scones through an improvisational activity where everyone took on a character. Facilitators helped clients think about the significance of these outings into the local area through reflection sessions before and after.

The practices described above may be particularly relevant to some of the clients who have come to live in St Mungo's supported accommodation. All clients have experienced mental illness and some may have experienced homelessness; some having also experienced abuse. Many clients have experienced having very little control over where they live or for how long. Clients may have negative associations with the area around Adamson Road because of the circumstances that led them to living there. Practices that intentionally involve working with small and ordinary physical features of a location, such as brick walls or plants to create experiences that may be positively memorable, may be particularly well suited to helping clients come to terms with their current environment.

## About this report

The *Performing Local Places* project evaluation aimed to explore:

- the impact of taking part in the *Performing Local Places* project on individuals' wellbeing, feelings of belonging and narratives of home, moving home and personal recovery
- how clients experience taking part in the *Performing Local Places* project
- the role of supported living staff in the *Performing Local Places* project
- who participates and why

In order to explore these aims we (the evaluation team) developed a Theory of Change model that to describe the work of the *Performing Local Places* team and the impact on the clients at St Mungo's.

## Methodology

This evaluation used qualitative methods to understand the impact of *Performing Local Places* on St Mungo's clients. We used a Theory of Change methodology as a framework through which to look at the *Performing Local Places* project (see below). This involved participant observation methods and semi-structured interviews. Our findings are based on four sources of data:

- Observational notes from *Performing Local Places* sessions (including taster sessions) made by the McPin team (19)
- Interviews with all clients who formed the core client group (5)
- Interviews with staff working at St Mungo's (6)
- Interviews with the core *Performing Local Places* team (4)

## Developing Performing Place model

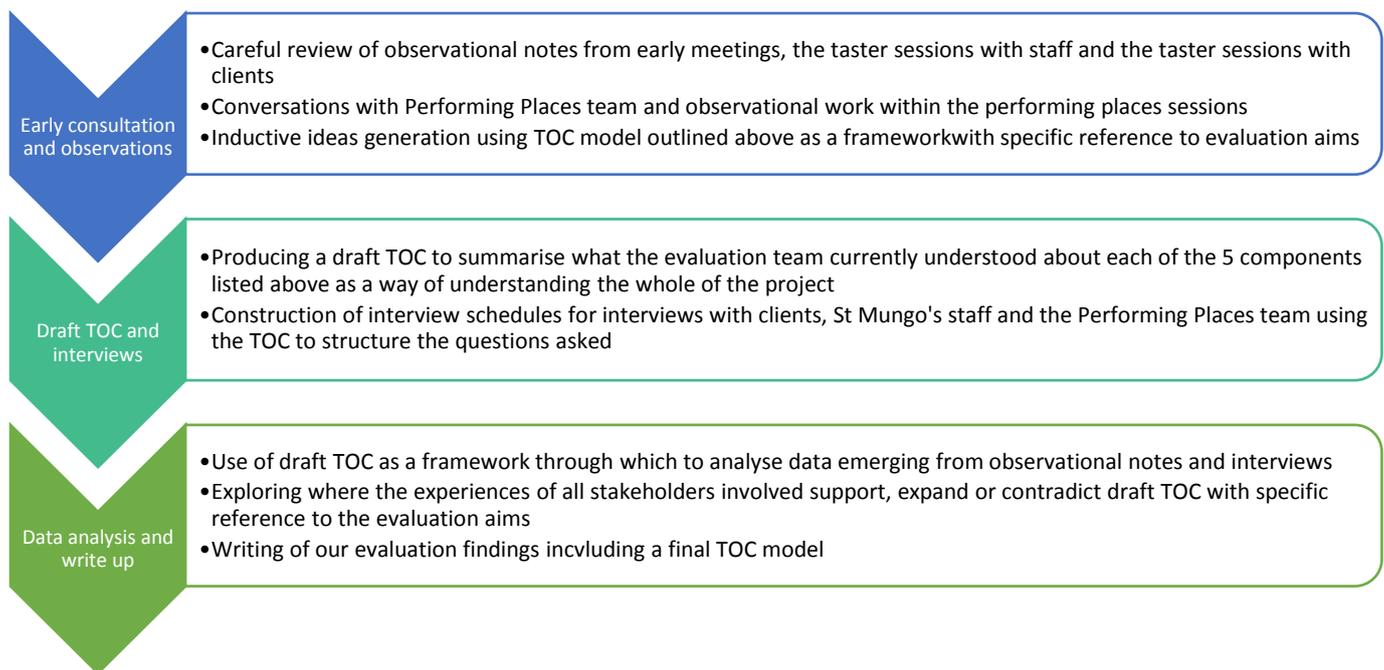
A Theory of Change (Harries et al., 2014) is a structured way of looking at how a project may change something (for *Performing Local Places* how clients may feel about a particular place) for a particular group of people in a particular context. Using this as a framework it is possible to map out the resources a project may use and the activities that are central to making that change for those people. It is also possible to identify features within the local context that make it more or less challenging to complete a particular project.

We developed a Theory of Change (TOC) model to describe what the *Performing Local Places* team were doing in their performance practice with the clients at St Mungo's. We used the concept of the logic model presented by Harries et al. (2014) to develop our TOC. For this evaluation we used the following components:

1. **Inputs or resources** – the resources that the *Performing Local Places* team had available to them for the project
2. **Activities** – the activities that the *Performing Local Places* team organised and facilitated throughout the project
3. **Local context - enablers** – the factors within the local context at St Mungo's that were helpful in the working of the *Performing Local Places* project
4. **Local context - challenges** – the factors within the local context at St Mungo's that were challenging to the working of the *Performing Local Places* project
5. **Impact** – the impact that the *Performing Local Places* project activities had on the clients at St Mungo's

Data was analysed in three stages (see Figure 1). Analysis was carried out collaboratively within the team, in three distinct stages.

Figure 1: Evaluation process – exploring the *Performing Local Places* project



## Peer research methodology

Two researchers worked on this evaluation, one of whom has experience of mental health problems and uses this experience in her work. This researcher conducted the majority of the observational work and conducted all interviews with clients and staff at St Mungo's. This researcher disclosed to clients that she had lived experience of mental health problems either when clients were invited to take part in an interview, or in conversation prior to the interview taking place. This is done to help build trust with participants and encourage dialogue within interviews. Having an interviewer who is open about their own experience of mental ill-health can reduce the power imbalance

often existing between interviewer and interviewee, and can help to make interviewees feel more comfortable talking about their own experiences. The researcher did not have direct experience of living in supported accommodation but had spent time as an inpatient in mental health services and used this experience to build rapport with the interviewed clients. The second researcher on the project conducted interviews with the team who were delivering the *Performing Local Places* project and supported the overall programme of work.

## Observational work

One researcher was present during all *Performing Local Places* activities, which included 17 regular project sessions and four taster sessions at the start of the project (one for staff and three for clients, each at a different St Mungo's residence). Observation work involved joining activities to some extent within the sessions and then writing detailed notes afterwards. The notes included a description of the session activities and conversations that these activities prompted. The notes also included comments on individual clients' engagement with the activities and any observed challenges to taking part. As part of the participant observation methodology, the researcher recorded reflections on how she experienced taking part in particular activities from a participant point of view. Observational notes were also taken of planning meetings and of phone calls between the research team and the *Performing Local Places* team. These notes formed an important part of the analysis process. Notes made by the *Performing Local Places* team including photographs of the activities were also made available to the research team.

