

**Title: Evaluation of Restore's 'Changing Spaces: Ecominds' projects, 2009-2013**

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### **Section 1: Introduction**

Restore, a provider of services for people with mental health problems in Oxfordshire, in May 2013 commissioned an independent consultant to develop an evaluative report of a 'Changing Spaces: Ecominds' project run by the organisation between 2009 and 2013. The project involved garden developments at two Restore sites – Fleet Meadow, Didcot and Manzil Way, Oxford – and has involved in excess of 80 Restore members, paid staff and volunteers during that time. The report has been developed from interview data. The methodology used to do this is fully described in Section 2: Methodology.

Three key outcomes guided research. These were:

- 1) Achievement and Empowerment: How and to what extent were Restore members involved in all planning and practical aspects of the project?
- 2) Community Engagement: In what ways did the project enhance and support Restore's engagement with communities local to the two sites?
- 3) Addressing Stigma: How and to what extent did the project address the social exclusion resulting from stigma experienced by many with mental health problems?

The report is organised into five sections. These are:

- 1) Introduction
- 2) Methodology
- 3) Findings: A thematic analysis
- 4) Discussion
- 5) Future Recommendations and Conclusions

### **Section 2: Methodology**

## **Why qualitative research?**

This was a narrative-based qualitative research project, collecting data largely through short, focused interviews. Interviews were held between 7 March, 2013 and 6 June, 2013. The interview respondents were drawn from three categories: Restore members; Restore paid staff and volunteers; a representative from a referring agency. A questionnaire was also distributed to members of the public, described in more detail below. All respondents gave their permission for their testimony to be used in the report and all except one expressed a wish to be named in the report. Respondents were as follows:

Members	Susan; Becky; Andrew (1); Jane; Robin (1); Robin (2); Sam(1); Sam(2); Louie; Adam; Alan; 1 anonymous contributor
Staff/volunteers	Olivier; Gordon; Charlotte; Johnathan; Julian
Referrers	Andrew (2)

Interview data were collected largely through one-to-one interviews. Research used ‘intensive interview’ methods (Charmaz 2007, 26), allowing a range of interview approaches including loosely guided explorations of topics and semi-structured, focused questioning. One-to-one interviews explored participants’ ‘individual accounts, allowing a range of themes and issues to arise naturally out of interview directions resulting from the interviewer-interviewee relationship’ (Seidman 2006, 36). Interview encounters were framework by questions which sought to explore the three key outcomes. The lists of interview questions are included below.

Interviews drew on oral history interviewing methods and techniques. Key for the research was to capture the subjectivity guiding and enclosed within oral history testimony, often described as its ‘unique and precious element’ (Portelli 1981, 67). This report discusses the value of this in more detail in Section 4: Discussion.

In collaboration with Restore it was decided not to cross-reference the interview data with other quantitative data, for example as gathered in respondents’ Record of Achievement files. It was felt that this would skew data since only members scores are recorded – ie not those of the other respondents – staff, volunteers and members of the public. It was felt that it was central to capture subjective reflections of the project from various groups simply in their own terms, thus ensuring an equality of opinion on the research group as a whole.

## **Where**

Interviews were held in a variety of places and always in private. Members were interviewed at the Manzil Way and Fleet Meadow sites. At Manzil Way interviews took place in the Ecominds garden

itself, in the garden adjoining the members' restroom and in the Beehive Café. At Fleet Meadow, interviews took place in the pottery room and in a staff meeting room. Staff and volunteers were interviewed at Manzil Way and Elder Stubbs sites in Oxford, and Fleet Meadow. The referrer was interviewed at his workplace at the Warnford Hospital in Oxford.

As well as one-to-one interviews of those involved in providing and receiving the service, questionnaires were given to members of the public to capture their thoughts and opinions about how Restore contributed to local communities and how the Ecominds project added to this. A total of twenty questionnaires were handed out to people using the Beehive Café in the course of one day. A sample questionnaire is included and an analysis of the results is provided below.

