

Centre *for* Social Justice and Change

Research Report 5

An evaluation of the New Choices for Youth Right Here Project in Newham Sixth Form College

Syd Jeffers: Centre for Social Justice and Change

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Summary

Executive summary

Right Here Newham is a five year project that is part of the national Right Here initiative funded by Paul Hamlyn Foundation and managed jointly by the Foundation and the Mental Health Foundation (2009 -2014).

The initiative aims to develop new approaches to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 16 to 25 years by early intervention and the participation of young people in all aspects of project development and manage is integral to its approach.

The project

The Right Here Newham project in Newham Sixth Form College (at the time of this evaluation Nov 2013 to Jan 2014) consisted of

- a newly established Men's group that had been running for only a few weeks that met on Wednesday lunchtime
- a well-established drama class that had been running for over a year that met on a Thursday afternoon
- new drama class that ran on a Wednesday afternoon

The work was led by a very experienced youth and drama worker Project worker. The Men's group was run by him in conjunction with an experienced youth safety worker.

The aim of the project was to improve the emotional wellbeing and resilience of the young people involved

The evaluation

The evaluation consisted of making observations of the drama classes and Men's group discussions in the final few weeks of the project, and interviewing the students involved.

It had been hoped to identify and interview students who had been involved in the earlier work of the project in the college but this was not possible.

The evaluation aims to capture the detail of how the project worked and to give some indication of how the participants felt about the project and the impact it was having on their lives.

Summary

The main findings

The work of the project was very well received by students in the Men's group and both drama classes. The main feedback was:

Men's group

- The Men's group reported that they valued the sessions because it allowed them to talk about real issues that concerned them, such as racial stereotyping, violence and the general pressures of being a young black man in Newham today. The project provided a space for this to occur that they would otherwise not have.
- They said that these sessions helped because they could express themselves freely and be listened to and not patronised.
- They said that the fact that the project workers were seen to be 'like them' in terms of gender, ethnicity and social background meant that they could relate better to them.
- The workers were seen as being motivated by passion rather than money which also made them more credible.
- In terms of impact they said that the sessions had made them more likely to walk away from trouble and think about how they could improve themselves as young black men and it gave them some ideas about how they could deal with these issues.

The drama classes

- The drama classes reported that the fact that they could bring issues from real life into the drama studios really helped their ability to cope.
- The main impact appeared to be a greater empathy towards other people and a change in attitudes towards mental health issues in themselves and other people.
- They found the project worker inspirational and challenging in that he appeared to understand them and was ready to adapt his teaching to their needs.
- He was able to put them at their ease so that they felt free to truly express themselves in these classes
- They felt that they could relate to him more like a friend or brother than a teacher though he was also able to challenge them to be more reflective and to push them to work harder.

All the groups said that they would like more of this kind of work.

The evaluation

About the evaluation

The brief

The Right Here Newham programme, supported by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the Mental Health Foundation, is running four demonstration projects aimed at raising the profile of mental wellbeing among young people across the UK. The four projects are located in Newham, Brighton and Hove, Sheffield and Fermanagh, run from 2009 to 2014 and are for young people aged 16 to 25 years old. The emphasis is on early intervention to reduce risks of developing mental health problems and address the stigma associated with mental health that often prevents young people from seeking help. Young people's participation in shaping and informing the development of each project is integral to the approach of the programme.

The Newham project is led by New Choices for Youth (NCY) in partnership with Newham Asian Women's Project (NAWP), the Harmony Family Centre and the Forum for health and wellbeing.

One of the areas of work of the Newham project has been with young people in Newham Sixth Form College (New Vic) this has taken the form of a Men's Group and Drama workshops running since 2012-13 and the current academic year 2013-14.

The Right Here Project as a whole is the subject of independent evaluation by the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) but it was felt that it might be useful to do some work looking specifically in some detail at the work done with the young people at Newham Sixth Form College (New Vic) to try and understand how the reported success of this work has been achieved.

The brief of this evaluation was to gather evidence as to the effectiveness of the Right Here Newham projects work in New Vic with young people around mental health issues.

The proposal

The research proposal was to do the following:

- Sit in on the Men's Group and Drama sessions run by youth safety worker at New Vic and the community development worker with Harmony part of the Right Here Newham project
- Talk with and interview as many of the students who have been in contact with these sessions. As I understand it there are 3 cohorts:
 - Current New Vic students currently engaged with the projects
 - Current New Vic students who have been engaged with these projects in previous terms
 - Former New Vic students who have been engaged with these projects in previous terms
- Interview three members of staff associated with the project and possibly relevant student counsellors
- Give ongoing feedback to the project workers

I required assistance from New Vic staff to identify and access the students, past and present. Obviously student confidentiality would be a priority and would be respected within the project.

The evaluation

Design and methods

The scope of the evaluation

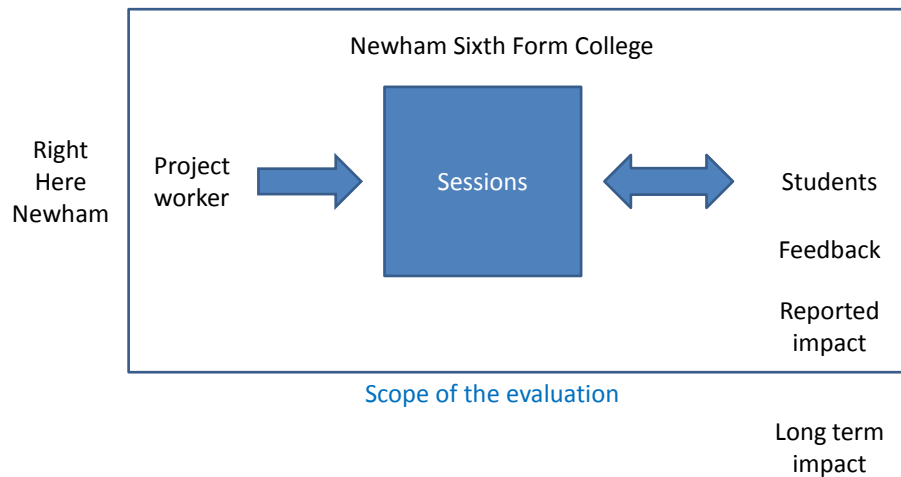


Figure 1: The scope of the evaluation

The project design was a case study of the work of project worker in New Vic which involved sitting in observing and occasionally participating in aspects of the work he did with the drama group and the men's group. Given the timescale and resources available it was not possible to do very much more than this. Indeed it was not possible to talk to earlier cohorts of students as New Vic staff were not able to provide details or negotiate access to these students.

The diagram below summarises the key agencies and relationships involved in the work of the Right Here Project (RHP) with Newham Sixth Form College (New Vic).

The evaluation

The Right Here Newham project in New Vic and this evaluation

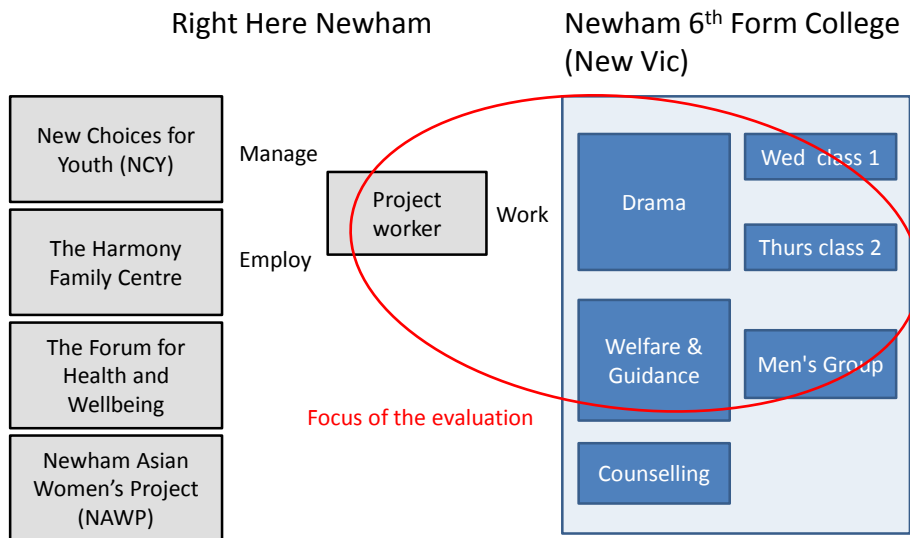


Figure 2: Key agencies and relationships and focus of the evaluation

Accessing the groups

Initial meetings with the project worker

I met with the project worker at the NCY office and talked to him about his background and approach to the project and what he was trying to do with the young people in the various groups.

He has a long career in youth and community development work initially around sports and more recently drama and is also active as a creative writer and story teller. He was recruited to this project via the previous NCY project manager with who he had worked with as an Associate Director of Participation in the Children's Commission (under the ODPM).

With NewVic

A meeting was held with staff from the college, the project worker and manager from the Right Here Newham Partnership to negotiate access and discuss the aims of the evaluation.