## Qualitative interviews

Interviews were conducted face-to-face and were audio recorded.

### Interviews with clients at St Mungo's

Interviews (n=5) were conducted with St Mungo's clients who had participated in *Performing Local Places*. The focus of these interviews was people's experiences of the sessions and their thoughts about the challenges involved in 'moving on'. We also attempted to interview people who had participated in a taster or a session and then decided not to go back, but we were unable to secure these interviews.

### Interviews with St Mungo's Staff

Interviews were conducted with St Mungo's staff (n=6) who had either participated in *Performing Local Places*, or who had been involved in encouraging clients to take part. Interviews were also conducted with senior management about their reasons for engaging with the project and what the benefits and challenges of the project might be.

### Interviews with the *Performing Local Places* team

Interviews were conducted with core team members (n= 4). The content of these interviews concerned the original rationale for *Performing Local Places* and the body of work on which this was based. Interviews also concerned the experiences of the facilitators of the project, the benefits of the work and the challenges they may have faced in implementing this work at St Mungo's.

## Data analysis

Reflection notes and interview transcripts were analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The draft TOC was used as a deductive framework through which to analyse the data. Researchers held regular reflection meetings during this process to discuss what was being identified and how data should be interpreted. Additional data coding was conducted inductively but within the framework of the TOC to capture aspects of the project that were not included in our early draft. Data was managed using NVivo 11 software.

## Findings

The *Performing Local Places* team conducted 17 sessions with the clients at St Mungo's, which comprised the core activity of the project. In addition to this, the team conducted three taster sessions with clients and one taster

session with staff at the beginning of the project as part of their outreach work. Clients and staff at St Mungo’s were invited to participate in sessions in which they could experience the kinds of activities that would be happening throughout the project. Through the project, participation fluctuated but eventually settled on a core group of 4 people who had consistent attendance, with some additional clients joining for one or more sessions on a less regular basis. The facilitators also noticed a number of residents ‘hovering around the edges’ of the project. These residents may sometimes observe the activities or briefly join in, or regularly sought out the facilitators to say hello and ask about the progress of the project, but who did not go on to actively participate. We interviewed these four participants, alongside members of St Mungo’s staff and the *Performing Local Places* team. We also interviewed one client who only attended three sessions but engaged particularly well. Table 1 provides demographic details for all interviewees.

## Participants

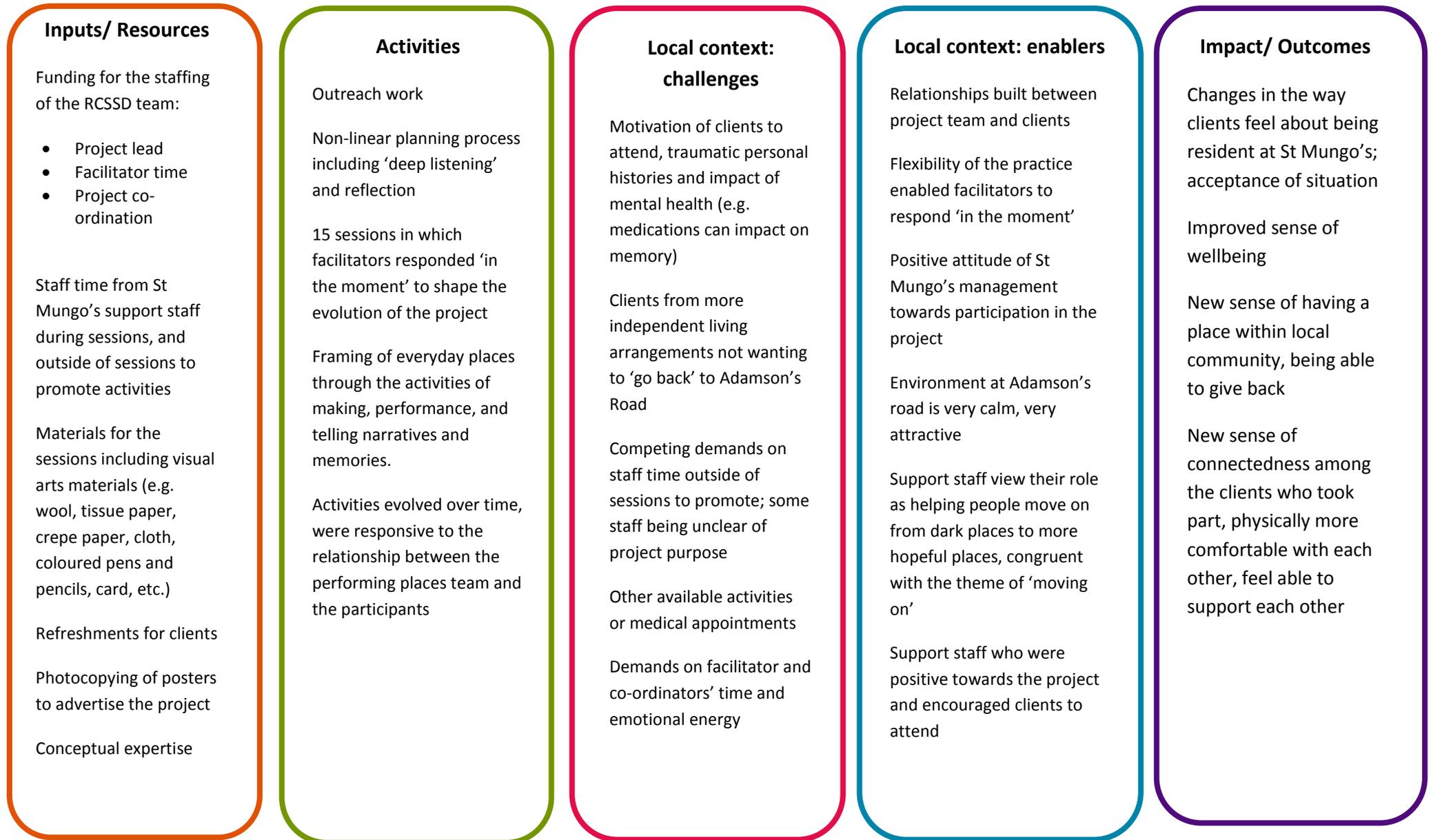
**Table 1 – Interviewee demographics**

<b>Gender</b>	
Male	4
Female	11
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
White British	6
White Other	3
Black African	2
Black Caribbean	2
East Asian	1
Unknown	1
<b>Job title and/or project role</b>	
St Mungo’s - Clients	5
St Mungo’s - Support workers	5
St Mungo’s - Senior management	1
<i>Performing Local Places</i> Project Lead	1
<i>Performing Local Places</i> Facilitator	2
<i>Performing Local Places</i> Co-ordinator	1

## Describing the process of the *Performing Local Places* project - Final TOC

The evaluation team used all of the data collected to build a TOC model that described the activities and impact of the *Performing Local Places* project. This is presented in Figure 2 below.

