

The Gathering Project 2022 Final Report



'Thanks for helping me get some of my confidence back.' – Participant

'The Gathering Project exceeded all my expectations and I'd like to thank you for bringing it to us. I'm sure all my members got lots from it and I personally found it very useful.' – Group Leader

'I was part of a session as a volunteer and remember never having laughed so much' - Participant

Contents

1. What is The Gathering Project?	Page 2
2. Evaluation methods	Page 3
3. Findings/Impact	Page 3
a. What does the data tell us about the people?	Page 3
b. What does the data tell us about the project?	Page 4
4. Has the project met its aims?	Page 5
5. What's Next? – Development of The Gathering Project for 2023/24	Page 9
6. Conclusion	Page 11
7. Appendices	Page 13

1. What is the project?

The Gathering Project is a creative community programme which is running for three years from 2021 until 2023 across Hampshire. It is designed to promote community cohesion, resilience and positive health and wellbeing using theatre and creative activities.

Participants whose wellbeing has room for improvement, will learn how to make healthier lifestyle choices and to reduce harmful behaviours, as well as learning how to access relevant local services and support.

The project aims to:

- Help people speak about their mental health and have an improved quality of life
- Use arts and creative activity as a tool to support wellbeing
- Bring people together
- Connect people to local support services

In 2022, following development from the first year, the project was designed to run with 10 partners for five weeks. Sessions would focus on the overarching narrative of 'Thrive', and each weekly workshop, lasting two hours long and working with a maximum of 15 participants, would link in with a specific theme relating to 'Thrive'¹.

The project targeted the deprived communities² of:

- Basingstoke
- New Forest
- Southampton
- Rushmoor
- Havant

Additionally, the No Wrong Door community grant gave the opportunity to focus on specific communities within Hampshire who are considered especially suitable for wellbeing engagement projects.

Fluid Motion Theatre Company (FMTC) decided to target **men**, those who are from **Black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds** and/or those who have experience of **substance misuse**. This is because these communities statistically have poorer mental health or are less likely to access mental health support, and therefore the project would have a more meaningful impact on those who need it most in Hampshire.

Finally, there was a specific interest in working with a proportion of **young adults**, with the aim of offering them a progression route into volunteering roles created by FMTC as a legacy of the project.

With that targeting criteria in mind, project partners for 2022 were:

Organisation	Targeting criteria (if relevant)	Area (target area)
Gosport Voluntary Action	Wellbeing	Gosport

¹ These were *Explore, Consider, Notice, Act* and *Create*.

² These areas have been selected through a combination of tools: [Arts Council England's Priority Places](#) (2021-24), the [Government's Levelling Up for Culture Places](#) which are predominantly areas of multiple deprivation, and [Hampshire County Council's tool](#) which provides data on mental health and wellbeing in all areas of Hampshire. This last one also compares against Indices of Multiple Deprivation.

Andover Mind	Wellbeing	Basingstoke
Families Matter – Women’s Wellbeing Group	Wellbeing	Hythe (New Forest)
The Vine Centre	Wellbeing	Aldershot (Rushmoor)
Age Concern Hampshire – Popley Group	Wellbeing	Basingstoke
Dementia-friendly Alton	Wellbeing	Alton
Enable Ability/Inter Activ	Men/Young adults/Wellbeing	Portsmouth (Havant)
Society of St James – North Lane Lodge	Substance Misuse/Men	Aldershot (Rushmoor)
The Good mental health Cooperative – The Nexus Project (with Men in Mind)	Men/Wellbeing	Portsmouth (Havant)

2.Evaluation Methods

The team used a variety of evaluation tools to gather data throughout the project.

These were:

- Registers.
- The *Recovering Quality of Life* (ReQoL)³ Patient Reported Outcome Measure.
- The project feedback form.
- Photography.
- Written case studies.
- Collation of workshop paperwork e.g. group mind-maps, positivity post-it notes and body outlines.
- Interviews with project partners and the creative practitioners.
- Creative responses made by participants (flower templates).