### **Interview questions**

#### Members:

- 1) What has your involvement in the Ecominds project been?
- 2) How was that organised?
- 3) What do you think you've gained by being involved?
- 4) What do you think Restore has gained from the project?
- 5) What has the local community gained from the project?
- 6) Did you go out to advertise/talk about the project?
- 7) What is stopping more people visiting the gardens?

#### Staff and volunteers:

- 1) In your opinion, has the Ecominds project achieved its aims?
- 1) What has your involvement in the project been?
- 2) What do you think you've gained by being involved?
- 3) What do you think the members have gained from being involved?
- 4) What do you think Restore has gained from the project?
- 5) What has the local community gained from the project?
- 6) Is there anything stopping more people visiting the gardens?
- 7) How might that be addressed?

#### Referrers

- 1) Are you aware of the Ecominds project?
- 2) What does it add to what Restore already provides?

- 3) Does it provide specific extra opportunities for members to develop skills/to engage with the local communities?
- 4) Does it provide specific opportunities to address stigma?

Members of the public questionnaire (see attached example)

- 1) How often do you visit the Beehive café and garden?
- 2) How did you find out about the Beehive and garden?
- 3) What do you enjoy about visiting the Beehive and garden?
- 4) Is there anything the Beehive could do better?
- 5) What do the new gazebo and willow dome add?
- 6) Do your friends/colleagues/neighbours use the café or garden?
- 7) If they don't visit, why is that do you think?

**Section 3: Findings: A thematic analysis**

This section looks at the common themes that emerged during the interview process. The thematic analysis used is drawn from a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1999). This has become the most widely used framework for analysing qualitative data (Denzin 1997). It was conceived as a way of generating ideas and understanding from the data as it emerges, rather than testing an hypotheses determined in advance. It calls for inductive reasoning and an iterative approach, with researchers moving back and forth between ideas, data organisation and the data itself throughout the process of research, analysis and writing up (Bryman 2001). The analytical codes and themes discussed in this section have all arisen from the interviews themselves. The most commonly arising themes are discussed in three sections: The Restore Collective and the Enabling Structures of Ecominds; Communities; Addressing Social Exclusion. Each section relates to each of the key outcomes – Achievement and Empowerment, Community Engagement and Addressing Stigma – discussed in Section 1: Introduction.

This section ends with a brief evaluation of data gathered by questionnaires filled in by the public.

**The Restore Collective and the Enabling Structures of Ecominds**

This sub-section examines how Ecominds supported and enhanced the collective experience, and how that experience supported recovery. It also looks at how the project gave structure to time and tasks and how the project enabled members to shape their own experiences.

## **Communities**

This sub-section looks at the inter-relationships between members and their surrounding localities. It examines some of the strategies for, histories of and barriers to engaging with local communities. Also, members reflect on the inter-dependent, mutually beneficial nature of community relationships.

## **Addressing social exclusion**

The final sub-section offers a collection of members' reflections on the nature of stigma, of how members perceive the doubt and suspicion with which society – and elements within local communities – regard them and their social identity. With great honesty and often profound insight members find ways of understanding and explaining the ignorance that prevents some from enjoying what Restore members have to offer.

## **The Restore Collective and the enabling structures of Ecominds**

*It was expressed in many terms – a collective, team work, camaraderie – but an agreed upon core strength of the Ecominds project was that members and staff combined their abilities and experience to achieve results:*

Becky: The mosaic has been a really good bonding thing, in terms of team work and learning to share with each other. Even if you do want to go and do it by yourself you still feel your part of a collective.

Jane: I would watch the men doing the gazebo...we were all doing it. It was a collective thing. There was a group of us doing the mosaics. There were the men doing the gazebo, we were working as a team.

