An evaluation of the BearFace Theatre CIC

Creating Change programme

working with female service users on probation and participating staff in Cosham & Southampton.

Digital artwork co-created by BFT and participant, Creating Change Southampton.

BearFace Theatre CIC

2022

Self-awareness   Confidence   Love

Self-love   Voice of reason   Motivation

Energy   More calm   Self-compassion

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Contents

Executive summary

Overview

BearFace Theatre CIC (BFT) *invite genuine voice, personal exploration and the co - production of contemporary reactive work in a variety of settings. BFT design and deliver tailor made programmes using a range of participatory, creative and active methods to lift the voices of those who feel unheard.*

BFT is not a performing arts or traditional theatre based company; it is better described as 'creative action for social change'. The BFT approach to working with those affected by the criminal justice system is not offence orientated, and there are no pre-determined agendas or scripted work.

The Creating Change programme uses games, drama and theatre techniques, music, visual arts, and movement to help service uses to build pro social and strength-based narratives. BFT methods are bottom up, responsive, playful, co-produced, collective, democratic, active and creative. This means that their programmes are responsive to the specific needs of a group, enabling participants to explore complex themes and narratives of the intrapersonal and interpersonal that resonate with their own lives.

This report aims to present key findings from two Creating Change programmes, delivered with service users and participating members of staff in Cosham and Southampton. It will also present findings from the first BFT sessions with service users in a community setting. The report aims to employ a desistance framework, as well as a Theory of Change model (Russell, 2020), to analyse, interpret and decipher meaning from the narratives of participants.

Note: *a brief overview is included of a session delivered by BFT with probation staff in Reading.*

Southampton

- Delivery setting: One Small Thing
- Delivery dates: 07.09.22 – 25.10.22
- Number of sessions: 8
- Length and number of sessions: 2hrs per week - over four consecutive weeks
- Participants: 8 service users and one member of staff
- Attendance rate: 73% average (up from 57% in 2021)
- Pre and post questionnaire scores: average increase of 18% / highest score 35% increase (no self-scoring questionnaires showed a decrease in scores)
- Reason for attendance: part of probation order however, all women have a choice after their first session to decide if they want to continue or not. This is to be in communication with their probation officer and will not lead to a breach of order if they choose not to continue

MAST

- Delivery setting: MAST (community setting)
- Delivery dates: 02.12.22 and 09.12.22
- Number of sessions: 2 (this was the first time BFT have run post programme sessions in the community)
- Length of session: 2hr session in week one, and a 5 hour session in week two
- Participants: 4 service users and one member of staff
- Attendance rate: 63%
- Reason for attendance: voluntary

Cosham

- Delivery setting:
- Delivery dates:
- Length and number of sessions: 2hrs per week - over four consecutive weeks
- Participants: 4 service users and one member of staff
- Attendance rate: 66% average
- Pre and post questionnaire scores:
- Reason for attendance: part of probation order – as stated above there is freedom to choice after 1st session.

Key attributes of Creating Change:

- Creative & fun
- Active & collective
- Democratic
- Participatory & collaborative
- Participant led / bottom up / co-produced
- Shame free
- One step removed

Note: *please refer to the Theory of Change model (Russell, 2020) on page 10 for further details on key attributes.*

"It has helped me to learn how to avoid making impulse decisions, to think about things before making rash decisions. Thinking about how my decisions can affect my life.

It makes you want to get up and come to these groups. It's the support you get here. We do a lot of programmes, and they cover the same things, but here we can rehearse and practice the things we've learned, so it helps cement things. I feel safe in this group, it's safe and friendly. It's a better place to be than out there"

(Service user)

"The programme is brilliant. I've watched the women change, I've watched them grow in confidence, I've watched them start to think about things differently, I've watched them approach situations differently because they're learning there is another way to think about things.

They smile, they are having fun, they are relaxed around each other. It is all the things that you want to see happen for them as a worker. It's a good programme; it gets good results in a short space of time"

(Participating staff member)

Key: the use of the word participant refers to service users and participating staff

A 2019 MoJ white paper suggests that arts projects may play an important part in supporting the process of desistance (stop committing crime). BearFace Theatre CIC (BFT) aims to facilitate real change in people's lives by challenging punitive discourses and supporting some of the key enablers of desistance. Their approach to working with marginalised and disadvantaged communities is rooted in arts based practices and is informed by applied theatre methodologies. BFT work across criminal justice settings with the aim of galvanising groups to creatively address and actively communicate shared challenges (Thompson, 1998).

The Creating Change programme advocates for a more compassionate driven response to offending; using creativity to raise the voices of service users who are a hugely vulnerable and disenfranchised population in society. The programme is built on the premise that, *"most offenders and non-offenders alike are capable of personal change when motivated, given the chance to express themselves differently and the opportunity to try out new ways of relating to other people"* (Baim et al. 2002).

This research project used an ethically sound framework and employed a multidisciplinary lens to produce a rich and comprehensive evidence base that captures how participants experience the programme from an individual and collective perspective. The report aims to examine BFT methodologies, in relation to how pro social and strength-based narratives and social networks are developed. It aims to explore how key enablers of desistance (Maruna, 2019) emerge in individual and collective 'small stories' (Georgakopoulou, 2006) that we tell ourselves and each other about the 'co creation' of narratives of change. It is within small stories of desistance that it is possible to find narratives of hope.

Narrative identity is socially constructed. Our narratives develop in interaction with ourselves, significant others and wider socio/cultural context, and continue to develop as they are told and retold (Todd-Kvam 2021). Difficulties arise when one self-narrative becomes dominant and rigid, constraining a person's ability to imagine alternate versions of themselves. Change is possible when experiences challenge our dominant self-narratives. Gergen and Gergen (1988) emphasise the continuous and relational nature of narratives: their telling and enactment are inherently embedded and socially interdependent actions.

Creating Change is a non-targeted programme, and there are no pre-determined agendas or scripted work. The process invites participants to challenge by choice; presenting an opportunity to step outside of their comfort zones and explore their self-narratives within the support of a group setting. The programme uses games and creative activities that are participatory, fun and active, producing spontaneous thought and dialogue between participants. Activities often act as an analogy for the collective and individual life challenges faced by groups and are followed by group discussions that are ultimately led by the participants. Storytelling techniques are used to explore collective and individual narratives of the intrapersonal and interpersonal. This approach allows space for groups to collectively grapple with complex themes that respond to their specific needs which are bespoke for each group.

Despite the many challenges faced within the criminal justice system, key findings of the Creating Change programme appear to expose rays of light that come in the form of storytelling through

introspection and connectivity – providing meaningful and illuminating insights into the short to medium term impact of Creating Change on participants personal development and progression.

Context and partnerships

In 2017/18 Hampshire Cultural Trust (HCT) & BFT delivered a 3-session programme in six Women's Centres funded by HIOW CRC through a Purple Futures Innovation grant. Since then, Creating Change has developed from a 6 session programme in 2018/19, to an 8 session programme in 2019/20. BFT have continued to work closely with Hampshire & Isle of Wight Probation Service and have delivered a further 10 programmes since 2020. The introduction of staff training and development sessions, as well as post programme opportunities for service users, have helped to widen the reach and breadth of the Creating Change programme.

