

Improvisation

&

Mental Health

A Cross-Sector Pilot Partnership
Evaluation Report

August 2018

**In partnership with Simon Magnus,
Worthing Museum, Sussex Recovery College
and the University of Brighton**

September 2017 – August 2018

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“I've opened up to new things that I never thought I would do. I now understand it's ok to try new things and make mistakes. I even told my psychologist because it lessened my anxiety. Everything was open and free.”

Community Member

Executive Summary

Soundcastle use music to bring people together, tackling social isolation and improving wellbeing. We devise creative music projects which enable people to discover the skills to write their own music, bringing music back into grassroots culture and daily life. Our practice places community members at the heart of the creative process, promoting ownership and ultimately autonomy. This leads to reduced isolation, enhanced wellbeing and connectedness.

The Improvisation and Mental Health project was a cross-art, cross-sector pilot partnership which examined how combined facilitated arts might influence creativity and resilience in both community members and artists. It brought together Soundcastle (music), Simon Magnus (drama), Sussex Recovery College, Brighton University and 37 adults with mental ill health.

The project took the form of 3 Sound and Movement courses for adults with mental ill health who were recruited by Sussex Recovery College (SRC). Sessions were held at Worthing Museum and hosted within the SRC framework. Each course consisted of 10 sessions delivered on a weekly basis. In Autumn 2017, we delivered the first Introductory course. This was followed by a second phase in the Spring of 2018.



During this time we delivered 2 courses simultaneously. The first was a new Introductory course to recruit new community members. The second was an Advanced course open only to those who had previously completed the Autumn sessions. Due to extra funding, we were able to deliver 5 extra sessions in preparation for a performance showcase. In the Introductory phases, the community members were facilitated to explore their improvisation skills in both sound and movement, expressing their individual identities, using instruments, voices and bodies to explore playfulness, creativity and connection. During the Advanced course, we took these new skills to the next level, learning how to co-devise a music and storytelling performance piece which was showcased at the Sussex Recovery College Graduation Ceremony. In addition to this, we hosted 2 CPD days. One was delivered internally at Sussex Recovery College and open to peer trainers and

Experts by Experience from the NHS Sussex Partnership. This was to explore individual leadership skills. The second was for artist facilitators and examined cross-art facilitation in mental health settings.

100% of community members participated in regular, audio recorded reflection circles. During these feedback sessions, they often referred to their own anxieties and challenges, their increased skills, their ambition for future activities and recognition of their own wellbeing levels. In addition, artist facilitators and peer trainers held transcribed debriefs after every session as well as several team evaluation meetings throughout the year. Peer Trainers attended a series of interviews with Helen Johnson, Senior Lecturer in Psychology from Brighton University to give an independent insight into their cross-sector experience. Audio recorded reflection circles and written feedback forms were completed by all CPD attendees. These accumulated responses provide the qualitative data in this report.

79% of community members completed Recovery and Wellbeing monitoring and 87% completed self-assessment surveys of their own creative and collaborative skills. Attendance was monitored via project registers. These accumulated responses make up the quantitative data in this report.



The Team

Soundcastle

- Project Manager and Lead Music Facilitator – Hannah Dunster
- Support Facilitator (Spring) – Gail Macleod
- Support Facilitator (Autumn) – Fernando Machado
- Project Management and Evaluation Support – Jenni Parkinson and Rachael Perrin

Partners

- Lead Drama and Movement Facilitator – Simon Magnus
- Sussex Recovery College Peer Trainers – Belinda Channer and Julie Barnett
- Brighton University Researcher – Helen Johnson
- Worthing Museum – Gerry Connolly and James Sainsbury

Funding

Improvisation and Mental Health was funded by Arts Council England, Awards for All and Worthing Community Chest. It was supported in kind by Sussex Recovery College and Worthing Museum.



Project Summary

Sound and Movement Introductory Course 1:

October – December 2018

- 10 community members signed up for the 10 week course through Sussex Recovery College recruitment days. Of these students, 8 managed to complete the course with 7 attending more than 80% of the sessions.
- The group met on a weekly basis at Worthing Museum.
- Hannah Dunster and Simon Magnus started exploring how to combine their sound and movement practices through 2 practice sharing sessions, developing content for the course.
- Peer Trainer, Belinda Channer brought the cross-sector perspective. Through a group induction, regular team debriefs and 2 evaluation sessions, the facilitation team interrogated the nature of cross-sector partnership work.
- Soundcastle started to further develop the Soundcastle Theory of Practice by challenging it with a new art form and seeking ways to enhance resilience as well as wellbeing through the practice.
- Community members on the course were given control of creative content, improvising within a facilitated framework.
- The group were encouraged to explore playfulness, spontaneity and mistake making rather than creating a set piece of work.
- Community members used instruments, voices, assistive music technology and their bodies in the sessions.
- On the last day of the project, the group were consulted on what they would like to get out of an Advanced course and where they could see their own practice leading.

Sound and Movement Introductory Course 2:

April – July 2018

- 10 new community members signed up for the 10 week course through Sussex Recovery College recruitment days. Of these students, 8 managed to complete the course with 6 attending more than 70% of the sessions.
- The group met on a weekly basis at Worthing Museum.

- Whilst the course was comparable to the Autumn, Hannah Dunster and Simon Magnus started exploring how to embody what they were asking of the community members into their own facilitation practice, researching improvisatory and spontaneous co-facilitation techniques.
- A new peer trainer, Julie Barnett joined the facilitation and action research team, attended an induction and was incorporated into the spontaneous facilitation approach.

Sound and Movement Advanced Course:

April – July 2018

- 7 community members signed up for the 10 week course having already completed the Autumn Introductory course. Unfortunately 1 of these students was unable to attend due to ill health. Of the remaining 6, 100% were able to complete the course, attending 90% or more of the sessions.
- The group met on a weekly basis at Worthing Museum.
- The artist facilitators sought to challenge the Soundcastle Theory of Practice further through the idea of *Permissioned Challenge*.
- Community members requested the challenge of devising a performance showcase.
- The group were facilitated to co-devise a 10 minute, improvised music and storytelling piece – *The Storm's Daughter*.
- The group started meeting independently outside of the course to rehearse material.
- Soundcastle were able to facilitate 5 extra sessions in preparation for the performance due to additional funding.
- The group performed their work at the Sussex Recovery College Graduation Ceremony at the Charis Centre in Crawley to an audience of 150 people. This performance was filmed and shared online with permission from the group.
- On the last day, the group were consulted on their future vision for the project. They viewed a professional film of their performance and were shown how to access it online in order to share with family and friends.

Permissioned Challenge: a Soundcastle term meaning the process of asking community members if and how they would like to be challenged, taking the practice beyond wellbeing and towards resilience.

Training and Research:

October 2017 – August 2018

- The Soundcastle team and Simon Magnus all attended training either in Mental Health First Aid or in working creatively in Mental Health settings.
- The Soundcastle team attended a company development day which focused on risk taking within our collaborative working practice.
- The Peer Trainers attended a series of interviews with Helen Johnson at Brighton University to give an independent insight into their cross-sector experience.
- Soundcastle, in partnership with Simon Magnus offered a ‘Sound and Movement CPD: Cross-Art Facilitation in Mental Health Settings’ to artist facilitators. We delivered in London and attendees travelled from as far as Hastings and Milton Keynes. The course had 10 attendees, including 3 from the Soundcastle team.
- Soundcastle have created an activity toolkit for artist facilitators working in mental health contexts. This is available on the Soundcastle website and has been shared online.
- Soundcastle, in partnership with Simon Magnus and Julie Barnett delivered a CPD session in Leadership Skills to 10 attendees. All were either Sussex Recovery College Peer Trainers or Experts by Experience from the NHS Sussex Partnership. We used sound and movement activities to explore how to tap into personal values in order to find a unique and authentic leadership style.
- The sharing of our learning is ongoing at industry conferences and events. We have already attended Arts and Health South West, the next will be in Oct 2018 at MUS0C (York University) where we have been invited to present. We have applied to present at the Music Education Expo (London), Feb 2019.



Outputs

Intended: We will have worked with Sussex Recovery College to deliver 3 separate Sound and Movement courses at Worthing Museum for adults with mental ill health.

As intended.

Intended: 30 adults with mental ill health will have taken part in Improvisation and Mental Health.

Exceeded intentions.

The Sound and Movement courses and CPD sessions engaged a total of 37 adults facing diagnosed mental health challenges, 7 more than anticipated in our original prediction. The Sound and Movement CPD for artist facilitators directly engaged a further 9 adults, emphasising the cross-sector nature of the work.

