Responding to Covid-19

A process evaluation of Perthyn:
An on-line peer leader project in Wales
for those seeking sanctuary

hope and story

Y Sefydliad Iechyd Meddwl

Mental Health Foundation

Dr J. Burns │ May 2021

Contents

Front cover photo by Charles Donnelly Perthyn | Belonging. All photos were taken during the Perthyn project.

Executive summary

"I am going to go back to my early age ... my family were ... displaced ... we had to flee our home ... [We were] dependent on outside organisations ... what it proved is that early as a child, you remember who gave you that toy [and] food ... I still remember their faces.

What I got from that, was an urgency to help others so even after years [later] now, I have the possibility of help[ing] others."

Project staff seeking sanctuary

The UK received 29,456 asylum applications in 2020 (Government, 2020a). Each of these represents an individual life and with that life, like ours, comes a story and a journey.

The stories of people's lives are fascinating, sometimes harrowing, sometimes very sad and sometimes jubilant and triumphant. Rarely do we harness these stories towards encouraging others and if we do, we look at the impact on others rather than the storyteller themselves.

The aim of this evaluation was to experientially examine the **process** of people seeking sanctuary becoming peer leaders through the lens of their story using a 'hope' theory (Burns, 2020).

The evidence suggests that validating and utilising the lived experience of a person seeking sanctuary, brings hope to others, how building effective rapport is vital, how 'peer-ness' can be a tool in keeping individuals strong and finally how a modelled training approach (MTA) works.

"I put hope in my mind ... I still have hope that my life will change. I always hope the best for my life." Peer leader

Introduction

The overall aim of this process evaluation is:

- **to explore the experiential process of people seeking sanctuary becoming peer leaders using a 'hope' theory.**

A process evaluation is:

"... a study which aims to understand the functioning of an intervention, by examining implementation, mechanisms of impact and contextual factors."

UK Medical Research Council, 2015

Process evaluations identify the procedures undertaken, the decisions made in developing a programme and how they work. In turn, this helps to deliver more effective programmes running alongside other intervention projects so that the **process** of generating outcomes is examined.
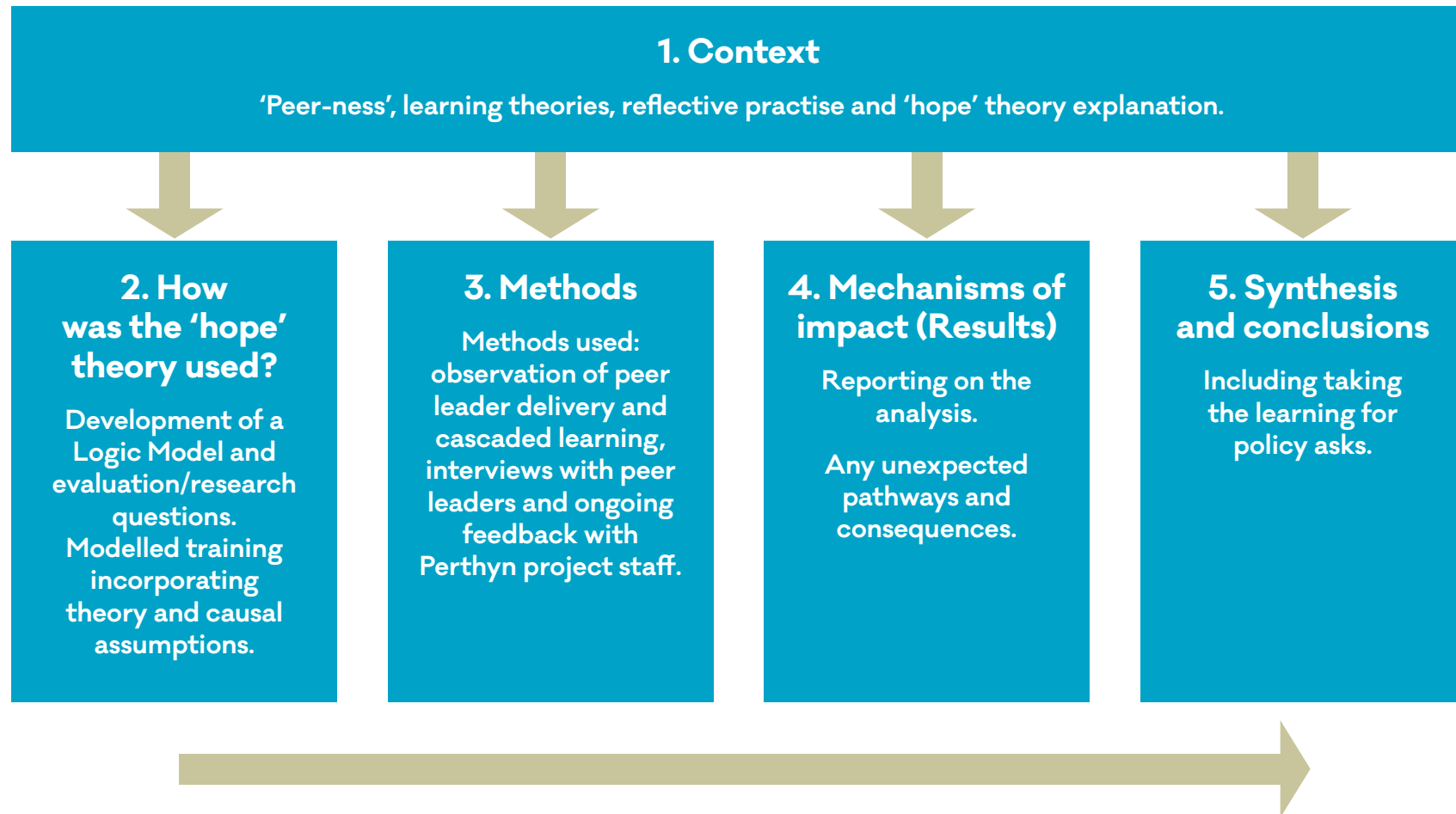
In addition to documenting the programme's development and operation through this process, process evaluations can also assess reasons for successful or unsuccessful performance sometimes known as the 'active ingredients.'

This can allow for a replication or adjustment so it can succeed again or in some cases, abandon a project altogether (Government, 2020b).

In 2015, the Medical Research Council (MRC) released guidance for process evaluations based around some core process themes: Context, Description of the Peer Leader process, Methods and Results/Mechanisms of Impact. Adapting the names of the core theme, this process evaluation will loosely follow the MRC framework.

The diagram on the following page, shows how the aim will be fulfilled mapping the process evaluation onto the MRC framework. Each aspect within this diagram will be discussed in this report.

Note: The words 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker' have been removed as far as possible and have been replaced with 'person/people seeking sanctuary'. This is to give as much value as possible to the individuals involved in this project. Thanks to the project staff and those seeking sanctuary who have contributed to this report through interview or photos.

Acknowledgements and grateful thanks to Helen Tower (Project Manager), Dr Nicole Burchett (who led the Group Interview), Prof Florence Ayisi and her film crew for their contributions to this report.

Fig. 1. Figure to show the process evaluation journey

1. Context

'Peer-ness', learning theories, reflective practise and 'hope' theory explanation.

2. How was the 'hope' theory used?

Development of a Logic Model and evaluation/research questions. Modelled training incorporating theory and causal assumptions.

3. Methods

Methods used: observation of peer leader delivery and cascaded learning, interviews with peer leaders and ongoing feedback with Perthyn project staff.

4. Mechanisms of impact (Results)

Reporting on the analysis.

Any unexpected pathways and consequences.

5. Synthesis and conclusions

Including taking the learning for policy asks.

1. Context

The MRC (2015) suggest that contextual factors sit across the whole process evaluation influencing every part. For example, different interventions may be more or less effective in a different setting or with a different set of people.

This is supported by other authors who state that continually referring to contextual factors can illuminate the barriers or facilitators of the process (Murta *et al*, 2007) (Wierenga *et al*, 2013) (General Medical Council, 2015).

1.1 'Peer-ness'

What is the definition of a 'peer'? A peer is someone who has shared similar life experiences to their surrounding community, but it does not mean they are all the same age or have the same socio-economic status (NICE, 2020). Peer leaders often share the same motivation to want to help someone who is going through or has gone through similar things to themselves.

Dickerson *et al* (2015) described this bond of common interests or experiences as 'peer-ness'. Also, the shared life experience gives a 'camaraderie effect' (Lahvis, 2017) which produces an empathy and unique bond:

"by helping others, an individual sustains a feeling of camaraderie, a sense of well-being that augments one's own health." Lahvis, 2017. P20

1.2 Learning theories

The modelled training approach (MTA) used in this project has an underlying principle of 'I show you, we do it together, I watch you' – like a scaffold on a building. This approach is not new to the education world. Bruner (1962) was a psychologist who felt that the Western knowledge-based way we taught children before 1960 was not going to truly educate them. He felt that teaching needed to allow children to participate in their own learning and culture, rather than just receiving information. He felt that learning should 'scaffold' the child and not just be:

"mastering the content ... rather it is a set of phenomena (or culture) that occurs around the mastery of the content." Bruner, 1996 cited in Takaya, 2008. p.13

Bruner based his theories on the Russian born psychologist, Vygotsky (1896-1934) who suggested that optimal learning happens in a social environment

peer-ness

particularly when there is a close proximal presence of someone who is more knowledgeable. Bruner developed Vygotsky's theory further and suggested that when children start the learning process, they are dependent on the support from the adults around them. As children develop however, their new skills and knowledge create an independence and gradually the adult support can step away. He likened this to scaffolding that is used to create new buildings. As each brick is put in place and the building grows in strength, gradually the scaffolding can slowly be removed until the building can stand alone.

A few decades later and based on similar principles of social learning, Mezirow (1991) introduced the Transformative Adult learning theory. He demonstrated how children's learning cements the ability to be independent and autonomous and adult learning builds on this foundation with improved critical skills, the ability

to examine assumptions and frames of reference plus a high ability to be able to work with others to solve problems. He states that learning is a social process where subjects and concepts often make better sense when there is full participatory discussion with others.

With these theories and methods in mind, it begs the question as to why so many adult health intervention courses for groups are taught over one day with the 'hope' that the learners will go away knowing how to facilitate and sustain a group?

1.3 Reflective practise and ability

There was an assumption that the peer leaders would be able to reflect to some extent. There are many effective reflective models for example, Kolb (1984) and Gibbs (1988), and the project staff drew on the principles of these and others to help the peer leaders reflect on how they felt about the process.