Access to the three groups was uneven in that it took longer to negotiate access to the Men's group than the drama group because it was new and rather delicate being in the very early stages of formation. Access to the two drama classes was much more straightforward in terms of the project manager asking them if it was okay for me to sit in on their sessions.

A summary of my contact with the three groups is given in the schedule of field work in [table 1](#) in the appendix.

The evaluation

Initial contact and introduction to the evaluation

Having been granted permission to attend group sessions by New Vic I would typically be introduced to the groups and state the purpose of my being there. This would involve a brief outline of the evaluation.

I would introduce myself as a researcher/lecturer at UEL based at the Docklands site situated just over a mile away. I explained that the sessions that Project worker was running with them was part of a larger national project into mental health and that I had been asked to get some more detailed evidence of how the project was working at the level of the interaction between the project worker and the students in the various groups.

This was expressed as a chance for them to give the parent project (Right Here Newham and its sponsors, the Paul Hamlyn Foundation) feedback on how well the project was doing and what difference the project was making to them. I said that there was no guarantee that what they said would make a difference but that it could only help if the project had a better idea of their experiences.

All the groups said that they were happy to participate in the research and before I interviewed them individually or collectively I gave them an ethics form to read and sign which outlined the aims and objectives of the project and how the ethical issues raised by the research would be handled in terms of confidentiality and consent etc. (see research participants consent form in appendix).

The case studies

The Right Here Newham (RHN) project through Project worker had been working in Newham Sixth Form College for a two academic years running a Men's Group with the project worker the Youth Safety Worker reporting to the College's Welfare and Guidance Manager. At the time of the evaluation a new Men's group had just been set up and it took a few weeks for it to get going at which time I was allowed to ask permission of the participants to sit on their sessions.

The two figures below attempt to show what parts of the project in New Vic I was able to observe. The earlier stages of recruitment and the previous classes and groups that were important in terms of preparing the ground for the current groups were not possible for me to observe. However I was able to observe the key aspects of the project, namely the Men's group discussions and the drama classes themselves.

The evaluation

Men's group

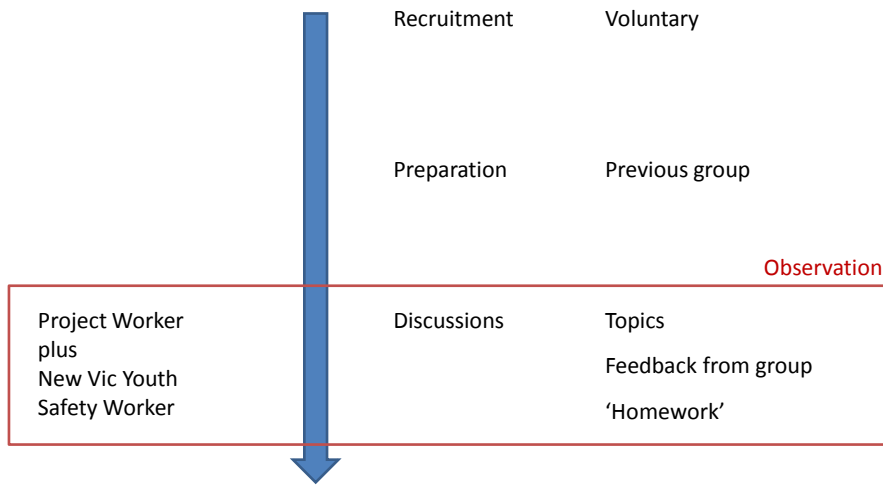


Figure 3: The Men's group case study

The project worker had also been working with the drama department and was at the time of this evaluation working with two classes; a 2nd year drama class on a Thursday with whom he had been working for a year and a half and a 1st year group which was had begun a few months earlier at the start of the academic year. As these groups were more established it was easier for me to sit in on their sessions though I still asked their permission to do so.

Drama classes 1 and 2

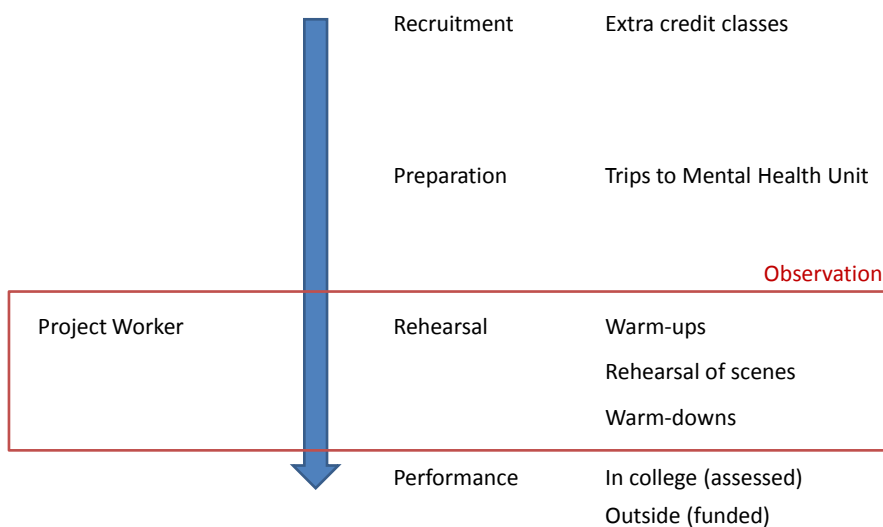


Figure 4: The drama classes case study

The drama classes

Work with the 2nd year Thursday drama class

The students

The students in this 2nd year drama class were composed of roughly 4 young men and 4 young women though there were some students who dropped out of the class as it went on. The group was ethnically mixed with 3 black 3 mixed race and 2 white students. They were all studying drama and performance with a view to doing this at university or college.

The classes: session 1

The classes took place initially in the main theatre studio then in the smaller dance rehearsal rooms on Thursdays after lunch for an hour and a half.

The format for the classes would be that the project worker would greet the group and ask them how they were, and tell them off if they simply said 'good'. He would then do some kind of warm up exercise.

Warm up: 7 up

In the first session I attended he ran a 7 up exercise where all the students and the project worker stood in a circle and had to count off (in various accents) 1 to 7 and point with their hands to the next person, when they got to 7 they would try and catch the next person out by pointing in a different direction. If they did catch the next person out that person had to step out. This continued until it was down to two people when they would decide the winner in a sort of verbal duel. The point of this exercise was to help them focus and be 'on point'. Another warm up exercise the project worker used was moving as a group to music and changing direction on his command.

After introductions and a warm up the general pattern was that the project worker would get the group to perform an exercise or improvisation related to a mental health issue that he would get them to discuss afterwards.

Exercise: Non-verbal communication

For example in the first class he got them to sit in pairs and to stare at each other without talking for 2 minutes. At the end of what seemed like a very long 2 minutes he asked the pairs to talk about what it was like. The point of this exercise was to talk about concentration and body language in communication. The project worker also used the feedback from the students to talk about how they coped with difference and emotional cues from other people. He drew two points out of this, one was about being more open to other people's moods and to be more disposed to ask whether the other person was alright rather than avoid them if they looked upset. The second was more instrumental in terms of using this sensitivity in their acting to get inside the characters they were playing.

This discussion of communication and focus was followed by a discussion of the need to be supportive to each other within the class and with other friends, to take care of themselves and look out for each other.

Improvisation: Betrayal

The project worker asked them to improvise a scene where they played out their reactions to being betrayed by a close friend. They were given 15 minutes to prepare a short 2-3 minute scene.

The drama classes

They did this and then after they performed them in turn he gave them feedback on their performances and followed this with a discussion of the issues raised about self-control and being emotionally resilient.

His point was to show them how people try to get an emotional response by 'pushing your buttons' and how sometimes it is better to resist this. The example he gave was that prison was full of people who could not control themselves when provoked emotionally. The argument the project worker made was that no one else was responsible for your emotional wellbeing so you had to take responsibility for this and learn to control it and make it as positive as you can.

After a little loosening up to '[Stuck in the middle with you](#)' (Stealers Wheel 1972), (to which I was invited to join in) the project worker gave them a second improvisation to do.

Improvisation: Things that hold us back

The next improvisation was about things that held them back in life. The class divided into three groups and devised and performed three short pieces.

Doing drugs

The first was about losing interest in a game and giving up and doing drugs instead,

Being distracted by friends

The second was friends trying to distract you from studying.

Unhappy families

The last was about being told off and abused by a sister.

The last piece was interesting in that the project worker told me that the student performing the piece was acting out a real-life situation where her mother was not about and she lived with an older sister and had been having problems with her.

After the performance this student was visibly upset and was trying to hold back some tears. The project worker sought to check she was okay and praised her for being so brave and for sharing these obviously painful and upsetting issues with the group. He broadened this point out to reinforce the need to look after each other and the value of expressing emotions rather than bottling them up.

The project worker closed the session with a warm down exercise.

Warm down: Belly rubbing

In this exercise everyone formed a circle facing in and he told people to think about how they were feeling and the need to look after themselves. This self was represented by the stomach which they were encouraged to rub in a soothing motion.

After the session the project worker talked to members of the group to make sure they had the phone number of the student who had been upset and asked them to check on her. I talked to the project worker about the session and gave him some informal feedback over a cup of tea.

