



Theme: *Meanings of Participation*

**From Combat to Creativity:
Engaging Veterans in Creative Projects**

**A Case Study of Cultural Spring's Veterans Glass
Making Project**

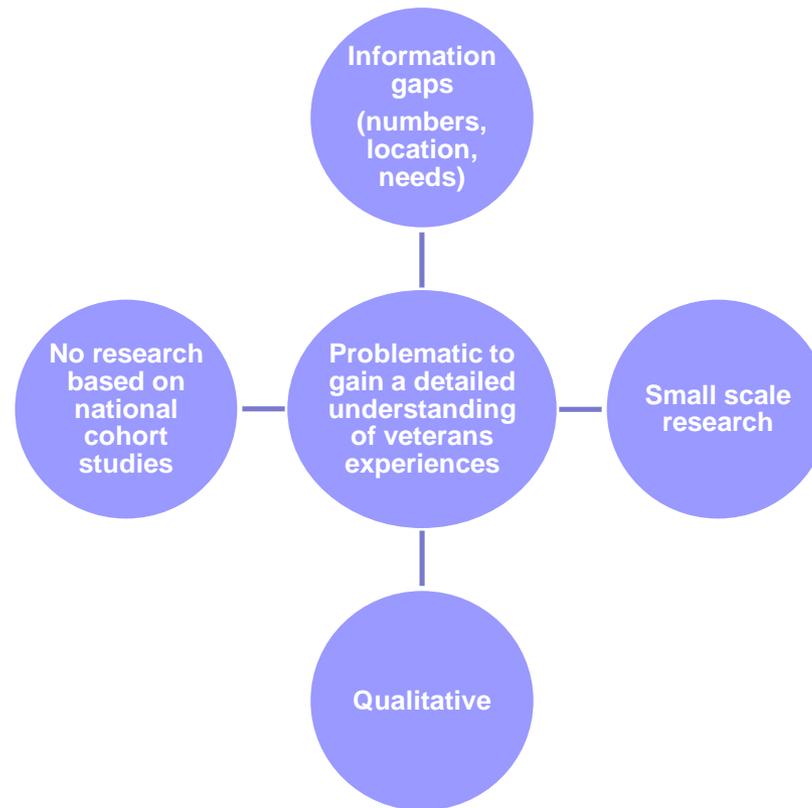
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Background

Benefits of participatory arts projects:

Personal Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased self-esteem• Enhanced empowerment• Improved:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mental health• General wellbeing• Sense of achievement
Social Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Friendship• Improved 'sense of belonging'
Economic Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employment opportunities
Educational Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New skills/abilities

Researching Veterans



Veterans: Issues

- Veterans are not a homogeneous group
- Vast majority transition back into civilian life successfully
- Transition difficulties associated with a number of vulnerabilities:
 - Limited literacy & numeracy skills
 - Alcohol misuse
 - Irritability/anger/violence
 - 50%+ have a long term illness or disability
 - Mental health disorders (anxiety/depression/panic disorder/PTSD)
- Some problems predate military service, others are linked to age, gender and military role
- Characteristics of Army life – v – Civilian Life

Veterans: Policy & Practice

■ **Renewed interest in veterans and transition policy:**

- Ministry of Defence Strategy for Veterans
- Armed Forces Covenant
- Policy of 'tiered resettlement support'
- NHS Mental Health Strategy

■ **Practice:**

- Mixed economy of services (statutory and charitable provision)
- Disconnected and fragmented funding and services
- Commissioners and providers can struggle to meet cases of 'dual/multiple diagnosis' and complex need.
- Important role of specialist organisations

The Partnership



The Veterans Glassmaking Project

Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Developmental & Dynamic<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Introduction to Glassmaking➤ Drawing-based Project➤ Poppy themed glassmaking project➤ Make, display and tour a glass window (forthcoming)
Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ 6 male veterans
Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ £1,000 approx.
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ NGC practitioners and freelance professionals

Ladder of Participation

Hart's Ladder (adapted!)



