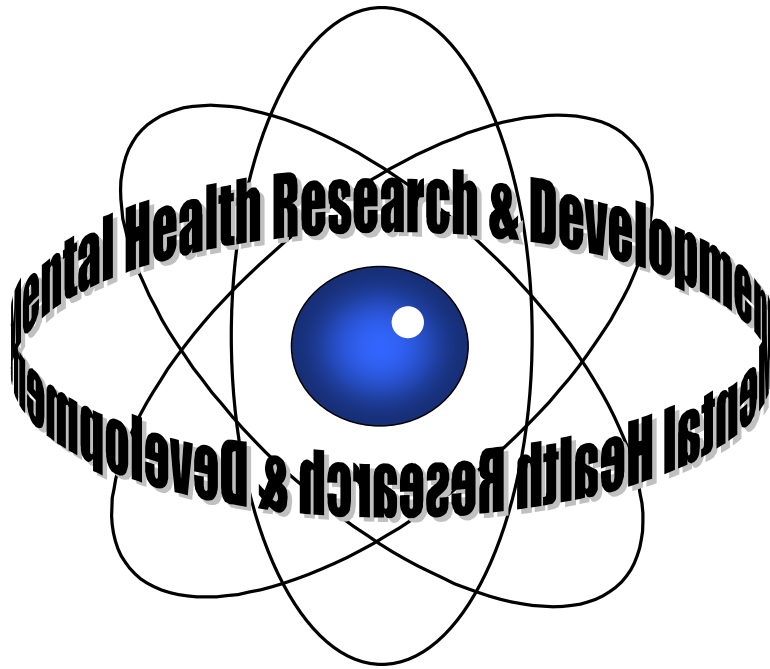


United Response – UR in the Picture  
Final Report



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## Executive Summary

By examining contemporary literature it appears that participatory arts programmes such as photography skills courses can improve participant motivation, enhance self esteem and confidence and stimulate a feeling of empowerment. It may also renew self identity, enhance the sense of belonging to a social group and provide a sense of relaxation, freedom and security.

In recent years partnership between United Response and Photovoice has been undertaken to provide mental health service users with the opportunity to learn photography skills. The perceived 'therapeutic' benefits of participation in the 'Mental Wealth' project stimulated further funding of the 'UR in the Picture' project and an associated research evaluation. The research question focused upon the impact of a participatory photography course as a therapeutic tool for people with severe and enduring mental health problems.

The mixed method research examined quantitative data collected from two groups on three occasions using the Rosenberg (1965) Self Esteem scale but also qualitative interview and focus group data immediately after the course and four months later.

The results indicate that the two groups self esteem measures were different from one another from the outset. One group began with mean scores within the normal range, whilst the second group began with mean scores indicating low self esteem. Although the sample size was very small, statistical analysis indicates there was a statistical difference between the two groups. Those with the lowest self esteem at the beginning improved to the same level as the other group at the end and this was sustained until three months later. It is not clear whether the improvement in self esteem was due to the project model or the facilitator style. The course appears to have the greatest measurable impact for those with low self esteem.

Interviews and focus group data were subject to thematic analysis. This illustrated a number of themes including project logistics and the arrangements for recruitment, the venue, group size, course length and the session content; skills content, both technical and creative; group style, both facilitator style and prior experience and ability; and the concept of photography as a gift that enhances mood, self esteem and confidence, provides some personal development,

diversionary activity and gives hope and pleasurable activity for the future. Overall, participants were very positive about their involvement in the 'UR in the Picture' project. They enjoyed acquiring new skills, being involved in a group with a mutual interest and felt it improved their sense of confidence. However, the course was short and participants would have liked it to be longer with the option of a follow up 'camera club'. The course suited participants with little previous creative or photography experience as well as those with creative talent. Mental health service users with low self esteem appeared to benefit the most but may be the hardest to recruit.

Based on these results, recommendations are made to the organisations for future courses. These include lengthening the course to deepen the learning experience, encourage social support mechanisms and enhance aspiration and further training. This would include a follow on 'camera club' where informal social and skills development could take place without the need for expert facilitation. Further relationships could be made for keen and talented photographers to link up with local photographers as mentors. Finally, other organisations showed enthusiasm for the project and enjoyed the chance to refer people into the project. They provided some continued support for photographers and their newly acquired hobbies. Collaboration with these organisations could enhance the resource provision to provide further training to new service users as well stimulate recruitment.

## Introduction

A report by the Social Exclusion Unit (2004) highlights that

“mental health problems require more than a medical solution: they require a positive response on the part of society to accommodate people’s individual needs and to promote mental well-being” (p.8).

Individuals with severe and enduring mental health problems are amongst the most socially excluded in the UK, with low levels of employment and few activities to engage in. The National Service Framework for Mental Health (Department of Health, 1999) highlights the need for the promotion of social inclusion in mental health care provision. Research has demonstrated that social support can promote quality of life in individuals with severe and enduring mental health problems (Becker et al., 1998). Participatory arts activities have been identified as potential routes to increasing social support and integration, and one of the Government’s action points is to promote access to arts activities for this population.

The arts have been used as therapeutic tools for many years, with roots in Freudian analysis and the discovery of the unconscious (Heenan, 2006). In recent years there has been an increased interest in using arts in health programme, with a shift in the focus toward the benefits of the “creative process” (p.182). Argyle and Bolton describe that the creativity can increase self-confidence and motivation, enabling

“... the expression of the otherwise inexpressible, and the experience of cognitive, emotional, and spiritual areas to which people otherwise have no access” (p.341)

Whilst in a medicalised approach to mental health services individuals become “patients”, in arts projects “people become artists” (Argyle & Bolton, 2005, p.342) and the individual remains in control of their own activities. Enjoyment is also a key component of arts activities.

Hacking and colleagues (2006) conducted a survey of participatory arts programmes. A total of 102 responses were received from programmes across England that offered participatory arts activities to adults with mental health problems. In total, these projects were offering activities to approximately 4,000 adults every week. Most projects operated within the community, healthcare or specialist arts sessions. The majority offered a combination of activities, frequently drawing and painting (77%), craft (60%), writing (59%) and photography (53%). The survey asked programmes to identify the key outcomes of their service. There was

considerable consistency across the range of projects, with a focus on improvements in self-esteem, quality of life and artistic skills identified alongside personal growth in identity.

Despite the drive to promote arts participation, the evidence base for such programmes remains limited. A small number of studies have, however, explored the effects of such programmes (e.g. Argyle & Bolton, 2005; Cosden & Reynolds, 1982; Hacking, Secker, Spandler, Kent, & Shenton, 2008; Heenan, 2006; Spandler, Secker, Kent, Hacking, & Shenton, 2007). The focus of these projects tends to be not the quality of the resultant artwork, but the therapeutic value of producing work (e.g. Cosden & Reynolds, 1982; Heenan, 2006). Some projects may, however, include an exhibition of the resultant work (e.g. Argyle & Bolton, 2005). Studies have explored the positive benefits of arts participation, identifying a range of common themes including increased motivation, self-esteem and confidence, empowerment, and renewed self-image and identity.

### **Motivation**

A key theme arising from Spandler's (2007) interviews was motivation. The participants felt inspired to engage in the art projects, with some experiencing these benefits beyond the projects in their daily lives, generally feeling more purposeful. Many felt that the aspirations generated by the creative activities facilitated reduced levels of hopelessness. Argyle and Bolton (2005) similarly discuss the perceived changes in motivation participants experience; the accumulation of work towards an exhibition enabled participants to focus on and fulfil personal goals.

### **Self-esteem and confidence**

Heenan (2006) highlights the increased self-esteem participants may experience as a result of participation in an arts project. Such improvement may act as a barrier against negative influences an individual with mental health problems may experience, thus reducing the risk of set-backs. As such, individuals may feel more resilient and able to cope. They may feel increased confidence to address their mental health issues. The arts participation group enabled individuals to feel less excluded from society, providing the increased confidence and self-esteem necessary to engage in mainstream activities. Participants confidence may increase as they are able to express themselves as individuals and lose the "label" they may have previously carried, to speak to others about the arts activities they engage in with and not hide them for fear of seeming 'unconventional' (Argyle & Bolton, 2005; Spandler et al., 2007).

## **Empowerment**

Hacking and colleagues (2008) observed reliable improvements in participant empowerment, alongside smaller changes in mental health and social inclusion. The greatest improvement was observed amongst those participants who experience no extra stress in their lives during the course of the study, who had positive impressions of the arts projects and higher scores on the CORE (Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation; used here as a measure of general mental health). Heenan's (2006) qualitative study similarly indicates improvements in empowerment as a result of arts projects. The "atmosphere" of the group was important, focusing on achievements rather than weaknesses. Membership of these groups enabled individuals to feel empowered as "citizens and an equal rather than a patient or someone to be pitied" (p.188).

