

Data Archive

Research question

Confronting 'diseases of despair': How can I facilitate self-reflection and the discovery of existential meaning in order to improve wellbeing?

Key values of the study

- To help people to process their experiences using their own agency
- Meaning Making: To help people find a redemptive "living meaning" in their experiences through the use of symbols
- To provide a numinous or transformative experience that has a positive impact on mental wellbeing.

Key questions to guide data collection

- Are people finding their meaning? How useful is it? What are the long term effects on their mental wellbeing?
- Is the use of archetypes effective?
- Does the experience feel numinous? Does it have any transformational effects?
- How could it be improved? How is it not working?

The first two interventions were mostly preparatory and offered no useful data

INTERVENTION: Paper Flower Workshop 1, on the grass outside CSM - 17th June 2021

How can we create and facilitate human connection in order to improve mental health and wellbeing?

Method

20 minute paper flower workshop in groups of 1-5

Total Participants

5 other students from MAAI

Feedback

Conversational: It was a pleasant workshop

My Learning

It is possible to connect one on one through a mutual craft activity, though it was quite public and the conversation/connection could have gone deeper.

The activity is not very compatible with large groups, it is harder to make a connection with everyone.

INTERVENTION: Paper Flower Workshop 2, Camp Bestival - 30th July 2021

How can we create and facilitate human connection in order to improve mental health and wellbeing?

The activity is kept to one-on-one.

I have pre-prepared topics of conversation to steer the theme towards human connection.

Method

40-60 minute, one-on-one paper flower making workshop

Participants

4 members of the green craft team, people with varying experience in running craft workshops

Feedback

Conversational: It was a pleasant experience.

“I said things out loud that I had never said before”

Participants contacted 1-2 days later reported that they had been thinking about our conversations and reflecting

My Learning

The conversation was able to go deeper and on average a stronger connection was created between myself and the participants.

I succeeded in creating a space for them to reflect on themselves

Some of them really needed it, I sensed they aren't often given this kind of reflective space

But I wasn't able to offer them any practical help in their meaning making.

Considered changing research question to:

How can I assist young adults in the discovery and application of their personal philosophy in order to improve mental health and wellbeing?

INTERVENTION: Library of Meaning 1, Spinney Hollow Scratch Night - 6th November 2021

How can I help people to find meaning in their lives in order to improve their mental wellbeing?

Method

Interactive self-led journey through a collection of archetypes, participant chooses nine that are meaningful for them, they are guided via written prompts to reflect on how they represent their past, their future and what they are grateful for.

Participants

5 invited participants who took the full journey, people of varying ages and professions

25 audience members of a scratch night who explored the books, took cards and left feedback, all of varying ages and professions.

Feedback

Quotes:

Positive confirmation: Meaning Making

“It helped to give words and meaning to the thoughts and feelings I have held within me.”

“It was a quick way to get into some of the raw emotions of the past and reflect on them - then I experienced a lift after being asked to focus on gratitude and then looking to the future.”

“Feels beautiful to be woken in this way, delving into parts of me, thinking about past, present and future - aspirations, inspirations, experiences.”

“It gave me a moment of celebration for my foibles: It makes you feel proud of the things you maybe would have criticised in yourself.”

“It feels very encouraging, very forward moving in a very gentle way.”

“It presented me with the emotional opportunities to act differently.”

“It’s a really beautiful little check in with oneself.”

“It helped me to formalise my sense of self. It helped to put words and meanings to emotions that have been there for a long time.”

“I chose to tell myself a story of something that happened to me recently, and it brought up those emotions really quite quickly and quite raw, that was quite powerful.”

“It was useful to put my thoughts and feelings into a narrative.”

Positive confirmation: Archetypes

“I was surprised how easily some of the archetypes jumped out, how familiar and resonant the explanations felt, how deep and mournful the shadow elements feel.”

“It was quite an emotional journey because some of the archetypes triggered some memories or emotions from the past that really resonated with those archetypes.”