Intended: 2 Sussex Recovery College Peer Trainers will have attended a series of interviews with researcher Helen Johnson of Brighton University, to give an independent account of their experience of cross-sector working with artists.

As intended.

Intended: We will have delivered an internal CPD day at Sussex Recovery College for Peer Trainers and Artists working in Mental Health cross-sector settings.

At the point of delivery, we made a decision to change the content of this CPD session to What does leadership look like to you? - a session designed to help people working in mental health discover their own unique leadership style. We took this decision because Sussex Recovery College was not working with many artists at the time and so the original plan had become less relevant. We extended the invitation to Experts by Experience as well as Peer Trainers so that as many people as possible could benefit.

Intended: We will have delivered a cross-arts CPD day for artist practitioners working in mental health settings.

As intended.

Intended: The Advanced course will have culminated in a performance showcase at the Sussex Recovery College Graduation Ceremony at The Charis Centre, Crawley.

As intended.

Intended: We will have created an Improvisation and Mental Health toolkit and disseminated it online.

As intended.



Outcomes

Outcome 1: To increase creative and collaborative skills in adults facing mental health challenges (see Appendix 2)

- Community Members were asked to self-assess their own creative and collaborative skills on a scale of 1 to 10 on 2 to 3 different occasions throughout the 10 week course. The collated data shows an average definitive increase in confidence in both these areas. During the Introductory courses, creative skills rose over the 10 sessions from 4/10 (*I can use my imagination to inspire sounds*) to 8/10 (*I can honestly express my emotions to others through my artistic creations*). Collaborative skills rose from 3/10 (*I will try out new ideas but not if I have to leave my comfort zone*) to 9/10 (*I can develop artistic ideas through discussion and/or improvisation*). Interestingly, the same ratings survey carried out with the Advanced group still showed an increase, but from a much higher baseline. Creative skills rose over the 10 sessions from 9.6/10 (*I can combine different art forms to create something new e.g. sound and/or movement*) to 10/10 (*I can create an emotive, artistic experience and invite other people to join me in it*). Collaborative skills rose from 7/10 (*I can support and build upon other people's artistic ideas*) to 9.6/10 (*I can develop artistic ideas through discussion and/or improvisation*). This higher

baseline suggests that despite the 3 month break between the Introductory and Advanced course, the original learning had a long term impact.

- Facilitator and community member qualitative feedback from all three courses showed increased levels of confidence as people with high levels of anxiety became more engaged and involved over the sessions.

Week 2:

Artist Facilitator: *"G is still feeling self-conscious about not being perfect, but she's managing to control it and cross the hurdle to join in."*

Week 4:

Peer Trainer: *"The ball exercise has set up a psychology that helps people to mess up. This meant that G felt able to stop and start again with a new idea in the body percussion circle."*

Week 9:

Community Member G *"In the beginning of this I felt judgemental of myself because in my mind if I'm going to do something it's gotta be done perfectly otherwise what the point? So I had to disengage those wires in order to participate and then I started laughing at myself which was good."*

- By Week 5 of the Introductory course, community members had started reflecting on their ability to take activities home and continue being creative beyond the session framework:

"I took the line home and it turned into crotchets and quavers, a rhythm from the shapes we made. It's giving you inspiration to do something isn't it?"

"It felt like I could do it for hours, I could make a rhythm and go on forever."

"Whatever we do in these sessions, I use it, it inspires me. It's giving me more ideas and confidence to play with my son."

- By Week 7, community members were able to positively comment on the creative activity that had taken place during the sessions:

"The Storytelling was mesmerizing"

"I've really heard the music change. It's gone from noise to music. It's a tall order to be asked to play an instrument and create something like that."

- When the second Introductory course and Advanced course were running simultaneously, artist facilitators were able to see the difference between the two and the progress that the **Advanced course had made**. *"Today, this group [the Advanced course] felt like they were arriving for a rehearsal. The introductory group arrive for a course, but this group are a band!"*
- During the Advanced course, artist facilitators noted an increase in the collaborative nature of the work being created, noting in particular the sensitivity community members displayed to the artistic needs of the group. *"I value his sensitivity in the music we make. What he makes is simple but that's because he is listening to what the music needs. He is displaying real musical sensitivity."*
- Community members on the Advanced course commented on the performance, their apprehension and their sense of achievement.

"I never thought I could take part in a show performance... but we did it!"

*"Never imagined I could **feel so good** about doing things that to start with I felt apprehensive and afraid of."*

*"I thought the applause at the end was really good. That kind of blew me away because I wasn't expecting it. I mean, I was expecting it... but it was **proper bloody power!** There were 3 or 4 people who came up to me after who said they were blown away. People are aware of me doing things - that's really good."*

Outcome 2: To develop Soundcastle facilitators' skills in cross-sector work with adults facing mental health challenges

- The Soundcastle Theory of Practice developed and adapted to this new context, raising questions about how we work in the future and continue to evolve. An interesting point of discovery was how that in the past, the nature of Soundcastle's practice has promoted wellbeing but with less conclusive evidence of promoting resilience. On this project, with the informed support of the peer trainers, that changed for the first time and we now have evidence of increased resilience in community members beyond the project framework (see Outcome 4). A big part of this was the introduction of the idea of **Permissioned Challenge**.

This means literally asking the group if, when and how they would like to be challenged, allowing them to take responsibility for their own development.

Artist Facilitator: *"In all my facilitation, I get so concerned with the safe space that I'm now realising that I over nurture the most vulnerable. But this can then make the space unsafe for others. They know that they are entering a group environment and we need to remember that they are adults. We are not therapists and this is not therapy."*

Peer Trainer: *"The Recovery College promote this idea that students are here to get in and get on with it. This was part of the induction as peer trainers. We are not there to mollycoddle them - it's not therapy. This is very important for them to be ready to go out into the world."*

Artist facilitators also commented that whilst in the past, they wouldn't have risked putting on a performance with vulnerable people, the idea of **Permissioned Challenge** gave this **responsibility to the group**. *"In music it's a natural thing to get to the point where you want to share. I made the suggestion we should perform at the ceremony. My big learning was give them the option. This allowed me to relax as a facilitator and kept the responsibility with the group as a whole."*

Permissioned Challenge has radically developed Soundcastle's facilitation approach in cross-sector work, enabling us to push community members to achieve their highest creative potential without putting their wellbeing at risk.

Community Member: *"Sometimes I've been apprehensive to do things and it has been good to be pushed."*

- An extra point of development for the artist facilitators was learning how to fundamentally embody exactly what we were asking of the community members within our facilitation practice. We were emphasising the need to celebrate community members making mistakes in order to explore creativity. We in turn then allowed ourselves to also enjoy this luxury as facilitators. The freedom to make mistakes meant that with the permission of the group, we could take more risks and try out new activities and processes without fear of failure. *"We're focusing on watching, listening, leading and being less critical of ourselves."*
- All courses were co-produced with Belinda Channer and Julie Barnett, Peer Trainers from Sussex Recovery College. Peer Trainers have lived experience of mental ill health and represent the cross-sector partnership in this project. Learning how to co-produce effectively with the *Peer Trainers* was a major point of development in our cross-sector work.

We soon came to the realisation that we were speaking very different languages *“I am learning that in your language ‘learning’ actually for me means failings!”* We approached the cross-sector partnership as a point of research. Helen Johnson’s interviews found that peer trainers *“spoke of the course almost as though they were visiting a strange country. It was new and weird terrain to venture into, that was completely unlike their experiences elsewhere. Because of this, they had to learn to behave differently, to understand new words and ways of speaking, and to feel at ease with new ways of being.”*¹

Peer trainers spoke positively of the fluid artistic format of the sessions: *“Simon and Hannah will say ‘We thought we’d do this, this and this.’ But then sort of half way through it would change because it was different dynamics within the group, and that is something that doesn’t happen normally within a group environment within the college, or within any sort of class space. So that’s another thing I think is really good.”*

However the two peer trainers had quite contrasting experiences of their roles within the course. One peer trainer felt sure of her role at the start. She had a clear moment in the sessions where she led the community member reflection circles and commented *“I didn’t feel like a spare part. I felt part of something.”* However as time went on, it became apparent that there was less need for the reflection circles. Together, we discussed the idea of leading from within, observing the needs in the room and supporting the mental health issues as and when they arose. However, in the final evaluation meeting, it emerged that this approach had left the peer trainer uncertain of her role *“I do have a role. Even though I’m not certain what it is, and I’m trying to learn what it is, and see what it is.”* **The second peer trainer felt very unsure at the start** *“At the beginning I thought ‘I don’t know what I’m supposed to be doing here. How can I be a peer trainer when we haven’t got tables and I haven’t got a flipchart?”* **However as time went on, she became more confident with the artistic approach:**

“Well, for me there was no pressure to be musical. I needed to show the group that I was able to participate. I was able to show the group how I was moving on with my mental health.... Once I could see how the group needed support I could just drop into the facilitator role. I have never done this before - I was a mixture of leader and facilitator and I could comfortably be both. I learnt a lot about inclusion - not being afraid to try something new. I saw how the group were really up for the challenge. A lot of the learning for me was looking inside and thinking deeply about how I am on the

¹ Johnson, Helen, University of Brighton, Report produced for Soundcastle on *The Process and Impact of a Facilitated Arts Course for Mental Health and Recovery* (August 2018)

inside. I always left feeling full of joy. I am running an anxiety course in October and I am thinking about how I can weave this in. Really unexpected!

