Creating Change

*An Applied Theatre Intervention
for Hampshire & Isle of Wight
Community Rehabilitation Company*

Evaluation Report 2018/19

by Alexandra Russell

Content

"Out of all the courses I've done this has been the most positive and rewarding one"

Service user, Southampton

Executive summary

Introduction & context

- Creating Change is a partnership between Hampshire Cultural Trust (HCT), Hampshire & Isle of Wight Community Rehabilitation Company (HIOW CRC) and BearFace Theatre (BFT).
- In 2017/18 HCT & BFT delivered a 3-session programme in six Women's Centres funded by HIOW CRC through a Purple Futures Innovation grant.
- Further funding obtained from the Office of the Hampshire Police & Crime Commissioner (OPCC) to extend the offer in 2018/19 as this 6-session programme in five Women's Centres.
- HCT secured further funds from Hampshire OPCC to develop Creating Change into an 8-session course in 2019/20 for the existing five HIOW CRC Women's Centres.

Attendance

- 70 service users accessed the intervention across five CRC Women's Centres (Basingstoke, Aldershot, Cosham, Southampton and Isle of Wight).
- 50% of service users attended 4-6 sessions.
- A major factor when trying to understand attendance patterns is the often complex, unpredictable and chaotic life circumstances of service users that compromise their ability to commit fully to a programme.

Questionnaires

- Significant increases in service users self-scoring across all five CRC Women's Centres, suggesting clear improvements in personal development (areas include making positive life changes, self-reflection, empathy, self-esteem, confidence, social bonds etc.).

Group Observations

- Service users placed high value on the Creating Change programme being a female only environment.
- All service users appear to respond positively to the active, participatory and creative methods of the programme.

Creating Change programme

- It is a strength based and pro social programme for service users wanting to make a positive difference in their lives and desist from crime.
- Facilitators display an exceptional ability to build a trusting and positive rapport with service users and put the group at ease to allow them to reveal and reflect on a genuine version of themselves.

"I actually feel like a different person... meeting different people and seeing other people's lives, amongst my own...it's made me want to change what I do in the future and help people, maybe tell my story… because things can hit bloody rock bottom but you can change your life, I'm proof of that!"

Service user, Aldershot

Key words: *Service users are female participants that took part in the Creating Change programme as part of their Probation order*

1. Introduction

The partnership between Hampshire Cultural Trust (HCT), Hampshire & Isle of Wight Community Rehabilitation Company (HIOW CRC) and BearFace Theatre (BFT) has been developing and strengthening over several years, delivering the Creating Change programme. In 2017/18 HCT & BFT delivered a 3-session programme in six Women's Centres funded by HIOW CRC through a Purple Futures Innovation grant. That led to an application to the Office of the Hampshire Police & Crime Commissioner (OPCC) to extend the offer in 2018/19 as a 6-session programme to the revised five Women's Centres. Based on positive feedback HCT have secured further funds from Hampshire OPCC to develop Creating Change into an 8-session course in 2019/20 for the existing five HIOW CRC Women's Centres.

2. Context

Creating Change is an arts intervention programme designed for HIOW CRC Women's Centres to inspire positive change on Service Users' journeys towards achieving better life chances for women on their journey to desistance. Creating Change aims to encourage CRC Service Users to identify, moderate and manage their attitudes, thinking and behaviours in order to make positive changes in their own lives. The programme aims to encourage personal development and life skills, and is modelled on a strength based approach that promotes a pro social identity for service users.

This research evaluation is based on evidence taken from five CRC Women's Centres in Hampshire. The Creating Change programme consisted of 6 sessions (2 hours per session). A total of 70 service users accessed the programme from across the county at the following 5 CRC Women's Centres: -

1. Basingstoke (21.05.18 – 02.07.18)
2. Aldershot (12.06.18 – 17.07.18)
3. Cosham (12.09.18 – 17.10.18)
4. Southampton (01.11.18 – 06.12.18)
5. Isle of Wight (09.01.19 – 13.02.19)

"From coming a few months ago with no confidence... now I feel like I'm building my life, I'm growing, my confidence is coming back, and I'm changing my life. So positive!"

Service user, Aldershot

3. Methods

Using documentary research methods and ethnographic fieldwork, the project implemented a bespoke methodology and set of tools for feedback/data collection. It aimed to offer flexibility and respond to the needs, abilities and dynamics of programme service users. The research framework was specifically designed to ensure the voices of service users were meaningfully captured during each programme.

Service users were offered the opportunity to contribute throughout the monitoring and evaluation process, with a range of tools employed to investigate the collective thinking, attitudes and behavior of service users (aligned with the three main research aims in section 4). These tools aimed to provide rich qualitative evidence to aid analysis of any potential impact of the BFT process on service users.

The researcher attended every session across all five CRC Women's Centres. The following methods were applied at various stages of the programme:

- **Group Observations**
- **Unstructured Interviews**
- **Questionnaires** *(pre and post programme)*
- **Personal Reflective Statements** *(written by service users)*

Ethical considerations underpinned every aspect of the research. Anonymity was guaranteed to all service users as part of a best practice framework. Informed consent was also gained from all contributors. As well as tailoring the process to take account of the vulnerability and needs of service users, all service users were clearly informed that they could choose to remove their contributions at any stage of the process. Confidentiality was only guaranteed if service users were not in immediate physical or emotion danger.