The classes: session 2

The following week the class started with the project worker asking the group about which performance they should work on for the end of term and who should play what parts.

The drama classes

This brief discussion of business was followed by the project worker checking on their wellbeing in terms of asking them how much sleep they had got the night before and what time they went to bed. He also asked them about whether they had breakfast and whether it was healthy. The group confessed that they went to bed very late and didn't eat very well.

While the project worker went off to photocopy scripts I took the opportunity to interview them as a group.

Feedback: 1st Group interview

I began by outlining the point of the evaluation and asked them about what the classes were about. They said that the classes were extra credit classes about teaching them drama and broadening their knowledge about mental health as the focus of the dramas were mental health. The project worker had taken the group to visit mentally ill patients at a local hospital and had used this to develop scenes that the group would build a performance around. They said that they found this interesting and important as actors and people.

In them asked the group to tell me about what they got out of the classes and what role the project worker played on this.

Issues emerging

Talking about the emotional upset raised by their performances the week before I asked them how they felt about this.

Disclosure and support

They responded by saying that one of the positives of the class was that they had become much closer as a group and looked out for each other now as they had become close over the year and two months they had been meeting because they had shared some of the 'deepest darkest secrets' with each other. One of the students said that the classes really made you think not just about yourself but about the other person that meant they were more empathic and did look out for each other more. It meant they knew each other which was very different from their other classes.

About understanding real life

One of the key differences about these classes was that it was about real life not just getting a good grade. They said that it was really important that the classes dealt with real issues for young people like gangs and postcode wars which were real issues for them.

Empathy

When I asked for examples of the difference the class had made. Two students talked about the difference it had made in terms of them coping with problematic relationships. One student had a brother with ADHD, personality disorder and behavioural problems who she didn't get on with and used to argue with all the time. As a result of the class she is much more understanding and has learned how to react around him which has made her relationship with him much, much better.

Another member of the group had a younger brother aged 15 years who was autistic and he had to get ready for school in the mornings. They used to fight as he doesn't really like school and didn't want to go but now he has become much better at listening and more patient with his brother so they don't fight anymore.

Another student said that the classes had made him more open to other people's problems and that now he would feel able to listen and know how to respond and that it made him much more caring as a result.

The drama classes

I asked them about what they thought of the project worker's role in these lessons and they made the following points:

Challenge and focus

They said that the project worker challenged them and made them focus. Even in the simple warm up game of 7 up they responded to the challenge and spent almost a year trying to beat him. When they asked why they kept losing he told them that this was because they were not focussed which encouraged them to make an effort to focus in this class and in others too.

Finding ways of coping

When I asked them about one of the project worker's key message that they are responsible for their own mental wellbeing they agreed to a point. They said that of course there might be things outside your control that might affect your state of mind but the classes had helped them deal with these things better so they agreed with him there.

Style of teaching

The students really liked the way that the project worker taught them and talked to them. Unlike many teachers that they said they found boring the project worker was different, always interesting and positive. An important part of this was that the project worker related to them differently, he appeared to be on their level and more understanding. They felt that he related to them more like a friend than a teacher. Occasionally he might ambush them a little in terms of springing a task or performance on them but they also appreciated the fact that he really pushed them and was very critical of their work in a constructive and professional manner.

The classes: sessions 3 to 7

Over the next four sessions, three before Christmas and one after the class became more focussed on preparing for their performance and rehearsing the discrete scenes. There were issues about students who dropped out (notably the student who had been upset early on eventually dropped out) and having to get other student to take on their roles.

A couple of exercises that the project worker used in these classes were

Exercise: Act, pause and resume

Here students would have to pause in the middle of their performances and then try to restart with the same intensity, the point being to focus.

Warm down: Sing your lines

After getting frustrated that the class had not really learnt their lines the project worker asked them to sing them in an operatic style. Students reacted variously to this some really threw themselves into this whilst other were hesitant and had to be persuaded not to be embarrassed.

As the time went on the project worker also found time to work in discussions of wider issues like whether the group might be interested in performing to other audiences. This was related to mental health issues because the performance was a series of scenes about mental health problems developed out of their trip to the mental health unit.

Another discussion was about their attitudes to sexuality and relationships and their parent views too. An important part of this discussion was around the issue of tolerance. The project worker made the argument that if they were serious about a career in drama they would have to be pretty tolerant as they might be asked to act out of sexual character and that they would be working in a

The drama classes

profession which was very liberal. This provoked a very heated debate which exposed some fairly entrenched positions around homosexuality.

Before the last rehearsal I had the opportunity to interview the group again about what they thought about the classes and what the classes had done for them.

Feedback: 2nd Group interview

For this second and final group interview the format was slightly different in that I asked the group to take it in turns to answer the same two questions.

B (black male, brother autistic)

B said that he was now more aware of how other people were feeling, before he didn't really care, or pay attention to how other people around him were feeling. He gave the example of his younger brother (15) who is autistic. His father had told him when he was younger that he didn't understand his brother but that as he got older he would. B said that this hadn't really happened; he didn't understand him much and still argued with him. However now his role has changed and he has to take care of his brother including getting him ready for school in the mornings. B said that the class has really helped him to be more helpful and understanding of the mental health issues affecting his brother.

In terms of the class B said that it was 'more real' which meant he could relate to it better. Other (drama) classes were entertaining but this was serious as well which made him think much more.

Another important point for him was that unlike other teachers the project worker would check out if you were alright or if there was a problem if you came in late or were upset or something.

K (white male)

K said that as a result of the classes he was now more sensitive of other people's emotional states and more likely to ask them how they were, before he wouldn't have been concerned if someone was upset or crying, but now he was likely to ask them how they were and try and console them.

K found the classes valuable because this was the only place where these issues were discussed and the project worker pushed and really motivated them and talked to them more like a friend or a brother than a teacher. The project worker taught them and talked to them in a way that made them feel more comfortable.

S (dual heritage male)

S Said that attending this class had helped him 'look out for people more'. Before if someone was upset he would just 'blank them' but now he would talk to them. He gave an example of a male friend who had been upset as his parents had been arguing. R said that he had talked to him and tried to make his friend feel better which he wouldn't have done before.

S said the class didn't feel like a class because of the way that he motivated them. For example the other day when the project worker had asked them to sing their lines operatically, S had said he couldn't but the project worker pushed him to get over his inhibitions where other teachers wouldn't have. He really enjoyed the classes.

S later reinforced D's point about feeling free to express herself in this class, he could show who he was. The project worker encouraged him to put himself into a character in a script he was reading.

The drama classes

N (dual heritage male)

N gave a tongue in cheek response that the sessions had helped him be more open the problems in society like depression and mental health issues. He added that the classes had given him solutions to what to do if he encountered someone with mental health problems. For example if someone he knew was crying he would not ignore it now as he had become more 'sympathetic to their needs' and now he felt that he would know what to do, what to say, how to comfort them. In term of tools to do this he cited listening and giving them a reason not to get more upset. He said that by talking with someone that allowed them the opportunity to off load and for things not to build up inside them, this helped make things better. He said that he can see that it works because the other person opens up much more as a result and has strengthened his friendships because he feels that he can rely on other people now too.

N said he felt that the project worker really cared about the class. For example the project worker had told them off about not giving each other the same respect they would give a teacher, by not listening to directions from other members when they were rehearsing their scenes. When the project worker said this N could tell that the project worker was really sincere, he wasn't saying this because he had to, like a normal teacher would.

Another important aspect of these classes was that unlike other classes where they were encouraged to forget about real life, here they were encouraged to talk about these issues and use them in the class. N said that schools were concerned about stopping crime and violence amongst young people and this is important to young people too. He said that they learn how to relate to each other and that this was key to a community; 'to know what each other are feeling, and know what they are going through', so these classes really help.

N reinforced D's point about being encouraged to put themselves in to the characters they were playing and that it also helped in other classes as now he realised what they were trying to do to help them.

O (white female, brother ADHD and personality disorder)

O said that she had become more empathetic. The example she gave was of her relationship with her brother who suffers from a number of issues, (ADHD, autism, personality and conduct disorder since the age of 9, he is now 15). Before these classes she was always fighting with him, but now they get on and they don't fight at all. She said that this was because she understood his situation and what was going through his head, as a result of these classes. She now finds common interests with him and this helps.

O said that the project worker always came to their lessons with a plan but he began by talking to them and adapted the class to their mood or what they wanted to do or what he felt they needed to work on. For example if someone, or the group was a bit down he would use that to talk to us about depression, or if the group was unfocussed he'd use a game like '7 up' to motivate them. Even if he did sometimes surprise them and ask them to prepare something today to perform tomorrow without much notice O said this was all good.

E (white male)

E said the class changed his perceptions of people with mental health issues or disabilities. Now he sees them as unique rather than as ill and was concerned with the way they were discriminated against and stigmatised. As a result of these classes his attitudes have changed and he felt that he would want to treat them differently, in a more considerate and caring way. Now he would see them as much more like 'us'.

The drama classes

E said that what he found really liked about the class was that the project worker gave everyone a chance to learn and talk about these issues that they otherwise would not get the opportunity to do. Without this class he felt none of them would talk about mental health or care about it. The project worker manages to bring something out of each of us that motivates us to show something about the issues related to mental health.

