Change the Picture
Photography with Vulnerable Women

Introduction

This publication and CD-Rom documents Change the Picture, a participatory photography project with vulnerable women in London, and it brings together learning, reflection on practice and images and writing by the women who participated in the project.

It is a record of an experimental project that has broken new ground for PhotoVoice. There is limited documented and published research that discusses the impact and dynamics of creative visual work with highly vulnerable women outside of an art therapy framework. The project aimed to explore and discuss the dynamics of participatory photography with highly vulnerable groups – to deal with questions around ethics around participation, consent, the boundaries between private and public creative processes.

It is hoped that the learning will be of value to others working with creative and visual arts with vulnerable women.

Change the Picture involved a rich and considered project process. Everything presented in this publication is a result of shared work, observations, and continually ongoing discussions about the project and its methodologies. Huge thanks to all those who have participated from the women to the project facilitators and staff.

Tiffany Fairey
PhotoVoice
Change the Picture: Project Overview and Background

Project Introduction

Change the Picture was a participatory photography and self-advocacy project that aimed to provide a creative support to the lives of vulnerable women, some of whom were homeless and / or street based sex workers in East London.

Built on a strong partnership between two pioneering charities – PhotoVoice and U-Turn, Change the Picture aimed to support vulnerable women by providing them with a space for creative expression and relief while also using their images and words to raise awareness of the issues they face with policy makers, service providers and public audiences. Alongside the workshops, research assessed the impact and potential of photography as a therapeutic tool and the learning gained was distributed with information and resources to practitioners and organisations working with vulnerable groups.

The project took place between January 2007 and August 2008 and was based out of U-Turn’s Women’s Centre in East London. The Women’s Centre is a space where vulnerable, homeless and street based sex working women are able to come to have a cup of tea, wash, access services and find support and advice. The majority of U-Turn’s client group have suffered varying degrees of social deprivation, abuse and violence and are dealing with mental health and substance misuse issues.

The project consisted of two main phases. The first phase involved twenty eight weeks of drop in workshops that took place at Women’s Centre and were open to all users. The second phase involved one on one sessions where the lead facilitator worked with five women to produce images and writing specifically for a public postcard advocacy and awareness campaign and exhibition.

PhotoVoice worked with one lead and three rotating facilitators to ensure a range of skills, knowledge and experiences was brought to the project at different times. Working closely with the U Turn staff, the facilitators were able to create a safe forum for the women to experiment with photography and share their stories. A trained psychotherapist provided additional support to both the women and the facilitators. During the workshops, equal space was given to photographic work and creative writing in the form of storytelling, captioning and poetry. This proved successful in engaging the women emotionally and helping to develop their stories.

A safe forum was fundamental to the development of the postcard advocacy and awareness campaign, as well as to the exhibition - it was only through the bonds that built up, that the women felt confident and secure enough to grant copyright and consent for their images and words.

www.changethepicture.org.uk
Context

U Turn offers its innovative support, information and practical intervention primarily to vulnerable and homeless women, but many of them are working as sex workers. The facts and figures below give some context to Change the Picture and the women we worked with.

- It is estimated that in the UK more than 80,000 women are involved in prostitution.\(^1\)
- In this country around half began their involvement in prostitution before their 18th birthday. Some studies suggest that the figure may be closer to 75%.\(^2\)
- The mortality rate for women in street prostitution in London equals twelve times the national average.\(^3\) In the UK as many as 90 sex workers have been murdered in the last 12 years\(^4\) and have been shown to be by far the most at risk female group for homicide.\(^5\)
- Over 80 percent of women involved in street prostitution suffer violence, compared to 48 percent of women in off-street prostitution.\(^6\)
- Rarely do they choose a life on the streets; they are usually forced by drug addiction and a history of physical, sexual and mental abuse. In one survey over half the women said they did not like prostitution; only 13 percent said they were “fairly happy” and more than half had experienced violence.\(^7\)
- Street prostitution is a dangerous occupation. The women make instant judgments and take enormous risks, often trying to earn enough money to combat drugs cravings.
- 95% of women sex workers are believed to be addicted to drugs according to the Home Office.
- 70% of prostitutes (and their children) are believed to have been in care at some point in their lives.
- These women, are for the most part hidden, they receive little notice or attention in the press and this coupled with their disconnected lives compounds the risks they face and their isolation.
- There is a need for a holistic approach to tackle the multiplicity of issues that affect these women if we want to assist them to achieve a long-term sustainable change in their lives.

