

# Evaluation of series of four courses titled: Caring for Our Wellbeing

*Held at The Lantern in 2016 & 2017*

## **on behalf of The Lantern Community Project**

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T12XPX8*

**By: Kearney Consultants & Trainers Ltd.**

**April, 2018**



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## Executive Summary

The Caring for Our Wellbeing Course was developed by SHEP in response to a need in the community for short courses with a focus on enabling people to take charge of their own wellbeing. SHEP recognised that most people have experience of mental and emotional distress in their lives. The Caring for Our Wellbeing Course was designed to provide a supportive space where people are facilitated to build their resources and resilience. Four Caring for Our Wellbeing courses were run by The Lantern between Winter 2016 and Winter 2017. Sixty-two people in total participated in courses which ran for 2 ½ hours per week over an eight-week period. The courses were facilitated by two experienced individuals, both of whom had been trained by SHEP.

The Lantern Community Project has a long reputation in supporting adults to develop greater personal awareness, confidence and capacity to overcome life's challenges and has built a strong reputation in community development in Cork city and suburbs. It has positive links with many agencies throughout the city and these relationships were helpful in creating the foundation for successful delivery of the Caring for Our Wellbeing Programme. Funding for the programme was received from the Ireland Fund, from Presentation Ireland and from SHEP, totalling €4,400. This was expended on facilitator costs, materials, stationery, refreshments and this evaluation.

Kearney Consultants was asked to evaluate the delivery of the courses over the entire delivery period. This involved meetings with the course designers, with The Lantern staff, with the course facilitators and with participants themselves. Kearney Consultants met 40 participants in four focus group immediately after their respective course completion and met 12 individuals from several courses in face-to-face and telephone interviews.

The evaluators also undertook a review of secondary data to support the analysis. This data included material produced by The Lantern, by SHEP and available online.

The report produced as an outcome of the above work includes a detailed project description, including participation profile, rates and attendance, an analysis of the facilitators' approach and activities and most importantly the impact on participants framed in the context of the course objectives, with observations and recommendations for future delivery.

People's reasons for becoming involved in The Lantern Caring for Our Wellbeing courses varied but stemmed predominantly from a sense of being overwhelmed by the level of stress and anxiety they experienced in their own lives and how this was impacting on them. The facilitators created safe spaces for participants so that they could become fully involved in each session and derive optimum benefits from the course.

Sixty-two people participated in the four courses, with an average of 16 in each course. Seventy-eight per cent were female and the participant age range was between 40 and 50 years with approximately 15% being under 40 and 15% being over 50. Most participants came from Cork city and suburbs. Some participants had experienced homelessness, addiction or mental health difficulties in their lives and some continued to engage with services while attending the course and subsequently. Individuals mentioned low self-esteem, lack of confidence, difficult family circumstances, experience of loss and bereavement.

We make several observations based on our analysis.

1. The fact that The Lantern Community Project already had a track record in supporting people and had premises which was welcoming and inviting helped to lay the basis for a strong foundation for course delivery. This included being able to

engage potential participants and secure their interest in doing the course. The experience and expertise of the facilitators was impressive and their ability to deliver on course objectives through the combination of a variety of methods and approaches was notable and the reason for successful outcomes. The partnership and linkages which the organisation already has in the city were important backdrop to project success.

2. The Caring for Our Wellbeing courses were well thought-out in terms of purpose, content, facilitation and activities and resulted in significant positive impacts on participants who developed a clear set of skills and strategies to go forward in their lives in a way which they could not possibly have envisaged prior to their involvement. The experience was quite transformational for all and this was noticed by their family and friends and they felt empowered to plan for their futures in positive ways. Some decided to continue being involved in The Lantern, some opted to explore courses organised by SHEP and others were planning new activities in their lives which was a shift away from what they had previously done.
3. Each course delivered on its purpose and objectives. The facilitators addressed the questions posed at the outset through the eight-week period using a variety of methods and approaches – what is wellbeing?; how do I know when I am well?; what helps me to stay well?; what happens to me when I'm feeling stressed and distressed?; what can I do about it? Methods used by the facilitators included meditation, relaxation, movement, drawing, role play, active listening, reflexivity to stimulate discussion, deep thinking and learning.
4. At the core of the learning through each course was the experience of growing personal power where people can take control and achieve self-direction rather than feeling overwhelmed and out of control – or being controlled by others.
5. It was evident from this report writer's various interactions with participants that they were looking to the future in a more positive way than they had before they started the Caring for Our Wellbeing Course. They were making positive choices and decisions in their lives in a way that they were not able to do prior to their participation in the course. This is a very powerful thing to say. They felt they had acquired coping strategies and increased their self-awareness in a very positive way.
6. Other activities which supported learning and increased impacts included the formation of groups which enabled individuals to develop a sense of belonging and sharing and learning from others. Group formation was carefully done, and the facilitators negotiated contracts with participants at the outset to ensure that the safe space was maintained. The facilitators managed learning in a professional way including engaging people in activities and use of recapitulation and affirmation at the start and end of each session.

Impacts on participants in all courses were extensive as reported by them and included:

- Very positive experience and endorsement of the approach taken by both facilitators including a recognition of their different yet complementary styles – “they were the glue that held it together!”
- All participants felt supported and safe throughout their involvement in their respective groups and this helped them to participate more fully
- Participants felt that they belonged to a group almost immediately and this helped them to overcome feelings of isolation, and gave them the realisation that others

have similar experiences – they learned from, and supported each other through the eight-week period

- Participants moved towards a greater sense of self-awareness as they participated in their respective courses
- One of the highlights of learning for participants was that of understanding the importance of boundaries to protect oneself and to become self-realised and further to this, by knowing about personal boundaries one is enabled to help others and to know when to mind oneself
- At the core of the learning through the course was the experience of growing personal power where people can take control and achieve self-direction rather than feeling overwhelmed and out of control – or being controlled by others
- Participants learned about coping strategies including quietening one's mind, reflection, asking for help, importance of distractions and fun, and finding the authentic self
- Participants noted that family and friends saw differences in them, in their attitudes and they also said that they were more positive and motivated about the future and were making plans in a way that could not have conceived of prior to doing the course

### **Recommendations**

1. *Caring for Our Wellbeing* needs to remain as a central pillar of course delivery for *The Lantern Community Project* as it imbibes the principles, vision and core values of the organisation and is compatible with those of *SHEP* as the originator of the programme.
2. The facilitation model used in course delivery needs to be continued and resourced appropriately. Two facilitators need to be in place to optimise outcomes for participants and to ensure their safety while involved.
3. The organisation could consider ideas around group workshops, greater access to low-cost counselling, extension of courses to a second or follow-on course activity.
4. Extra informational resources could be developed and made available to course participants on supports and services in Cork city and county and nationwide.
5. Progression routes (formal/non-formal/informal) could be further explored and communicated to participants in the courses so that they can identify pathways for themselves.
6. Long-term continuous funding needs to be sourced to allow for course programme to be delivered on a multi-annual basis. Ideally, this would be part of a larger funding proposal to support the organisation's activities as a key contributor to personal empowerment and capacity-building in the city and surrounding area.

## **Conclusion**

*The Lantern Community Project is unique in what it offers and how it goes about its work and indeed, this was one of the main conclusions of an organisational evaluation conducted in 2015. Those who work for it are steeped in community development and community education and the importance of valuing experiential learning as a way forward for individuals and groups.*

*Caring for Our Wellbeing brings together everything that is important in The Lantern Community Project's philosophy and as such could become a cornerstone of its future identity.*

*The fact that the courses were delivered within a well-established organisation in the city centre, which has a strong reputation and credibility, contributed to their success. The practical supports offered through the availability of a quality physical space were also important. Participants could have their breaks in comfort, could meet others and, if they were not already, part of The Lantern Community Project's community, they could feel welcomed and included.*

*The quality of course delivery and content are excellent. This is largely down to the excellence of the facilitators whose experience, wisdom, sensitivity and abilities are second to none. The value added by the availability of two facilitators in each session is vital for its success and the impact and outcomes would be diminished if this team was not available.*

*We hope that this evaluation will be useful to the project, to SHEP and to current and future sponsors and funders.*

RITA KEARNEY

**Kearney Consultants & Trainers Ltd.**

April, 2018

## Section 1. Introduction

In December, 2016, Kearney Consultants & Trainers Ltd. was invited to evaluate the current programme of Caring for Our Wellbeing courses being run by The Lantern Community Project during 2016/2017. Caring for Our Wellbeing is a community-based mental health programme which was originally been piloted in 2013 by the Social and Health Education Project (SHEP). The Lantern Community Project ran the first of the series of courses in Autumn 2016 and this shaped the subsequent evaluation process. Caring for Our Wellbeing is one of a larger suite of programmes developed by the Social and Health Education Programme (SHEP) which has pioneered the development of experiential learning in group-work settings for over 40 years.

Three Caring for Our Wellbeing courses – each lasting 8 weeks (20 hours) – ran in 2017 and these – along with the first course held in late 2016 - were the focus of the evaluation.

The courses were delivered with the support of the grant of €3,000 made available by the Ireland Funds through its Community Development Programme (Investing in Ireland's Communities). A further €1,000 was received from Presentation Ireland and €400 from SHEP. Monies were used to cover the costs relating to promotion, facilitation, stationery and materials, administration, refreshments and this evaluation.

In addition to their own work in each session, the facilitators were guided by expertise from HSE South Lee Mental Health Service and the HSE South Lee Community Work Department and SHEP as courses progressed.

Kearney Consultants understands that the Evaluation will be helpful to The Lantern Community Project in shaping how they approach future course design and delivery and that it is also intended to meet funders' requirements to report on how their grant was deployed.

**Section 2** below focuses on the approach to the evaluation and the methods used to collect primary and secondary data. **Section 3** is description of the project and its delivery and the results of the evaluation activity. **Section 4** contains observations and recommendations for planning of future activities. The conclusion at **Section 5** is followed by the appendices.

## Section 2. Approach to Evaluation

### 2.1 Introduction

It was very important to the project promoters (SHEP and The Lantern Community Project) that the Caring for Our Wellbeing course design would include a participative evaluation tool which would identify participant's self-perception of their wellbeing at the start of their involvement in specific courses and track their perceptions through it to the course's conclusion with a reflection on their views at the end.

It was very clear to this writer from the outset that the integrity of the process of engagement and participation could potentially be compromised or affected by the evaluation activity and so the approach to be adopted had to be sensitive and respectful of individual and group boundaries.

The evaluator met with two SHEP and The Lantern Community Project representatives (including the Project Coordinator and both course facilitators) on two occasions prior to starting the evaluation activity. To shape the future approach to evaluation, we also met participants in Course 1 (held in late 2016). The group discussion held in March, 2017 (see **Appendix 3**) yielded valuable material and deepened our understanding of the course's impact on participants.

The outcome of these meetings helped this report writer to shape the approach to be taken in gathering information from participants and resulted in the holding of three group discussions and 12 individual discussions with participants as well as several meetings with the course facilitators at the end of each course's delivery.

These interactions helped us to explore participants' experience of the course in which they were involved so that this information, together with that gleaned in earlier meetings, could inform the proposed approach and methodology to evaluate future courses.

Following discussions with the project promoters and previous participants, it was evident that the evaluation was to serve several purposes:

1. To document delivery experience
2. To place the course delivery in the context of the wider brief of the organisation and those supporting the organisation
3. To provide evidence of use of grant monies
4. To capture participants' experience in a safe, non-compromising way and respecting their privacy
5. To discuss facilitators' experience of course design and delivery
6. To generate observations and recommendations to help with future course design and delivery

We coupled the primary research activity (consultations) with desk research to deepen our analysis and produce meaningful observations and recommendations for future course delivery.