One of the peer trainers also commented on how they planned to use a more creative approach in other courses. *"It's important that we're in the room but we don't have badges as the facilitator. I feel very accepted as part of the group. It's different from other Recovery College courses. All the other courses are much more rigid. It's made me think about what else we can do in other courses elsewhere. I would take away from this to be more flexible with ice breakers and be more movement based to engage the room further."*

- We extended this learning into a cross-sector CPD session for Peer Trainers and NHS Sussex Partnership Experts by Experience. Hannah Dunster, Simon Magnus and Julie Barnett co-produced a course for 10 attendees in an effort to find what their individual, creative and fluid approach to Leadership might look like. The response was mostly positive with 9 out of 10 attendees wanting to attend future Soundcastle training. They estimated that in their respective working environments, the impact of the course would reach approximately 90 people per month.

CPD Attendee Feedback: *"The most important thing I'll take away is the knowledge that when being myself, I can actually be more productive than when trying to fit into a role that I've invented. So that as a leader, I would be myself doing it rather than trying to fill the role of 'being a leader'. Going through the exercises here and getting used to there being no rights and wrongs gives you quite a big sense of freedom. So I'm going away feeling much more relaxed than when I arrived."*

We had positive, discursive relationships with the peer trainers, a willingness to learn and research together and an impact demonstrated beyond the framework of the project. However, there is still progress to be made in creating the optimum cross-sector language, clearly establishing roles and learning how to communicate effectively at all times so that everyone feels certain of their place in the sessions.



Outcome 3: To develop artist facilitator skills in cross-art delivery in mental health settings

- This was the first Soundcastle project run in equal partnership with an artist facilitator from a different art form – theatre/movement. This enabled us to challenge our Theory of Practice and explore the fundamental flow between art forms, practitioners and community members. A major area of development was in the ability to improvise as a facilitator. Hannah Dunster (music) and Simon Magnus (movement), as the lead artist facilitators, realised that in order to remain responsive to the room whilst also leaving space for the two art forms to flow and enhance one another, they would need to improvise the evolution of creative activities within the space itself. “I’ve got an idea, can I run with it?” became the theme of the project. The artist facilitators needed to implicitly trust each other, embody what they were asking of the community members and respond directly to the needs of the group.

**I’ve got an idea!
Can I run with it?**

Artist Facilitator: *“In our case, our workshops’ content was based on improvisation through sound and movement. By embodying an improvisatory energy into our facilitation relationship, we in turn enabled that energy to embody itself in the group. We challenged ourselves to bring just one starter activity and a vision for what we hoped the group would achieve in each 2 hour session. Then, responding to the group’s energy during this first activity, one of us would say “I’ve got an idea! Can I run with it?” As facilitators, this was the equivalent of ‘Yes and...’ From that moment on we would improvise how the workshop would develop. This enabled us to respond completely in the moment to the group, rather than impose a set plan that may not have been appropriate for their energy that day.”*

The peer trainers commented on the fluidity of the improvised facilitation process: *“They seemed to work seamlessly, because there’s Simon with the drama side and then obviously Hannah with the musical side. And it was a bit of drama, a bit of movement, so we’d do some movement, and it might be crossing the room, it might be stretching, and then within that Hannah would then say, ‘now we’re going to make some music with our bodies now’ ...And so that would come on, and then that would be then developed by Simon into something else. It was very fluid. It was seamless, absolutely seamless.”*

- We were moved to consider our own place in the community. As we encouraged the community members to make mistakes, we realised that in order to experiment and learn

from the cross-arts partnership, we would need the freedom to make mistakes of our own. This in turn then helped the community members to feel more at ease with making their own mistakes. This led us to consider the role of the facilitator in a community setting. *“Communities don’t have flawless, neutral enablers within them. Facilitators are imperfect humans too and in order to grow we need to try new things and risk making mistakes.”*

- Alongside **Permissioned Challenge** comes the chance to really push people to reach their creative potential. As outlined in **Outcome 2**, as facilitators we learnt to trust the community members to take responsibility for their own wellbeing. They set the limits of the challenge and that meant that as facilitators we didn’t need to be afraid to push them. We used a combination of sound and movement to extend the creative potential of the group and create more interesting art.

Artist Facilitator: *“Today I put a movement spin on a standard music riff building. I pushed the group to play ‘crossing the space’, exploring different movements as the rest of the group played their music riff. As the person crossed the space, the musicians had to respond, adapting and changing their sound to reflect the new movement. I realised that as a facilitator, I have a new tool now – I can use movement to build a bolder, more interesting riff with a richer sound.”*

From Soundcastle’s point of view, we are now exploring far more physicality in our music making *“I value the physicality of the sessions - I think the fact that we literally move together and actually have to step up is so valuable.”* This value started to be unconsciously reflected and used as a tool by the community members themselves. *“At the end, G was working out the song by moving to the lyrics. He was working out the tune by moving in a very musical way.”*

- We extended the reach of our learning about cross-arts practice in mental health settings by delivering a CPD session for artist facilitators. This was attended by 10 practitioners from varying art forms, 3 of whom were Soundcastle practitioners. 100% of practitioners said that they would like to attend a future Soundcastle training day based on their experience. They estimated that the impact of the training would reach a combined total of 535 people per month through their working routines. Feedback from attendees highlighted the thought processes stimulated by the training, from the concept of **Permissioned Challenge** through to group responsibility and the flow of activities.

“For me, it’s really made me think about giving people permission. Not being overly enthusiastic - sometimes when I facilitate I can be so excited and so ready for something to happen that I don’t

give people that many options... For example during Hannah's physical warm-up where she was saying, 'if you'd like to do this, if you'd like to touch your hair, if you feel like this would help you to roll your shoulders'. Offering choice all the time - that's the big learning."

"The main thing I will take away is that I don't always have to follow the same, rigid routine. I've realised that I've been doing warm-ups as a routine and that actually I wasn't being true to what a warm up is which is getting people to be in a state of flow and to be playful"

"If things aren't going well, it's ok to pause and open the group up to discussion... Today I've learnt to meet them at their level - I'm human and they're human so open up for discussion and not be so obsessed with being the authority figure who demands respect."

Several practitioners made contact with Soundcastle during the weeks following the training to feedback the impact on their work.

"Just wanted to say that the Soundcastle training has transformed my teaching this week. My sessions had a more natural flow, my students had more agency and we achieved a musicality that we hadn't before. Brilliant."

Outcome 4: To increase the wellbeing and resilience of adults facing mental health challenges (see Appendix 3)

- Community members showed an overall increase in wellbeing over the duration of the 3 courses. Recovery and Wellbeing monitoring forms, completed at the start and end of the courses, combined with regular, transcribed reflection circles gathered the following results. These statements refer to the community members' everyday lives beyond the parameters of the course. Over the duration of the Introductory courses, 66% recorded an increase in their happiness levels and 91% of community members showed an increase in enjoyment of activities in daily life.

"I've been dancing at home more since last week."

"Same here, I've been dancing more at home."

"My spirits have been lifted."

83% recorded a decrease in their levels of loneliness and 66% recorded an increase in their ability to trust others. 91% recorded an increase in feeling hopeful about their future.

"The enjoyment of being in a group and being free to express yourself not just through sound and movement but as a human being. It's nice to meet people. I spend a lot of time being very lonely in my life so when I come to this group, I feel something better in myself."

During the Advanced course, **66%** recorded an increase in their happiness levels and **83%** recorded a decrease in their levels of loneliness.

"It keeps me distracted from bad stuff. When I come to this course, I get to interact with people. We never fall out. We have differences of opinion but no animosity. It allows me to interact with people on a level that's safe. I don't have any fears. Sometimes I have problems being around people and places. I don't have that with the museum or group. That's what it gives me."