## **Self-image and identity**

Some individuals experienced a renewed sense of identity through art projects, "beyond that of someone with mental health difficulties" (Spandler, 2007, p.795). For some individuals who were able to develop their artistic abilities, there was a sense that they were now seen as an individual with artistic abilities rather than simply as an individual with mental health difficulties:

“... so nowadays because I do a lot of art if people ask me what I do I don't say 'oh I'm mentally ill, I go to the day-centre, I can say 'well, I do art, I practice art'” (p.796)

## **Relaxation, freedom and security**

The security of the group environment can provide the freedom to explore personal issues (Heenan, 2006). Furthermore, art participation sessions can provide non-threatening spaces for individuals to learn and develop their artistic abilities, working alongside others in a supportive, non-competitive manner. Spandler (2007) found that arts participation provided a place to relax for a number of the participants, providing a focus away from their difficulties. Individuals with self-harm issues were able to transfer their distress onto their art, whilst voice hearers were able to concentrate on the art rather than their distressing voices.

## **Belonging to a social group**

An additional important theme evident across these studies is the value of being part of a social group. Participants gain an importance sense of “belonging” (Argyle & Bolton, 2005, p.350):

“When you’re all sat as a group doing something, you go home warm, thinking there’s people out there that care whether you’re dead or alive”

There is increased willingness to share and communicate as part of a group. The improved self-esteem and confidence that participants experience may facilitate their willingness and ability to engage in positive social behaviours (Heenan, 2006). For some participants who have feared leaving the house, arts participation may provide a novel, welcome place to safely build their confidence in social interaction.

One difficulty, however, with the social element of a number of arts participation projects is that often the “scheme existed in a vacuum” (Heenan, 2006, p.188). Many projects operate for a short, fixed period, with little availability of long-term comparable projects to progress onto. Although some other benefits may extend beyond the life of the project, the value of the social group is likely to be time-limited to the project. The participants in Heenan’s study felt they had been given a sense of hope, but there was little similar support available once the current arts participation ended. There is a desire and need for more widespread accessibility of arts participation. In addition, further research is needed to provide evidence of the efficacy of such provision.

United Response (UR) supports 200 people who have a range of severe and enduring mental health needs. In April 2005, United Response and the charity Photovoice piloted a project, called Mental Wealth, to train and empower people with mental health needs to express their realities through the medium of photography. The aim of the project was to raise awareness of some of the key issues facing people with mental health needs, particularly in the context of new proposed Mental Health legislation, and to highlight these to MPs and policy makers at an exhibition at the House of Commons.

This project was designed to raise awareness of the reality of living with a mental health need, and it succeeded in this. But what no one anticipated was the perceived powerful ‘therapeutic’ benefits many participants experienced, by their own accounts and the internal evaluation of Mental Wealth. United Response has since been successful in gaining funding to roll out a new project called UR in the Picture to mental health service users. This has entailed training

two United Response support workers and three service-user participants (1 of the Mental Wealth pilot and 2 from the early UR in the Picture project) to facilitate two sets of six workshops for up to sixty of United Response and other mental health service users. United Response commissioned Photovoice to plan and facilitate these workshops and four days training for each of the facilitators. (i think this should say two days training for each facilitator)

The workshops were hosted by a United Response project manager and other facilitators, such as mental health support workers, previous project participants and a social work student. Alongside, a Photovoice photographer and photography assistant(s) led the sessions, planning the workshop content, teaching the photography technical and composition skills and directing the course participants. These photographers and assistants were different according to the day each course ran.

United Response sought to commission research to evaluate the outcomes of this project for participants, as well as to assess process and implementation. The evaluation was designed to capture what it is about United Response and the partnership with Photovoice that makes the project special.

## Method

### Programme aims and objectives

The overall aims of the 'UR in the picture' programme were to improve people's health and well-being across a range of spheres, encouraging positive, and reducing negative behaviours.

This included:

- Improved mental health and self-esteem;
- Greater involvement in volunteering or further study;
- Increased life aspirations

General objectives of the project defined by United Response were:

- To enable adults with mental health needs to enjoy and express themselves, exploring the experiences and challenges they face using photography as a therapeutic tool within an safe and secure environment
- To enable adults with mental health needs to gain confidence in their own voices and their place within society and to be empowered to speak out about their lives, needs and the issues they face
- To enable adults with mental health needs to learn new creative and digital media skills
- To train two United Response support workers to use photography with their client group and to co-facilitate participatory photography workshops
- To work with two former participants of Mental Wealth to act as project advisors and peer facilitators alongside United Response and Photovoice staff
- To create a toolkit for United Response support workers nationally detailing how photography can be incorporated into their work supporting their clients living with mental illness
- To research the impact and potential of photography as a therapeutic tool with adults with mental health needs and distribute its findings in a research paper
- To create a body of photographic work that can be used to educate public audiences both locally and nationally on the experiences of adults living with mental illness and to be used with in communications and advocacy / campaigning initiatives led by United Response

The aims of this research evaluation were more narrowly defined to focus on the ‘therapeutic benefits’ of participation in this project.

### **Research question**

What is the impact of a participatory photography course as a therapeutic tool for people with severe and enduring mental health problems?

### **Research design**

This was a mixed method design, using repeated measures of a quantitative survey tool and qualitative interview and focus groups.

- Survey of participants participating in the workshops using the Rosenberg self esteem scale at the course beginning, end and four months after completion.
- Focus groups at end of the workshops and at four months after.
- Structured interviews with participants during the project.
- Face to face or telephone interviews with all consenting workshop facilitators.
- Desk research including reviewing M&E data from workshops and first participatory photography project, ‘Mental Wealth’

### **Research participants**

The following tables illustrate the number of people attending the workshops, those who agreed to participate in the research and where they were referred from. Three people came to the first session and then didn’t return. One joined on the second week and continued through to week 6. One participant attended for 2 sessions only.

	Wednesday group	Thursday group
Attended at week 1	14	14
Attended 3 or more sessions	12	12
Attended at week 6	8	12
Returned at month 4	6	6

Table 1 group attendance

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Wednesday	14	11	11	11	12	8
Thursday	14	12	11	10	11	12

Table 1 a group attendance

	Wednesday group	Thursday group	Total
Questionnaire T1	13	9	22
Questionnaire T2	8	9	17
Questionnaire T3	5	5	10
Interview	5	8	13
Focus group wk 6	8	9	17
Focus group mth 4	6	6	12

Table 2 Research participants

Referral source	Research Participants	Workshop Attendees
United Response	7	9
Community Mental Health Nurses	2	2
MIND Day services- Littlehampton	5	6
Bognor CMHT	3	3
Richmond Fellowship	1	1
Chichester MIND	1	1
Chichester Day Hospital	1	1
Midhurst CMHT	1	1
Total	21	24

Table 3 Referral sources

In addition to the two workshops under examination, United Response hosted an earlier and similar project for 4 of their service users. Some of these project participants became voluntary facilitators for these workshops under evaluation.

### **Workshop facilitators**

Interviews were also conducted with 5 facilitators and 1 photographer. They were involved in running and managing the workshops. Most were conducted on the last day of the six week programme. One was a telephone interview at a later date.

### **Referrers**

It was possible to speak by telephone to three of the professionals who referred their clients/ service users into the project for feedback regarding this part of the process. One referrer contacted the researcher later to express some further thoughts.

### **Research tools**

The Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) is a 10 item, 4 point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The scale has both positive and negative items, for instance "I take a positive attitude toward myself" and "all in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure". The scale is widely used (Gray-Little, Williams & Hancock, 1997). It is assumed to be a valid and reliable measure of self esteem but as yet there is little evidence of its sensitivity to change (Bowling, 1997). In this study the scale was administered at the beginning of the photography course, at the last session and then 4 months later. Time 1 questionnaires were collected at the first Wednesday session and the second Thursday session for logistical reasons. Time 2 questionnaires were all collected at week 6, the final sessions. The scale total score ranges from 0-30. Scores between 15 and 25 are often considered to be within the general population 'normal' range; scores below 15 suggest low self-esteem. These thresholds will be used for the purposes of this project.

Qualitative data were obtained by conducting interviews and focus groups on the last workshop session. Further focus groups were held four months later at a reunion. The qualitative data provided was audio recorded (with permission) and notes transcribed. These notes were analysed using thematic analysis to identify the frequency, intensity and extensiveness of themes, which arose (Braun & Clarke, 2007).

1. Data are collected and transcribed in note form
2. The researcher immerses in the data, reading and re-reading interview notes and listening to audio recordings, making notes and identifying emerging patterns to form a coding framework.

3. The data are analysed using the coding framework, adding new themes to the framework as they emerge and linking related items into sub-themes.
4. A master list of themes is developed from this coding framework
5. Where possible the researcher obtains feedback from the participants to ensure that their true meaning has been captured in the interpretation (triangulation).

Themes that emerge are pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of collective experience.

## Results

### Quantitative data

The results from the Rosenberg Self Esteem questionnaire indicate that the two groups were quite different from the outset. The Wednesday group had a higher mean score from the beginning, indicating higher group self esteem. Scores between 15 and 25 are often considered to be within the normal population range; scores below 15 suggest low self-esteem. The Wednesday group is always just within the normal range, whilst the Thursday group start below normal in the range for low self esteem and towards the end tip into the normal range. This is illustrated in table 4. The sample is small and results must therefore be treated with caution but we have considered the statistical significance of the data. There is a significant difference between these groups ( $t [20] = 2.272$ ; two tailed,  $p = 0.034$ ) at time 1.