3.Findings/Impact

The project was in its delivery phase from 23rd June 2022-22nd February 2023.

9 groups experienced the project, with one of these groups experiencing a three week deliberately condensed version of the project⁴, and the final group only experiencing two out of the five sessions⁵. In total, 87 participants experienced the project, and across the 41 weeks⁶ of delivery, there were 280 meaningful encounters and 560 contact hours.

The project worked with six different creative practitioners.

3a.What does the data tell us about the people?

Participants were aged between <20 and >90, and there were participants featuring in every ten-year age bracket in between. The largest common age groups were tied between 60-69

³ <https://www.regol.org.uk/p/overview.html>

⁴ This was a result of a compromise with the group leader who was nervous that the different model of working might throw off the usual attendees of this newly established group.

⁵ This was due to the project content and the nature of the participants changing from the point of establishing the partnership to the point of delivering the project (it was no longer suitable).

⁶ Society of St James received an additional meet and greet session with the creative practitioner and Community Producer prior to the project starting. This worked very well in engaging participants gently with the project.

years, 70-79 years and 80-89 years. The second most common age groups were 30-39 years and 50-59 years. 11 participants chose not to answer this question with an age selection.

49% of participants declared a disability. With 38% declaring a mental health condition and the second most common type of disability: 'long-standing illness or health', being selected by 24% of the participants who declared a disability. Learning disability, visual impairment, hearing impairment and physical impairment were also selected by some participants.

Thinking specifically about the target criteria, 10% of participants identified as being from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background (this is a rise on the 7% measured at the point of publishing the interim report) and 41% identified as male. This latter figure is a significant rise from the 7% measured previously when it was also written: '*This figure is too low but will likely improve as the remaining data is analysed, and as continued efforts are made to work with the target audiences.*' *Community Producer.*

Although the ethnic diversity target remains to be low (owing to the difficulty engaging with groups who specifically meet because of a shared ethnic culture), it is a *great* achievement to have been able to engage with nearly as many males as females by the end of the project (48% identified as female). There were also non-binary participants, and those who 'preferred not to say', or who didn't answer at all.

3b. What does the data tell us about the project?

The data from the project feedback form tells us that 86% of participants scored 4 or higher (where 1 is low and 5 is high⁷) for the statement: 'I enjoyed the project'⁸.

To give some background to this high score, when asked 'what word comes into your head when thinking about the project?' There were 39 different words used, but the most common were '*fun*', '*happy*' and '*helpful*'. '*Positivity*', '*kindness*' and '*friendships*' also featured in multiples, and words such as '*togetherness*', '*health*', '*self-esteem*' and '*acceptance*' were used. The full word cloud can be found in Appendix 1.

Additionally, against the statement: 'I am more likely to reach out for help with my mental health if I need it', 69% scored 4 or higher, and a further 20% scored 3. Both results offer very promising reflections of the project.

Despite extra measures taken to support the successful completion of the ReQoL forms following the challenges identified at the interim point, only 43 participants in total completed their forms and of those only 14 (33%) showed a significant improvement in mental health.

However, it has already been identified that even with the forms filled out correctly⁹, '*it will be impossible to know if scores are given because of the project, or because of other things going on in people's lives (good or bad)*' because the form '*does not give any space for explaining answers*' Data Administrator, FMTC.

The project feedback form however, which directly asks participants to score whether the project has had 'a positive impact on my mental health', gleaned a high return of 76% of participants scoring 4 or higher.

There were multiple comments feeding back on the strengths of various sessions. One participant said that '*the one with the bus (session 2 – consider) really helped me try and empathise and think about other's lives and be more understanding*'. Likewise, this same

⁷ All statement scores are scaled in this way.

⁸ Of all the participants, only one person answered less than 3 for this statement.

⁹ On both sides, and with the method for answering questions interpreted correctly.

session included a 'scenarios' task which had a profound impact on one individual who could relate entirely to lending somebody else money and not feeling good about it.