83% recorded an increase in their ability to trust others and **66%** recorded an increase in feeling hopeful about their future.

"The thing about praise and self doubt when you discount the achievements that you've made, stuff that goes on in your life. In here we shove all that stuff completely to one side and I haven't had that feeling of being completely free in a long time, not constantly worrying about what happens next."

Community members also took ownership of the group's wellbeing within the space, bringing presents, food and making it feel safe and friendly:

Peer Trainer: *"L keeps bringing in presents. She brought in cakes and flower head dresses for the ladies! She has been making the space hers - making it a warm welcoming space and sharing it with us. She's showing her appreciation in a way she feels comfortable."*

- Community members showed an overall increase in resilience over the duration of the course. Recovery and Wellbeing monitoring forms, combined with regular, transcribed reflection circles and feedback forms gathered the following results. These statements refer to the community members' everyday lives beyond the parameters of the course. During the Introductory courses, **83%** of community members showed an improvement in being able to get started with everyday tasks and **66%** felt more able to cope with daily life.

"It's like recharging your batteries or your aura and after the session, you're ready to take on another week - here we go! It makes me feel happy afterwards. Something's lifted."

75% recorded an increase in their level of confidence.

"I've opened up to new things that I never thought I would do. I now understand it's ok to try new things and make mistakes. I even told my psychologist because it lessened my anxiety. Everything was open and free."

During the Advanced course, 100% of community members showed an improvement in their ability to get started with everyday tasks and 66% recorded an increase in their level of confidence.

"It's making me more stable, more confident, more able to make friends."

"There is a quiet confidence there now. I do like singing. As much as I was nervous on the performance, I would like to do another one. The more you do it, the more confident you get. That can only be a good thing."

"I feel more self confident and more assertive in things that I do outside. It's actually given me the incentive to start taking piano lessons so I'm starting to learn jazz piano, something that I never thought."

"Friendship and connections. Having the skills to connect with people and make new friendships. I don't even need to worry about it now, I can just go out there and do it because I've learnt it in all these months. It's not about remembering every little detail, it's all in your head. It's already there so just need to relax as much as possible and be confident in yourself and be yourself."

The Advanced group took the initiative to independently meet up beyond the course and have extra rehearsal sessions for the performance. This is the first incidence of this happening on a Soundcastle project with both artist facilitators and peer trainers commenting on the significance of the group independently making the arrangements, hiring a studio and rehearsing the material. *"It was amazing that they met up in between sessions –real motivation."* This happened only once the group had decided to put on a performance, leading facilitators to observe *"they needed the performance to have the purpose in getting together. They used these sessions to get into a rehearsal mentality."*

- **Community members often spoke of the impact the course was having on their daily life which included having the courage to take part in other activities, being able to analyse and break free from negative thought patterns and reconnecting with who they really are beneath the mental health diagnosis.**

"I was quite shy and scared to even come to this, but now I've been moving on and doing other music stuff outside of the group which could have only happened because I came to this group."

"I think what I really benefitted from a lot was trying to do the exercises that Simon was bringing on a weekly basis and those were quite out the box for me and so I think that in itself really got me out of a rut in the way I think about myself. It got me out of that pattern of 'oh you're just being stupid', the negative thinking levels which has been really positive... Intrinsic to my nature is striving for something to be perfect and to get myself out of that way of thinking - it's been really good for me to stop that. I think also it's helped me a lot to think about other people and how things affect them and so the focus hasn't always been on how has this made me feel - it's about how other people are feeling because it's been a group. That's been a huge learning curve, the consideration aspect for other people."

"What I'll take away is the ability to know that I have made contact with an inner self somehow - so that I found something inside of me that is more like the real me. We all go round being conditioned by our families, upbringing, advertising etc. Underneath all that there is the real person. Letting go of all the stuff we let go of, led to that."

- **Helen Johnson's interviews uncovered the importance of play for the peer trainers; she noted that one peer trainer "spoke about the value of being silly, of laughing (including laughing at yourself), and of having fun without worrying about looking stupid. For both her and one of the students, this capacity for play spread beyond the classroom, enabling them to interact with and relate to their grandchildren in new and valuable ways."**²

"I have a great time with my granddaughters now. ... when I used to go up before it used to be, you know, take her to the park, do this, do this, do this. And now we do things like make camps with bedsheets, and this is what I used to do with my children. And in the hot weather, take the duvet out of the duvet cover and put a fan on, and it all blows up. ... Just all those sorts of things that I'd lost or hadn't been able to tap into, all those things I used to do with the children, with my kids."

- **Finally, feedback forms indicate that 100% of community members developed new goals in life as a result of attending the Advanced Sound and Movement course. They spoke regularly in reflection circles of their hopes and intentions for the future and some of their plans were**

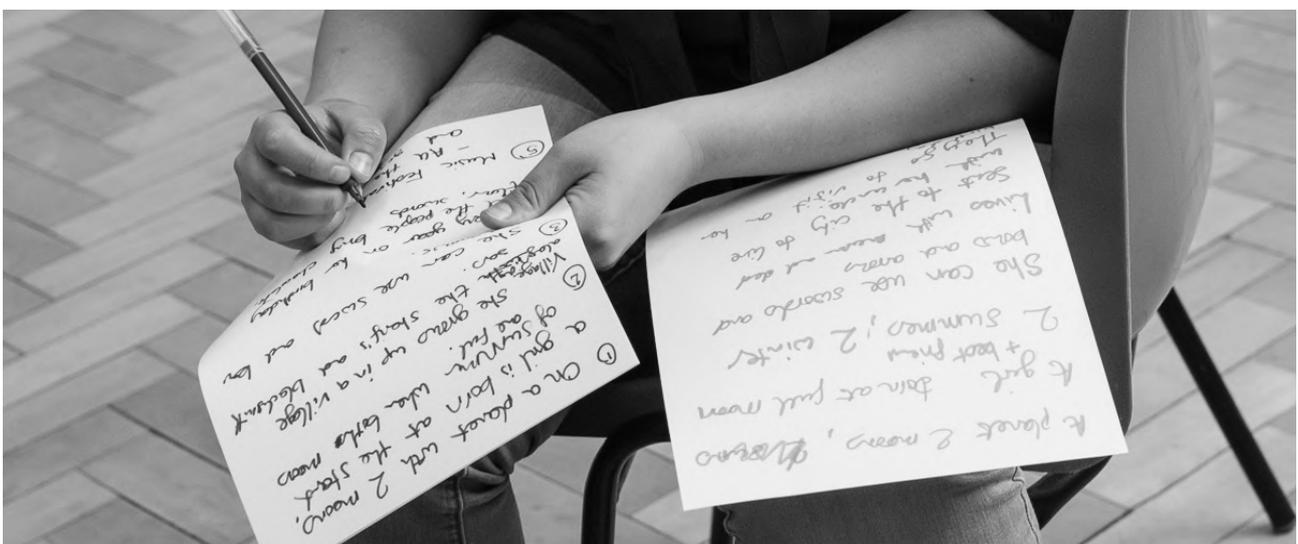
² Johnson, Helen, University of Brighton, Report produced for Soundcastle on *The Process and Impact of a Facilitated Arts Course for Mental Health and Recovery* (August 2018)

already underway before the course finished. Following the project, all 6 community members who completed the Advanced course went on to challenge themselves in further creative or collaborative settings. One community member has become an Expert by Experience as well as taking up jazz piano lessons. A second community member has started drumming lessons. A third has become a football commentator for blind people, a fourth became a peer trainer, a fifth went from being unemployed to becoming a delivery driver and the sixth enrolled in a music production course at Northbrook College.

"This course has opened my mind up to lots of positive possibilities."

"It's helped me to become more creative and to develop ideas and not be afraid of doing that. It's helped me build confidence in areas that I've not had any confidence really. It's given me better perspective of the area that I want to get into which is my music which I've been developing over time. This has given me the impetus to continue with that journey and not lose sight of my goal."