Photo by Charles Donnelly Perthyn | Belonging

1.4 The 'hope' theory used for the training

The theory used in the training of the peer leaders was the result of analysis of a PhD study on the experiences of other peer leaders delivering a wellbeing intervention within a perinatal (new mums) project (Burns, 2020). The theory generated (see Fig.2 below) begins with acknowledging and respecting the 'story' of participant's lived experience. The empathy felt by the peer leaders towards their peers, resulted in the motivation to be a part of helping somehow and this led them to work or volunteer for a third sector organisation, offering their 'expertise'.

Their empathy and the 'want' to give hope to others often gave a 'light at the end of a tunnel'. This encouraged their peers to keep going through their difficult times. The peer leaders' own lives were a living testimonial of hopeful and recovered lives. As a result, the peer leaders were rewarded in different ways in their efforts, be this altruistically or egoistically. However, there was the also the possibility of vicarious difficulties or the re-living of negative emotions for the peer leaders, which needed to be managed carefully.

The rapport and connection that the peer leaders built was authentic, genuine, and accepting. Within rapport, there was a flow of reciprocal conversations that were described like a 'dance' of give and take, listening and responding. In these conversations going back and forth, the peer leaders experienced and practised attunement with their peers so they could accurately reflect and respond to the feelings being expressed by individuals within the group. There was also mis-attunement where there was too much sharing and disclosure by the peer leaders which needed careful management. This mis-attunement interrupted the flow and reciprocity of conversation, which then had to be re-established.

Fig. 2: Diagram to show the 'hope' theory

Rewarding

Giving hope

Rapport building

Motivating

Empathising

Lived experience
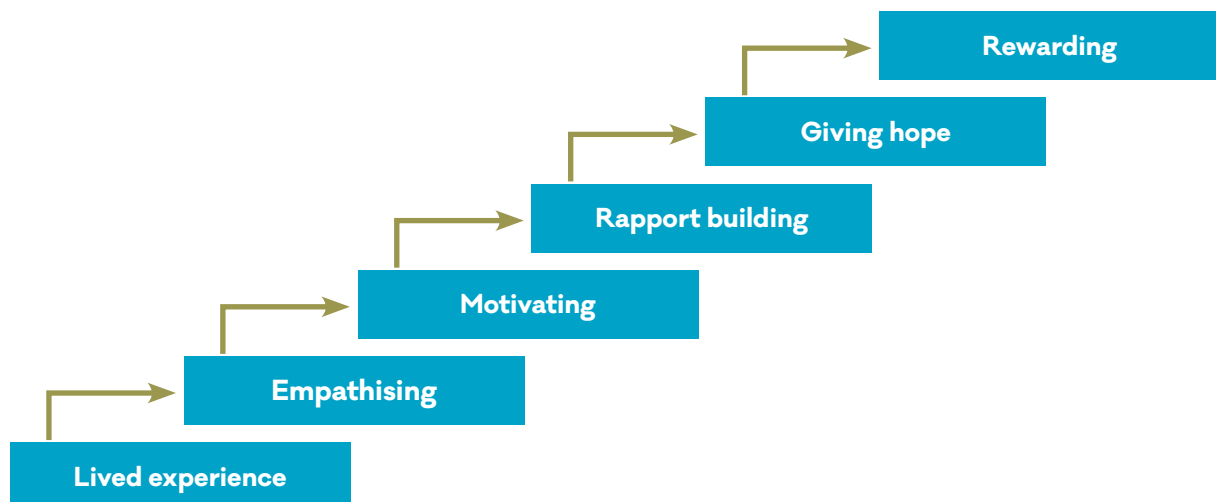
2. How was the 'hope' theory used?

This section of the process evaluation states the evaluation aim and objectives, discusses the Logic Model, describes the whole of the Perthyn project, the MTA and how it incorporated the 'hope' theory. It also includes some further contextual factors and assumptions.

2.1 Evaluation aims and objectives

The main evaluation aim was:

- **to explore the experiential process of people seeking sanctuary becoming peer leaders using a 'hope' theory**

The objectives were to:

- successfully incorporate the 'hope' theory into the MTA of the Perthyn project
- capture the experiences of the project staff and peer leaders using the 'hope' theory in their training
- better understand how useful the 'hope' theory is as part of the process

2.2 Logic model

A good process evaluation starts with a theory of change or logic model (Government, 2020b) which is a diagrammatic representation of how a study or project is going to work (see Diagram 1).

The logic model shows a flow from gaps in knowledge for the Perthyn project, the resources needed, and the methods used to fulfil the above aim.

The gaps in knowledge were the lack of understanding of the impact the theory can make as it is incorporated during the life of the project. Also, a limited understanding of the journey and process of including a theoretical framework for an MTA and no knowledge of the experiences of the peer leaders and project staff using the 'hope' theory as a framework within this project.

The resources needed to carry out this evaluation included knowledge of the 'hope' theory, accessibility to observing and asking questions about the use of MTA and time to be able to collect data throughout the whole project.

Diagram 1. Logic model to demonstrate the gaps in knowledge for the Perthyn project, the resources needed, the methods and activities and the outcomes intended.

Gaps in knowledge for the Perthyn project	Resources needed	Methods or activities	Outcomes
There is no understanding of the impact the 'hope' theory makes as it is incorporated during the life of the project.	The 'hope' theory generated from perinatal work in Burns (2020) PhD study.	Discussion and informal questions with all project staff and members during initial training.	
There is little understanding of the journey and process of the modelled training approach.	Access to collect data during the modelled training approach sessions of the Perthyn project.	In-depth, self-report questionnaires from the group facilitators.	The experiential process of the project staff was captured using qualitative data.
There is no theoretical framework for the Perthyn project modelled training approach.	Consent from the Mental Health Foundation and REACH+ partners and peer leaders to collect data and observe process.	Evaluator observations of the group facilitators training the peer leaders (before the peer groups were formed).	The 'hope' theory was successfully incorporated into the modelled training approach of the Perthyn project.
There is no knowledge of the experiences of peer leaders and project staff using the 'hope' theory as a framework within the Perthyn project.	Co-operation and advisory support from the Perthyn Project staff and peer leaders.	Evaluator observations of the peer leaders start to lead their groups with peers present.	There was a better understanding of how useful (or not) the theory was as part of the process of the modelled training approach.

Also, consent was needed from all partners and co-operation from the project staff and advisory group was needed. Finally, there was the use of some secondary data from peer support models and the previous pilot run through of the Perthyn project.

The methods are described in more detail in 4.1 and the outcomes were to capture the experiential process of the project staff and peer leaders using the 'hope' theory. Also, to demonstrate whether the 'hope' theory was useful as part of the MTA.

2.3 Description of the overall Perthyn project

Following a successful pilot of a similar Perthyn project in 2019 with people seeking sanctuary in a different city in South Wales, the Welsh Government, through a Covid-19 response grant, funded a scaled-up version of this Perthyn model for 10 months in four different cities in Wales (October 2020 to June 2021). It was led by the **Mental Health Foundation** in partnership with **REACH+** (a college department who taught English as a second language (ESOL) to people seeking sanctuary).

This 10-month scaled-up version of Perthyn is the subject of this process evaluation and how the 'hope' theory was incorporated into the MTA capturing the experiences of peer leaders and project staff.

For context, the aims and project description of the requirements of the funder (Welsh Government) for the overall Perthyn project were as follows:

- To increase the skills of 16 peer leaders who were seeking sanctuary (using an MTA) to be able to set up and run small peer support groups online.

- To set up four online sustainable peer support groups for those seeking sanctuary in four cities in Wales (to move to face-to-face groups when/if Covid-19 restrictions allow).

- To increase emotional resilience and emotional literacy in people seeking sanctuary peer group members.

- Demonstrate effective third sector partnership working.

- Produce two social video documentaries and photo gallery reflecting the journey and impact on the peer leaders.

The four online groups set up, were designed to be sustainable after the project staff withdrew by training the 16 peer leaders. Within the groups themselves, the intention was to create a space for a wellbeing intervention to be delivered so that men and women seeking sanctuary could increase emotional resilience and literacy, creating new friendships which in turn might decrease isolation and perhaps prevent mental ill health.

For context, the wellbeing intervention used was the exploration of different English words such as, 'belonging', 'courage', 'hope', 'sanctuary', and 'happiness'. These words were first translated into the people seeking sanctuary's own language and then they discussed what these words meant to them, which allowed to explore their stories. All the discussions were captured on a power-point slide (or similar).

Fig. 3: A summary of one of the sessions where the word 'belonging' was captured.

A sense of permanence – because of who I am I just belong e.g. being a family member.

Different for someone who came into this country legally (e.g. study) versus someone who is escaping (e.g. asylum seeker).

Perkatesi (Albanian).

Having children has given me a new sense of belonging. Feeling of worth. I am doing something really important being a Mum. 'I have created a root' – I am needed and of worth.

It can mean different things at different times in your life span.

My identity has been very fluid depending on what country I have lived in. Always changing. If I want to belong it is not always up to me e.g. being included in a joke – feeling safe enough to be able to ask for the explanation so to join in the laughter too.

When you lose a relationship, identity or roots, you can then feel like you lose your sense of belonging. You have to change and adapt in order to find belonging again.

Perthyn (also means a relationship with).

BELONGING

Prinadlezhat (Russian) being part of.

Knowing that you won't be rejected. Safety and permanence. Creating a relational 'nourishing nest'.

If someone doesn't have a sense of belonging it can affect someone's wellbeing and identity.

Belonging is fostered by a feeling like you are contributing e.g. a job – sense of value/self worth in society. This gives you resilience.

Pripadanje (Croatian) to be part of something.

Connections to people and a place. Feeling like you have 'roots' somewhere. In contrast with being transient somewhere.

Security and worth. It doesn't have to be family, but you feel secure and you have a sense of self worth.

A sense of home with people – where you can be yourself on a 'bad day'.

Feeling safe to be myself. No fear of being judged. To be myself. When I have no fear of being judged in a group, then there is a sense of belonging.

Trauma can make us feel like we can't belong when perhaps we did before. Something we have no control over.

Qui appartiennent (French).

2.4 The modelled training approach (MTA)

The MTA is a process by which learning is imparted through demonstration. It is a collaborative and empowering process promoting the learner to direct their learning. Crucially, it goes at the speed of the learner. It included aspects of the 'hope' theory; empathy and rapport building (listening, authenticity, boundaries, flow, and so on).

Within the Perthyn project, the project manager trained the group facilitators. These group facilitators spent time with the peer leaders using MTA to help them set up their peer groups. This involved much demonstration, discussion, collaboration and empowering the peer leaders to have a go themselves as they grew in confidence.

