

EVALUATION REPORT

Liftin Da W8ight: 12 Week Drama Course Jan/Feb/Mar 2012



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The Project

Organisations involved:

Noh Budget Films provides drama-based programmes that use creative action methods to enhance life and social skills. Theatre and drama-based games and exercises are used to enable participants to explore real life situations. Course content draws on the techniques and teaching methods from Theatre of the Oppressed www.theatreoftheoppressed.org Keith Johnson's Improvisation www.keithjohnstone.com/ and games and exercises from the Facilitators Sources www.tonycealy.com

Jabbok Support Services is a charity that supports women ex offenders and women with mental health problems to re-integrate into society. Jabbok provides a range of services in order to assist women with support and advice on issues such as employment, training, financial issues, mental health issues and housing.

Liftin Da W8ight was a 12 week drama course that took places Friday's 10.00am- 2.30pm at Jabbok Support Services, Finsbury Park, London (February/March 2012). The course was facilitated by Tony Cealy (Noh Budget Films) and was attended by fifteen women from Jabbok Support services. Islington Council funded the project.



Lifin Da W8ight's Course Aims

- To develop and strengthen the emotional wellbeing of 15 adult women, in order to access opportunities in work, education and further training.
- To equip the participants with new strategies and skills in order to increase their confidence with the challenges they face in their daily lives.
- To showcase the talents and performances of the group in a final presentation.

Course Objectives

- To provide personal development workshops that increase social and life skills.
- To produce a presentation dramatizing participant's positive changes to their difficult lives.
- To enable participants to come to a new understanding about themselves, each other, and the community at large.
- To identify and clarify values, express feelings, practice new behaviours in a safe space.
- Assess & evaluate the effectiveness of the programme and as a model for further and ongoing intervention.

Short-term outcomes

- To develop self-confidence and self-expression.
- To develop pride in self.
- To reduce levels of stress.
- To develop and practice new strategies and behaviors in order to deal with challenges faced with in daily live.
- To develop teamwork/group-work skills.
- To increase motivation to move forward in life with a more positive outlook.

Long-term outcomes

- Greater levels of engagement and an increased openness to wider learning.
- Improved relationships with family, friends and others.
- Greater awareness of making decisions out of awareness and choice rather than habit.
- Increased participation in community activities.
- Performances to the local community showcasing skills.
- Increased access to employment opportunities.

Aims of Evaluation

To evaluate whether the **short-term outcomes** of the course have been achieved.

This will be achieved by attempting to capture the impact that the course has had on the participants', within the following 3 areas:

- a) Social development
- b) Personal development
- c) Ability to develop new strategies and skills

The evaluation will also include,

- d) An activity case study

Methodology

Qualitative and quantitative techniques are used in the collection of data for the evaluation but in the main qualitative.

Data was collected using the following methods:

- One to one interviews with project participants.
- One to one interview with Jabbok staff member.
- Participant feedback during course group discussions.
- Pre course questionnaire and post course questionnaire.
- Observations by evaluator during course (Participant Observation)

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

a) Social Development

A recurring theme of the findings was the extent to which the women participating in the course found the aspect of **working in a group**, a particularly beneficial experience.



Within both group feedback and one to one interviews, participants consistently claimed that group-work provided an important opportunity for **identification** with others with similar experiences to themselves. This was key in providing **support** for participants many of whom talked of the difficulty of facing the challenges and difficulties in their lives in **isolation**.

“We are all in the same boat... I see myself in others... my situation is not as bad as I think.”



“Everyone got on very well no one judged anyone, I didn’t feel uncomfortable in the presence of anyone’...I think we could all identify, that we’ve got our own emotional problems.”

“I identify when I see people in the group feeling powerless fearful or frozen.”

Identification with the scenarios within the devised performance was also something participants recognised as providing meaning to the process. Observation of the sessions showed that this had a cathartic effect with participants being able to gain insight into their own situations by taking the perspective of a character in the scenario.



A participant expressed her most memorable experience of the course as being when she really connected with and related to a scenario in the play regarding a difficult relationship in the play, saying, “I could almost cry” explaining how raw, but meaningful it was to her. Although emotionally challenging she continued to describe her experience of participating in this type of drama course as “an eye opener”.

A feeling of **safety** within the group and a **non-judgemental** environment was cited by many participants as being vital for their ability to engage in the course in a meaningful way.

“Often when we meet new people you pre judge, but in this group I learnt not to, you could relate to situations others found themselves in.”

“I feel safe and secure with them...they’ve been in my shoes I’ve been in their shoes, that’s why I feel happy and jolly in taking part.”

“I’ve been in other groups in the past but in this group I feel safe in this group don’t feel judged.”

An unexpected but significant and reoccurring theme that emerged, from the findings was the mention of importance of the feeling of **equality**, felt by participants on the course.

Many of the participants spoke of the positive experience of being treated as an equal by the group facilitator as well as feeling an equal within the group. Many regarded the **absence of a hierarchy** as being something that was benefited them and enabled them to have a more fulfilling experience.