Research aims and questions

A Theory of Change model (Russell, 2020) that was designed based on previous BFT work in prisons and probation was used as a lens to analyse and interpret key findings. The research aimed to explore the following three questions in relation to the Creating Change programme in probation settings, as well as progression routes within community settings:

1. **Does the Creating Change programme contribute to the following areas of participants' personal progression?**

- trust and empathy
- strong support bonds and networks
- understanding about actions
- reactions and potential consequences,
- recognising strengths
- building confidence and self-esteem

2. **Does the Creating Change programme contribute to the following areas of participants' community engagement?**

- ability to express ambition and/or to explore progression opportunities

3. **Do the individual and collective stories participants share within the programme contribute towards the key attributes that are currently agreed to aid desistance?**

Research methods

Short to medium term ethnographic methods (ethnography is a type of qualitative research that involves immersing oneself in a particular community or group to observe their behaviours and interactions up close) were employed to generate meaningful data on the Creating Change programme. The researcher attended all 8 sessions in Southampton and participated in the first four.

The following methods were used at various stages of the Southampton programme:

- Researcher as participant for the first 4/8 sessions, engaging within the parameters of the programme. This helped to build meaningful levels of rapport and trust with research participants.
- Conversational and unstructured interviews.
- Group discussions (without the presence of BFT facilitators, but including the participating member of staff)
- Group observations
- Comparative questionnaires (i.e. questions scored 1-10 completed at the start of the first session and repeated at the end of the final session to indicate shifts in attitudes, thinking and behaviours).

The reduced number of sessions for the Cosham programme meant that one group discussion was conducted by the researcher at the end of the final session.

The two sessions at **MAST** in Southampton produced new data on post programme narratives. These were gathered using group observations, group discussions, as well as researcher participation in most activities throughout the two days.
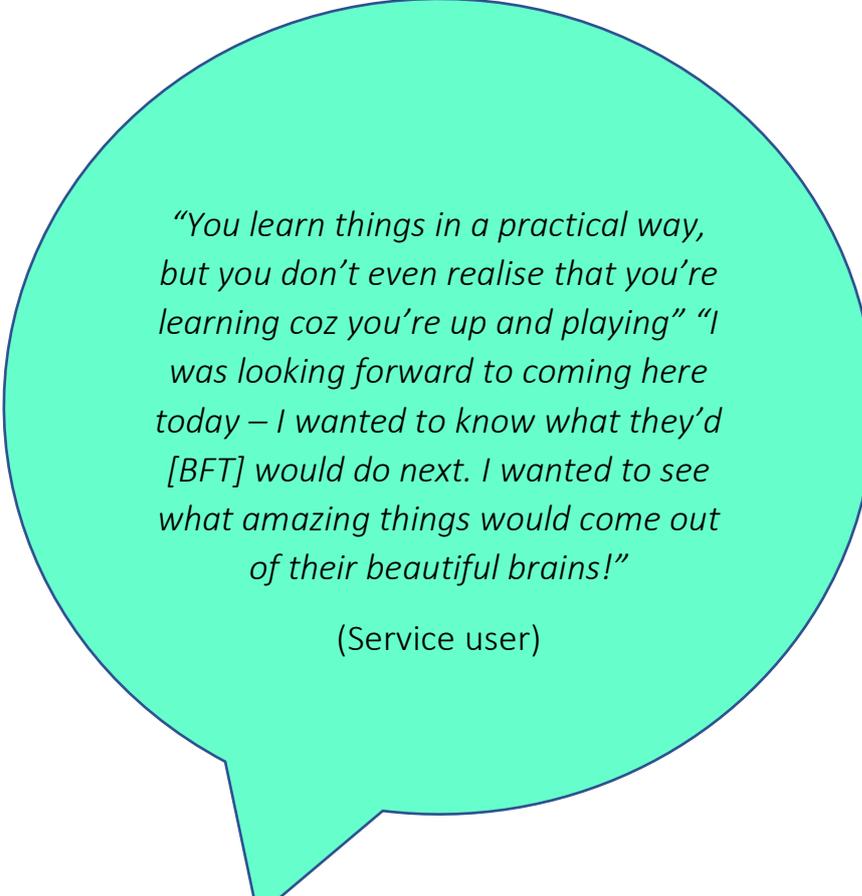
"You learn things in a practical way, but you don't even realise that you're learning coz you're up and playing" "I was looking forward to coming here today – I wanted to know what they'd [BFT] would do next. I wanted to see what amazing things would come out of their beautiful brains!"

(Service user)

Questionnaires (pre & post programme)

All Individuals and Probation Practitioners were asked to complete a self-scoring questionnaire pre and post programme. Participants were asked to answer the same set of 13 questions at the start and end of the programme. All questions were formulated based on the research aims, and each question had a possible score of between 1-10 points. The scores from the 1st (pre) and 2nd (post) questionnaires were used to produce individual and group scores, providing a point of comparison, as well as generating an average score across for each programme. The questionnaire scores provide limited insight into shifts in attitudes, thinking and behaviour across the span of programme delivery. However, it is interesting to note that all scores do increase by the end of the Southampton and Cosham programmes.

Creating Change: methodology

Those affected by the criminal justice system are more likely to feel uncomfortable engaging in formal and traditional learning styles that require participants to be passive and stationary. This is often due to the inherent disadvantages faced in their lives, including adverse childhood experiences in formal education settings. It is relevant to this report to acknowledge that those affected by the criminal justice system are significantly more at risk of having poor literacy skills. The MoJ 2021 White Paper reveals that 'offenders':

> *"… have low levels of education and 42% were excluded from school. A recent study by the Criminal Justice Joint Inspectorate estimates that 50% of offenders have a learning difficulty/disability (LDD)"*

> (Prison Strategy White Paper, 2019)

The Creating Change programme has been designed to respond to the active learning styles of many service users. It employs Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1984) strategies to encourage learners to transform themselves through 'doing'. The VARK model (Mills *et al.* 1992) cites that a kinaesthetic learning style allows learners' to physically act out events or use all their senses while learning. These styles of learning advocate for the effectiveness of active, participatory and creative methods when working with those affected by the criminal justice system.

BFT invite participants to determine the agenda of sessions and encourage them to collectively decide on the themes and topics examined. The major themes explored, and direction of discourse are rarely, if ever, duplicated, given the bespoke nature of each group. The programme is responsive to, and inclusive of, the lived experiences of participants and the group dynamics at play.

The Creating Change programme employs co-produced and bottom up methods to develop high levels of personal investment, trust and sense of safety to help participants feel comfortable enough to begin to visualise, re-imagine and play out different ways of seeing themselves and others. This approach is matched in virtue by the benefits gained from building social bonds and accessing a range of different perspectives from within the group.

Creating Change is directly informed and underpinned by a multidisciplinary framework of evidence-based practice and theory. These include (but are not limited to) Freire's pedagogy and the Socratic

Method. Freire's seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) treats 'learners' and 'teachers' as 'co-creators' of knowledge, and places them both at the heart of the learning and creative process. The Socratic Method asserts that both the facilitator and participant are responsible for adding to the discussion and expressing their thoughts, queries, and other concerns.

> *"Do not take what I say as if I were merely playing, for you see the subject of our discussion—and on what subject should even a man of slight intelligence be more serious? —namely, what kind of life should one live . . ."*

Socrates

The Socratic Method uses open-ended group discussion and debate with no pre-determined results. It promotes critical thinking and focuses on questions opposed to answers. With the help of questions, participants can determine and identify the moral obligations and values of their life. It is a collaborative approach by the 'teacher' that motivates 'students' to find their own approach to solve problems.

