

Committees:	Dated:
Community and Children's Services Health and Wellbeing Board Culture, Heritage and Libraries	14/09/2018 21/09/2018 22/10/2018
Subject: Dragon Café in the City	Public
Report of: Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information
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Summary

Dragon Café in the City was launched at Shoe Lane Library on 8 February 2018. The aim of project was to engage City workers and residents with their mental wellbeing through a varied programme of activities taking place in the library. It was funded by the Wellcome Trust and Carnegie UK Trust's Engaging Libraries programme, with additional funding from the Department of Community and Children's Services. The project was particularly aimed at (but not exclusive to) male City workers aged 25-55, a group of people who are often less able than others to engage with their mental wellbeing.

The project was co-produced by Barbican & Community Libraries, Mental Fight Club and Business Healthy, with additional input from Output Arts.

A total of 14 fortnightly Dragon Café in the City sessions were held, running from 12pm to 8.30pm. More than 6,000 people visited Shoe Lane Library on the Dragon Café in the City days and 320 people signed up to be members of the café. A wide programme of activities was offered, including creative workshops, chess strategy, stress management "lunch & learn" sessions, free massage, yoga and mindfulness. The project has been evaluated through feedback forms, focus groups, case studies and informal feedback. Response to the project has been very positive: 91% of respondents said the Dragon Café in the City met their expectations and 80% of respondents said they felt more inclined to engage with their mental wellbeing after attending. The project is also being evaluated by Wellcome Trust and Carnegie UK Trust, with particular focus on what the wider public library profession can learn from it.

The project partners are currently seeking funding to run the project again and will use the feedback to inform the format of future sessions.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. Building on the City of London Corporation's suicide prevention campaign, "Release the Pressure" – led by the Public Health team, Barbican & Community Libraries bid for £14,667 of funding from the Carnegie UK Trust and Wellcome Trust's Engaging Libraries programme. The objective was to pilot new ways of engaging city workers and residents with their mental wellbeing through a programme of activities in Shoe Lane Library, a sanctuary in the heart of the City.
2. Barbican & Community Libraries was one of only 14 library services (out of 120 applicants) selected for the Engaging Libraries programme. Our project was co-produced with Mental Fight Club, who run the very successful Dragon Café in Southwark: "an open, welcoming group which puts on exciting, well-organised and inspirational creative events and programmes as well as simply being a place to be"¹ to support people affected by mental illness. Other partners include the City Corporation's Public Health team and Business Healthy, Monitor Deloitte (who have provided evaluation support), Output Arts, and various health and wellbeing providers.
3. Barbican & Community Libraries has a unique demographic of users because of the 450,000 workers who travel into the city every day, with a large population of male users aged between 25-54. It is this demographic that we were particularly aiming to target with this project. This audience is often considered "hard to reach" in terms of mental health and wellbeing, as they are less likely to talk about their stresses and concerns. This was the main premise for the "Release the Pressure" campaign. Our approach was to offer a wide programme of engagement, including practical workshops, creative workshops, art installations, mindfulness, body movement and massage.
4. Having successfully secured funding for the project from Carnegie UK Trust and Wellcome Trust, the Department of Community and Children's Services provided additional funding through Public Health Commissioning and Barbican & Community Libraries. This helped to enhance the pilot and extend the programme from monthly to fortnightly activities. Specific outcomes and objectives were set and aligned to the funding. These can be found in Appendix 1.
5. The benefits to the City of London of extending the funding and the scope of the project were:

¹ Dragon Café website: <https://dragoncafe.co.uk/about-us/>

- Supporting the first and fifth priorities of the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy: “Good mental health for all” and “Promoting healthy behaviours”. It also supported the first priority of the City Corporation’s 2015-18 Mental Health Strategy around prevention.
- Promotion of the City’s existing commissioned public health services to workers and residents, such as the smoking cessation/substance and alcohol misuse service, health intervention service and advice service.
- As a pilot project, Release the Pressure will be used as a case study by Carnegie UK Trust and the Wellcome Trust across the UK. The project illustrates an alternative approach to clinical mental health support, particularly targeting lower levels of poor mental health. It is also an exploration of how library services can actively engage communities with personal health and wellbeing matters.
- The project provided free support for the improved mental wellbeing of residents and workers. Most (99%) of the businesses in the Square Mile are small to medium enterprises (SMEs), employing half of the 450,000 workforce. Many of these companies are not able to put health-related support in place for their staff. For residents, who can access the commissioned service from East London NHS Foundation Trust, Dragon Café in the City presented a different form of support and an alternative to clinical approaches to addressing common mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety.