		Mean score	Standard Deviation
Time 1	Wednesday group (N8)	17.88	6.534
	Thursday group (N9)	11	5.701
Time 2	Wednesday group (N8)	17.50	7.892
	Thursday group (N9)	14.89	5.061
Time 3	Wednesday group (N5)	18.2	7.396
	Thursday group (N5)	16.8	4.324

Table 4 Mean score Rosenberg Self Esteem scale at time 1, 2 & 3.

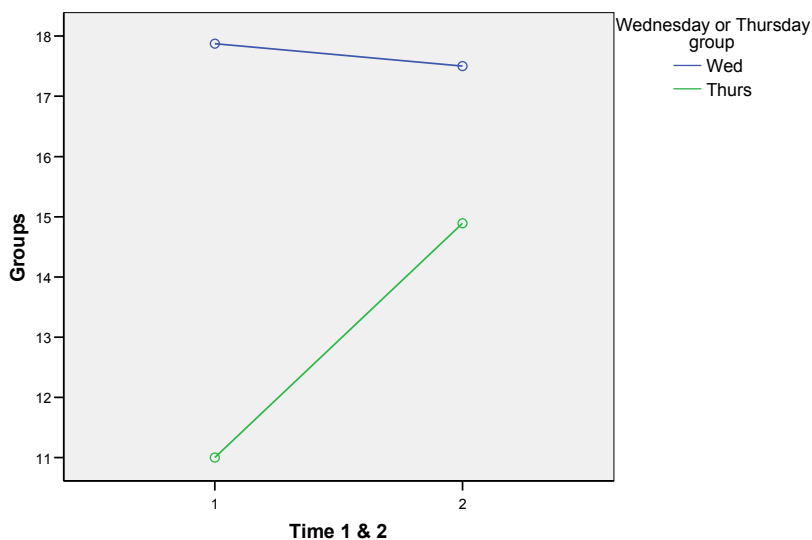
The standard deviation shows the variability of the answers in the group. This shows that the Thursday group answers varied between each participant less than the Wednesday group. Overall the Thursday group responded significantly more negatively about themselves. Negative items ( $t [20] = 2.973$ ; two tailed,  $p = 0.008$ ), positive items ( $t [20] = 1.524$ ; two-tailed,  $p = 0.143$ ).

However at time 2 the results change. By examining the main effect, or by looking at both groups together, there is no significant change in self esteem scores between time 1 and time 2 ( $f [1,15] = 3.652$ ,  $p = 0.075$ ). However, by examining the interaction or by separating the groups, the Thursday group showed considerable improvement in their scores, while the

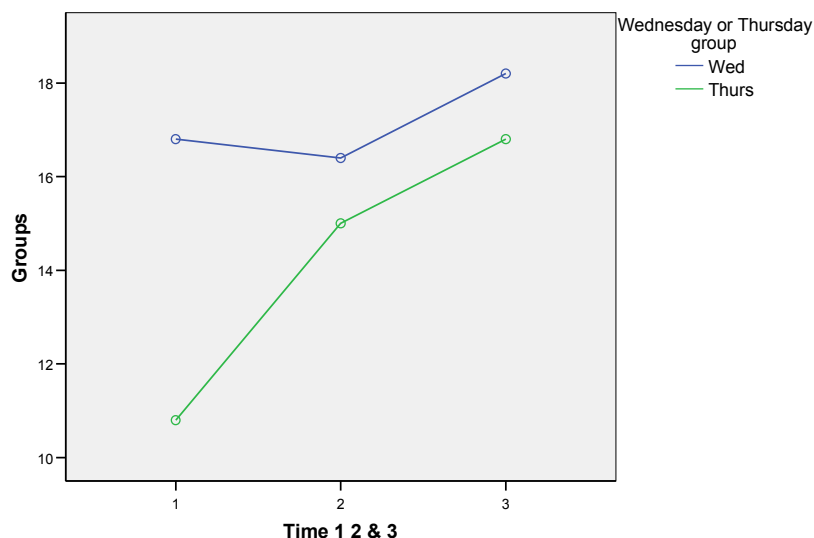
Wednesday group remained roughly the same ( $f [1,15] = 5.378, p = 0.035$ ). These data are illustrated in figure 1 below.

By time 3, there were fewer participants who attended the final meeting and completed the Rosenberg questionnaires, this reduced to 5 participants in each group. Hence it is not a robust enough sample to make claims about statistical significance. However the data represented in figure 2 illustrates the trends; that the groups appear to sustain and slightly improve their self esteem scores. In statistical terms the main effect of the combined groups on Rosenberg scores over three occasions was significant:  $f (2,16) = 4.428, p = 0.03$ . The interaction or separating the two groups on the Rosenberg scores over the three occasions was not significant:  $f (2,16) = 2.188, p = 0.145$ .)

**Figure 1 Mean group Rosenberg scores at time 1 & 2**



**Figure 2 Mean group Rosenberg scores at time 1, 2 & 3**



There is no evidence that self esteem measures are different according to the source of referral.

### **Qualitative data**

In addition to the quantitative questionnaire data, the research included qualitative interviews and focus groups with project participants and the facilitators. An analysis of the themes arising from the subsequent data are described below. They are:

1. Logistics
2. Skills
3. Group Style
4. The gift of photography

These data were also informed by the Photovoice forum website, which provided an area for feedback on the progress of the two courses. Facilitators and photographers were invited to give feedback about the successes and areas for development. Many of these were organisational or what had been noticed about the group members' progress. Abbreviations of these can be seen in appendix a. Where participants had made interesting comments, the facilitators recorded these as anecdotes. Some of these are illuminating and are included with the data in the results section.

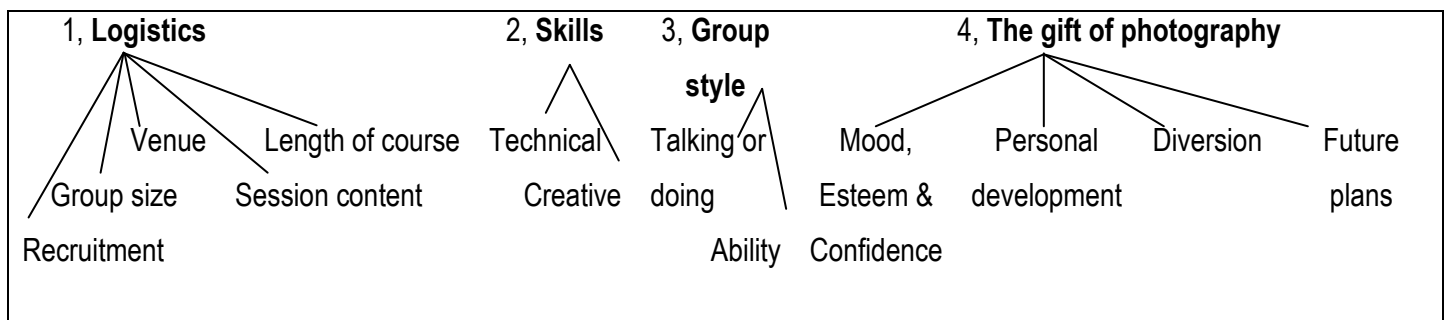


Figure 2 Themes derived from 'UR in the Picture' interviews and focus groups at the project end

### 1, Logistics

The course had been designed by 'Photovoice' based on their experience of working with marginalised groups internationally. It is their intellectual property and therefore the course content is specified from the outset and delivered by photographers employed by 'Photovoice'. The project was managed by a United Response employee, who recruited participants, arranged the venue and ensured the projects smooth delivery. This included managing travel expenses, organising lifts for participants and generally encouraging participation.

As part of the interviews and focus groups, the arrangements made for the group were discussed by participants and other stakeholders. They noted the successful aspects and how they thought future courses could develop and fulfil other service user needs.

#### Recruitment

Recruitment into the Photovoice groups from United Response sources only were reported to have been problematic from the outset. Numbers of potential participants appeared to be low. Four attended the first group and no-one arrived on the first day of the second group. These groups were not included in this evaluation, since they took place before the evaluator was recruited. However, when the recruitment was opened to other mental health sources such as MIND, community mental health teams and day centres this recruitment rate improved dramatically. For the workshops under scrutiny here, there was a full complement of participants.

External referrers were happy with the referral process, especially where they made late applications. Although they suggested that some mental health service users were not able to make a swift decision about participation and this may have precluded potential participants. This was a characteristic that may be common to mental health service users. Some were reported to have regretted not taking part when they heard about the course from their peers later on. This facilitator suggested that being offered places on a fully funded course was very appealing for service providers.

*“...it was also sponsored and paid for as well which was another huge bonus, so people didn't have to worry about finding sponsorship or funding for the individuals they were just able to participate...” (Facilitator 5)*

It is not clear whether there were any differences between clients from each referring service, such as severity of mental health issues.