The following week, he said *'I couldn't get it out of my head that lending somebody money has had an impact on my own mental health'*, he went on to say that next time he wouldn't lend the money but would put himself first. This is wonderful feedback and demonstrates the success of our aim to help people have an improved quality of life.

In relation to the activities carried out, the mantras and breathing exercises seemed a common theme in the techniques that participants would use in the future and 25% of participants individually commented that the project needed to last for longer than two hours, or there needed to be more than 5 sessions within the project.

4. Has the project met its aims?

Evaluation methods have been designed carefully to measure impact, and to assess whether the project has been successful in achieving its aims or not. For each aim listed below, participant feedback, project partner feedback and ongoing reflections from the creative practitioners can be used to form conclusions.

Aim 1: Help people speak about their mental health and have an improved quality of life

Oftentimes, people are not actively considering their mental health on a regular basis (or ever). This project aims to help people explore and reflect on how they feel, and then empowers them to have the confidence to communicate how they are feeling with others, be that as part of an exercise within the sessions or as a call for help during/beyond the project. The theory is that by being aware of mental health and understanding how to support yourself and others, you can have an improved quality of life.

The evaluation data tells us that 76% of participants scored 4 or higher against the statement: 'I can speak more confidently about my mental health'. One person gave the justification that this is *'because [the group] is non-judgemental'*.

Against the statement: 'The project had a positive impact on my mental health', the same 76% result was given, but a higher percentage of participants answered five than for the previous statement.

Both results are fantastic and show a direct link between quality of life (with regards to state of mental health) and the ability to talk about mental health. Participants commented: *'Definitely seen an improvement on my resolve of issues and confidence'*, *'I would recommend this course to help different issues people may be experiencing'* and *'thanks for helping get some of my confidence back'*.

The achievement of this aim has been supported by case studies too.

The first case study participant came across the project within the supported accommodation he resides in, *'[I] was told about the drama project and thought I'd give it a go'*. He went on to describe the impact that the sessions had on him: *'Sessions with [Practitioner] have had a positive impact on my mental health and I feel happier'*.

It was also observed that the body language of this person from session one to session five was remarkably different. *'Where before he was conscious to make and maintain eye contact, but very bashful, closed-up and only contributing intermittently, by session five he was gregarious, vocal as a key member of the group and extremely relaxed. By contrast, he looked so comfortable in his own skin and in his surroundings'* Community Producer.

The second case study comes from somebody who *'went to two special school[s] as I have learnt [sic.] difficult[ies]'*. They went on to comment: *'I have depression and anxiety and was very upset and frustrated that I couldn't get a job...when [Practitioner] came...she is a lovely lady and really enjoying her class I found that it help relax me and not make me feel anxious about life it calm me down definitely change my way of thinking that I need to stop worrying so much...'*

Both extracts demonstrate the positive impact on mental health as a direct result of the project. The fact that the participants were able to identify and speak about this change in themselves is also a marker of success for the project.

Additionally, seven of the nine project partners answered a set of questions following the project. They were asked, 'on a scale of 1-10, please rate the degree to which The Gathering Project has had a positive impact on participants. With 1 being 'it hasn't had any positive impact', and 10 being 'the positive impact has been extraordinary'.

The average score from the feedback given was 8, with comments to support this such as: *'The clients that attended really enjoyed the project. It is evident by how often they talk about it and one client in particular still visiting his experiences by speaking about them daily'*.

This same group of partners were also asked: 'Have you noticed any changes (positive or negative) in participants outside of the project since it started?' One project partner said: *'When they attend other groups, they now come earlier to sit and chat/have coffee with other service users'*, and another said *'The Gathering project had a very positive impact on the participants, I could see an improvement in confidence and the ability to put their views across and actively participate in activities'*.

A final partner commented: *'I feel it had a very positive impact. The clients appeared more confident and relaxed after each session. L in particular appears to have gained a lot from it. He tells me he felt a connection and it brought back good memories of his time as a dancer.'*

It can therefore be argued indubitably that the aim to 'help people speak about their mental health and have an improved quality of life' has been achieved.

