



Recovery Community Development in Scotland. *Co-Creating a new prototype event.*

The idea

On March 25th 2017 the very first RAT PARK FESTIVAL was held in Irvine, Scotland. The inspiration was to create a space for the emerging and established recovery communities in the south of Scotland to meet, mutually inspire and provoke each other to deepen their work and extend the reach of their work.

From Community Development shared learning to RAT PARK

A group was convened in late 2016, after the annual recovery walk, to explore what might be possible and waiting to happen next in the recovery community in Scotland. They came from all over the south of Scotland and included paid recovery community development staff, recovery community activists, and organisationally the SRC and Nurture Development Scotland.

The open dialogues brought us to shared learning and Johan Hari's TED talk – 'Everything you know about addiction is wrong'. We were inspired by Bruce Alexander's book 'The Globalisation of Addiction' to develop connection as the strongest goal in community development efforts. We were inspired to explore what a community based human version of the RAT PARK might look like, how recovery communities can contribute to flourishing communities.

The event was designed around the assets we had available to us as a group. We had a grant of £1, 500 from the Recovery Initiative Fund. Among us, we had loads of workshops and new ideas to share and people willing to share them. The Local recovery group RAW in North Ayrshire volunteered to be the host group for the event. They activated all their Irvine friends and secured free venues and low cost catering as well as the town centre screen for the recovery walk film.

The event itself

Held in three venues in Irvine over 9 hours on a Saturday, 22 contributors made 14 separate sessions available to the 150 people who had pre-registered for the event. Each venue was themed and the aim was to bring fresh ideas, models and practices to the attention of participants, who would try them out.

The Meetings Tent held the opening gathering, Meet the Fellowships, Walk and Talk Recovery, Mindfulness Recovery, Baw on the Deck recovery meetings and the Irvine Soup crowd funding experiment.

The CAN DO Tent held all things asset based and opened with the “We Can” game developed by Nurture Development followed by the Self Reliant Group model intro, and finally exploring Social Enterprise.

The Campaigns Tent focus was big questions, and held the Big picture dialogues, a Tell Your Story workshop, Act As If We Own The Place and We are our own Media.

In addition, participants undertook two forms of research; participant research and research undertaken with local residents on their response to and their understanding of recovery.

Participation and Feedback *“The event definitely has great potential”* Wevolution
The numbers fluctuated throughout the day and we estimate 90 people took lunch and 70 people participated in the event. They came mostly from the surrounding areas and Glasgow but also Edinburgh, Stirling, Dundee and Aberdeen.

22 organisations and groups contributed to the day including new allies the Scottish Recovery Network (mental health), Wevolution, and Pay it Forward – the Social reporters network. Narcotics Anonymous, ORT recovery network, Cocaine Anonymous, Al anon all brought a public information stall. Recovery groups such as “ Love and Light”, the Men’s Mindfulness group and Recovery Films all contributed to the workshops. Recovery At Work (RAW) hosted the day acted as stewards, fed the participants and set up the spaces for the events.

“I thought the overall event was absolutely brilliant. I really enjoyed being out in the community asking the general public about their knowledge and experience around recovery. I was surprised that they did not know that mutual aid support groups existed.” Walk and Talk Recovery

“The mindfulness session was attended by around 16 people and we did a sit and share session which includes introducing a word into the meditation, the word was Mother which was very emotive for lots as it was mother’s day on the Sunday .” Mindfulness Recovery

“We really enjoyed the workshops and found the networking very useful. As a result, we have arranged a couple of exchange visits. Numbers were small for the workshops we attended and our own but it meant that deep discussions were possible and people felt free to speak which was valuable. Our workshop was at 530 and some folk had to leave earlier to catch transport home so an earlier slot would maybe have been better.” Social Enterprise workshop

The public research results were interesting. Most people when asked about recovery thought about vehicle recovery, then illness and only 20% thought of addiction recovery. 71% personally knew someone who is suffering or has suffered from addiction. 50% knew someone in recovery, 30 % said no and 20% didn't know if they did or not. Interestingly, when asked who they would go to for help for addictions, 50% said GP, 30% A.A. and 20% said church.

Reflections

The hosts and organisers met again to reflect on the prototype in April. We reflected on

- The drop from registrations (150) to attendance (70) and the dripping in during the day rather than turning up en masse at the beginning.
- The new forms; the no speeches/ no sitting down opening session to all the new ideas in workshops and new forms of recovery meetings showcased at the event.
- The research component
- The active performing addict at the event- 'Banquo's Ghost'
- The treatment 'Shepherds' style meeting community led activism style and their different event expectations.
- The physical use of three venues in different locations.
- Expectations of the contributors
- Our highlights

Prototype conclusions for RAT PARK FESTIVAL 2

It was a great idea and it's very much worth doing again, taking a new host, new area and new assets into the co-creation. RAT PARK is a good brand and starts an interesting conversation. Having the fellowships in the space helped and allowed as to offer additional ideas for mutual aid expressions to communities.

We thought a through the gate draw should be considered for any other festival to encourage people in for the start and make it clear it's a whole day event. The workshops that worked best were the most creative and challenging of pre-existing views and models. We could draw more on our own community and allies for more of this in future. We would prefer participant contributors who are part of the whole event and community connection.

The research is helpful and a preparation workshop before people take it to the streets would increase its effectiveness. We suggest that in future at recovery events we create a clear space and identify people to support and maintain connection with anyone who is actively performing their addiction that day and not send them away.

We thought the East coast / Edinburgh might be a great host for the next one.

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