Issues around the existence of a sex ‘trade’

- Prostitution makes victims of many of those involved in it, and of those communities in which it takes place. Key concerns include:
  - The nuisance caused to neighbourhoods through noise, litter and harassment
  - The impact on the neighbourhood in terms of undermining economic regeneration and neighbourhood renewal
  - The advertising of prostitution, particularly through soliciting on the street and the use of prostitutes’ cards.
  - The spread of sexually and drug transmitted infections
  - Increasing use of the internet as a grooming/advertising medium
  - Links with drug abuse / markets
  - Links with criminality, including robbery
  - Related violence, including serious assaults against those involved in prostitution
  - The increasing stigmatisation and social exclusion of those involved in prostitution
  - The abuse of children through prostitution
  - The impact on their families
  - People trafficking for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation
  - The effect on the attitudes of men to women, and on gender equality more generally.

Objectives and Outputs

\(^1\) Robust figures on the number of people involved are not currently available. The often-quoted figure of 80,000 comes from a 1999 Europap-UK survey of 17 well-established projects in larger conurbations. Typically, these types of projects were in touch with around 665 women. Around 120 such projects were known to be operating at the time which would bring the total number of those involved to around 79,800.  
http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/paying_the_price.pdf pg 17


\(^5\) Lowman & Fraser, 1995; Potterat, Brewer, Muth, Rothberg, Woodhouse, Muth, Siltes, and Brody, 2004; Ward, Day and Weber, 1999

\(^6\) Church et al, 2001), 98% (Benson, 1998) Teela Sanders, Urban Studies p.3.

\(^7\) Selling Sex in the City: An evaluation of a targeted arrest referral scheme for sex workers in Kings Cross, South Bank University, 2001 p.23
The objectives of Change the Picture were:

- To enable the women to enjoy and express themselves and work through difficulties they face through using photography as a therapeutic tool within a safe and secure environment.
- To enable the women to gain confidence in their own voices and their place within society and to be empowered to speak out about their lives, needs and the issues they face.
- To enable the women to learn new creative, digital and IT skills.
- To create participatory photography workshop models for working with vulnerable and abused groups.
- To research the impact and potential of photography as a therapeutic tool with vulnerable and abused women.
- To distribute the research findings and workshop models within in a document that will share learning about photography as a therapeutic tool and encourage good practice.
- To create a body of photographic work that can be used to educate public audiences on the experiences of female sex workers in London, highlighting the obstacles faced by these vulnerable women.

Project Outputs

- 28 weekly drop in workshops attended by 31 women.
- Ongoing exhibition of work and ‘image wallboard’ at the Women’s Centre.
- 10 one on one workshops with 5 women to produce postcard images and writing.
- 5 advocacy postcards sent weekly to over 260 key individuals.
- Public exhibition of images and writing in a London restaurant.
- Case-study publication detailing project methods and learning.

Project Time Line

January – March 2007
- Project Development
- Recruitment
- Training

April – December 2007
- Weekly drop in photography workshops

January – May 2007
- Postcard Campaign and exhibition workshops – individual sessions

May – July 2007
- Postcard distribution
- Exhibition Preparation

July 2008
- Exhibition opening
- Evaluation report produced
Project Process: Workshops

Drop-in workshops
The workshops ran every week over 28 weeks from March till December 2007. All the workshops were facilitated by two photographic facilitators. The lead facilitator and project coordinator, Ania Dabrowska, facilitated every workshop in collaboration with one of the three rotating facilitators, Caroline Irby, Kyna Gourley, and Leila Segal. In the final few months they were also joined by the poet Betsy de Lotbiniere who worked with the women to develop their poetry and creative writing.