"This programme has changed me"

Service user, Cosham

4. Programme aims

- **Reduce Reoffending** *(the duration of each programme was potentially limiting when attempting to evidence any impact on desistence. The Justice Data Lab could offer a possible opportunity to analyse offending trends of service users post programme).*

- **Positive personal development for Service Users**

- **Connect Service Users into new pro social networks in their communities**

5. Research aims

Research participants: Service users (women) and facilitators (BFT)

This aimed to robustly investigate the following three main aims of the Creating Change programme: -

1. Investigate any positive impact of the Creating Change programme on service user thinking, attitudes and behaviour (*informed by the Seven Resettlement Pathways to Reducing Reoffending and the Interchange model)*

2. To use the authentic voices of service users to inform and shape the analysis of this research project.

3. Apply a newly designed theory of change (section 7) as a framework to deconstruct and interpret any perceived benefits of the Creating Change programme on service users.

6. The programme

6.1 Learning spaces

The five centres varied considerably in terms of learning spaces provided for programme delivery. The most effective and well received spaces by service users and facilitators appeared to be those with the following features: -

- Plenty of windows and day light
- Windows that could be opened to allow for fresh air
- Enough chairs for all service users to sit comfortably

- Enough space for the whole group to move freely around the room for active and participatory exercises
- Access to tea and coffee making facilities for break out time
- Private and secure from any non-service users/supporting staff observations
- Close to public transport connections

6.2 BearFace Theatre CIC

BFT design and deliver strength based and pro social programmes for service users wanting to make a positive difference in their lives and desist from crime. Their approach appears to promote co-ownership between facilitators and service users. The Creating Change programme is informed by the Interchange Model of best practice and offers an innovative and forward looking programme that, 'encourages individual responsibility and active citizenship'. They aim to create an *'offence free'* environment to allow service users to be vulnerable in the space, re define their sense of self beyond their previous offending behaviour and begin to build a new narrative to enable them to shift their identity from offender to participant.

The Creating Change programme aims to establish effective **transformative learning environments** that actively and consciously avoid delivering a product driven process. The programmes ability to create opportunities to be vulnerable within the space appears to allow service users an opportunity to present a genuine version of themselves. This is achieved through the facilitation of active, creative and participatory exercises that are delivered using a bottom up approach and places the group as co-learners throughout the process. This method helps to ensure all content and direction is generated from the service users to offer the greatest relevance and meaning to any given group on their journey to desistence.

Service users engage in an experiential learning process that encourages them to **act and learn equality** and conceive of a more positive future. Something that non offenders often take for granted. BFT have designed the Creating Change programme to work towards **de-labelling and re-humanising offenders** to help them **lead positive lives back within their communities,** aligned with the Interchange model. The programme is built on the premise that most **people have the capacity for personal change** when motivated, given the chance to express themselves differently and the opportunity to try out new ways of relating to other people.

The group play out and visualise real world scenarios and deconstruct their meaning through collective group discussion. A group is asked a series of questions to encourage depth of thought and critical analysis without offering any answers during the problem solving process. It is for the service users to create their own narrative around possible alternatives to the problems they enact and collectively explore different perspectives and approaches.
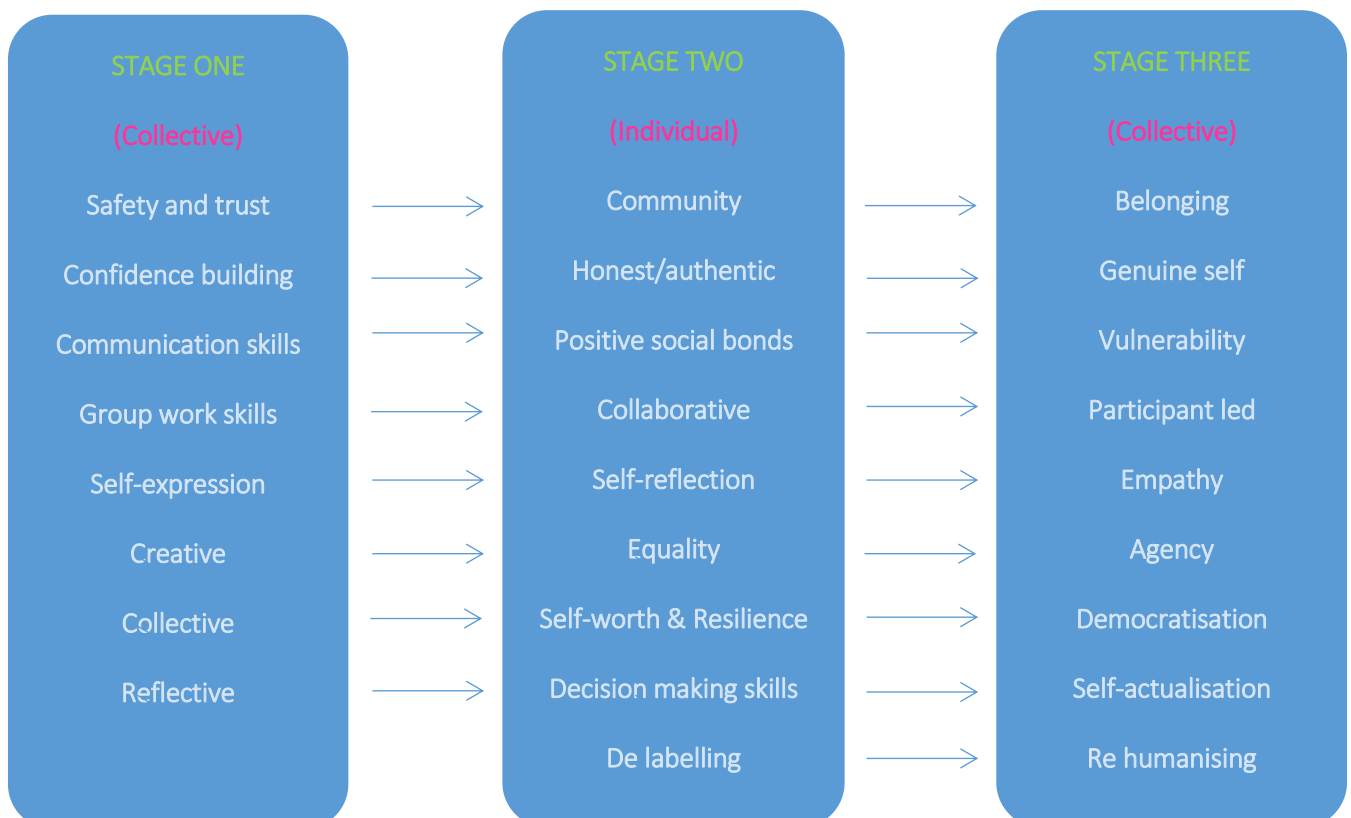
BFT encourage service users to articulate positive interpretations of negative entrenched attitudes, thinking and behaviours by performing and reimagining alternative outcomes. Service users are supported to rehearse new versions of