*"The freeing aspect was like a pivotal key in the whole thing. Improvising is a very restricted thing for me, being spontaneous. I am a creative person and I can be spontaneous but that block was for me barring that. What we've developed and practised over the weeks and just being together as a group has managed to unplug that thing so that the fear of being spontaneous is not a fear. There is no fear. Why should you feel fear when you're doing something you really enjoy? So it's really made that diminish which for me is a key answer. For me, it's actually a beginning. **It's not the end of a journey, it's actually a beginning** so it's like sure we've reached that point of feeling what we each gave on the course but there is so much more to go..."*



Recommendations

- Offer taster sessions in the workshop content to interested community members who may not have the confidence to apply purely based on the prospectus description. This type of responsive working doesn't easily translate into text. It could be more effective to give short, participatory demonstrations.
- Research local buddy systems. For this project, we were relying on the Sussex Recovery College's partnership with a buddy system organisation to support more anxious community members in their attendance. Unfortunately the organisation that was delivering this left the partnership and several community members were not able to attend our course. We need a back up plan on future projects should the same thing happen again.
- Ensure that the peer trainers we are working with are fully trained and aware of the Sussex Recovery College's supervision system. Whilst we had a very positive relationship with both peer trainers, we must also acknowledge that we are asking them to collaborate in a very new, unknown context which can at times be anxiety inducing. One of the peer trainers was not aware that she could access supervisory support from Recovery College which at times may have helped her to navigate the process and flag up any concerns.
- Conduct further research into the cross-sector, co-production relationship and continue the search for a shared language and equal leadership model between artists and peer trainers.
- Review the Soundcastle Theory of Practice to incorporate the concept of Permissioned Challenge.
- Adjust the debrief spreadsheet so that after every session, we formally record written feedback between peer trainers and facilitators as well as the artistic plan for the following week. This is to help the whole team remember what has taken place during the debrief meeting.
- Create a music group, external to Recovery College – The People's Music Collective. This will be comprised of a group of adults in Worthing who wish to compose and perform new music as well as celebrate the talent and skill of people who happen to be mentally ill. The Sound and Movement courses at Recovery College will continue and serve as a training ground for those who wish to progress on to The People's Music Collective.

“Hopefully I can continue to make music with the lovely people I made friends with on this fantastic journey which you encouraged me to go on.”

Community Member

“What an amazing experience and journey - it's been a huge challenge, yet such a safe encouraging 'space' to explore and develop within - a totally 'rare' and precious time with special people.”

Community Member



Report compiled by Soundcastle, August 2018 from written, digital and verbal feedback, collected from 37 community members, 2 peer trainers, 4 artist facilitators and Soundcastle's management team.

Photographs by Sarah Hickson | www.sarahhickson.com | @sarah_hickson (Twitter) | @sarahmhickson (Instagram)

Appendix I: Community Member Statistics

46 community members

37 adults facing mental health challenges

9 adults who did not declare a mental health diagnosis

18 adults attended the Sound and Movement courses

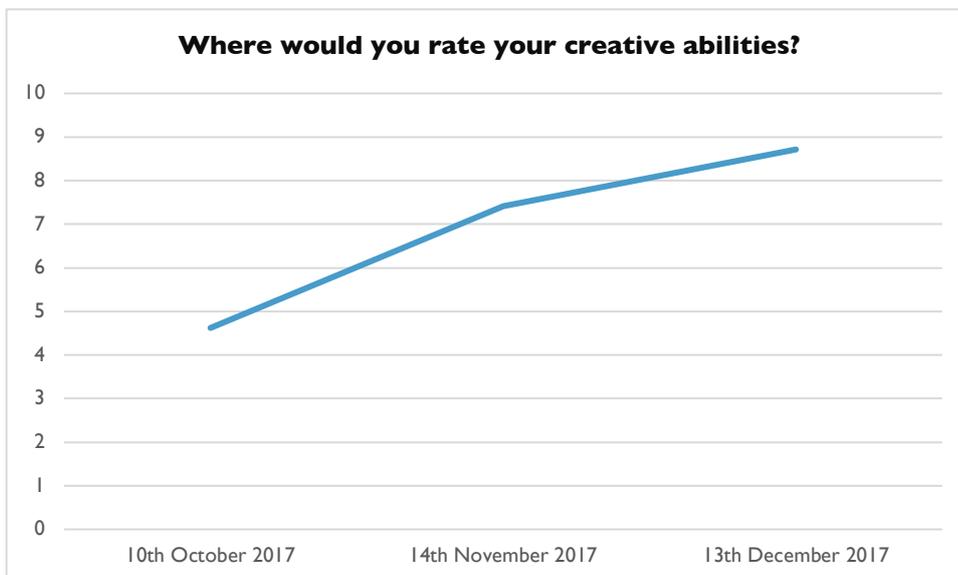
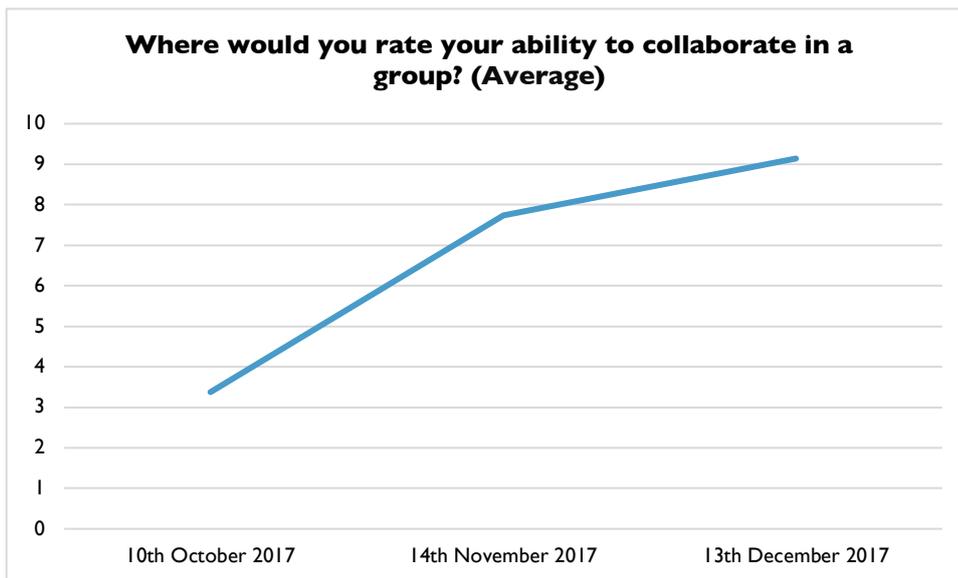
10 adults (Peer Trainers and Experts by Experience) attended the Leadership CPD training

9 adults (artist practitioners) attended the Sound and Movement Cross-Arts CPD training. This training was also attended by 3 Soundcastle Directors.

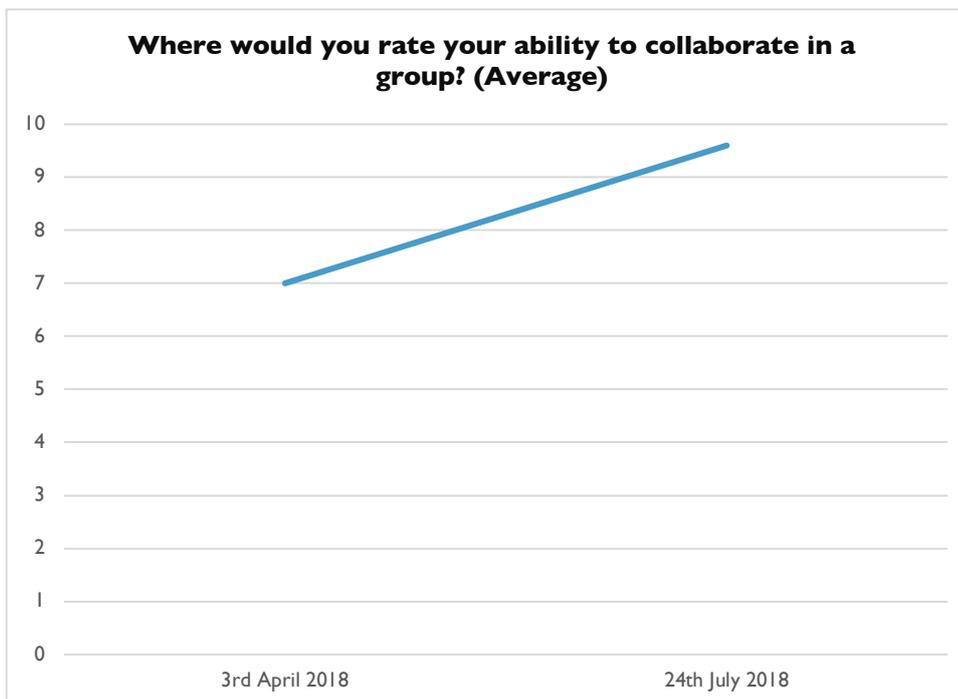
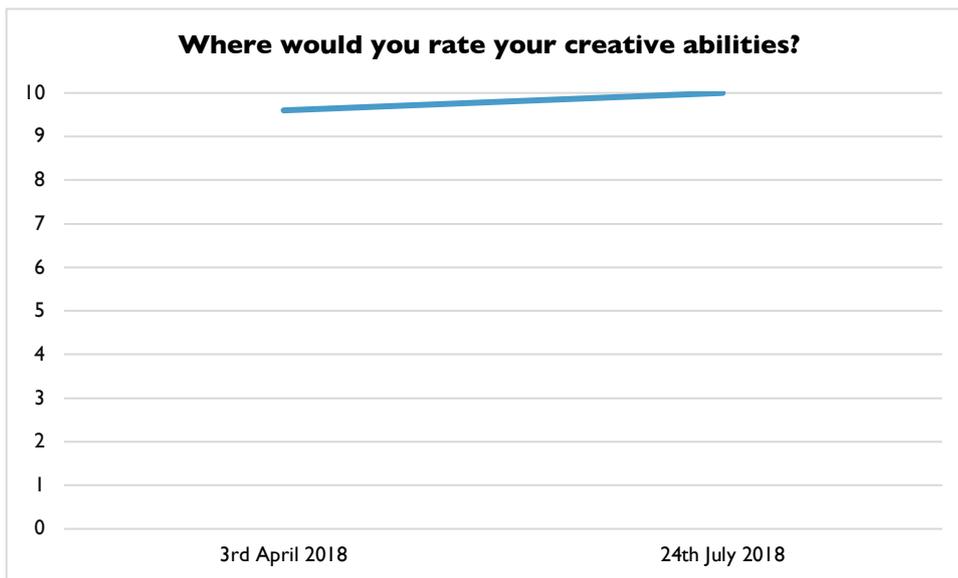
Appendix 2: Collaborative and Creativity Skills – Community Member Self-assessment

