



Mental Well-being Impact Executive Summary Changing Minds, St Mary's Secret Garden, Hackney



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INTRODUCTION

This is a summary report that presents the findings from a Mental Well-being Impact Assessment (MWIA) that was undertaken on the Changing Minds project delivered by St Mary's Secret Garden, Hackney. The Changing Minds project was funded by a grant from Ecominds and the MWIA will form part of the evidence for the evaluation of the project. The main findings are contained in a detailed report. The twin aim of the MWIA was to:

- To identify the impact that the Changing Minds project has had on the mental well-being of staff, volunteers and users
- To identify recommendations that have the potential to maximise positive and minimise negative impacts on mental well-being.

The importance of mental well-being and its benefits for individuals and communities are now widely recognised.ⁱ

A commonly used definition of well-being is '... a dynamic state, in which the individual is able to develop [his or her] potential, work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships with others, and contribute to their community. It is enhanced when an individual is able to fulfil their personal and social goals and achieve a sense of purpose in society.'ⁱⁱ

The Changing Minds project was to provide mental health service users (MHUs) with the opportunity to clear, design and create an outdoor space within the site at St Mary's. The project was delivered throughout 2011 and consisted of two sessions (3 hours) per week. The delivery used a model of sharing all planning and delivery decisions between staff and volunteers.

WHAT IS MWIA?

MWIA seeks to identify and evidence (through community profiling, literature review and stakeholders views) the key impacts that a service or project has on mental well-being, and ensure relevant population groups are being targeted. Wider determinants and protective factors for mental health are used as the basis for the assessment. Factors considered include:



- **Wider determinants** e.g. transport, leisure activities, challenging discrimination, economic security
- **Enhancing control** e.g. belief in own capabilities, a sense of control, opportunities for expressing views and being heard
- **Increasing resilience and community assets** e.g. emotional well-being, learning and development, trust and safety, social networks and relationships
- **Facilitating participation and promoting inclusion** e.g. sense of belonging, ways to be involved, activities that bring people together

MWIA Toolkit (2011)ⁱⁱⁱ

KEY FINDINGS OF THE MWIA

The MWIA findings from the population profile, literature review, case studies and stakeholder workshop suggest that the following are the most important impacts on mental well-being of Changing Minds:

Population groups

The Changing Minds project was specifically designed for and targeted people who are mental health service users – hence it was serving an acute need for community based projects that offer a chance for social activities as well as confidence building. Black and ethnic minorities were well represented and the project was accessible as there was no cost to participate.

Wider determinants

There were some positive impacts identified that are supported by the published research, including:

- Access to being outdoors and socializing when otherwise would be indoors and isolated
- Being involved with the project reduces the stress of everyday living on a low income and with mental health problems
- A space for the creative arts e.g. performance arts as a small stage has been built
- The location of St Mary's is very accessible to local people and those from further afield as close to several bus routes
- The project was devised and delivered in a highly democratic manner
- Views were often challenged and people learnt more about tolerance.



Protective factors for promoting and protecting mental well-being

Enhancing Control

The staffs of St Mary's played a significant role in making this project one that people could feel able and valued to participate in through making it a project that was designed and delivered by all involved.

Resilience and community assets

Examples cited by Volunteers involved with Changing Minds suggest that there has been a positive impact on their resilience as individuals; and as a group they have developed themselves into a community asset. These findings are supported by the project evaluation data. Examples include:

- Being involved with a group undertaking an arts based programme has built trust and given an opportunity to offer each other emotional support and a safe space to share their problems
- Acquiring new skills and confidence such as Mosaic creation, and gardening
- Creating a learning environment where people can take some responsibility for shaping the project has promoted feelings of achievement and pride

There were no significant negative impacts identified.

Participation and social inclusion

Changing Minds has given people an opportunity to volunteer and do something for people in need which can be positive for mental well-being. Examples include:

- Volunteers have benefitted from their participation by building relationships with people from other backgrounds.
- Potentially vulnerable people on a low income are able to be engaged with meaningful activities as sessions were free. There is a growing evidence base about the positive impacts of arts, creativity and fun on mental well-being.

Case studies are available from volunteers who have since gone onto further study, volunteering and part-time paid work citing their experience of participating in Changing Minds as a factor in making these steps.

However, for some volunteers their interest and engagement has fallen off since the ending of the structured developmental stage of the Changing Minds project. Hence, the positive impacts are likely to be temporary as they may revert back to being isolated in their homes.

The research suggests that volunteering enables the development of knowledge, experience and skills and is, therefore, highly likely to promote the individuals self-esteem and sense of participation as well as a reduction in social isolation. Volunteering is also a pathway into paid employment. Providing social and learning



activities in an urban area where there are potential problems of isolation and inactivity which could lead to poorer mental well-being is likely to be making a positive impact on those who participate in them.

Changing Minds project outcomes

The evidence suggests that the Changing Minds project has been successful in contributing to the delivery of most of the outcomes that are directly related to mental well-being. See main report for details.

RECOMMENDATIONS

MWIA seeks to identify a number of recommendations to maximise the potential positive and minimise potential negative impacts on mental well-being of future delivery of similar projects. Full details of those arising from the MWIA are listed in the main report.

Sustainability of Changing Minds

Finding ways to keep volunteers interested and engaged should be continued with the maintenance and the future use of the performance space that is central to the garden. This requires on-going facilitation and staffing levels and skills need to reflect this and continue to be maintained.

Future projects and services

This group worked well together and there may be opportunities for them to collaborate in developing future bids with St Mary's. This could be built into the St Mary's fundraising strategies.

Sharing the learning from Changing Minds

St Marys and Ecominds should consider how they can share the learning and benefits with local, regional and national commissioners to explore how to roll this out in other locations.

Sharing the learning and application of MWIA

This MWIA has generated knowledge and understanding of the impact that Changing Minds has had on volunteer and staff mental well-being. It would be useful to share the findings with a larger audience such as Ecominds and other organisations as a Tool that can help with the assessment of impact of interventions on mental well-being.

ⁱ Huppert F, Baylis N, Keverne B (eds) (2005). The science of well-being. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

ⁱⁱ Foresight Mental Capital and Well-being Project (2008). Final project report. London: The Government Office for Science.

ⁱⁱⁱ Cooke, A., Friedli, L., Coggins, T., Edmonds, N., Michaelson, J., O'Hara, K., Snowden, L., Stansfield, J., Steuer, N., Scott-Samuel, A. (2011) 3rd ed., London: National MWIA Collaborative