Since the lives of the women the project worked with are affected by varying degrees and types of addictions, mental issues, and social deprivation, the dynamics of each of the sessions were impossible to predict from one week to the next. In anticipation of these challenges, an easily adoptable system of drop in workshop models was developed, which enabled the facilitators to pick exercises suited to different women and their emotional states. For examples of workshop ideas see the Resources area of this CD Rom.

The facilitators learnt that the best way to operate was to break the days into blocks of discussions, writing, shooting, editing and viewing of the images. These were the key elements of each of workshop templates. Each of the sessions would focus on a specific issue, and thus each of the blocks would be orientated to address it. Throughout the length of the project hundreds of images from old magazines and books were stored in a big “inspiration box” which was often used as a starting point of the discussions. These images covered all aspects of photography, enabling a practical illustration of different photography and genre of imagery inspiring the women and demonstrating how they can progress and experiment. Methods ranged from formal mini exercises about composition, use of colour, shifting of focus, to more in-depth explorations of how images of even the most mundane objects can be used as metaphors to tell their own stories. Each week the participants were given 2-3 small prints of their best photos to keep in their individual photo albums, or send to their children, partners, or families, whilst at the end of the projects cds were made and given to the women with all the work produced by them.

A small, rotating exhibition of women’s work was hung at the centre and an image wallboard on which visual material was displayed and used as aid in discussions and writing produced by the women. In this way any women attending the centre outside of the workshops had a general insight into the projects. The board generated further discussions amongst them and encouraged them to actively participate. This was aided by the support of the U-Turn staff whom helped the facilitators to break down mistrust and the barriers faced in motivating the women to get involved in the work.

The attendance numbers, time of arrivals, attention levels, and the continuity of engagement were inconsistent, which necessitated constant reformulation of prepared workshop models and ideas. None of the women attended more than half of the workshops, and some of them took part in just one session. However, given the open architectural plan of the U-Turn Women’s Centre, where the project was run, the activities were always observed by women who were unable, or unwilling to part take in the activities, but showed interest in various aspects or parts of the work. The facilitators needed to constantly adopt the prepared workshop exercises, and use intuition, skills, empathy, and humour in order to maintain control over the activities and the interest levels of participants.

Captioning and storytelling – methods of engagement.

The often erratic nature of the sessions made it difficult at times to spend good time on the captioning of photographs. Many of the women found it too laborious a task and as a result many of
the generated captions were matter-of-fact titles simply describing the photograph for the sake of being able to refer to them later on. To engage women with this process, various exercises were used to illustrate the power of working with text. For example, a simple discussion generating exercise was based on women picking some magazine images from the “inspiration box” and then swapping the captions beneath them, discussing how the meaning of the images would then be altered.

Very early into the project, it became apparent that storytelling and writing were frequently used by women to “process” some of their experiences and emotions about their lives. Many different styles of writing including poems by famous poets, the women’s poems, popular songs and stories of their lives were used as inspiration for taking photographs. As the project progressed and relationships between the facilitators and the women grew there was more focus on individual women’s interest and stories and their links between storytelling and photography. These were enjoyed and well received as special workshops, but hard to implement methodically in each session. However, on the whole, the ritual of writing/telling and reading their stories to the group became one of the core elements of the project, capturing the overwhelming need many of the women expressed to “tell it how it is”, “to get it out of their system”.