themselves and ultimately reshape their own thinking, attitudes and behaviours. This process results in often deep and complex discussions occurring spontaneously between service users and facilitators which establish a sense of equality and democratisation within the group.

The process of devising non scripted story and narrative appears to require service users to develop interpersonal skills that enable them to negotiate, compromise, problem solve, communicate ideas effectively to persuade others. It is a fluid and organic process. Service users are encouraged to trust the facilitators and others in the group enough to be guided through a series of activities that have the potential to take them outside of their normal comfort zones and challenge their sense of self.

7. Theory of change

Initial observations and interview evidence findings suggest that some service users moved through three progressive and interconnecting stages of transformation within a programme. The three stages are cited below and depict a six week programme of 3 blocks of two. These stages suggest interconnecting socially and individually impactful outcomes that service users appear to experience at different stages over the duration of the programme. It appears stages two and three can only be achieved once service users are able to be vulnerable within the space and reveal a genuine version of themselves. This can only occur if a safe and trusting space has been established and a growing sense of equality and positive social bonds are promoted. Current findings appear to indicate that service users need to complete at least 4 sessions (preferably consecutively) to begin to start articulating examples of group and individual transformation.

STAGE ONE	STAGE TWO	STAGE THREE
(Collective)	(Individual)	(Collective)
Safety and trust	Community	Belonging
Confidence building	Honest/authentic	Genuine self
Communication skills	Positive social bonds	Vulnerability
Group work skills	Collaborative	Participant led
Self-expression	Self-reflection	Empathy
Creative	Equality	Agency
Collective	Self-worth & Resilience	Democratisation
Reflective	Decision making skills	Self-actualisation
	De labelling	Re humanising

Some service users appear to struggle to articulate the deeper level emotional impact of the programme (as shown in stages 2 and 3). This could be a result of a lack of access to the sophisticated language required to effectively communicate their experiences to achieve stages 2 and 3. This potentially impacts the accuracy of the research findings and suggests that some service users will always struggle to fully articulate any deeper level impact. The interviews highlighted significant levels of frustration from some service users during interviews that they struggled to find the words to express the depth of their experiences on the programme. It may be that some service users are never able to effectively communicate their experiences of the programme or are unable to attain stage 3.

"I wouldn't say or admit it to your face but the last 6 weeks have been incredible. I got it, I'm getting so much out of it. I didn't feel odd or your superior or different being there, but part of a safe group. I was expecting a bunch of hardened criminals yet I met a bunch of everyday people. Sorted"

Service user, Basingstoke

(sent via text to an Case Manager one week post programme)

8. Delivery

8.1 Organisational support

CRC support staff appear to play a valuable role in encouraging service users to participate in the Creating Change programme. Consistent and positive participation in all sessions appeared to establish the following positive responses from both service users and BFT facilitators: -

1. Enabled service users to quickly settle into the group and contribute ideas, experiences and opinions more effectively.
2. Offered additional support within a group of service users with complex needs
3. Reassured those service users that initially felt unsure of taking part in the programme.
4. Presented a united and cohesive impression for service users that staff valued the programme and understood the worth of it for service users.

8.2 Barriers to participation

Some of the key barriers to participation included: -

1. Complex life circumstances of service users required them to leave sessions early or not be able to attend. During interviews service users spoke of their frustration at not being able to fully commit to the programme.
2. Length of the programme limited the opportunity for service users to progress to stages 2 and 3 of the theory of change (section 7).
3. Alcohol consumption; attending under the influence.
4. Sporadic attendance of Case Managers and some service users.

5. Case Managers should be present and participating in all group activities (this also affords service users the opportunity to discuss external life factors outside of session time).