**Figure 2: Describing the *Performing Local Places* project – how did it work?**



## Session content and mechanisms of facilitation

### Project lead

The project lead (Prof. Mackey) secured funding from the ARHC (Arts and Humanities Research Council). She also made the key connections with Camden Council and with St Mungo's at Adamson's Road and oversaw the initiation of the project. Following this her role in the beginning was to put appropriate staff in place to run the project and to be involved in key planning and decision making around the content of the sessions. Over time the way she was involved in this changed and evolved:

*We were to roll out the 'performance of place', a model which included working in and around local places such that the participants felt more at ease in their environment and felt able to consider further steps onwards. I employed the two facilitators who had worked with me beforehand on the previous Challenging Place project. I trusted them – and their work - completely, because they knew and understood the Performing Local Places practice and was able to be a little more 'hands off' than previously. In fact, that didn't work so well for me and I returned to be more involved in the latter half of the sessions. I worked with the project manager, encouraging her outreach work and supporting her when times were frustrating. The four of us would often debrief after the sessions and discuss the moments of success, in particular. I would suggest, offer advice, support and occasionally redirect the work. If I felt the work was moving too far away from 'place', for example, I would bring it round to that focus again. (Prof. Mackey)*

### Facilitators

The presence of two skilled facilitators was a key component of this project. The facilitators described working very differently in this project compared to when delivering workshops with other groups. They found facilitation to be an intense process that frequently involved shifting from group to one to one work, and of having to be reactive 'in the moment'.

Facilitators described the following processes in their work which are explored in more detail below:

- Planning
- Creative work within the sessions
- 'Deep Listening' and 'in the moment' responsiveness
- Flexibility
- Facilitator Reflections and with project leader
- Inclusive approach and building relationships

### Planning

A lot of planning and reflection occurred before sessions:

- Facilitators met each week to plan the content of the session.
- They did not 'fully schedule' particular sessions but rather planned a number of activities around the focus for the week which might be incorporated into the session.
- This process also involved incorporation of ideas, concepts and images given by clients in the previous sessions

New activities developed for the later sessions were designed to be of direct relevance to participants who were active within the project, focusing on themes of places and community that seemed of importance or interest to them.

## Preparing the space

Care and effort went into preparing the space before the sessions started. The furniture was carefully arranged and the *Performing Local Places* team provided refreshments and music to ensure that the clients felt comfortable. Physical materials were arranged carefully in the space for clients to look through and choose from.

## Creative work within the sessions

Within sessions facilitators and clients worked together on a number of activities. These were not discrete activities, but worked in reciprocal, non-linear ways, with ideas and images arising in one activity, inspiring the content of later activities and always focused on 'place'. Activities included:

- **Warm up activities** – including focused drama exercises and mindfulness.
- **Reflections** – the group gathered at the beginning and end of the sessions to reflect on their work. Reflection served as an opportunity to revisit what happened in the previous week's session and to link this to the work planned for the session to come. At the end of sessions, reflection allowed clients to think about what had happened in the session that was significant for the group and could be linked in with the theme of place.
- **Making based** - The majority of sessions involved some active 'making' of objects from arts materials such as tissue paper. In some sessions small objects or positive messages were produced which were taken out in to the local area and 'gifted' to the community.



Photo 1: Making activities

- **Narratives** - Throughout the project, clients frequently offered up short narratives from their own personal histories or linked activities with popular narratives. One theme that arose in the later stages of the project, for example, was the story of Hansel and Gretel, and the idea of leaving trails to mark the path through different environments.
- **Memories** - Some clients spoke in a relatively concrete way about their childhoods or places they had been as children, or about their experiences of being homeless. Others spoke in a much more ambiguous or dream like way about events that may have been the retelling of memories and childhood events. It was

unclear to what extent these narratives did or did not incorporate elements of fantasy or narratives that ran counter to the event being described.

*“Alongside that were the memories, positive memories that we were always asking them for so that we could somehow transpose their memories to a practical way of working with them, which is also narrative. So I think narrative appeared in these two very powerful but subtly strong ways which required deep listening from us in order to try and make these connections to place, which was what we were always trying to do.”  
(PP team 02)*

- **Performance based activities** – The key performance work happening within the majority of sessions in the latter part of the project involved the making of trails and working in outside sites. The clients and members of the team went out into the local area and created visible trails through the environment. This could take the form of using ‘sprinkles’ to form Hansel and Gretel like trails leading out from the accommodation to parts of the local environment, or taking made objects out into the area and ‘gifting’ them to the community by placing them or attaching them to parts of the physical environment. Small, individual performances were given by each member of the group in the form of telling stories in a nearby church garden. Always, this was about changing the look of local places and experiencing such places differently, in line with the focus of the project.



*Photo 2: ‘Gifting’ of made objects into the community*

Larger scale versions of this type of activity involved the *Performing Local Places* team and clients creating an installation on ‘the triangle, an area of pavement near Adamson Road. This installation used astro-turf and umbrellas on a sunny day to ‘disrupt’ the ordinary and every atmosphere of the location.



Photo 3: Installation at 'the triangle'

The *Performing Local Places* team reported performance based activities to be more difficult to make work than they had initially expected. Some of the later performance based activities were based on ideas or narratives that had been offered up by clients at an earlier point in the project. The *Performing Local Places* team reported that the performances that worked best arose spontaneously out of activities that clients were already engaged in, or activities that strongly and meaningfully linked to a memory of one of the clients. Over time members of the team felt that the performance work of the walks out into the community and the creation of trails was having an impact and the clients came to enjoy these activities.

*[...] we wanted to give them a sense of being able to shake the local area that they were in, not just feel alienated from it, to give them the sense of being able to, at first, just make little changes to it and enjoy that thought that they have this little knowledge of owl card hiding somewhere or a fake autumn leaf looking like a real leaf hanging from somewhere and it is just for them. But after it while, it really shifted from making them feel like they can change the local area, to making them feel like they are communicating with people in the local area. Doing one of our works, [Client] actually met an artist who came up to her and said are you people who have been hanging all those messages? Thank you so much, I really enjoy them, they really make my day and [Client] was just blown away. (PP team 03)*

#### 'Deep listening' and 'in the moment' responsiveness

Facilitators described having to pay careful attention to clients within sessions in order to be able to make the sessions responsive to their needs:

- Facilitators described a process through which they would engage in 'deep listening' to clients within the sessions.

- Ideas gained through this process would be used to guide the facilitators' choices in relation to developing the current activity or choosing the next one. This resulted in clients having a direct impact on the delivery of sessions.

Facilitators continued or dropped activities in response to their ability to hold the interest of the group.

### Importance of flexibility

The flexibility of the practices used allowed facilitators to work with participants 'in the moment'. More traditionally structured workshops might have resulted in some participants being excluded from the activities. The *Performing Local Places* facilitators used a subtle approach when supporting clients to think about 'moving out' to engage with the local environment and community. They felt that making more explicit attempts to get clients to reflect on these issues may have been too intimidating and may have been a barrier to engagement.

Facilitators described working with the group to understand their needs, mood and energy levels. They engaged participants in one of the pre-planned activities that most actively resonated with clients' thoughts, images and narratives. This flexibility extended to the implementation of the activities themselves. Facilitators described picking up and enhancing particular elements that were most engaging for participants and letting other aspects of these activities recede in importance or be dropped completely.