## 2.2 Specific Evaluation Activities

These are summarised below with more information on each following:

- Desk research including examination of the context, the theoretical framework informing design, delivery and course outcomes
- Meeting with course organisers on three occasions to set up evaluation activity
- Asking course facilitators to let participants know about the evaluation process, its purpose, and the commitment on her part to preserve people's privacy
- Requesting course facilitators to ask participants to create some creative pieces during their participation which would capture their experience of their journey through the course
- Reviewing a representative sample of the SHEP survey forms distributed by the facilitators to each participant at the end of each course
- Reviewing and analysing course attendance records
- Meeting facilitators before and after their facilitation of the last session in each course
- Meeting course participants in a group setting after their last session in each course. This took place one week after the end of Courses 1, 2 and 3
- Holding short interviews with a cross-section of participants in each course after their participation in same

### *Desk research*

We reviewed material on SHEP and The Lantern Community Project, and briefly examined relevant theories in relation to group work, group development, personal development and capacity-building and of the material used to inform course design and content.

### *Creative pieces produced by participants*

Each participant in respective courses was asked by the facilitator in Weeks 1 or 2 of their course to prepare an individual collage around the question:

*What are my hopes for myself around caring for my wellbeing?*

At the end of the course, the facilitators returned the collages to the participants and asked them to look at their collage and reflect back to Week 1. The question posed was:

*Where are you now around caring for your wellbeing?*

The findings were charted. The collage was used to trigger a memory of how participants were at the beginning and the facilitators charted where they were at the end.

The facilitators then handed out the written SHEP Evaluation. The participants did not add to their collages at the end of the respective course in which they were involved. They also asked the participants about voluntarily meeting the evaluator on the week following the end of the course in which they had participated and to do so with their collages.

The River Exercise was used at the end of each session and the facilitators asked the group to individually write down a word or symbol to represent how they were at the beginning of the session and then how they were at the end. They encouraged participants to reflect on what happened in the 2 ½ hours to bring about this change and to see if they could incorporate the findings into their daily lives. The facilitators did this with the participants every week.

**Appendix 1** provides a cross-section of collages and river exercise drawings.

### *Survey forms*

All participants were asked by the course facilitators to complete the SHEP evaluation form at the end of the course in which they participated. This report writer reviewed a representative sample of these. We reviewed the completed forms in advance of the group discussions to provide a context for the planned discussions and also reviewed them in preparation of the final report.

### *Course attendance records*

This report writer also reviewed all course attendance records which yielded useful statistical information for this report including numbers registering, attending and gender profile.

### *Meetings with course facilitators*

During the evaluation activity, the report writer met both course facilitators on several occasions before the commencement of each course and at the end of each course. This activity helped to set the context for the work and to increase understanding of the dynamics of each course's delivery.

### *Group discussions*

Kearney Consultants met 40 participants (66%) in four focus group immediately after their respective course completion. Attendance at each group discussion was 10 people. No group discussion was held for Course 4, due to time constraints but individuals were met individually by this report writer (including several telephone interviews). All participants had been asked by the facilitators in advance for their permission for this discussion to take place and all were expecting to participate in these discussions. Reasons for non-attendance at the post-course discussions included the fact that people had moved on to other courses, activities or other personal priorities.

### *Individual interviews*

We met 12 individuals from several courses in face-to-face and telephone interviews. This represented 19% of total participants.

The report writer was always during these discussions mindful of maintaining participants' privacy and Data Protection issues.

The interviews were short (up to 30 minutes) and focused on the participant's view of how the course went, what had happened for them during the course's delivery, what had changed for them, what lessons they were bringing forward in their lives.

## **2.3 Conclusion**

The discussions with the course designers, facilitators and with participants (individual and group), the review of paper-based material and desk work in relation to theories and background, combined to produce a foundation for analysis, observations and recommendations.

**Section 3.1** describes the Caring for Our Wellbeing in terms of its purpose, design, schedule and logistics. **Section 3.2** is an analysis of the experience of course delivery, participant profile and its impact on participants.

## Section 3. Evaluation Results

### 3.1 Project Description & Delivery

Caring for Our Wellbeing is a community-based mental health programme arising from a pilot programme in 2013. It is one of a larger suite of programmes developed by the Social and Health Education Programme (SHEP) which has pioneered the development of experiential learning in group-work settings for over 40 years.

Caring for Our Wellbeing was developed by SHEP in response to a need in the community for short courses whose focus is supporting people to take charge of their own Wellbeing. They recognised that most people have experience of mental and emotional distress in their lives. Sometimes, people go through periods of significant distress which affects their health and Wellbeing. A supportive space where people are facilitated to build their resources and resilience can be very helpful and the Caring for Our Wellbeing Course was designed as a response to this.

The course is for people in the community who have an interest in their own health and Wellbeing, people who experience emotional distress at times, and who would like to work together with others in a supportive environment to explore ways to enhance their Wellbeing.

It has the following objectives:

- To give participants an opportunity to explore the idea of Wellbeing
- To identify what supports their Wellbeing and what undermines it
- To identify what helps them with their distress
- To take responsibility for their Wellbeing, developing a plan for themselves which is realistic, and which takes account of the reality of human vulnerability and distress in life
- To enjoy time to care for themselves

The course format – like other courses offered by SHEP – is facilitated in a way that is interactive, supportive and enjoyable with an emphasis on experiential learning. Course promoters recognise that participants bring a wealth of life experience with them and the approach used enables participants to learn from their own experience as well as from the experience of others in the group.

Key questions addressed through the course are:

- What is Wellbeing?
- How do I know when I am well?
- What helps me to stay well?
- What happens me when I'm feeling stressed and distressed?
- What can I do about it?

SHEP has offered the Caring for Our Wellbeing course 30 times in 2016 and 2017 in a variety of locations in Co. Cork and Co. Kerry (SHEP programme area). SHEP has trained tutors in both counties with others going through their apprenticeships.

For the courses' delivery at The Lantern Community Project, two trained facilitators – one a Lantern Community Project staff member and one contracted for the purpose – had extensive experience in creating supportive environments and helping personal learning through using a variety of methods and approaches. They had both previously trained with SHEP. They delivered the four courses between late 2016 and late 2017.

The Lantern Community Project is strongly linked to SHEP and has a history of delivering courses designed by SHEP through facilitators who have also been trained by SHEP<sup>1</sup>. Some courses are partly subsidised by Cork Education and Training Board (ETB).

The Lantern Community Project is not a mental health service and staff recognise, through their extensive experience and work in the area, the need amongst its client group for participation in community education, arts and wellbeing activities in ways that are not labelled mental health but integrate the clients in the mainstream community education setting.

The course organisers in The Lantern Community Project planned that each course to be run in late 2016 and during 2017 would reach up to 20 vulnerable adults who are experiencing isolation and marginalisation due to mental distress, and assist them on their recovery journey, through engaging and integrating them in community education, arts and groupwork. Participants on the programme were to include both clients and carers. As with others who avail of The Lantern Community Project's services and activities, they were to be welcomed, included, and supported.

This innovative person-centred programme, like other activities supported by The Lantern Community Project, was to use a multi-agency approach with SHEP providing the initial expertise and design and ongoing support, the HSE South Lee Mental Health Services, providing professional support, mentoring and referrals and the HSE South Lee Community Work Department and Cork ETB providing additional guidance.

The programme was also to have on-going evaluation mechanism in place which was due to commence early in its delivery and is now being completed after the delivery of all four courses.

The original grant amount requested from The Ireland Funds was €4,155<sup>2</sup> and €3,000 was received. A request was made to Presentation Ireland to cover the shortfall and €1,000 was received with a further €400 being received from SHEP. The total project cost was €4,400 and covered promotion, some administration, facilitator fees, stationery and art materials, refreshments and the evaluation. The other costs associated with course delivery – design and administration, networking, room rental, referrals and follow-up by the facilitators and other staff were covered by The Lantern.

Course participants were also to be supported after their participation in their wellness plan by the Lantern's Community Development Worker and by their joining a self-directed peer support group if they wished.

Anticipated outcomes were to include: 60 participants, 80% completion rate, participants reporting an increase in confidence, sense of belonging, active engagement; participants will have explored wellness tools, offered follow-on support around their wellness plan and the option of joining the self-directed peer support group.

The Caring for Our Wellbeing Course was promoted by The Lantern Community Project through Cork's Annual Learning Festival in September 2016 and again in September, 2017, through the organisation's Open Day, through promotional activity undertaken by SHEP, through the organisation's website and social media, through Cork ETB channels, through other organisations (e.g. Simon), word of mouth and through local flyers and notices in local community newsletters.

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<sup>1</sup> Including: Men's Health and Wellbeing Programme; Women's Health and Wellbeing; Introduction to Personal Development, Introduction to Ceramics, Stress Management etc. Most courses run for 8 to 10 weeks

<sup>2</sup> Breakdown of grant request to The Ireland Fund was: Facilitator Cost €33,60; Flip char/paper €35; Art supplies & refreshments €160; Monitoring and evaluation €600

Four courses were delivered between 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2016 and 24<sup>th</sup> November, 2017. Course durations and locations were as follows:

- Group 1 – 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2016 to 25<sup>th</sup> November, 2016 – George's Quay
- Group 2 – 3<sup>rd</sup> February, 2017 to 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2017 – George's Quay
- Group 3 – 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 2017 to 26<sup>th</sup> May, 2017 – Nano Nagle Place
- Group 4 – 6<sup>th</sup> October, 2017 to 24<sup>th</sup> November, 2017 – Nano Nagle Place

The first course (Group 1) commenced on 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2016 and ran over 8 weeks for two and a half hours every week. The course ran on Friday afternoons, starting at 2.00 pm and finishing at 4.30 pm with a break at approximately 3.15 pm. This format was followed in subsequent courses.

The facilitators were: Noreen Leahy (a part-time employee of The Lantern) and Geraldine O Connell (contracted for course delivery), and as stated above, both were experienced and qualified facilitators who had worked on the delivery of many courses and sessions in the past.

In terms of session formats, the emphasis was on experiential learning i.e. participants reflecting on their own life experiences. The facilitators focused on key questions referred to above and dealt with these through each successive week, and using a variety of approaches, methods and tools to facilitate reflection and learning. In addition to their training as SHEP facilitators, the facilitators each brought their own unique experience to each session. For example, Geraldine had used movement and dance in previous activities and incorporated these into the sessions.

The objective was to work through participants' understanding of wellbeing, knowing when one is well and when one is distressed, identifying ways to become and stay well and plan to maintain wellbeing.

The facilitators structured each session around these topics and worked with participants to develop an agreement which would keep them safe while in the session space. The principal agreement to listen to others and it was also important to agree that "everything that was said in the room stayed in the room". This was meant to keep participants safe and to enable them to participate as much as they could. If topics or issues arose which were outside the focus or if a person brought up a distressing matter, the facilitators dealt with this outside the group and signposted participants to other services as appropriate.

Otherwise, both facilitators worked with the group jointly and relied on each other to move the learning agenda forward. Tools and techniques used through the sessions included the River Exercise, collages, the memory box, meditation and relaxation techniques, role play, movement and dance. The facilitators ended each session with a short recapitulation of what had gone on in it and they started the subsequent session with a short reference to the previous week's session. These devices were used to affirm learning in the former and in to ground people in the planned activities in the latter.

Each session had two parts with a break between. The break was regarded by the facilitators as an important element in course delivery as it helped people to rest, reflect, meet more informally, bond and recharge for the second half. It also gave people a chance to find out more about the organisation.

There was a progression through the 8-week period facilitated by a focus on different topics every week, revisiting of some topics and emphasising the importance of reflection as a key tool in personal awareness and building coping strategies. At the final session, participants were invited to revisit the collage which they had worked on in the first session and were also asked to complete the SHEP evaluation form. They had been informed about other options

within The Lantern Community Project, within SHEP and had also been made aware of other options and opportunities.

## 3.2 Analysis of Experience of Delivery

We examined the data and information which we collected for preparing this report and referred to in **Section 2** and **Section 3.1**. The following is a presentation of the findings.