The project manager led a training session with the group facilitators that explained the 'hope' theory and the principles needed to train the peer leaders. Diagram 2 shows the final slide of the theory presentation used in the group facilitator training.

Diagram 2: Summary slide used in the training of the group facilitators.
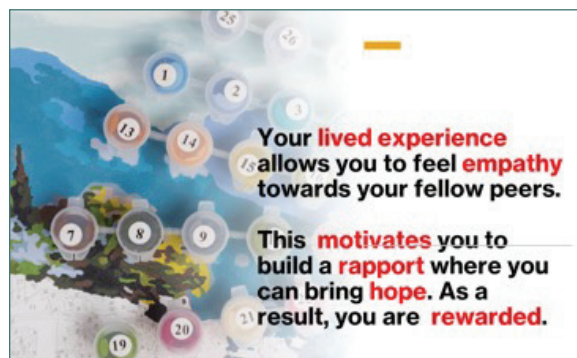
The group facilitator training continued demonstrating the wellbeing intervention (as described in 2.3) using the metaphor of 'scaffolding' (Bruner, 1996 cited in Takaya, 2008. p.13). The group facilitators were shown that at the start of their work with the peer leaders, most of the 'scaffolding' is up (full support for the learning), but slowly, as the 'building' emerges, the 'scaffolding' can be taken away as the peer leaders take up the mantle of leadership and start to lead their own groups. The removal of the 'scaffolding' however, is only at the pace of the 'building' work.

Fig 4. This shows the cascaded MTA process and the different roles project staff held

Project manager	Group facilitators	Peer leaders	Peer groups
Oversight, design, and delivery of training incorporating the theory	Using the MTA, spending time with the peer leaders to set up peer groups	Setting up and leading peer groups	Recipients of the wellbeing intervention and peer support

More 'scaffolding' (time given to help the peer leaders understand their role), can be put 'back up' if needed. One of the strengths of the MTA is that it is fluid and dynamic. It moves and adapts depending on where the peer leaders are. If for example, the peer leaders know more about one of the subject areas covered, less time would be spent on this. Similarly, if the peer leaders had never been involved in group leadership before, more time would be spent on this.

As the group facilitators received the training, the main principles of MTA were discussed (see Diag. 3 below). These principles were considered the 'building blocks' There was no particular order in which these principles needed to be covered by the group facilitators, but like a checklist, they did need to be included in the sessions at some point.

Diagram 3. Main principles of the MTA

2.5 Further contextual factors worth noting

Steckler and Linnan (2002) suggest considering the environmental factors that might influence the programme implementation which then shapes the data collection methods. For this project this includes the project being delivered online due to Covid-19. This makes rapport building harder as the social time before and after sessions, body language, informal clarifications, breaks for refreshments are harder to facilitate online. Working online is often a very direct and purposeful experience with little room for deviation. For example, only one person can feasibly talk at one time, whereas in a face-to-face group, individuals can turn to each other and discuss.

Break-out rooms can be used, but these are often planned in advance rather than spontaneous. However, to mitigate these challenges, allowing space for icebreakers and 'get to know you' sessions were helpful in building rapport. On the plus side, working on-line did mean that the people seeking sanctuary could attend without the need for childcare or having to travel anywhere giving greater access. The group facilitators also could join the session from anywhere too. People seeking sanctuary have varying levels of English, therefore the application of the theory

into practise was worth considering as some of the words might not have been well understood. Even though the peer leader's standard of English was very good, checking back with them to make sure the concepts have been understood is key.

The project worked with a large partner organisation, REACH+, who had access to people seeking sanctuary learning English, making recruitment easier. The Mental Health Foundation (MHF) recruited skilled group facilitators who ran the MTA with the peer leaders.

2.6 Assumptions

In order for the MTA to work, it was assumed that the Perthyn project could recruit group facilitators who already had the skills to run groups and peer

leaders who were willing to be trained. It was assumed that the peer leaders were willing to give their time (there was no payment for them) to lead a group online.

Another assumption was that the peer leaders would be able to recruit people seeking sanctuary peer groups online. This was a challenge as during the first aforementioned Perthyn pilot project, the women recruited through meeting other women in the playground, in the park, church groups or college classes. The peer leaders this time had to recruit digitally which assumed they knew people to invite.

It also assumed that the success for the first face-to-face Perthyn pilot project could be scaled-up and repeated online for this project.

Photo by Florence Ayisi Perthyn | Belonging

3. Methods

The methods for this process evaluation were qualitative and as follows:

1. **Discussion and informal questions with all project staff and members following initial training** (n=27 project staff and members)

2. **In-depth, self-report questionnaire from group facilitators** (n=6 questionnaires)

3. **Evaluator observations of the group facilitators training the peer leaders (before the peer groups are formed)** (n=18 sessions observed)

4. **Evaluator observations of the peer leaders starting to lead their own groups** (n=10 sessions observed)

5. **Group interview with peer leaders** (n=3)

In addition, regular discussions were held with the project manager, project staff and partners to examine maintenance of the skills learned by the peer leaders and the feasibility of the groups to continue.

Once the qualitative data had been gathered, the data was analysed using thematic analysis which looked for patterns within the information and then named these patterns to tell a 'story' of the process emerging (Patton, 2015).

Consent to share anonymised quotes was gained through email or verbal confirmation for the group facilitators and peer leaders. All names were replaced with pseudonyms and data was stored securely.

Photo by Dickhan Ho Perthyn | Belonging

4. Mechanisms of impact (results)

4.1 Results of discussion and informal questions with all project staff and members following initial training

(n=27 project staff and members)

Following each initial training session, the evaluator held a discussion with those present to find out more about whether the 'hope' theory (from now on referred to as 'the theory') fit within the project and/or the MTA.

The data gathered from the discussion following the initial training sessions were analysed with main themes being:

- **The theory frames a whole journey.**
- **The theory categories reflect experiences.**
- **The theory validates lived experience.**
- **The theory only works in interactions with others.**
- **The theory can support peer leadership training.**

The following describes the above themes in more detail.

The theory frames a whole journey

One group facilitator said that the theory sets the scene for this type of peer work:

"It helps to frame the way you may approach things ..." Group facilitator

It is as if the group facilitator was saying that the training and work falls better into place with the 'frame' of the theory around it. Framing also suggests a boundary that the activity stays within which may allow a freedom to go up to the edges as opposed to no boundary where the activity doesn't know where to start and stop. A project staff member felt that the theory summarised what the aim was along with how the last slide (see Diag. 2) was a "light bulb", suggesting it made sense when the theory process was seen altogether.

"It is (great) to have the summary. The final slide is a light bulb ... the refugees ARE uniquely qualified AND they recognise it." Project staff

A peer leader agreed that the theory made sense and there was a process.

"(The theory) 100% makes sense and is good idea ... (we) go through a process. It is not easy. It is very, very hard." Peer leader

One group facilitator said that seeing the whole journey is helpful as it allows the theme of 'hope' to shine through. The fact that someone from the other end of the tunnel can 'shout' back and say to someone at the start of the tunnel, "you can come through this"; communicates hope.

"when someone is going through something it is not a straight line ... there are highs and lows in people's process that they are going through ... being able to understand the whole of the journey can be really helpful." Group facilitator

She went on to say about her own experiences:

"my own experience ... being a single parent and being able to say to younger single parents I am looking at this down the other end of a very long tunnel and it will get better and things do get better and you do succeed, and you can come through this and so on – the hope part." Group facilitator

Another group facilitator also commented on her own experience and discussed motivation and reward being a part of this journey in the work that she does:

"I was just thinking about the motivation part of the process and I was relating it to myself a little bit ... feeling like a reward ... the work that I do, gave me that insight just to know that I had made a difference ... because of my own experience ... having a difficult childhood or whatever ... really motivated me in

my work ... how that comes full circle, in that you have made a difference to somebody." Group facilitator

This group facilitator described how she had come 'full circle', back working with those who had had similar experiences to herself and was able to give them hope. This suggests that she is giving and making the kind difference she would have liked to have received when she was going through her difficult childhood. A staff member seeking sanctuary agreed with this coming full circle:

"I am going to go back to my early age ... my family were ... displaced ... we had to flee our home ... (We were) dependent on the outside organisations ... what it proved is that early as a child, you remember who gave you that toy ... the ones giving you food ... I still remember their faces ... it is a very sharp memory even after so many years ... what I got from that was an urgency to help others so even after years now, I always had this tendency to help ... later I volunteered with refugees in my country, teaching them how to write, read and help them with their education so ... you have the possibility of help others." Staff member seeking sanctuary

Perhaps this is very validating for their own story, perhaps soothing some of the pain she had endured? The same staff member who was seeking sanctuary, concluded that,

"you want to give that hand because you were looking for that hand and perhaps there was only one hand being offered to you." Staff member seeking sanctuary

The theory categories reflect experiences

Commenting on the category 'empathy', one peer leader said that his experience of being an asylum seeker and the process of becoming a refugee plus getting his family to join him in his new country had motivated him to help others because he knew the challenges first-hand.

"I have been through the (system) and I can now help others. I see how difficult it is. I know what it feels like. It is exactly as you said." Peer leader

Another peer leader recalled being a child when her family were forced to move countries. She said that she knew then that one day she would like to help other people seeking sanctuary because of the experiences she had gone through.

"when you have 'walked in their shoes', you can help others easily. You can find the words because you have had the same experience." Staff member seeking sanctuary

Another peer leader agreed by saying:

'I have walked in their shoes. I know how difficult it is, but it makes you who you are." Peer leader

On the category of 'motivation' another peer leader said:

"(The) more important thing for me was to have experience with people who really need(ed) the same kind of support I asked for when I come to this country." Peer leader

On the category of 'reward', one peer leader who was a qualified medical doctor in his own country and was trying to retrain in this country. It was almost as if he could see the altruistic and egoistical reward of giving help to someone else – it benefited him, but the metaphor of 'medication' suggests that through helping someone else, he too was being 'healed' and helped. He said that:

"when you help someone else, you feel like it is medication for yourself." Peer leader

Further comments about reward showed altruism and egoistical rewards coming through,

"when you help others, you help yourself ... it is a beautiful thing to be able to give to others ... I want to share my experiences to help others ... As much as I give, I receive." Peer leader

The theory validates lived experience

A group facilitator said that by naming 'lived experience' and listening to people's story gives a real validation. This does not mean that personal stories are necessarily shared out loud, rather it is the sense of being alongside another who has been through something similar gives that sense of comfort and validation.

"I think that it highlights that it begins with a story and how important it is to listen to people ... So, it is important at the beginning to put value in the story and the lived experience ... as we start with these people it probably is the first thing that needs to happen to just listen and to validate their experiences and their stories." Group facilitator

A staff member seeking sanctuary shared her thoughts on how lived experience is often not considered as something that has worth or weight, perhaps even worth a qualification in its own right.