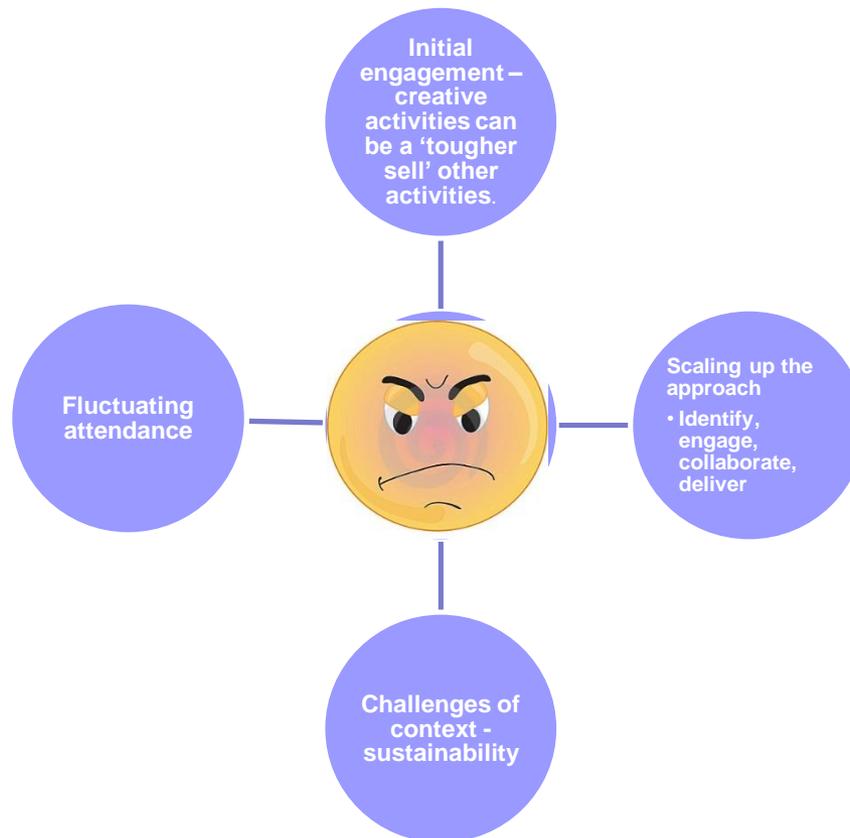
Project corresponds to higher rungs

- Started at **rung 5** – consultation and information and then moved through:
 - **Rung 6** – Shared decision making (professionally initiated)
 - **Rung 7** – Leadership and Initiation
 - **Rung 8** – Shared decision making (participant led)

Benefits

Participants	Forward Assist	National Glass Centre	Cultural Spring
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ New experiences, skills, knowledge and expertise that build on previous activities ➤ Creation of tangible outputs ➤ Sense of <i>ownership, responsibility</i> and <i>achievement</i> ➤ Entrepreneurship ➤ Opportunity to do something that resonated with and could affirm validity of experiences and identities. ➤ Motivation <p>16 January, 2017</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Widened organisational offer and opportunities for service users ➤ Helps to maintain service user engagement with organisation ➤ Supports Forward Assist's informal approach to mentoring and welfare of service users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ New group of people engaged on an ongoing basis ➤ Widened input into NGC projects (e.g. drawing exhibition) ➤ Target achievement ➤ Widens experience of staff and freelance artists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Engaged hard to reach/atypical group in new activities ➤ Enabled Programme to provide a pathway of increasing engagement ➤ Demonstrates the effectiveness of working with existing groups (crucial) ➤ Publicity and promotion potential

Challenges



Conclusions



Key elements of familiar delivery approaches work with veterans



New opportunities that build on – and *resonate* with - previous experiences and expertise



Engaging pre-existing groups does enable ‘non-typical groups’ to engage in creative activities



Long-term projects, directed by participants with opportunities for increased and varied involvement work.



Engaging pre-existing groups can support capacity building, partnership working, and also ensure quality of process and outputs



Creative opportunities that are one component of a wider set of interventions to support transition to civilian life work.

Delivery Framework

- Supportive policy and practice context is essential. It must:
 - Recognise
 - Incentivise
 - & Fund
- ‘bottom up’ community arts provision

Delivery Framework

- Engagement – Peer-to-peer engagement is effective.
- Include *new* activities that utilise participants *existing* aptitudes and skills
- Long-term and developmental
- Part of a wider set of activities focused on *challenge* and *change* which could include:
 - Outward Bound
 - Social and psychological support
 - Sport
 - Training
 - Volunteering

Delivery Framework

- Creative projects should:
 - Be output focused
 - Enable participants to direct project activities and outputs so these:
 - Resonate with – and respond to - wider life experiences and interests. Key to a positive experience.
 - Enable participants to draw on their skills and aptitudes.
 - Encourage participants to have a sense of ownership and management.
 - Include a pathway to further opportunities.
 - Dovetail with the aims and values of the partner agencies involved, Integration opens up wider opportunities.

Delivery Framework

■ Excellence & Quality

- Skilled, qualified and knowledgeable staff
- Project reflects interest of participants
- Collaborative, social, enjoyable

Concluding Remarks

- Veterans are unique group, but many approaches, issues and practices that have enabled delivery of the VGMP are of wider resonance and relevance when working with groups who may typically not engage in creative opportunities

“Their (participants) agency within that creative process has changed from coming along to something that somebody else is leading to actually managing a project”

“Veterans do Remembrance Sunday, so to be involved in a project where they’re producing memorabilia, poppies, that actually means something”.

“The activity is brilliant, but it’s not just the activity. It’s the social interaction with like-minded people”.

“It’s being part of something. We’re all from a structured environment being in the forces. It’s like being back in the family unit, we’ve really bonded together”

The Finished Products (some of!)