### Venue

The course was held in the upstairs room of a local bar- restaurant. The venue was less than suitable for some participants with mobility problems as there wasn't a lift to the upper floor.

*“It takes me a long time to get up the stairs, I'm frightened of falling”(Participant 10 Wednesday)*

One research participant noted that the venue was rather 'cramped' for the slide shows, as course participants had to crowd around to see; it was quite cold during the winter period too. Another found the room dark and this had affected his mood on one occasion. The venue was chosen according to the budget available and within a short space of time. The project manager acknowledged the venue limitations but she and other participants and facilitators felt on balance it had been adequate.

The food was provided as part of the hire cost by the proprietors. Many of the participants reported that they enjoyed the hot meal supplied as part of the day: *“and we get fed as well!” (Participant 11- Wednesday group)*. The courses had been organised to include meals because the project manager believed this would be of nutritional benefit as well as a further opportunity to socialise together. Several participants acknowledged this, saying they could chat to another over lunch:

*“it was good to discuss things in a more relaxed way” (FG Thursday)*

*“A lot of my clients are very lonely... a great feeling of isolation and anything we can do that would bring people together so that they can get this feeling that they are not the only person suffering... is a good thing...this happened on the first day at lunch, they started talking about photography, then themselves, then their experiences of mental health, like a peer support group going on” (Facilitator 2)*

This arrangement began very well, although during the life of the project the venue chef changed and so the food quality changed.

### Group size

Walking into such a large group of people created some considerable anxiety. This is a problem specific to any group with mental health issues, where joining in and social contact may be a challenge from the outset. Some of the participants found that the size of the group was intimidating from the beginning.

*“...there have been a couple of clients who haven't been able finish it because there were too many people, too overwhelming and just couldn't participate, which is a shame” (Facilitator 3)*

Despite this, only 3 people dropped out. Facilitators discussed the earlier project, which had only 4 members and some felt that this had been an effective group size for this type of group work.

*“...the groups are quite big, ... the smaller group ... worked better... I think maybe people can get left behind and maybe not have as much chance of one to one” (Facilitator 3)*

The number of facilitators, both previous project participants and support workers was seen as a benefit of the course design, as this added a dimension of support for participants, no-one was left behind.

*“Composition and understanding how a picture fits in the frame and the lighting of the picture.... Because when the groups break up they have virtually one to one, so they can go into quite a lot of detail about [these skills]” (Facilitator 1)*

### Course length

Consistently participants described how they wished the course could have been longer.

*"I wanted it to carry on and not stop today... I love it" (P1 Thursday)*

*"I spoke individually to [4 participants], they all said they are loving the project, several said it is a shame it is only 6 weeks long."(Forum anecdote)*

One course participant specified eight weeks as the optimum length, several wanted even more. They suggested extending this as they wished to develop their technical skills, look at different cameras and learning about photograph editing and printing. A photographer suggested that between 8 and 12 weeks would be the optimum period to allow relationships in the group to flourish and further develop the concepts of photography as a personal narrative and self advocacy. Considering the majority of these data were collected on the last day of the course it is likely that some of the participants were expressing some sadness that the course was coming to an end, that they would still feel despite the number of weeks it continued.

*"the worst is the ending really" (Participant 7 Thursday)*

*"what now? I've no idea" (Participant 5- Wednesday group)*

However the participants also expressed a desire to continue meeting with one another. Within the confines of the last day it was not clear whether any person would become responsible for arranging a date or venue for this to happen.

### Course content

The course content is described in more depth in the skills theme. However there were some comments that relate to the course organisation and they are described here. Several participants suggested that the funds required for the food could be better employed in other ways, such as trips out to new sites for photography in a mini bus. There was some interest in this idea as a way of extending the photography subject material.

*"We could have had packed lunches and gone out further afield" FG Thursday*

*"There only so many photos you can take of Bognor... I thought we would go out to Littlehampton, Arundel, places of interest you know" (Participant 3 Thursday)*

The last session is a very busy day for the photographers, as they work one to one with each of the group members to select the photographs they wish to have printed for their scrapbooks and for the exhibition. For those not engaged in this or waiting their turn this included quite a lot of waiting around. Although this was a chance for continued socialising, there appeared to be missed opportunities for making arrangements for future meetings as well as distributing local information regarding photography opportunities, college courses and so on. At the final meeting, it was clear that group members had not got in touch with one another, nor arranged any meetings. The project manager then instigated a contact list to be shared as desired, to help overcome this difficulty.

## 2, Skills

### Technical skills

Although the course was designed to encourage participants to view photography as a vehicle to provide a narrative of their lives, participants engaged with this at different levels. The participants all reported they attended the course with a view to developing or extending their photography skills. This was their primary expectation.

*“Initially I was hoping to get a more technical understanding of photography, um, there was more in that sense ... it’s helped with mental health as well. It’s very creative rather than technically based” (P6 Thursday)*

*“I didn’t know about portraits, shadows and reflections before” (Focus group- reunion Wednesday group)*

Some of the participants were taking part in an activity they had never tried before or hadn’t done for a long time.

*“More confidence with cameras, it’s something I hadn’t done for years” (P1 Thursday)*

### Creative skills

In addition to technical skills, the participants described having developed creative skills and were given a chance to look at every day items with a new eye, to see art in the everyday. Participants took inspiration from this.

*“I got a lot of experience of using the camera, understanding the camera a bit more, knowing more about how to take a photograph, I know what to look for now...when I first*

*started I just took snap shots just like everybody else but now they are little bit more refined...it's given me an artistic eye" (P3- Thursday group)*

*"seeing that photography can be an art thing, you know" (Participant 5- Wednesday group)*

*"he hadn't expected photography to be quite so therapeutic. He says he's lying awake sometimes thinking about what to shoot and how to shoot it but affirmed that this was a positive thing. He also mentioned that he is seeing pictures everywhere, even looking at how film directors use similar compositional devices." (Forum Anecdote)*

*"Everybody sees things, it doesn't matter....you can still see that the sun shines and you can still appreciate beauty, so anything that channels peoples creativity is entirely positive" (Facilitator 1)*

Inspiration also came from their peers.

*"Looking at other peoples work.... I can develop that into something else"  
(Focus group- Thursday group)*

This demonstrates how many of the participants were pleasantly surprised by their creative development. One participant enjoyed the fact that he could now describe himself as a photographer. This was confirmed by the receipt of a certificate at the end of the course. This validated their attendance and commitment as well as their achievement.

*"I didn't realise about the certificate we were going to get as well so again that was another surprise." (Focus group- Wednesday)*

The participants in the reunion focus group said they had not been able to get a full understanding of narrative or story telling through photography. One person said *"I don't think I made enough use of that"* (Reunion focus group Wednesday group). This skill was thought to be something they would need more training for.

### Prior experience

The participants all agreed that none of them needed to have had previous photography experience, skills or abilities to join the group. This was seen as a benefit, making the course and its benefits accessible to anyone with an interest in attending.

*“...photography is good..., if you wanted to join a watercolour group and do watercolour painting you’d got have to have some kind of skill haven’t you, artistically, whereas everyone can hold a camera and press a shutter and its capturing images that are personal to them... it’s instantaneous art where you don’t have to actually be very artistic... to be able to share with each other...” (Facilitator 5)*

Although this view might challenge a mainstream professional photographer’s opinions of their own work and beliefs about art, it allowed the group members and stakeholders to feel it was a skill accessible to all of them.

Despite being referred via mental health services the participants did not anticipate the group or workshops to be therapeutic per se. These factors are described later in the theme ‘the gift of photography’. The participants did clearly describe how they could take the skills back in to their day to day lives and use photography for pleasure. One participant described how it had made her look at the world differently:

*“I shall go on looking through a photographer’s eye now.... It gives me an appreciation of beauty and a different perspective. Like the alphabet... look at things like they were letters... I just keep looking at things and thinking well I’d like to photograph that” (Participant 12 Wednesday)*

### **3, Group style**

The participants were not aware of any differences between the two groups because they had not moved between them. All participants spoke very highly of the photographers, saying they were helpful and friendly.

*“They’ve been very understanding with us, they’ve given us all the help they can without making us feel small” (Focus group- Thursday)*

### Talking or doing?

However, facilitators involved on both days were aware of differences between the groups from the outset. A main difference appeared to be that one photographer enjoyed talking to the group about ideas for longer periods, while the other was keen to break the group up and keep them active:

*“The Wednesday group has been less effective as a group..., people have been sitting and listening almost for hour after hour and it’s not a realistic expectation...by contrast the Thursday group breaks up regularly and is very task centred. So they’ll say, go photograph colours.... then they regroup and they discuss and then they download... the trouble when groups don’t talk to each other... it’s very difficult for them to bond and find common purpose whereas when they split up and go off in twos and threes they get to know the person who’s with them; they feel confident about going up and saying actually I don’t understand this....” (Facilitator 1)*

This issue was put on to the internet forum for discussion by week 4, candid suggestions were made, with cross pollination of ideas from one group to the other by the photographers and facilitators. Suggestions were to spend more time asking participants to take photographs and spend less time discussing the resultant images, reducing those shown through editing. This was suggested to maintain a sense of fun and ‘hands on’ work. Further suggestions were that the some of the concepts under discussion did not suit the mixed range of abilities, leaving some participants a little ‘left behind’. These issues appeared to cause some friction between different facilitator parties, resulting in a group discussion with participants on week 5. This did not appear to resolve the tensions. This may have influenced a drop in the number of attendees at week six.