"These people, especially refugees ... you go through the system of claiming asylum, living as an asylum seeker and then depending on the help that you can get ... and starting your life from scratch again. I think it is almost like a degree or a PhD in their heads ... they really struggle especially when they write their CVs for example ... there is a big gap for example (between) the last job ... and they think 'I don't know how to record this'. If you could briefly explain what you had been doing and facing the challenges and trying to bring your family here ... In my experience, I believe there is a value with it (lived experience) definitely." Project staff member seeking sanctuary

She goes onto say,

"... experience is really, really valid and it has been difficult – it still is – sometimes they still struggle to move on but living something like that ... as a refugee ... it is almost like finishing a degree and then you get residency card, and it is like 'here is my diploma!." Project staff member seeking sanctuary

Another project staff member stated that the experience counts more than a textbook.

"Before, there was a textbook (and) this can only take you so far, but unless you have experience ... you need experience." Project staff

One group facilitator wondered what happens to stories if they are not valued and if they do not get to a place of hope. Does this mean that they can't help others? Perhaps this suggests that the theory could help people seeking sanctuary to see how their lived experience or story can be a part of a complete process resulting in helping others.

"I was pondering what happens if they don't think there is value in their story and what happens to the rest of the process if they don't get to the place of hope?" Group facilitator

The theory only works in interactions with others

The process of the theory needed to be in interaction with others. The story does not change whether alone or with someone, but the interface with others, allows a strength to be built, an assimilation of these stories. A validation. Hope.

"For me it is the fact that they have someone to share it with. I think that is really important as well. Yes, they have a story, but there is someone with a listening ear who would come along, be interested and care." Group facilitator

The need for a social interface to be or share was mentioned by another group facilitator who likened the 'story' of lived experience being carried around and needing a place to be told,

"Like they are carrying around their story with them ... and it is giving them a space for that story to come out ... that person may share their story which then initiates everyone else ... stories (are put) into the space rather than it all being kind of carried around." Group facilitator

Theory can support peer leadership

Creating a unique space for stories can be rewarding for the peer leader but also give value to the stories of the peers themselves. This group facilitator said,

"(there is a) power of peer leadership ... and how it starts with sharing a story, but by doing that there is

something about the invitation for other people who are joining the group ... it sort of gives permission ... to tell their story." Group facilitator

Another group facilitator and a staff member seeking sanctuary felt that the theory could be used in different settings other than just with people seeking sanctuary and gave two examples of where it could work:

"it translates really well into all sorts of work with different groups and different communities, I think ... I can relate to that in the work I have done with single parents – the peer support work, but also with prisoners." Group facilitator

"(It could relate) to anything. We are talking about refugees. It could be (becoming) a new mother. It is the same." Staff member seeking sanctuary

Photo by Dickhan Ho Perthyn | Belonging

4.2 Results of in-depth self-report questionnaire from group facilitators

(n=4 questionnaires returned)

Six questionnaires were handed out and four returned. The questionnaires were anonymised to help the group facilitators be free to answer as truthfully as possible. There were six questions asked and the answers gathered were themed:

1. 'What stood out for you about this theory?'

2. 'Do you feel this theory helps/ hinders the understanding of this project?'

3. 'Do you feel you used the theory (or not) in your facilitator role. If yes, why? If no, why?'

4. 'What aspects of the theory did you find helpful (lived experience, empathy etc)? Why?'

5. 'Does the paint by numbers metaphor work for you and if so why or why not? Would you suggest another metaphor?'

6. 'Any further thoughts?'

Four themes emerged:

1. **A simple map**

2. **Validation of story**

3. **Equity in the group**

4. **Rewarding**

A simple map

The group facilitators stated that there was a 'simplicity' about the theory that was:

"profound in mapping experiences." Group facilitator

"It underpins what the project is about and frames it in a really simple and yet deep way." Group facilitator

The word 'simplicity' does not infer 'simple' rather it suggests it is uncomplicated and straightforward. A map suggests a route or guide or outline or picture of where someone has been and where someone might go.

Validation of story

There was a sense that the theory, by starting with the words 'lived experience', gave a validation, a worth, an affirmation and endorsement to the journey people seeking sanctuary had taken and were taking. The group facilitators stated that the theory was: 'profound in being able to value each individual' (group facilitator). One group facilitator who reflected personally said:

"(in my life) I have always felt my story was inadequate (and I have) compared myself with others (dramatic stories). The theory has reminded me that my story is unique to me and this helps me empathise. Believing your story matters, is essential." Group facilitator

By hearing these stories, this group facilitator was able to validate her own story which in turn gave her empathy. The phrase "believing your story matters, is essential" suggests that the individual

journey taken, particularly the difficult parts, is now useful and the struggle and challenges were not in vain. By affirming someone's story there is an automatic validation for the person themselves too. They feel believed and heard. This falls in line with one of Carl Rogers 'facilitating conditions' which is unconditional positive regard where each client is regarded as a person of worth and value and this includes the story they might be telling (Rogers, 1961).

Equality in the group

One group facilitator suggested that the groups, which consisted of the group facilitators, partner project staff, peer leaders and the people seeking sanctuary peers themselves, came with a

"level playing field … I wish life had more opportunities to level the playing field and welcome all stories as a valuable part of the whole picture." Group facilitator

The story/lived experience that the group members brought with them not only could be shared but it created a space for equality. Not everyone shared their full life stories of coming to the UK, but the various life experiences that were shared around the wellbeing intervention English word explored in each session, allowed each person present to be represented in some way. No story is better than anyone else's – it is just their story. During the training with the group facilitators and peer leaders, equality was not expressly discussed, however, respecting individual life experiences was. Also, discussed was the importance of demonstrating empathy. Perhaps the respect and

empathy demonstrated, created a sense of equality? At times, one group could have up to ten different nationalities represented. One of the group facilitators quoted the poet and artist Morgan Harper Nichols (2021) who uses the metaphor of cooking when poetically representing a group experience of people from different nationalities. She says:

"… in the kitchen.
There is a table.
There are chairs.
There are human beings bound together
by a need for nourishment,
and in order for that to happen,
we have to bring our ingredients together
and work to create a feast
so that everyone
can be fed. "
Harper-Nichols, 2021

Rewarding

The group facilitators commented that they themselves felt 'grateful' to be involved in the project. One group facilitator said:

"I felt motivated to give hope and I have felt rewarded." Group facilitator

Other words to describe how they felt included, 'humbled' and 'privileged' and 'honoured'.

"I am honoured to have been a part of this (project)."

Feeling rewarded of course is one of the categories of the theory which shows that this can transcend across all project participants, not just the peers or peer leaders.

Photo by Charles Donnelly Perthyn | Belonging

4.3 Results of observations of the group facilitators training the peer leaders (before the peer groups were formed)

(n=24 sessions observed)

Six MTA sessions were led weekly for each of the four online groups. Each session was led by two group facilitators. The sessions included a maximum of seven peer leaders and a minimum of two.

There were always other project staff present too. The evaluator attended online to observe and kept a journal. The group facilitators explained the theory before each session.

At the early stages, the peer leaders were experiencing a little of what it would be like to be a 'peer' in a group because the group facilitators were leading the sessions. Gradually, as they grew in confidence, they handed over more and more to the peer leaders.

During these sessions, the evaluator looked specifically for:

1. the group facilitator including/using the theory in the session and how this was presented

2. the group facilitator and/or peer leader demonstrating rapport building and empathy and what evidence was there of this

3. any other group processes

Following the observations, reading of the notes taken and in discussion with the project staff, four themes emerged:

- **Demonstrating empathy.**
- **Transferring ownership of the group.**
- **Time together allowed deeper connection to grow.**
- **Challenges.**

Demonstrating empathy

At the time of writing, another wave of Covid-19 was in full force and all the peer leaders had shared how they were feeling either 'frustrated' or 'disconnected' from one another, so one group facilitator preceded the theory explanation with the phrase,

> *"… we are not all in the same board, but we are all in the same storm."*
> Group facilitator

This helped acknowledge the difficult time everyone was having and allowed the theory explanation to be received better. This demonstrates the attunement the group facilitator had with their group, that they were able to adapt the session accordingly.

As this was an MTA, it was important that the group facilitators were modelling empathy and rapport for the peer leaders to observe. This was evident in that they asked the peer leaders simple questions, allowing them to speak, validating their answers, thanking them for saying something and praising them for their contributions like, "that was a good answer" and "thank you for your contribution".

Following the presentation of the theory, the group facilitators often started the session with an 'ice breaker'. One example was, "if you have/had a super-power, what would it be?" The peer leaders answers included:

> *"(I have a super-power) of being able to start again."*

> *"(I have a super-power) of being positive when everything is against me."*

> *"(I have a super-power) of being strong and not giving up."*

These answers suggest that the group facilitators were creating a safe space for the peer leaders to praise themselves and share something vulnerable without the fear of being laughed at or criticised.

It also shows that the peer leaders were demonstrating the ability to speak and summarise in English more 'heart-level' emotions and phrases as opposed to functional English learning and discussions like in the ESOL classes. This was evident in a recent report published by the Mental Health Foundation (2021) where one person seeking sanctuary said,

> *"Because if I go in the ESOL class I cannot start talking about anything … [this] bothers me."* Participant seeking sanctuary in Mental Health Foundation report, 2021

The group facilitators were also able to be empathic in presenting the theory at the start of each session. They used a visual power-point and adapted it into simpler language. Here is an example of how one group facilitator re-framed the theory in one session:

"Your story allows you to feel empathy. That empathy helps you to build a rapport and relationship with your friends. The really important part (of this) is that you bring hope to the group. As a result, you feel rewarded because you are helping someone else." Group facilitator

There were also some new insights into the word empathy. One peer leader explained that she had been a part of another peer group where she did not feel heard or listened to. She felt hurt and left the group. She said the following,

"I want someone to 'feel' me, and they didn't." Peer leader

By this, she was expressing her desire for someone to have acknowledged her story she was sharing, validate and 'feel' with her the feelings she was experiencing. She felt confident to be able to share this in the group.

Another peer leader said that the group needs to be,

"… a place allowing your roots to grow in one place again. Our roots have been damaged (we need) time to heal – start again. It is a process and life experience … a (more than a) state of mind … (it is a) physical thing too." Peer leader

The imagery from this peer leader showed the need to empathise with each other, to 'heal the roots' and put down new ones, emotionally and physically.