> *"The ultimate goal of the Socratic Method is not to focus on the thoughts or the general perception of the world, but to take into account the generalized worldview of each individual. The study prefers when it comes to expressing underlying beliefs and values rather than propositions and abstractions"*

(Using Socratic Method in Your Classroom, 2022)

BFT methodology is informed by emerging knowledge on the interplay between the arts in criminal justice settings and desistance. Key findings from the research suggest that the Creating Change programme is interdisciplinary in its approach. It is underpinned by evidence-based practice and theory from the following six interconnected areas:

- **Applied Theatre**: Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 1993) / Theater of the Oppressed (Boal, 2000)
- **Philosophy**: The Socratic method (Socrates)
- **Psychology**: Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (2011) / Experiential Learning (Kolb, D. 1984)
- **Criminology**: Reconciling 'Desistance' and 'What Works' (Maruna & Mann, 2019) / The Good Lives Model (Ward, 2004)
- **Sociology**: The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (Goffman, 1956) / Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943)
- **Social Capital**: Social capital building supporting the desistance process (Albertson, 2021)

Note: further information on supporting literature can be requested from the researcher.
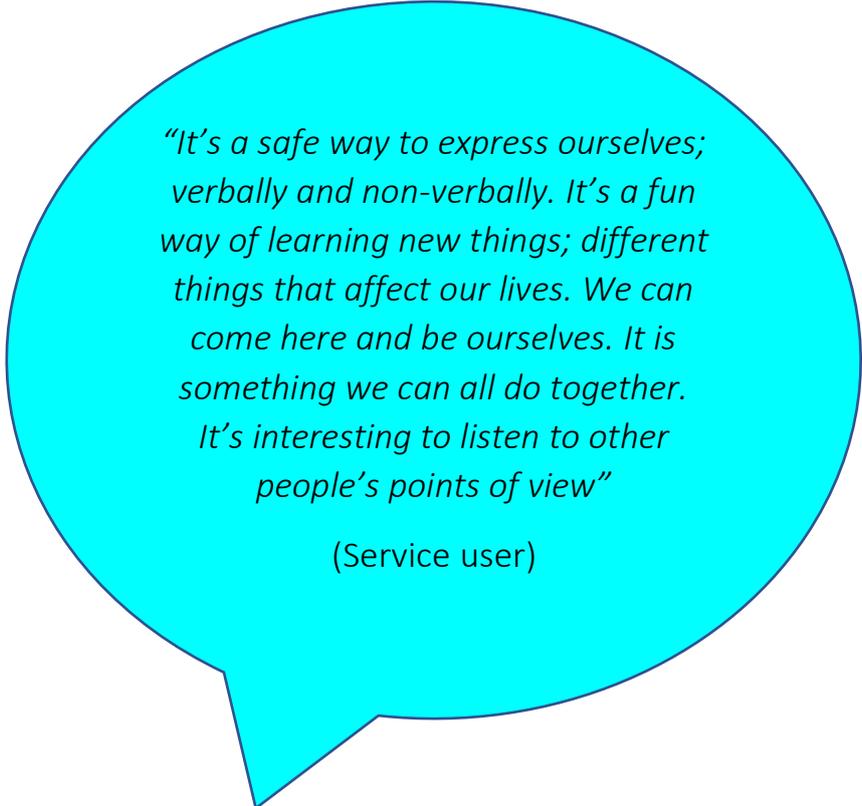
"It's a safe way to express ourselves; verbally and non-verbally. It's a fun way of learning new things; different things that affect our lives. We can come here and be ourselves. It is something we can all do together. It's interesting to listen to other people's points of view"

(Service user)

Key findings *(the terms service user and staff will be used in this section for purposes of clarity)*

Desistance

"Desistance is typically understood to be more than just an absence of crime. Desistance is the maintenance of crime-free behaviour and is an active process, that involves the pursuit of a positive life" (2007, p. 652). It is not an event, it is a process; a process of 'to-ing' and 'fro-ing', of progress and setback, of hope and despair"

(Inspiring Desistance? Arts projects and 'what works?', 2011).

This section of the report aims to present evidence gathered from the two Creating Change programmes in Cosham and Southampton, including the first community sessions delivered by BFT at MAST. The key findings are not based on amassed outcomes, but rather seek to discern meaning and offer insights into the narratives developed through the 'co creation of change' that acknowledges 'desistance develops at micro levels' (Todd-Kvam, 2021). Key findings focus directly on the individual and collective narrative identities, stories and interactions (with oneself and others) of programme participants.

The key findings suggest that Creating Change aids specific stages of desistance, as well as supporting the process of building the valuable resource of social capital. The narratives of participants presented in this section correlate with the following four-stage process of desistance described by Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph (2002, p. 999-1002), which include:

1. an openness to change
- As the programme progresses, participants describe a strong and growing desire to make positive changes in their lives.

2. exposure and reaction to 'hooks' for change (or turning points)
- Creating Change presents an opportunity for participants to begin and invest in a process of personal and social development (including post programme in the community).

3. imagining and believing in a 'replacement self'
- The co-produced, active, creative and collective methods employed by Creating Change helps to support a process of introspection and develop new narrative identities.

4. and a change in the way that offending and deviant behaviour is viewed
- Creating Change is a non-targeted programme; it is not offence orientated and aims to treat participants and 'co-creators' of knowledge. Participants are encouraged to collectively deconstruct attitudes, thinking and behaviours and analyse causality to construct more self-compassionate narratives on offending behaviours.

Maruna states that desistance is an ever evolving and contested area of study, however it is commonly accepted that there are key enablers that mean people are more likely to desist from crime. Three additional enablers that Maruna (2019) cites as being key features of desistance and are encapsulated within the Theory of Change model (Russell, 2020) are:

1. recognition of their worth from others
2. feelings of hope and self-efficacy
3. a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives'

(Maruna and Mann, 2019: 7)

Social capital

"Social capital is a term used to describe the extent and nature of our connections with others and the collective attitudes and behaviours between people that support a well-functioning, close-knit society"

(GOV, 2021)

The Creating Change programme centers on relationship and the building of social bonds. It is generally accepted that relationships and social networks may be amongst the most important elements of social capital, and that behavioural change requires both individual agency and collective support networks to establish stability. If it can be argued that offenders are part of our communities, then social capital is a relatable term when considering social cohesion in society.

Positive and trusting relationships, social ties and networks of participation constitute some of the key elements of social capital in relation to desistance.