Facilitator support and journaling

Given the fact that at times this work can be emotionally demanding and draining, the project facilitators were offered supported supervision with a counsellor over the workshop period. This same support was also available to the women in case anything was raised during workshops that they needed additional support to work through. The project facilitators were overwhelmed by the evident emotional vulnerability of the women for whom the project touched on areas of their lives that had often remained hidden or buried after years of detachment – a key survival strategy for many of the women. Central to the project was the recognition that the photographic facilitators were not therapists and were not trained to deal with the women on this level. For this reason ensuring that both the women and the facilitators had direct access to professional support through the workshop process was key.

Project facilitators also wrote a regular general workshop journal as well as individual facilitators’ journals. These became useful tools for an ongoing self-evaluation and a form of communication between the supporting facilitators who were working in rotation and were able to keep informed and comment about progress made in their absence.

Editing and Archiving of Images

All the work produced during the project, as well as ongoing documentation of the discussions surrounding it, were archived on a weekly basis on an external hard drive dedicated to the project as well as being kept on the project laptop. All the women were given prints of their best photographs to keep in personal albums, and at the end of the project CDs of their images were given to them all.

A basic structure was agreed for each day, dedicating time at the end of sessions to discussions and editing of the material. All women were actively engaged in editing of the material they produced on a weekly basis. They were also actively encouraged to take part in the archiving and when the concentration levels and willingness allowed, they learnt how to download and store their images, eventually doing this independently.

Women’s center exhibition

Presentation of photographic work – and the celebration and affirmation that comes from seeing your pictures in the form of big framed pictures or in print – is key to the PhotoVoice process. From five months into the project an exhibition was hung at the Women’s Centre, with over ten framed pictures on display for all the staff, visitors and users to see. The idea is that this exhibition will be continually added to as more photographic work is produced and will serve to celebrate the women’s creativity, brighten up the centre and create a sense of ownership and belonging to the space.
Project Process: Exhibition and Postcards

Going Public
In terms of desired project outcomes, the main objective of the project was to use photography to raise women’s self-esteem, to work alongside them during a process of empowerment. There was no pressure on women to work towards the public showing of their work, however, it was made clear from the beginning that such opportunities existed, and that their images and writing could be used to raise awareness of experiences of vulnerable and working women. It was agreed that any in-depth personal or advocacy work would be carried out only when a strong working dynamic with willing participants was established. As the project developed, following considerable consultation, it was agreed that the women’s work would be used in a public awareness raising campaign consisting of a series of postcards and a public exhibition.

Postcard Campaign
It was felt that a postcard campaign would be the most effective means of using the images as it did not require the women to create or consent to a large body of work. Postcards maximize the impact of the message as they enable a single image accompanied by text to deliver a powerful message straight into someone’s hands. The aim was to raise awareness with public audiences and policy makers of the experiences of these women and the photography and writing stood as an extremely powerful testament to their lives, touching on areas that were hidden and buried not only to the public but the women themselves.

Key women were selected from those who expressed an interest in their work being shown publicly and they either generated new images or chose images that had already been shot during the workshops. Photographs and writing were chosen according to issues that the women had expressed that they wanted people to understand about their lives and their experiences. These issues were then organized by the lead facilitator into 5 themes – one for each postcard.

One on one time was spent with each women to choose their images and the writing and ensure that they gave their full consent to its public usage. The lead facilitator, PhotoVoice and U Turn staff and board members conducted the overall editing for the postcards and exhibition. Whilst the participants should have had an active role in the selection, the chaotic nature of their lives and difficulty in gathering the group together for any period of time meant this was not a viable option. While the preliminary edit was discussed with the participating women, it was U Turn staff and trustees who finalized it.

A series of five postcards were produced and sent on a weekly basis over five weeks to a mailing list that included MPs, members of the justice system, other organisations working with vulnerable women and press and media. It was a deliberate decision to keep the information on the card limited to the image, text, logo’s and a web link to Change the Picture. It was hoped that this would intrigue the audience, encouraging them to follow the web link to find out more about the project and the women. The final postcard in the series invited people to the exhibition opening where they could come to see more of the work and meet PhotoVoice and U-Turn staff.