Transferring ownership of the group

The rapport building was strong enough to gradually allow the ownership of the group to shift from group facilitators to the peer leaders. As the evaluator watched the group facilitators and peer leaders every week online the relationship between the two grew. Trust was built.

Over the course of a few weeks, there was a shift of 'ownership' or 'control' **from** the group facilitators **to** the peer leaders. The peer leaders started to be bolder and more confident in their approach. This was evidenced in the questions, comments and opinions from the peer leaders that emerged in the 5th and 6th week.

"we need to put together an invite to send to our friends. We don't have that yet, so it is difficult to invite (people)." Peer leader

"… could be for another start sessions I would introduce more games, more dynamics, playful things so that people really get into what it is about. Later on, we can do the topics and go deep about the meanings of the words." Peer leader

When discussing what words to use in the invite, the phrase used was "Come and meet other refugees and share stories and help each other". One peer leader said,

"... but I may not feel like sharing stories so I do not think this should not be in the flyer. Can we say instead 'come and connect with others to help each other'? Sometimes my mood does not let me share a story ... when I have been depressed, I just want someone to be with me, but I can't talk. I don't want to ask me any questions or anything ... (sometimes) it is very hard." Peer leader

Another commented on recognising cultural differences,

:... different cultures have different approaches. Please tell me if I am being rude or blunt." Peer leader

These quotes evidence how the group facilitators had created a group dynamic that was allowing a shift in 'control' from the group facilitators to the peer leaders as they shaped how they wanted to lead their future group. One group facilitator ended a session by saying:

"thank you for the privilege of working with you today." Group facilitator

Time together allowed deeper connection to grow

The MTA takes time, but one of the benefits is the connections that can be built. Despite being online and the lack of face-to-face physical contact, the connection within the group moved to a deeper level.

This was evident in the honest conversations, transparency of stories, support for each other and correction

when something needed to change. For example, one group facilitator found she could interrupt and correct one of the peer leaders when they had forgotten to include the others,

"... remember, when we are putting group rules together, everyone needs to be included." Group facilitator

When a peer leader was struggling to find the English word for something, the other peer leaders supported him to find the correct word. This was also demonstrated through compliments given to each other on what had been said or thanking another for their contribution. This was especially evident when the peer leaders were practicing leading a session.

One peer leader described the experience as:

"I can feel myself change because I feel more good than before ... (I have) changed myself more. I now have self-confidence." Peer leader

This suggests something was happening to her over time as she attended the group week after week. She went on to say:

"this group – they are now my friends." Peer leader

friends

Challenges

There were some challenges to running the groups online. Having small children in the background, internet issues and seeing each other in small squares on a screen meant building connections was more difficult. Reading body language, having 'small talk' over a coffee or talking in pairs, is just not possible online so rapport building took longer. Also, communicating through a second language means that nuances of speech are lost.

For example, telling a joke or making light of something that happened, might not be understood through the medium of another language. Again, this meant making connections was more of a challenge. Some lacked access to digital equipment or Wi-Fi and even though the project was funded to purchase new equipment, this took time to acquire due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Photo by Charles Donnelly Perthyn | Belonging

4.4 Results of observations of the peer leaders starting to lead their own groups

(n=10 sessions observed)

The peer leaders led one or two 'mock' sessions first without any of their peers present. The group facilitators had helped them plan the sessions they were going to lead. They introduced the sessions, led an 'ice-breaker' and then chose a word together. The evaluator observed these.

The three themes that emerged from this stage of the group process were:

1. **good rapport means there is trust present**

2. **hope keeps on giving**

3. **empathy and rapport demonstrated**

Good rapport means there is trust present

By week six when the peer leaders were beginning to invite their peers, the level of sharing with the peer leaders was now at a much deeper and trusting level. This peer leader described the group as now being able to 'hold' each other so that they can move forward,

"This group is like my family now … we are touching each other and holding each other so we can move forward." Peer leader

Trust wasn't one of the subcategories of rapport within the theory, but it seems that this is an appropriate word to use as was evident in the deeper level of sharing the peer leaders felt comfortable with:

"When I came here (to this country), I didn't want to stay. I was walking at night alone. I was pregnant with my baby." Peer leader

It took six weeks of meeting together to establish this level of trust to be able to share these deeper more vulnerable experiences. It also showed the developing ability to be able to reflect and share through a second language. Having the confidence to speak in a second language without the fear of humiliation, also shows trust in the group. Again, as mentioned in 4.1, rapport only works in interactions with others as these peer leaders are reflecting and sharing with others, how others have helped them.

Hope keeps on giving

Hope is one of the theory categories and throughout the Perthyn experience, there was evidence of hope being received, held onto, and passed on. This peer leader demonstrates how 'hope' can be given within the trusted group:

"I wanted to kill myself when my asylum seeker (application) was rejected. My friend (at the hostel) said, 'Look at me. I have been in this house for 5 years. I still fight for my case. It is just 6 months since you came from your country … just after 6 months you want to kill yourself? You have to have hope to fight the Home

Office. If you don't have hope ... for 5 years I just live with hope. If you have no hope you can't fight.' I put hope in my mind ... I still have hope that my life will change. I always hope the best for my life. That advice the lady said. I hold onto hope." Peer leader

Hope is clearly given here from her friend, but by passing on the story, this peer leader is giving hope again. Hope is like a gift that keeps on giving and 'hangs onto' the story which is being told dropping into other's lives as they listen. The person who gave this peer leader hope did not diminish her own hope. The peer leader who received this hope did not diminish her own hope by

sharing this story and perhaps by sharing this story, her hope even grew. Those listening to this story gained hope for themselves to hold onto. It was like a gift that kept on giving.

Empathy and rapport demonstrated

During the fifth and sixth week of the group, the peer leaders were starting to invite their friends and peers to join the group. Each group designed a flyer (examples below with contact details removed)

This flyer reflected the peer leader's motivation and desire to be empathic and inclusive in their recruitment.

Fig 5: Example of flyer to recruit peers seeking sanctuary to a group.
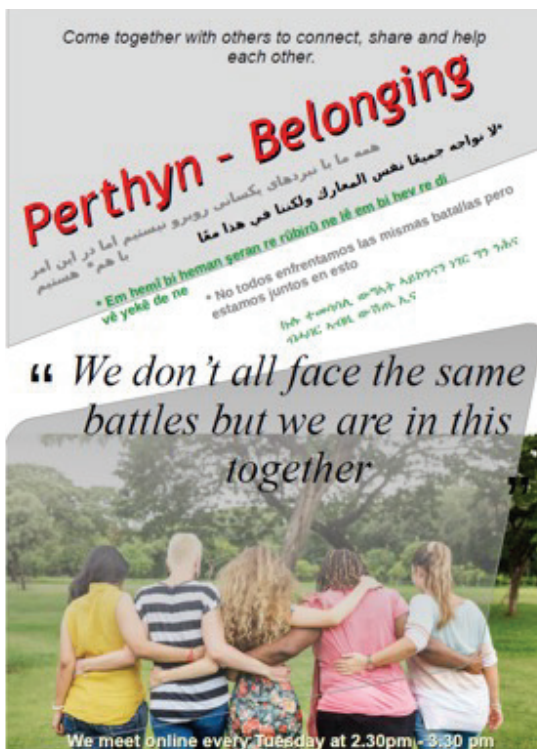
Clearly the peer leaders were motivated to create the flyer but also their sensitivity was represented by the different languages and the picture of people walking together with different heritages. There was a sense of a shared story and camaraderie depicted in "we don't all face the same battles, but we are all in this together".

This is also represented in the picture of people walking side by side. It is interesting that the group in this case, picked all women in the picture even though two of the peer leaders were men. Perhaps the need for the arm in arm picture with different heritage people was more important than gender to them.

In addition, the peer leaders were starting to lead the sessions online being vulnerable and sharing deeply to build rapport. They gave time and space for any peers present to say something. If the peers were not saying anything, they might gently ask or prompt them:

> *'... what do you think? Have you got any thoughts on this word?' (peer leader)*

One session, the word that was chosen by the peer leaders was 'solidarity'. A peer leader opened the session with:

> *'solidarity is like a string or chain that holds us together through our lived experiences. In Africa this is very important. Our culture is built on solidarity. Everybody stands up for one another.' (peer leader)*

A discussion continued about this word and then a refugee peer leader said:

> *'When there is something for one person it can be for everyone, for example, when I have one bread, I can share that bread. I can be happy when I share. All based on solidarity. In Cardiff, everyone has their own problems, but in Africa you can't leave your house without checking on your neighbours ... in this country you could stay indoors for 2 years and no-one would know.' (peer leader)*

A peer group member disagreed by saying:

> *'In (my country) I was an activist because of the communist regime and poverty ... I have seen (the same solidarity values) in Welsh people. They have really stood by me. Anything I need, they have helped me.' (peer leader)*

This kind of discussion showed how the strength of rapport was building in order to have different opinions and the confidence to verbalise these.

4.5 Group interview with three peer leaders

A group interview was held on-line and focused less on the 'process', rather on the 'experience' of being a peer leader.

Four themes were deduced:

1 A closed life, reopened (the impact of the pandemic)

2 Liberation from language (the position of the English language)

3 Values that facilitate connection and a sense of belonging (the values held by Perthyn members)

4 A hope shared is a hope enhanced (recognising the impact and reach of hope)

These themes will now be described:

1. A closed life, reopened

The impact of Covid-19 was keenly felt by those seeking sanctuary due to the societal inequalities this group experiences. The usual places for connection and learning were closed and there was a sense of being isolated and alone.

"... but when lockdown start[ed] I thought, "oh my god, I can't do anything" because I was at home and no activity, no work, everywhere was closed and just online and I had problem with speaking [English] (laugh)." Yanina

On-line platforms became the new way of communicating overnight and this meant an immediate barrier.

"... I can't speak English, I can't contact good with people, um, especially this time, corona time, I uh, I, feeling um, scared about, uh, online contact." Aisha

However, Perthyn did provide a chance for people to connect in a safe way during the pandemic.

"Sometimes you have the same kinda issue, you have the mental health that can be similar, er, situation, or something that you are needing support, you are needing someone to talk to, you are needing sometimes only to see through even the screen to see someone, that someone is there with you." Kayla

The peer leaders recognised that Perthyn was more than just an ordinary group and this is explored in the following remaining themes:

2. Liberation from language

Language is an enabler; it is the foundation of how we interact and progress in the world. Language is often given huge importance as necessary skill in connecting and integrating into communities. However, when it is not known, such as by those seeking sanctuary in a new country, it can be an almost overwhelming barrier.