8.3 Service user attendance

The below graphs provide a total overview of service user attendance across all five CRC Women's Centres (graphs for individual centres can be found in the appendix of this report). It would appear that **a major factor when trying to understand attendance patterns is the often complex, unpredictable and chaotic life circumstances of service users that compromised their ability to commit fully to a programme**. A significant number of service users spoke openly within group time and during 1:1 interviews about their desire to complete the programme but that external factors had meant this was often not possible.

Some of the most common reasons given for absences were attributed to appointments for substance related health care, signing on, work, lack of child care, attending interviews. The data suggests an interesting trend for those service users that managed to attend 3 consecutive sessions were markedly more likely to complete the programme. The Theory of Change (in section 6) suggests that for service users to be able to start to articulate moments of transformation in their attitudes, thinking and behaviour, they need to complete at least 4 sessions of a programme.

50% of service users completed 4-6 sessions
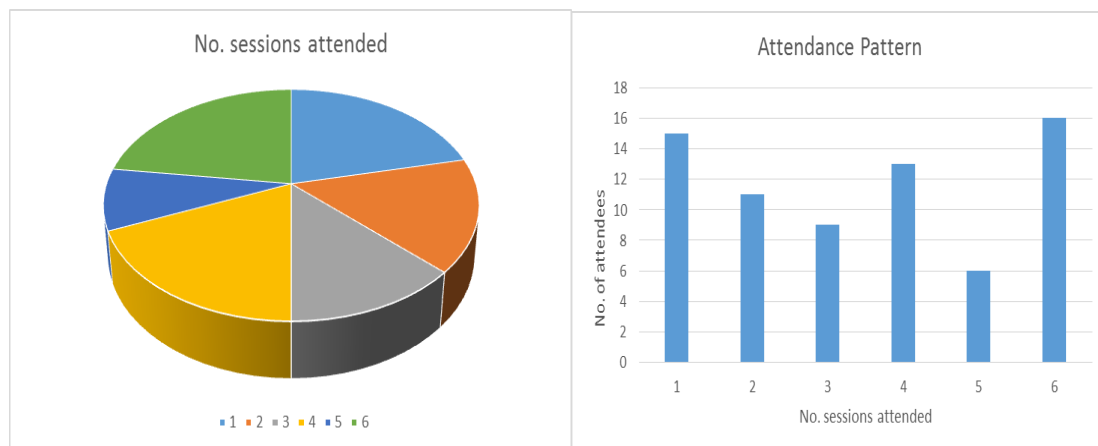
"I really enjoyed it, so I really didn't want to miss it. I've never done drama classes like this before. For me, it's all about getting to know other people, finding out my strengths and my weaknesses and getting motivated by other people. Really, really good, I really like it, I look forward to it. I feel really, really privileged and really lucky to be taking part in it. I'm enjoying everything that's coming along. It's surprising me each time, but in a good way! You get to play different people! It's good. I'm loving it, I don't want it to end!"

Service user, Southampton

8.4 Group Observations

Key 10 observations from each of the five CRC Women's Centres

Basingstoke

1. "The space resembles a women's prison" stated two service users at the start of the session (this is also agreed upon by other participants).
2. Some service users initially consider the warm up games (used to establish a positive collective rapport between everyone in the group) as 'childish'.
3. Facilitators initially focus on building a safe space to encourage self-expression and personal honesty. Participants display low levels of self-worth and describe feeling a lack of trust towards others and high levels of anxiety.
4. Limited levels of trust initially shown by service users to facilitators. Some of the most vulnerable participants negatively question and criticise actions of the facilitators.
5. Facilitators appear to be open, energetic, genuine, positive and encouraging of everyone's efforts and contributions.
6. Many participants share personal and significant life events with the group (many of whom they have only met today). This could signify a rapid increase of trust in the space or a powerful desire from the women to tell their stories.
7. Lots of laughter and joking by participants – this appears partially defensive and born out of anxiety.
8. Facilitators create numerous opportunities to reflect and deconstruct what each exercise means to individuals and as a collective group. Participants often relate these reflections to their lives.
9. Participants begin to show a desire to tell their stories. The facilitators expertly extract the main shared themes from these stories and ask service users to consider theatre as a lump of clay that is moulded and re moulded to create meaningful understanding of what was, what is and what can be in the choices of their lives.
10. A service user that was initially the most reluctant to take part in the first session is now helping to lead activities with facilitators and has become one of the most vocal members of the group.

Aldershot

1. First questionnaire indicates most participants struggle to think of 5 things that they like about themselves. Participants share examples of traumatic and complex life circumstances.
2. Participant's levels of self-worth are generally low – describing a lack of trust for others and high levels of anxiety.
3. Safe space is being established through 'check in' process that allows participants an opportunity to share significant life experiences from the previous week.
4. One participant describes a moment of control outside of the space during week 2 when she was in a moment of potential violence but chose to walk away from the situation.
5. One participant states, "she is only here because she has to come"
6. The group openly discusses the value they place on the programme being just for women and that this makes them feel safer.
7. Spontaneous and genuine examples of laughter, cheering and applause from participants and facilitators that appear to be used to encourage and support members of the group.
8. Social bonds are being created within the group – exampled by participants choosing to spend the break together as a group
9. Probation service staff members have requested the opportunity to access this programme for their professional development.
10. Service users begin to reveal a more genuine aspect of their persona and drop some of the bravado they first presented with.

