

Summary of an evaluation of Cherry Orchards: A Camphill Community

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Background

The Mental Health Foundation was invited by Cherry Orchards to carry out an independent evaluation of its work and life. This aimed to describe its key characteristics, therapeutic processes and effects on residents' mental health and well-being and explore aspects viewed as core to its therapeutic effects.

The Research

The study used a mixed-method approach, which included:

- A researcher living in and alongside the community for two weeks of onsite data collection and observation, in order to experience and understand community life
- One-to-one conversational research interviews to explore the perspectives of eight residents and ten co-workers¹
- Resident ratings of 'therapeutic alliance' (i.e. the quality of their relationships) with their key-workers² and with the community as a whole and any changes in their own needs for support.

A brief description of the community

Cherry Orchards is a registered care home, which is part of the Camphill Movement. It offers time-limited residential placements of 18 months to 2 ½ years for adults with mental health or psychological problems. The community is situated within a beautiful setting, and facilities include a small farm and certified organic garden, which provides most of the community's food requirements. This physical environment clearly supports the therapeutic work. The community offers 24-hour, live-in support and provides a holistic and individually tailored therapeutic programme including individual and group-based arts, movement and speech therapy, horticultural work, one-to-one counselling and weekly key-worker sessions.

Cherry Orchards residents

At the time of the research, Cherry Orchards' residents came mainly from the West and South West of England. However the community also worked with residents from other parts of the UK, with active involvement from their local care teams. Most residents were single people living with a range of psychiatric diagnoses, including Schizophrenia, Bipolar Disorder, and Borderline Personality disorder, some having concurrent difficulties such as addiction problems, eating disorders and learning disabilities.

Residents' Ratings of Therapeutic Alliance and Change in areas of need

Even the newest residents rated the quality of relationships with the community and with their individual key workers quite highly. However, this therapeutic alliance appeared to further increase over time and this was particularly significant in the key worker relationship (i.e. how much they agreed with each other and shared understanding of problems and the ways to work with them).

¹ Co-worker is the term Camphill uses for many of its (often unsalaried) workers who live alongside people with specific needs in Camphill communities. In this context it also refers to paid members of staff and a Community Trustee who were included as interviewees in the evaluation.

² Key-workers are co-workers designated to meet and work regularly with individual residents.

Residents' experience of Cherry Orchards – Themes

Residents rated areas of their lives where they thought their needs for help and support had changed since arriving at Cherry Orchards. The greatest changes were in emotional and mental health needs. Positive changes increased with length of stay at Cherry Orchards. Individuals interviewed particularly noted improvements in their self-esteem and confidence and their ability to carry out practical tasks. They also described considerably reduced anxiety and changes in self-harm behaviour.

A number of fundamental characteristics of Cherry Orchards had helped residents to make these changes, including the warm, friendly and supportive atmosphere within the community.



Residents felt valued by the community and described a strong sense of belonging: a feeling that some had never experienced before. They suggested that by taking on other peoples' positive perceptions of them, they had begun to develop their own sense of self-worth. They believed that as the community cared for them, they had learnt to care for themselves. This gave many of the residents the confidence to express their feelings to the rest of the community and to ask for feedback and advice from others. After asking for feedback, they felt they were allowed the time and space to take away and reflect on these new perspectives in order to learn from new ideas.



Residents found the beautiful and peaceful surroundings of Cherry Orchards therapeutic in itself and appreciated the regular daily structures, rotas and routines, which reduced their anxiety by providing clear rules and boundaries for community living. They benefited from working towards goals alongside their key-workers without pressure and at a pace they felt comfortable with. Residents also appreciated being encouraged to take responsibility for themselves by making their own decisions and maintaining overall control of their care. This helped them to learn and develop new skills as well as increasing their confidence.

Co-worker descriptions of therapeutic processes – Themes

Co-workers interviewed identified seven key aspects of Cherry Orchards, which were integral to the therapeutic processes at work in the Community,

1. Living in Community offers co-workers and residents experience of living and working alongside each other, building relationships and trust. This enables people to discover and take on board new perspectives and possibilities.

2. Creativity as self-discovery entails opportunities for residents to engage in meaningful and purposeful activity, whether in the garden, kitchens, artistic therapy, workshops or one-to-one interactions. These allow feelings to arise and be addressed directly through personal awareness and attention.

3. Rhythm includes daily, weekly, monthly and seasonal cycles of growth and development, designated times for stillness and reflection, gathering together and celebration. This regular rhythm provides a sense of order and safety as it draws people in to find their rightful place and integrate more deeply into the life of the community.

4. Growing and Preparing Food gives people at Cherry Orchards opportunities to connect with their external environment and take valued social roles in the community, express choice and experience variety.

5. Spiritual Activity and Values at Cherry Orchards mean that each person is recognised and respected as a unique individual in the community. Empowerment, self esteem and the discovery of meaning in life are essential elements in residents' recovery. Therefore Cherry Orchards provides time and space for people to think and consider, seek solace and meaning and to contribute to shared celebrations of meals and festivals.

6. Responsibilities and Goal Setting are tailored to the strengths and needs of community members via weekly key-worker and supervision meetings. There is ongoing encouragement, negotiation of realistic aims and expectations giving chances to work in stepwise and supported ways to change old patterns and find new ways of being and behaving.



7. Interface with the Wider Community describes the ways that Cherry Orchards' space and boundaries provide a secure base from which residents have the opportunity to get involved in activities outside the community and prepare themselves for the challenges of moving on to living in other settings.

This project was conducted by the Research Team at the Mental Health Foundation. To find out more about our work, please contact us at:

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Residents and Co-workers' shared understanding of therapeutic processes

Residents and co-worker descriptions of therapeutic processes are set out here alongside each other, demonstrating areas of shared understanding.

Residents	Co-workers
<p>Community living</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm, friendly, supportive atmosphere • Feeling valued and belonging • Feedback and advice from others • Internalising sense of self-worth • Increasing confidence to express self 	<p>Living in Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing, connecting and building trust • Accepting and valuing, feeding back and challenging • Journeying together • Creating an inner space for 'other' • Expressing and learning about oneself
<p>Reflecting, internalising and learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from others • Space and time to reflect • Accepting self and illness • Changing inaccurate beliefs • Internalising sense of self-worth 	<p>Feeding back and challenging</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moments of stillness and self-reflection • Seeing different perspectives and the possibility of change • Learning to manage emotions and feelings
<p>Rotas and routines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear rules and boundaries • Meeting responsibilities and working toward goals • Learning new skills and developing knowledge 	<p>Rhythm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularity, order and safety • Spiritual extension of rituals and rhythms • Personal effort and authenticity • Managing emotions and feelings • Developing emotional independence
<p>Working with key workers on care plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust between resident and key workers • Key workers upholding promises and remaining true • Encouragement to take responsibility • Working gradually, at a comfortable pace toward goals over time • Not feeling pressurised • Maintaining control of one's own care 	<p>Responsibilities and goal setting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contracts between the individual and community • Expectations and encouragements • Negotiating achievable goals • Taking ownership of problems and realising personal strengths
<p>Organic food and its benefits</p>	<p>Growing and preparing fresh, organic, additive free food</p>
<p>Beautiful, peaceful and relaxing physical environment</p>	<p>A peaceful, semi-rural 20-acre estate with private single room accommodation for all residents</p>

There was clear agreement between residents and co-workers on many of the therapeutic processes involved in achieving the outcomes described. A number of recommendations and suggestions for future research and community development are now being explored. This evaluation and its findings therefore provide Cherry Orchards with a strong evidence base on which to build for the future.