Positive confirmation: Numinosity

“I instantly felt reflective with a sense that this is a special place. I feel cared for, that my experience is important, and in return I want to take care in reading and taking in the meaning in the cards.”

“I loved how tactile the experience was; handling the old books, seeing old inscriptions and dedications which added to the sense of history and timelessness of the archetypes.”

“It felt very mystical, in a very ancient and tender way. It feels very personal.”

Critical/how it could be improved

“I’m wondering if this is a library where talking is permitted. I feel a desire to connect, to share my choices, to understand the choices of others.”

“It might be more profound if the space was protected a bit more, perhaps a librarian to “Shh!” noisy chatterers!”

“I know people who would find this a bit too personal to share.”

“You could have an optional session afterwards, like a book club, where people could share their experiences.”

“It might be worthwhile to have a bit of storytelling.”

“The music that you played really helped to connect us on our individual journey,”

“A group sharing would have been too soon for me, there would need to be a little bit of time for me to divert from some of the stronger emotions connected with the exercise.”

“It would be interesting to see what other people have chosen.”

My Learning

The method seems effective, but the design of the space needs to be considered more in order to support it

People are taking too many cards, the amount of prep required is unsustainable

INTERVENTION: Library Of Meaning 2, Hastings Library Mental Health Awareness Event - 19th November 2021

How can I help people to find meaning in their lives in order to improve their mental wellbeing?

Method

Interactive self-led journey through a collection of archetypes, participant chooses nine that are meaningful for them, they are guided via written prompts to reflect on how they represent their past, their future and what they are grateful for.

Participants

2 members of the public

3 professional stakeholders involved with arts based therapies and community support groups

Key Stakeholder: Tara Reddy, director of Arts on Prescription: A company based in Hastings that implements arts based therapies into GP referral pathways

Feedback

Positive confirmation: Meaning Making

“A thought provoking task, helps put into words significant feelings and events through one’s life.”

Critical/how it could be improved

“The task was enjoyable but difficult to do alone.”

Conversation with Tara: she was very impressed with the project.

James Baker , who runs support groups for carers, said his members would really benefit from a craft activity themed around the project.

(Email from James on 5th May 2022)

I was introduced to Edward and the library of meaning through a mutual colleague within the mental health sector and I was frankly blown away by what a fantastic job he has done with the project. It is such an innovative idea and has real application to supporting those who are going through such challenging times in their lives and I personally feel would have major benefits in aiding those I support. As the team lead for mental health at care for the carers we see so many carers going through their own self led journey which poses so many challenges, the approach Edward has taken and the beautiful, unique and tactile nature of what he is trying to achieve with **the Library of meaning would be so beneficial to our clients**. I hope to work with him in the future and I see real positive benefits to what he is doing. Keep up the great work Ed.

My Learning

I got to meet some key stakeholders and learn that it is very appealing to the community interest based companies in the area of mental health. They are often looking for creative ways to raise awareness. My project was far more interesting to look at than a table full of leaflets.

INTERVENTION: Library Of Meaning 3, State Hall on Hastings sea front - 26th March 2022

How can I help people to enjoy experiencing the thoughts and feelings that they find most uncomfortable and practise self acceptance?

Method

Interactive self-led journey through a collection of archetypes, participant chooses three that are meaningful for them, they are guided via written prompts to reflect on how they represent their past, present and future.

Participants

2 members of the public

2 stakeholders involved with mental health support work

Was also visited by Tara Reddy again who said the project was magical and she was inspired by it.

Feedback

REFLECTIONS	
<u>What was interesting?</u> Watching how members of the public interact with the project without my explanation.	<u>What was insightful?</u> "I'm afraid I might get sad." - A conversation regarding childhood trauma.
<u>What was intriguing?</u> "I don't want to go to the past, let's skip that one." - A reluctance to look backwards	<u>What was inspiring?</u> A key stakeholder's enthusiasm for the project.