Aim 2: Use arts and creative activity as a tool to support wellbeing

As a mental health theatre company, and as a team of people working with lived experience of poor mental health which the arts and creative activities played a positive role in supporting, the belief that arts and creative activities can be used as a tool to support wellbeing sits at the heart of both this project and all of the work that FMTC does.

With that in mind, the final case study can be used to give evidence that the aim of using arts and creative activity as a tool to support wellbeing has been achieved. This comes from another male who lives within supported accommodation. He said: *'I live in supported living with other men with similar mental health. I was asked about the workshop and joined without hesitant [sic.] and I've loved it'*. He went on to comment: *'I've learned more about the work [Practitioners] do and what it could lead on to drama e.g. learned more about stress free life and wake up feeling better refreshed and I've loved every minute'*.

This participant went on to volunteer to give feedback and be part of the content creation day for the third year of the project, and it is sincerely hoped that his journey with drama will continue.

Moving on, it's important to have project partners who understand or at least are willing to take a risk with the artistic content. In this spirit, one project partner handed over an entire work

stream for young adults within their setting to experience this project. They commented: 'It appealed to me because it was different to anything we have tried before and I could see how it would build confidence and give the participants skills to deal with personal issues and become more inclusive in the community.'

This risk paid off, as this partner later fed back that: *'The Gathering project had a very positive impact on the participants, I could see an improvement in confidence and the ability to put their views across and actively participate in activities. It was nice to have something completely different to what we normally provide and next time I will pull others from their work streams to attend.'*

Given the range of different Practitioners and the differentiation across and within the groups, it has been noted that different groups experienced varying levels of creative delivery within their sessions so as not to overwhelm or exclude them from participation.

This was observed by one partner who said *'I liked the idea of group creative activities which would generate reflection and discussion, but the theatre element was a concern as I didn't think group members would engage. In the event, the theatre element wasn't used, I guess because the facilitator came to the same conclusion.'* In a different group however, the Practitioner commented that *'they only came for the drama!'*, which meant the group were more than happy to engage with the theatrical tasks.

This variation was reflected upon throughout the project by FMTC and the Practitioners. How could a balance be found between offering authentic, engaging experiences that help people to explore and reflect on their mental health comfortably, whilst still maintaining 'who we are' as a company? Targeting efforts and early relationship building with project partners is important here, as is working with skilled Practitioners who feel confident enough to gently and safely take people outside of their comfort zone. Where the project ethos/aims became too compromised (with the final group), it was pulled to a close three weeks early.

That said, the percentage score given by participants against the statement 'I better understand that arts and creative activities can be used as tools to look after my wellbeing' remains to be at a high 78% of participants scoring 4 or higher. Of this group, 61% scored the highest rating of 5.

This was supported by the statement that *'[I] had [a] good understanding before, helped me to implement more'*, as well as *'I feel I've had to play along and give answers when I had none. But by acting it I often produced something authentic...'* and *'did not feel pressured to take part in activities, which on the flip side, made it easier for me to attempt them'*. These are insightful reflections given by participants about the use of arts and creative activities within the sessions.

Another project partner fed back that *'it takes a lot to let go of your barriers and feel comfortable enough to express yourself through drama. Confidence levels have definitely increased and the feeling of cooperation within the group; they don't appear to be so concerned with their own limitations and are more willing to have a go.'*

As a result, despite the age-old pondering of how to deliver creative activities without scaring people off, it can be definitively concluded that arts and creative activities have been used as a tool to support wellbeing, and that participants are equipped to go on to apply this themselves.

Aim 3: Bring people together

The first iteration of the project in 2021 focused on helping people who were tackling loneliness and isolation experienced because of the Covid-19 pandemic. As well as this, it is evidenced that connecting with others has extremely positive consequences for mental health and wellbeing¹⁰. As a result, this is a very important ongoing aim of The Gathering Project.

Against the statement: 'The project made me feel more connected to my community', 73% scored 4 or higher.