### 3.2.1 General Considerations

#### Organisational Context

The setting of the four courses in The Lantern Community Project's premises was a key factor in the programme's successful delivery.

The Lantern Community Project is a "place of welcome". It offers, in common with SHEP, supports to adults to develop greater personal awareness, confidence and capacity to overcome life's challenges and to contribute to family, community and society. It is a place of welcome and support. Indeed, and as evidence of its continued ability to deliver a unique type of support to individuals, while The Lantern Community Project moved from No. 14 George's Quay to the newly refurbished Nano Nagel Place during the year, there was no perceptible change or diminution in the quantity and quality of activities and services offered by The Lantern Community Project. This was also the case for The Caring for Our Wellbeing programme.

According to the Lantern Community Project's website:

*Its broad programme welcomes a wide variety of people from all walks of life and by doing this, it helps people who are experiencing loneliness, isolation and exclusion to get their confidence back and feel they have a worthwhile contribution to make to their families, to their neighbours/communities and to society (<http://lanternproject.ie/what-s-on.html#a-place-of-welcome>)*

Previously and currently, courses are offered in Men's Health and Wellbeing and Women's Health and Wellbeing. Caring for Our Wellbeing was a natural addition to the suite of courses, activities and events offered by the organisation to contribute to its aims.

Fundamental to the work is a commitment to respecting the dignity of each person, their potential to grow and transform and to overcome challenges, the importance of building positive relationships and recognition of the interdependence of personal well-being and community well-being.

The four Caring for Our Wellbeing courses were delivered under The Lantern Community Project's umbrella. This reflects the delivery of the same courses by SHEP facilitators elsewhere in Cork and Kerry.

The Lantern Community Project has a reputation and track record in providing access to community education courses, supports and activities. This helped in the promotion of the courses through established channels, in adding to the credibility of the course offering and in providing supports and signposting services as appropriate. Some of the participants on each of the courses had already been involved with The Lantern in the past and heard about the courses. Some who completed their respective courses became involved in The Lantern's activities afterwards.

It is important to the success of the course delivery that this framework is in place. The facilitators also worked in other roles in The Lantern and this added to their understanding of

the environment and the potential course participants. Were courses to be organised outside of The Lantern's context, it would also have been more difficult to manage the course delivery from an administrative perspective.

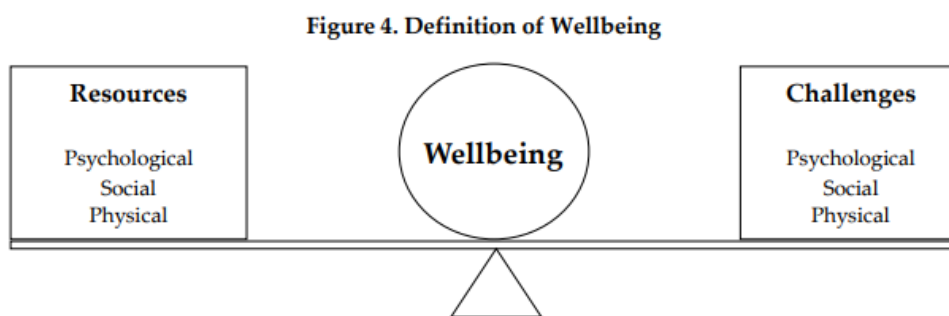
During delivery of the Caring for Our Wellbeing courses, the Lantern Community Project moved from its offices at 14, George's Quay to Nano Nagle Place in Douglas St., but this did not impact negatively on course delivery. In this report writer's view, this is due to the professionalism of the facilitators to keep focused on the course's objectives, to ensure their integrity and the organisation's commitment to maintaining relationships through change.

We regard Caring for Our Wellbeing as a positive addition to the organisation's activities and complemented the organisation's mission and commitment to personal empowerment and its strong links with SHEP which has mutually compatible objectives.

### Definition of Wellbeing

We focused on coming to an understanding of the concept of "well-being" to frame the analysis further as the focus of the courses is on "caring for our well-being"

Dodge et al's article "The challenge of defining wellbeing" is very useful in this respect<sup>3</sup> and we found it helpful in evaluating whether or not the Caring for Our Wellbeing addresses this as a core focus. Dodge sees "wellbeing" as the balance point between an individual's resource pool and the challenges faced, explained diagrammatically as follows:



*The see-saw represents the drive of an individual to return to a set-point for wellbeing ... as well as the individual's need for equilibrium or homeostasis ...(and) ... each time an individual meets a challenge, the system of challenges and resources comes into a state of imbalance, as the individual is forced to adapt to his or her resources to meet this particular challenge... in essence, stable wellbeing is when individuals have the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge. When individuals have more challenges than resources, the see-saw dips, along with their wellbeing and vice-versa (page 230)*

While this type of theoretical framework is not explicitly articulated in the course design and delivery, we consider it useful as another way to analyse the course focus and content.

Through the eight-week programme, the facilitators – using different tools and activities - explore different themes and topics constantly addressing and revisiting the principal questions:

- What is Wellbeing?
- How do I know when I am well?

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<sup>3</sup> The challenge of defining wellbeing | Didge, R., Daly, A., one, J., & Sanders, L. (2012). The International Journal of Wellbeing, 2(3), 222-235. Doi:10.5502/ijwv2i3.4



- What helps me to stay well?
- What happens me when I'm feeling stressed and distressed?
- What can I do about it?

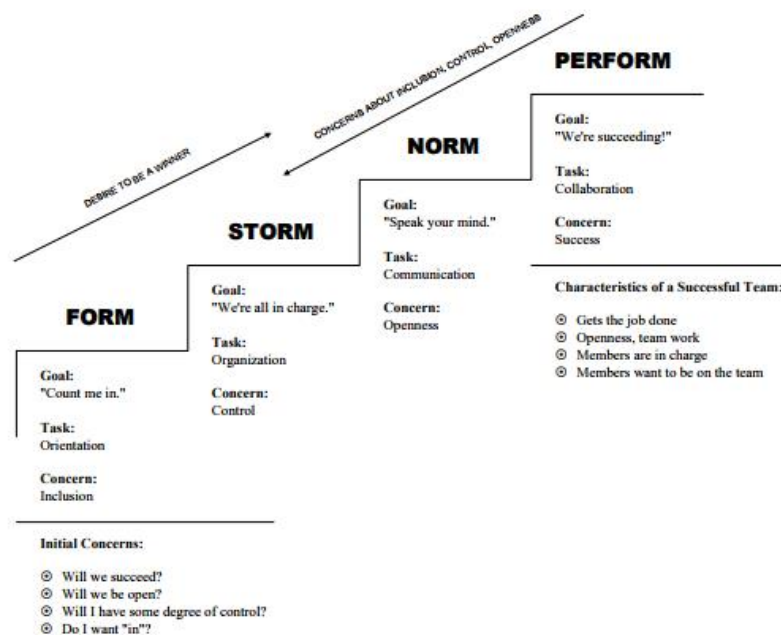
Caring for Our Wellbeing focuses on supporting participants to become more aware of themselves, their strengths and capacities and to balance these with the challenges they have or are facing. The facilitators enable participants to identify those activities (resources) that help to become and stay well (in balance) and to develop strategies to reduce the impact of negative experiences (challenges). Self-awareness and self-acceptance are key parts of this.

In this context, it relates very well to Dodge et al's analysis and definition of attaining a balance between personal resources and challenges faced and is helpful in analysing the course's impact on individuals.

### Group Development

While the focus of Caring for Our Wellbeing was not explicitly on group development but rather on facilitating individuals to learn to care for themselves, it is evident from our review of the experience of course delivery, that groups did form over the 8-week period and this helped in the achievement of course objectives.

This has some resonances with Tuckman's Stages of Group Development<sup>4</sup>, which is represented figuratively below:



Most individuals joined each course on their own, and through work done by the facilitators, began to get involved, to commit, because they felt that the course/group was relevant for them, that they were included, and they could contribute and have some successes. T

These mirror the characteristics of groups formed for other purposes and this contributed to the successful outcomes for individuals. Through the eight-week period, participants in each course felt an increasing sense of belonging and trust and exhibited signs of mutual support.

<sup>4</sup> Tuckman, B. (1965) Development sequence in small groups, Psychological bulleting, 63, 384-399



They were enabled to transcend their own personal realities to consider others' realities and, in this way, gained greater insight into their own lives. Effective involvement in group activity enables participants to communicate more and to feel a sense of accomplishment and success around core issues. In the case of Caring for Our Wellbeing, participants interviewed by us (group and individual discussions) indicated that they had had positive experiences in group settings, felt valued and respected and became more confident through the course delivery. From a situation of not knowing many and being somewhat nervous at the start (forming), to a situation of communicating and participating (performing), the group dynamic grew and enabled participants to gain in positive ways.

### **Facilitator's Expertise**

Both facilitators were trained and experienced in delivering courses in the community. As referred to earlier, both had been trained by SHEP and had delivered several courses for SHEP in the past. QQI agreed SHEP's quality assurance procedures in 2012 for many of its courses. One facilitator was an employee of The Lantern Community Project while the other was contracted for course delivery. With their SHEP background, the facilitators brought a lot of professionalism and experience to course delivery and engagement with participants from the outset to course completion.

It is clear from this report writer's interactions with facilitators over the course of programme delivery and from feedback from participants that they were indeed very experienced in their role as facilitators as evidenced in their use of different approaches, tools and methods. Their competence in these ways contributed to the success of each course and the overall programme.

The facilitators created a space to foster good communication and interaction between group members, they provided direct and unobtrusive assistance and guidance and kept discussions flowing smoothly in each session. They took their responsibilities seriously and were always aware of the challenges which they faced. Their responsibilities included:

- Creating a positive safe space for individuals in the group
- Identifying times if discussions started to fragment or disrupt the follow
- Preventing dominance of individual voices and ensuring inclusion of all voices
- Summarising discussions and conversations
- Bringing closure to sessions with end results or actions
- Dealing with specific issues outside of the scope of the group

The facilitators dealt with challenges regularly faced by participants in a variety of ways, including:

- Continually focusing on and attending to the group
- Being comfortable with ambiguity and information overload
- Processing misperceptions and emotional reactions
- Mindful of not focusing on process at the expense of content
- Helping the group develop so that individuals regain or attain their own autonomy and independence

Both facilitators used a range of techniques and tools in their work during each course and over the whole programme duration. These included: setting ground rules, active listening (encouraging, restating, reflecting, summarising), focused conversation, brainstorming, meditation, relaxation, dance and movement, creating collages and river of life, using memory boxes etc.

In addition to the work which the facilitators undertook in the groups, they also signposted individuals to other services and supports in The Lantern or elsewhere as needed and

appropriate. In their discussions with me, they reported that sometimes, issues arose for a participant which could not be dealt with within the context of the course, or which would have disrupted the flow of the session, and in this case, the facilitators reassured them that they would talk with them after the session. This offer of additional support was invaluable to participants and in their feedback to me, they cited this as a positive aspect to the course.

## **Participants**

### *Targeting of potential participants*

The Lantern Community Project, using links and contacts already established, promoted the Caring for Our Wellbeing courses to other organisations with which it has relationships in the city – Bridge Recovery Project, Cork Simon, HSE (Mental Health Services, Community Work Department), The Homeless Persons' Unit, Edel House, Cork Education and Training Board, Cork City Council. It also was presented at the Cork City Adult Learning Festival in September, 2016 and brochures were distributed around the city. In addition, participants came from other activities in The Lantern or heard about the course through friends. Local radio was also used to promote the course and social media.

The organisation's reputation and links with other organisations and individuals in the city were very helpful in promoting the Caring for Our Wellbeing programme and was a valuable contributor to successful engagement of future course participants.

Potential participants were invited to drop in to talk about the course in advance of its commencement, ask questions and see if it was a good "fit" for them. The facilitators were on hand to answer specific questions and other staff and volunteers at The Lantern who were aware of the course also helped this process. This also gave the facilitators a chance to meet them and start building a relationship with them or adding to a relationship already started. While regular promotional activities are necessary, it is important to The Lantern to start a relationship with potential participants as early as possible to build trust and good communication as these will act as a constructive basis for future involvement in – in this case – the Caring for Our Wellbeing course.