D (black female)

D said that the class had helped give her an open mind and changed how she would react to people. For example if someone gave her 'odd looks' she would not react aggressively, she would be more open and try and engage more positively.

D said that this lesson was completely different to her other lesson in that it was more 'natural' because it was about what was happening around their lives, how they felt as a person and how they could achieve their goals. Other lessons were not 'really bothered' about what they went through outside college, which was possibly why they misbehaved, but in the project worker's lessons they felt that they could 'express themselves, be ourselves instead of pretending and putting a smiley face on'. D said that she felt free in these classes and that you could 'proper see who I am', whereas in other lessons she didn't feel she could express herself so she felt trapped.

D also said that she thought this lesson had also helped her in other drama lessons because she had learnt to be more empathic. In other non-drama classes there had been benefits too. For example she hated maths and English but now she realised that she needed these lessons to achieve her goals. This lesson had helped her think more about her future and motivated her to try harder.

Thursday drama class members	What difference have the classes made to your mental health or well being?	What about the sessions has made the difference?
B (black male, brother autistic)	More caring and understanding. E.g. takes care of brother who is autistic	He related to the class more because it addressed serious issues
K(white male)	More sensitive to other peoples moods and more caring	This was the only place these issues were discussed and he felt he could relate to the project worker more like a friend or a brother than a teacher
S (dual heritage male)	More likely to talk to a friend who was upset, as more caring now.	The project worker really motivated him and pushed him to try harder, in a way other teachers didn't.
N (dual heritage male)	Feels more confident about helping someone now as they know what to do. Strengthened his friendships.	The project worker's sincerity was important it felt that that he really cared and wasn't just saying things because he had to like other teachers appeared to. What was important was to bring real life into the classes so that they could relate to other people more.
O (white female, brother has personality disorders and ADHD)	Made her more empathic, this had radically improved her relationship with her brother who has a lot of mental health issues.	That the project worker was responsive to the class and adapted the lesson to meet the need of the group.
E (white male)	Changed his attitudes to mental health and disabilities.	Gave them all the opportunity to learn through talking about the issue

The drama classes

		of mental health. The project worker drew something out of them which motivated them to address these issues through their performances.
D (black female)	Changed how she reacted to aggression, made her more open minded.	These lessons made her feel free to express herself and not put on an act as they were about real issues in her life outside the college and she didn't feel that she had to ignore them. The lessons also helped her to try harder in other no-drama lessons as these classes had helped her think about her future more.

Table 1 Summary of Thursday drama group feedback

The drama classes

The Wednesday drama group

The students

The project worker worked with a 1st year drama class on a Wednesday morning. I managed to sit on three sessions and I conducted a group interview with them on the last session.

The group was composed of about 12 students evenly split by gender. The class was ethnically mixed and one white male student was accompanied by a support worker as he was autistic.

The classes: session 1

The classes were held in the main drama studio and later in the dance studio in an adjoining building.

Warm up: Walk then change direction

The project worker began the class with a warm up exercise where everyone had to walk around to music. Then at his command everyone had to change direction (I was invited to join in and did so).

After the warm up the project worker asked how everyone was and congratulated a young man who had just celebrated his birthday. He continued by talking about the importance of mental wellbeing and trying to make yourself happy by making other people, for example, parents or guardians, happy. One student said that he would do things for his parents 'if they paid me' and the project worker talked about the trap of looking out only for yourself.

He then asked them to get into pairs with someone they didn't normally talk to.

Exercise: Non-verbal communication

The exercise was to sit facing each other and not talk just stare into each other's eyes for 2 minutes. After the 2 minutes the project worker asked them to describe what this had been like. He said the point of this exercise was to get them to focus which they would need to do in their performances

He then asked them to get into groups of 4 to devise a short scene to illustrate real conflicts or stresses they came across. They would then work on it and perform it in front of the group at the end of the class.

The project worker dealt with a student who had come in late while the groups did this. He also tried to show them a clip of their performances in the previous week but had a problem getting any sound so he had to abandon his plan.

Improvisation: Everyday scenes of conflict and stress

The three scenarios that the groups performed were:

Disrespect

In this scene one person (the autistic student) had his cap stolen by a group who taunted him and then spat in the hat before giving it back.

The rest of the group booed when the performers were too quiet and the project worker gave them feedback and encouragement about where to stand and the need to project their voices. The project worker also conferred with the autistic student's support worker.

The drama classes

Being ignored and picked on

The next group presented two scenes. The first was about being ignored by friends in a shopping mall. The second was different in that it was not so much about being ignored as being picked on by a parent and about being shouted at in the bathroom by a mother who was making negative comparisons of one daughter against another.

The project worker remarked to me how this was a real situation that the student was acting out.

Being manipulated

The last group did a scene where a friend is manipulated into giving money and a credit card to 'friends' who take advantage and ridicule the person.

After the performances the project worker talked to the group about the importance of 'triggers' that might cause stress. These might include religion, money, relationships, or friends. However the point was that we as human beings had freewill and could change direction and try to better how we felt especially by making others feel better.

He closed by asking the group to do this by telling a parent or sibling that you loved them, and report back the following week what reaction they got and how it made them feel.

The group asked the project worker whether he could be their drama teacher full time.

There was then some excitement as a fight had broken out involving students in the street outside the college.

The classes: session 2

The session was held in a different room to normal in a dance studio. It began with a warm up.

Warm up: 'Stuck in the middle with you'

The warm up exercise was for the group including the project worker and myself to move in a clockwise direction dancing to ['Stuck in the middle with you'](#) (Stealers Wheel 1972), changing direction when the project worker shouted 'change'.

After the warm up the project worker asked them how they felt and noted that they were smiling. He then made the point that it was important to try and make sure you had at least two or three moments of feeling good every day. He said if you are smiling you can't be angry.

He then told the group to split into three groups to devise a tableaux scene about situations where they felt stressed. They were given a time limit to do this (8 minutes) after which they would perform it and get feedback from the project worker and the others in the group.

Improvisation: Stress tableaux

Peer pressure, being offered drugs

The first tableau was a scene where a young person was being offered drugs by friends and there was considerable peer pressure applied for them to join in.

The project worker's feedback on the initial performance was that they needed to 'get on point' to put themselves into the scene as it wasn't convincing. He widened this out to make a more general point about 'knowing the rules of the game' about performance and about life itself.

The drama classes

The group repeated the scene and got positive applause from the rest of the group as it was much improved.

Sexual harassment

The second group presented a scene about sexual harassment between a girl and her boyfriend.

The project worker's feedback was to point out that they got out of character when the response to the harassment was laughter. He said that it was really important to stay faithful to the character or else the scene would not be credible. He also made reference to [Plan B's 'She said' \(2010\)](#) video where these kind of issues were depicted.

Drunken parent

The last group presented a scene about parental abuse where children at home watching 'Sponge Bob' on TV were disturbed by their mother who was drunk and aggressive towards them.

After the three performances the project worker asked the group as a whole which scene they found most realistic and troubling, and who did they identify with and feel empathy for in the scenes. This led to discussion of the things the group found stressful in their lives and how they tried to deal with them and how it made them feel. A theme that emerged was peer pressure and bullying by friends and family. The project worker made the point about the need to recognise that you had a choice and that you needed to guard against being manipulated. When trouble presented itself he advised them to 'vote with their feet' i.e. walk away from it.

The project worker then built on this by talking about what they could do to change things by changing themselves. He said he recognised what was going on in their lives 'out there' but that they could try to address these things by making changes to themselves. He gave the example of body language and self-fulfilling prophecies. He said if you think negatively, you act negatively and negative things were more likely to happen. Your mood was betrayed by your body language. He encouraged them to try and break negative cycles, for example by doing one good thing a day. It was like the idea of karma, where if you do good, good things happen to you. So he exhorted them to 'start everyday like they meant it'.

Warm down: just say no and dance

The warm down involved the groups acting out a rejection of the offer of marijuana followed by the group dancing alternately well than badly.

The project worker sent them off encouraging them to have a good day and to plan their days and think about how they could feel better.

The classes: session 3

Improvisation: Stress tableaux

In the last session the groups worked on the scenes that depicted stress.

Feedback

After the last session I conducted a brief group interview with the group who all participated.

The drama classes

Issues emerging

I asked them about how they found the classes and what they were getting out of them. I asked what they would tell someone who didn't know about the project and was sceptical about its usefulness and their responses were as follows:

Enjoyment

The group were very enthusiastic about the sessions as drama classes and as spaces to talk about things related to how they were feeling and their life experiences and plans for the future.

It gives us options

When asked about what they were getting from the classes one of the first responses was that it gave them options, in that it made them think that there might be other ways to deal with situations that they encountered. Having an opportunity to talk through these issues was helping.

He understand us

The group felt that an important aspect of the success of these sessions was the project worker himself because they felt that he understood them and where they were coming from in terms of the issues they faced and what their experience was.

Opportunity

An important aspect was that the sessions gave them the opportunity to talk about these issues that they encountered which they wouldn't have otherwise.