Participants gave additional feedback here, and this seems to be divided into comments about how the group made them feel, comments about working with individuals in the group, and comments about how supportive the group were because of the project. Below are some examples:

- *'we have all had a lovely time in the group'**'was lovely meeting new people'*
- *'was lovely to connect'*
- *'people in this group made it easy'**'within the group a feeling of safety'*
- *'extra team members to help get activities done if tough session'*.

Project partners also made comments that relate to the aim to bring people together: *'One of the attendees has grown in confidence and is more willing to speak to people she doesn't know...'* and another: *'I think the group has bonded more, the dynamic of the group has shifted.'*

Therefore, this aim has been achieved within the sessions by strengthening bonds, although it would be good to know how many members were new to the group, and who came specifically because of the activities on offer so that we can truly know if the project has achieved the act of bringing people together who otherwise wouldn't have met.

Aim 4: Connect people to local support services

This last aim refers to the value the team places in ensuring that participants are able and willing to take next steps to support their own mental health beyond the project. A 'looking after yourself' poster was spoken through in session one, and referred to every session thereafter, with particular emphasis again in the final session. It is also reiterated that the setting where the group is held is an ideal port of call, should anyone need some more personal or further support.

When asked to score against the statement: 'I have learnt more about the different support services on offer', 59% scored 4 or higher. This is a positive figure, but there is development that can be done here to signpost people more effectively.

It could be that a conversation/role playing scenario is incorporated into one of the sessions so that participants kinaesthetically embed the practise of asking for help. It also must be ensured that each participant can go away with a copy of the poster, whether they use it or not, as opposed to having one copy in the space that a person must overtly refer to if they are interested¹¹. On an occasion when the posters were given away to individuals, the Producer observed one participant circling a helpline before putting the poster in his pocket.

¹⁰ [5 Ways to Wellbeing](#) – Mind (2023).

¹¹ There was inconsistency across the groups as to how the poster was shared and the instructions for how to benefit from it.

Despite the lower score answers against the statement, multiple project partners gave very positive feedback against the aim to connect people to local support services. One said: *'We have noticed that service users are reaching out more now when they need support which is great as this reduces the risk of self harm/suicidal thoughts and overthinking.'* It would be great to be able to measure this brilliant outcome some time beyond the project.

Another project partner commented: *'The participants seem happier to talk about some issues with staff members and from this we have given extra support to a participant who has been finding her Job Centre Plus visits overwhelming. We have now attended with her and made plans to liaise with them going forward, we have also supported her in the paperwork involved.'* This outcome demonstrates a connection between the project and the ability to reach out for help. A final partner commented *'we are confident that the participants of the workshops now feel more able to engage and request support if needed.'*

From the combination of feedback available, it can be concluded that the project has achieved its aim to 'connect people to local support services', with the greater perception of this coming from the project partners than the participants themselves.

5. What's Next? – Development of The Gathering Project for 2023/24

The Gathering Project has been designed and funding secured. This will run for eight weeks with eight different groups. These eight groups will exist in deprived areas in Hampshire¹² and will be for people with mild to moderate poor mental health.

It is important that it is for groups of people who are attending for their wellbeing, and not as a general social group with a differing common interest/theme such as because they have dementia or share a particular gender-identity. This is supported by the Practitioner comment: *'with some of them I feel like I'm interrupting their social group that they come to, to relax, and others really engage with it and love the activities'*.

All findings have supported the design of the next iteration of the project. These have been used to structure the following section.

Delivery content

As mentioned, content has been developed to extend the project to eight weeks to demonstrate clinical relevance and to meet appetite.

Initial planning for The Gathering Project 2022 had it running from April-September 2022. Due to difficulty sourcing groups and getting sessions with those already established up and running, the delivery phase extended five months passed the originally planned end date.

Feedback at the time revealed that the summer is a challenging time to run the project because participant/service users' routines shift slightly during this period. For some partner settings, their groups even stopped running, meaning that the project needed to happen in autumn or early the next year. As a result, the delivery phase for 2023/24 will extend until December 2023. This allows for reporting and developments for the following year to take place in the final quarter of the financial year.