Cosham

1. Facilitators display an exceptional ability to build a trusting and positive rapport with participants and put the group at ease to allow them to reveal a genuine version of themselves. They present a relaxed and authentic partnership that appears to encourage the more reluctant participants to voice opinions and take a risk by taking part in what seems to be unfamiliar and potentially exposing activities.
2. Most questionnaires show a strong desire to make a positive change in their lives.
3. All service users appear to respond highly positively to the active and participatory methods of the programme. Participants show excellent levels of focus, laughter and encouragement of others – potentially highlighting empathetic qualities in the group.
4. Service users state that they feel they can be themselves in this group as they are treated like a normal person.
5. Sporadic attendance can negatively shift the group dynamic and make it hard to manage. This can be a time consuming process as participants become more closed to sharing a more genuine identity in front of unknown participants. It is the ability to be vulnerable in the space that appears to yield the greatest opportunities for self-reflection and identity deconstruction.
6. Bravado and laughter is still occasionally used as a defence mechanism during some of the more demanding and exposing exercises.
7. All Service users take part in every exercise and no one chooses to sit out. It is also interesting to note that no one within the group questions the process they are experiencing.
8. It appears the active, creative and participatory exercises are positioned as prompts for discussion.
9. The investment participants' show in this context appears to be quite remarkable in reliance to other Probation programmes. They show ownership over each exercise and display a sense of empowerment through the collective and participant led aspect of the programme.
10. Case Managers in the space would occasionally sit in a corner of the learning space and work on laptops and use their mobile phones. This was obviously distracting for service users and facilitators during sessions.

Southampton

1. None of the participants had heard about the course and did not have pre-existing relationships outside of the group.
2. Laughter and humour permeate the group from the first session as participants relax and begin the process of building social bonds.
3. Participants and staff comment on having never taken part in a course like this before – something as active and fun as this programme.
4. Generally very low levels of self-esteem and self-belief in this group. Tangible anxiety and low mood.
5. The programme appears to stir up deep emotions within participants. These emotions are deep rooted and real. One participant states, "people can't usually tell what I'm thinking because I look fine but I can't hide anything from you lot – you see me!"
6. There is total focus and concentration during each activity. The facilitators are never required to ask individuals to be quiet or pay attention. There is a sense that everyone (including facilitators) are in this together and on the same journey of personal and group discovery.
7. One of the participants struggled with one of the exercises as it reminded her of living on the streets. The facilitators listened to her concerns and immediately changed the exercise to accommodate her needs. This perhaps shows a high level of flexibility and an example of their bottom up approach to ensuring participants fare co-learners within the process and have ownership over the direction of the work.
8. Facilitators have implicitly given participants 'permission to play' through modelling their own genuine, open and expressive behaviour. This appears to allow participants to enjoy themselves which relaxes them and makes them more susceptible to self-reflection and viewing (sometimes entrenched attitudes and thinking) from an alternative perspective.
9. Humour, laughter and nurturing within the learning space offers opportunities to de label women from being an offender to offer a more authentic identity and help participants explore a possible future self-post their time on probation.
10. This is a space to be listened to, that values participants contributions, connects them with others with similar experiences, offers a safe space to play, encourages them to consider their own needs and promotes optimism for their futures (even though their lives are often chaotic, complex and socially and economically challenging).

Isle of Wight

1. Centre is clean, bright and inviting. The room being used for delivery has been decorated with art work create by service users. The environment feels safe, warm and friendly. Supporting staff member participates in all the activities and offers encouragement to those participants that initially struggle with the transition between talk based group work and becoming more active, creative and participatory. She is a massive assert to the success of the group.

2. Within the first activity laughter begins as soon as participants understand the game, begin working together towards a share goal and start physicalising/being active. Participants appear to be far more likely to spontaneously offer group/personal reflections once they're on their feet and being active and participatory.

3. Participants show heightened levels of compassion and empathy for each other – especially when hearing other women talk about the trauma of their life experiences.

4. Participants attribute the rapid speed of revealing a genuine version of themselves in the group to being treated as human beings by facilitators.

5. Many participants presented with blank and emotionless faces when they first started the group. Participants acknowledge this shift and explain this is a leaned skill that protects them from the dangers of the world – avoiding exposure as a method of defence.

6. Two women speak to the rest of the group about this programme being their greatest inspiration in their lives. One of these women explains that she now feels more like herself again and full of confidence. She has applied this experience in her real life to get a job at Sainsbury's.

7. Remarkable levels of honesty communicated by those participants that have attended the most sessions. They appear to own the space and are perceived as confident by others in the group, although they initially presented with high degrees of bravado in the first sessions.

8. Two participants attended the session today drunk or under the influence of substances. They appear to be high functioning and were still able to occasionally contribute ideas within the group. However this proved to be distracting for other participants and potentially unhelpful in relation to their own journey to sobriety.

9. The programme promotes a diplomatic process – one where facilitators and participants are effectively 'co-learners' on a journey of self-discovery and self-actualisation together. This approach helps to establish equality in the space by acknowledging that there is no difference between anyone in the space as everyone is treated as a human being.

10. Some participants appear to lose focus during some of the more challenging exercises that require a greater intensity of self-reflection and critical analysis of their decision making processes. However all women stay committed to each activity and seem to gain strength from a sense of collective compassion and encouragement shown by both facilitators and participants.