*We did do some planning and it fell on absolute rocky ground, didn't it? We had to realise it was better just to go in with a selection of exercises and hope for the best, wasn't it? Normally, if you're planning with a group that you know, you can plan the session and you know how it's going to work pretty much or you can make it up. With this group, they were always different. In fact, the group was always different. We're not really planning for a known group, depending on how they arrive and how they present on that day and how they might be feeling. (PP team 01)*

### Facilitator Reflections

Facilitators met once a week after that week's session to reflect on the sessions and insights from these reflection sessions were fed into the planning of the next sessions. Often, they met with the project lead also. Facilitators also used these moments to emotionally support each other

*Well we've put a huge amount of time behind the scenes into making sure that the group is working. So we meet every week outside of the session, normally one evening that we have been, haven't we, after different work and just planning out or speaking on the... mostly meeting actually. We've done it physically, haven't we, reflecting on what's happened the session gone and how we might move them on and what we might want to develop and what key themes have emerged. (PP team 01)*

### Inclusive approach and building relationships

Clients described how the patience of facilitators and other members of the *Performing Local Places* team helped them feel like they could participate without feeling under pressure to do so. This relationship building may have been important in enabling clients to be more adventurous in the activities they took part in as the project developed over time. Staff also reported that the relationships that the facilitators built with clients was one of the reasons that clients returned to sessions.

*I've met all those individuals and, as I say, I believe they have worked tremendously hard to make this work and they're, I would imagine, very, very skilled at their jobs so I would imagine it's those relationships that have kept people coming back. (St Mungo's Team, 02)*

One resident in particular, spoke about an immediate sense of acceptance when they joined the group relatively late into the project. This resident was able to bring a personal object that had a specific significance to him to the sessions. In being able to do this, he felt accepted and able to engage with the group.

### Wider team support in the sessions

In the later stages of the project having the whole *Performing Local Places* team in the sessions was essential in allowing clients to engage with the trail performances at their own pace. This allowed some team members to lead the trail and others to move more slowly, meaning that all clients had time to consider where to place objects in the environment. This also meant that team members were able to give clients one to one attention in these moments.

## Client Experiences of the *Performing Local Places* project

### The meaning of 'moving on'

One of the project aims was to help clients think about 'moving on' from 24 hour supported accommodation to more independent forms of supported living. Early on, it became apparent that using this interpretation of 'moving on' might be too ambitious for the particular set of clients who were most engaged with the project. Most of these clients had moved to Adamson Road relatively recently, in some cases, during the running of the project. As a result, the *Performing Local Places* team focused on working with clients on the idea of 'moving out' in to the local area (at around half way through the project), by which they meant encouraging clients to go outside and engage with the immediate local community. This was explained by one of the facilitators:

*So the original purpose was to take the genre, the ideas of Performing Local Places, to take some of the things, not the exact things that we've done before but to replicate them, so narratives, subversion, revisioning local places, to take some of those ideas from the previous project, Challenging Place, to experiment with them at St Mungo's in a non-threatening way and to see if they made an impact upon the residents in terms of their attitude to moving on from fully supported living to semi-independent living. That was the original purpose of it, whether we could make a difference, whether we could encourage people in this rather obscure abstract way, to rethink where they are or where they might go as a result of doing these strange performance activities. (PP team 04)*

Interviews with staff and clients from St Mungo's however revealed different understandings of the what 'moving on' could mean to the *Performing Local Places* team. Many clients at St Mungo's have been through very negative life events (frequently more than one), including homelessness, experiences of abuse and mental health problems. For some, their arrival at Adamson Road was a result of a series of traumatic events, which may have involved the loss of a home or contact with inpatient mental health services. In this context 'moving on' may involve clients coming to accept some aspects of what has happened to them, and provide the platform from which they may be able to build a meaningful life. There was evidence that some clients felt that the project had helped them in this form of 'moving on'.

*I think I tried to feel more settled here but things haven't changed for me really since [names significant negative event]. I'm trying not to dwell on feelings about [significant negative event]. A lot of my time is taken up by things like that when I'm not in the group so it's another reason why I like to be involved in the groups, which is kind of moving on. [...] So yes, I've sort of moved on. I've accepted that I live here now. I've accepted that... [Client 01]*

This sense of 'moving on' as a form of personal development was also felt by participants who had very recently moved out into independent living.

*Well, for me, it means, like, where I'm at the moment with my new flat I'm thinking about what I can do to decorate the place, make it look like mine, you know? So I have quite a good selection of ideas, and I think what it's done is take, like, not a stagnant brain literally, but, like, a stagnant imagination and it's brought it back to life. Because I was always very creative but I, sort of, got out of the habit of it, so now I'm, you know, being creative again. So that's my*

*moving on, is going back to my roots and, you know, getting all my art stuff out again and doing all of that kind of stuff, yes. (Client 02)*

### Systemic barriers to 'moving on'

While the *Performing Local Places* team shifted the aim of the project early on from 'moving on' to 'moving out' into the local community, we did ask clients about their perceptions of 'moving on'. Two clients spoke about the barriers to 'moving on' that were inherent in the system. One spoke about having lost a privately rented flat through changes in their benefits, and a second spoke about being unable to secure a flat to move on to. Both spoke of not being in control of important decisions being made around where they lived and for how long, making it difficult to consider what 'moving on' could mean to them.

One of the clients spoke of having refused to engage with the idea of making plans or moving on as a way of coping, and suggested that they did not want to be 'moved on'.

*Being moved on to something that I don't want to be or do. That is something that is intrinsic in the whole hostel system. You're told that you need to have stability in your life yet nothing is stable so how can you have stability in your life when nothing is stable? The whole system is basically set to make sure that you're constantly unsettled. If you settle somewhere for one or two years and then you get moved on again, how are you supposed to put roots down? Again, there's nothing permanent. That I struggle with because if you want to get back into work you've got to have a permanent fixed abode. Even for bills and things like that, they don't like it when you move around. You can't set up a Sky subscription, you can't set up a BT phone line. You can't do anything really. It's very limiting. [Client 01]*

### Feeling accepted

All of the clients that were interviewed spoke about feeling welcomed and accepted in the group. This can be seen in our TOC model as a facilitating factor that encouraged active engagement with the project. Clients at St Mungo's may have been through events that left them feeling like outsiders, so this is a significant outcome in its own right.

*I found them very accepting. I didn't feel like I wasn't involved at all in some of the sessions. So it was quite an unusual feeling to feel that way in the group straightaway I felt. Normally you have to go to a few sessions before you feel like you actually belong there so it was nice to feel so involved, yes. (Client 01)*

One client spoke about feeling "more loved" as a result of the project and another found it helped her to accept herself.

*I do everything slowly to show that I care, and I think that has been very much aided by the group because they emphasise that whatever you are, whoever you are, we accept you and we think you're fascinating. And that's a very good thing to learn for yourself, is to accept yourself and think that you're fascinating. So I think that that's what they've done for me, yes. (Client 01)*

### Improved wellbeing

All interviewed clients reported several outcomes related to improved mood and wellbeing. They reported enjoying the activities and feeling happier or more relaxed as a result of taking part in the sessions.