"... I felt 'oh my gosh, everything is just speaking.' Because when you can't explain ... you can't do anything ... [employer] please give me a chance to show my activity not just my speaking." Yanina

The theme of liberation from the difficulties and not knowing a language was noted by the peer leaders as the one thing that made Perthyn stand out – that being proficient in English was not a pre-requisite to joining.

"... if you can't speak, you can't do anything. But in this group ... this experience completely changed my mind, no, you can join a group, you can ... have a teamwork ... even you can't speak very well." Yanina

"[Perthyn] is very helpful, even if you can't speak English ... you can keep going there and you can try to feel like, like you are not alone, so that is good, good, good." Kayla

This begins to break a vicious cycle of feeling nervous about joining a group because of not being able to communicate, but within Perthyn, the group members felt worth and could contribute. They were able to share and of course, their language improved as a result.

'Somebody understands, somebody feel, but somebody else no, I can talk about my experience. Some organisation can't understand me, but in this group here understand me. I have lots of ability but ... my talking just my English is not, big challenge ... the language is not very important [in Perthyn]' (Yanina)

"I have more benefit now with our group really ... I have class in this time, I chose this group work, I have benefit more in group than class ... this group ... understand me very well (laugh) and it was ... like a gift for me ... I really, really ... grow up a bit this

team because I learn a lot better with this team." Aisha

3. Values that facilitate connection and a sense of belonging

The peer leaders felt they could bring their 'true selves' to the group despite the English language barriers. This was in part due to the seeking sanctuary shared experiences of the members.

"... I have ... some ideas for refugees because I feeling about these people ... because ... no-one feel about refugees like me and (Yanina) because we have details [of being an asylum seeker] before we have our [refugee] papers." Aisha

"I can understand another refugee or asylum seeker because I ... was asylum seeker and ... I am a refugee ... I can understand I think very good." Yanina

There was no judgement on English language ability and each person was treated with respect. This gave a sense of safety for the group members.

"I think it make a lot of difference because ... sometimes we can be sad story, it can be kinda traumatic story, but ... anyway, sometimes when we share it, with another people, you feel kind of, much more in peace." Kayla

The need to feel valued and contributing to society is often lacking with those seeking sanctuary. Perthyn recognised this so confidence was built and developed their leadership skills.

"... because before, before, I felt I'm not ready to be a leader. I think that.

But (names in group) wished me '(name) you can do it, you can do it' ... after many weeks ago, I feeling I can do it and asked them, 'ok give me a chance' (laugh)." Aisha

"... yeh, it's different, very different to my country. I was a leader in my country but ... UK is really different. But in this programme ... I realised I panned out ... I can, I can manage the programme [be a peer leader], I can talk, I can ... really be comfortable with ... anybody else, with a group." Yanina

Being valued also led onto another beneficial impact and that was feeling a part of the wider community beyond those seeking sanctuary.

"I didn't feel belonging in (country of origin), over thirty years, thirty years. I feel belonging here ... I feel belonging here in Cardiff because I, I love to live in Cardiff ... I feel Cardiff like my home ... when I go outside, I feeling very better and may, I think that our group give me this more feeling about Cardiff, our Perthyn group, give me this feeling." Aisha

'For me ... I think in this group ... I don't find ... no difference between me and the British, the people [the staff facilitators] in this group." Yanina

4. A hope shared is a hope enhanced

Hope was seen as central to building resilience and overcoming adversity. Each of the peer leaders shared a challenging story. Although these were tough experiences, it was hope that helped through these difficult times.

'I think without hope, without hope we can't continue, we can't see the future. Hope is ... like a sun in our life. If we don't have hope, we don't have nothing (laugh) ... still we have hope and we have a ... bright future, we can make it, we make friends, we can talk about ... our problems, we can ask ... without hope I think everything else impossible." Yanina

"Actually, for me hope is everything in the life ... hope is part of our lives. We need to have hope that we can keep going, to do everything, it's in my case, like I say before, I love to be one day a nurse, to work in NHS ... I will keep going, I will fight for it because it's something that I love so, let's go again. That is hope." Kayla

As their confidence grew and as they gained more control over their lives, the peer leaders allowed them to share their lived experience to help others share in their hope for a more positive future.

"Before my [refugee] status I feeling ... different ... now I am strong mind ... I feel comfortable, I feel have a more positive idea [how] to give it to people like me before, every people need it to help ... I hope I give back UK something, because ... they [the UK granting refugee status] are saving my life." Aisha

Each of the peer leaders who attended the group interview felt they had benefited from being a peer leader. It has enabled them to recognise their worth and equality with others, give and receive hope through their lived experiences which in themselves had value (see appendix for a fuller discussion on this group interview).

5. Synthesis of themes

The analysis of the aforementioned themes were drawn together into four overarching themes that best describe the process of this project and therefore what learning can be drawn of including the 'hope' theory within the MTA.

5.1. The 'hope' theory described the process of the peer leaders

The words, 'lived experience', 'motivation', 'rapport', 'hope', and 'reward' were experienced and were good descriptors of the experiences observed during the process. They were either demonstrated by the group facilitators and peer leaders or they were observed in action or felt by those attending the group. 'Lived experience', 'rapport' and 'hope' particularly stood out as important experiences within the process: 'lived experience' for the recognition and validation of 'story' (see theme 3 below), 'rapport' because of the emphasis on the need for 'trust' and how the project participants identified this as an important part of being able to move forward in the group process.

Also, the need for 'time' was identified to grow rapport and to deepen connections so that sharing could take place. Finally, 'hope' was an experience of a gift that kept on giving and 'hangs onto' stories

Photo by Florence Ayisi Perthyn | Belonging

told. 'Hope' was not diminished when shared, on the contrary, the more it was passed on, the more it grew. A hope shared was a hope enhanced.

It is worth noting here, that there was no evidence of vicarious trauma from sharing or hearing stories and the peer leaders and peers only shared what they felt comfortable with. Some shared their entire story of coming to the UK. Others shared aspects of it, some shared none of it. In addition, these groups were not focused on helping those with existing mental health problems, rather to build 'peer-ness' for on-going support.

5.2. The framing of a whole journey

Using the theory allowed the project participants to view the start and end of how their lived experience was going to be used. Perhaps this gave the peer leaders a different perspective on their journeys? The 'hope' theory was referred to as a '*framework*', a '*map*' and a '*journey*'. This seemed to encourage a better understanding of where the MTA and project was *going*.

It also produced a sense of purpose and hope for the peer leaders as they could see how their stories could be used to give others hope. By putting a 'frame' around the project, it allowed the project participants to explore all experiences freely within these boundaries.

5.3. Validation of lived experience and stories

By naming 'lived experience' as the first part of the training, much validation was experienced by those seeking sanctuary and indeed the group facilitators. Some people seeking sanctuary struggle to get work, qualifications, or other forms of occupational satisfaction in their new countries and yet, in this project, their story really counted.

Some felt that their lived experience could be the equivalent to receiving a diploma. To respect and listen to someone's story gives them worth and value. They feel believed, heard, and cared for. In the context of 'peer-ness' and trust (which is built over time), listening to another's story in a safe space where there is no-judgement, 'invites' others to share their story too.

Through this, camaraderie can be built. A further important principle here was the mention of 'equity' and how the group felt a sense of fairness and justice of no-one being the underdog. Again, this is an ongoing process of making sure the 'powerful', as in those who were fluent in English (because it was their first language) were not taking advantage of, looking down on, dismissing or manipulating the peer leaders or peers whose first language was not English. As mentioned, at any one time, there were up to ten different nationalities present in one of the groups and each member was respectfully held as equal. Interestingly, even though language can be seen as a barrier, because there was no pre-requisite to joining the group with proficient English skills, the pressure was

off and therefore confidence was built. There was in fact a sense of 'liberation from language' as a barrier.

5.4. Transferring of group ownership and leadership

This theme was a gradual process observed and demonstrated throughout the MTA and groups. The use of the 'scaffolding' metaphor allowed the perceptive group facilitators to gradually remove the scaffolding of group ownership and leadership around the peer leaders as they grew in confidence.

There wasn't a list of competencies or a sense of one day the peer leaders couldn't lead and the next day they could, there was a subtle shift towards their ownership and leadership of the groups. The group facilitators watched carefully for comments, attendance, interactions, understanding, cameras on or off, questions, confidence in use of the English language (without fear of getting it wrong) and offering of suggestions. These were indicators of the growing confidence of the peer leaders over time. It was a dynamic and fluid process. Contextually, the peer leaders brought with them their previous skills and the ability to be reflective (or not).

The peer leaders also had to have good observational skills as they watched the group facilitators demonstrate good group leadership. Even though this was through a second language for the peer leaders, tone, facial expressions and other cues can all express a way of being within a group to build rapport that transcends language and culture.

Photo by Charles Donnelly Perthyn | Belonging

6. Conclusion

The evidence presented in this process evaluation has demonstrated the following key points:

Being empathic and **validating someone's story** or lived experience, helps the person feel like their life journey counts in some way, that there is a purpose in their experiences, their story is of worth – like having a 'diploma'; nothing is wasted. Helping them recount their story, use their story, have their story believed, share their story – seems to bring healing to themselves and to others and often made a challenging time of their lives make more sense. Their story is also what motivates them to want to help others too – to make their peer's lives better in some way.

This theory seems to show that **the dance of rapport, relationship and connection is a vital ingredient in making this type of group work**. The back and forth, 'serve and return' conversations, gestures, body language (even online) help connect individuals through their shared stories. This is not something that is easily captured or taught. Some seem to have the ability to do this more naturally than others, but it is firmly based on an empathic approach introduced by Carl Rogers (1961) in his approach and in which Truax and Carkhuff (1967) have helpfully tried to explain further.

