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# The Impact of Meaningful Activity

An investigation of the personal experiences of users  
of a mental health activity centre.

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## Abstract

Activity centres are one way that those experiencing a severe and enduring mental illness can spend their time. Whilst there has been some research into meaningful activity internationally, within the New Zealand context there has been relatively little, particularly with this population group. This qualitative study took an Interpretative Phenomenological approach and sought to investigate participant's experiences of one such activity centre. A sample of five participants who used the centre as part of their weekly schedule provided information via semi-structured interviews. From this data a set of five themes emerged; Belonging, Self-efficacy, Identity, Empowerment and Support, these being the key overall factors defining their time with the service. The participants illustrated their experiences with examples that personalised the journey of each. These examples became the sub-ordinate themes of the research and detailed the particular facets of the service and experiences that promoted their engagement and recovery. These included: Socialisation and relationships, Resources and outcomes of classes, Independence, Staff, Enjoyment and fun, Non-judgemental staff/peers/environment, Flexibility & choice, A sense of a journey, Skill building, Personal growth, and Responsibility. These subthemes interacted with a high level of complexity with the themes and across the participants. This highlighted that each participant had a uniquely individual experience at the service. These individualised experiences support research which has been conducted around the concept of recovery in mental health where recovery emerges as an individual experience and journey. Overall experiences of the service were positive and participants reported that the service had been a positive factor in their recent lives and, for some, in the long term. This study was also found to support previous research which found that activity centres have the potential to improve life quality for vulnerable populations.

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## Table of contents

Title page	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of contents	iv
List of figures and tables	vii
<b>Chapter 1: Background</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 The changing landscape of Mental Health services in New Zealand	1
1.1.1 Where have we been?	1
1.1.2 Beyond the institutions (early 2000s to today)	2
1.1.3 Current research	3
1.2 Research population	4
1.2.1 Mental illness prevalence in New Zealand	4
1.2.2 Definitions	5
1.2.3 Current research	6
1.3 Recovery	7
1.3.1 The enigmatic concept of Recovery	7
1.3.2 Recovery in the New Zealand context	9
1.3.3 Recovery themes	10
1.3.4 Relevance to current study	12
1.4 The value of employment and activity centres	13
1.4.1 The value of employment in recovery / meaning making	14
1.4.2 The value of engagement in activity programmes in recovery and / or meaning making	14
1.4.3 Current research	15
<b>Chapter 2: Qualitative Research &amp; Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1 Qualitative research	17
2.2 Methodology – Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis	18
2.3 Qualitative research in Mental Health	19
2.3.1 Qualitative methodology and the current project	21
2.3.2 IPA and the current project	21
2.3.3 Summary	23

<b>Chapter 3: Method</b>	<b>25</b>
3.1 Current study description	25
3.2 Ethical considerations	25
3.3 Cultural considerations	26
3.4 Accessing participants	27
3.5 Final participants	28
3.6 Participant involvement	29
3.7 Process	30
3.8 Number of participants	31
3.9 Sampling method	31
3.10 Data collection	32
3.11 Analysis	33
3.12 Validity	35
<b>Chapter 4: Participant narratives</b>	<b>40</b>
4.1 Participant 1 – Robert	40
4.2 Participant 2 – Lyall	44
4.3 Participant 3 – Rita	47
4.4 Participant 4 – Amy	51
4.5 Participant 5 – Luke	54
<b>Chapter 5: Results</b>	<b>57</b>
5.1 Overview	58
5.2 Belonging	58
5.3 Identity	60
5.4 Self efficacy	62
5.5 Empowerment	64
5.6 Support	66
5.7 Activity centre vs employment	68
<b>Chapter 6: Discussion</b>	<b>70</b>
6.1 Overview	70
6.2 Recovery	72
6.3 Theme / subordinate theme interactions and contributions	74
6.4 Other key factors and interactions	75
6.5 Work vs activity programme	77
6.6 Limitations	78

6.7 Future research / implications	79
6.8 Conclusion	80
<b>References</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>88</b>
Appendix A MUHEC approval letter	88
Appendix B Advertisement	89
Appendix C Information sheet	90
Appendix D Consent form	94
Appendix E Letter to Trust Board	95
Appendix F Interview Template	96
Appendix G Individual participant theme tables	97
Appendix H Table 1 of collated themes for all participants	102
Appendix I Table 2 of collated themes for all participants	103

## List of figures and tables

Table 1	Ethical issue identified and mitigating measures	26
Table 2	Analysis process	34
Table 3	Table of themes	57
Table 4	Subordinate themes relative to themes and participants	72
Figure 1	Theme interactions	71