Relationship-building is regarded by The Lantern Community Project's staff as an important aspect of its work and this approach, while needing an investment of time on the part of staff, makes good sense, is respectful of people and contributes to successful course delivery including Caring for Our Wellbeing.

### *Participant Profile*

Through personal contact and general promotional activities undertaken by The Lantern Community Project, people were encouraged to register for Caring for Our Wellbeing. In addition, some had been referred to The Lantern Community Project by other services in the city. Some had previously been involved with organisation while for others, this was their first time to undertake an activity with the organisation.

The following summarises some of the principal highlights of course registration. It describes on numbers participating and gender breakdown in each course:

<b>Course No.</b>	<b>No. of Participants</b>	<b>Gender Breakdown</b>
<b>1</b>	15	85% female
<b>2</b>	13	61% female
<b>3</b>	18	83% female
<b>4</b>	16	81% female
<b>Total</b>	<b>62</b>	
Average all courses	<b>16</b>	<b>78% female</b>

The average number of participants in each course was 16. Of 62 people participating in all courses, 22% were men while 78% were women. This latter is a notable statistic and demonstrates the higher level of interest in this course on the part of women. It would be interesting to explore this phenomenon further, but this is outside the scope of this report.

In terms of participants' origins, according to our research, the Caring for Our Wellbeing course participants came predominantly from Cork city and its immediate surrounding areas and we also interviewed three people from county towns who came on a weekly basis to their respective courses. Some participants lived nearby and either walked or took buses to the centre (either in its location at George's Quay for the first course or at Nano Nagle Place for the subsequent courses).

No specific information was available on participants' age profile (as this data was not collected by the course organisers) but we observed that the average age cohort was between 40 and 50 years of age with less than 5% being under 30 and approximately 15% being in their 30s and the same percentage being in their 50s.

According to the course organisers and verified by some participants interviewed by this writer, some participants had experienced homelessness, addiction or mental health difficulties in their lives. Some continued to experience difficulties and their participation in this course and sometimes in other activities organised by The Lantern on the premises was important to them, according to their own feedback. Some individuals had been or continued to engage with services such as mental health, homeless and addiction services, but appreciated the value of their participation in Caring for Our Wellbeing.

Indeed, many individuals interviewed by this writer had complicated lives with many challenges. Those referred to by participants included low self-esteem, lack of confidence, difficult family backgrounds, experience of loss and bereavement and sometimes complicated by addiction issues. In their feedback to us, participants' reasons for doing the course included their wanting to find a place and a way of dealing with these challenges.

We observed during our time visiting the organisation for this evaluation that the profile of course participants was similar to that of other people who use The Lantern's services or participate in its activities.

### *Course Attendance*

Prior to each course's commencement, the Lantern Community Development Workers spoke to many potential participants either on a one-to-one or at the organisation's open Coffee Morning or with a referring agency e.g. South Lee Mental Health Service or Headway and the potential participant. Some potential participants came through SHEP by means of telephone contact.

Staff spoke (in person or by telephone) with all potential participants to provide more information on the course and its objectives and to answer questions and provide clarifications. Some people had expressed an interest in participating in courses prior to their commencement but did not engage thereafter.

The course organisers stated that there was scope to join a course up to two weeks into its delivery, but the course was closed thereafter as each group had already formed its own dynamic and it would not be appropriate to allow new people to join. There was some variation in attendance levels in each course over the 8-week delivery period.

Course No.	Average weekly attendance	Average % attendance	Nos. attending 75% +
1	11	75%	10
2	9	66%	7
3	11	62%	10
4	8	52%	7
Total	<b>10 per course</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>34</b>

Course 1 had the most consistent weekly attendance with 75% attending on average and, of these, 10 participants attending 6 or more sessions. Course 4 had the lowest average weekly attendance at just over 52% with 7 of these participants attending 6 or more sessions.

Reasons for non-starting, sporadic attendance and/or non-completion were varied.

According to the facilitators, some people felt overwhelmed or unable to do the course and did not attend the first week or subsequently. While some did not attend courses, it was reported to this writer that they attended other activities organised at The Lantern Community Project.

The facilitators reported to us that participants were very good at giving apologies if they could not attend. Some had hospital appointments, family commitments, life events which interfered in their participation. The facilitators regularly followed up with people who did not attend to make sure that they were alright.

### 3.3 Analysis of the Experience of Participation

We have reviewed the participants' experience of participation through analysing the information collected through the creative pieces, the completed survey forms and the individual and group discussions (see appendices). This analysis is presented under a number of headings below:

#### Participants' view of facilitators

The facilitators' use of a variety of tools and techniques was clearly welcomed by participants. Participants were exposed to these throughout the 8-week course as facilitators used tools and techniques in a variety of ways to achieve their objectives. From our review of activities through course delivery, the facilitators remained neutral and non-judgemental throughout the process and were committed to the process of discovery on an individual and group basis.

Participants' were universally praiseworthy of both facilitators and this demonstrates a. that they did their job well and b. that they did not take a partisan approach or single people out in any way. All participants interviewed by this report writer felt that they were listened to, respected and supported in their involvement. Some activities – for example – doing the

River Exercise or the Collage – were new to participants and some felt slightly awkward at the outset, but once their purposes were explained, they undertook them enthusiastically.

According to participants, the facilitators made sure that everyone was involved in each session through, among other things, ensuring that everyone had equal opportunities to contribute and that they felt safe to do so. Participants reported that they were able to leave each session with a sense of optimism and with energy to face the next week.

### **Being respected & feeling safe**

Course participants felt very supported throughout their involvement in their respective groups and this helped them to participate more fully. The fact that they negotiated a contract at the start of their respective course made them feel comfortable and safe. This contract was often revisited by the facilitators and participants to check that it remained intact. Participants stated that the facilitators handled the course very well and ensured that all participants were listened to, respected and felt safe within the context of each session.

This idea of personal safety was raised by people in both individual and group discussions. People liked the confidentiality element and the fact that everyone signed a “contract” at the outset to observe people’s privacy. This put people at ease and also gave them scope to share without judgement.

### **Being part of a group**

International research demonstrates the value of participation in activities which provide support and care for people who may be under stress in their lives<sup>5</sup>. At the very least, people need to be in a safe place and feel that they are listened to. This potentially provides scope for them to quieten, reflect, consider options and develop coping strategies. The availability of the course provided this space and the activities undertaken by the facilitators to achieve the objectives meant that participants were engaged, felt listened and appreciated, interacted with others, and worked towards outcomes.

This was evident from our discussions with groups and participants and evidenced in their returned survey forms and other materials produced by them during their involvement in the course.

In this context, it is evident that the facilitators managed each session very well, with every participant contributing in one way or another, listening to others and talking when they felt comfortable to do so. The facilitators focused mainly on the topic of Wellbeing. By interacting with others who came to the course with an interest in caring for their Wellbeing, and hearing their story, participant realised that they were not alone.

Experiences like depression or bereavement can be isolating and group activity can be a positive way of overcoming these feelings of isolation and realising that others have similar experiences. By being involved in a group of people who share the same issues, one can feel that they understand how one feels more than others who may not have had the same experience of the problem or issue with which one is dealing.

Many of the principals of this way of working with groups are common to other fields such as group counselling, group therapy, support groups, skills’ development groups or interpersonal process groups.

Caring for Our Wellbeing has much in common with the characteristics and benefits of group therapy though it does not purport to be group therapy by any means. We have some

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<sup>5</sup> Example: Journal of Gerontology: Series B, Volume 53B, Issue 5, September, 1998: Stress Reduction for Family Caregivers: Effects of Adult Day Care Use, Zarit, S., Stephens, M.A., Townsend, A., Greene, R.

general observations about participants' experience of the group sessions based on our findings in this evaluation report and placing this in the context of a brief analysis of the benefits of group therapy available at [www.bestpsychologydegrees.com](http://www.bestpsychologydegrees.com)<sup>6</sup>:

- Participants revealed much of their interior lives and experiences to others and agreed to a contract of confidentiality so that each could feel comfortable sharing in a warm, supportive and non-judgemental environment
- Group members realised they were not alone in their struggles and this validated what they were going through. They also felt supported in their journey in a way that they had not heretofore
- By hearing from other people with similar or shared experiences, they gained a wider perspective on their own situation and this could potentially help them deal with their own issues more effectively
- By providing insights to others in the group, they could potentially build their own self-confidence and belief in their abilities in coping with their own issues
- By being involved in the group setting over a series of weeks, each participant's sense of their own isolation was eased as they engaged with others and participants were able to communicate their feelings more clearly and also to listen to others in an active way. They noticed that there was a drop in their anxiety levels through the course duration
- Participants were able to observe others in the group, give valuable feedback and benefit from social interactions and enabled them to transcend their own struggles through experiencing their common humanness with others fighting similar battles
- By participating in the group, individuals experienced compassion, respect and honesty and this created a community of trust among them while involved and has potential for more after their involvement

### **Feeling involved**

Participants became involved in the Caring for Our Wellbeing course for a variety of reasons but mostly because they felt overwhelmed by the level of stress, anxiety or depression they experienced in their lives and how this was impacting on them.

Of those interviewed by telephone or in person by this report writer, all had, very positive things to say and none regretted their involvement. Individuals had many opportunities to engage in each session during course delivery.

According to those interviewed and presented also in the returned survey forms, they felt listened to, respected and supported – both by the facilitators and the other participants. They were aware of the rules and found that these helped to keep things on track and provided safety.

Participants felt that the facilitators handled each session well, moved things along, used a variety of tools and approaches and kept the momentum going. The facilitators gave space at the start of each session to summarise the previous session's work and wrapped up each session by summarising what was covered.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.bestpsychologydegrees.com/faq/what-are-the-benefits-of-group-therapy/>

Participants noted that if a person had an issue which could not be dealt with in the group setting or which was inappropriate in that setting, the facilitators undertook to support the person outside of the group. Their praise of the facilitators was extremely positive, and they stated that it worked well because of them. The facilitators were very different from each other, but there was great complementarity which added to what was on offer.

Some of those interviewed already had been involved with The Lantern Community Project in different ways and they found that Caring for Our Wellbeing was a great addition to what the organisation offered. They stated that it was great to be involved in something that allowed one to become more aware of oneself, to learn to care for oneself and to acquire strategies which would allow them to cope in the future. This was echoed by those participants who had no previous involvement with the organisation.

**Appendix 2** presents a description of a sample of participants' stated experiences in their respective groups<sup>7</sup>, some of the highlights are presented below:

- Things learned during the course – learning about myself, being kind to myself, setting boundaries, it's okay to say "no", learning to work as a group
- Most enjoyable aspects of the course – supportive group, very easy going, time to myself and the facilitators – they were the glue!

It became clear to this writer that each session facilitated by the two facilitators needed to be totally safe spaces without any indication of outside influence or without being modified by participants having to be mindful that they had to temper their views to satisfy an external evaluator's expectations.

Participants felt that there was a "togetherness", a sense of not being alone or isolated, by being involved in their respective groups.

In summary, and reflecting on the course objectives, facilitators worked with participants to address the questions asked at the outset and which are the focus of the Caring for Our Wellbeing course. They focused on defining the concept of "wellbeing" by exploring it in different ways through participants' own experiences. They enabled participants to consider time when they felt "well" and what helped them to be well and stay well. They reviewed coping strategies and ways through which participants could handle times of stress and distress.

### **The journey towards self-awareness**

In their feedback to this report writer in group and individual discussions (**Appendix 3 and 4** refer), participants stated that they felt vulnerable prior to undertaking the course and were searching for something to help them.