9. Impact

This section offers an insight into the authentic voices of service users and an opportunity to better understand the impact of the Creating Change programme. Using interviews, group observations, personal reflective statements and questionnaires, service users articulate their experiences of taking part in the programme and offer some compelling and positive examples of individual and group transformation in relation to changes in attitudes, thinking and behaviour.

The following extracts were gathered pre, during and post programme from all five CRC Women's Centres. The theory of change (section 6) was specifically designed around the BFT approach and is used here as a helpful framework to organise and connect service users responses to the research aims set out in section 2 of this report.

STAGE ONE

Safety and trust / Confidence building / Communication skills / Group work skills / Self-expression / Creative / Collective / Reflective

1. "I found this quite helpful for building confidence".
2. "Everyone was like 'uh - drama!' but I was like "honestly, you will love it, the ladies are wonderful, what they do is amazing and the reasons behind what they do", and it's just… I'm over the moon you were coming back, I was really pleased"
3. "We all seem to work as a team. I do put on a front - a second face - we don't want people to know how we're feeling. I'm not really a confident person. I've seen people open up since they first came here. People have really come out of their shell. It helps you build in confidence. This allows you to be yourself. Normally you don't allow time for yourself. You're doing a fantastic job"
4. "This has brought me out of my shell a bit as I don't normally like doing anything or speaking in front of other people"
5. "This has given me confidence and positive thinking – confidence to take part and talk with others I don't know. I'd like to join a theatrical group after this programme. I need to find something to do with my time now – my whole life has revolved around drink and drugs. I'm an introvert so the drama side gets me out of myself because we are all in character it doesn't have to be spot light on me so I don't have to get nervous about it"
6. "We all work together like a team here"
7. "I don't have a social life – I just have my cat. This is an escape route for me out of my life and a chance to be social. Everyone is just so friendly. This makes people feel better about themselves and be more confident and gives that lift to not be a dogsbody but be someone"
8. "I'm finding the whole experience humbling. That last session was quite powerful – they're all such nice and warm people. Friendly. Outgoing. Kindly.

I've done loads of different courses and training for work but nothing like this. We're all having fun and laughing"

9. "I'm getting, like, more confident, like I've only just recently moved into this area, to a refuge, so when I first come here I was like really anxious and I didn't know anybody at all. I'm starting to come out of myself and get my confidence back"

"People here are being honest and are comfortable to trust. This has helped me so much, this could not have come at a better time in my life, of being like, an alcoholic basically, so I have had so much support, I'll never forget this. It is life-changing, that's exactly what it is!"

Service user, Aldershot

STAGE TWO

Community / Honest/authentic / Positive social bonds / Collaborative / Self-reflection / Equality / Self-worth & Resilience / Decision making skills / De labelling

1. "Some things are quite helpful for me here – it makes me think of different things in a way I'd not thought about them before. In a good way"
2. "I'll always shy away from things like talking to people – new people especially. I've never wanted to do anything like drama or acting before. But you're making me think now about joining a drama group coz I think it could be good for me as it's something I feared but there isn't really anything to fear"
3. "Everyone gets a say here but you don't have to go into anything too deep. You don't have to learn a big speech or a script"
4. "Everyone in this group has a bond together – their body language looks like they're actually listening. BearFace girls get us up and motivated, working as a team. I think it's really good"
5. "I would say that this programme is well worth doing for other people who have problems like me. It's a bit of drama and a bit of banta – everyone mixes really well"
6. "We are lots of different people from different backgrounds but when we're here it feels like we're one"
7. "It [the programme] makes you think of things differently… and it's really strange... I can't explain... the way you girls [facilitators] do it, is just brilliant, because you know, it is when you sit down after we've done a certain thing, that's when you see everyone go 'oh my god, yeah' and that's when it rings true and all of that sort of stuff with me, it sticks there, it really does"
8. "I feel calm. The facilitators know what they're doing – the games might look like being back at school but it makes you start thinking about things in a different way. If you just sit around and have a chat it makes it personal but playing games helps you relate to each other's experiences in a more general way"
9. "I can relate because we're not being judgemental or being judged I feel I can relax here, I feel safe here. I want this programme to help me feel more resilient and build my self-esteem. I will think back to this programme when I go about my real life to give me strength"

10. "I just find it very hard to communicate but they've [facilitators] have been brilliant. We've all done it together. As it goes on I let down my guard and makes friends. I have trust issues - so for me it was nice for me to see things in a different way - and thinking about the people that are there for me. I'm doing this to build myself back up again - I've had a lot of life knocks"

11. "It just makes me feel part of society again. Meeting all these women, we've all got such different problems in our lives, yet we're all so alike"

12. "I was looking forward to coming today. I thoroughly enjoy it. It's the interaction – we seem to have so much fun and things to think about as well, so it's a combination of mindfulness, laughter and getting to know the ladies better. I find this group lovely. We have bonded as a group and it's nice to talk with other women in a safe environment. As we're all moving around and we're physically touching each other or supporting each other it makes a world of difference. It makes a world of difference from just sitting down and talking. You can observe the other women and get information about their behaviour as to their personalities. They're probably doing the same with me. So it's helping us learn more about each other. It's getting to know people better. There just wouldn't be an opportunity to do that if we were all just sat down. I think the facilitators are brilliant – very vocal – they're bringing up stuff in people that people wouldn't normally talk about. They're so encouraging and everyone is participating. I'm thoroughly enjoying it and I'll keep on coming back. What they're doing is amazing and very important"

13. "I really enjoyed it, so I really didn't want to miss it. I've never done drama classes like this before. For me, it's all about getting to know other people, finding out my strengths and my weaknesses and getting motivated by other people. Really, really good, I really like it, I look forward to it. I feel really, really privileged and really lucky to be taking part in it. I'm enjoying everything that's coming along. It's surprising me each time, but in a good way! You get to play different people! It's good. I'm loving it, I don't want it to end!"