> *"…no one activity can effect change (such as programmes or people), but instead services should: …respect and foster agency and reflexivity; they need to be based on legitimate and respectful relationships; they need to focus on social capital (opportunities) as well as human capital (motivations and capacities); and they also need to exploit strengths as well as addressing needs and risks (McNeill, 2006: 55)"*

(Wigzell, A, 2021 p. 6)

Re-imagining futures: Exploring arts interventions and the process of desistance (NCJAA, 2019) identified ways in which arts practice can aid changes in self-identity and personal agency and build social and human capital. McNeill, *et al* (2012 p. 2) states that:

> *'the arts in prison can encourage cooperation within the groups, between the group members and the arts practitioners, and, on occasions, outside of the immediate art groups, these projects not only develop social and human capital, but demonstrate how negotiations are managed in positive personal and professional relationships'*

Enablers to participation

- Safe and familiar space to deliver sessions
- Staff that that pro-actively participate in sessions
- A willingness to make a positive change in their lives
- Desire to support and help other women in crisis
- Feeling connected to the group / building friendships
- Enjoying and valuing the programme methods and ethos
- Feeling safe within the group
- Friendships and social networks
- Sense of equality between service users, facilitators and staff
- Fun, playful and enjoyable
- A mix of active and creative activities; followed by group discussion and reflection
- Non-offence orientated
- Open ended and participant led discussions
- One step removed

Barriers to participation

- No referral background on service users and their history with other women in the group
- Family deaths
- Chronic low levels of confidence & self-esteem
- Substance misuse
- Mental health issues (i.e. high anxiety and depression)
- Break down of the family unit
- Toxic relationships
- Sole parental responsibility
- Irregular employment / unemployment/
- Pervasive influence of negative social networks
- Financial instability

- Unstable accommodation
- Varying commitments associated with on-going legal issues
- Disconnect with core values and belief system due to living with the stigma of a criminal identity

Southampton

Overview

Creating Change was the first group programme to be delivered with service users in Southampton since the easing of COVID-19 restrictions. The group was in a younger demographic than in previous Creating Change programmes and predominately identified as White British. Service users had been instructed to attend the programme by their probation officers as part of their probation order. However, during the latter part of the programme, over half the group stated that they would have voluntarily attended and would be interested in pursuing post programme opportunities to work with BFT in community settings.

Attendance (average participant attendance was **74%** up from **57%** in 2021)

4 women attended for 1 session between session 1 – 3, but due to various complex personal issues, substance misuse, clash with another course they had to attend, access to children on the same day. They were not able to continue.

Participant	Sessions attended %	Individual attendance %
A	8/8	100%
B	7/8	88%
C	7/8	88%
D	6/8	75%
E	5/8	63%
F	5/8	63%
G	5/8	63%
H	4/8	50%
		74% average

Session No.	Attendance	attendance %
1	7/8 (+1 staff)	88%
2	8/8 (+1 staff)	100%
3	4/8 (+ 1 staff)	63%
4	6/8 (+ 1 staff)	75%
5	7/8 (+ 1 staff)	88%
6	6/8 (+ 1 staff)	75%
7	7/8 (+ 1 staff)	88%
8	6/8 (+ 1 staff)	75%
		74% average

Pre and post questionnaire scores

Participant	Start	End	% increase
A	100	107	7%
B	85	95	12%
C	89	107	20%
D	72	97	35%
E	81	107	32%
F	101	109	8%
Average	88	104	18%

Note: that only 6/8 participants completed their final questionnaire.

"I told my probation officer about the programme this morning, she asked about it, and I was telling her the game about the socks, and that the aim of it was to think about when everyone is throwing stuff at you in life and you're trying to juggle.

It was stressful catching the socks and knowing who was throwing them and who you needed to throw them to and dropping them like when it all gets too much in life, we gotta learn how to manage the rest of everything happening at once – or like the bombs and shields game – knowing who has your back, and who pulls you into trouble. I told her that Jen and Kate are fun, they've got loads of energy and they don't judge us about getting into trouble"

(Service user)

Theory of change model (Russell, 2020)

The Theory of Change model (Russell, 2020) has been employed to help contextualise the key findings in this report and present a composite picture of the programme. The model was designed using data gathered from six BFT programmes delivered within prison and probation settings. It is a framework to measure short to medium term impact on the personal growth and development of service users and participating staff.

The model cites three interconnecting and progressive stages of the BFT programme over 8-12 consecutive sessions (normally one session per week). Key findings indicate that most participants transition through all three stages, but often at varying points over the duration of a programme.

It is not always a linear process, with participants often moving back and forth between each stage of the model. Due to a combination of varying levels of critical self-reflection, willingness to make a positive change and complex life circumstances, some participants only reach stage one or stage two of the model during delivery.

It is important to recognise that although the model has been designed based on empirical evidence that asserts the progressive value of BFT programme methodologies, those participants that only achieve attributes within stage one of the model should still be considered to have taken significant incremental steps towards their longer journey to desistence. However, it is important to acknowledge that data gathered from participating staff also indicates notable areas of personal and professional development.

The following quotes have been ordered to correspond with attributes from the three stages depicted within the Theory of Change model (Russell, 2020):

- 1:1 conversations between the researcher and participants
- group discussions
- group observations
- personal reflections written by participants

Note: *Some quotes apply to more than one attribute from the Theory of Change model (Russell, 2020).*

Safe & trusting

- *"It has helped me not to feel so paranoid about other people. We're learning to trust other people"*

- *"I feel safe in this group, it's safe and friendly. It's a better place to be than out there"*

- *"I trust the other women in this group – we've become a team – like a unit – I think we all feel it's safe to be ourselves here"*

Active & collective

- *"When I do stuff that's just sitting down, I get restless and don't pay attention and that. But when I get up and we're doing an activity, I feel happier and able to listen to everyone talking together"*

- *"It's interactive – getting up and doing things – it's getting to do something together as a group, rather than just sitting down and not doing much – the activities get us bouncing off each other"*

- *"It was not what I was expecting; I thought we'd just be sat in a circle talking all the time. It's not like that, we do fun activities. I really enjoyed the session thinking about our face, our voice, and I found it a big eye opener. Hearing the other girls share their thoughts was powerful"*

Creative & fun

- *"I like the playing, it gets us in the mood and working together, being positive and laughing, I'd prefer getting up and doing an activity than just sitting down and having to talk the whole time. I'm not good at sitting down for very long and I lose concentration, so they games break it up which is good"*

- *"All the games we play make sense, at first, I thought it was a bit silly, but when you go back and reflect on it, you can see how it applies to your life. It gives you life skills – learning how to prioritise your life and work out who has your back, and those people bringing you down"*

- *"I think the programme is really fun, you learn about day to day things in a fun way, you learn a lot about yourself. It's more relaxed than other groups – it's relaxed – it's calm – chatting in between activities. It is good to be playing, I like the role play"*

Shame free

- *"I think the two of them are brilliant – they don't come in all miserable – they're so buzzing and happy – positive – enthusiastic – they are about how you're feeling – instead of sitting their criticising like other groups – they want to help you"*

- *"I didn't want to come, and I was saying I wouldn't do it, but it did come and it's funny. I don't mind coming. It's not quite as intense as the other groups I have to go to. It's fun, it's a laugh. It has got interesting ways of working that aren't all focused on what we have done wrong"*

- *"This session felt more personal, you get to talk about things that are important to you, and no one will judge you in the group. Today we got to talk about our faces, our voices, what we want from life. I keep everything to myself, but I don't mind it here coz nobody judges"*

Being believed in

- *"Jen and Kate are solid as rocks. If you can imagine it, they can do it. They don't conform to anything and there is no predictable structure to what to expect each week. They give complete and utter respect, and that's what they get back in return"*

- *"I like the way they [Kate and Jen] work, they want to help everyone, but sometimes they'll say something, and I will respond negatively straight away without thinking, and then I'll immediately regret having said it and feel like shit for the rest of the day. I'm just so broken"*

- *"They teach the women that they can, that they're able, that they've got as much chance as anyone. They give them hope – something to work towards – they tell them that they can. They make them believe that they might be able to do the things that people have previously told them they wouldn't be able to do. That's worth more than all the money in the world"* (staff)

Social bonds & networks of trust

- *"I hope to get more friendship – more confidence – being able to support others – and understand what other people may be going through. It makes you have a whole new perspective on life. It makes you realise that instead of struggling on your own, you can get help from others, and let other people help you. It just means so much to me."*