“It was amazing to see... the similarities, you know... it was unbelievable the amount of people that had the same feelings, it made me feel like, ok we’re all

equals here, there's no hierarchy here, that sort of gave me permission to be myself."

"Its really nice, everyone has a chance to play different roles, there's no hierarchy or anything."

"He (the facilitator) is very reassuring... everyone is equal."

The interviewee goes on to explain that the facilitator will stop the process to reassure those who may be finding the process difficult in order that they feel comfortable to continue to participate i.e. valuing everyone's input quality.

Another participant says in relation to contributing to the devising process, "You feel very much like an equal."

Another aspect that participants cited as important was the **supportive** nature of the course. This was evident from observation of the participants within the sessions.

"There's friends now, that I know we'll keep in touch, it's been very nurturing, women are very nurturing. It's been very positive for me."

As many of the participants had not used Jabbok services before, having the drama course on site meant that the women became aware of what other support Jabbok offered.



b) Personal Development

The safe environment of the course enabled to participants to **express themselves** and participate without inhibition.

Being able to **be them-selves** and to be true to who they were was repeatedly referred to as a particularly beneficial aspect of the course.

“I have been in other drama groups, but here, you are actually giving something of yourself.”



“I liked improvisation and not working from a script as I could put parts of myself in it... and really be *in* the character.”

“You can see real *personality* coming up when a person is in role.”

“He encourages you to take the risk and to be true to who you are... It's good to just to take that risk and jump in at deep end, because sometimes the negative thinking stops you... and you could find you're creativity this way.”

“When I first came, I didn’t feel like myself, but now I feel part of the group... I enjoyed it

These comments highlight a sense of **inclusiveness** participants felt within the group. The importance of **genuinely feeling that their input was valued** and ultimately that they *themselves* were valued was paramount.

“There’s a feeling of safety here—there’s no judgement, you just through in your input.”

This ‘safety’ many felt on the course key in increasing participants **confidence and self-esteem** and ultimately sense of wellbeing.

“It makes you feel you are worth something and gives you confidence that you are worth something...that you didn’t realise there was any value in yourself.”

“It makes me feel I can do things, there must be things I can do.”

“This is the first time I have sung in a group in 10 years!”



“It keeps me going and makes me happy and this is something I look forward to... it just puts a smile on my face.”

“This (course)... has made them happier from the first day we came that goes for myself included.

The Jabbok coordinator comments on the impact the course has on the personal development of the women participating,

“Through the drama can they can stand in an audience and be outspoken. Their increased confidence and self esteem... is the beginning for them to step out of their situation... where they are... This is what will prepare them for the employment ladder... I hope that this continues in their life.”

In terms of the course **reducing levels of stress**, a participant commented,

“You feel more relaxed when you leave here... you feel more confident.”

Many participants had positive comments regarding the facilitators approach,



“His way of facilitating make you feel comfortable.”

“He gives us the tools to do it... an ease to do it... I look forward to it... I really enjoyed it.”

A participant that was surprised at the ease in which she felt in taking part said, “Other courses put you on the spot (to speak) the way you’ve (the facilitator) done it, is clever, you don’t feel nervous.”

c) Development of new skills and strategies

In terms of developing and practicing new ways of behaving in challenging situations the participants commented,

“The course has helped me do things more calmly, better and in a more positive way.”

“If you’re in a complicated situation it has taught me how to be calmer and work around a situation, instead of getting angry, its like getting even without causing too much stress on yourself or the other person.”

“Instead of loosing your temper it helps you to take a step back and think more positively, especially in my situation.”

d) Activity Case Study

A particular activity that took place on week 3 of the course; ‘my life in 3 words’ was cited as the most memorable or beneficial part of the course by a significant number of participants.

For this activity participants had to think of three words to describe their early middle and present life. Words were written up in columns for all to see. The aim of the exercise was to use the commonality of peoples journey as material for the starting point of the play.

A participant commented that this was because she was able to be reflective saying,

“I realised that feelings from when I was young have carried on through life... and (they) can explain some of my feelings now, like feelings of frustration... and fighting feelings of rejection from when I was young.”

“It has invoked what is deep inside me...and has given me time to see what I can do with my life.”

“It has helped me analyse myself.”



Evaluator observation, ‘My life in 3 words’ activity:

Participants were very engaged in this activity. There was thoughtful consideration about the words they wanted to use to describe the 3 stages of their lives.

What was apparent, was that the **support and encouragement** within the group. When some participants struggled to find the right word to sum up their experience, others suggested word that might fit showing understanding and empathy.

This activity provided a good opportunity for participants to look outside of themselves and see a situation from another's point of view as well as providing a perspective of personal changes over time.

Some commented that it was useful to have the space to be reflective, something they rarely did.

This activity however was difficult for some due to the emotions it brought up.

“I’ve got a frog in throat I’ve not felt like this for a long time.” She then talked about not wanting to ‘relive’ situations she’d been in.

Although this activity was done half way through the course it was this participant’s first week and so she had not been taking part in other sessions that would have been a progression towards this reflective activity.

One participant commented on this in interview that it was difficult for the women quoted above, and didn’t think it was good she was in put this situation.