STAGE THREE

Belonging / Genuine self / Vulnerability / Participant led / Empathy / Agency / Democratisation / Self-actualisation / Re humanising

1. "I'm a fun loving person but I try to be what everyone wants me to be. But a lot of times these smiles are just a cover up. I just want someone to understand me as a person. I need some help. This group sees you as an actual person – you don't get judged"

2. "I think this programme is touching a nerve with everyone – its triggering answers I've never thought about in relation to the situations we act out. It's making me think - it's making everyone think! This is about real people that all have a different point of view and some of it is quite strong stuff. I've enjoyed [the programme] and I'm getting a lot out of it"

3. "This drama helps you think a bit more before you do an action which is really helpful. It's like a game but it opens your mind in how to reach a certain point but not in the normal way. I've been to prison. This helps you not feel sorry for yourself or be scared to tell other people what you've been through. You can still laugh and have a good time while talking about very serious things like our

offences. This programme is a good way to evolve in a positive way. They're helping me make different, more positive decisions and I want to come here because it's helping me"

4. "For a long time, the thought of going out by myself and people around me used to terrify me. But now I can walk to the bus stop here and not just look at the ground. I can now look around. Having to be with people on this programme has helped. I'm not scared anymore. This programme has forced me to get out into life"

5. "I find it interactive – I like interactive things. When I first came in I felt apprehensive because of the diversity of people but after the first exercise I think everyone really relaxed and gelled. People have really opened up and it's nice to see how other people interact as well. It's not just about me, it's about other people"

6. "You're not acting – you're being yourself. I just really enjoy it and that is why I keep coming back. Getting up and doing things makes this much more of a laugh! It goes in but rather than just talking you get to have a laugh with it as it's active"

7. "It's so much fun and it does help you in different ways. It's made me more confident – this has helped us all come together as women coz we didn't know each other. I normally don't like groups but it was a lot easier – helping each other out. I think getting up and doing theatre/drama gets in your head a lot more. You're having a laugh and you want to come – coz you're having a laugh it's a lot easier to remember instead of sitting at a desk. This has helped me trust in people. This has shown me that I can do better- I even had a few days off from drinking last week. I'm learning to take help, rather than running away from it. I think this programme should have more sessions – maybe 8. You know they [BFT] want to help you just by how they are. I'd like to thank them [BFT] for helping me and trusting me"

8. "I'm trying to think about it, from this group, out of any of the others, I would say I've started to really realise what my triggers are that make me react in a bad way and how to change how I react. I like this course"

9. "There's a lesson behind everything. Not just – let's all run around like lunatics – there is a lesson at the end of it, which is a reason for why we're doing it. I think one of the best things since I've been here was the bombs and shields, and I mean, I'm 47, and I just get on with things, but doing that bombs and shields thing, the majority of the girls in the group, chose me as their shield, rather than their bomb, so they see me as a safe person, not a dangerous person, and that was really eye-opening for me, in a group of people that I don't really know, seeing me as a safe person instead of someone that is going to be destructive in their life. I thought was quite touching"

There was also one example of a service user that struggled to participate in the sessions (Basingstoke CRC Women's Centre). It is potentially significant that out of 70 service users that took part in the research, only one articulated a dislike of the Creating Change programme (although it would be difficult to evidence whether this is representative or due to the self-silencing of other service users). Her comments from her interview are cited below:

"I'm not a drama oriented person. They are really nice girls but it's not my cup of tea. I've suffered from depression all my life and I never know which one of me I'm going to be. Sometimes I can be really positive and want to get on with stuff but other times

I don't want to leave the house. The others are learning to communicate their feelings for the first time. I think some of them find it really fun. I think drama loosens people up, you get more action and truth from people with drama but I'd get really fed up with having to do this programme on-going or again"

9.1 Questionnaire findings

Across all five CRC Women's Centres the greatest variations on pre and post questionnaire scores offer an insight into service user's journey of progression through the Creating Change programme. **Increases in confidence, empathy for others, understanding cause and effect and self-worth presented the most significant improvements** (questionnaire graphs and figures can be found in the appendix). A potential challenge with conducting pre and post programme questionnaires is the sporadic attendance of some service users. This resulted in a loss of data due to some service users leaving the programme early without any notice to the programme organisers.

9.2 Service user key goals

The following goals were shared by service users on their starter questionnaire. They present an interesting correlation with the 3 stages suggested in the theory of change model (section 6). However, it is significant to highlight that not all service users are capable of articulating the impact of their journey through the Creating Change programme beyond stage one. For some service users their experiential learning journey was limited to progressing no further than stage one due to factors stated in the attendance section of this report (i.e. sporadic attendance). The key goals stated by service users below are not always confined to one stage of the theory of change model – they often overlap into other stages progressively.