Community Members were asked to self-assess their own collaborative and creative skills on a scale of 1-10 on 2 to 3 different occasions throughout the 10 week courses. The collated data shows an average definitive increase in confidence in both these areas. The Advanced course shows less of an increase but also starts from a much higher baseline, suggesting that the impact of the Introductory course endured the 3 month break.

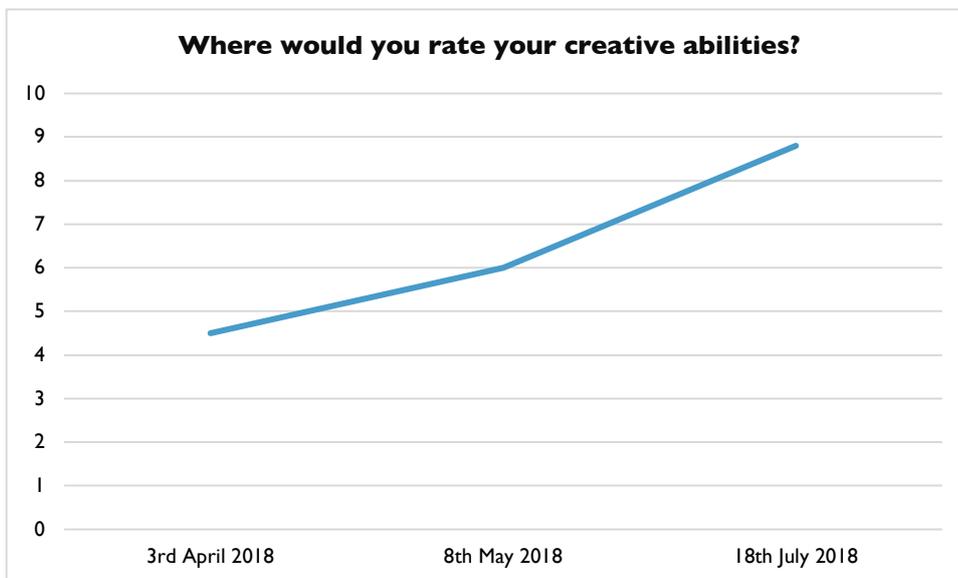
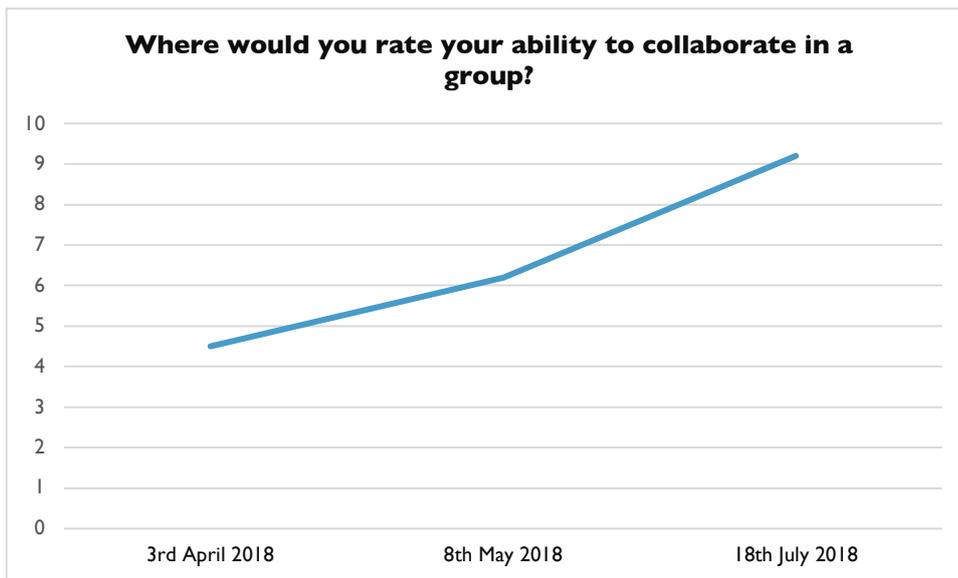
Introductory Course I (Autumn 2017)



Advanced Course (Spring 2018)



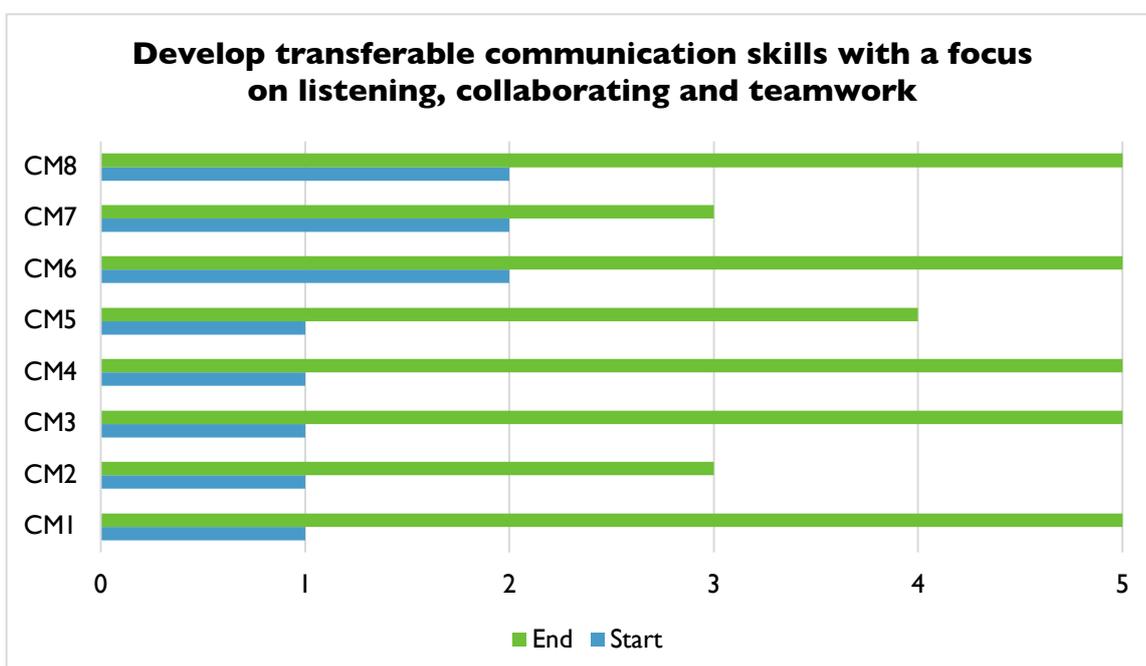
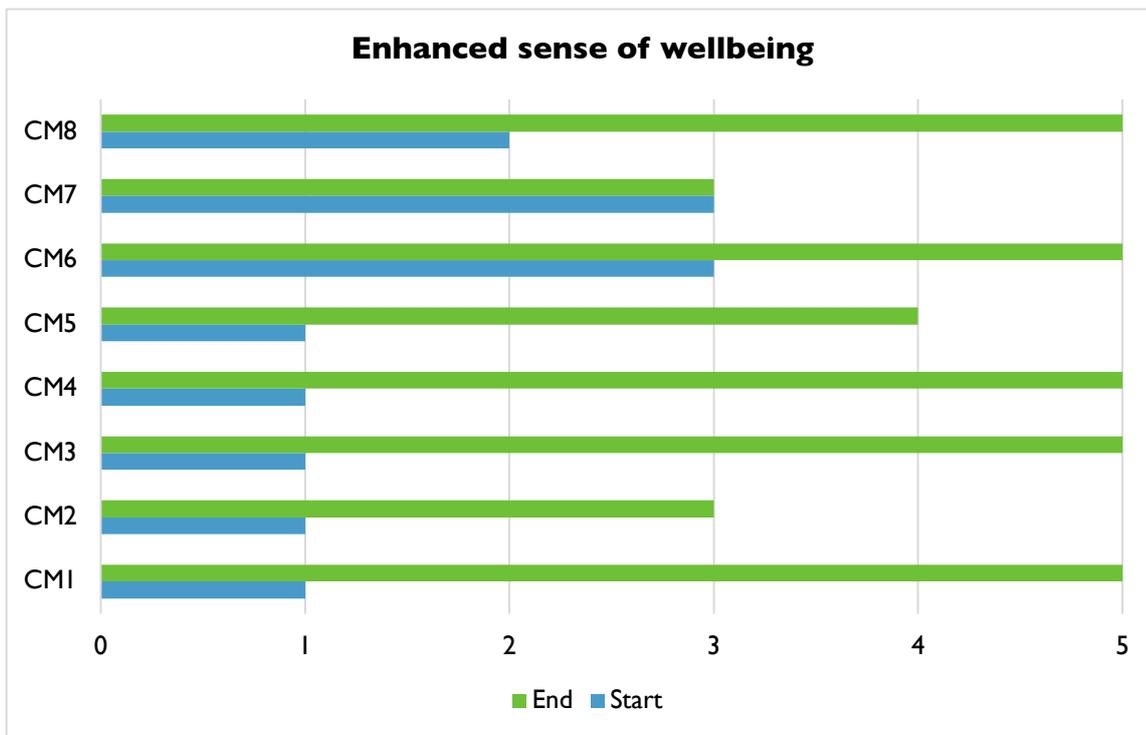
Introductory Course 2 (Spring 2018)