*I think the most important thing is that after the session I'm not feeling tired. It wasn't heavy, it was pleasant so after the session I felt relaxed and I was always in a good mood. (Client 03)*

*I see it as a different spectrum whereas – to compare to daily living, this can be tiring and hard work; a lot of effort has to be put in to get through the day, whereas when you're in *Performing**

*Local Places, you feel much more relaxed and more joyful, and you can have a sense of different feeling in yourself. (Client 04)*

Some clients linked this explicitly with the creative nature of the project.

*I thought it was very creative, a lot of fun, very stimulating and I found that it made me feel very happy, very enthusiastic. (Client 02)*

This impact was also observed by St Mungo's support workers.

*I think on a day in particular, some would come out of the session and say that was the best session and that they were glad that they went. So I think just generally being happy. But then I feel like with... because we see the clients every day, sometimes there were still fluctuations, but I feel like definitely on the day there was a marked improvement in happiness. (St Mungo's Team 01)*

One client felt the project had a lasting impact beyond feeling better immediately after a session.

*There has been, it has a positive, it had a positive impact on me and it gave me hope. Before, I didn't have any hope. I was depressed a lot of the time and I was anxious with people, with myself, especially myself and I put that anger completely in the back of my mind. As the days got by, I became more wiser. I feel wiser. (Client 04)*

Some clients also reported gaining confidence as a result of engaging with the project.

*I feel good, I feel I learn something new every day, every week; it gives me hope and inspiration and confidence to go out into the community and do what they do, and inspire others. (Client 04)*

Although not explicitly measured, there are indications that the project may have had an impact on clients living at Adamson Road who did not take part in the project. A member of St Mungo's staff observed that some clients have engaged with the trails left behind by project participants in the local area:

*Yes, it's brought everyone together more and people have hopefully enjoyed walking down Adamson Road on a Friday afternoon when there have been hundreds and thousands on the floor, flour or luggage leaflets. Are they called leaflets? [...] Tags tied to the trees with nice sentiments. People have talked about it and I think generally, when they have talked about it, I suppose generally they've been smiling. Sometimes our conversations are probably maybe quite... they could be quite distressing or worrying or anxiety provoking with the staff, for the staff, for me, maybe for the clients as well. So these conversations would have lifted everyone so that's positive. (St Mungo's Team 02)*

One client who had just moved into Adamson Road started attending the sessions after seeing these tags and said seeing the positive messages written on the tags made him feel better. Another client reported using some of what she had learned through the project as a coping mechanism on bad days.

*I think there were things that people who are running the group brought, like the little round lights, fairy lights. All those kinds of things made me think wow, something as simple as that cheers you up, makes you feel great and you might be having, you know, at home one of those dull mornings when you can't really feel like the way you want to feel. And then if you have something like that you just put it on your window sill and look at it for a few minutes, and it will just make you feel happy and, you know, gone are the blues. (Client 02)*

One client reported that reflection sessions at the beginning and end of each sessions had helped them work on problems with their memory

*Sometimes I have problems with my memory because of all the different tablets that I'm on and stuff and sometimes remembering what I've said when I've been out on the walk and then I've*

*been asked to write it down or (unclear 00:08:57) or something, it's like I can't remember what I said. Then I'll get reminded or there'll be something that's said and it's like, "Oh yes, that was it." So yes, it's helped me a lot from that point of view as well. (Client 01)*

Several clients enjoyed being able to engage in childlike activities. This was important to one client in particular who reported having family problems when young, and that the project had allowed them to 'revisit childhood' in a way.

*I think it goes back to childhood. I mean it's the sort of thing that I think kids used to do back before everybody had mobile phones. I think that's the sort of thing that people used to do just to have something to do, something that was a bit different, made people think, "Why are there cornflakes on the floor?" I remember stuff like that but I was never actually involved because of all the problems that my family had. So it's allowing me to have a second childhood in a way, without feeling too childish. (Client 01)*

### Social connectivity

For regular attendees, participating in the project over a prolonged period of time allowed them to create relationships with each other. The core group felt more confident to talk to and support one another, and felt physically more at ease with each other. This outcome was observed by the clients themselves, the *Performing Local Places* team and the St Mungo's staff team.

One of the project facilitators recognised this as one of the successes of the project:

*I do think the group dynamic that's established and the way that those three, especially, are communicating and engaging with each other, the sense of warmth between them and belonging and the fact that they all come from the same house but didn't really talk before they were saying, I think that's really hugely successful and something of a legacy that we can leave with them. That is really a sustainable, successful outcome I think. (PP Team 01)*

It is noteworthy that the clients themselves did not attribute this simply to spending time together during project sessions, but to the nature of the arts activities that formed the core of the project.

*They are both [indoor and outdoor project activities] for social, positive social networking. Positive social networking. (Client 04)*

As a result of the relationships created over the course of the project, one client now spends time with other project participants:

*We go out together... because we have learnt from the performing places to interact with each other, so we use that in the community to interact with each other outside, to go to different places, to the cinema, to the coffee shop, to the bank. (Client 04)*

The support worker of one of the project participants described how significant this was for her client:

*I know that for my key client, that was a really, really positive experience and they said that because they haven't lived here very long, they went out together for coffee outside of the group and yes, she said that that was a turning point for her in a way and feeling a bit more at home here and knowing that she has people that she can go out with was really important to her. So yes, I know that they go to the group together so I'm sure that would have contributed to it. (St Mungo's team 03)*

Another client described the project activities as "social art":

*Like when you have friends you meet up with them it's sociable, social art in a way. Very sociable, an artist is seen like a mad scientist creating works of art. In this case it was socialising through art, it was social, a different style. (Client 05)*

Although it is likely that clients would develop some degree of familiarity with each other in any well run group, it seems that it was the nature of the arts activities – collective working and engaging with the community – that strengthened clients' interpersonal relationships.

### Feeling more settled at St Mungo's

Taking part in the project made several of the clients feel more settled and more comfortable living in St Mungo's supported accommodation. This impact was greatest for two clients who had recently moved from hospital to Adamson Road.

One client said of her initial experiences of living at Adamson Road before joining the project:

*It felt more negative, it was more negative, there was no romance to it. (Client 05)*

Another reported feeling that participation in the project had made the transition between inpatient services and living at St Mungo's easier:

*Other than that, it's helped me to have some sort of stability really. /.../ It helps me that the group and everything that is involved with the group has helped me to transition from being in a rehabilitation ward to feeling more active and outside of the hospital. I've been in hospital quite a while after the overdose so I felt quite institutionalised. Although I'd not been in a psychiatric wing, it was still quite institutionalising. You had your meals at a set time and all that sort of stuff. You had to ask permission to go out for a cigarette. It was that sort of stuff. It was hard for me to not feel a bit lost when I came out. So having the group on a Friday helped me transition from that a bit. (Client 01)*

A participant, who had been a St Mungo's client at the start of the project but continued to attend sessions after she moved into her own flat, found that the project had helped her to feel more settled in her new home.