Ongoing reflections, specifically from Practitioners, suggested that the level of paperwork was extensive for them to manage. This relates both to the evaluation methods (explained later) and the large list of resources required to deliver each session. Resources will be re-usable

¹² These are: Rushmoor, Gosport, New Forest, Totton, Thornhill, Fratton.

across multiple sessions (wipe-clean laminated designs) and physical resources limited where possible.

Feedback also showed that sometimes session content would be more than enough for the allocated time, and sometimes Practitioners would be rushing through to get everything completed. For example one practitioner said: *'sessions are a rush for this group (but slow for other groups)'*.

It is difficult to judge how content will land with any group on any given day, but more specific targeting and more flexible session plans (both described in more detail later on) should allow the Practitioner to take how much time there is left, as well as the creative confidence of participants, into account throughout their delivery. This will ensure that the content fits the session length.

Lastly, one Practitioner commented that there was: *'A lack of drama and creativity within this work'*. This goes back to the fine-balance that is needed between arts and creative activities and ensuring that participants are comfortable enough to continue taking part.

This will be explored greatly within the content planning day and subsequent Practitioner training day when content will be designed and Practitioner confidence will be explored. The latter element will ensure that Practitioners are equipped practically and emotionally to take creative risks with their groups without excluding anybody or feeling conflicted themselves.

Target audiences and recruitment of project partners

Although there were clear target audiences set for 2022, this posed its own challenges:

1. There were groups carried over from 2021 which slightly skewed the focus of the project (because group members were not characterised by the targeting criteria chosen).
2. Within the ten partnering opportunities available, geography, age, gender, ethnicity, and specific participant experiences needed to be considered when finding groups, which made for a small pool to choose from.
3. It was a challenge landing contact with specific target audiences, specifically young adults and those who are Black, Asian or minority ethnic. This meant that despite meaningful contact being made with 54 different group leaders/networks and an extended delivery phase which reached 5 months past the originally proposed end date in a bid to work with these groups, only some of the audience targets for the project were met.

Nine out of ten available groups were partnered with, and some were more closely representing the targeting criteria than others. This meant that there were extreme differences across the groups which posed challenges for consistent delivery of the workshop content, and with trying to keep the project close to its four core aims. Some participants had limited memory, limited mobility and/or learning differences, which radically altered how the content could be engaged with.

The following changes have been made to resolve this issue for the 2023 project:

1. Clearer targeting has already been defined for 2023, and with fewer groups to source there is able to be closer comparison for each group, ensuring that the content can be delivered across all of them without drastic adaptations needing to be made.
2. There will be increased efforts to work with groups who have mild to moderate poor mental health, as opposed to multiple different targeting criteria. As such, there will theoretically be a larger pool of groups available to partner with.

3. The content is less prescriptive for the Practitioner and the objectives for the individual sessions are clearer. This allows for more flexibility with the content and a greater understanding of what is needing to be achieved. Therefore, whole session plans should not need to be rewritten for specific groups, as the individual plans will be able to accommodate everybody with minor adjustments made where necessary e.g. doing an exercise individually instead of in groups if numbers are low, or if a particular group is typically inhibited.
4. In this same vein, project partners will need to commit to participating in a (predominantly) theatre project, which means the expectation for participants to practically engage with the material is there from the outset. The Producer will be meeting groups ahead of the sessions starting so that individual participants feel they have made their own decision about the project, as opposed to feeling blindsided by the material/the project by the organisation who represents them (which may be a barrier to willing participation).

Evaluation

Overall, the evaluation methods used were a real strength of the project and have provided a plethora of relevant data to analyse. However, some Practitioners did feedback that data collection/management was a challenge. Specific reasons given were the fact that the ReQoL Patient Reported Outcome Measure was unsuitable, and that data collection was too time-consuming both within and after the session it was collected in.

In response to this, as the ReQoL measure was only a pre-requisite of funding for the 2022 version of the project, the team will re-establish the tried and tested wellbeing measure: The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale to measure impact in 2023/24, therefore negating any issues with this.