This theory seems to show that even though we cannot capture hope in a tangible way, box it up and give it to someone else as a Christmas present, hope – the feeling, the value, the aspiration – can change lives. **Hope can be gained, hope can be given and then given again and again. Hope is not diminished in the givers life when given.** Hope can be seen, not with a human eye, but in the tenor of how someone says something, or through a story that has a happy ending or in the tears of someone who has made it through a difficult time. As McGrath says,

> *"... while the scientific method is essential to our understanding of the natural world, it (is) incorrect to apply this to fundamental questions like value and meaning. Although these cannot be verified scientifically or logically, they are essential to human life and culture."* McGrath, 2020, p175

This suggests that peer groups need 'hope' woven throughout them, whatever the curriculum or intervention.
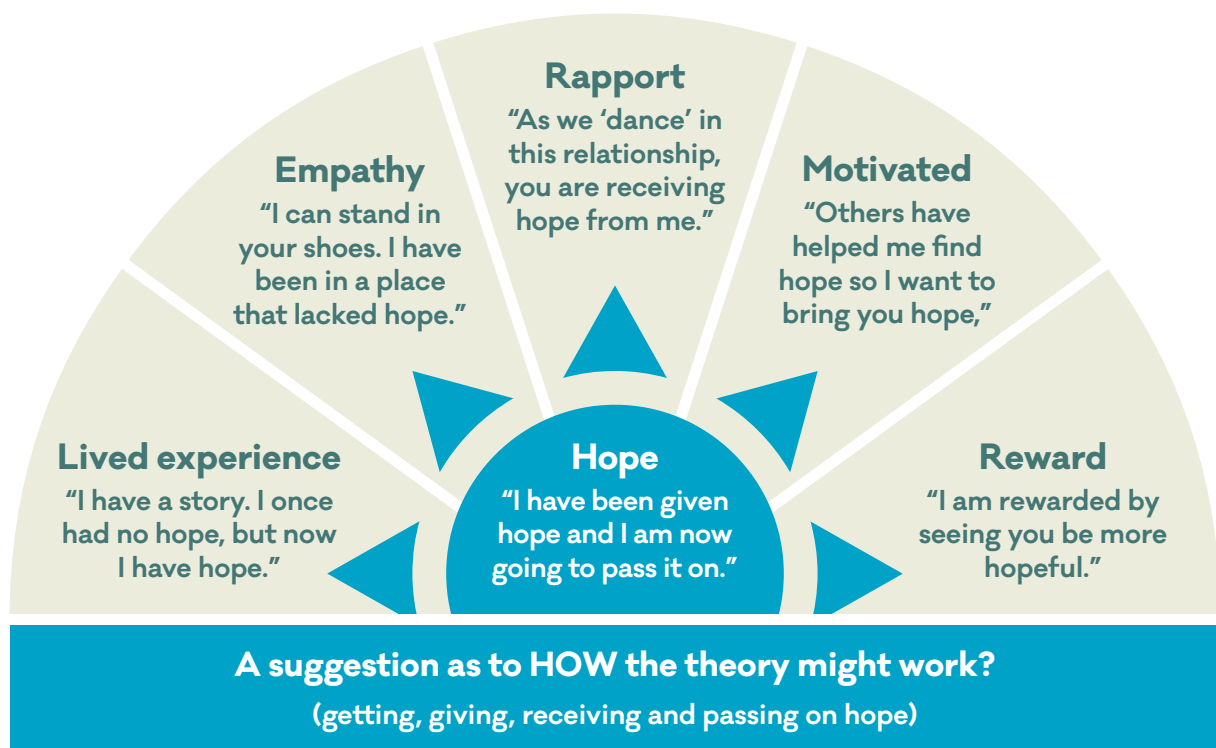
From the evidence in this evaluation, it seems as though **those involved in the process of sharing their story and giving hope are rewarded in some way**. Again, not of monetary value or qualification of some sort, but nevertheless, the process has given them something of value and worth. They feel rewarded for their actions, their sharing, their giving of hope. And all of this contributes at some point in the process, a transfer of ownership and leadership taking place from the group facilitators to the peer leaders. Like an invisible baton being passed over time.

The most important ingredient of this theory and process seems to be hope. Hope is tied to the story or lived experience. Hope is tied to the motivation of wanting to build a rapport with someone else. Hope is tied to the reward of having given this to someone else or themselves. If the theory was to be redrawn, it could be less linear (which describes the WHAT Fig 2.) and more of a HOW (see Fig 6.) – the active ingredient being hope. All the categories are important and do not always happen in a linear process, but without the getting, giving, receiving and passing on of hope, the suggestion is that this process wouldn't work to help others in quite the same way.

Fig. 6: Figure to show how 'hope' could be a central category for the process of empowering peer leaders.

Rapport
"As we 'dance' in this relationship, you are receiving hope from me."

Empathy
"I can stand in your shoes. I have been in a place that lacked hope."

Motivated
"Others have helped me find hope so I want to bring you hope,"

Lived experience
"I have a story. I once had no hope, but now I have hope."

Hope
"I have been given hope and I am now going to pass it on."

Reward
"I am rewarded by seeing you be more hopeful."

A suggestion as to HOW the theory might work?
(getting, giving, receiving and passing on hope)

7. Learning to take forward – the 'active ingredients' of this process

For those working with populations and their helpers that are in transition like people seeking sanctuary consider:

- Using an MTA, not a one-day training so that the pace of learning can be flexible, ongoing, reflective and respectful.

- Capturing spoken and unspoken examples of 'hope' wherever and whenever and share it.

- Placing more genuine value and a listening ear for people's stories and journeys.

- Using the 'hope' theory as a way of framing a peer project.

- Not seeing language as a barrier, instead to use it as a tool.

- Giving more time to projects that run groups, to enable genuine, equal and power balanced relationships to be built.

- The time that is needed to build engage and build the confidence of peer leaders in order to sustain groups beyond the life of a project.

- Changing the language use of 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker' to 'people seeking sanctuary', to give maximum value to the individuals.

"Actually, for me hope is everything in the life ... hope is part of our lives. We need to have hope that we can keep going, to do everything, it's in my case, like I say before, I love to be one day a nurse, to work in NHS ... I will keep going, I will fight for it because it's something that I love so, let's go again. That is hope." Kayla

hope

8. References

1. British Government (2020a) *How many people do we grant asylum or offer protection to?* Office of National Statistics, Home Office. Available at https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-december-2020/how-many-people-do-we-grant-asylum-or-protection-to Accessed 10.4.21

2. British Government (2020b) *Process Evaluation.* Available at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-in-health-and-well-being-overview/process-evaluation Accessed 14.10.20

3. Burns, J. (2020) *The experience of perinatal and refugee peer leaders delivering wellbeing interventions. PhD thesis.*

4. Medical Research Council (2015) *Process evaluation of complex interventions: Medical Research Council guidance.* Available at https://www.bmj.com/content/350/bmj.h1258. Accessed 13.4.21

5. Dickerson, F., Savage, C., Schweinfurth, L., Medoff, D., Goldberg, R., Bennett, M., Lucksted, A., Chinman, M., Dixon, L., Daumit, G. and DiClemente, C. (2015) *The use of peer mentors to enhance a smoking cessation intervention for persons with serious mental illnesses.* American Psychological Association.

6. General Medical Council (2018) *Evaluating Interventions.* Available at https://www.gmc-uk.org/education/standards-guidance-and-curricula/guidance/guide-to-evaluating-interventions/evaluating-interventions Accessed 30.10.20

7. Glasgow, R. Vogt, T. Boles, S. (1999) Evaluating the public health impact of health promotion interventions: the RE-AIM framework. *American Journal of Public Health.* September 89(9): 1322-7.

8. Harper-Nicholls, M. (2020) All Along You Were Blooming. Zondervan. USA.

9. Kolb, D. (1983) *Experiential Learning: Experience as the source of Learning and Development.* Prentice Hall. London.

10. Lahvis, G. (2017) Social Reward and Empathy as Proximal Contributions to Altruism: The Camaraderie Effect. *Current Top Behaviours in Neuroscience.* 30, pp. 127-157.

11. McGrath, A. (2020) *Through a Glass Darkly: Journeys through Science, Faith and Doubt.* Hodder and Stoughton. London.

12. Medical Research Council (2015) *Process Evaluation for Complex Interventions.* Available at https://mrc.ukri.org/documents/pdf/process-evaluation-of-complex-interventions/ Accessed 30.10.20

13. Mental Health Foundation (2020) *Perthyn.* Evaluation Report.

14. Mezirow, J. (1991) *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

15. Murta SG, Sanderson K, Oldenburg B. *Process evaluation in occupational stress management programs: a systematic review.* Am J Health Promot. 2007;13:248–254.

16. NICE guidelines (2020) *Community Engagement: improving health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities.* Available at https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng44/chapter/recommendations#peer-and-lay-roles Accessed 19.10.20

17. Patton, M (2015) *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods.* 4th Ed. Sage. London.

18. Rogers, C. (1961) *On Becoming a Person: A psychotherapists view of psychotherapy.* USA: Houghton Mifflin.

19. Steckler, A. and Linnan, L. (2002) *Process Evaluation for Public Health Interventions and Research: an overview.* In Process Evaluation: pages 1-23

20. Takaya, K. (2008) *Jerome's Bruner's Theory of Education: From Early Bruner to Later Bruner.* Available at file:///C:/Users/jburns/OneDrive%20-%20Mental%20Health%20Foundation/Desktop/PHD/Literature/Takaya%20-%20Bruners%20theory%20of%20education%202008.pdf Accessed 23.10.20

21. Truax, C. and Carkhuff, R. (1967) *Toward Effective Counselling and Psychotherapy: Training and Practise.* Chicago: Aldine.

22. UNICEF (2014) *Equity focused formative evaluation of UNICEF's Engagement in the Decentralisation Process of Indonesia.* Available at https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/files/Equity-focused_Formative_Evaluation_of_UNICEFs_Engagement_in_the_Decentralization_Process_in_Indonesia.pdf Accessed 30.10.20

23. Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

24. Wierenga, D. Engbers, L. Empelen, P. Duigits, S. Hildebrandt, V. Van Melchelen, W. (2013) What is actually measured in process evaluations for worksite health promotion programmes: a systematic review. *BMC Public Health.* Available at https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3890539/ Accessed 27.10.20

25. World Health Organisation (2013) *Evaluation Practise Handbook.* Available at https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/96311/9789241548687_eng.pdf;sequence=1 Accessed 30.10.20

Appendix

Group Interview, enhanced report: The impact of Perthyn: a sense of belonging (led by Dr Nicole Burchett)

The Perthyn project has been running in numerous iterations since January 2019. The, apparent, simplicity of the model is its strength, making it accessible, clear and powerful. This section of the report builds on the work of the Process Evaluation by providing the voice of the peer leaders involved. The previous section focused on an objective narrative that concerned the process of becoming peer leaders, this section will focus on the experience of being one.

Although a focus group was arranged to collect this data, due to the numbers attending, and the online medium that was used, it was more akin to a group interview. The questions that were asked were based on the key findings of the Process Evaluation with the aim of aligning with, and building on, the previous section. However, although there are some similarities with what preceded it, there are also differences driven by a different aim (that of capturing the subjective experience of being a peer leader, albeit in relation to the Process Evaluation findings).

From the group interview with three peer leaders, four themes were inducted. These were as follows; *a closed life, reopened* (the impact of the pandemic), *liberation from language* (the position of the English language); *values that facilitate connection and a sense of belonging* (the values held by the Perthyn members) *and a hope shared is a hope enhanced* (recognising the impact and reach of hope). Each of these themes will now be explored in turn, using peer leader quotes to support the narrative.