*And I think it makes things much more— it gives it a certain depth and also I think there's a lot of laughter about what performing places does, because some of the things they use are very simple, like a ball of wool or a little roll of ribbon. But, you know, I wouldn't have thought to do what we did with it and it really made me think oh, what do I have in my home, you know, that I could do things with? And it, sort of, made you, like, do a little creative project each day just to see, you know, what you're thinking about or feeling about. And it's a way to spoil yourself, I think, yes. (Client 02)*

### Feeling more settled in the local community

As the focus of the project shifted from 'moving on' to semi-independent or independent accommodation to 'moving out' into the public space and exploring the local area, one of the main outcomes for the participants was establishing a sense of place and feeling more connected to the local community. Interviews with staff members confirmed that finding a place in the local community can be challenging for St Mungo's clients.

*Also, the other thing would be the stigma that they may carry with them and their feeling of not belonging in the community, that they're marked somehow, that can be quite profound I think. (St Mungo's Team 02)*

One member of staff suggested that it was this approach of engaging with the local community that distinguished *Performing Local Places* from other group activities taking place at Adamson Road.

*I really like the fact that it is here but it's also in the community. I think that's really important because a lot of people will attend... like we have groups here every week and generally they're*

*relatively well attended but encouraging people to go and do things in the community is the next step and something that's normally a bit more difficult. So the fact that both is happening is really good and just getting people outside and together. (St Mungo's Team 03)*

Especially for clients who had not been at Adamson Road very long, the project allowed them to become more familiar with the local area. Clients interviewed for the evaluation reported having built new associations with the local area that were positive.

*I feel a good atmosphere and I remember myself, colleagues. Before, the triangle, I passed the triangle, it was boring. Now if I pass, for me, it's something that was a place of happiness, interesting. When I pass the triangle at the moment or Swiss Cottage, I feel a very pleasant atmosphere, yes. (Client 03)*

Clients also developed a feeling that they could have a place within the local community or explore further.

*It becomes a bit more mine and it becomes a bit more an adventure, you know? (Client 02)*

*As the days go by, it has made me more stronger, more stronger, and it allowed me to explore more about London, to discover places. Yeah, it was, it had a very positive impact. (Client 04)*

During one of the sessions, one client spoke about how difficult it is to have a sense of belonging when living in a hostel and said how the trails that the group had made during previous sessions had helped her with this. She also said that following the trails the group had made leading into the local community made her feel protected during the rest of the week.

The project also supported clients to feel more confident interacting with people in the local community. Being outside, enabled clients to communicate with other people on the street – neighbours, people waiting at a bus stop, other passers-by. The trail making and performance activities aroused people's curiosity and encouraged communication. A member of the *Performing Local Places* team described one such interaction with a local artist:

*But after a while, it really shifted from making them [the clients] feel like they can change the local area, to making them feel like they are communicating with people in the local area. Doing one of our works, (client) actually met an artist who came up to her and said are you the people who have been hanging all those messages? Thank you so much, I really enjoy them, they really make my day and (client) was just blown away. (PP Team 03)*

Communication with members of the local community also took place more indirectly through leaving behind trails and 'gifts to the community', objects made by the clients or positive messages. This allowed members of the community to engage with what the group had created during the rest of the week, as described by a member of St Mungo's staff:

*I saw neighbours or members of the general public reading them. So again, that makes it seem like this looks really light fun but valuable and interesting. I suppose it brings a smile to your face. I definitely heard about neighbours commenting on it and their children playing in the flour. (St Mungo's Team 02)*

This activity of 'giving to' the community appears to have been particularly important to some of the clients who spoke of feeling good about being able to do this, and like they were contributing to the community.

*Yes, the thing for me was things like the gifting. It's not actually yours, it's something that you've left for other people. Things that have come up for me, that sort of thing, it's like instead of picking something up and taking it away when you think, "Oh, that's nice," it's leaving it for other people. Far too often people see a flower and they go, "Oh that's nice," and pick it whereas leaving it for other people, it's helping to spread the joy. There's not enough of that in the world really. So yes, that sort of thing helped. (Client 01)*

*I feel good, I feel I learn something new every day, every week; it gives me hope and inspiration and confidence to go out into the community and do what they do, and inspire others. (Client 04)*

It also prompted some to think about independent living, explicitly in relation to settling into a community:

*What I've learnt in Performing Local Places is that be free to do what you want. Be free to explore, so that gave me the confidence boost to do that in the community, in the local community, especially when I get my own flat. (Client 04)*

Directly and indirectly engaging with the local community through the project has enabled clients to feel not only more comfortable in the area but also more accepted by the community and reduced the sense of stigma clients felt.

*Yes. So yes, I think things like that will stick in my mind for a long time. Yes, I think it was just hopefully if people in the community knew that we came from here, which is a mental health project, hopefully it's given them a bit more insight into we're not actually that weird. We're not people to be afraid of and we can actually make the community a nicer place to be in. I don't know if that was the aim but I think that's certainly something that's happened. (Client 01)*

## Challenges to facilitation

### Emotional labour

The project team found the transient nature of group membership of the early sessions and the efforts involved in 'holding' the groups and in 'deep listening' very emotionally tiring. Facilitators frequently left the sessions feeling 'drained'. During the length of the project they did not receive the kind of formal supervision that many people working in mental health care settings receive and as a consequence, they turned to one another for emotional support.

*But there is this thing of we've been very, that's why it's the emotional labour again because your brain is just hurting because you're really thinking about every single engagement and how to hold it and are we on the same page. (PP team 01)*

During the later stages of the project the whole team was needed during the trail performances. Different clients moved at quite different speeds and members of the team were frequently engaged in one to one work with individual clients that was an intense experience for the team members. The project manager made constant efforts throughout the week prior to the sessions to engage clients at St Mungo's in the project (see later) and build relationships with clients who showed an interest in participating.

*At the end of the project, now I feel actually a whole mixed bag of emotions because I am physically drained, I am mentally drained. (PP team 03)*

### Boundaries and working within the St Mungo's framework

The *Performing Local Places* team reported instances in which they found the boundaries within which they worked with the clients at St Mungo's were different to the way they worked in other contexts. In particular, one of the facilitators highlighted incidents early on in the project, in which clients arrived at sessions, intoxicated or in a state of poor personal hygiene. They commented that in other challenging environments they had worked in they would not have allowed people to join activities under these conditions. We did not interview clients who did not engage with the project as part of the evaluation so cannot know whether this affected clients' decisions or ability to participate.

These differing approaches to engaging with clients were also reflected in the way the *Performing Local Places* and St Mungo's teams viewed outreach activities. Whereas the *Performing Local Places* team expected the clients to be strongly encouraged to participate, the St Mungo's philosophy of supporting clients to make independent decisions required them to remind the clients about the project rather than persuade them to attend.

### Different perceptions of time

The facilitators spoke about how their sense of control over the time spent on any one activity, or on the session as a whole, was variable from session to session. They spoke about having to work very much 'in the moment' in order to

maintain client engagement and that this led to difficulties in keeping track of time. During the later stages of the project they found that clients would arrive early to the project and facilitators felt it was important to begin soon after they arrived. Similarly, they found that they were unable to keep to a standard finishing time. Some sessions finished early, as clients became too tired to continue, while in others, the clients would maintain their energy and engagement for extended periods of time.