Some people said there was an imbalance in their lives which was impacting on them in a negative way – many for long periods of time. Some had previously engaged with various services (e.g. counselling, therapy etc.) and had been involved with other activities at The Lantern Community Project, while others had not. Some participants stated they had certain issues (e.g. addiction) with which they were dealing. Some were dealing with very pressurised home situations which created a lot of stress for them. These challenges – psychological, social and physical – made life quite challenging for them. In their efforts to deal with these, they searched for support to help them.

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<sup>7</sup> Based on survey forms completed by participants in all courses were examined by this report writer



For those already engaged with the Lantern Community Project, they realised that Caring for Our Wellbeing was a course which could support them. Others heard about it at The Lantern Community Project's Open Day, at Cork's Lifelong Learning Festival, through social media, promotions and through word of mouth. For all, they identified Caring for Our Wellbeing as a way through which they could regain their balance in their lives.

While participants recognised that they were still on the journey at the end of the specific course in which they were involved, their increased self-awareness – gained through the course – was regarded by participants as the means through which they could move forward.

Indeed, some participants told this report writer that they planned to continue to be involved with The Lantern Community Project and to undertake other courses and activities which would nourish their wellness. Others not continuing with The Lantern Community Project stated that they were more confident, had more skills and wherewithal to continue in their lives.

It is evident from our discussions with participants (**Appendix 3** and **4**) that they did indeed undertake a journey through the eight-week period, to an understanding of themselves and others, their experiences, the challenges faced, the positives in their lives, the creation of space to take charge of their lives and consideration of ways to nurture themselves in the future.

The collages produced by participants were used to trigger a memory of how they were at the beginning of the respective course in which they were involved and the facilitators charted where they were at the end of the course.

In addition to collages, participants were asked by the facilitators to draw "A River" to write down or draw a word or symbol to represent how they were at the beginning of each session and at the end of each session. It is noted by those involved in personal development studies that reflection is a valuable tool in personal awareness-raising. Some "River" images are also presented at **Appendix 1**.

In their feedback to this report writer - either in a group or in individual context - participants noted an increased awareness on their part and ability to manage their lives in a better way and also stated that the positive changes are noticed by family and friends.

### **The importance of boundaries**

In their feedback to this report writer in the interviews and supported by the Survey Forms, participants cited the work they did on setting boundaries as part of their key learning in the course in which they were involved.

It is noted that of us have poor boundaries at one time or another in our lives. We often get caught up in other people's problems and treat them as if they are our own. This can sometimes lead to situations where we may be manipulated and used. There are many reasons why we ignore boundaries and have much to do with our belief about being accommodating and helpful and, wanting to be liked.

Boundaries are a necessary tool of personal well-being and help a person to filter out what is acceptable in one's life and what is not. The underlying principle is that healthy personal boundaries help rebuild and maintain positive self-concept. Healthy boundaries mean that one can take better care of oneself and not allow others to define who one is.

The facilitators worked with participants to identify their own personal boundaries in the light of their own personalities and life circumstances – to learn about the self. They helped them



to affirm their own needs by working through a list of their own needs and beliefs. It was clear from the feedback from participants to this report writer that some participants had deprioritised their own needs in their lives and put more emphasis on other people's needs. Others had, according to themselves, lost their perspective and were unsure of themselves and their own sense of self.

Through group discussions and personal reflection, participants focused on, among other things, to what extent their own boundaries were helping or hindering the satisfaction of their own needs.

According to authoritative research in various psychology journals, different types of boundaries are appropriate in different settings. So, what is appropriate when one is with friends or family may not be appropriate in a work setting. For example, if one shares personal information with strangers, this may damage one's confidence in oneself. Most healthy boundaries involve one making a judgement between what to share and what not to share, valuing one's own opinion and not getting over-involved in other people's problems.

Through the course, facilitators enabled participants to reflect on their life experience, the life experiences of others and to build their trust and belief in themselves and that, in this context, healthy boundaries allowed them to take better care of themselves in every way. The evidence for this is presented in the material produced by participants (collages, river of life) and in their completed survey forms as well as their feedback to this report writer in individual and group discussions.

Participants learned that personal boundaries are important – they determine how we approach relationships in our lives. They help us to keep in tune with our desires, needs and feelings and enable us to reject things that we don't want to do and accept things that we want to do. Good boundaries help us to become less concerned with how we are viewed and more satisfied with our own self-perception.

Participants became aware of the importance of boundaries for self-preservation and protection and by recognising that boundaries are important they also realised that they could be able to offer more to others while protecting themselves.

### **Self-growth and empowerment**

Aside from learning about boundaries, participants learned about caring for themselves, knowing who one's friends are and when to walk away from some situations and they learned about the value of reflecting and stopping before "diving in" to some situations.

The Caring for Our Well-being Course places an emphasis on self-growth and empowerment through creative activities and opportunities for relaxation and fun which are some of the main bases of learning. As Adams (2008) notes: "Empowerment is about taking control, achieving self-direction, seeking inclusiveness rooted in connectedness with the experiences of other people" (p. 18)<sup>8</sup>. Freire states that "... each wins back (his/her) own right to say (his/her) own word, to name the world" (1973, pp. 11-13)<sup>9</sup>.

Much has been written about the concept of empowerment. While this is beyond the scope of this report, it is evident that, by participating in the course, each person acquired tools and strategies to deal with their lives in a proactive way.

Participants worked on developing their own wellness plans through which they could work towards getting a balance through healthful practices and attitudes. They covered many

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<sup>8</sup> Adams, R. (2008). Empowerment, participation and social work. Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan

<sup>9</sup> Freire, P. (1973). Pedagogy of the oppressed. New York: Seabury

topics to do with wellness – physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual and social – and identified areas which had become unbalanced and strategies to address these imbalances – to come back to a point where there was equilibrium in their lives.

### **Coping strategies**

Strategies learned about included doing more physical exercises, journaling, spending time with good people, engaging in artistic pursuits, pursuing one's love of music, getting connected with nature and things that feed the soul, taking care of one's body through good diet, having enough sleep, quieting one's mind through relaxation, meditation and setting goals. A key strategy about which participants spoke was that of asking for help when one needs it. Another strategy spoken about was that of thinking before acting and becoming more reflective – so that one could prepare more carefully for situations.

The facilitators worked through many of the key coping skills which help an individual to deal with stress and anxiety including grounding (through the meditative and relaxation activities at the start and closure of each session), distractions (thinking about hobbies or things they like to do that are fun), scope for emotional release (creating a non-judgemental safe place where people could be honest and authentic with themselves and with others), thinking about ways in which other people live their lives and learning from this and considering ways to help others (accessing one's higher self).

This report writer noted that the group context was also a microcosm of the wider community and that the participants' ability to participate and be self-realised in this context was also a reflection of how they could do similar outside of the group. Their increased self-awareness, the supportive environment in which they found themselves and their freedom to be themselves as well as respecting others were all reflections of what they should strive for when outside the group.

Several participants told this report writer that their lives outside the group had begun to alter in a positive way because of their involvement in the course. They observed that friends and family saw these changes in them and recognised them as a positive development for the person.

### **Planning for the future**

It was evident from the various interactions with participants that they were looking to the future in a more positive way than they had before they started the Caring for Our Wellbeing Course. They were making positive choices and decisions in their lives in a way that they were not able to do prior to their participation in the course. This is a very powerful thing to say. They felt they had acquired coping strategies and increased their self-awareness in a very positive way.

In concluding comments to this evaluator in the group discussions, it was clear that they had plans to either continue taking courses (in The Lantern, in SHEP) or to ensure that they would take the lessons from the course and apply them in their lives.

Most of those interviewed wanted to continue being involved with The Lantern Community Project in one way or another. For example, for those interviewed before Summer, 2017, many took part in workshops and activities held over the summer period. A few, while they had enjoyed their experience, were ready to move on to other activities outside of the organisation. Most wanted to remain engaged.

All interviewees stated that this course is an absolute necessity for future planning for other individuals. They recommended that it should continue, a few stated that the course

duration should be longer or that there should be a subsequent course. All stated that it should be offered to others as they had derived great benefit from it.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

Caring for Our Well Being complemented other activities undertaken by The Lantern Community Project. Course organisers were able to use existing promotional channels to engage participants and the average participation rate in each course was 16, mostly female, and the majority of whom were aged between 40 and 50.

The courses were well thought out in terms of purpose, content, facilitation and activities and resulted in significant positive impacts on participants who developed a clear set of skills and strategies to go forward in their lives in a way which they could not possibly have envisaged prior to their involvement. The experience was quite transformational for all and this was noticed by their family and friends and they felt empowered to plan for their futures in positive ways. Some decided to continue being involved in The Lantern, some opted to explore courses organised by SHEP and others were planning new activities in their lives which was a shift away from what they had previously done.

## Section 4: Observations & Recommendations

### 4.1 Observations

Caring for Our Wellbeing is one of the most relevant courses being offered at present and the only one of its kind being offered in Cork City. It is less a course than a series of progressive sessions, facilitated by highly professional individuals, with a well-thought rationale and purpose, appropriate course structure and content, use of relevant methods and tools to optimise outputs and outcomes with a deep commitment to individuals who find themselves in challenging situations and who are trying to build their ability to deal with these in a positive and constructive way. Specific observations are presented below:

1. Caring for Our Wellbeing is a perfect fit for The Lantern Community Project in terms of achieving outcomes which are compatible with the organisation's purpose and objectives and added to what the organisation can offer to participants and potential participants in its activities, projects and courses.
2. The partnership between SHEP and The Lantern Community Project which has built up over many years provided a constructive basis for being able to set up and deliver Caring for Our Wellbeing and the course objectives also reflected SHEP's mission and core values.<sup>10</sup>
3. The organisation's strong relationships with other agencies in Cork city were invaluable prior to, and during, course delivery. Some participants were signposted to the course by these agencies and some continued to support participants while they were involved in courses.
4. The approach and delivery of each course allowed for the fulfilment of the original objectives which were:
  - To give participants an opportunity to explore the idea of Wellbeing
  - To identify what supports their Wellbeing and what undermines it
  - To identify what helps them with their distress
  - To take responsibility for their Wellbeing, developing a plan for themselves which is realistic, and which takes account of the reality of human vulnerability and distress in life
  - To enjoy time to care for themselves
5. The successful delivery on the course objectives was primarily due to the quality of facilitation provided by the two facilitators and was further enhanced by their knowledge of other pathways and supports to which they guided participants as appropriate.

The professionalism of the two facilitators was impressive and ensured successful outcomes for course participants. Both facilitators were highly trained and experienced and though they had not worked together before, their styles complemented each other, and the outcomes were greater than they would have been with only one facilitator present. In addition to their professional abilities, their empathy, respect and sensitivity to participants meant that the latter felt really supported through the course delivery. The availability of two facilitators was vital in

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<sup>10</sup> SHEP's vision is to work towards: *the creation of a socially just world, where all people live in dignity, where we cherish and celebrate each other and ourselves and where the integrity of the earth is honoured. Its core values include: belief in each person's dignity, people's potential to grow and transform, the reality of human struggles and vulnerabilities and the interdependence of personal well-being and community well-being* (<https://www.socialandhealth.com/about-us/mission-core-values/>)

achieving constructive outcomes as they could provide a wider range of activities within the context of each session thus optimising participants' engagement as well as identifying times when participants needed additional supports.

6. The delivery of four Caring for Our Wellbeing courses in an accessible city centre location helped SHEP achieve its objectives in terms of community education.
7. Many community education initiatives are traditionally focused on hobby or recreational activities and many training, and education activities are oriented towards skills' enhancement and accreditation.

This series of courses is focused on personal capacity-building for people who feel vulnerable or challenged in their lives and in many ways, this type of course should be a precursor to getting involved in other progression activities as it can build one's capacities and resilience. It is also a course which could be available alongside other personal development activities and, we believe, could be offered on a much wider basis throughout communities so that individual and community capacity is fostered and enhanced.