The problem here was, as some participants joined after it had started some were at differing stages of the process.



QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Below are the findings from the pre questionnaire, given to participants before the first session of the course began. It aimed to establish the 'starting point' of the participants. It focuses (as does the qualitative research), on evaluation the short term outcomes of the course i.e. the soft outcomes. The aim was for the participants to complete a post course questionnaire and to assess whether there had been a change that indicated that the short-term outcomes had been achieved.

Seven participants of the eight participants present on the first week completed this.

Participants were asked to score on a level of 1-5 1 being 'not at all' and 5 being 'very'

Pre Questionnaire Results (7 participants filled in this questionnaire)

	1	2	3	4	5
Enjoyment of group work		1	2	3	1
Confidence levels		2	4	1	
Stress levels		4	2	1	
Positivity in self			4	1	2
Managing conflict		1	3	1	2
Motivation		2	3	2	
Hope for future			2	1	4

Post Questionnaire Results – Participants who also filled in pre questionnaire (3 participants)

	1	2	3	4	5
Enjoyment of group work				2	1
Confidence levels		1	2		
Stress levels		1	2		
Positivity in self				2	1
Managing conflict			1		1
Motivation			2	1	
Hope for the future					3

The original aim for the use of questionnaires was to do make a comparison between the 'starting point' of participants (in terms of the soft outcomes of the project), and the end point. How/if participants changed through experiencing the course. However, this proved to be problematic for a number of reasons:

- Less than half (7 out of 15 participants) were present at first week to fill out the pre - questionnaire
- Only 3 participants out of 7 that filled in the pre questionnaire also filled out the post questionnaire
- Newcomers started throughout the courses duration, therefore didn't fill out pre questionnaire at beginning
- Erratic attendance meant participants had different experiences in terms of number of sessions and depth of experience

However, with this in mind, through analysing just the data of those who filled out **both** the pre and post questionnaire, a comparison of the results that show a change (increase or decrease are shown below)

The results are based on a comparison between the majority answers in each category:

- **Participants' hope for the future increased by up by 6%**
- **Participants' stress levels decreased by 10%**
- **Participants' sense of positivity in themselves increased by 11%**

These results suggest that, within 3 out of the 7 categories, there was a positive change for the participants that filled in both pre and Post questionnaires.

This indicates that the short term, 'soft' outcomes that have been achieved are 'reducing stress', 'increasing motivation to move forward in life with a more positive outlook' and developing pride in self (short term outcomes – 'Liftin the weight')

Recommendations

Maintaining a consistent group throughout the course is recommended for future programmes. All participants would have the opportunity to progress through the course together, which would provide maximum benefit for all.

A few mentioned the length of the course being too short in terms of wanting more time to rehearse and in relation to the experience having an affect on the way they approached situations in their daily lives. The coordinator from Jabbok also expressed that it would be more beneficial for the women, if the course was longer.

A longer course is recommended. It would mean that the skills and strategies learnt on the course would be able to become more embedded in the every day lives of the participants.

Conclusion



The qualitative data in particular showed that the course did in the main achieve its short-term outcomes. The evidence shows that the course had an impact on personal development in particular enabling participants to feel valued for themselves and for their input into the course. This was key to a raising self-esteem and confidence.

The course also had an impact on social development, particularly in terms of enabling participants to feel feeling safe and supported in a group situation. This was vital, as it led to the development of positive communication within the group. The freedom of participants to be themselves was key, as it enabled participants to benefits from the course in a meaningful ways.

The group experience also enabled individuals to gain insight into their situations as well as empathising and supporting fellow group members. This was significant for many who felt very isolated in the issues they faced in their lives.

The course did to a certain extent give participants the opportunity to develop and practice new strategies and skills, but this specifically *within* the course setting. It is not known whether this was translated into the everyday lives of participants. An evaluation assessing the long-term impact of the course would be needed to establish this.

Similarly, the qualitative data does not indicate whether this course has provided participants with 'motivation to move forward in their lives'. Although the quantitative data indicates that this motivation increased by 6%, it must be noted that on a post questionnaire that gave the highest category for 'motivation in everyday life' a note was added, saying, " In drama, yes but in anything else I am not so good"

This shows the limitation of using quantitative methodology when evaluating 'soft' outcomes. However, this motivation to continue further drama courses was strongly backed up backed up by the qualitative data. *All* participants when asked, said they'd like to do a further drama course of this type. This could be seen as an indication that motivation had increased in terms of gaining insight into their lives *through* drama. This could be seen as the start or trigger for increased motivation in other areas of their lives.

The issue repeatedly raised regarding the importance of the feeling of equality in the group, was a significant, unexpected and interesting finding. The positive experience of not feeling part of a hierarchy was particularly significant to this the group of ex offenders and had until recently, been in a powerless situation in prison.

The experience of feeling equal within the group, led to participants being able to truly express them selves. This in essence was the ultimate achievement of the course. It was what established an environment conducive to cultivating a sense of wellbeing.



“Its helpful in every way, mind body and soul.”