Robin (2): It's like a camaraderie, you sort of get to know each other better. There are people who've got better ideas about something, and they put their ideas forward and another person puts their ideas forward and it's a combined effort.

Adam: Working as a team you can work it out together and there's always support around if you're not sure. It's a good working environment. Nobody's a professional. It brings people together. If you're working with somebody with two or three days a week and you see it coming along you build personal relationships whilst you're doing it. And you always have that connection that you did that together.

Alan: If it was myself I probably wouldn't do it it's better for me because I'm working with different people, it gives me more satisfaction. If I'm working with myself I'd probably be moping because that's where you are.

Julian: We had people all pitching in. You know we had people mixing water, or carting stuff, sawing, banging in nails. So we got a lot of people doing things, working together, just helping to hold a bit of wood while someone else fixed it.

Olivier: There were some very skilled people. Like the wooden gazebo at the Beehive, is very skilled. I think one of the staff's brothers put up the shell and then the rest was done with members. You will see at Fleet Meadow there is a bench and that was made with staff planning it generally but the rest of the work was done by members. The skill was there in the background. That's what Restore do every day anyway this kind of, OK, we'll give you the means to do it and then you work on it with help. That's the sense of achievement.

Sam (2): It's hard work but it's rewarding, especially when you've got a group of you, you're not the only person doing it. Being part of a team has been really important. Everyone has a really positive attitude when it comes to taking on big projects.

*The links between the collectivity of the creative and manual labour that went into both of the gardens, and progress towards recovery were articulated by many:*

Robin (2): This has given people something to do and that helps them recover. Because a lot of people when they're ill they feel rejected and they feel hopeless. But if they do a job like that where they create something, and they work together as a team, it gives them a sense of belonging. When you're part of the group, you are a member of the group and you belong. You come here and they give you work to do. Because work, whether we like it or not, is the thing that makes us what we are. We need to do something don't we, so if you do nothing that's less than we can be. So if you give someone something to do, you make them a person again.

Andrew (2): There's tremendous benefit from just spending time with nature. Also, like we all do, doing practical things, just seeing that you've achieved something.

Adam: It's good for getting you thinking. Keeps you sort of mentally active as well you know, trying to get all the levels right, making sure it's the same as the opposite side. Very satisfying once you've completed the section, because you know it's going to be there for at least a decade.

Louie: When you have mental health issues, it's very hard to listen to people because some people feel they're being bossed around or something. But because there's just that pot of money, we can come up with our own ideas and put our own stamp on it, it makes us feel more confident it makes us feel better, and it works.

Sam (1): So people have done different patterns and different pictures, a mosaic...so we have to clear the stones back out so you'll have like mosaic, stones, mosaic, so everybody puts a different part of themselves into the path.

Becky: There's been weeks when I've sort of been like I my god I've got to do the mosaics again. But once it's finished I was so happy and proud of myself. That kept me going, I thought about what it was going to be like when it was finished. And also I thought I've started this I really have to finish it for me. It's quite good to have things like that because it's quite easy in life to start and drop things and it was nice because I knew that there was a space on the bench and that was waiting for my little bit of work. And I had to get on and knuckle down. That gives you a sense of belonging as well, it's not just a random little bit that you're doing, it's for a whole.

*There are numerous examples of people learning from each other across member, staff and volunteer lines. In this way people are assuming responsibility for their own and others' learning, taking control of the environment and the project in order to shape it to support a collective sense of progress.*

Gordon: We have volunteers who come in and pass their skills on. But we do have a lot of members, sort of peer support, skills get handed on from one member to another.

Sam (1): I helped out with the circular path, with the first two turns basically. That was really nice because I'd never done bricklaying before and I got a couple of lessons from members who knew how to do it.

Becky: I'd never done anything like that before. I really like creative stuff but I'm not very good at drawing. I came here and they said they were going to do mosaics and I thought I'd get to be a bit creative at the same time I haven't got to learn too much. I know that Olga originally taught a few people and then Charlotte taught me how to do it and then I sort of taught a few others so its just kind of spread through everyone.

