



SMASHINGTIMES

INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE ARTS & EQUALITY

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Acting for the Future – Using the Arts to Promote Positive Mental Health and Well-Being and Suicide Prevention for Travellers

Acting for the Future Documentary

Smashing Times have created a short film documentary *Acting for the Future* directed by Mary Moynihan and produced by Freda Manweiler, Smashing Times. The documentary features interviews with Patrick Nevin, Tallaght Travellers Community Development Project; Linda Green, Primary Health Care Coordinator, Kildare Traveller Action; Bridget Dooley, Bridget O'Brien and Bridget Cawley, Primary Health Care Workers with Kildare Traveller Action and Kathleen Cawley and Bridget O'Brien, also from Kildare Traveller Action. The documentary combines a focus on positive mental health and well-being for Travellers linked to the theme of human rights for all.

Project

The documentary was created as part of a yearlong project using creative processes to promote positive mental health and suicide prevention with young people and adults from the Traveller and Roma communities. The project titled *Acting for the Future* was implemented by Smashing Times and the Samaritans, working in partnership with four Traveller and Roma support groups: Tallaght Travellers Community Development Project, TravAct, Kildare Traveller Action and Musicantia. In addition to the four partner organisations, the project also worked with a range of Traveller and Roma Groups including South East Traveller Mental Health, Southside Traveller Action, Roma Equality Project, Tullow Women's Group, Waterford and South Tipperary Community Youth Service, Laois Traveller Action and Carlow/Kilkenny Social Inclusion.

Theatre-Based Workshops to Promote Positive Mental Health and Well-Being

The project used participative theatre workshops with counsellors and clinical psychologists to promote active healthy lifestyles, positive mental health and suicide prevention and to increase awareness of and access to mental health services in Ireland for members of the Traveller and Roma Communities. An original workshop model was designed and implemented with Traveller and Roma groups using the creative medium of a theatre workshop process to engage participants in a process of exploration and awareness-raising in relation to how to look after your positive health and well-being. The workshop feature games and exercises to develop mind and body awareness, to develop breathing techniques and relaxation methods, and to create a forum for conversations and dialogue on mental health and other concerns. The workshop is like a doorway to a more positive form of dialogue and engagement. The workshops raise awareness of the importance of being able to talk, share and express what is happening in a safe and supportive environment, giving participants the 'strength to stand in their own power' and to take the time and resources needed to support and

develop their own positive mental health and well-being. Another success factor of a theatre workshop process is the way in which it develops a form of solidarity amongst participants, building trust and openness and a deeper form of engagement.

The evidence based independent evaluation conducted by Trinity College Dublin for Acting for the Future with Travellers and Roma demonstrates that there was a successful increase for participants in relation to having increased awareness of positive mental health; increased awareness of the importance of healthy lifestyles; increased knowledge of techniques for positive mental health and coping strategies; having information on support services; and being more confident in discussing mental health. Participants felt that the arts have a key role in positive mental health promotion.

Interviews

In addition to the implementation of a theatre based workshop programme using the arts to promote positive mental health and well-being with Travellers and Roma and the creation of the documentary, the project also saw the written documentation of ten interviews conducted with Travellers and Roma. Ten interviews were conducted with twelve Interviewees including Margaret Mc Donagh, Kathleen Ward, Nelly Ward, Alice McDonagh, Kathleen Banks, Geraldine Mc Donagh, Kathleen Cawley, Patrick Nevin and Sergio Pruteanu and three interviewees who are anonymous.

Acting for the Future

The project promoted an intercultural approach to delivery of health care support services in an equal, accessible and effective way, acknowledging and valuing the diversity of all service users. Young people and adults from the Traveller and Roma communities had access to a programme that promote positive mental health and suicide prevent and access to a range of culturally appropriate mental health educational materials including a project information leaflet, two Mental Health and Suicide prevention leaflets, a drama workshop model, a short documentary film and a Final Report and Evaluation, all designed in collaboration with members of the Traveller and Roma communities.

Smashing Times are very grateful for the support of the HSE National Social Inclusion Office for their vision and integrity in relation to supporting the role of the arts within intercultural health care practice, promoting positive mental health and well-being with Traveller and Roma groups in Ireland. We especially wish to thank Ruth Armstrong and Michelle Hayes, National Social Inclusion Office and Pat Healy, National Director, Community Strategy and Planning, HSE, for supporting participatory arts practice in health care contexts in Ireland. This is a unique partnership that promotes access and inclusion for Travellers and Roma in Ireland, bringing together the skills, expertise and vision of a range of diverse sectors in society – the arts sector represented by Smashing Times, the healthcare sector represented by the qualified health care professionals working on the project and by the HSE National Social Inclusion Office, and the local community represented by the people from Traveller and Roma communities that are partners in the project. The work promotes access to the arts, the developing of innovative arts practice in participatory and health related contexts and the promotion of positive mental health and well-being.

Smashing Times are delighted to have been a part of this process and we look forward to continuing this innovative work into the future and to promoting inclusion and positive mental health and well-being for all people across the island of Ireland.

Feedback from workshop participants:

“I did the workshop and I thought it was brilliant . . we had the best laugh there. They really have a way of getting you to forget about the stress and forget about . . to open up. . . . I found it very, very good. We had some great craic in there now. . . I found it very good. . . We’ve learned how to just take a split minute out for yourself, and breath, the breathing exercises I found very good. And one thought that often stuck in my head was ‘you can’t change what is about happen so just calm down and take it and do the best you can with that situation’. We got very good little tips out of it and the breathing exercises and all that, was very good. At the end of each exercise then we use kind of shake off our stress, I found that very good. You’re kind of fresh then for your next piece of work’.

Bridgette O’Brien, Kildare Traveller Action

I find art very, very relaxing, and I find it takes your mind off of everything, your just there and you have this blank canvas when you are doing the physical act and it just calms you down and just re-fixes you if you know what I mean.

Bridgette O’Brien, Kildare Traveller Action

‘I can say a very good experience, very positive. They (the group members) feel good, and they have said it’s something new, we experienced something new which actually we find is positive, we feel good. . . . Breathing and how to feel more comfortable, I haven’t done that before but actually find it’s a positive way, a good way. A very good experience, very positive for all of our participants’.

Sergio Pruteanu, Musicantia Roma Culture and Educational Centre

‘Release of stress, good laugh, better than counselling’.

Member of Kildare Traveller Action

‘The games and exercises were so useful and it was fun to do something different. I’d love to do more in the future’.

Member of Travact

‘You could see the joy in the faces, you could see that the coping mechanisms were ringing true and that people were learning different ways to cope . . . I feel the role of art in promoting positive health is so seriously underestimated in Irish society and in contemporary society in general. For it, it keeps me ticking over, it keeps my head right. The creativity and the innovation and the different processes, you can just get lost in the arts . . . you are just taking time out for yourself’.

Linda Green, Primary Health Care Coordinator, Kildare Traveller Action

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