Current Position

6. The Release the Pressure campaign launched in the summer of 2017. It is a separate project to Dragon Café in the City, but it did inspire elements of the pilot. The Dragon Café in the City pilot was officially launched on 8 February 2018.
7. In total, there were 14 Dragon Café in the City sessions, running from 12pm to 8.30pm. This attracted a total of 6,525 people to Shoe Lane Library on these days. On average across the pilot, this represented a 92% increase in the number of people visiting Shoe Lane Library on Dragon Café in the City Thursdays, compared with Thursdays without the Dragon Café in the City sessions.
8. A total of 320 people signed up to be members of the Dragon Café in the City. This ensured that they were kept informed about all Café activities and sessions. Registrations also allowed the project team to collect data for evaluation purposes.
9. In total, the Cafe offered:
 - 60 free 15-minute massage sessions to help emphasise the importance of self-care
 - 17 “Lunch & Learn” talks and other workshops on a variety of topics, including stress management, ThriveLDN Problem Solving Booths, and using apps for good mental health awareness. This attracted more than 130 participants.

These workshops were run by professional health and wellbeing trainers. Most of these trainers offered their skills on a pro bono basis because they felt it was important to support the wellbeing of people living and working in the City and could see the value of the project.

- 14 game-playing sessions, including regular chess strategy sessions. These were designed to create new connections, support the development of community and help people learn new skills. This attracted a regular audience of participants, most were men aged between 25 and 54.
- 28 hours of free mindfulness and body movement (including four sessions specifically tailored to support cardiac health) and two hula-hooping sessions. These sessions attracted a regular, mixed gender and age range audience of approximately 15 participants per session.
- 23 workshops which allowed participants to explore their creative potential. These included terrarium making, pickling, watercolour painting, mask making, magic tricks and singing. Approximately 200 people participated in these workshops, a mixture of residents and workers dependent on the time of day the session was offered.

10. The delivery model for all these sessions was to work in partnership and co-produce with other organisations and individuals who are already involved in developing activities to support good mental wellbeing. Partners included ThriveLDN, which is led by the London Health Board to improve the mental health and wellbeing of all Londoners and is supported by the Mayor of London. Through this partnership, we provided Problem Solving Booths on all of the Dragon Café in the City days. The booths consisted of two chairs and signage, encouraging members of the public to sit and take the role of either the 'helper' or 'helped' and have a conversation. The idea was to get Londoners talking and starting to think about some small ways they can improve everyone's wellbeing: *"I've heard from City residents that the Problem-Solving Booth is useful and valuable"* was a comment recorded at a Focus Group.

11. We also worked in collaboration with Output Arts, an art collective that makes site-specific, interactive and participatory audiovisual artworks and experiences. They engaged with the public through the theme of "releasing the pressure". They interviewed members of the public about how they relax, recorded these interviews and embedded them into an art installation comprising a bath, rubber ducks and copper piping. This was a fun and innovative way to get people talking and thinking about how they manage stress: *"On other days I tried and enjoyed the installations and read about the reasons/inspiration behind the plumbing, ducks etc."* (Dragon Café in the City user feedback).

12. City of London commissioned providers and other organisations were also invited to attend the library on Dragon Café in the City days to promote their services. This included: The Advocacy Project, which is currently setting up a user-led service, City & Hackney Mental Health Voice which enables genuine and constructive involvement from people with mental illnesses in City & Hackney; City of London LivingWise, which promoted NHS health checks for those aged between 40 and 74; and WDP Square

Mile Health, supporting people with drug and alcohol problems and smoking cessation.

13. As this was a pilot project, we undertook extensive evaluation to assess its success against the objectives set through the funding application to Wellcome Trust/Carnegie UK Trust, and those required by the City of London. This evaluation consisted of feedback forms handed out at every session since 19 April, two focus groups, five case studies and a post-it note comments board at every session. We have also analysed the data given on the sign-up forms. The findings of the evaluation are:

- 35% of attendees were male and 65% were female
- Approximately 75% of male attendees were City Workers and approximately 75% of these were aged between 25-55
- 40% of respondents who gave feedback were male and 69% of these were City workers
- 91% of respondents felt strongly or very strongly that the Dragon Café in the City met their expectations
- 97% of respondents would recommend Dragon Café in the City to friends or colleagues
- 76% of respondents felt that their mental wellbeing had improved by attending
- 80% of respondents felt more inclined to engage with their mental wellbeing after attending
- 77% of respondents felt more able to engage with their mental wellbeing after attending
- 77% of respondents felt a strong sense of community at the Dragon Café in the City.

(See Appendix 2 for a graphic presentation of the analysis of some of the feedback data.)