Intrigued, didn’t understand to begin with, original idea very powerful.
CHASTE

Very effective campaign
Mothers’ Union
Exhibition

The postcard distribution culminated in a public exhibition of the photographs, writing and poetry by the women. The show, exhibited in a London restaurant for 8 weeks, brought together over 15 images and text panels. The images were displayed A0 and A1 sized boards with images sitting alongside the women’s poetry. It was important that the show reflected the whole process of the project so it consisted of not only the postcard, issue-based images but also included some of the creative and abstract photographs produced by the women. The exhibition opening drew a considerable crowd, including MP representatives, services providers and activists for women’s rights and generated press interest on the issue of vulnerable, homeless and working women in London. The unusual venue for such an exhibition not only gave value to the work of the women but also ensure a larger and less obvious audience for the work. Although the venue did not lend itself to collating direct feedback on the exhibition the response on the opening night was overwhelmingly positive and many people commented on how emotive and powerful the images were. Future venues are being considered at the time of this publication including other London restaurants and a gallery close to the Women’s Centre. This will allow the women the opportunity to view their work in a public arena as they did not have the confidence to attend the above exhibition.
Ethical Considerations within Change the Picture

All participatory photography work calls for an understanding and awareness of the risks involved in doing creative self advocacy work, particularly when images are created to be circulated publicly or to do campaign or media based work. This was as crucial as ever in Change the Picture when considering the numerous protection issues that concern a group as vulnerable as the women whom the project worked with.

The principles outlined below reflect the considerations that guided staff through the project process. The key protection concerns that project staff shared related to the implications of participants being recognizable through their creative work, and the question of whether they were in a position to make an informed decision about what the potential consequences of having their creative work out in the public realm. A priority through all PhotoVoice projects is that participants maintain ownership over their creative journey and the images and writing they produce. Throughout the process it was important, as far as was appropriate, to ensure that sufficient control remained in the hands of the women.

Ethical considerations in a project like this undoubtedly raise tensions and trade-offs between process and product, speed versus outputs and the various agendas of participating stakeholders. The intuition, integrity and sensitivity of the project facilitators and project staff was central to the negotiation these issues. There is always the risk that there might be occasions when the interests of the project are in conflict with the interests of the individual. It is obvious that the protection of an individual must always come first.

Being open and honest
This applied right from the beginning, and throughout the process. The facilitators clearly explained the purpose of the project to the women in ways that were accessible to them. The women were made aware of the expected outcomes of the postcard campaign and no claims of change or impact were made that PhotoVoice or U Turn could not meet.

Obtaining Consent
A clear distinction was made between the work the women produced that was for personal and private use and the work that they produced which could be used in any kind of public facing work, specifically in the postcards, exhibition, media work and publications. The large majority of photographic work that they created during the workshops was not viewed or shown beyond those workshops by the women and facilitators that were present. For the photographic work and writing that was used publicly in exhibitions, press work, the postcard campaign and any publications a specific edit was made were clear ground rules around the issues of anonymity and consent were upheld.

Involvement in both the workshops and the campaign was voluntary and the women were able to withdraw at any time without prejudice. It was agreed that no material would be shown publicly without consent from the women, with a clearly specified exclusion of portraiture. Informed written consent was obtained for all images and writing to be shown in a public arena including press and media.

There is clearly an issue in this kind of work with vulnerable groups as to whether people with any degree of mental health issues or learning disabilities are in a position to be able to make decisions in their own best interests and give informed consent. It can also be debated whether participants from excluded or vulnerable groups have the required knowledge at hand to make fully informed decisions about their participation in the project and the implications their participation will have for them personally. Participatory arts projects involve creative processes that are organic and unpredictable. It is not always possible to pre-empt outcomes and the implications that people’s participation may have. In Change the Picture discussions around consent and protection issues
for highly vulnerable participants were held amongst project staff and the guidance and advice of a trained mental health professional meant that the protection of the women was upheld at all times.