Secondly, the Producer will be at the first and final session of all session sets to support the Practitioner with data collection and management¹³.

Signposting/Aftercare

The need to develop the way that the support services are embedded into the sessions has already been discussed within this report, but one Practitioner identified that there is also *'scope to utilise this relationship and develop the skills of the attendees. I would like to have been able to signpost them to places they can further access this kind of work in their free time - a local drama group for example'*.

As a result, the team will be creating a resource which signposts participants to general creative activities, as well as detailing specific pathways which will enable participants to source their local arts and cultural provision.

Finally, a suggestion was made that there should be a small recap summary for participants that they could take away from each session. This would help them to continue using the tools and embedding the learning and positive impact of the experience and would also support them to fill their evaluation forms out with more certainty of mind. This is something that can be easily implemented into the 2023/2024 version of the project.

4. Conclusion

There were changes to project delivery both practically and structurally as well as within the session content, but thankfully this did not appear to detriment the experience for individuals.

¹³ This was trialled for the final four groups in 2022 and worked very well, but this did incur unavoidable travel costs against the project budget which will need to be taken into account.

In fact, it likely enhanced it, without compromising FMTC's ability to deliver against the core aims, as these were all achieved.

The target audiences who were difficult to engage (those who are BAME and those who are young adults) are reflected in the low participation rates for these groups. However, this learning has been embedded for next year and therefore targets are more achievable. It also must be noted that previous low engagement from the male target group had multiplied by at least 5 by the end of the project, which is a brilliant achievement.

Overall, this project played a significant role, however small, in participants' lives whilst it was happening, and for some will live on beyond the experience playing an influential part in future decisions.

'This may be about enabling them to have an improved quality of life and choosing to speak about their mental health, using arts as a tool to support their wellbeing, continuing to connect with others, reaching out for help, or a combination of all four outcomes. Either way, it has been a delight to work with such a broad range of people who live in Hampshire, to help them to actively support their mental health through the use of creative activities. We can't wait to deliver the next iteration of The Gathering Project'. – Fluid Motion Theatre Company.

- *You're doing a good job, thank you.*
- *I found this group really valuable.*
- *I have realised I'm not alone in my experiences.*
- *It's the first time I've tried talking out loud and I think it went quite well!*
- *I actually feel like I could actually be a talk show host!*
- *More of this kind of project is needed.*
- *I have really enjoyed the Gathering Project again and look forward to the project returning next year.*

Practitioner feedback:

- *Without a doubt I could see the value of Gathering for J, her confidence was visibly growing each week!*
- *The group are actively taking home their paperwork (e.g. positive post-its, looking after yourself posters etc.) and sticking them around their mirrors or in a place where they can see it. They are valuing what we are doing each session, and incorporating it into their lives.*
- *The breaktime was really lovely. Lots of positivity, support and chat, so it felt important not to rush this and to give the group an actual break. Lovely atmosphere today, and a sense of familiarity and fondness for the sessions/project. Group concluded that they'd have us back.*
- *One participant has agoraphobia, so the sessions are really helping her confidence and how she would like to communicate better with her 5-year-old daughter.*
- *All in all we received really positive feedback from staff and participants - and a definite sense of wanting to develop the work and have us back.*
- *It was very rewarding to see trust and confidence gently grow amongst the regulars.*
- *Importantly, I was seeing the change in the participants, people who in week 1 couldn't make eye contact, week two when talking about mental health triggered them and made them cry and have a panic attack and then today those same people were dancing, smiling and shouting loudly 'I am amazing', 'I am confident', 'I am a work in progress', so much positivity in the room.*

Project partner feedback:

- *I think sessions have really helped develop a core group and increase trust and communication. Interesting to see if this makes a difference when back to usual.*
- *I was at all times grateful to [Practitioner] for coming along and for taking the pressure from me. I just had to turn up and to ensure the smooth running of things, it was a pleasant break from the usual angst of finding something to say and do with the group each week.*
- *Never once did any of the guys feel pressured and were able to leave the workshop with no questions asked if they chose. We just can't wait to work with you again.*