By watching both groups at work, the differences in working practice or style were evident to the researcher. However it is not clear whether participants performed differently under these conditions, nor that this impacted on the overall outcome for the individuals. In fact the Rosenberg results indicate that the groups were different from the outset. Where gains were made in levels of self esteem it is not clear whether this was due to the facilitator style or the engagement in the course more generally.

### Mixed ability groups

In terms of group membership, participants were pleased that both the groups were of mixed ability as this was inspirational; but not so much that some were left behind the others.

*“If I was a first grade of violin I would want to be with a classical orchestra, when you go to groups that are so diverse in their capabilities it makes it very difficult for the tutors and it’s quite daunting for people on the lower level... its been quite a reassuring group...”*  
(Focus group- Wednesday)

One of the referring professionals agreed that the level of teaching was exactly right for the participants.

### Choosing exhibition photos

Part of the art of leading these groups appeared to be providing a sense of value to all the photographs downloaded in order to build confidence and esteem; yet also emphasizing the quality of some in order to choose them for the final exhibitions. At the reunion meeting, one group felt that they had been given limited choice of photographs for the final exhibition and were a little disappointed when they saw the displays at Bankside. They said they would have chosen different photographs themselves.

## **4, The gift of photography**

The themes above illustrate the practical implications of a participatory arts project such as ‘UR in the Picture’. However the main aims of the project include an examination of the therapeutic impact. Self esteem is considered in the data collected by questionnaire but it is important to analyse the participant accounts for both obvious and less tangible aspects of being involved in the project. The impact of being involved in the ‘UR in the picture’ project was wide and varied and can be broken down into several sections. These are mood and esteem, personal development, diversion and the future. One course facilitator had given the therapeutic aspect considerable thought, by trying to disentangle therapeutic effect from more general benefits:

*“Are the groups therapeutic?... My view is they shouldn’t be,.. the therapy should be incidental to the whole endeavour... for some of these people will have been through everything, psychiatrists, doctors, the whole shooting match and this is really time out from all of this, this is trying to put your problems in perspective....”* (Facilitator 1)

Overall the facilitators and participants talked about their involvement in the project as if they had been given a gift. This was literal because course participants were given the cameras to keep beyond the duration of the project.

*“there’s no point in training people how to use a piece of equipment and then taking it away from them” (Facilitator 5)*

It was also a gift in terms of the developments they made and experienced on an emotional plane as described below.

### Mood and esteem

The project was wholeheartedly enjoyed by the participants. They described it as fun and participants really looked forward to attending every week. The focus group members reported that it gave them a ‘boost’, a ‘lift’ and they felt ‘elated’ by the course.

*“it has helped mentally because I can go out and about more and not be fazed by wondering what people are looking at, and if they’re looking at me because I’m too busy looking through the lens...” (Participant 4- Thursday)*

*“When I look at these portraits, I realise that three weeks ago I wouldn’t have dreamt of talking to anyone, I would have turned away.” (Forum Anecdote)*

Participants were inspired by seeing what each of them could achieve, the beauty of each others photographs and how they might develop their own work using other techniques or similar subject material.

*“...a couple of people that were naturally amazing photographers ... and that rubbed off on the other participants so it brought them up the mixture of developing self esteem through the peers...” (Facilitator 5)*

Facilitators also described the participants pride as the showed their own work in the weekly slideshows.

*“On the first day when I took one person home he said ‘I cannot remember the last time that anyone has clapped and applauded something I have done’, he was so chuffed” (Facilitator 2)*

This was balanced with trepidation as participants worried about the quality of their work and how it would be judged. One or two participants mentioned how unfamiliar they were with receiving praise, compliments and appreciation.

*“It’s challenging because people are judging you” (Focus group- Thursday)*

*“people keep telling me how good I am, which is... I find it hard to think they are meaning it” (Participant 2- Thursday group)*

### Confidence

Most said they felt that they had experienced a boost to their self confidence. This was a highly consistent theme from all of the stakeholders. This forum anecdote shows how one participant discussed how this course had encouraged him to leave the house, which had previously been very difficult.

*“What a star. This is a man that for the pre course meeting and at least week 1 was extremely nervous and shy, to the point that I thought he would walk out at any minute. At week 3-4 most of his images were taken either indoors or at 2AM in the morning if outside. Now at week 5, (he) is confident enough to go to a beach with a 3 foot mirror under his arm during daylight and not be concerned about other people. His confidence has grown, he is desperate to pursue photography further, and I feel this course has so far had a profoundly positive affect on his mental wellbeing.”(Forum anecdote)*

*“I’m still not as confident as I’d like to be... but as I’ve got to know people my confidence has grown” (Participant 3 Thursday)*

*“Asking people to take their pictures gave me confidence. I didn’t know I was going to enjoy it, but once I got a swing of it was great.” (Forum anecdote)*

Another participant was able to separate this raised level of confidence from increased photography skills and what she described as ‘core confidence’ (Participant 9 Wednesday). She wasn’t sure how far the confidence had permeated into her psyche and would be sustained in other aspects of her life. The down side of all these positive experiences means that the participants were quite sad that the course was all over and they longed for some further courses to sustain the feelings it generated. It is not clear that all participants sustained

the good feelings beyond the life of the project, as some expressed some struggles with their confidence in the final focus groups.

Being involved in the course had related consequences for participants. For instance, one of the referrers commented it was important that participants had had to travel to Bognor, to negotiate lifts and let people know if they were attending or not, as this encouraged them to take responsibility for themselves; something that some participants had lost confidence in. Facilitators spoke in terms of “*spikes of huge self esteem*” (Facilitator 5) and how this course helped in this regard. However, it is not clear if describing benefits of the course in this way was due to the use of the Rosenberg scale which is explicitly a ‘self esteem’ measure or whether this would have been noted anyway. One facilitator remarked that he had seen an improvement in a participant’s self confidence, not through visible excitement but by the fact the person had attended every week and had engaged in the subject discussions, allowing positive comments to be drawn from him.

### Personal development

Personal development may be further divided into several aspects: social skills, peer support and emotional expression.

### Social skills

As described earlier, the group members expressed some degree of trepidation when entering this group’s social situation for the first time. One facilitator explained how she had used her experience of facilitating a previous group to explain what had happened and calm these nerves and worries. Another facilitator felt that the workshops were a useful tool to get people to engage with others, when this may have previously been difficult:

*“...this is a safe way of introducing people into [social situations]” (Facilitator 2)*

*“One participant mentioned that this was the first group he had attended since being diagnosed with anxiety and I thought this was an extremely big achievement. He said he was enjoying the workshops and having fun.” (Forum Anecdote)*

Most participants described the experience of being with new people as enjoyable. They liked making new acquaintances with likeminded people. Some described a sense of belonging and

others said that they felt encouraged to join other types of groups because this had shown them it could be a positive experience.

*“I won’t be so frightened about joining a new group having joined this group. I was a bit frightened when I first come here because I knew nobody” (Participant 3 Thursday)*

*“I’d be more inclined to go along to another group, yes, I wouldn’t be as, have as much reserve or fear about like I did with this one initially, it’s broken the ice a bit with me...” (Participant 5- Wednesday group)*

They felt uplifted by being in the group. One facilitator described the group members as less ‘stressy’:

*“A lot of people are socially isolated and the panacea for that is meeting and doing with other people and is very hard to bring about on your own account, it’s much easier if you’ve got an excuse for doing it, some people are incredibly shy. There has been a huge increase in relaxation, people are much less ‘stressy’ with each other and with themselves” (Facilitator 1)*

### Peer support

This project was a chance for new participants and those from the previous courses to support one another. There was evidence in the focus groups of gentle encouragement for one another, by giving compliments, offering technical tips and valuing one another’s work. One participant described how he was taking the skills he had learned in the group to other people beyond, spreading the value. Previous participants were able to continue the work they had already started. Facilitators could see how this had had an effect on these mentors:

*“...the best part has been the peer support and mentoring...” (Facilitator 5)*

### Emotional expression

Clearly there was very little direct focus on the common bond of mental health difficulties within the group discussions, especially early in the course. Later on, one group were asked directly to represent perceptions of mental health and how they felt these could be changed in their photography and through subsequent group discussion. This was said to have proved inspirational and had not aroused visible discomfort in the participants. Although, facilitators felt it was beneficial to wait until week 5 to do this, so that a culture of trust had already been established.