**Anonymity**
Over 30 weeks we worked with 35 women. Given the sensitivity of issues connected to their safety, shame and stigma associated with vulnerability, sex work, and drug addiction, the decision was made that the right to anonymity be a key issues.

In terms of anonymity, the solution was straightforward enough; all names were to be changed and no images of clearly identifiable faces would be shown in a public campaign or an exhibition. It is important to stress, that portraiture was explored and practiced and hugely enjoyed by the women, and in particular self-portraiture, but this was clearly identified as their personal work. Thus, the material shared through this publication is a small selection of what the women have produced during the course of the project.

**Flexibility**
Through-out the work with the women the approach remained flexible and adaptive without sticking rigidly to pre-determined tools and techniques. This allowed the facilitators to shape the workshops according the women’s moods and interests at any given point. In this way the facilitators could support and encourage a level of engagement that would never had been possible if the workshops had been scheduled and structured.

**Appropriate support**
Creative processes can be involving and intense for everyone participating – both for the women and for the facilitators – and can bring up all sorts of emotional and personal issues. The women and project facilitators had access to the support and supervision of a trained counselor for the duration of the project and the project staff put a high value on the support and care of everyone involved in the project team.
Best Practice and Project Learning

An independent evaluation of the project was carried out by Pippa Hockton, a trained psychotherapist with over 14 years of experience of working with vulnerable women.

Below is an explanation of the methods used in the evaluation and the recommendations that came out of it.

Evaluation Methods
In deciding on evaluation methods the emphasis was on permitting a collaborative evaluation where as many participants as possible would be able to contribute. We felt strongly that we did not want the participants to be the passive subjects of research, as this would be in conflict with the aims of the project.

Five evaluation methods were combined to provide the most detailed and comprehensive measure of the outcomes. The first of these methods was the most significant because it gave everybody involved an equal opportunity to have their say in the evaluation and to have note taken of their individual experiences and observations.

1. Dialogue/interview with participants, workshop facilitators and the staff of the Women’s Centre.

This ensured the inclusion of a individual experiences from a cross reference of the people involved in the project and also allowed for anecdotal evidence.

2. Independent observation of workshops

The introduction of an independent observer added an objective perspective, balancing against the perhaps more emotive view of the facilitators and participants.

3. Standardised Psychometric Test

This was to be carried out with as many participants as were willing, immediately before and after their participation in a workshop. The standardised test took the form of a series of ten questions used to measure any change in overall confidence and well being. With the co-operation of participants, the intention was to carry out this test with a third of those attending. It was decided, at the planning stage, to carry out the standardised test before and following each workshop, rather than at the outset of the whole project and then again after it had ended which would be more conventional. This was to allow for the shifting population of the Women’s Centre and to avoid missing the opportunity to complete the test, should they no longer be participating at the end of the eight months period. The test itself was adapted to be as brief as possible, in order not to infringe too much upon the participants’ time and good will, whilst retaining sufficient substance. This was particularly a concern as the participants were being asked to take part twice in one session.

4. Attendance statistics

Detailed records of the number of sessions attended by each women were kept on a weekly basis.

5. On-going diaries by the four workshop facilitators

As has already been discussed in this publication, weekly workshops diaries were kept by the four facilitators which proved to be an invaluable source of information about the workshops and their impact.
However, it was important to review the evaluation methods during the project and make any necessary changes. It was decided after the first five weeks to drop the standardised test. It was replaced by a more informal, "before and after test" with open ended questions about how the participant was feeling in that moment. It was sometimes very difficult for the facilitators to engage the participants, women might be very tired, distracted by other women using the centre, or just anxious about doing something unfamiliar. It was felt that to ask them to participate in a questionnaire, however short, and however carefully the questions were selected was off putting. It was challenging enough for the facilitators to get women involved without putting further obstacles in the way. A more informal questioning about current mood and confidence level, integrated with the actual workshop much more comfortably. Women agreed very willingly to describe their immediate feelings both before and after the workshops and there was no evidence that this held women back from taking part.
Best Practice Recommendations

The evaluation was carried out over a 16 month period and resulted in a comprehensive report. From this key recommendations and considerations to bear in mind when preparing a creative project with vulnerable women have been drawn out.