My Learning

- The process can quite easily bring up a persons buried trauma, and I felt quite unqualified to handle it.
- The aesthetic is appealing to members of the public, but they are unsure and reluctant to interact with it.
- The process is not successful in an open public place.
- I need to improve my methods of research, I need to have a more focussed and controlled test in order to gather useful information.

INTERVENTION: Library Of Meaning 4, Spinney Hollow, 18th April 2022

How can I help people to find meaning in their lives in order to improve their mental wellbeing?

Method

Interactive self-led journey through a collection of archetypes, participant chooses three that represent their past, present and future. They then take these archetypes into a small booth and sit at a unit with two illuminated stained glass windows, they are prompted to write down what each archetype means and how it feels for them.

Participants

10 invitees:

Jennifer Walmsley and Kate Hadley - Directors of BearFace Theatre CIC, an applied theatre company specialising in working in the criminal justice system.

Keith McAllister- Managing director of a community interest company which helps 18-24 year olds gain employment in the hospitality industry.

Craig Lockwood - Head of Youth for Soco Music Project which uses music to help the self development of young people.

Julie Wear - GP specialising in professional support.

Alan Wear - A doctor who treats people with severe mental illness.

Harriet Riddel - A textile performance artist who uses a pedal powered sewing machine to sketch pictures and create one-on-one portraits.

Kate Mellors - A voice teacher who uses singing to aid personal development, working with women leaving the criminal justice system, adults in recovery from addiction and adults with learning difficulties.

Becca - A trainee therapist

Phillipe - CIO working in Life Sciences

Feedback

Positive confirmation: Meaning Making

“Oh I’m going to have to actually think about this. When I was in the booth it got me and I really connected.” - Jenny

“I went on a little journey! I could have spent a long time in there.” - Keith

“It’s a very positive experience. It feels like an English folklore version of tarot cards. I found it a very useful tool.” - Craig

“It gives you a taste for self reflection and it’s a very special way of doing so.” - Mary

“I’m very practical, I’m very suspicious of introspection so in a way I’m not a good candidate for this. I was anxious whether I would find something that I could resonate with. But I know I need to think about this. It fills a need. And the less you expect it, the more impressed you are when you feel this connection.” - Phillipe Mazaz

[Conceptual coherence]: “I find this very very coherent, the whole design works well. The medium supports the objective, it is appealing and you just enjoy it. It feels relevant, done with warmth, friendliness and compassion.” - Phillipe Mazaz

“I found it really useful. There’s something wonderful about being invited to reflect, the prompts are good, they can mean anything to anyone. The tent was really effective, to have that time to reflect.” - Kate Mellors

“ You can’t not find that beautiful, and you can’t not be drawn in by it. There’s something about the tactile nature of the books and the discovery of the little cards.” - Kate Mellors

“As a doctor who works in mental health, you clearly need people who make you ask questions about yourself or the nature of the world, and this exercise I think is quite good at helping people with that process. You’re holding a mirror up to people and getting them to reflect.” - Alan Wear

“Cognitive therapy is effective but it doesn’t work if someone is not prepared to examine the mental process that lead them to where they are. And this is quite a good way of doing that.” - Alan Wear

Critical/how it could be improved

“I wanted to connect but I was worried that people were waiting and I didn’t want to take too long.” - Jenny

“I wanted to have the questions from the booth to take away with me so I could have more time with them.” - Jenny

“Literacy: if books are not your friend, if you can’t read or you have dyslexia, that would be quite hard. You would have shut a lot of people out. They would probably at least need a few workshops before and after doing the task.” - Jenny

“You’re dipping in to psychotherapy, it’s deep. We are a little way into the journey of learning how to understand ourselves, but for people who are in the early stages of that journey, this is pretty advanced.” - Jenny

“It needs a guide. If I were to bring my beneficiaries here, they would need to feel like they were being held through the whole process by you.” - Keith

“If I was brand new to this [kind of reflection] it would probably feel overwhelming.” - Keith

“It would be really interesting to see at a GP conference or something for professionals who are at a certain level [of understanding] but don’t necessarily have a chance to creatively think about themselves.” - Jenny