Facilitators and some participants were able to acknowledge the emotional expression that the participants had been prompted to include in their photography. They felt that at times the participants made intimate disclosures as they described their photographs and that revealed something of themselves:

*"I think anything creative, art you know... it's almost therapeutic as well...it's easy to write something down, or your feelings but showing it, showing someone it has quite an impact, I mean one guy was saying he felt isolated and depressed and he showed us a picture of him in a bath, under water... it really hits you" (Facilitator 4)*

*"it's quite difficult to take photos when you are depressed, you know getting organised....this course is a bit like art therapy...you can express what you want to express....saying 'this is how I feel...'" (Focus group- Wednesday)*

It was deemed useful as a device to communicate with friends and family too.

*"this is a good way of showing people this is what your life is like to friends and family" (Facilitator 2)*

Some participants could see the value of this emotional challenge:

*"sometimes when the pictures go on the wall... and they sort of put you on the spot to describe what you were thinking or feeling then I have been able to say something... that's quite good for me" (Participant 7 Thursday)*

Other participants were thought to be less likely to engage at this conceptual level of photography:

*"Some people find it difficult to wash their dirty linen in public" (Facilitator 1)*

Participants found ways of expressing emotion through their photography without it being so explicitly personal:

*"a shopping trolley that was chained up....there is one trolley that is permanently fixed to attach the other trolleys to... this trolley has been made but never used for what it was produced for, never used as a trolley. It was such a nice photo with an emotional aspect to it" (Participant 6 Thursday)*

## Diversion

The course was viewed as diversionary as well as a focus for the participant's thoughts:

*"coming and having a purpose, to have purpose to go somewhere, you know to meet people" (Participant 7 Thursday)*

Although the participants had all been brought together because of their mental health difficulties, the course focused on photography not therapy.

*"Photography is a means to an end rather than an end in itself for these groups, they're here for a purpose and not because they're mentally ill but because they're taking photographs, so you're emphasising wellbeing rather than illness" (Facilitator 1)*

One of the facilitators described some of the participants as isolated, with usually very little to fill their day. The course gave them something to do, both on the day but with homework too. These activities gave them a focus to concentrate upon rather than their usual worries and thoughts.

*"...it made me forget about other things, if I hadn't been in this group I'd have been sitting down worrying about my worries...[there's] less time to dwell on things" (Focus group-Thursday)*

*"It made me forget, every time I came here I forgot about all my worries, I seem to have left my worries at home. I mean I go back to them but it's given me a focus" (Participant 3 Thursday)*

*"(He) said that he would never have left the house during the day had it not been for the project." (Forum Anecdote)*

The workshops fostered an interest and subsequent determination to complete the homework. The participants described how in doing the homework, the camera became a part of them and allowed them to start acting differently.

*"I don't like to stand out when I'm out and about and having a camera I just ignore everyone, there was one photo... and I had to literally lie on the floor to take it, and people must of thought I was a complete nutcase (laughs) I didn't care particularly, it was just, I wanted the shot" (Focus group- Thursday)*

*“It’s another accessory, a part of you, nothing else around you, you know, matters you know, it’s just you and that piece and the equipment you’re using” (Focus group- Thursday)*

### A sense of pride- the exhibitions

At the end of the project participants were able to exhibit some of their best work in two exhibitions. One was held locally at the same venue as the course and another held in Bankside Gallery, London. The local exhibition was held quite soon after the end of the course and was attended by most of the participants. At this point participants from both groups were able to mix with one another and view each others work, both in the wall displays but also as a slideshow. A few of the participants sold photographs. Most, but not all of the participants felt able to attend. Participants were able to take along one guest each. One participant found this limiting but this rule was reportedly due to the venue size and budget limitations. At the reunion meeting, most participants expressed their happiness and the confidence inspired by being involved. This had been compounded by the exhibition at the Bankside gallery and media coverage, both locally and in the Guardian Online. These exhibitions stimulated a sense of great pride, in being taken seriously.

*“It was wonderful; it was a very good feeling to see your photographs on the wall. I was walking round seeing other people’s, I was really chuffed for them.” (Reunion focus group- Wednesday)*

A few were more cautious about the enduring effect, especially those who had not been able to continue with photography. One referrer expressed a little disappointment that not all participants had had their work represented in the publicity material or online. This was a question of equity rather than artistic ability. United Response has loaded all the exhibition photographs onto their website since.

### The Future

The two groups were of varied ability. Several of the participants showed real promise, in terms of artistic ability and desire to pursue photography through college courses and employment. This is a valuable self discovery but doesn’t detract from the personal interest inspired in all of the other participants.

*“three quarters of the group would probably want to carry on to do an advanced course....even the ones that haven’t as much out of it technically at least now they’re going out and taking photographs and they can share these with family” (Facilitator 2)*

*“(she) said that she would love to take a year out and do nothing but photograph!” (Forum Anecdote)*

*“(he) bought a book about digital photography for himself this week, and was really excited to show it to other participants - saying that he will continue to do regular sessions himself, so he can get better and better at shooting his stories.” (Forum anecdote)*

It seemed some participants needed the motivation of the course to keep up their photography:

*“I’m going to miss the structure... and whether I will continue taking the photos, I don’t know... I find it hard to go out and take photos on my own... just when I’m with other people” (Participant 7 Thursday)*

Another participant was hesitant about his ability to carry this learning beyond the course. This reflected his continued low confidence and negative thinking:

*“I been going out taking photographs... because I had a reason to do it, but now I haven’t got a reason, I’m worried that I’m not gonna be taking any more photos and I’m going to lose it...” (Participant 2- Thursday group)*

At the reunion meeting, not all participants described continued exuberance for photography. One participant had been asked to take the photographs for a friend's wedding and would be paid to do so. Two more expressed a desire to go on to college courses. More generally participants realised that photography had now become a hobby, *“I’ve got a new hobby now” (Participant 13- Wednesday group)*, something they could do for pleasure. It seemed to be something they could take into relationships with friends and family, sharing the outcome of their labours, giving them a focus for conversation that wasn't about their state of mental health.

*“If you can go back to your home environment and talk about photographs.... You can share it... you’re building a bridge” (Facilitator 1)*

As previously noted, participants seemed to be interested in the idea of continuing to meet one another socially but it wasn't clear at the final session whether participants or facilitators would lead the organisation of this.

### **Additional data**

Group discussions and interviews were held with participants from the first series of workshops, prior to this evaluation. These were carried out by a member of United Response staff. Similar themes of increased confidence and pleasure in learning about and performing photography were reported by participants (N4) and facilitators. They also identified the benefit of meeting regularly and purposively with a group of friendly and supportive peers. One of these participants went on to become a facilitator in the groups discussed here.

The researcher was able to have brief telephone conversations with three of the professionals who had referred participants into the project. They had approached individuals as well as displaying posters about the project and assisted in obtaining places. They encountered people who were interested but could not take the step required to join the group because of their mental health difficulties and others that were immediately keen to join in. They generally reported satisfaction with the project and felt that the benefits to service user participants were likely to be sustainable. They felt that it helped with skills development and self confidence by providing a social venue as well as opportunities to speak to new people. Some of the participants had to negotiate with one another to arrange transport and all had to take responsibility for attending regularly. This was deemed useful. They reported that service users had surprised themselves and others with the quality of their work, the value it was given and the inclusive nature of the workshops. The exhibitions were judged of particular value to people often excluded from mainstream society. Referrers observed a degree of envy by people who had considered and rejected joining the group when they saw how enthusiastic their peers were, bringing back samples of their photographs. The course venue was thought to be unthreatening to participants, although not entirely suitable for the exhibition. One particular organisation had followed up the project by organising a weekly arts club, where staff would accompany people to take photographs and then assist in the use of computer software to download and edit. Another reflected that the participants who had benefited most have been people not generally considered suitable for referral into this kind of group work. The use of photographs has since been adopted by one of the services to build a memory book for a

person with memory difficulties. This was inspired by this project. All of the referrers felt they would refer into a similar project again. None felt the course had been too short, although they acknowledged the sadness people felt about ending. One professional suggested that the funds required to run such a project prohibited its mainstream use but that the principles could be adopted by trained support workers to provide in house workshops. This was claimed to be likely to make such work more sustainable, similar to other walking or allotment groups. One referrer was cautious that the project funders and managers should be mindful of the hopes that could be inspired in people attending the course that might not eventually come to fruition. This was thought to potentially have a later detrimental effect on mental health. This referrer also expressed caution about the effectiveness of risk assessment of service users. That is to say service users might become engaged with vulnerable people in the community through photography, where risk to themselves or others might not have been truly anticipated in advance. In addition it was suggested that care should be taken to create a sense of equity despite the level of creative ability in the publicity materials and persons invited to be 'official photographers' at events.

Overall it would appear that the course was able to send out 'seedling' ideas to other organisations who wish to capitalise on the course. This would be by setting up similar groups, using the service user photographs to decorate buildings and using photography to record events and progress.

### **Course based evaluation data**

From the outset participants were asked to comment upon the aims they had for the course and the house rules they considered important. At the end of the course participants were asked to comments on whether their aims for the course had been met. They agreed they had.