1. The central importance of the caliber and integrity of facilitators

The facilitators of Change the Picture were sensitive, encouraging, and patient and developed an excellent level of trust with the women. It is a difficult balance between encouraging participation when women are reluctant to take part whilst respecting their individual choices. In this case the facilitators proved to be very skilled and the role they played was the key to the successes of this piece of work.

It took determination and perseverance to persuade women, who, in most cases were reluctant, to participate. Once they had joined in, it required patience and sensitivity to work with a broad spectrum of challenging personalities, to enable them to discover their own ability. It took tenacity to keep going through the frustrations, for instance when they had arrived with a carefully planned workshop and no women wanted to take part. The facilitator’s energy and passion not only kept the work going but it was infectious and exhilarating.

The women involved in this project live in extreme circumstances, coping with violence, addictions, homelessness, exclusion and more, none of them have the same circumstances, many are mentally ill or have a very young mental age as a result of a learning difficulty. Within their peer group there are divisions, oppression and abuses, alongside great warmth and support. They are extremely vulnerable on many levels. With such a complex group with so many different problems, one must rely on the personal integrity of all involved.

Invest in careful selection to recruit staff who will not only have the creative skills but who will be empathic, sensitive and have the integrity necessary to work with vulnerable people.

2. Training and support of facilitators

Clinical supervision was made available to the facilitators in this case which provided them with some support and the opportunity to air some the frustrations which inevitably arose in the course of the project.

When a particular group will include participants with specific issues, such as addiction, sexual abuse, and domestic violence consider providing some initial training to raise awareness of the specific issue. There are many agencies which provide one day training workshops on all of the issues which may be significant. This would be particularly helpful when those involved in the delivery of the project come from different backgrounds.

3. The combination of writing and photography.

Some women enjoyed the photography more, some enjoyed the writing but the combination of both ensured the workshops appealed to a range of preferences and interests. The opportunity to write helped women to find their voice in relation to the imagery they produced and encouraged more women into the project. The combination of the writing and photography enabled all of the women to relate experience to image.

4. Integration of one to one work with group work and multiple facilitators

Change the Picture adapted itself to the needs of some of the women to have the opportunity to do one to one work and not exclusively group work. All of the women were encouraged to take part in group work but this was not pushed and it was not the only option.
The opportunity to take part in a group activity gave certain women a sense of belonging, solidarity and companionship. This cannot be overstressed as a benefit for these women, many of whom live in isolation. In particular women enjoyed going out in a group to take photographs and when some of them were asked how the project might be improved, there were several requests for more group outings. There were however problems on occasions with the group dynamics.

There were two facilitators for each session which had several significant advantages. From a purely practical point of view it enabled facilitators to give the women more attention and to work with women who were at different stages of the activity. It permitted group work as well as one-to-one work to take place simultaneously. The women benefited from the one-to-one attention, whether that was with the photography, writing, and discussions or just considering what they might do next. It was during the periods of one-to-one work that those few women who chose to do so, felt safe enough to discuss more personal issues. Many of the most creative opportunities, whether with photography or writing, occurred when women were getting individual attention.

Significantly, having more than one facilitator available at a time had a very positive impact on group relations. Women had the benefit of the consistent presence of the lead facilitator, which provided the necessary containment. At the time same they had the opportunity to relate to three other facilitators which turned out to be very enriching. The success of work of this sort depends on a very good level of trust between participant and facilitator and in this case, each of the facilitators formed positive, stimulating working relations with different women.