“This could churn up quite a lot; where’s the debriefing? What’s the safety net? How are you going to send people away in a safe place? People might need a chance to talk it through, it more not need more than a ten minute chat.” - Julie

“I could see it working well with people going through the change of retiring.” - Julie

“If you like books, you’ll love this. But it would be seen by some of the young people I work with as a literary experience, and I think most of them wouldn’t take well to it. It’s the opposite of the world that they are used to; they like fast digital excitement, they would probably find this old fashioned. And they would refuse to do anything that they are told to you, they would need to somehow do it without them realising it was happening.” - Craig

“It needs a guide...a librarian.” - Craig

“It’s quite heavy in words, for some people words are really hard. I wonder what it would be to make the descriptions even shorter. Just a few sentences, I would make it more abstract, but perhaps the invitation is more about which symbols appeal to you. There’s so much richness in just The Archetype names that you’ve chosen, I think

that draws people in, then I found that I would have to read it all a few times to understand it.” - Kate Mellors

“I think the fact that it’s a solitary experience is really beautiful, but I think people would also need to talk about it, especially the kind of groups I work with,” - Kate Mellors

Kate Hadley - In terms of her beneficiaries:

“The theatre of it may put some people off, you would want to happen upon it, rather than feel they have to do it.”

“I would probably introduce the archetypes to a group before hand in a session.

Archetypes is quite a big word, a lot of people don’t know what that is, it’s quite an academic word. It takes quite a lot of literacy to read them. I think you would have to already be on a journey of discovery. For some of the people I work with it’s hard enough to sit in a circle, let alone do something like this.”

“This is quite internal compared to other therapies, it’s asking people to look into themselves in a very deliberate way, and some people can’t do that, or they don’t want to do it. And I think my answers were perhaps a little bit superficial. In some ways it’s an entertainment.” - Alan Wear

“To make it better, I would want you there, someone observing my choices and giving that sense of validation. The fact that it’s just for me doesn’t feel like it’s enough, I wanted to be able to share what I’ve picked.” - Harriet

Positive confirmation: Numinosity

“The doors and the glass are gorgeous, it’s very clear.” - Jenny

“I think the idea of it being a spiritual experience but not connected to religion really appeals to people. Especially people who have been through some shit in their life. A lot of the people I work with can be so philosophical and deep thinking; not afraid to go there. They’re very keen to talk about their journey. I can imagine this being a really useful way to unlock talking about that.” - Kate Mellors

Positive confirmation: Archetypes

“The images are great, not too esoteric or obscure. They have a power and beauty that’s really exceptional.” - Phillipe

“It’s quite heavy in words, for some people words are really hard. I wonder what it would be to make the descriptions even shorter. Just a few sentences, I would make it more abstract, but perhaps the invitation is more about which symbols appeal to you. There’s so much richness in just The Archetype names that you’ve chosen, I think that draws people in, then I found that I would have to read it all a few times to understand it.” - Kate Mellors

Change over time

Karen - “I keep The Book Of I on my mantel piece and I look at it every day. Sometimes I open it so I can see if I still feel the same. A week or two after I got the cards I placed them all out on my bed and went through a really useful exercise of putting them into their place in the book. I interact with it regularly, it’s comforting. It represents me, and it’s nice that it’s visible. It feels sacred in some way.”

Craig - “I put the little book on my shelf with my other special things because I love the art of it. And seeing regularly has actually reminded me a lot about the experience. **Think it’s just cemented my choice of cards and maybe slightly grounded me with better sense of self. This may sound grand, but it is a slight improvement in this area.**” -

Me- “Are you the kind of person who usually finds it easy to reflect on themselves?”

Craig - “I find it easy to reflect on thoughts and feelings but tough to reflect my past actions and experiences. Weird that, and not something I’ve concluded until you asked me! Thank you. “

Harriet - “ I have thought about your project. How much I like the symbols and what they represent. When I was teaching in the week, I had the class doing a self portrait with a mirror. I asked them if they could include a symbol or word which represented their past, present and future. I enjoy the archetypes and thinking about a symbol for these three moments of ever changing life.”