STAGE ONE

Safety and trust / Confidence building / Communication skills / Group work skills / Self-expression / Creative / Collective / Reflective

- Build confidence and self-esteem
- Positivity and strength
- Share my story with other women (and hear theirs)

STAGE TWO

Community / Honest/authentic / Positive social bonds / Collaborative / Self-reflection / Equality / Self-worth & Resilience / Decision making skills / De labelling

- Friendship *(developing social bonds)*
- Learning to be honest
- To believe in myself again
- Learn to help others
- Consistency of being clean from substances

STAGE THREE

Belonging / Genuine self / Vulnerability / Participant led / Empathy / Agency / Democratisation / Self-actualisation / Re humanising

- New ways of thinking and acting
- Learn how to be happy
- Learn to be a better person
- Understand myself better
- Get back into employment

9.3 Group discussions

The Creating Change programme appears to allow for a succession of different voices to be heard within a group during the active and participatory exercises, as well as during the discussions that follow. No one voice appears dominant during sessions which could be attributed to the expertise of the facilitators and the structure and nature of the programme. The following comments have been collated from group discussions of service users that were facilitated at the end of programmes at each CRC Women's Centre.

1. "I've really enjoyed it. I've enjoyed the group work, but I've realised that once it became the last two weeks [of the programme] and it had to be more individual, I didn't enjoy it. I didn't like expressing myself, I still lack trust. I'm sorry about that. But I have enjoyed it, but I've found the last two weeks really hard" (stage 1)
2. "I've got to be honest with ya, it's made me relax. It's what I need. I just love all of it. They're lovely people, you don't get that. It's not very often you come across such nice people as yourselves. That's a compliment" (stage 2)
3. "You've brought out the inner confidence. Teaching us in a way that, what's the word? Self-enjoyment, finding that self-enjoyment, finding that comfortability even in an uncomfortable situation. Being able to take that outside and put it into a situation that is uncomfortable, being able to use what we've done here and pretend it's nothing. That's what you've given me. It's given me confidence to pretend to be something else when I'm not, when I'm feeling sad. So people see me for what I am, rather than what I'm feeling" (stages 2-3)
4. "I'll probably start crying again. It's made me feel accepted. Made me feel like I have friends at last, because I never used to make friends at school. I'll never get accepted, even by my family. I feel like this is my family here. You've given us the tools" (stages 2-3)

"I don't know, I feel like quite buzzing right now. I feel like I want to go home and be like "Right, what can I do today?" like, rather than, I normally spend my days sitting in my room doing nothing, unless I have to go out, it's lifted my spirits. I've been looking for a job anyway, but like now I'm thinking, right I'm going to go home, get back on indeed. I've got four interviews coming up!"

Service user, Aldershot

9.4 Personal Reflective Statements

The following comments were made by service users on their written personal reflective statements. These were completed by those service users present during the sixth session.

1. I believe this has helped me a lot and I've enjoyed it.
2. I love this group – I think it should go on longer.
3. I've loved learning about myself – thank you for helping me.
4. This group has made me find myself.
5. I have made strong friendships here.
6. I liked the fact that everyone felt safe and comfortable enough to join in.
7. This course has been the most beneficial of all courses I have taken through probation.
8. Have learned how to view my life more positively by acting out a part in the group to help me think and not jump to conclusions about others.
9. The positive attitudes and alternative approaches to past experiences helped me learn how to change the way I live my life.
10. I've learned empathy towards others – different perspective. I feel humbled.
11. I don't want to enjoy this – it's supposed to be punishment. Trying not to enjoy it but I'd do it again if I had to. It feels a lot more comfortable.
12. The programme is different from what I expected – more interactive and no lecturing. I've learned from watching how others react to things.
13. I'm surprised how supportive the group have been of each other. It has made me more open minded.

10. Recommendations

1. Staff and facilitator voices to be included in future evaluation and research.
2. Staff to participate consistently in sessions to encourage and support service users.
3. Staff should not be permitted to use work stations in the programme delivery space during activities, this is disruptive to the focus in the room.
4. Staff to be given opportunity to be trained for professional development and in order to fully understand the benefits of the programme for Service Users.
5. Research and evaluation findings should be shared across Probation to promote best practice.
6. Length of programme should be 12 sessions in correspondence to the theory of change.
7. Service users not to start a group past week three of a programme.

8. Tracking of service users (3 months before start of programme, over duration of programme and 6 months post participation) to build evidence base of impact on desistence.
9. Additional time allocated to allow for a minimum of two interviews to be conducted with service users at every session.
10. It is important that new service users on future programmes are not previously known to each other. This helps to encourage authentic positive social bonds and limits the impact of previous histories between women.
11. **Justice Data Lab:** The Justice Data Lab should be used to evidence desistence rates for future service users that access a Creating Change programme to help assess the impact interventions have on reducing re-offending rates.
12. Sign posting service users to on-going support services and group sessions beyond the programme.
13. Offering tea and biscuits at the start of each session helps to orientate service users within the space and relax them prior to starting a session.
14. Further consideration should be given to whether service users should be permitted to take part in a programme if they are believed to be under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol.
15. De brief sessions with supporting service staff straight after each session to communicate disclosures from service users and share key findings and observations and promote best practice guidelines.
16. Future programmes should be discussed with service users in advance of them joining a group to help promote awareness and manage expectations.
17. This evaluation is based on 6 sessions; next round will be eight sessions.
18. Size of the group should be a maximum of 12 service users (minimum of 4).