- *"It is good to see how close we've all become. Having a laugh together. We have this bond between us now forever. It was good for all of us, gave us confidence, gave us support, and a bond for a lifetime"*

- *"It makes you want to get up and come to these groups. It's the support you get here – it's all about the group working together. We do a lot of programmes, and they cover the same things, but here we can rehearse and practice the things we've learned, so it helps cement things"*

Stage two (collaborative / co-produced / autobiographical)

Vulnerability & empathy

- *"It puts you in a positive state of mind, and you can tell that everyone is dealing with their own shit. You learn about coping in life, you hear other people's problems, so you don't feel so isolated and alone, but you do it all in a fun way"*

- *"It's like we've got each other's backs, we've all been through shit, but that shared experiences have brought us all together"*

- *"I come here coz it gets me involved with other girls in the same situation. I'm making friends, and it gets me out of the house. It helps me with my confidence, and knowing that you have somewhere to go to when you're having such a crap time"*

Confidence

- *"It has helped me to feel less anxious about talking to people, helped me do better communication, knowing when to say no, and learning to think about yourself – your own well-being"*

- *"One of the things I'm going to take away with me is accepting that I can ask for help, it's fine to ask for help. This group does make me motivated. I think it has built a lot of confidence for the girls, seeing them come out of their shells over the weeks"*

- *"Covid made me a bit anxious about being in a new group, but now I'm here I love it, it's really fun! I look forward to coming every week. I haven't really taken part in many groups. I woke up this morning and I was so excited to come. I don't want it to end"*

Positive self-expression

- *"We do a lot of programmes, and they cover the same things, but here we can rehearse and practice the things we've learned, so it helps cement things"*

- *"I'd like to continue taking part, I like the way they explain things. I find it really hard to express myself – find the words – but here they use activities to explain things in a deeper context. Other groups tell me things, and it goes in one ear and out the other"*

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Equality of learning

- *"I think Jen and Kate are brilliant; they're fantastic! They understand how we feel, they are there to talk to, they bring out the best in us. They make things fun, and make things feel not so bad. They make it enjoyable. Their energy helps us all bounce off each other. They tell us how they cope, and help us learn how we can cope with things"*

- *"The programme is brilliant. I've watched the women change, I've watched them grow in confidence, I've watched them start to think about things differently, I've watched them approach situations differently because they're learning there is another way to think about things" (staff)*

De-labelling & rehumanizing

- *"Kate and Jen are fun; I wouldn't have changed the way they did anything. They have the right amount of confidence, while also being able to mess around. If they'd been hard faced, we wouldn't have done it"*

- *"Kate and Jen are just brilliant; they are so energetic and caring; they care about what we have to say. They treat us like we're worth listening to"*

- *"I wouldn't ask someone to do something that I wasn't willing to do myself. It's the same for work, home, most things. It helps the women to see me as human, they think the support workers are sorted, but we are just like them, everyone with their own life issues"* (staff)

Co-production & storytelling

- Please refer to the poem in the appendix in this report; it was written by the group as a collaborative piece of creative writing.

Stage three (participant led / rehearsal of bespoke material / sharing event)

Critical self-reflection

- *"It has helped me to learn how to avoid making impulse decisions, to think about things before making rash decisions. Thinking about how my decisions can affect my life"*

- *"I'd come and take part in this, even if I didn't have to come. I was anxious when I first came. They get into your head and bring out all your thinking. After the first week I was doing my head in, coz I was thinking so much about what we'd done in the group. I felt a lot better in the second week. It's such a nice atmosphere – the girls are brilliant – you can talk openly; you just feel comfortable around everybody"*

- *"It was not what I was expecting; I thought we'd just be sat in a circle talking all the time. It's not like that, we do fun activities. I really enjoyed the session thinking about our face, our voice, and I found it a big eye opener. Hearing the other girls share their thoughts in a creative way was powerful"*

- *"I helps me think about what I'm doing, so if I get angry and watch punch someone out, I'll try to think about if first and step away"*

Resilience & agency

- *"I came here in a terrible mood, but now my mood has lifted. I don't feel angry like I did this morning. I feel I'm now ready to go home and get on with the rest of my day and forget about how I felt this morning – it acts like a circuit breaker"*

- *"It offers different coping mechanisms to deal with life"*

- *"It gears you up to do stuff, coz I could have laid in bed until 1pm today but I was like come on then! I was looking forward to the group"*

Authentic self

- *"It gives us reassurance that we can open up and be ourselves"*

- *"The group gets you out of the mood you're in, it gets you motivated, getting up and being able to be yourself, you don't need to worry about an activity that makes you look embarrassing coz you know everyone and they're doing it with you. So, there is nothing to be judged or laughed at because you're all doing it together"*

- *"Jen and Kate are not afraid to come out of their comfort zone. They gave us the confidence to be ourselves. Our pictures will give us motivation during shitty times. We can look at the pictures and think how far we've come"*

Democratisation

- *"It makes you feel as if a weight is lifted off your shoulders, coz I'm normally quite a closed in person, but everyone in that room makes you feel wholesome. You don't feel that people are turning their nose up at you – we're all on the same level doing it together"*

Self-worth & identity

- *"I've turned a new leaf. It's giving me confidence, I'm coming out of my shell, I'm more open to it all. If you saw a video clip of me in the first week to now, you'd see a big change, I'm pretty much a completely different person. I talk a bit more, I'm a bit more fun, but I'm still not bouncy, bouncy like tiger"*

- *"Their opinions haven't always mattered, but the change here has been immeasurable in all of them. In the first week, barely any of them would speak, now you can't get them to shut up"*

New narratives

- *"It is giving me a different point of view of life"*

- *"Come the end of this, what I would hope for myself is that in situations where I feel myself getting angry, instead of going all guns blazing and punching someone up, just step back and count to 10 and think OK how else am I going to deal with this then?"*

- *"It is helping me to control my emotions which is a hard thing to do. This clears my head and means I don't go out and start shouting at people"*

- *"I find it really fun. This is the kinda work I want to do, I don't want to work in a shop doing retail, I actually want to help people out. This group has helped me out a lot. I was in a very toxic relationship, but I recently got rid of him"*

- *"I feel sad, knowing that it's coming to an end, but at the same time it feels good completing something, and having a new frame of mind to approach life"*

Case study of progression (Service user):

Stage one:

- *"Probation told me to come to this group, or I go back to court. I have a job too, but they make miss days to do this"*

- *"I've always felt intimidated by women, I said to my probation officer that I didn't want to have to do anything with a big group of women. This isn't too bad, but it's still in the back of my brain coz women are bitchy and not very nice to each other. You can act as nice as chips to each other's faces, but once peoples' backs are turned, they say horrible stuff. So, I basically keep my guard up even when everyone is having fun and being nice"*

- *"One the first day, I saw X walking up the road to here and I had to make a split decision about whether I was going to come because she is from a time in my life that was really bad. She's drugged me, beaten me up, given me black eyes. But when she saw me, she started crying and gave me a massive hug which really threw me, but it's nice to see her in a different light"*

Stage two:

- *"Every week I get a bit more comfortable, but I'm not someone who likes to be the centre of attention, if you know what I mean. I don't like having to stand up in front of everyone, I don't, I hate it, it makes me feel anxious"*

- *"My first two weeks I was very sceptical, I thought it wasn't for me but when I go home, I do actively think about what we've talked about and what I'm going to say next week. Like what have I done for myself. I hate awkward silences, so I have to plan to have something to say"*