Jenny - “It was very thought provoking and stayed in our minds for a while. It felt very advanced. You could consult with a group of professional therapists and develop a sort of package for professionals to use in their training and delivery. It would be beautiful if it was set amongst certain workshops, if you had more scaffolding around it and it was a part of a 12 week programme of workshops. Perhaps with different levels of depth for people. But you would need to consider what care package you

had to support it. Be aware of the power of it, and how many different levels you could use it for.”

Kate M - “There’s something about having something to latch on to, a very simple thing, I find this really helpful, how someone says something a certain way, or I find an image of a certain thing, it can just really help to bring myself back. Its like a reestablishing and re-intention which is something I think the cards do so strongly. It allows you to tap back in to that feeling. And you don’t even have to know how to explain something in words, it just brings you back into the body and you can feel all of that intention.

Julie Wear - It set me thinking for a while about my future roles and where i will be going and I had a good chat with Jenny about it a couple of days after the event, We talked about an informal buddying to give an opportunity to talk and think this is a good idea. Since then life has taken over again and to be honest I haven't had a lot of new thoughts in the last week.

To have an impact I think it might be good to have a follow up chat with a buddy a couple of weeks after visiting your library to give people the opportunity to embed their thinking and to progress
Hope this is useful

OBSERVATIONS/TRENDS

- People’s approach can generally be split into two types: those who explore and read every single book, and those who only pick up the titles that appeal to them.
- For many people, the past is synonymous with suffering and they can be reluctant to recall it.
- Its a bit wordy, that can be off-putting or exclusionary
- The Booth is useful. The symbols work. The aesthetic is appealing
- Some people wanted the opportunity to share their choices with others
- There is balance to strike between the experience being solo/group
- There needs to be the option of a debriefing for some people, or a chat to talk it through
- This is quite advanced as a method of self observation, for some people it would be too much.
- It needs a guide..?

- The use of narrative works
- There is some evidence to suggest it is helping people to think differently about their lives and themselves, more compassion
- There is evidence to suggest it feels numinous and sacred.

Notes:

“If you look at your life not as a series of events, or a list of achievements but as a garden, what are you spending time cultivating? What are you growing? What needs weeding?” - Kate Hadley

Changing emphasis in archetypes and stories, chimes with Kristina talking about the problems with The Hero’s Journey.

“I’d describe this as Popular Therapy. As an entertainment is not a bad idea.” - Alan Wear

“When you did River People, it was really quite dark. But it drew you in, and you realised there was really some suffering here. And in a way you’re trying to take it a step on from that.” - Alan

“I started doing art the way I do because I wanted to travel and get out there and meet people. Now I’ve been doing it for ten years and I imagine it will change, Its about what you want, the arts should reflect how you see your life.’ - Harriet

“This reminds me of doing a portrait of someone, but this is a self portrait, having that time to sit and focus, be focussed on.” - Harriet

INTERVENTION: The Story Chapel, Camp Bestival, 28th-31st July 2022

How can I help people to find meaning in their lives that leads to improved mental wellbeing?

How can I create a secular sacred space that uses storytelling to improve mental wellbeing?

Method

This intervention was held at a family festival, set in the green craft area. Participants enter a small ‘den-like’ space, big enough for one adult at a time, the space is

constructed with foliage and natural materials. There are three stained glass windows set into each side of the structure, making six windows in total. The windows depict a person in search of meaning, there is a narrative written into the windows describing the journey which asks a series of questions: What characters are we being? What places have we come from? The things do we treasure? The archetype books are displayed on small shelves with the archetype cards stored in each book. There is signage outside the space describing its purpose, participants are invited to enter and consider what stories they are inhabiting in their lives, they are asked to leave feedback in a comments book.