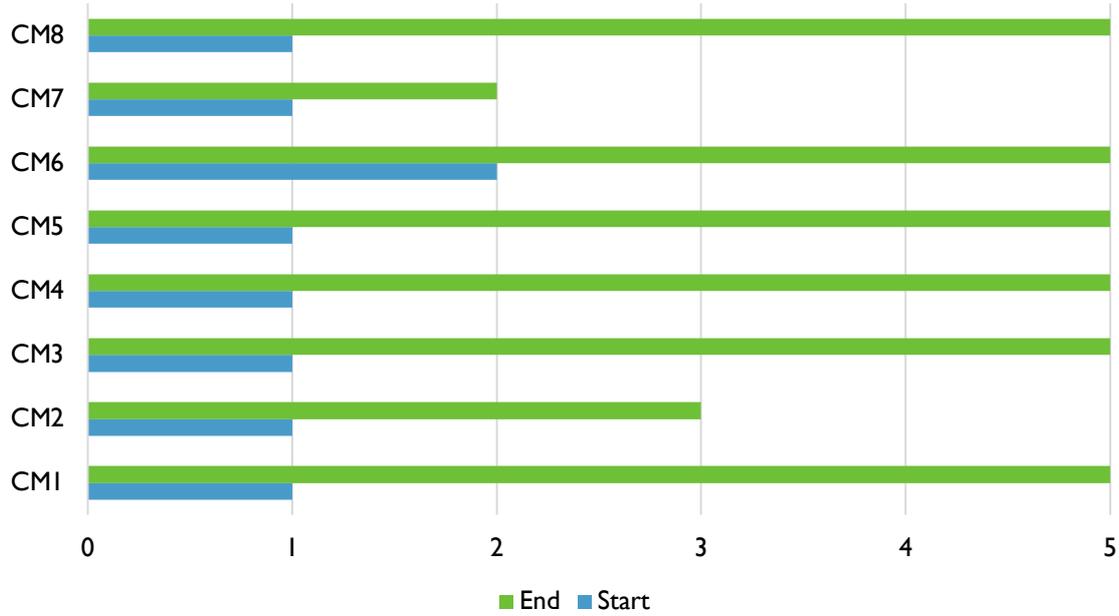
Appendix 3: Course Learning Outcomes – Community Member Self-Assessment

72% of community members indicated their progress towards the course learning outcomes at the start and end of the courses on Sussex Recovery College feedback forms. We were pleased to see demonstrative progress towards achieving the course learning outcomes with 100% reporting increases in levels of wellbeing, transferable communication skills and the feeling of being a part of an artistic community.

Introductory Course I (Autumn 2017)

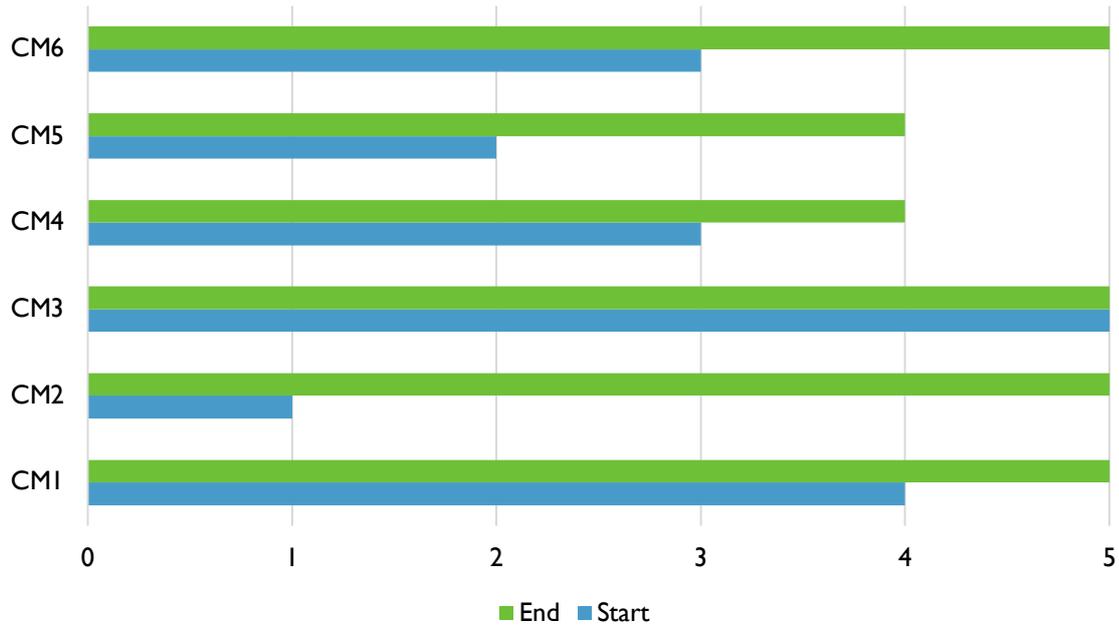


Gain a sense of connectedness to a local creative community

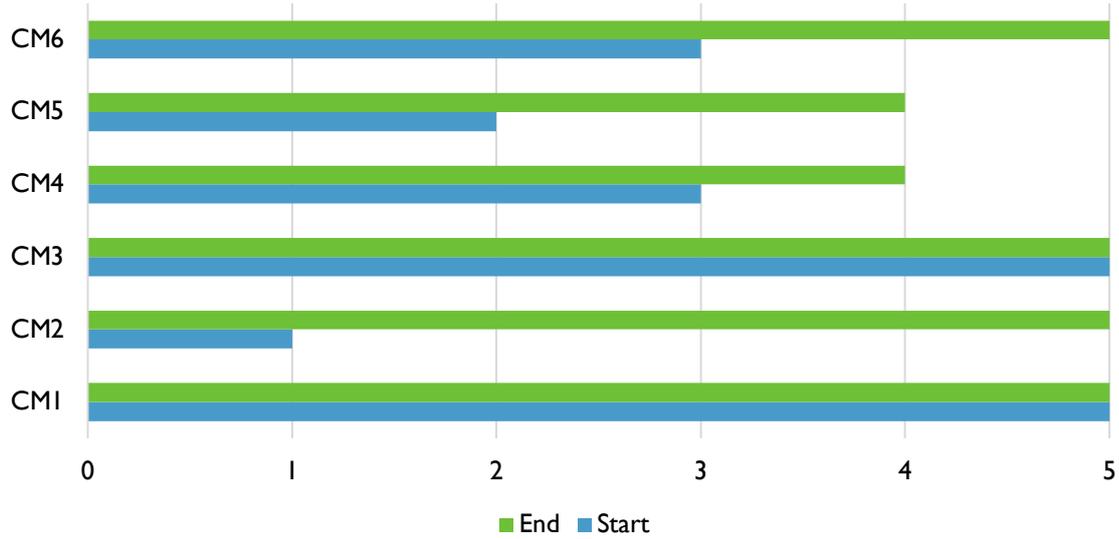


Advanced Course (Spring 2018)