Looking after themselves

The sessions helped in that they encouraged them to think about looking after themselves in terms of their emotional and mental wellbeing. It also helped in that little things like the project worker's 'belly rubbing' exercise reminded them about this.

'Think the project worker'

Another aspect of this was how they responded to things that might be threatening to their wellbeing. The project worker encouraged them to 'vote with their feet' and to walk away from trouble. They said that they would 'Think the project worker' i.e. what would The project worker do, or advise them to do in these situations.

Just do it!

A young man in the group made the last comment which was that he felt that the project worker encouraged him not just to think about doing things but to actually take the next step and bring his dreams to life by actually doing something towards them.

The Men's group

Work with the Men's group

The students

The Men's group (MG) that was observed in the period of the evaluation was newly established and had only been going a few weeks. Not everyone attended all three sessions that I observed but there was a core group of young men who were there and I interviewed a couple of them after the last session.

It was comprised of a number of young men who identified themselves as 'black' though the ethnic origins of the group were more complex as it included young men who had been born or had families that originated in countries as varied as Nigeria, Somalia, or Palestine. All of them lived locally though and most though not all had grown up in this area of East London.

In terms of their position in the college they were in their first year of two at the sixth form college and all of the wanted to go to university or further education to study a range of subjects:

Architecture

Medical science

Information Technology

Quantity Surveying

Finance

Business marketing

Physiotherapy

The students had chosen to attend the group voluntarily. Previous groups had been a mix of referrals, where young men had been exhibiting behavioural problems in classes, and volunteers. Apparently this new Men's group had been recruited by word of mouth, where a few of them had heard about the sessions and had decided to find out about it and then brought their friends to it.

The meetings

The standing arrangement was to meet outside Sid's cafe in the atrium of the college on Wednesday lunchtimes where they would follow the Youth Safety Worker (YSW) and project worker, the Right Here project worker (RHPW) to a room in an adjoining block.

Occasionally there were problems when the rooms were changed and people were not sure where it was going to be held. The YSW would normally provide light refreshments, soft drinks and snacks biscuits and crisps as it was a lunchtime meeting. Meetings were normally about an hour long.

The Men's group

The format of the sessions was that having picked the group up at the café and led them to a room the project worker would begin the session by asking them about how they were and then follow up by asking them about the task or informal piece of 'homework' he'd given them the previous week.

For example at the end of the first session I attended The project worker asked them when was the last time they had told a close family member, a mother, father or sibling that they loved them. Most of them said it had been a while. So he set them a task which was to do this for next time and say what it felt like. The following week the project worker began the session by asking them to report back on the task set.

The body of the meeting would typically involve a discussion led by the workers on a theme leading up to the task for the following week. However the discussions appeared to be fairly impromptu i.e. there was no set script which allowed the workers to react to what the young men were saying and to what had been occurring in the college or in the news. For example the death of Nelson Mandela was used to initiate a discussion of moral choices and how Mandela showed that it was possible to break a cycle of violence by deciding to forgive rather than seek revenge.

The meetings would end with the project worker reinforcing the theme of the discussion and giving the group a tasks, such as telling your Mum you love her or making time to go on a 'man-date' with yourself.

The themes discussed by session and feedback from participants:

Session 1

Violence: 'Make a choice'

At the end of the first session I attended the group had been talking about a fight that had occurred a couple of weeks before, outside the college. This had been sparked by two college students bumping into each other but had escalated to the point that each had found reinforcements, from inside the college and outside and a fight had broken out. Some of the members of group had been directly involved.

The project worker used this incident to get the group to talk about the implicit obligations that they felt to back up their friends. The group acknowledged that this was the unwritten rule they all recognised and would follow.

However the project worker challenged them in two ways. Firstly he asked them whether they would respond so readily if their friend needed help with a dull domestic chore. Secondly he asked them to think about how their families would feel if something happened to them as a result of getting involved in a violent situation.

The project worker then linked this to a broader point about the need for them to think about the consequences of their actions and their choices.

The Men's group

Being a man: 'Tell your loved ones that you love them'

This discussion of violence and obligation led to another discussion about being a man more generally. Just as it was part of being a man to back up your friends and not lose face, the project worker asked the group to think about the wider issue of disclosure. He asked the group when was the last time you told a loved one that you loved them, and how did it make them feel? The project worker challenged them to do this for next time and to report back.

First group interview

Having been introduced to the group near the end of their session I asked whether they would mind sparing me a little time to be interviewed to give feedback on the group. Most of the group remained though some had games and had to leave.

Issues emerging

What was the Men's group about?

They told me that the purpose of the group was to help them understand 'things' better and to help them 'dodge' problems like having a fight with someone and how to stop this getting worse. They said that the group (the project worker) gave them advice about how to do the right things, how they could stop fights and look after themselves better.

Was it working and if so why?

The group was very positive and said that although the group was new and had only met a few times it had made them think about stuff. In terms of what made the group work they were very clear that the project worker was key to this in that they could identify with him and found him credible because they felt that he put himself in their shoes and spoke to them on their level. As one said "He doesn't speak to us like an old man or a teacher".

What's different about these sessions compared to lessons?

An important issue for them was that the project worker was seen to be motivated by passion rather than money. They said "they (teachers) teach it to get money; the project worker teaches it from his heart".

Apart from passion, a key factor was that he spoke to them in a way they could relate to by using slang and swearing. Teachers wouldn't talk in this way which meant that they couldn't either. This was important as they said this made them feel they could be themselves.

Another aspect which was important was that the project worker shared the problems and situations that he or his friends had been in which they could identify with and helped them think 'outside the box' about consequences later. The project worker was seen as credible role model.

The Men's group

What made them come to the group?

The fact that the group is all men, and that the project worker is like us was seen as important. The project worker's ethnicity and gender were seen as crucial; for the young men this meant that he understood them, knew what young black men were like and what they were going through. They said that this didn't mean that a woman couldn't help them but women have a different attitude to problems and different experiences.

Another important point they identified was that the project worker didn't see them as problems or talk down to them. They liked the fact that he said they were strong and praised them. For example, they cited the way the project worker talked to them about how they could break stereotypes of black people by being successful and that they could use stereotypes as a motivation to prove these people wrong.

Racial stereotyping

They said that even in Newham which was so diverse they felt stereotyped and in the college there were some teachers who prefer to help the white students and if you ask them a question they will 'brush you a bit to the side'. The police were also perceived as having a stereotyped view of them as young black men. This was why the project worker could help because they felt he recognised this and could help them combat these stereotypes. They might be standing in the street as a group of friends but the police would look at them as being a gang.

What did they hope to get out of the sessions?

They said that they found the Men's group sessions interesting and that they could learn from mistakes. They said they felt that 'the powers that be' don't really care about them, closing youth centres, for example, so things like the Men's group they appreciate as it's helping them a lot. They would really like it to continue.

Session 2

Being a man: talking about feelings

The following week the second session I observed started with the members of the group sharing how they had got on with the 'homework', i.e. to tell a loved one that they loved them. They went round and reported that it felt good and quite emotional. Some said they did this normally but others said it had been a long time since they had done this.

The project worker reinforced the point that part of the problems we faced as men was that it was not considered manly to disclose feelings and that this was one of the hardest but most important things to get over to build and sustain healthy emotional relationships.

Taking responsibility for change: Mandela and 'man-dates'

In the second meeting the project worker used the recent death of Nelson Mandela, the week before, to talk about the possibility of breaking cycles of hate and violent behaviour and making important and positive changes. He used Mandela as an example of how decades of racial injustice

The Men's group

and violence could be addressed and a vicious cycle broken by Mandela choosing to forgive and choosing to act positively.

This example led to the project worker challenging the group to think about changing the world by changing themselves. Despite living in hard times with all kinds of threats and hazards he argues that Mandela's example showed that you as an individual always have a choice.

He suggested that they might do this in a concrete way by using the knowledge they had about living in Newham as young black men and becoming social entrepreneurs advising local policy makers about ways of promoting safety for young people in the borough. In effect they could 'get paid' for using what they knew through their experience which was potentially valuable.

In terms of taking this forward the project worker suggested that this might be something they could take further on a residential course that might be arranged by the College. Secondly, within the work of the Men's group the project worker set them a task which was to keep a 'man-date' with themselves, where they spent an hour with themselves doing something different than they would normally do. The point being to give themselves time to be reflective and to be potentially proactive.

Attitudes to education

On the back of the discussion about making personal changes and influencing policy makers by using what they knew about the lives of young black men a worker asked the group what they really thought about education.

This led to a discussion within the group where some thought educational success was about being naturally smart which was challenged by another view that, on the contrary, success was more about hard work and application. One participant said he knew people who were much smarter than him who were not doing as well because they were not working as hard. Another added that passion and motivation was important too.

Second group interview

Issues emerging

Changing yourself

I asked the group about what the project worker had been saying about change and the extent to which they accepted his argument. They said they were coming to the class because they wanted to change. The group was voluntary and they were coming because it was a space where they could try and talk about changing themselves.

What difference does it make?