8. The availability of this course alongside other courses and activities in the organisation's premises – first at 14 George's Quay and later at Nano Nagle Place, meant that participants could meet and interact with others and experience the benefits of being part of a wider circle of people and this added to the value of participation in the courses.
9. The timing and scheduling of courses on Friday afternoons seemed to suit most participants. The ease of access at 14 George's Quay was a positive feature (especially for those using Cork city bus services) but we received no negative responses about the movement to Nano Nagle Place as it was regarded as central for most people. The two-and-a-half-hour duration of each session, with a break in-between, appeared to suit all participants. It gave enough time for personal immersion and group activities and allowed the facilitators to progress the work in a substantial way. It also provided an opportunity for participants to socialise with each other and to meet others using The Lantern Community Project's premises in a casual way.
10. The session structure was relevant and constructive in achieving the outcomes. The facilitators started each session with a recapitulation of the previous session's outcomes and completed the session with a summary of outcomes. The facilitators kept the momentum of topics flowing without pressurising participants. Any issues not directly relevant to the session's objectives were dealt with by the facilitators outside of the session time.
11. The ground rules and contract agreed by participants in each course were vital elements of course delivery and provided safety and comfort for them which in turn created an atmosphere of sharing and interpersonal communication essential for the success of the course.
12. Though the theoretical background was never explicit in the course design and delivery, there are resonances to practices in other fields such as those in group development work, group therapy and in understanding of approaches to fostering wellbeing and generating coping strategies. Indeed, the facilitators' focus on building the group was most helpful in achieving objectives. While some people knew each other prior to the course, many did not, and the group-based activities helped to cement and unite individuals around collective challenges and

identification of solutions and the impact of this was recognised by participants in their discussions with us afterwards.

13. The range of methods, tools and techniques used by the facilitators to encourage participation and to progress towards achievement of the objectives was imaginative and inspiring – and fun! The facilitators were flexible and adapted their approaches in the sessions to maximise outputs. They blended physical activities with more sedentary activities to ensure that results were optimised and that participants got as much as they could from each session. Some of the activities pushed people “outside their comfort zone” and this led to their being able to reflect on their lives in different ways including gaining insight into challenges and how they could strategise and plan to attain positive outcomes.
14. Evidence collected and analysed during the evaluation points to the transformational impact of people's involvement in respective courses. People felt safe, able to communicate, to share and through these felt a sense of belonging and personal security. This opened up the opportunity for growing self-awareness, increased confidence and self-esteem, consideration of other people's existences and looking towards the higher self. On a practical level, but enabled by the transformative work undertaken in the group context, individuals learned or relearned strategies to help them to cope with challenges, with stress and anxiety and at the end they all stated that they felt more empowered and ready for the future
15. Participants interviewed for this evaluation on an individual or group basis had no criticisms whatsoever and were especially praiseworthy about the facilitators. Everybody stated that they were delighted to have been involved, that, while some activities were challenging at times, they derived a lot of positives from it, gained insights into their own realities and were in a better place at the end of it. No one regretted having done the course and most wanted to continue working on themselves in one way or another. Some would have liked the course to have been longer or to have a second course.
16. The challenge of access to continuous, consistent financial resourcing is one which was also faced by the course promoters. Non-profit organisations like The Lantern Community Project continually face this challenge and it is difficult to devise a long-term strategy when funding is not guaranteed. Caring for Our Wellbeing is a key vehicle of change that could be offered to people in the long-term but needs to be adequately resourced so that there can be confidence about the future.
17. We recognise that many participants in The Lantern Community Project's activities are in vulnerable situations and are sometimes challenged by life's circumstances. Reasons for this are complex and are derived from both internal and external conditions. It can be difficult for people to move from a situation of being and feeling socially isolated to one where one feels and is included.

While Caring for Our Wellbeing can offer support and potential to participants, it is limited, and more things need to happen for people to move from a situation of disempowerment to one of empowerment. The Lantern Community Project offers a great deal of support to individuals – including caring for Our Wellbeing – but more needs to happen at community and societal level for true transformation to happen and social justice to prevail.

## 4.2 Recommendations

1. Caring for Our Wellbeing needs to remain as a central pillar of course delivery for The Lantern Community Project as it imbibes the principles, vision and core values of the organisation and is compatible with those of SHEP as the originator of the programme.
2. The facilitation model used in course delivery needs to be continued and resourced appropriately. Two facilitators need to be in place to optimise outcomes for participants and to ensure their safety while involved.
3. The organisation could consider ideas around group workshops, greater access to low-cost counselling, extension of courses to a second or follow-on course activity.
4. Extra informational resources could be developed and made available to course participants on supports and services in Cork city and county and nationwide.
5. Progression routes (formal/non-formal/informal) could be further explored and communicated to participants so that they can identify pathways for themselves.
6. Long-term continuous funding needs to be sourced to allow for course programme to be delivered on a multi-annual basis. Ideally, this would be part of a larger funding proposal to support the organisation's activities as a key contributor to personal empowerment and capacity-building in the city and surrounding area.



## Section 5: Conclusion

From the outset, this was a thought-provoking and interesting assignment. We had already been aware of the work of The Lantern Community Project and its mission and philosophy through other work. We were also familiar with the work of the Social and Health Education Project and could see how and why the Caring for Our Wellbeing course became such an integral part of the latter organisation's offering to local communities.

The Lantern Community Project is unique in what it offers and how it goes about its work and indeed, this was one of the main conclusions of an organisational evaluation conducted in 2015<sup>11</sup>. Those who work for it are steeped in community development and community education and the importance of valuing experiential learning as a way forward for individuals and groups.

Caring for Our Wellbeing brings together everything that is important in The Lantern Community Project's philosophy and as such could become a cornerstone of its future identity.

The fact that the courses were delivered within a well-established organisation in the city centre, which has a strong reputation and credibility, contributed to their success. The practical supports offered through the availability of a quality physical space were also important. Participants could have their breaks in comfort, could meet others and, if they were not already, part of The Lantern Community Project's community, they could feel welcomed and included.

While there are some challenges in terms of commitment and retention of participants, the quality of course delivery and content are excellent. This is largely down to the excellence of the facilitators whose experience, wisdom, sensitivity and abilities are second to none. The value added by the availability of two facilitators in each session is vital for its success and the impact and outcomes would be diminished if this team was not available.

The partnership approach adopted at pre-delivery, delivery and post-delivery stages helped in the successful implementation and positive outcomes for the participants and the organisation. On a practical level, the facilitators were able, for example, to signpost participants to other support services as appropriate. On a theoretical level, The Lantern Community Project was able to garner the insights and supports of experts from the HSE, SHEP and others as needed at different times. Partnership is a key element of successful delivery of community education and empowerment initiatives.

We are grateful to participants for sharing their experiences with us and without their cooperation we would not have been able to prepare this report. We are also grateful to the staff, to SHEP personnel, and especially, the course facilitators, for their interest and insights.

We hope that this evaluation will be useful to the project, to SHEP and to current and future sponsors and funders.

*Evaluator Kearney*

**Kearney Consultants & Trainers**

*April, 2018*

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<sup>11</sup> Kearney Consultants & Trainers Evaluation of The Lantern Community Project for The Presentation Sisters, 2015



## Appendices

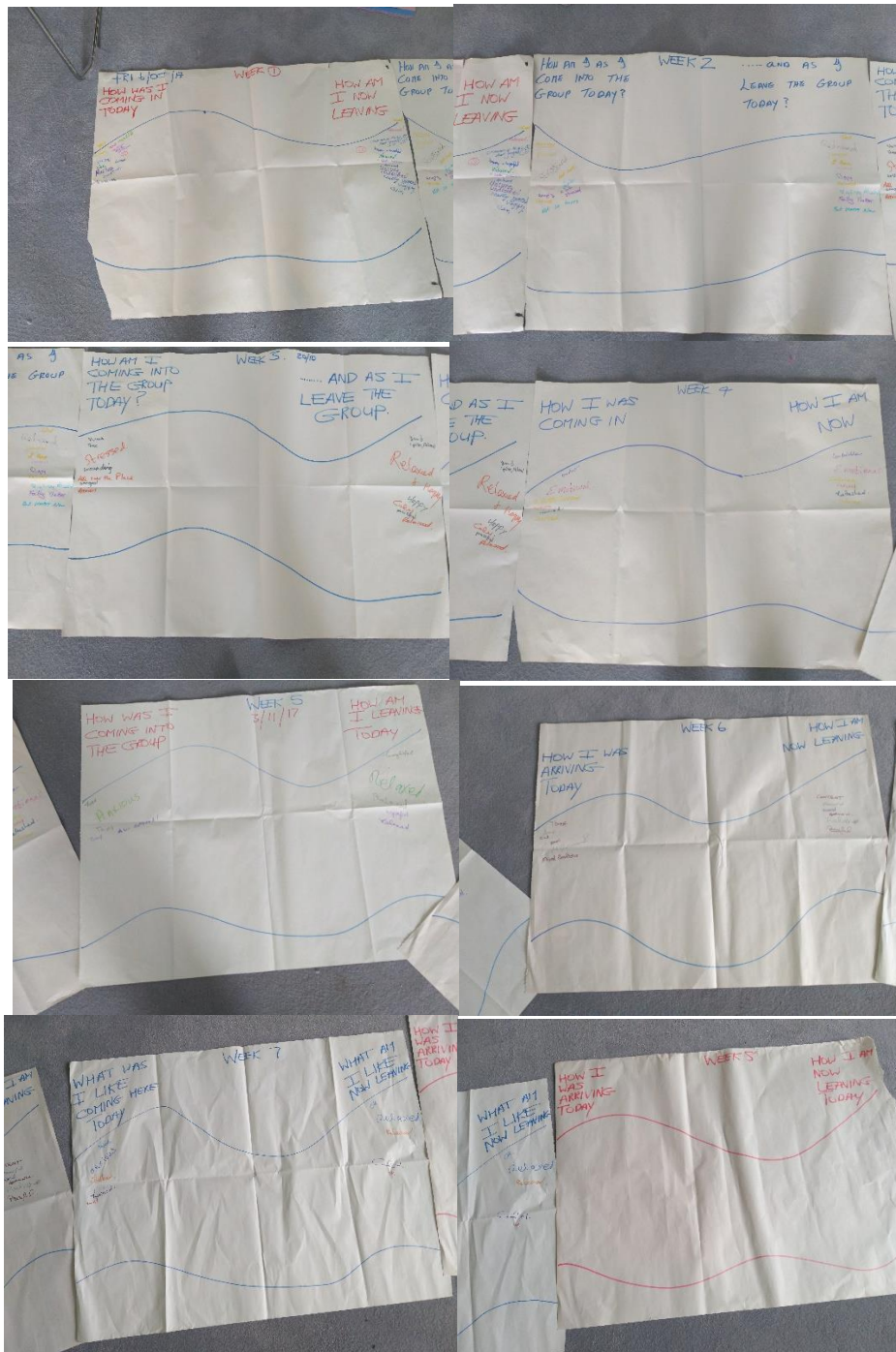
No.	Title
<b>Appendix 1</b>	Review of cross-section of River drawings & Collages
<b>Appendix 2</b>	Survey Forms
<b>Appendix 3</b>	Group Discussions
<b>Appendix 4</b>	Individual Discussions

## Appendix 1: Review of cross-section of Collages & River drawings

**Collages** – a representative sample of collages assembled by people during their participation in a Caring for our Well-being Course. Participants started their collages in Week 1 and returned to them in Week 8.



**The River drawings** – These images of flipchart pages are from Course 4 with the river starting at top left and finishing on bottom right.



## Appendix 2: Survey Forms

The principal questions asked in the survey forms which were administered on the last day of each course by the course facilitators were as follows:

1. Name three things you have learnt during the course
2. What did you enjoy most about the course?
3. What was the most helpful aspect of the course?
4. What were the greatest challenges for you during the course?
5. What might have improved the course?
6. How would you rate the skills and style of the facilitators in helping you to learn? (1 = not very good, 10 = excellent)
7. How would you rate the course overall? (1 = not very worthwhile, 10 = excellent)
8. How would you rate your own learning from the course? (1 = not much learning, 10 = a great deal of learning)
9. Any other comments?