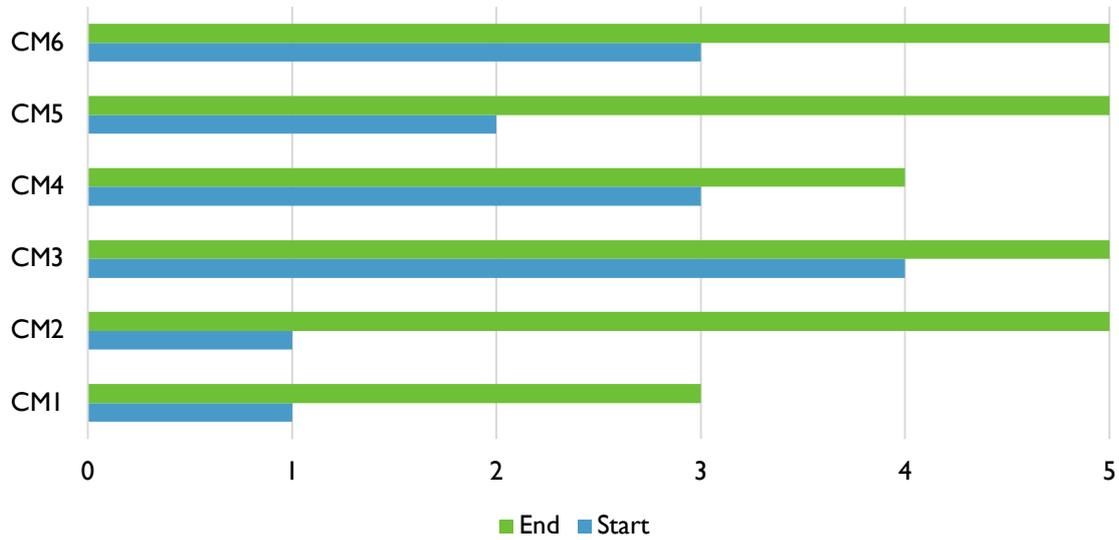
Enhanced sense of wellbeing



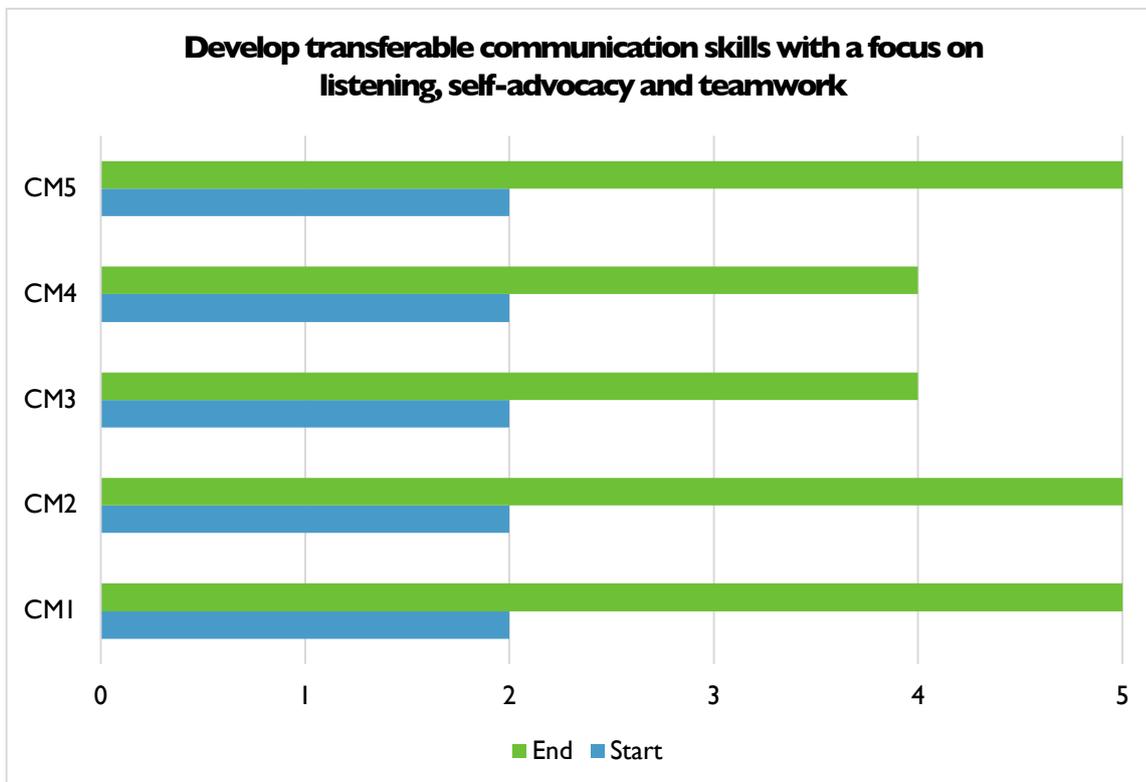
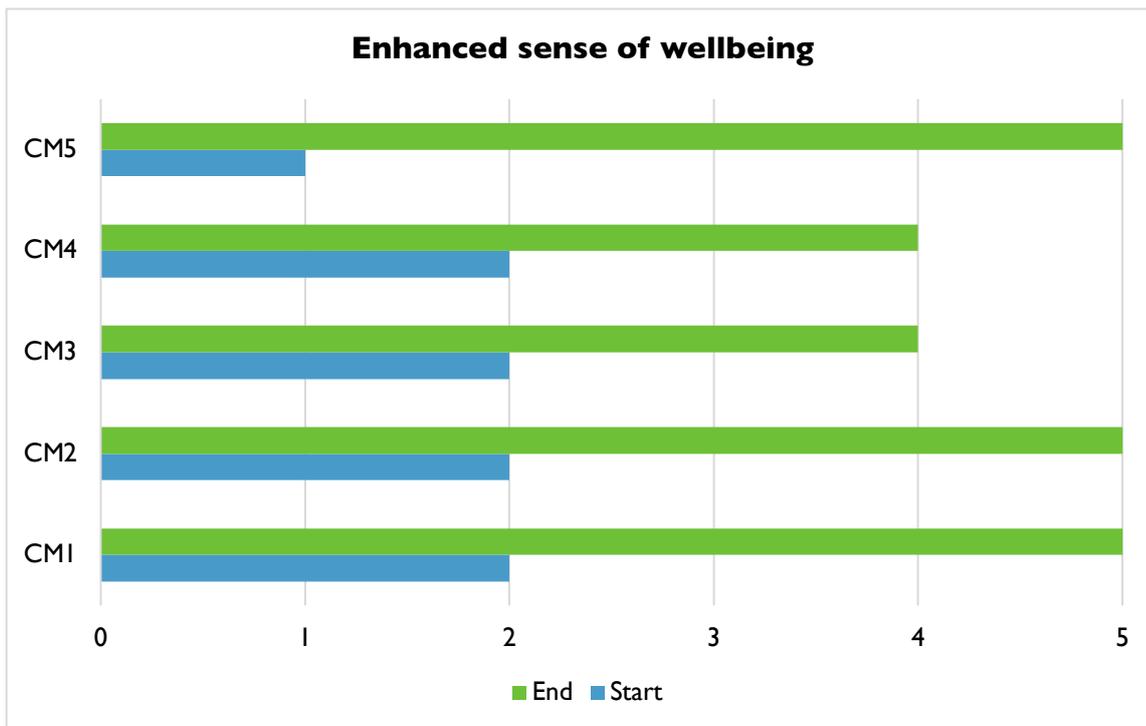
Develop transferable communication skills with a focus on listening, self-advocacy and teamwork



Gain a sense of connectedness to a local creative community



Introductory Course 2 (Spring 2018)



Gain a sense of connectedness to a local, creative community