Participants:

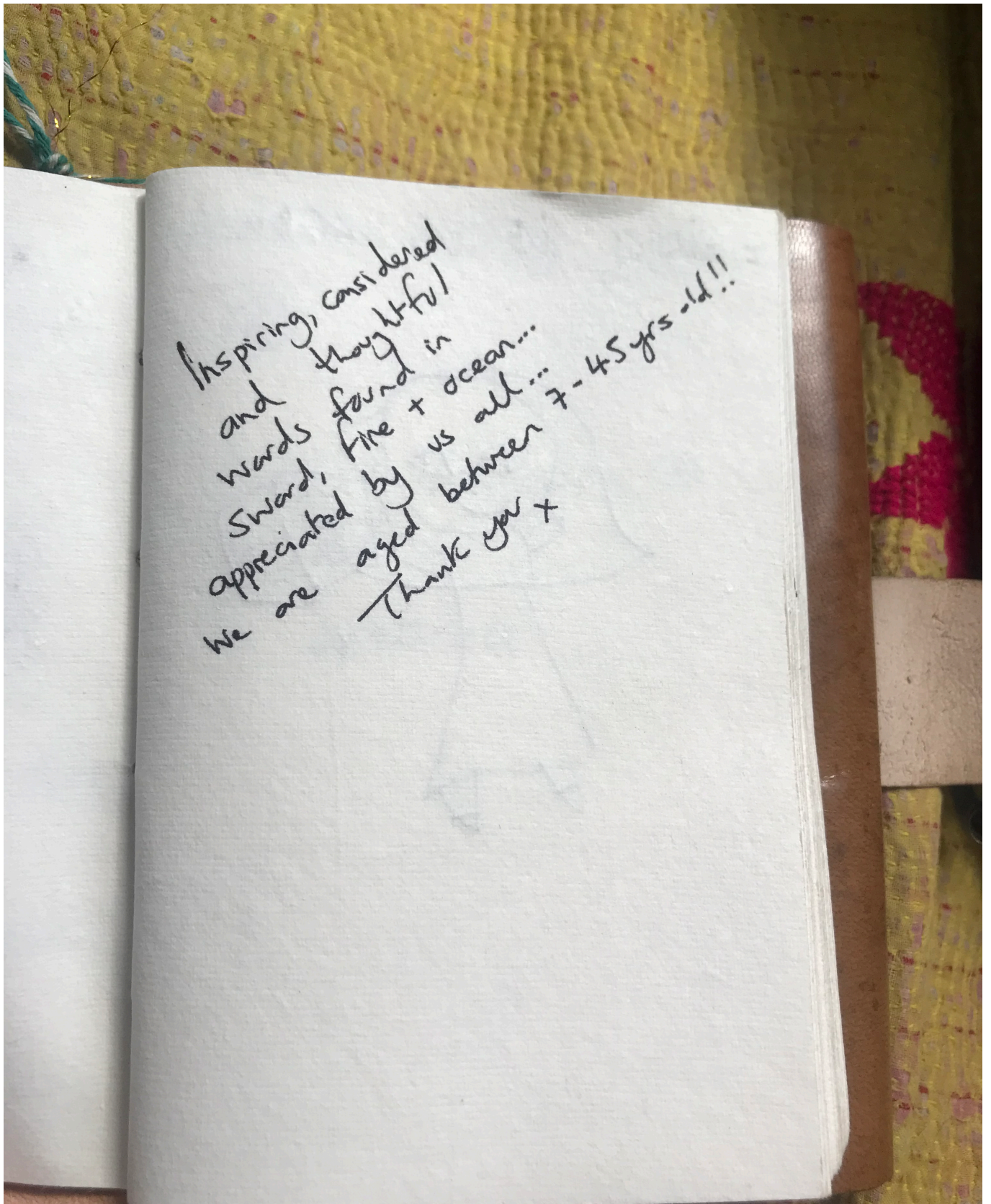
Members of the public, adults and young people ranging from 2 years old to approximately late forties/early fifties.