The following is a summary of responses of 12 participants to the survey forms which they completed on Week 8 of their respective courses:

*Name three things you have learnt during the course*

Have learnt to take time out for myself

Selfcare, value myself more, to be myself

Learning about myself, taking my life back, loved it

Care more for my well-being, listen to what my body is telling me, be mindful of caring about other people

Things I can do that help my well-being, how to get back on track when I become unwell, taking care of myself isn't selfish

That it's ok to be kind to myself, set limits, self-awareness

That it's ok to say no

That it's ok and safe to put myself and my needs first

That boundaries are a necessary tool of well-being

Learning more about myself

Learning to work as a group

Respect one another

*What did you enjoy most about the course?*

Relaxation techniques, movement, collage

Very easy going, but good learning in it

Meeting people, having time to myself

Group cup of coffee and time for a chat

Group was very supportive, and group felt safe

Lovely group that gelled well together, and the getting to know each person was lovely

The facilitators! They were the glue! And the loving energy!

Time to myself and to meet other people

The different things we did every week

*What was the most helpful aspect of the course?*

Safety, confidentiality

Easy going nature of it and facilitators

Everything

Being a good listener

Facilitators were welcoming, friendly and very helpful

Being able to feel comfortable enough to talk about personal things (and get time too)

The toolbox exercise along with the gentle movements  
Caring for myself and my well-being  
I found out a lot about myself  
Working together with other people

*What were the greatest challenges for you during the course?*

Speaking out  
A bit shy at the start, but became more confident  
Coming out of my shell  
To make sure I attended the whole 8-week course  
Speaking in front of other people is difficult for me, but the group was supportive and helpful with it  
Making or taking the time to get there on time  
Controlling my emotions, learning to respond and not react  
To get to course on time

*What might have improved the course?*

0  
0  
Everything was great  
Nothing - everything was fantastic  
Follow-up group after the course, longer course  
Thought the course was perfect for me (and thank you both)  
Everything was perfect  
For me to be at the course on time

*How would you rate the skills and style of the facilitators in helping you to learn? (1 = not very good, 10 = excellent)*

All respondents returned 10 as their answer

*How would you rate the course overall? (1 = not very worthwhile, 10 = excellent)*

All respondents returned 10 as their answer

*How would you rate your own learning from the course? (1 = not much learning, 10 = a great deal of learning)*

Eleven respondents returned 10 as their answer, 1 gave their answer as 5

*Any other comments?*

Really enjoyed the course  
Very much enjoyed the course, felt very relaxed & comfortable  
Thank you for everything and God bless you all  
I'd like a follow-on course, facilitators were fantastic, a credit to SHEP, worked well together  
No comments  
Really enjoyed the 8 weeks and challenge of getting there  
This was the best course I ever did  
I loved meeting people and realising that we have a lot in common



## Appendix 3 – Selection of Group Discussions

### Group 1 – 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2016 to 25<sup>th</sup> November, 2016

*Discussion with 9 participants, 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2017 – location George's Quay*

We discussed participants' experience of the Caring for Our Well-being Course held at The Lantern in late 2016 (when the organisation was still located at George's Quay). The following is a short reflective paragraph which we prepared as part of an interim report to The Lantern.

Of nine people interviewed by us in March, four had never previously been involved with The Lantern. Regardless of their previous experience, all participants stated that their involvement in the course had been very positive. They felt very supported throughout the process and felt they had opportunities to share in a trusting and respectful environment. The course gave them the opportunity to reflect on their lives and to identify areas on which they wanted to work in the future. They said that they felt individually and collectively supported. All participants stated they were in a stronger place than they had been previously, and all were planning to move onto other activities through which they could continue to build their strengths and capacity.

In terms of their reflections on their well-being, participants referred to their feeling low, lacking in confidence and that the course helped them with coming out of themselves, trusting and generally feeling much better about themselves and feeling that they enjoyed the group. They didn't specifically mention their well-being per se. One woman did say that she had felt very low in herself and that this was a lifeline for her and that she would continue to come to The Lantern in the future. Out of nine people, six said it was too short. They loved it.

### Group 2 – 4<sup>th</sup> February 2017 to 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2017

*Group 2 – Group discussion - 7<sup>th</sup> April, 2017 - location George's Quay*

Eleven people – 6 women, 5 men – older age profile than first group in late 2016. Were introduced to doing work on collage and river which none of them had ever done before. Considered the question "what is wellness?" in the context of the collage. Wellness tools used included relaxation and movement to music. Great emotional sharing even at early stages of the course.

Participants' responses to the question "where am I now around caring for my well-being" were charted at the final session on 24<sup>th</sup> March. The following points were made by individuals in their feedback to facilitators at this session.

*More reflective, more at ease with myself, feel listened to, greater awareness of my needs, got a feeling of togetherness (hadn't felt that before), environment of respect, noticed I felt on a particular day after each session, group gelled, looking after myself more, my anxiety dropped week by week, am more aware of my well-being, staying on top of it, picked up some words and phrases, more control over my anxiety, gave me a platform to step outside the safety zone, to try new things, I have plans to do more courses, feel more at ease with myself, more content in myself, more awareness of keeping occupied, hearing more of what else is out there, very enlightening, learning not to beat myself up, feel encouraged to do more, think it's brilliant to know I can drop in anytime, putting my needs first, more confident, learning to say now, hopeful for the future, going back to a course, hopeful for new home, to being part of another group*

*Session was facilitated by Course Evaluator, also present was a Notetaker*

- Everybody looked relaxed and interested
- *Everybody was asked by Evaluator to stand up and shake arms and legs to focus and relax*
  - Next the participants were asked to introduce themselves and tell the group where they are from (examples: Macroom, Douglas, City). Some had found out (at the start of the course) that they had met before as neighbours which gave them a feeling of closeness
  - No. 4 - was quite nervous, could not sit still, was wriggling his fingers a lot (he told the group that he had been with The Lantern before)
  - No. 6 - found herself in difficulties, she looked back 30 years but now she can see what her needs are, and she likes it, her parents died 2 years ago close to one another, when they were gone she found that all her structure and purpose of life had gone too, now with this project she learned that it's time to be about her and to listen to her own needs
  - No.9 - her husband passed away, she felt lost and came to The Lantern, she never really knew what it is about but when she had done a few sessions she felt that she could talk freely in the group without being judged, she minded her grandchild quite a lot, but an accident nearly happened and that was an eye opener for her, she changed her attitude entirely and learned to say NO more
  - No. 4 - told the group that he heard about this course on the (Lantern) Open day
  - No. 5 - said that she was on the SHEP course first and then looked for some more help and found out about The Lantern Community Project, so she went to it, she found that she learned with the project that she needs to focus more on the now rather than the past
  - No. 7 - heard through his counsellor about The Lantern, he is pleased having done it - he found that there is a lot under the surface
  - No. 3 - is full-time carer, she heard about the course through the Open day, when she did the course, she liked the control of the group by the facilitators, she mentioned that (Facilitator name) made a difference like light and dark, it's being life changing she finds, she is caring for 3 people and appreciated that change in her words she said that the facilitators are angels
  - No. 10 - was let go from her job (her boss died), she found it hard to cope with it, her structure of the day was gone, and she had way more time on hand than ever before, when she told this her friend, the friend suggested to come here and use that time to do things just for herself
  - No. 9 spoke about a toolbox which the facilitators used to make life more understandable they were asked to put certain tools into it, she also said that if she was to give herself a present it would be this course and the good people she has meet, it also was nice to be able to talk in confidence and to know nothing is brought outside and nobody is being judged
  - They all agreed that it helped them to give themselves permission to be open
  - They said that it helps them to understand society
- *Evaluator asked participants - what was most fun to do?*
  - Dancing, being out of the comfort zone after about 5 min
  - They drew a river to explain how they feel coming in and going out of the project plus the general awareness of yourself

- Sometimes they found it hard to come in and not sure what to do but once they got in they were glad that they did come
- No. 3 was really looking forward to coming (today) even though she was really tired but felt much better after it, she was energised again
- *Evaluator asked - if there was anything negative in the course?*
  - The group agreed that they did not like to do the collage so much it felt that it was silly, but they could see the reason why they were asked to do them, it felt like being stuck in the moment they felt it was also good to investigate the past
  - They all agreed that the tutors worked great together, very different people but most complementary for the course
  - They found that time was given when something unexpected came up and needed special attention, they had good control and no pressure was put on at any time their guidance was so good that everyone felt special
  - It was said by all that it was a great atmosphere of trust, they said things that they never said before, they allowed themselves to be vulnerable and they were stunned at what they have said to the group, they never would have said it to their family even, all that achievement was due to the facilitators
- *Evaluator asked - if they felt strong and supported?*
  - They agreed that they felt in good hands, gelled well together due to the facilitators, some said that it was like magic, it was not normal to talk about yourself, it freed up to talk, everything happened really fast, they did not expect to reveal stuff that fast, some people were upset and surprised at what was said, the facilitators helped them along and made sure they were ok, at time in a 1 to 1
  - Evaluator asked if they noticed the world in a different way
  - They learned that there are other people with the same problems and thoughts and that it is ok to say things
- *Evaluator asked - how are your feelings toward others?*
  - No. 4 is a carer, he learned to focus in a different way, he said that there is a difference in having to help and wanting to help
  - It was said that we all wear masks at times and that it's worth working on relationships, where you are listened to and can take off your mask
  - If you look around you and see with how many friends, you can be yourself with
  - You often find that you have different friends for different things, some are for life and some for pleasure
- *Evaluator asked - if the course has helped you?*
  - The group said that they started reflecting on who you need
  - No. 3 said that a group like this opens other avenues
  - No. 5 changed her ways of handling things at home, she started passing on work to others and does things for herself
  - No. 7 said he has since less conflicts within himself, he now can distance from people's issues
- *Evaluator asked - how do you maintain a focus on your life and the things you want to do?*
  - It said that they will keep it going taking time for themselves, life was a pain before
  - No. 4 feels good he is after having a partner after 21 years on his own, the course has helped that way, he is extremely shy
  - No. 5 wants to do second course of SHEP



- No. 4 has a mission in life now
- *Evaluator asked - what do you do for this summer?*
  - Some signed up for little courses lots going on, dance class, summer concert, 4 showings of films
  - Every Wednesday coffee and chat at 2.30pm
  - Talking about SHEP and The Lantern
  - Group is really relaxed and calm except No 4, he is a little nervous, nice atmosphere otherwise
  - The group said that it is nice to know a lot of people who have had similar issues or problems
  - It let them see that there is no reason to beat themselves up over anything, nobody outside likes to talk about things anymore, they stick to themselves and have no interest in others' problems
  - The expectation of loving somebody is to give them your time when they are sick and that makes you to a slave of your mother in that case, people disagree with this, they said that you should be still able to share out the care and still love her
  - No. 5 told the group that her brother had a stroke, she was expected to look after him, but she feels guilty not wanting it
  - Girls are always expected to do it as supposed to boys
- *Evaluator asked - what is the unique part about this?*
  - Group agreed that the facilitators are very special even if they were doing the Lantern in a scruffy place if the facilitators are there it would not matter and still be special
  - It feels like a safe environment and it's powerful
  - It feels good that they did it together
- *Evaluator gave some additional information then asked about some recommendations*
  - Group liked to have a follow-on course
  - They would have liked to have the same course on again for others
  - It could have been a bit longer (another 2 or 3 weeks)
  - No. 9 found that since the course she is opening up more and going out more she really likes to keep this going
  - No. 2 heard about the lantern through an acquaintance, it's her first time doing this, would like more of it and would love it to be longer
  - Follow on could be the next SHEP course
  - It would be good for people just starting this journey, what is most difficult on daily bases is getting out of bed, 11 out of 14 said that, good to know it's not just yourself ...
  - First time to take care of yourself most said that at lantern they said a lot of things for the first time, that makes them feel like they fit in with the group, it is easy to talk to any person of the group, no pressure or shyness
- *Evaluator asked about their future*
  - No. 7 - how do you feel amongst most women
  - He said he finds it's ok, it is easier to talk, in the beginning it was hard, and it took some time to adjust, as they were half way through, it became easier to talk, his psychologist even noticed a difference in his behaviour for the better
  - We are all walking the same walk, we are wearing masks, you must accept our flaws, your ego should not rule your life
- *Evaluator – what are your plans for your future?*
  - Course is too short