A closed life, reopened

The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020/2021 has had a huge impact on world. In the UK it has resulted in freedoms being constrained and lives becoming more restricted. This sense was keenly felt amongst those seeking sanctuary (refugees and asylum seekers) due to the societal inequalities that this group experience. This was also felt among the peer leaders of Perthyn.

> *"... lockdown was very bad time for everybody, and it was really tough time ... when we started this programme, um, er yeh, it was not easy."* P2

> *"... but when lockdown start I thought, "oh my god, I can't do anything" because I was at home and no activity, no work, everywhere was closed and just online and I had problem with speaking because I can't contact with anybody else because I can't speak [English] (laugh)."* P2

Many of the usual places to go and connect with people were closed. The opportunities that were open for people, such as volunteering, were going through a dramatic process of change in order to adapt to the new restrictions. This left many without the routine or meaningful activity they had been trying to establish in their lives. For this group of peer leaders this was attending college and meeting up with other people seeking sanctuary.

The college they attended and the spaces available to interact, were heavily restricted at this time and the sense of being alone was heightened. This was added to by the challenges that not being proficient in English brought, alongside a fear of communicating online. Almost overnight online platforms became the new way of interacting and were taken for granted by those who had easy access to this technology, and who had digital proficiency, across the globe. This was not as easy to a change to make for the peer leaders.

> *"... I can't speak English, I can't contact good with people, um, especially this time, corona time, I uh, I, feeling um, scared about, uh, online contact."* P1

> *"... but online is not very good, unfamiliar for me, you know, the other side of screen is not very good to know or understand or connect with somebody else."* P2

Although online contact was recognised as a challenge, it also became a medium of communication that many were grateful for. Perthyn provided a chance to connect with people in a safe way in the context of the pandemic.

> *"Sometimes you have the same kinda issue, you have the mental health that can be similar, er, situation, or something that you are needing support, you are needing someone to talk to, you are needing sometimes only to see through even the screen to see someone, that someone is there with you."* P3

The peer leaders soon realised that Perthyn was more than just an ordinary group, this is explored in the following three themes.

Liberation from language

Language is an enabler; it is the foundation of how we interact and progress in the world. Language is often given huge importance as necessary skill in connecting and integrating into communities. However, when it is not known, such as by those seeking sanctuary in a new country, it can be an almost overwhelming barrier (as seen in the narrative above and below).

> *"... when I came here I feeling alone, very weak ... I feeling I can't speak, I can't ask for help ... some jobs, I go to asking but I can't, I know my language not perfect, my language not, er, enough but I try, I try."* P1

> *"... I felt 'oh my gosh, everything is just speaking.' Because when you can't explain, er, you can't do anything ... [employer] please give me a chance to show my activity not just my speaking."* P2

The theme of 'liberation' from the difficulties that not knowing a language brought, was threaded throughout the group interview. The peer leaders noted that one thing that made Perthyn stand out was the message that being proficient in English was not a prerequisite to joining.

"... if you can't speak, you can't do anything. But in this group, um, this experience completely changed my mind, no, you can join a group, you can, um, you can have a teamwork, er, even you can't speak very well. P2

"[Perthyn] is very helpful, even if you can't speak English ... you can keep going there and you can try to feel like, like you are not alone, so that is good, good, good." P3

This begins to break a vicious cycle. Not being able to speak the language often equates to not being able to access support or integrate into a safe new community, leading to problems and further isolation. The group members were able to feel of worth, supported and able to make a contribution, regardless of the level of language they held.

"Somebody understands, somebody feel, but somebody else no, I can talk about my experience. Some organisation can't understand me, but in this group here understand me. I have lots of ability but, um, just, my talking just my English is not, big challenge ... er, yeh, the language is not very important [in Perthyn]." P2

The clear irony is that, through attending Perthyn the English of the group members naturally improved. There was a more natural flow to the conversation, which could lead to many different subjects being discussed, and therefore quite different to the structured learning process within a more formal class. Not only this but the group provided a space to share diverse cultures and stories. This enabled additional learning outside of the traditional English focused 'English for Speakers of Other Languages' (ESOL) classes that many people seeking sanctuary attend.

"I have more benefit now with our group really ... I have class in this time, I chose this group work, I have benefit more in group than class ... this group, um, understand me very well (laugh) and it was ... like a gift for me ... I really, really, um, grow up a bit this team because I learn a lot better with this team." P1

"... it was amazing for me ... yes, it's a good chance, good opportunity for you and you can improve yourself, your language, and you can be a leader." P2

"I think, um, I think that it helps because, er, it's a group that, er, we can share a lot of language, it's not only English, so, it's kinda, some words in, um, Pakistan or Arabic, Portuguese, all these, it's kinda interaction, yes, in the, I don't know how to put it properly, I think it's the interaction." P3

Values that facilitate connection and a sense of belonging

Another difference of Perthyn noted by the peer leaders, was the safe space the group itself created. The peer leaders felt they could bring their 'true selves' to the group. This type of environment is not easy to create, yet without the proficiency in English, the groups were able to achieve this. This is due to the intrinsic values and approach of the group through its members, which embodied the Perthyn ethos of openness and support.

Each member is welcomed into the group as an equal and treated with respect. There is no judgement given to level of English held or the stories that the member chose to share. This enabled those in the group to feel safe enough to give and receive support from their fellow group members.

"... everything is in equality, and sometimes I can't talk maybe, or sometimes another member in this group maybe not in the mood, maybe sad maybe happy ... but everybody understand each other and er, we can talk about our problems and the problems not just for me, everybody has some problems and everybody understand each other and ... everything is equal in this group." P2

"I think it make a lot of difference because, er, sometimes we can be sad story, it can be kinda traumatic story, but er, anyway, sometimes when we share it, with another people, you feel kind of, much more in peace." P3

The innate need for each of us to be seen and valued was also satisfied within the groups. Often the restrictions on those seeking sanctuary, regardless of the pandemic, do not allow the person to share their skills and feel they are contributing to their community in a meaningful way. Perthyn recognises the worth, strength and skills in everyone and so confidence is built within the group as people feel accepted, supported and seen. This facilitated the peer leaders to build confidence and develop skills or use existing ones.

"... because before, before, I felt I'm not ready to be a leader. I think that. But (names in group) wished me '(name) you can do it, you can do it' ... after many weeks ago, I feeling I can do it and asked them, 'ok give me a chance' (laugh)." P1

"... yeh, it's different, very different to my country. I was a leader in my country but, um, UK is really different. But in this programme, er, I realised I panned out oh yeh, I can, I can manage the programme [be a peer leader], I can talk, I can, um, really be comfortable with, um, anybody else, with a group." P2

Interestingly this led onto other beneficial impacts that extends beyond the group. Through feeling appreciated and accepted in the group, the peer leaders felt a greater connection to being part of the wider community, beyond those seeking sanctuary. Barriers of race and ethnicity were dissolved, and the experiences and stories of individuals were recognised as equal to one another.

"... I didn't feel belonging in (country of origin), over thirty years, thirty years. I feel belonging here ... I feel belonging here in Cardiff because I, I love to live in Cardiff ... I feel Cardiff like my home, er, when I go outside, I feeling very better and may, I think that our group give me this more feeling about Cardiff, our Perthyn group, give me this feeling." P1

"Er, for me, er, I think in this group, I, er, I don't find, um, no difference between me and the British, the people [the staff facilitators] in this group." P2

"... I think I, I think that yes, yes, because even you don't have experience to be asylum seeker or refugee, but you have another kind of experience in your life, so, it's like I say, maybe you need the support as well, or maybe you can bring some support to asylum people so I feel, yes." P3

A hope shared is a hope enhanced

The peer leaders showed that 'hope' was facilitated by attending the Perthyn groups. They recognised their own strengths, which helped them hold hope for a positive future, in fact hope was seen as central to building resilience and overcoming adversity.

Each of the peer leaders shared a story of challenges and difficulties in either the process of gaining refugee status or applying for jobs and volunteering positions. Although initially disappointed when things didn't go how they would have liked, it was the hope that this would be different in the future that helped them through these times of sadness.

"... I come here in Cardiff no-one I know anyone here, no friends, no, I feeling bad, I crying ... I fight with myself to face my challenge, er, after that I feel very sad about the last time I crying, why crying, why? I have to be strong. Er, I am lucky, I am this point now, I am very lucky [to have refugee status]." P1

"Er, I think without hope, without hope we can't continue, we can't see the future. Hope is ... like a sun in our life. If we don't have hope, we don't have nothing (laugh) ... still we have hope and we have a ... bright future, we can make it, we make friends, we can talk about, er, our problems, we can ask, um, and er, yes, um, without hope I think everything else impossible." P2

"Actually, for me hope is everything in the life ... hope is part of our lives. We need to have hope that we can keep going, to do everything, it's in my case, like I say before, I love to be one day a nurse, to work in NHS ... I will keep going, I will fight for it because it's something that I love so, let's go again. That is hope." P3

As they began to feel more confident and certain in their skills, though using them in Perthyn, they were able to look beyond their own basic needs.

Gaining more of an internal locus of control through being a peer leader, allowed them to share their lived experience to help others share in their hope for a more positive future. One peer leader explained he/she had gone from seeking support from The Hub to translating documents to support others.

"... before my [refugee] status I feeling, um ... different ... now I am strong mind, um, I feel comfortable, I feel have a more positive idea [how] to give it to people like me before, every people need it to help ... I hope I give back UK something, because ... they [the UK granting refugee status] are saving my life." P1

"... [Perthyn] was good opportunity for me, I learn a lot and er, I, just I hope (laugh) I hope to understand everybody, every migrant come to this country and understand them ... because, um, when I come here, um, then nobody understand me and, er, it was a really lonely feeling and this group, I really happy and I hope we have like this programme more." P2

Each of the peer leaders who attended the group interview felt they had benefitted from being part of Perthyn. Taking the focus away from proficiency in language (i.e. English) to that of sharing in a safe space regardless of it, was a powerful tool in being valued and gaining confidence to add value. Being a peer leader had enabled them to recognise their worth through being a central part of something that facilitated learning and connection.

By sharing their stories with others each member was on an equal footing and all experience was valued, whatever someone's background. As well as creating a space to talk through, and gain support for some potentially difficult experiences, sharing their lived experience was valued in and of itself. This is one of the elements that makes Perthyn so powerful.

rewarding

Y Sefydliad
Iechyd Meddwl

Mental Health
Foundation

FR Registered with
FUNDRAISING
REGULATOR