### The role of documenting and evaluating the project

The project coordinator highlighted how her role in the project could sometimes cause difficulties. Two of the clients did not like to have their photographs taken or to appear on video. It was useful to the project that aspects of the project were documented in some way. While the *Performing Local Places* team worked quite hard to ensure that efforts to document the project were sensitive to the clients, at times the work of documenting the project could be delicate. The project coordinator spoke about feeling like she should not be there at times, or that in taking photographs and videoing what was happening, she was violating client trust.

*You feel like you're betraying them, obviously. (client 5) hates being photographed. (client 4) is okay with video but not okay with photos. (client 1) is okay with both. (client 3) and (client 4) are, to a certain extent, also okay with both but (client 3), you have to warm her up. If she sees others say no, she will say no too. (client 4) is fine. So with so many different people you're like, "Actually, I really need this photo of (client 2) but how do I manage (client 5) and her anxiety? I totally understand." So yes... (PP team 03)*

Facilitators also found it challenging to have additional people in the sessions who were involved in documenting or evaluating the project and who were not the core participants for the work.

### Resident outreach work

The *Performing Local Places* team experienced more difficulty in engaging clients in the early stages of the project than expected. Initial plans for 'outreach' activities were less successful than the team initially expected and it took some time to establish a 'core group' of participants. The team used a number of strategies in trying to do this, which evolved over time. These included:

- Posters that were printed and displayed on notice boards and placed under the doors of clients' flats
- Attending breakfast at a local café, which is attended by clients of St Mungo's
- Contacting interested clients early in the week to remind them about the sessions
- Knocking on doors early in the day before the sessions and speaking to interested clients

Even after this core group of participants was established, there were ongoing fluctuations in the group membership, although this appeared to stabilise in the latter stages of the project.

The *Performing Local Places* team raised a number of issues that they believed may have contributed to this instability of group membership:

- **Conflicting appointments** – clients and staff reported that particular clients could not attend due to medical appointments and also because of meetings arranged within the St Mungo's houses
- **Staff turn-over and nature of shift work** – It was intended that St Mungo's staff would play an active role in encouraging clients to take part in the *Performing Local Places* project. However, given the nature of shift work, staff who attended the taster session (and so who best understood the activities) were not necessarily the staff on duty in the immediate run up to, or at the time of, sessions. Those staff on shift on the day of the sessions may not have been as well placed to explain the project to interested clients
- **St Mungo's philosophy** - St Mungo's has a recovery focused philosophy and therefore, staff do not try to persuade clients to take part in activities. Clients must make the decision to join a group for themselves.

- **Illness related factors** – some clients were impacted by low mood and the effects of psychiatric medication which may have impinged on their ability to remember when sessions were occurring or to take part for the full length of sessions.

St Mungo’s staff also highlighted a number of factors that they felt made it difficult for clients to engage:

- **Approach to Outreach** - Staff working with clients on a one to one basis were sensitive to the impact of ‘over doing’ attempts to encourage clients to attend. Some clients could perceive such efforts as attempts to coerce them into doing activities that they did not want to engage with.

*And, be more understanding because someone with mental health, especially when someone has complex mental health you have to be very sensitive to their feelings as well. Even though it is like reminding them and being consistent to them it comes across as you being forceful and you as a staff member you start, kind of, creating a wall where they think “She is annoying me and she is just not listening to me. Why is she not listening to me? I have told her constantly I don’t want to go. I don’t feel like going so why is she doing that?” and the next time you talk to them about something they might enjoy they don’t even want to look at you so it brings a negative relationship between you two and it can be very annoying for them. The next thing you know they will go and report you and say, “I don’t want to work with her.” (St Mungo’s Team 04)*

- **Levels of participant motivation** – Client motivation is a major challenge to engagement in any kind of project or activity. Staff described how it is common for clients not to engage in project activities, possibly due to the effects of mental health difficulties and mental health medication.

*To be honest, because we have a lot of different activities that will come and go and be available at different points, engagement is generally something that’s quite difficult. Or at least getting people to start and to try it for a first time can be really hard. I think that was a challenge. I know that there were a couple of people that once they started coming, would come more regularly but yes, I think that’s one of the biggest challenges, is encouraging people to actually attend. (St Mungo’s Team 03)*

- **Negative associations with Adamson Road as a 24/7 house** – some clients had spent time at Adamson Road in the past. For these clients, going to Adamson Road may have felt like going backwards rather than moving forwards.

*I would speak to a few of them and they would say, “Where is that?” I’d say Adamson Road, Swiss Cottage, it’s a St Mungo’s project. “Oh no, I don’t want to go to a different...” and I’m like, “No. We are not moving you there. It’s just...” and it was like “I don’t want to go there.” They wouldn’t even let you finish, you could tell that they had made up their minds./.../ Yes. I was surprised to see how intimidating it could be just to go to a different service to just attend an event. I don’t know, in their mind it might be something where they feel like instead of making progress they are taking a step backwards. (St Mungo’s Team 04)*

- **Personal history of the clients** - The personal history of people who become clients of St Mungo’s is often characterized by multiple negative life events, homelessness and mental health difficulties. These repeated knock backs can result in strong experiences of stigma and discrimination, which may mean clients are reluctant to engage with new activities or with the local community. For some clients at St Mungo’s, the local community may seem like an unwelcoming or threatening place, and they may not wish to engage in activities that are designed to lead them out into it. For some clients, with very difficult personal histories, the idea of moving on from such events may feel very difficult.

*I think some of our clients have an awful time trying to let go of the past.[...]Perhaps most of that awful time has been in the mental health system, so being sectioned, admitted to hospital, medicated, I don’t know, never mind any involvement with the police or the probation services, being*

*taken away from their children or their children taken away from them or being accused of things that they never did. It's probably easy for me to say well let's forget all about that, tomorrow is another day. Some of the clients have lost a lot and really to come to terms with whatever has happened to them but also what they've lost can be really a huge struggle. [St. Mungo's Team 02]*

## Conclusions

At St Mungo's, staff work using a recovery based approach, to help clients accept their mental health problems and personal history, and to begin building a meaningful future. During the evaluation, we found that the philosophy driving the work of the *Performing Local Places* team broadly converged with that of the St Mungo's team. The *Performing Local Places* team modified the aims of the project to work more closely with clients around the idea of 'moving out' into the local community rather than 'moving on' to less intensively supported accommodation. The original plan for the project was to do performance work that involved creating physically marked trails from Adamson Road to the other less intensively supported St Mungo's residences. Following this change of focus, facilitators helped clients to explore how they felt in their local community through adapting the idea of creating a series of physically marked trails. These activities were designed to subvert the normal or ordinary features of a landscape, for example producing an installation featuring umbrellas on a sunny day. In doing so the work aimed to help clients form a new relationship with their local environment. Through this work they explored ways in which they could make a contribution to the community through 'gifting' art in their local environment. Through these activities, some clients spoke about gaining a different sense of what their place in the local community could be, and some ways expressed a kind of psychological, if not physical, 'moving on'.

There were a number of promising outcomes for clients. This included feeling more positive about the place they live in and their local area, and feeling that they could engage more meaningfully with the local community. For some clients, the project helped them to feel less stigmatised and that it was possible for them to be viewed as people who could help to make the community a nice place to live in.