They said that this message of change gave them hope that it was not only white people who could change the world. This was somewhere they were listened to and taken seriously and not patronised. They said that this helped them make better decisions, to do the right things and not the wrong things. The fact that they saw the project worker as being like them and they saw him a

The Men's group

credible role model was really important. When the project worker spoke about karma and making the world better by doing the right thing it was like 'My Name is Earl'.

Attitude to politics

Talking about changing the world the group said that they didn't trust politicians and felt they just wanted votes and were not sincere. Even Obama was a figurehead but it didn't mean that he was able to do anything for black people. However they did agree with the project worker's argument about changing yourself.

Session 3

What would change look like? 'Start every day like you meant it'

The third session I observed began with the project worker asking the group how they had got on with keeping a 'man-date' with themselves. Apart from The project worker nobody had done this. The project worker used this to talk about what this showed in terms of our sense of self and making time for ourselves.

He followed up by asking them about the previous task telling their loved ones that they loved them. The members of the group fed back one at a time about this, and how it had made them feel, which had been positive. The project worker used this to reinforce his point that they needed to think about making changes to their lives by making time for themselves.

He asked them what a really good day would look like and when was the last time that they had had a really positive experience or day.

Attitudes to carrying weapons

The project worker asked the group about their attitudes to carrying weapons and whether they thought it was justified. The group response was a little hesitant and mixed in that some said that it depended on the circumstances. It might depend on how vulnerable people felt.

The project worker asked them to think about how their loved ones would feel if something happened to them. He reinforced this by sharing his own experience of losing a brother in a hit and run incident which was why he was so committed to working with young people.

Taking this work forwards

The project worker asked the group whether they would be interested in going on a residential where they could talk about these issues and could work on becoming trainers themselves to take this work forwards so that they could talk to their friends and other young people. The project workers said one of the problems was the age gap and that as young people they were in a great position to be able to communicate more effectively with other people nearer their own age given the right support and training. It would also be a space where they could address the issues raised by being a young black man in the UK.

The Men's group

The group response to this was very positive and there was some discussion of racial stereotyping and how they could challenge negative expectations by doing well in education and avoiding the problems that were literally on the streets around them in terms of gangs and violence.

Safety on the streets as young black men in Newham

The project worker picked up this theme and asked them how they were going to spend Christmas and how vulnerable they felt. The members of group responded in turn and talked about how they planned to avoid trouble by staying indoors with family and by staying in their areas.

The project worker tried to encourage them to spend some time with themselves and talked to them about how they might challenge negative expectations about them as young black men to be loud and badly behaved. He made the point that they could make changes and become what they wanted to be if they had faith in themselves and made time to make the changes.

No excuses

To reinforce this point the project worker then showed them a video of [Nick Vujcic - No arms no legs no worries - look at yourself](#). The video clip was of a man born with no arms or legs who was a motivational speaker whose message was that regardless of what you have, or don't have in his case, you can and should be positive. The project worker reinforced this message by saying they couldn't make excuses for not doing things or trying to make changes having seen this example.

Interview with pair from the Men's group

After the last session I observed before Christmas I interviewed two of the young men from the Men's group. One of them (Manny¹) had been key in the recruitment of the others to the group. He was from an Arab Palestinian background who lived in Custom House and was looking to be a quantity surveyor. The other young man (Kingsley) had grown up in Nigeria and was living with his older brother in Canning town as his parents were not around. He was looking to study mechanical engineering after college.

I asked them about the following issues:

Why had they joined the Men's group?

Manny had joined as he had seen a leaflet and come out of curiosity. He was motivated because he was aware of problems related to gangs and violence that some of his friends had experienced and he wanted to avoid them. Having come and been impressed he had persuaded his friend Kingsley to join.

Initially Kingsley had been hesitant as he didn't do 'bad stuff' and wasn't involved in anything like that, although he was aware that these issues were real though complicated. However he decided to give it a go on the recommendation of his friend Manny who he thought was a good person.

¹ Pseudonyms are used.

The Men's group

What had they got out of the Men's group?

In terms of their experience of the group they were both very positive. Manny said that what was good was that they talked about real issues that related to them as young people. For example how they could improve themselves, be a man and be somebody, avoid trouble and getting killed at such a young age. Kingsley found that it was really helpful in terms of being more open about things and having more empathy. For example when the group talked about carrying a knife it made him think about how you wouldn't need to carry a knife if you weren't a person always getting into conflicts, you wouldn't need to be always looking over your back.

Interestingly they said that the question about when was it okay to carry a knife was a bit too sharp for the group at that time as people were not prepared to answer the question honestly. They said that this was because people felt it depended on what your life was like outside. They knew what the 'right' answer was that the project worker was angling for but the group just stayed silent at that point rather than disagree with him.

However the project worker's disclosure of his motivation (the hit and run killing of his brother) made them look at him differently. It made them think about the importance of looking out for themselves and how their families would be affected if anything happened to them. It also inspired Manny to be more like the project worker and talk to young people to try and help them.

In terms of other effects Manny said that it had helped him concentrate and listen more in class as he used to talk over teachers a lot before but now he was understanding the motivations of the teachers trying to help them with the work. Kingsley added that it made him think about the importance of having a more positive attitude.

When I asked about the 'man-date' exercise Manny saw it more about avoiding other people who might lead them into trouble rather than as making a space for him to be reflective. Kingsley saw it as more about trying to avoid distractions and think about what he wanted to do.

In terms of mental health attending the group was helping but they said that the group was not a tight knit group and they were just really getting to know each other which was good. Manny said that he thought that more people even younger than them should get this kind of opportunity to talk as it makes a difference. However he also said that it was not enough and you'd need a lot more sessions to make a difference.

They weren't aware of the college counselling service and felt that they were unlikely to make use of it. They repeated the point about the value of the group sessions being that they felt free to be themselves and could relate to the project workers. I asked them whether being from outside the college was important and they said not necessarily. They felt that they could talk to the project worker; indeed Manny said he had talked to the project worker before the group anyway. However they felt that they could talk to the project workers in the same way, particularly after one had opened up about his personal motivation to do this kind of work.

Conclusions

Conclusions

Discussion of issues emerging

Men's group

Main themes of the project and student's responses

Choices

The project worker made two main arguments about choice to the Men's group.

Firstly he argued that they were largely responsible for themselves as they were no longer children. As such they were ultimately responsible for what they did and for their own wellbeing. In terms of mental health this meant that they needed to realise that how they felt was largely the product of what they did in terms of taking care of themselves.

Secondly he made the argument that they always had a choice about how they responded to situations, particularly stressful or dangerous ones. The key message here was that they could always choose to 'walk away' from trouble and exercise self-control.

The group said that they agreed with these basic arguments which were why they were attending the sessions. They said that they saw the sessions as being about how they could avoid trouble and make better choices.

Care

Another set of arguments that the project worker made to the group were about care.

On the one hand this was about taking care of yourself. This followed on from the prior assertion that they were responsible for their own situations.

This took the form of physical needs like getting enough rest and sleep and eating properly and avoiding 'junk' food. The project worker made much of the poor quality of convenience food that was very popular with students at the college and available up and down the streets of the area.

More importantly this need for care also referred to their mental wellbeing. The project worker argued that they needed to make space for themselves to reflect and think about what they wanted to do and to be. This was why he asked them to make a 'man-date' with themselves.

It was interesting that none of the young men (I failed in this assignment too) managed to do this task which was to reserve an hour out of a whole week in which you did something different which was about yourself.

Another key part of the care argument was the need to look out for other people, especially friends and loved ones. The reason being that it was an important part of looking after the self.

The exercise the project worker set the group about telling a loved one that you did indeed love them was much more successful in that most of the group did manage to do this (some said that they already did this regularly, even "all the time"). They reported back that it made them feel very good and that it was something they would try to repeat.

In terms of how they could take care of their friends this was a little more ambiguous in that they said that they had close friends already who they were prepared to 'back up' if need be. So the

Conclusions

argument the project worker tried to make was about the need to differentiate what was in their and their friend's, best interests. He used the fact that they were less likely to 'back up' their friends when they had dull chores to do to make the point that they were already making choices about when it was appropriate to act.

Part of the feedback they gave was that this had helped them become more reflective and helped them focus more. This meant that they were likely to think about things more and not just react to situations. They also said that it meant that they were more likely to focus in their classes as they were thinking more about what the teachers were trying to do for them and what they wanted to get out education.

Change

The last major set of arguments that the project worker made to the group was about change, changes in themselves and how they felt about themselves, changes in how they saw the world and acted in it. He argues that they could change the world by changing themselves.

A key aspect of this argument related to racial stereotyping. As young black men they were often seen in a particular light as loud, aggressive, threatening, low achievers etcetera. The project worker argued that they could change how they were seen and how people acted towards them, like teachers and the police, by changing themselves.

The group definitely felt that they were suffered from being racially stereotyped, not just in the street, but also in the classroom. They were keen to endorse the project worker's arguments about the need to challenge how people saw them. One of the things they really liked about the sessions was not just that they didn't feel stereotyped in these sessions and talked down to they were actually seen in a positive light as being strong young black men who might make a contribution to society.