14. We have received many comments from participants through the focus group, feedback forms, case studies, the post-it note comments boards, as well as people emailing us their views. This includes the following examples:

- *"I believe strongly that initiatives like the Dragon Cafe can be hugely beneficial for individuals and therefore the community. I was hesitant to try it myself as I am an introvert and find social situations stressful. Having dipped my toe in the water, I have broken through a barrier and know that I could attend many more sessions without undue stress. My confidence has certainly been boosted and my mood improved."*
- *"Little oasis – time out to focus on self. Nice people. Skilled speakers."*
- *"The range of events and activities on offer. Key was the atmosphere, though. Warm and welcoming and accepting."*
- *"Dragon Cafe in the City works well in the library, particularly the element around engaging the community."*

- *“Library settings are nice, especially the sofas. It offers the ability to relax in a free and public space without having to buy anything, like a coffee. It’s a really good space and conducive to wellbeing.”*
 - *“I think this has been a fantastic and much-needed initiative in the City and have really enjoyed the sessions I managed to attend. I will certainly miss it and look forward to hearing of its return. It prompted me to return to and use Shoe Lane.”*
 - How do you feel leaving today? *“Much better. Released. More informed. Hopeful.” “I feel strong!” “Positive and inspired.” “Feeling relaxed!”*
15. The Dragon Café in the City pilot had a high profile with the Wellcome Trust and Carnegie UK Trust. It was chosen as one of four projects to showcase at the annual conference of Libraries Connected (previously The Society of Chief Librarians). In June 2018, it was presented at two workshops, with an audience that included Heads of Service from across the country, the new Chief Executive of Libraries Connected, Isobel Hunter, and the Chief Executive of the Reading Agency, Sue Wilkinson.
16. We were also asked to jointly present a workshop on the project with Carnegie UK Trust and the London Borough of Redbridge at the annual conference of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, which is the main conference for library professionals across the country and represents all library sectors.
17. One of the main aims for the Wellcome Trust/Carnegie UK Trust in funding the Engaging Libraries programme was that projects should forge strong, successful collaborations with a range of partners. All four of the main partners – Barbican & Community Libraries, Mental Fight Club, Business Healthy and Output Arts – have jointly reviewed the experience of running the project together and concluded that it has been a successful partnership with clearly defined roles, good communications and matching aims and priorities. Wellcome Trust/Carnegie UK Trust will be producing their own evaluation of the project later in the year, which will further explore the co-production element and the way this may be replicated across the public library sector.

Proposals

18. Overall, the evaluation of the project shows that our aim of engaging City workers and residents with their mental wellbeing through a programme of activities in a safe and supportive environment has been successful. Given the positive feedback from participants and partners, the Dragon Café in the City team is currently exploring future funding options to extend the project for at least another six months.
19. We will use the pilot project evaluation to inform any changes to the format for future Dragon Café in the City sessions, including the possibility of shortening some of the sessions, offering more simultaneous sessions,

changing the day the sessions are offered on, and taking on some suggestions for different activities we could offer.

20. Although the project was fairly successful in reaching male City workers, the project team still feels there is more that could be done to engage this group with their mental wellbeing. We are therefore exploring changes to publicity and activities to appeal more to this demographic.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

21. The Release the Pressure project was designed to encompass multiple aspects of:

- The City of London Corporate Plan 2018–2023:

People enjoy good health and wellbeing. We will...

- a. promote equality and inclusion in health through outreach to our working, learning and residential communities and better service design and delivery.
- b. raise awareness of factors affecting mental and physical health.
- c. provide advice and signposting to activities and services.
- d. provide inclusive access to facilities for physical activity and recreation.

- Department of Community and Children's Services Business Plan 2018–2019:

Priority objective: Health and Wellbeing People of all ages enjoy good health and wellbeing. Outcomes:

- Health inequalities in our communities are reduced
- Residents and workers live healthier lives
- Public Health, including Business Healthy, will promote healthy behaviours (i, ii, iii, vi)
- Community engagement, volunteering and targeted provision will promote social inclusion and increase social connections
 - Public Health, health partners and services, including adult social care and libraries, will deliver initiatives to raise awareness, provide support, prevent and support self-management of mental ill health.

Implications

22. No risks have been identified.

Health Implications

"It helps to put things into perspective. If you are having a crazy day, it puts things into perspective, dials down the drama. When you are at work and you don't have a break and get caught up, going to Dragon Café in the City breaks the bubble. It also lets me connect with other people who are working in the City who have similar experiences. It creates a sense of connection and you feel less alone." – **Jessica, 36, City Worker**

23. The evaluation of the Dragon Café in the City shows that it has had a significant positive impact on the health and wellbeing of the people who participated, with three-quarters of participants reporting that their mental wellbeing had improved. The majority of participants also reported that they are now more inclined and more able to engage with their mental wellbeing.

Conclusion

“After the massage I feel I am standing up straighter. I feel more positive. Refreshed. I am not fazed by what happens for the rest of the day... I feel invincible!” – Vincent, 43, City worker

24. The Release the Pressure project has created a successful formula to support City residents and workers to engage with their mental health through the Dragon Café in the City programme.
25. The regular sessions of the Dragon Café in the City have also greatly increased the number of visitors to Shoe Lane Library. The evaluation and learning from the project will be shared with colleagues across the public library sector through Wellcome Trust/Carnegie UK Trust's report on the Engaging Libraries programme. The project partners will use the evaluation to make adjustments to the programme offer and seek further funding to ensure the continuation of the Dragon Café in the City in order to benefit everyone in the City of London.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Dragon Café in the City; funding and objectives
- Appendix 2 – Graphic representations of the feedback findings

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