5. Value of tangible work

The women took great pleasure in having their work printed out, owning copies of the photographs and showing them to the staff of the Women’s Centre and to other women. This was a simple, tangible pleasure. The women had something to show for their effort and this was a very important aspect of their experience. They made different use of the photographs; most movingly one woman was pleased with a photograph of herself smiling. She said she was going to send it to her family who she hadn’t seen for ten years, so that they would know she was happy and wouldn’t worry about her any more.

Change the Picture enabled the women to take away and to keep and share writing and pictures which brought them a lot of pleasure. Women kept personal photo albums and journals.

6. Provision of emotional support for participants

Change the Picture made counselling available to women on request on the same day as the workshop. Prepare for the emotional support for those taking part. Creative workshops can raise all sorts of emotional issues for those participating that may be well beyond the facilitator’s capacity to deal with. In Change the Picture it was important that this support was made available.

7. Need for activity workshop plans to be easily and quickly adaptable.

Engaging the women in activities was often challenging. In general the women’s lives are frenetic and chaotic. For some of them it was a challenge to stick at something and to concentrate for more than a few minutes. The working conditions were extremely difficult and the facilitators had to cope with the vicissitudes of the women’s lifestyles, whilst keeping up the momentum of the project. Plans and expectations had to be adapted constantly, tailored to the specific demands of the moment.

The facilitators were very responsive to the mood of the group which on occasions changed from one moment to the next and adapted plans accordingly.

8. Importance of pleasure and fun and opportunities to learn

Change the Picture was a project which allowed those who took part to take pleasure in simple things and to place a value on them. Alongside a publication and an exhibition, which were more
ambitious outcomes, there were many occasions when a woman was delighted with a photograph or some writing. The facilitators were very generous in celebrating small achievements and in recognizing their significance.

The chance to learn gave some of the women confidence and a sense of purpose. Several of the woman commented on the fact that in their past they had only had negative experiences of being in a learning situation and they were surprised how different the workshops felt. Others similarly expressed their appreciation of the teaching, stating that it felt like a privilege.

9. Attendance, engagement and participation

At the planning stage ensure that the numbers will be sufficient. This may mean that it is preferable to work with projects which are established and already have a quantifiable client base. Projects working in a drop-in style workshop format will always have fluctuating numbers.

Take care that participants are involved in any developments such as publications or exhibitions.

10. Group Dynamics

Consider strategies for dealing with internal conflict within the group of participants. During Change the Picture there was often disruption to the workshops as a result of rivalry and disagreement between women. Will there be ground rules and how will these be enforced? Will there be exclusions? Does the staff have the skills to address conflict within the group?

Consider the difficulties of working with people with different and potentially extreme mental health issues. Will all comers be accepted regardless of behaviour or will there be boundaries?

11. Communication between collaborating agencies

When a project such as Change the Picture depends on collaboration between different agencies it is essential that the communication between the agencies is very clear and very open.

In those cases when agencies are working together it is important to ensure at the outset that all those involved share the same purpose as well as understanding the working methods of all involved. Different agencies do work in different ways and sometimes make assumptions about the ways in which others work.

When agencies are working together it is important for those involved to understand where management responsibility lies. Where for instance will someone take a grievance?

12. Consent and protection issues

This was a central consideration through out Change the Picture. Participants ownership of their work must be respected.

When working with extremely vulnerable people, take care that they are not placed in a position where their vulnerability is itself exploited, for instance through giving permission to something which may be beyond their comprehension.

If any material created in a workshop is to be placed in the public domain ensure that the material can not harm the artist/author in any way. This seems an obvious point but sometimes a person might be harmed in a way which is not immediately obvious. For instance in the case of someone who has been significantly abused it would not be in the interests of their self perception to allow them to place material which referred directly to the abuse, in the public domain, unless this was accompanied by evidence of their recovery from the abuse. The risk is that to express past abuses may reinforce their unconscious identification with the abuse and run counter to the process of recovery which depends on establishing an identity which is free from the associations of the damage which was done to them.
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