Participants were also asked to give feedback regarding the day using a large sheet of paper with a grid of six areas: Improved confidence; learnt something new about photography; improved communication skills; had fun; learnt from others; met new people. Participants were asked to place sweets that had been distributed into the grid to identify areas of success that day. The photographers recorded this information by taking a photograph of the grid, once everyone had taken part. At the present time there is no data available to the research team regarding this evaluative data. Observation suggests that the participants did not take this light

hearted activity too seriously, often eating the sweets before they put them on the grid. Furthermore, it was one of the last daily activities and often participants were keen to leave, and some had already left.

## Discussion

As identified in the project aims, the main question for this project evaluation is to understand whether the intervention of a participatory photography course is 'therapeutic' for mental health service users.

- To research the impact and potential of photography as a therapeutic tool with adults with mental health needs and distribute its findings in a research paper

To do this it has been necessary to measure pre-identified concepts to illustrate change and the sustainability of the effects. The project steering group chose 'self-esteem' as the concept most likely to be affected by the intervention; and the Rosenberg 'self esteem' scale as the most appropriate measure of this concept.

### Self Esteem

When examining quantitative data derived using the Rosenberg 'self-esteem' scale it is clear that for one of the participant groups, obvious gains were made in levels of self esteem from the beginning to the end of the project. Although the data is not comprehensive enough to accept statistical significance, this does illustrate trends of therapeutic gain. It is also clear that this level of self esteem was sustained for both groups after the project had ended, regardless of the reservations of some group members found in the final 'reunion' focus group. However the groups did not appear to be the same from the outset. The Wednesday group began with higher levels of self esteem than the Thursday group and stayed at the same level throughout. It is not clear that the clear improvements in self esteem made in the Thursday group were due to:

- the Photovoice project model
- the facilitator style
- greatest impact for those with lowest self esteem

In future it may be possible to mitigate some of these factors by using the same facilitator for more than one group, using a control group or comparing this to a non-Photovoice branded participatory photography course. Larger participant numbers would give power to the

statistical computations. Some caution must also be reserved due to the lack of evidence of the measures sensitivity to change (Bowling, 1997) as well as the low numbers of participants.

In addition to administering this scale on three occasions, it was possible to interview stakeholders and participants regarding the process and engagement in the project and other perceived benefits and drawbacks. Themes arising included logistical issues, skills obtained, group style and the gift of photography. These qualitative data collection methods were able to access some views on the wider project objectives.

### **Participant outcomes**

Overall it is clear that this project stimulated a good feeling in most of the participants and stakeholders. Participants were able to enjoy themselves, learning new skills, develop self confidence and contribute to the body of photographic work for education about mental illness. This meets many of the overall project objectives.

Similar to the existing literature it is clear from the data obtained during this evaluation that 'UR in the Picture' was able to respond as a social support mechanism for the participants for the duration of the project. Participants did not overtly refer to the social support mechanism of the group nor were they enthused enough to arrange meetings in the future. However the researcher was able to watch the group members use social skills to remind each other of their successes, what they were now capable of and listen to one another in the focus groups.

The project participants were able to adopt a new or supplementary identity. They were able to become photographers rather than patients or service users and were able to take away skills they could use in everyday life. In comparison to the existing literature the participants exhibited increased self motivation through the creative inspiration and desire to produce their homework. Although self esteem appears to be sustained after the project was completed, it is not clear that this self motivation to take photographs is sustained for all participants long term.

Increased confidence is a strong theme explicitly evident in the qualitative data. Most participants described some effect on their confidence. This appeared to extend beyond the confidence in their photography skills and include confidence to mix and engage with new people and to venture beyond their usual known area. For some this empowered them to

become involved in new groups, considered continued training and even employment opportunities.

### **Who benefits?**

Demographic information was not collected as part of this project and therefore no broad markers of benefit according to age, gender or social classification can be made. It is clear that mental health service users with low self esteem may be the hardest to recruit into a project such as this due to their own self concept and negative thoughts. But they may be the people with the most to gain. Referrers acknowledged this having observed the initial reluctance of some candidates followed by encouraging qualitatively positive outcomes for the people who did participate. It would appear that the recruitment challenge may be mediated by asking facilitators or past participants to recruit, inspire and sustain participants. They could do this by speaking to potential participants prior to the course as well as by providing examples of their work, experiences and progress.

One participant clearly attracted the attention of the group members and the facilitators as he demonstrated a '*natural talent*' (Facilitator 6), engaging at a conceptual level. He was able to present work that provided an autobiographical narrative as well as being visually pleasing. It was reported that this person realised his own talent because of the course. Another has since decided to earn a living through photography and has kept in touch with one of the photographers. However, this was the exception rather than the rule and caution should be maintained regarding these striking successes, since these kinds of discovery were not the aim of the course. Although in some ways inspiring for other members, it may have also engendered some sense of lesser ability in participants. Although this is the nature of groups and skills within them, care must be taken not to prioritise these talented individuals over others, especially in publicity materials and time and attention given. On the other hand, it may be that these service user hopes are raised beyond the capacity of the service. For instance where natural talent is observed and encouraged yet little sustained support is in place for these people to develop this, in terms of training and employment.

This illustrates a hypothetical division that can be made about the participants in participatory arts projects such as 'UR in the Picture'. There are those who are invited to join the group but who cannot join or could not sustain involvement. This might be due to their continued mental health difficulties or because they didn't enjoy the type of work. Here there is a risk of

compounding negative thoughts about failure. Then there are successful course participants who develop their interest in photography as a hobby as well as using the group as a chance to socialise with likeminded individuals. These groups appear to show that gains in self esteem are sustained in the short to medium term. Although it is not clear that this can be sustained beyond the life of the project without some concrete organisation or follow up. This indicates that building in an informal camera club or something similar for group participants may be welcomed and help to sustain the positive outcomes of the courses. This need not require large resource investment but a way of providing a lynch pin for those without skills for group organisation. Finally, as described above, there are persons with a talent for photography and related arts who wished to take the skills to a higher level. It is easy to see these people shine, but facilitators must be mindful that this participant group does not dominate or eclipse others so that others may make considerable gains within the groups.

### **Broadening recruitment**

Early project recruitment was reported to be challenging but the widening of recruitment beyond United Response demonstrated the broad appeal of such a project. It is not clear from the accounts of participants in this project why recruitment should be difficult. Barriers could include the geographical location of the courses. It could also be that the mental health difficulties service user experience, compound all barriers to social participation. The groups of people involved in this project have mental health difficulties and generally these groups suffer from social isolation and inequity. It's not often that opportunities are offered free of charge, so referrers were eager to encourage participation. In the absence of further funds it is likely that mental health professionals will adopt and extend some of the principles from the 'UR in the Picture' project in to their own work environments. This seems to already be happening in varied ways. This may be of concern to Photovoice because of their intellectual property rights or desire to promote a standard model with trained facilitators. Clarity regarding the Photovoice method will be established when the toolkit is finalised. Organisations may be able to collaborate to develop a rolling programme of courses, sharing the cost of staff, Photovoice photographers and venues. This might incorporate the participant suggestions of excluding lunch but taking a trip to another town. Also individual budgeting arrangements may be considered in this calculation.

## **Project organisation**

In terms of project organisation, it was clear that although the project had been awarded funding, to include evaluation, this did not start at the beginning of the projects participant recruitment. Two groups were planned and one executed prior to evaluator involvement. It would be helpful to recruit an evaluator in the early phase to accommodate ethical approval processes as well as to observe and monitor the process from the outset.

Early recruitment to the first two groups was poor and it was not until the course was offered to a wider audience that larger groups could be enlisted. This should be of primary consideration in future funding bids and it might be useful to engage in wider service provider collaboration to both attract participants and funding awards. Views regarding the group size should be weighed between group effectiveness and resource availability. Considering the low drop out rate it is likely that 12-14 participants are optimum.

Finally, the participants seemed to be keen to continue to meet and some needed this encouragement to continue their photography. It would appear that to provide some low level support beyond the 'taught' course end but as part of the project might assist the longer term sustainability of positive outcomes for this group of service users.

Overall, the wider aims for the project appear to have been largely met and it is clear that the groups benefited greatly from their involvement.

## Recommendations

The organisations, United Response and Photovoice, may be interested to develop the course further. With this in mind the following recommendations for developing the project are made:

### 1, Lengthening the course by two or more weeks

Adding two or more extra sessions would be likely to have several positive outcomes

- To further cement to the group membership and sustained social support mechanism
- Enable time for a field trip to widen the horizons of some isolated participants
- To explore the concept of narrative or storytelling through photography in greater depth
- Provide time to discuss future options such as college, continued social meetings and what skills people may wish to pursue next.

2, Make relationships with local photographers/ colleges to act as mentor(s) for the talented photographers in the group.

3, Seek multiple organisation collaboration to share staff expertise, sites to host the course and the costs on a twice yearly basis. This might include varied service user groups, such as learning disability.

4, Provide low level support to assist group members continued meeting, for instance a camera club. This need only be informal, but provide dates and suggested venues as well as occasional speakers or photographer contacts as well as college prospectuses and continued encouragement.