- *"I like the way they [Kate and Jen] work, they want to help everyone, but sometimes they'll say something, and I will respond negatively straight away without thinking, and then I'll immediately regret having said it and feel like shit for the rest of the day. I'm just so broken"*

Stage three:

- *"It is fun, I do enjoy myself, it gets me out of the house and staring at the same four walls"*

- *"I've got to know this group now, there are people I like it then group. But I won't ever feel completely comfortable coz once you know people a bit more, they can use the stuff they know about you against you"*

- *"I've turned a new leaf. It's giving me confidence, I'm coming out of my shell, I'm more open to it all. If you saw a video clip of me in the first week to now, you'd see a big change, I'm pretty much a completely different person. I talk a bit more, I'm a bit more fun, but I'm still not bouncy, bouncy like tigger"*

Participation of staff

Creating Change requires the collective levelling of an often-uneven hierarchical structure between service users and those in charge of their care. As previously mentioned, an important aspect of the programme is the inclusion of probation/support staff who participate fully alongside service users and facilitators in every session; acting in both a pastoral capacity and as a bona fide member of the group. Their participation appears to help them build stronger and more positive working relationships with service users. A significant feature of this dynamic is the role reversal from authority figure to participant. Staff state that this unique interaction provides an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of their clients, and in turn enables them to offer better tailored support to service users on their journey towards desistance.

All staff interviewed explained that participating alongside service users had broken down barriers and significantly improved their working relationships outside of the programme. They stated that the bottom up / co-produced methods employed by BFT allowed service users to view them as 'human'; facilitating a collective process that enabled service users to rapidly build trust, safety and social bonds over eight sessions.

The Good Lives Model (Ward & Brown, 2004) asserts that people engaged within the criminal justice system need to live more socially integrated lives to reduce offending behaviour. Ward and Brown, (2004) state that offenders need to be matched with positive role models to combat the 'malign influence of anti-social behaviour'. The participation of service users, facilitators, staff and the researcher, affords service users the opportunity to collaborate equally alongside non-offenders to explore individual and collective narratives, thus gaining insight and understanding from a range of other perspectives and lived experiences.

1:1 conversation between researcher and participating staff member

"The programme is brilliant. I've watched the women change, I've watched them grow in confidence, I've watched them start to think about things differently, I've watched them approach situations differently because they're learning there is another way to think about things. They smile, they are having fun, they are relaxed around each other. It is all the things that you want to see happen for them as a worker. It's a good programme; it gets good results in a short space of time.

Most of them are usually quite closed off. They're untrusting, their expectations are quite low about workers and other people around them. They are used to being treated as second class citizens. Their opinions haven't always mattered, but the change here has been immeasurable in all of them. In the first week, barely any of them would speak, now you can't get them to shut up. I think they're all sad it is ending. Some have asked if there are any other sessions, they can take part in.

Jen and Kate are solid as rocks. If you can imagine it, they can do it. They don't conform to anything and is no predictable structure to what to expect each week. They give complete and utter respect, and that's what they get back in return.

The benefits are that they reach the women by doing it differently, not making them sit down and do a workbook. It is old fashion support working at its best. It is a bit out of my comfort zone, but it works, whatever it is they have, what they bring to it as people, it works.

They teach the women that they can, that they're able, that they've got as much chance as anyone. They give them hope – something to work towards – they tell them that they can. They make them believe that they might be able to do the things that people have previously told them they wouldn't be able to do. That's worth more than all the money in the world.

I've found it really hard, coz it is completely out of my comfort zone, I have had to make myself take part, because I am the person that sits back in the corner and watches everyone else. As an experience, I would love to find more like it, but I'll never find another two of them [Kate and Jen].

I wouldn't ask someone to do something that I wasn't willing to do myself. It's the same for work, home, most things. It helps the women to see me as human, they think the support workers are sorted, but we are just like them, everyone with their own life issues."

"I hope to get more friendships – more confidence – being able to support others – understand what other people may be going through. This programme makes you have a whole new perspective on life.

It makes you realise that instead of struggling on your own, you can get help from others, and let other people help you. It just means so much to me"

(Service user)

Key group observations (taken by the researcher)

- Attendance and retention rates on the Southampton programme have been high. The venue is safe and familiar to most women (men free environment apart from builders), with some women living at the setting due to domestic abuse and toxic relationships with partners. Many women are under the age of 30 – but some are already dealing with the trauma associated with having their children taking away by social services, struggles with drugs misuse and other major life challenges.

- At the beginning of the first session, several service users appeared anxious and non-communicative, displaying little or no eye contact and looked agitated. Emotional maturity is low – women are young and still in the permission to play stage, engaged but highly dependent on J&K for support, guidance and direction. However, social bonds form quickly between participants; this enables them to support and encourage each other to challenge themselves and step out of their comfort zones and actively engage in creative introspection.

- Service users make occasional references to drugs, alcohol and violence during check in chats, but women appear comfortable to open up and share their experiences, despite potential repercussions from probation. This is likely to symbolise high levels of trust and a sense of safety within the group.

- Learning challenges and style also appear to be similar for most participants. Participants openly explain that they struggle to stay focused and interested when sat passively for medium to long periods of time. Some group members have also spoken about their ADHD diagnosis; describing themselves as being 'explosive with energy, highly excitable, violent mood swings and erratic behaviour, anxious, and/or severely depressed' (sometime in the span of one day).

- Good humour, play and openness, self-deprecation of facilitators promoted a sense of trust and equality (playing, discussing, reflecting as a whole group) Socratic Method. Games were used as the impetus to begin practising critical reflection on broad themes relating to values and belief systems. Games and activities are then deconstructed during group discussion as representations of challenges people face in our lives. It is the active, participatory and playful nature of the programme that appears to help to keep participants engaged and prevents 'boredom' setting in amongst individuals and within the group.

- There was disruption at the start of the session due to negative dynamics between two women (one was new to the group). Jen and Kate resolved this and convinced them both to attend and give it a go using encouragement and praise and asking them to think about the rest of the group.

- Responsible sharing of lived experience by BFT facilitators and participating staff helps to build trust, safety and equality; reducing the sense of 'othering' that some participants describe experiencing in other probation groups. This approach appears to encourage the group to give themselves permission to 'drop their mask'/show vulnerability and share their stories and re-examine them from a range of perspectives.

- The commonality of adverse lived experience (often between service users) means themes explored during sessions are relevant, relatable, and responsive, which helps to avoid over exposing participants by singling out any one member of the group. The group shifts between collective and individual narratives that explore self-worth and identity using visual and creative activities. Participants 'perform' and discuss a range of themes that touch on what it is to be human, as well as homing in on individual lived experience.

- They thought it would be like doing theatre but it's not, it is fun, permission to look silly in front of others collectively breaks down barriers to participation. Experiencing joy allows for moments of serious and focused introspection. Participating staff member is really proud of service users and the confidence, commitment and engagement they have shown in only in three sessions.

- Small group tableaus that are created by groups are shown to the whole group and interpretation by the collective. BFT provide positive feedback and ask the collective group to reflect and discuss what associated themes or issues each tableau raises, often making connections with their own life experiences and providing a glimpse into their own personal narratives on self and identity. The collective group are then encouraged to openly articulate their perspectives and opinions, and on occasion challenge entrenched patterns of negative thinking.