Feedback:

Audio Recording of Liam Russel, architect:

Liam Russel 2 and Ian Mitchell

- It was a valuable space to share focussed time with his five year old - “This is a special place mummy”
- Conversation with Liam Russel: Sacred and ecclesiastical spaces are very rare and vital, because they don’t ask for any financial incentive. There is a valuable craft involved with them. They are very clever, there’s a pageantry in them, of craft , of light etc. We also celebrate the very best of society in those moments, everything feels intensively developed and crafted. That is the problem of modern architecture



Caption

- a lot of our components are made overseas, so much of what we do now has

become systematised and reduced to predictable outcomes. So it's hard to see how buildings and architecture can service mental wellbeing, there are going to be a select few buildings where craft and humanity is genuinely conveyed. And that needs someone who doesn't seek money but has a passion for the craft and a benevolent benefactor who is going to invest significantly into something.

Reflections:

Interesting: To see how people used it without any direct instructions, it was entertaining for even very young illiterate children. People were drawn to it.

Insightful: Young people responded to the atmosphere of the environment, they recognised it as a "special place" and knew to take care. They responded instinctively to the symbols on the books and knew what they were about.

Intriguing: Adults could see the value in a space that calmed their children, they recognised it as a refuge in a very stimulating environment. Some people remarked on wanting one in their garden.

Inspiring: A few people remarked on how they were moved to tears inside the space. It was said to be a safe space for them to experience their feelings. Ian Mitchell took a card from the books and thanked me profusely for allowing him to cry for the first time in ten years.

My Learning:

- Stunned by the way the public were able to find meaning in the space without any direct instruction.
- Amazed to see a massive variety of different ages enjoying the space, young people recognising the symbols without being able to read, adults sharing peaceful time with their children.
- It's important to have peaceful and mindful spaces situated in stimulating environments. The festival crowd was willing to find a bit of time to chill out and reflect.
- It moved some people to tears. This is profound. People need spaces set aside that allow them to connect with their feelings. This provided genuine opportunities to create positive change in mental wellbeing.

- The elements of passive world building sparked imagination in young people, and sparked meaning making in the older participants
- People were willing to have a space like this in their garden

INTERVENTION: ‘Meaning Making’ Print Workshop, 24th October 2022, Hastings, Care For The Carers

How do people respond to the archetypes in a craft workshop setting, are they able to identify sacred symbols that are of use in their mental wellbeing?

Method

Participants were given an overview of the project and of the utility of symbols. They were then invited to browse through The Library of Meaning and explore the archetypes. They were asked to identify a symbol that is meaningful to them, then they were led through the process of creating a Lino print image of their chosen symbol.

Participants

4 beneficiaries of the charity group ‘Care For The Carers’ who provide support to those caring for family members.

4 women aged approx late sixties-early seventies

A 7 year old girl and her father (the leader of the charity, early 40’s)

Feedback

Participants expressed the value they found in a creative activity

Participants responded that the workshop helped to deepen their understanding of the utility of symbols

“It was better than I expected.”

“I enjoyed the workshop today, it was a lot more than it thought it would be and it was very organised and helpful with making the choice and why I chose what I did.”

“Relaxing and focused! Interesting to consider the value of symbols - something to about more maybe.”

“I enjoyed the workshop, [I found it] much more enjoyable, interesting and useful than I thought I would. It was very well organised and presented.”

[I liked] the thought and preparation put into the workshop. Looking through the books and reading the cards was thought provoking. I enjoyed the social aspect.”

My Learning

- The age range for the workshop was very broad, with participants who were perhaps not accustomed to the kind of deep self reflection that the workshop called for. Despite this they seemed to take to it well. More than one person said they found it useful and thought provoking.
- They were very interested in the Library and responded very positively when I invited them to take some of the archetype cards.
- For me the workshop felt a bit like going back a few stages in the project. Without the context of the space the exercise becomes more cerebral and less immersive. I feel that the full impact of a shared experience is lacking without some sense that the individual is enveloped in the world of the project.
- However it was encouraging to know that the project is interesting and engaging for people who I would not consider to be my primary audience.