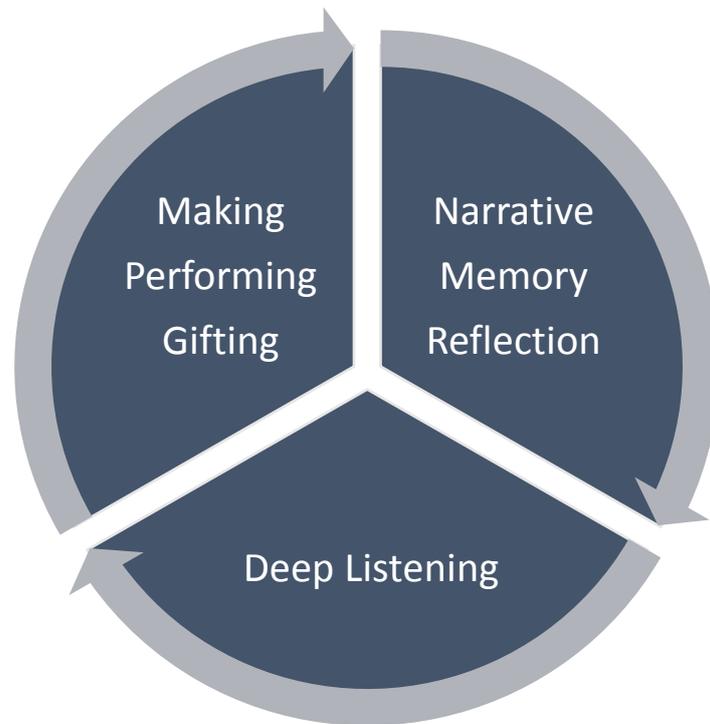
Clients who consistently attended *Performing Local Places* sessions got to know one another, and felt more comfortable talking, socialising and supporting one another. These individuals also described how getting to know one another had made them feel more comfortable in the place they were living.

There was also a positive impact on wellbeing, with clients reporting that they enjoyed the project, and felt more relaxed after the weekly sessions.

### Process of facilitation

At the outset of the *Performing Local Places* project Prof. Mackey outlined a clear framework for the kinds of activities that the project would focus on, which were designed to subvert clients' existing perceptions of the local environment.

Within this framework, the *Performing Local Places* project was of a non-linear nature and was able to be responsive to the narratives and experiences offered up by the clients (see Figure 3). At the beginning of each session, facilitators suggested activities and then used 'deep listening' as clients engaged with the activities. Clients spoke about the thoughts, memories and images that came to mind, and the facilitators used this as the basis for subsequent activities. In later sessions, this process evolved further as facilitators worked with clients to reflect on their experiences in previous weeks and how these experiences connect to other aspects of their life experiences. Figure 3: Flexible and non-linear process of facilitation



## Limits to the evaluation

The *Performing Local Places* team initially struggled to engage participants in the group, and in early sessions there were often more staff present than St Mungo's clients. At times, our participant observer was asked not to participate in some of the activities that the clients engaged in, which impacted on the kind of data she was able to contribute. For example, she may not have been aware of how challenging some of the activities were, as she did not try them herself, which may have affected the way she remembered them when writing her reflection notes after the sessions.

Given the limited number of people engaged throughout the course of the project, we were only able to interview a small number of people for this evaluation. Therefore, it is not possible to comment on how applicable these findings are to other people living in supported accommodation.

In our evaluation aims, we planned to look at client perceptions of 'moving on' and 'home', and how these changed over the project. The *Performing Local Places* team changed the aim of the project to focus more closely on 'moving out' into the local community. This was appropriate given the context of the work, and the fact that several of the participants in the project had only just arrived at St Mungo's and were still in the process of accepting and understanding this. As a result, we did not collect much data on how clients felt about 'moving on', but we were able to gather more data about feeling part of and contributing to the local environment and community than anticipated.

We were unable to speak with clients who decided not to take part in the project, nor (with one exception) those who only engaged for a short period and so are not able to comment from a client perspective on why they may have chosen not to participate or to have disengaged.

## Recommendations

### Time

Creating more time at the outset of the project would allow facilitators to work with clients and St Mungo's staff. This would enable them to build relationships with the staff and clients, which may enable clients to feel more

confident in participating in some of the more demanding activities. From a practical perspective, planned activities took longer to complete than initially expected, including the formation of a group who consistently attended sessions. Only once a core group was established, were the facilitators able to do work that was more challenging to participants, effectively meaning that work that was potentially more useful received less time. We would recommend running this project over a longer time period in this type of setting.

### *Supervision*

Because of the permeable boundaries of this work and the deep emotional engagement required by the facilitators, it would be a recommendation that appropriate clinical supervision is put in place to ensure there is ongoing active space for reflection. (In the follow-up project, facilitators arranged clinical supervision.)

### *Working with St Mungo's staff*

Staff working on a day-to-day basis with clients were not always best placed to explain the project to potential participants. There was also some suggestion that they felt repeatedly reminding clients about the project was not appropriate to the clients they worked with. We would recommend regular planning meetings between the St Mungo's staff and the Performing Places team throughout any future extension of the project, to enable all parties to fully understand the aims of the project and how they could best work together to improve client engagement. (The *Performing Local Places* team held a post-project reflection and explanation day with the St Mungo's staff to explore with them, further, the underlying rationale for the work. This built upon the original staff taster session.)

### *Documenting the project*

Using video and photography to document the project caused some problems for some of the clients, and the presence of an extra observer could be difficult given the small size of the group. The Performing Local Places worked with clients to avoid taking photos/video of them, as appropriate. For projects of this kind, we would recommend careful consideration in project design about the forms of documentation that are suitable given the nature of the clients involved, including exploring options with potential clients, should documentation be needed.

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## About the McPin Foundation

The McPin Foundation is a charity dedicated to improving the quality of mental health research by increasing involvement of people with lived experience of mental health problems. Our approach to research and evaluation focuses on the following:

- developing collaborative and user-focused mental health research with individuals, families and carers who have experience of mental health problems
- encouraging and supporting individuals, families and carers who have experience of mental health problems to get involved in research
- partnering with organisations to deliver public and patient involvement in research studies
- collaborating widely with individuals and organisations to ensure our work benefits everyone affected by mental health problems

We believe:

- The best quality research and services will emerge from combining high quality research expertise with insight developed through first-hand experience of the subject being researched.
- People who access services have the right to help shape the research that impacts on the treatments they receive.
- An effective mental health system should be user-focused, based on knowledge and science that intrinsically includes the voices and expertise of people affected by mental health problems.
- Involving people with mental health problems and their families in research can improve the quality of research by:
  - ensuring that research asks the questions that have the greatest impact on people's lives;
  - helping researchers engage positively and ethically with participants;
  - challenging researchers' assumptions in their study design and data interpretation;
  - making study findings accessible and engaging for a wider variety of audiences;
  - empowering people with mental health problems to use their expertise to make a difference;
  - challenging stigma around the ability of those with mental health problems to help shape research.

One of the core strategies to implementing the above principles in research and evaluation is to employ 'peer' researchers who have lived experience of mental health problems themselves.