- The structure of activities seems to help participants to frame what they want to say. A range of photos are created with the group/individuals' using filters and graphic design software to protect identities. These images provide a visual reference point for participants to see themselves reimagined. This physical representation of participants encapsulates their inner narratives and is akin to spinning clay on a wheel – enabling the viewer to look at themselves from a range of angles as a spur to critical self-reflection and begin the building new narratives of change.

- This can be a painful and uncomfortable experience for some participants, as it requires them to trust the group enough to drop any bravado and be open with themselves and others. This is especially significant for those that have had to keep their guards up for reasons of self-preservation.

   A minority of the group choose not to share and explains that she is not ready to 'untangle her thoughts and feelings'. The complex and chaotic life circumstances of many of the participants mean that moments of disengagement occur, as the world hangs heavy on their mind, but these are moments within sessions, opposed to impacting longer-term engagement. The group build strong social networks of support based on their shared experiences of similar issues and challenges (i.e. dugs and alcohol misuse, being forcibly separated from their children, low self-esteem).

- The BFT approach seems to actively promotes a positive identity away from that of an offender / non-targeted / non-judgemental / not offence focused – by treating the group with respect / re-humanising / de-labelling. Women open themselves up to play and be vulnerable in front of other women.

- This programme is a transaction; women are invited to participate, although they are required to attend as part of their order. They are not expected to give anything of themselves if it makes them feel uncomfortable; neither are they set any pre-set goals to achieve. The facilitation style of the BFT practitioners is warm, energetic, friendly, non-hierarchical and joyful. This approach appears to result in high levels of participation and engagement from the entire group. The group cites the active and enjoyable nature of the programme makes the learning / self-discovery more memorable and meaningful for them.

- Participant E was extremely reserved at the beginning of the session of the programme. She took part in all activities and group discussions but was guarded with her contributions and presented high levels of bravado, using a aggressive persona that meant she often appeared aloof. However, during session three she shared that this persona had been constructed as a coping mechanism to protect her from other people's manipulation and abuse. She went onto share that her life was terrible, and she was struggling to cope daily – she cried – the group acknowledged her pain and gave her comfort. She then went on to play, laugh and participate in every activity that session. During the break, the participating staff member commented that she had never seen her let her guard down in a group before that day.

The following are examples of what the participants stated they want in their lives:

- I want to be me; proud to just be me
- To be heard
- Family / have kids back
- Peace
- Connection / good friends
- Closure
- Security / wealth
- Love / Happiness
- Be looked up to
- Do good
- Independence
- The world to be kind

Final session reflections: Q. *What have you done well for yourself?*

- *"Saw my son"*

- *"Removed myself from negative people"*

- *"I walked away from a situation that 4 months ago would have blown up"*

- *"I took my kids to feed the swans"*

- *"I got a job and a house!"*

- *"I've decided to take the next step and get in touch with Footprints, I want to get a job"*

- *"I make sure I am drug tested every day so that I can't do coke. I know that my results are being written down every day and if I pick up, I won't get my kids back - I know I have to do that, so I do"*

Overview

The Cosham programme ran for four sessions, one per week for four consecutive weeks. A member of staff participated in the programme alongside service users. It was the first programme to be delivered after the easing of restrictions put in place because of COVID-19. For this reason, the number of sessions was halved from the usual eight session module due to a range of organisational and recruitment challenges. Attendance was higher than expected for the first group sessions post lockdown.

During a group discussion conducted by the researcher (without the presence of BFT practitioners), participants commented that COVID-19 social restrictions had not impacted their willingness or desire to attend group sessions. Participants attended the programme as part of their probation order, although all stated in the group discussion that they would have voluntarily attended and wished the programme had been longer.

Attendance

Participant	No. sessions	Attendance %
A	4/4	100%
B	4/4	100%
C	3/4	75%
D	3/4	75%
E	3/4	75%
F	2/4	50%
G	1/4	25%
H	1/4	25%
		66% average

Pre and post questionnaire scores

Participant	Start	End	% increase
A	91	111	22%
B	75	107	43%
C	72	115	63%
D	61	98	60%
E	87	112	29%
Average	77.2	108.6	36%

Note: that only 5/8 participants completed their final questionnaire.

Group discussion (led by researcher at the end of the final session)

- *"I'd come and take part in this, even if I didn't have to come. I was anxious when I first came. They get into your head and bring out all your thinking. After the first week I was doing my head in, coz I was thinking so much about what we'd done in the group. I felt a lot better in the second week. It's such a nice atmosphere – the girls are brilliant – you can talk openly; you just feel comfortable around everybody"*

- *"It's been so good, no judgement, I don't think four weeks is long enough. I'm really gutted it's ending. Everyone helps each other, everyone listens to each other"*

- *"All the games we play make sense, at first, I thought it was a bit silly, but when you go back and reflect on it, you can see how it applies to your life. It gives you life skills – learning how to prioritise your life and work out who has your back, and those people bringing you down"*

- *"It has helped me to realise that I don't need to try and do everything all at once, I can take time to access what I need, and look after myself, as well as other people"*

- *"Covid hasn't bothered me in terms of coming here; it's actually nice to come back to a group"*

MAST (Mayflower Studios Southampton) sessions

Overview

Session one (02.12.22 - 2 hours):

1. Participant A
2. Participant E

Session two (09.12.22 - 5 hours):

1. Participant A
2. Participant D
3. Participant E
4. Participant F

MAST sessions were the first opportunity for BFT to engage programme participants in a community setting. Service users were invited to voluntarily attend two sessions over two consecutive weeks at MAST. Two service users attended the first session that ran a couple of weeks after the end of the Creating Change programme. Attendance increased to four for the second session. The same member of staff that attended Creating Change attended the two sessions at MAST which helped with continuity.

Sessions delivered in community settings is a new progression route for service users. It is important to acknowledge that women chose to attend these sessions on a voluntary basis (with the member of staff that participated in the Creating Change programme). The sessions were an opportunity for service users to build on previously established social bonds, and increase levels of trust and reciprocity between peers, staff and facilitators.

The group used creativity to explore a range of themes around identity, future aspirations and beliefs and values, utilising applied theatre techniques, as well as incorporating music and using video to capture and playback work as a spur to further discussion. This was a leap of faith for some women; many citing that they had attended because they enjoyed the active and creative way BFT work. They stated that they wanted to challenge themselves to step out of their comfort zones and invest in the Creating Change programme. Service users stated that, for them, the sessions were a vehicle to be heard and seen.

Opening comments from session one:

- *"I get to be me today"*
- *"I'm here, because I want to be here"*
- *"I'm here because I like it"*
- *"I'm here to listen, I want to hear"*
- *"I wanted to come here; I have stuff to say"*
- *"I'm dedicated / committed"*

Group observations (MAST):

Service users have turned up voluntarily to take part in two community sessions. The group played games to build on established social bonds developed from the initial programme as part of their probation order. These sessions were an opportunity for service users to stretch themselves and challenge by choice. They creatively, explored new narratives and deconstructed narrative identity using a range of participatory, playful and performative methods. The group were supported by BFT facilitators to develop collaborative and bespoke work; this included splitting into subgroups to devise still tableaus that were unfrozen to reveal characters that were further developed by the whole group.

The introduction of mask work provided a one step removed approach that allowed the group to develop personas using a range of storytelling techniques. The narratives of these characters helped to challenge stereotypes, as well as examine entrenched patterns of interpreting the behaviour of others in relation to the characters own lived experience. The mask work was also an opportunity for the group to be forward looking and connect with their own aspirations for a better future.