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## Appendix a

Workshop date	Positive	Negative
26/02/09	Participants wanted to discuss their images with the group. Also enjoyed starting scrapbooks.	Some negative comments about groups from public. Not all participants willing to complete Rosenberg. Delay after group work due to punctuality.
05/03/09	Noticing what might be visually interesting in the mundane. Use of photographers work inspired participants. Developing way of talking about photos, not just snappers. Creative images to activate the senses.	Travel disruption, session late starting Mobile phone rule breaches
12/03/09	Everyone more relaxed & embracing project. Thoughtful response to challenging task. Splitting into 2 groups enabled objectives to be met. Evidence of peer inspiration and support. Outstanding homework. Useful discussion of editing. 1-2-1 helped project idea development.	Change of café staff, poor coffee. Participants already saying course too short. Homework review too long. More 1-2-1 required for photo stories to develop.
19/03/09	Viewing edited selection rather than every photo. Asking how mental health is perceived and how should be portrayed timed correctly, people relaxed enough to join in. 1-2-1 tutorials. Inspiration of night mode by one participant spread to others, this was rewarding for him. Discussion more candid re evaluation	Didn't revisit aims and objectives
26/03/09	The final slide show was wonderful; you could see how proud all the participants were and handing out the certificates after each person's slides were shown made all the participants proud. The day ran smoothly, the evaluations were all completed including the focus group and the 1:1's without impeding too much on the day. The photographic 1:1's were all completed with a professional edit for each participant.	The only thing that caused slight disruption was eating upstairs, however we worked around this and it was not a major issue
25/02/09	2 laptops speeds up downloads. Icebreaker- discussing picture preferences worked well. Treasure hunt-playful. Flip chart exercises- enthusiasm. All able to use cameras well. Appeared to enjoy selves. Tasks fun & relaxed	Treasure hunt might be better later on in course. Sweet exercise people confused about it. Dropped brainstorming activity due to time. Some people less able to talk as others talked more. Being told off for not sticking to the rules. Formal workshop structure.
04/03/09	Colour task enjoyed. Individual styles revealed themselves. Choosing to more a session of day empowered & energised. Using camera straight away.	Participants like more time out with camera. Caption ideas time consuming as a group. Slideshow and scrapbooks moved.

	Feedback shared different perspectives, helped confidence.	
11/03/09	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Homework slideshow <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- lively discussion</li> <li>- good mutual feedback</li> <li>- fruit and biscuits worked well, a good 'pick me up'</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Portrait assignment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- enjoyed having a specific set of instructions</li> <li>- approaching strangers gave people confidence</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. portrait warm up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a good group bonding</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. Portrait slide show <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- esteem raising</li> <li>- people really picked up the different types of framing</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. homework slideshow <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- too much time given to it in proportion</li> <li>- having it in the afternoon is better</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Scrap books <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- too much to cover in the day (portraiture priority)</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
18/03/09	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- People responded well to the idea that "the heat is going to be turned up", since we have started second half of our workshops, we'll push everyone a little bit more</li> <li>- meditation worked well as a warm up for the writing</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. homework assignment was brilliant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- everyone's story revealed their unique styles coming out</li> <li>- exciting development – useful for the personal projects</li> <li>- group bonding – it brought everyone closer to each other</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. the assignment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- developing ideas of narrative story telling</li> <li>- good response to abstract ideas and conceptual approach building</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We run over time by 10 minutes on (because we spent longer than planned on slideshow 1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- in defence – the assignment was so strong, it seemed worth a sacrifice of extra minutes</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Flipchart evaluation of the day - I forgot to ask people to put stars on the flipchart as an evaluation exercise</li> <li>3. I was concerned that x didn't return - especially following Sharon's comment that he left earlier last week due to be uncomfortable with the portraiture assignment. If only we were alerted to the reasons for his leaving, we would have given him different task to work on. Can he be contacted, given his prints, and asked to do a personal project, so he can return to the group?</li> <li>4. I was also sad not to see x at the workshop - as above, can x be given his prints, and informed about homework assignment?</li> </ol>
25/03/09	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. slideshow of homework: very good group participation</li> <li>2. one to one session brought out very interesting ideas, stories and thoughts about their images and personal projects</li> <li>3. Intro and Q&amp;A at the end- general feel of the group – everyone has become more outspoken and open – a sense of ownership of the workshop</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. morning refurbishment work at the venue was an interruption that took up time, plus general visitor numbers were challenging, but it was great having Matt's feedback, especially during the slideshow session</li> <li>2. Not going though the outshoot was a shame, but it would have been impossible due to time restriction</li> <li>3. not knowing what exactly is happening about the local exhibition makes it difficult for the group to know what they are aiming for – hard for imagine without a set date or venue</li> </ol> <p>Confrontation with group about session structure was not productive.</p>
01/04/09	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. one to one captioning – very enlightening, gave closure to the project, perfect for the last session</li> <li>2. final slideshow – offered people a sense of achievement</li> <li>3. more informal structure of the day</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. it's a shame four people didn't turn up, but their prints and cds with all the images were given to Sharon</li> <li>2. one to one and the group captioning resulted in quite a lot of hanging around for some people.</li> </ol>

## Appendix b

### Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)

Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself.

Please tick  to show whether you **strongly agree**, **agree**, **disagree** or **strongly disagree** with each of the statements.

		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	At times, I think I am no good at all.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	I am able to do things as well as most other people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	I certainly feel useless at times.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	I wish I could have more respect for myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	I take a positive attitude toward myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Appendix c



### Consent Form – Course Participants UR in the Picture

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet. Yes / No

I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have these answered. Yes / No

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without the standard of care or my legal rights being affected. Yes / No

I understand that any information I give will be confidential, except if I say something that causes worry about myself, or another adult or child, when the researchers will need to talk to someone else. They will let me know if they need to do this. Yes / No

I understand that any publications will not identify me by name. Yes / No

I understand that that there are 2 parts to this study: filling in questionnaires and taking part in an interview. I understand that I can take part in **one or both** of these. Yes / No

I am willing to take part in the following parts of the study (please tick 1 or both of the boxes, as you wish):

Interview

Questionnaires

If applicable: I am happy for the interview to be audio-recorded. Yes / No  
(N/a)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Person taking consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

## Appendix d



Avon and Wiltshire   
Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust

### Information Sheet – Course Participants

#### UR in the Picture

We would like to invite you to participate in a research study. Before you decide if you would like to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take some time to read through the following information and discuss it with others if you wish. Do ask if there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like to know more. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

#### *What is the purpose of the study?*

UR in the Picture is a photographic course that aims to help people with mental health problems learn to take photographs to reflect the reality of their lives. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the impact of UR in the Picture.

#### *Why have I been invited?*

You have decided to take part in the UR in the Picture course. We are asking everyone on the course to take part in this study. You do not have to take part in the research study if you do not want to. Your role with UR in the Picture will not be affected if you decide not to take part.

#### *Do I have to take part?*

It is up to whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part then the researcher will ask you to read and sign a Consent Form to show that you have agreed to take part. There are two parts to this study: filling in questionnaires and taking part in an interview/ discussion group *You may take part in one or both of these activities.*

You will be able to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. If you do decide to withdraw it will not affect the support you get from UR in the Picture.

#### *What will happen if I take part and what do I have to do?*

If you decide to take part in the questionnaire part of this study, you will be asked to fill in a questionnaire on three occasions. This will be at the first session, the last session and a few weeks after the course after the local exhibition. The researcher and a member of the course team will be available to help you complete the questionnaires if you need.

If you decide to take part in the interviews/ discussion group, the researcher will come to the final Ur in the Picture session to ask if you would like to take part in a private one-to-one interview or a discussion group with other participants to talk about your experience of the course. This will take place during and after the final session and will take about 15 to 30-minutes. We would like to audio-record the interviews/focus group but you do not have to agree to this if you do not want to.

*What are the positives and negatives of taking part?*

We hope that you will find it helpful to talk to a researcher about Ur in the Picture, and what was helpful and unhelpful about it. By doing this, Ur in the Picture can improve and continue to help people.

We do not think that there will be any negatives in taking part. However, it is possible that you might find the interview upsetting as we will be asking you questions about how Ur in the Picture has helped you. The Research Team and the course team will be able to offer you support if you feel upset.

*What happens when the research study stops?*

At the end of the study the researchers will write about what people thought of Ur in the Picture, what was helpful and unhelpful. We will write a summary that we can send to you if you would like to see it. There will be no information about individual people and you will not be identified in any report or other publication. We might use direct quotes from the interviews but these will be anonymous and not identify you in any way.

*Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?*

All data will be kept anonymously on a computer or in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office. Only members of the Research Team will have access to the data.

All information that you provide to the researcher will be strictly confidential, except if you tell us something that makes us worried about your own safety, or the safety of another adult or child, or which discloses criminal activity. If such a situation arises, we will need to follow particular guidelines and tell someone else about this. We will discuss this with you should this happen.

*What happens if there is a problem?*

If you have a concern about any aspect of the study then you should speak to a member of the research or course team.

*Who is organising and funding the study?*

UR in the Picture is being run by United Response and PhotoVoice. Researchers from the Mental Health Research & Development Unit (Avon & Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust and the University of Bath) are carrying out the research study.

**Contacts**

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