I asked them about this and whether they bought this argument. They said that they did however they remained very cynical about authority and 'the powers that be', those who run the colleges and services like youth clubs for young people and politicians more broadly. They said that they did not trust them and felt that they as young black men were not seen as important.

Attitudes to the sessions

The feedback about the sessions themselves was very positive. This was down to a mix of connected factors. Firstly, he was a man, they said that this meant he saw things or at least understood things like they did. They didn't feel that a woman running these sessions would have been able to connect with them as effectively even though she might have useful things to say. As a woman they felt that she would approach issues differently.

Secondly he was black and appeared to be from a similar social background. They said that this meant that they felt he knew where they were coming from, what they experienced and what they were confronted by in terms of racial attitudes. However this was not just about race, the fact that The project worker talked to them in a normal way using slang and swearing meant that they felt that they could be relaxed with him and not have to be polite and act with him.

Where the project worker was different to them was that he was older. Not so old he was out of touch but old enough so that he had experience which he could share with them. Because he was otherwise like them this experience was seen as relevant.

Conclusions

The Men's group sessions were run with the project worker who they saw as being similar in terms of racial and social background. A key difference was that one project worker was employed by the college. However they said that they could talk to this project worker too for the same reasons. The fact that he had disclosed some very personal details about his motivation for running these sessions, and for doing the work with young people he did, helped increase his credibility with the group.

The issue of sincerity was important to the group. They felt that a key thing that made the project worker in particular credible was that he was "speaking from the heart" as they put it. Unlike teachers who they saw as talking to them because it was their job, the project workers, particularly after they shared personal things with them, were seen as sincere.

The group sessions were seen as good and worth coming to because they wanted to change and avoid trouble outside college but a key factor was that they could talk about these issues within the sessions without being patronised and seen as part of the problem of 'urban black youth'. Instead they were praised and addressed as knowledgeable actors who wanted to improve themselves.

The bits of the sessions which didn't appear to work as well were the more direct attempts made to ask them about their attitudes to education and carrying weapons. It appeared that these questions tested the quality of the trust the group had built up in that the young men didn't really want to respond to the question of weapons as they said it was a bit too soon to ask this and because they felt that it depended on the risks that people faced. They knew that the response that was desired was to say it was not good or that carrying knives couldn't be justified but saying this was a step too far at this point in the development of the group. However they were prepared to accept that the sessions made them think about this question more.

Drama classes

The feedback from the drama classes was also extremely positive. Partly this might have been expected for the group that had been working with The project worker for well over year but even the relatively new Wednesday group made many of the same points as to why the classes were really good.

Main themes of the project and student's responses

Many of the themes that the project worker worked on with the drama classes were common to the Men's group. The key differences were that the drama classes were classes rather than lunchtime discussions. This meant that the roles of the students and the project worker were different in that teaching was explicitly involved. The project worker was teaching them drama and the lessons had exercises that the students had to do and there was homework in the form of learning lines.

Another key difference was that where as in the Men's group either project worker would lead a discussion, or talk to the group and ask for a response in the drama classes The project worker as a teacher would get talk to them about issues in between getting them to do exercises and improvisations around the themes of mental health and their experiences.

As a result some of the issues and techniques discussed were identified as relevant to them as young people but they were also often applied to their position as drama students.

Communication

The project worker did a lot of work with both drama classes about communication. For example the non-verbal communication exercises where they had to sit and stare into each other's eye was about being more sensitive to other people and non-verbal communication.

Conclusions

The group felt that they had become much more sensitive and empathic in their relationships as a result. For two of the group this had a direct pay off in terms of improving relationships with siblings that had mental health issues. For the rest they said that it made them much more likely to be aware of how other people were feeling and to respond positively to their needs.

Whereas in the Men's group disclosure was linked to things men didn't do but should, with the drama classes the accent was more on the need to improve communication skills for the purposes of acting as well as general mental wellbeing.

Care

Like the Men's group the project worker made similar arguments about the need to take care of themselves, physically and mentally. He also connected their ability to care for others to their mental wellbeing as he had with the Men's group. He used the idea of Karma to illustrate this. He talked about the need to eat well and get enough sleep. However the main focus was about the importance of looking after ones emotional wellbeing. Again he made the point about the connection between looking out for others and the positive effects this had on personal wellbeing.

The group responded very positively to this and the 'belly-rubbing' exercise appeared to work well in terms of reminding them of this.

Real issues

Through the improvisations that he asked the classes to devise, which were about their lives and things that worried them or made them anxious, the project worker tried to get the classes to talk about these fears and how they could deal with them better.

The students really valued this as they said it made it possible for them to bring issues into the classroom from 'real life' that they otherwise would have to face without the opportunity to discuss or examine. They said this was the key thing that differentiated the project worker's classes from other drama classes in that he encouraged them to put their 'real' selves into their characters. It was also important as they could engage with the class as they saw these issues as obviously relevant to their lives as young people. Another aspect of this was that they felt that they could be free to be themselves in these classes and ironically, not have to put on an act.

Coping

A lot of the discussions were about how they could respond to the stresses of real life they encountered. Through the improvisations they worked on identifying the nature of these and in the discussions that followed the project worker would encourage them to develop a number of coping mechanisms. For example focussing 'being on point' was a popular phrase he used to get them to concentrate on what they needed to do. Another strategy was to try and make themselves feel better, by being positive, smiling, trying to build in moments that made them smile into their everyday lives. This along with being more open and considerate of the needs of others he argued would help them look after themselves.

The groups said that they felt more open minded and that they had formed stronger relations (particularly the Thursday class) as a result of sharing 'deep dark stuff' with each other.

Attitudes to the sessions

The feedback from both classes was extremely positive. Both classes found the project worker inspirational and highly motivational. Given the length of time that the project worker had worked with the Thursday class they had developed quite a bond with him.

Conclusions

The reasons they gave for this positive reaction were that the classes allowed them to deal with real issues, so they engaged and found the work relevant. This also meant that they felt freer to be themselves and express themselves. They thought that the project worker really understood them and the issues they faced.

He was also seen as challenging in two senses. Firstly, professionally he would not let them get away with less than 100% effort and commitment in their rehearsal and performances. He provided critical feedback and was seen as very professional in this regard. Secondly, he challenged them to think more broadly about wider issues and to change themselves.

Another reason they liked the class was that the project worker was responsive to their needs individually and as a group. Although he had a plan for each lesson he made sure they were all okay and was prepared to adapt the lesson to meet what they wanted or what he felt they needed.

The final point is that they felt the classes had made a real difference to their wellbeing in terms of making them more reflective, more empathic and caring and it also helped deepen their relationships and gave them options for dealing with these issues that troubled them.

Conclusions

What does this evaluation show?

The evaluation in context

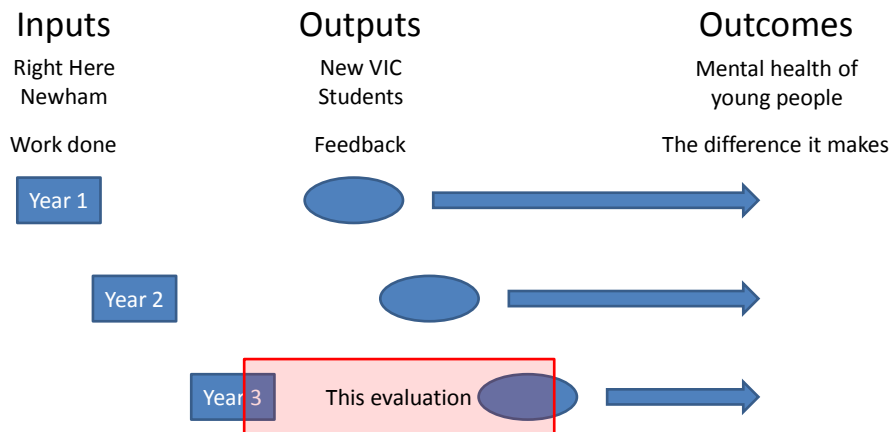


Figure 5: The evaluation in context

The brief for this evaluation was to capture some detail of the work of the project before it finished and get some feedback from the young people involved as to what they thought about it and the difference it was making to them

The figure above is an attempt to put the evaluation into a slightly wider context in terms of the timescale of the project. The present evaluation came very late in the life of the project and though it was hoped to be able to talk to students who had been in the earlier drama classes and earlier cohorts of the Men's group this wasn't possible.

The other key limitations are that this evaluation cannot address the long term difference the project has had on the young people involved as it was more of a snapshot a cross sectional rather than a longitudinal study. The evaluation is also limited in that it relies on what the student reported about the impact it was having on them.