- Had plans every time but found it hard to finish the plan sometimes
  - Started every session with grounding how would stress come up in you
  - People gave samples
  - When they did the collage, they did it entirely themselves, Evaluator is bringing them with her (people looked proud that they were used, also a little shy about it)
  - The group recommended another course focusing on other things, basically a part 2
  - No. 3 really would like to take part and is unsure at the same time
  - Talking builds trust, talking is more important than meditating
  - The group suggested that those kinds of sessions should be in cooperated in schools nowadays to boost their interpersonal skills and be able to talk
  - The group figured that each of them would know at least another 2-3 people who would benefit from these type sessions
  - Also, it was said that it would make sense to have them sessions available through the employers where shyness and anxiousness is covered
  - No. 3 is involving into groups to lose shyness and was told at that he should look into people's eyes and hold his head up, he has a severe form of shyness where it is not easy at all to do so
  - They also said that time puts pressure on them, but the facilitators managed to make it not a big issue, as they always stayed on a little if it was needed and if they felt someone needed a little extra attention
  - All of the group agreed to meet for a part 2 if possible
  - They said reminders should be sent without pressure, it's always a great thing, no pressure at all ever, men's shed cork uses it all the time, was mentioned
  - No. 3 thought the course was very bonding and he would be very happy to stay in touch in future
- *Evaluator thanked everyone and closed the session*

## Appendix 4: Selection of Individual discussions

*Woman – mid 40s, village near city and either drives or gets a bus to the project, participant in Group 2 (February to April)*

- Already involved in courses provided at The Lantern E.g. Crafts with Sparks, Dance and Movement, Meditation, Coping with Grief and Loss, Cooking, Silk-printing
- Gave up work and heard about The Lantern
- Had depression
- Dropped in on a casual basis initially, then became involved in courses
- Non-judgemental place, has made friends and there's a sense of community
- Introduced a friend to The Lantern
- Needed to care for her well-being, needed a structure and needed boundaries, wasn't taking care of herself and had lost her way
- Loved the focus of the course, saw it for what it was offering, hungry for anything
- Structure (course) was helpful, people were invited to make a collage and she loved it, it triggered many thoughts
- Felt safe, made a contract with the others around this, contract was put up on wall
- Listening was big thing
- In terms of topics, everything was open and mental health issues were handled well
- Areas where it was not appropriate to go were handled well
- Physical exercise is a good way to ground you
- Facilitators were excellent and could follow up on things afterwards which was great. Their expertise was huge. Two facilitators were needed, and they complemented each other very well – this added value to the session
- At the end, she wanted more, connection is key, would like to expand it more and other things should follow-on
- She intends to continue to be involved (with The Lantern)
- Brilliant – must continue

*Woman – mid 40s, friend of above participant, village near city, drives or comes by bus with friend – participant in Group 2*

- Previously involved (for about 2 years)
- Heard about it through Tabor Lodge, came with a friend, applied for another course (Effective Communication)
- Saw what it was offering and came here without thinking too much about it
- Never laughed so much as in the past 2 years
- No judgement
- New building is fantastic – space, access etc. though George's Quay was more central
- Currently comes 4 days a week to the project and volunteers too
- Sense of belonging and community
- Opened my eyes – I didn't know what I needed but got involved in so many courses – it's okay to focus on me
- Life has become more manageable and I'm taking on board what's mine and trusting my own judgement, I'm transforming and am making better decisions
- People are noticing the change in me, life is better for me, my eyes are open
- I saw the title of this course and it struck a chord – this is the best of all the courses (I've done)
- Mixture of men and women, all ages, meeting of both was great – it's great to mix it up
- Everyone had previous experiences, and all wanted (the course) – they were all open to it
- Knew two people (including her friend) but this didn't make a difference as I would have come anyway

- Enjoyed the weekly experience and always looked forward to it – never missed a week (except for one personal medical appointment)
- It is the best course – better than Personal Development course – this (latter) course didn't allow people to talk in the same way as the Caring for our Well-being course
- Daytime course was good and suited me better
- Everyone's motivations were different
- Felt supported in my journey, non-judgemental, listening
- Everyone was "doing everyone else's journey"
- Facilitators were very good – made sure that everyone had their say, they needed each other, combination of skills was important and if a specific problem arose they would deal with it (outside the group if needs be)
- Course was too short because it went better than expected, people were so open, more time needed to spend on topics, it could have gone on for 12 weeks!
- Felt safe in the group and was able to get additional support
- (In terms of recommendations), I would add another 4 weeks to the course, the format is good, the presence of two facilitators was good and necessary. It was well-structured
- Best of all (the courses) – most nourishing – it's what it's about – it's what The Lantern is all about

*Woman – early 60s, lives in north of city, carer – participant in Group 3*

- Carer (family) and for national organisations and has elderly parent too
- Very few personal supports and very stressed and tired, got totally absorbed in her caring and left no room for herself
- Always very active and involved in local community
- Heard about The Lantern at the Lifelong Learning Festival and went to a taster session, she was drawn to it as there was a "great vibe" at the taster
- Joined this course in May and didn't miss any session
- Very comfortable in every session, despite being a bit wary at the start
- Facilitators made it work – very accommodating, had good control of the group
- Very structured e.g. moved through topics, used the white board
- Liked mix of people as this added a dimension to it
- Liked the contract of "what is said in the room stays in the room"
- Felt she wasn't alone, great escapism, set aside time every Friday, despite other priorities, husband very supportive of this
- Great rapport, relevant topics
- Sessions needed two people – this gave it a wider dimension
- Group size was good, dancing was good
- Collage – felt a bit "weird" at the start as thought this was childish ("I missed out a lot in my childhood"), but it was easy, relaxing and it pushed some buttons for me
- Group was great, discovered a bit more about ourselves
- Gave me hope that life is for yourselves
- Food pyramid was interesting – making changes in my diet
- Can't believe the changes in me

*Man – mid 60s, lives alone, city – participant in Group 2*

- Goes to Men's Drop-in in The Lantern and really likes it, heard lots about the Lantern
- Heard about the course from one of the facilitators
- Involved with Homeless service and also heard about the Lantern from their coordinator
- Was nervous the first day especially as his health was not great
- Got talking and everyone introduced themselves to each other – 16 people – got to know each other
- Was careful at the beginning, then felt more at ease, liked it, liked the mix

- Always looked forward to the sessions
- Facilitation was very good, everyone got to speak
- Go back over issues
- Had fun too – drawings etc.
- Best part of course were the boxes with stuff in them
- Time flew – so much enjoyment
- This place is fantastic
- Tea breaks were great – celebrating people's birthdays, laughter
- The building is fantastic
- Would like to have got back to the collage (we did it at the beginning but never finished it)
- Maybe add one or two weeks onto the course – this would have helped
- I would do the course again
- After Christmas, I'll do more in The Lantern
- There's always something going on in The Lantern
- The facilitators are "second to none" – nice people, right people, right job

*Woman – late 30s, lives very close to project - participant in Group 1*

- Did course in George's Quay, did other courses (Effective Communication, Creative Clay, Art, Women's Well-being), attended open days
- Lantern is welcoming especially men
- Staff are kind, gentle, great empathy, human, helpful
- This course – I've faced my own challenges and good to reaffirm myself, self-esteem, things come back to haunt me, experiences in primary school etc.
- Good for texting and keeping in touch and keeping people in the loop
- Felt comfortable in the group, rhythm was gentle, non-threatening
- SHEP – did Personal Development course – this was much easier environment
- Likes that it was run by women and liked the type of facilitation
- Good at getting through topics
- Structure was good and there was a flow, flexibility
- Course content set me thinking about things – you could get stuck in your own path, realisation that we're all on a journey, sharing experiences
- Chance for reflection
- Liked the icebreakers, the tools, some art – these were enjoyable
- No big conflict in the group, some minor issues but these were dealt with
- Very glad it came
- Would recommend this course for older people
- Eight weeks was fine
- Perhaps it could deal with some more challenging issues and topics
- There were no downsides to the course

*Woman – late 30s, lives in city suburb – participant in Group 1*

- Started coming to The Lantern in March 2015
- Qualifications in childcare, business administration, currently working part-time in office
- Some mental health difficulties and links in with psychiatric services
- Volunteers in charity shops etc.
- Completed Women's Health and Wellbeing Course, Effective Communications and did Colouring for Fun in summertime and drops in on Wednesdays
- Really interested in everything The Lantern offers, you can be yourself, it helps your mood and you feel listened to
- Group (Well-being) was great, all interested, some friendships have lasted
- Everyone was there for own reasons, everyone helped, supported each other, no judgement and everyone got a chance
- Liked the exercises – relaxation at the beginning and end, movement and dance

- Coping strategies – this was useful
- Feels totally different, life is brighter, more options
- When course finished, came down with a bang
- Learned new ways, now sees life in a more optimistic way
- Sees The Lantern as great and you can be yourself
- Told loads of people about it
- All courses are great and there are quality tutors
- Tutors are part of the group, no separation, tutors are real people
- Before The Lantern, life wasn't good
- Now, plan to move out of home and is on the housing list
- Starting a course with one of the tutors elsewhere
- It matters like a community
- Hopes to do one of the SHEP courses (Personal Development)
- Wants this course to be continued to be offered or even to have a second one with different topics
- Doesn't see need for changes, 10 out of 10
- Course could be extended to 10 weeks

*Woman – mid 50s, lives in the general neighbourhood, volunteers in a charity shop, participant in Group 1*

- Went to Adult Education exhibition in City Hall in September, 2016, was searching for a course, would have done something in philosophy, transcendental meditation
- 100% convinced that this course should be repeated, got so much from it
- Has a lot of family problems and it helped me, source of solace
- Have met 3 amazing people (mentions one of the tutors - N – who is unique)
- Stopped me in my tracks, I'm always giving, lots of family issues
- This provides support and courses are invaluable
- You lose your power over yourself (when you are caring for others)
- Used to sing in a choir but that disappeared in recent years
- The Lantern offers freedom to be yourself (non-judgemental), you're part of a group, collective, but it's in strictest confidence
- Met some wonderful people
- Am "almost addicted"
- Feel that when I leave here I am better
- Want to continue
- Would feel abandoned if it (The Lantern) closed
- Loves the surroundings and the warm welcome
- It should be conveyed that this is a serious place and feels that this is not recognised, and it should be
- No negative experience whatsoever
- City has been crying out for this for a long time
- Learned from the course also sense of fun, get-together, movement etc. was great
- It could be repeated, because when you leave here, there's a void, even if it is 6 months, perhaps it could be continuous
- Where she volunteers (charity shop), there's a sense of community, trust and it's the same here
- Confidentiality (trust) is key
- A lot of hard work behind the scenes
- This time last year I knew nothing

*Woman – mid 40s, lives in city, participant in Group 3*

- Where am I now in terms of my wellbeing? Very hopeful
- I'm at the other end of the spectrum now compared to when I started

- The group has made all the difference, more relaxed and happy and have more confidence
- I'm more confident about meeting people
- A lot more aware of my needs
- More motivated
- I don't (now) feel as guilty about looking after myself
- More at peace with myself
- The course opened my mind
- Am aware of taking it slowly
- Found that we are all equal and we all have our ups and downs
- And reassuring – we are not alone – we have more in common than not
- Opened-up new possibilities which I hadn't seen before
- Self-awareness
- Better able to deal with challenges