The performative methods employed by BFT are always followed by group discussion, which encourages the group to consider the nuances and complexity of human behaviour and relationships – with oneself and the wider world around us. The group often applied the lens of their own lives as a framework for interpretation and discussion – finding points of commonality for purposes of reflection.

Music and movement were also incorporated; using the answers to the question of 'what they would say if you had their 'ear' of the local and national government?' The characters from the mask work helped the group to grapple with real issues in a three-dimensional way, opposed to solely relying on passive discussion. The masks were used to visualise emotions (feeling overwhelmed, sad, enthusiastic etc.), and developed dialogue around the concept of having/not having a 'voice'.

The collective split into two separate groups; each group devised a scene building on the themes previously explored earlier in the session. Each group performed their improvised scene in front of

the other; these were filmed (with consent) and played back to each group with an opportunity for comment and reflection – thus promoting peer to peer support, acknowledgement of their worth from others and the exchange of benefits – both central to social capital and desistance theory.

Closing comments from session two:

- *"I like being occupied, because I hate being on my own, and I hate silence. It's about doing something fun"*

- *"Useful to look at emotions in different ways, without having to say it"*
- *"Interacting with other people on my wavelength. It is important because opinions are valued here. I can be around other freaks like me"*

- *Being around each other; bouncing off each other's good energy. It is something worth doing. It's worth getting out of bed for"*

- *"I've watched people grow and become comfortable in themselves, which has helped me to be comfortable with myself" (staff member)*

- *"I would like to do another group – even if I didn't have to do it through probation"*

- *"We do something different every session, and I like that it is random and unpredictable. Everyone should give it a go – you become more open and not as worried. It's a safe environment and we trust them"*

- *"They [BFT] are crazy and not prim and proper – they don't make you feel like an outsider. They're not judgmental. They aren't all about what you've done wrong"*

Development and training for professionals

In addition to programmes for service users, BFT also offer training and development programmes for professionals working with people affected by the criminal justice system. These programmes are delivered to staff teams and multidisciplinary groups of professionals at all levels of management. The programmes are an opportunity to bring people together, and to share and develop trauma informed practice.

Over 30 probation staff participated in the Reading session. Some members of staff initially appeared anxious about what they might be asked to do, perhaps due to pre-conceived ideas and experiences of 'theatre'. However, the energy and positivity shown by the two BFT practitioners seemed to help ease such concerns, and every member of staff rose to their feet to take part in the activities.

Staff stepped out of their comfort zones and anxiety turned into laughter. Individual groups collaborated together to devise a phrase of something positive they all wanted more of in their lives (i.e. strength and self-love). These were turned into group chants that were conducted into a collective sound montage by the BFT practitioners. Staff commented that they had enjoyed the activity and felt social bonds were being formed between staff members that had previously not spoken to each other.

"I like the playing, it gets us in the mood and working together, being positive and laughing, I prefer getting up and doing an activity than just sitting down and having to talk the whole time. I'm not good at sitting down for very long and I lose concentration, so they games break it up which is good"

(Service user)

"I just wanted to take a moment to say such a big THANK YOU for coming along to our first Women's Team event

Your input was just key and very popular! It's so great to see you at work and I think what you do is just fantastic."

(Helen Morris, NPS Senior Probation Officer, South Central Women's

Outcomes

The 'sharing of work' event is never a pre-determined outcome for any Creating Change programme, as it depends on whether a group is willing/explicitly wants to develop work to share. The opportunity to devise work to share is generally only introduced in the latter stages of the programme. It is the removal of any expectation on a group to be working towards a sharing event that provides the necessary space and safety to explore beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviours, without worrying about an impending performance.

The Southampton group decided to work towards producing bespoke work, incorporating movement, audio, music, video, visual arts and graphic software. These mediums were used as vehicles to convey meaning and represented the voices of participants – creatively communicating collective and individual reflections and aspirations. A selection of staff at the setting were invited to an informal sharing of the video; with cakes and tea provided. It also included a live reading of a piece of creative writing that was collectively written by the group. This event appeared to lift service users' moods and attending staff – the group presented confidently and described feelings of pride and achievement. It was also apparent that staff were moved by the work that was shared and impressed at how much had been accomplished in eight sessions.

1. Due to the active and introspective nature of the programme, it is advisable to keep participant numbers under 10.
2. Staff participation is a vital part of the programme, having positive repercussions for both staff and service users in sessions and beyond.
3. The referral process needs to ensure that all safeguarding information is shared with BFT, as well as participating staff members. If additional service users join a group (only permitted up to and inclusive of the third session), it should be checked whether the service user has any history with current members of the group.
4. The space in which the programme is delivered needs to be large enough to host up to 10 service users, two facilitators and one member of staff. The active nature of each exercise requires enough space to move freely around the room/space within health and safety guidelines issued by BFT.
5. On-going support from staff to support service users to attend sessions on time. This is often a complicated process due to a range of unpredictable and unforeseen circumstances.
6. Post programme opportunities for service users to access BFT sessions within community settings should be supported by probation, and a staff member provided to attend these sessions to aid continuity and safeguard service users.

Conclusion

This report aimed to conduct a rigorous evaluation of the Creating Change programme. The evidence presented aims to represent the voices of service users and participating staff; it is in their narratives and stories that meaning can be deciphered, giving key insights into how the programme was experienced and interpreted by those taking part in it. The participation of staff working alongside service users proved to be instrumentally positive for everyone – breaking down barriers and improving relationships outside of the programme.

Creating Change invites dialogue on complex and nuanced issues – harnessing creativity, connectivity and positive self-expression to explore what it means to be human. The use of active, creative, fun and participatory methods results in high levels of engagement. Play and laughter are essential foundations of the programme, helping to build rapid levels of rapport, safety and trust within a group – allowing guards to be dropped and vulnerability to be shown in front of others. This is what aids the development of openness, social bonds, meaningful deconstruction of complex intrapersonal and interpersonal themes and reimaging of self in a short space of time, creating a responsive and memorable learning environment.

Creating Change appears to provide some of the key enablers that contribute to the longer journey towards desistance. However, it is important to acknowledge that the key findings presented in this report only represents the timeframe of delivery. Follow up post programme would improve the depth and richness of insights into the impact of the programme.

This report acknowledges the courage that is required to play and actively pursue self-honesty and self-discovery in front of peers, as this can be a profoundly revealing, painful and challenging process for most people. Key findings in this report show that participants work incredibly hard to critically reflect on their life choices and address entrenched patterns of attitudes, thinking and behaviours. The voices of service users and participating staff provide compelling insights into the struggles and

challenges they face, as well as asserting the value of small stories of personal growth and development.

The personal growth and development shown during the programme should be considered a vital stepping stone towards helping to meet their human needs. However, service users must also be provided with a holistic and individualised package of care and support to be able to apply the things they have learned to their lives beyond the programme. Without these needs being met, it is questionable whether some of the vital life skills learned over the duration of an 8 week programme will be implemented by service users outside of the safety of the Creating Change learning environment in the long term. The programme should not exist in a vacuum, instead it should be used in conjunction with a wider holistic package of care and support that includes support with employment, education, community engagement, housing, economic security, childcare, drugs misuse etc. Only then will service users have a realistic chance of moving forward to desist from crime and live meaningful and purposeful lives.

Bibliography

Note: please request citations and references from the researcher.