Conclusions

The scope of the evaluation

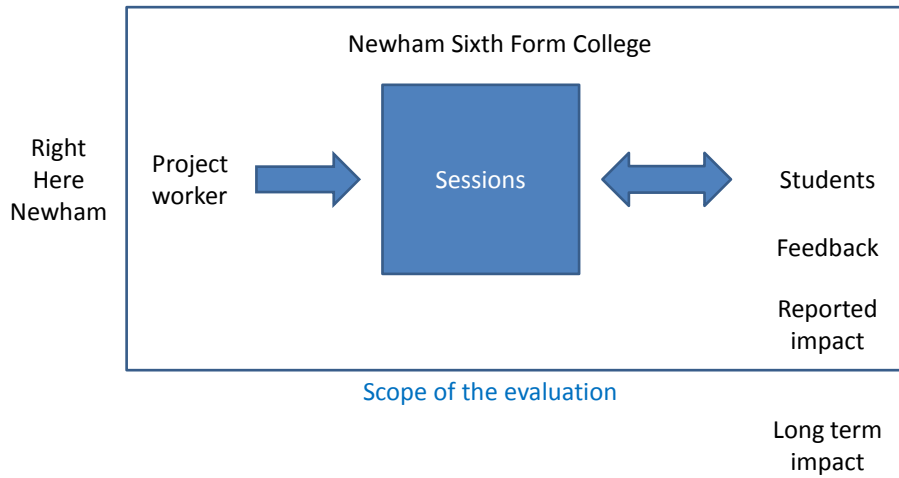


Figure 6: The scope of the evaluation

However I would maintain that in terms of the feedback the students gave about the about the work of the Right Here Newham project in Newham Sixth Form College it was clearly very positive and something they would argue ought to be continued and extended.

Conclusions

Appendix

Fieldwork summary

Date	Meetings	Wednesday Drama class	Wednesday Men's Group	Thursday Drama class
31 st Oct	NCY meeting with Right Here Newham Project Worker			
31 st Oct	CCG Young People's launch event			
4 th Nov	Meeting at New Vic with Welfare Guidance Manager and Youth Safety Worker plus Right Here Newham Project Worker and Manager and Trustee			
14 th Nov				Introduced to Drama group and observation
20 th Nov		Introduced to Drama class		
21 st Nov				Group interview then observation
28 th Nov				Observation of session
4 th Dec			Introduced at end of session and Group interview	
11 th Dec		Drama class	Observation and Group interview	
12 th Dec				Observation of session
18 th Dec		Drama class and Group interview	Observation and Group interview	
18 th Dec			Pair interview	
19 th Dec				Observation of session
23 rd Jan				Observation of session and Group interview

Table 2: fieldwork schedule

Conclusions

Men's group discussions and feedback

	Discussion	Feedback
4 th Dec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of recent incident of fighting at the college over a trivial 'bumping incident' • Importance of choices, can walk away • Why would they back friends up but not help them to do chores? • Task: Tell your loved ones that you love them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About being a better person • Avoiding trouble by thinking differently • Learning from credible role model • Race issues
11 th Dec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up: Did you tell your loved ones that you love them? How did it feel? • Question: What did they do when they were alone? • Discuss Mandela example break cycle of hate show change was possible • Change the world by changing yourself • Question: What did they really feel about education and government attitudes to black youth? • How to use their knowledge to change and get 'paid' as social entrepreneurs • YSO ask what they really felt about education and attitudes to gang violence and race • Set 'man-date' homework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credibility as like them, race, gender, class • Voluntary • Being listened to, not patronised • Free to express themselves • Cynical about politics
18 th Dec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up: Did have do a 'Man date' with yourself? • What would change look like? • Question: Is it right to carry weapons? • YSO disclose personal motivation • Residential proposal: about being a young black man in the UK • Safety over Xmas? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problems of stereotyping as black youth and where they live • Benefits more open, empathetic, less distracted better focus in class • Need much more like this, for all, and much earlier

Conclusions

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspirational video 	
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Thursday Drama group observations and feedback

	Activity	Feedback
<p>14th Nov</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm-up: 7-up • PW check on members of the group (including absent ones) talk about future plans • Exercise: pairs making silent eye contact • Discussion of non-verbal communication and focus • Discussion of the need to be supportive to each other • Improvisation: Betrayed by best friend • Discussion about exercise and self-control resilience and its benefits • Exercise: Improvisation around “things that hold us back” (15 minutes to prepare 2-3 minute piece) • Loosening up : “Stuck in the middle with you “ • Performance of improvised pieces about; dropping out of a game and doing drugs, being distracted from studying, and being told off by sister • Feedback • Warm-down: Belly-rubbing and self-care • Closing discussion of the need to look out for each other especially where upset like today 	

Conclusions

<p>21st Nov</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of what performance to do and role allocations • Discussion about taking care of self in terms of sleep and diet • Distribution of scripts • Exercise: Act/Stop including rehearsal of 'bump' incident 	<p>Group interview themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenging makes us think about things and other people • About real life not grades • Easy to listen to, engaging not boring, always positive • Relates to us more like a friend than teacher on our level • Made us more empathic • Helps us to deal with problematic stressful relationships • Help to build relationships as share deep stuff • Helps us cope with real problems like gangs, violence, stress <p>Informal feedback to PW</p>
<p>28th Nov</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of time left till performance • Check on students wellbeing, sleep and dealing with missed deadlines • Warm-up: 7 up • Distribute scripts and discussion of adding improvisations • Rehearsal of scenes • Feedback about need to get inside characters • Performance of scenes and feedback • Repeat performance with intensity • Request from student about linking Cadet group to NCY • Ask group about NCY meal on 12th Dec. 	
<p>12th Dec</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion: need to learn lines for performance after Xmas • Read thoughts and feedback about how to improve scenes (Long Good Friday example) • Money given to go to NCY dinner • Discussion of how much learnt through working with group and 	

Conclusions

	possibilities of doing more by performing outside of college if the group was interested	
19 th Dec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss NCY Dinner: Positive feedback • Group discussion about sexual relationships and parental views prejudice, tolerance and homosexuality 	
16 th Jan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delayed start (traffic) • Check who had scripts, photocopies made for 3 • Photographs of group rehearsing opening 'Inner city life' scene • Rehearsal of scenes • Feedback on scenes and background on characters drawn from real life • Warm down: Sing lines in operatic style 	
23 rd Jan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group interview before rehearsal • Rehearsal of scenes • Photographs of group 	<p>Group interview themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness • Empathy • Knowledge • Attitude to mental health • Open mind • Address real issues • Motivational, push more • Sincere, caring • Responsive to group needs • Bring things out in me • Free to express myself • Help in other classes

Conclusions

Wednesday Drama group observations and feedback

	Activity	Feedback
20 th Nov	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm up: walk and change direction • Discussion of wellbeing and making yourself happy • Exercise: pairs making silent eye contact • Improvise: scenes of emotional stress; hat being grabbed and spat in, being ignored by friends and shouted at by mother, being robbed and reactions to homelessness • 3 groups perform scenes • Discussion of emotional triggers and how to make yourself and others feel better • Homework: tell a loved one that you love them 	Group discussion
11 th Dec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm up: Stuck in the middle with you' • Discussion on moments of feeling good, smiling, try to do this 2-3 times a day • Exercise: connected tableaux that portrays experience of stress (8 minutes to prepare) • Performances: scenarios; being offered drugs, sexual harassment, abuse by drunken mother • Feedback discussion of manipulation and personal responsibility, advice: 'vote with your feet' • Discussion of body language and 'start every day like you mean it' and idea of karma do a good deed to change things, plan your day • Warm down: Act out rejecting offer of drugs, dance well, then badly 	

Conclusions

18 th Dec	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improvised scenes	<p>Group interview themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Really enjoying classes• He understands us• Gives us options• Think about teachers differently in terms of what they are trying to do for us• More like a friend than teacher, passion• Increased confidence• Example 'Think The project worker'• Help us achieve our dreams, actually do it not just talk• Feel better about themselves 'tummy rubbing' exercises and more likely to walk away from trouble
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Conclusions

Ethics form



An evaluation of the Right Here Newham (RHN) project in New Vic

What is this project about?

This research is about young people's experience of the Right Here Newham (RHN) project's work with young people in New Vic. The RHN project wants to get feedback from the students on what this has done for them in terms of feelings of well being and how this was achieved?

Who is doing the research?

This research is being conducted by Syd Jeffers Senior Lecturer in the School of Law and Social Sciences at the University of East London sydney1@uel.ac.uk tel: 0208 223 7733.

What is involved?

The research will involve Syd Jeffers sitting in some classes at New Vic and interviewing current and former students about their experiences of the work of the RHN project. The interviews will be up to an hour long, but may be shorter. The interviews may be recorded (with permission).

Will the interviews be anonymous and confidential?

Yes. The interviews will be anonymised and the information will be treated as confidential (subject to the normal legal limitations on confidentiality regarding disclosure of imminent harm to self or others). Data generated in the course of the research will be retained in accordance with the University's Data Protection Policy.

Will it affect me as a student?

No. The project will not affect students at New Vic in terms of assessment or treatment as the interviews will be confidential and anonymous.

If a student from UEL or any other educational institution is interviewed there will be no implications for the assessment, treatment, service use or support offered to that student either.

Do I have to take part?

No. Participation is entirely voluntary and participants have the right to withdraw consent at any time, and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.

Who should I contact if I'm unhappy with any of this?

The research has been approved by the Universities Research Ethics Committee. In the event of any concerns about the conduct of the investigator, researcher(s) or any other aspect of this research project, they should contact researchethics@uel.ac.uk.

Signed consent

If you are happy to participate sign and date here:

Syd Jeffers UEL Nov 2013