Louie: I'd never done stuff like this before, block-work or paths. Because I'm a chef by trade but then my skills are quite transferrable. Because, like whipped cream is the same consistency as plaster.

Cement is like a cake mix.

Susan: When you come in the morning Charlotte would say there's mosaics or there's grass cutting, there's something to do that's got to be done. So we might just get a group so there's six or seven people in a group and you get whatever you going to do.

Johnathan: There is a certain amount of geeing people up. Because obviously we've not had the greatest summer so getting people out into the garden can be a bit of a challenge...We get people who will, when we've got a project like the pergola or the willow dome will get involved. When it's just the general maintenance, you get the same core of people who want to cut the grass and look after the flowers...managing that team is something that I've only just learned to do. Before that I was taking my lead from other staff.

Jane: We used to have the meetings and I used to do the minutes and type them up...I was trained as a shorthand secretary

Adam: The staff make it clear every day that it's a members' garden, and the decisions are up to us and the staff make it clear that it'[s up to us to decide. Quite often there's votes, everyone's ideas are listened to.

Gordon: The willow dome, when we were looking into the summer house and looking at the skills we had and thinking this might be difficult to fit into the time span we had available, we as staff and volunteers came up with the idea of the willow dome. But then that was put to members in the meetings, what their thoughts were. We kept them on board and also in the construction. Yes we've got people coming in to help build it but members will be fully involved in that.

Sam (2): The pergola is a great asset to the garden. We had a selection of ideas for plants for the pergola and we had sheets passed around at the meetings and we could tick as many or as few as we wanted and then the most popular were bought. So, yeah it was a nice touch.

Sam (2): I learned lots of new skills. Johnathan at the time took me under his wing and showed me bits and pieces. But some of the jobs, for example the pond, that was a lot of just digging, digging and putting it into a barrow and just dumping it! So that's not really a skill, they need people to graft!

*Respondents reflected on how the project helped to structure time and tasks, providing a practical framework for weekly activities, and a personal one supporting recovery:*

Adam: Gardening has been key to my recovery...to get out there in the fresh air, see things grow and see them progress through the seasons. Its under-rated I think. For me it's moving on from you've had your harvest now you're preparing for the next step. It's always like that in the garden. You get a great appreciation of time in the garden, you know, it's nearly spring, oh, I've been here that long? It's like a personal progress. Because you remember when you first came here and now everything's green and everything's grown. It's like sort of landmarks in your own progress. To see all your planning. Even in the depths of your own hardships you can still get manage to plan and cultivate and bring enjoyment, even when you're felling lousy.

Louie: My time here would have been a lot different without the Ecominds project. When I came out of hospital I was all sort of up and over, you haven't got a routine and you haven't got anything to focus on and that just gives you something, twice a week, to come in and say, 'Right, I know what I'm doing, happy with doing it'.

Susan: If it wasn't for here I'd probably just go down to the bottom, to the shops and come home and sit indoors all day. It gives me a little knock, and get up and go.

Charlotte: The tricky thing for me has been recording things. Because we've always had to bear in mind, gosh we've got to write that down to make sure that report goes back. Trying to hit targets and taking photographs. But we've had a couple of volunteers who've took that on. So we had a volunteer who was very responsible. She wanted to work with a small group just taking photographs, so we've got a whole lot of photographs on Twitter, a full record of making it. Another volunteer has made a video, called 'Beyond the Dome'! She made a video of the willow dome being made with some members.

Sam (2): A skill I've learnt is that, I tend to go at things like a bat out of hell. I've gone at things then the next day I'm flat out and I can't seem to tell myself when to have a break. And I've had Gordon, whose always said look take it easy. I'd worked at it too hard and I'm suffering and he'd say well you've done enough today. You've had a great input now you can just do something relaxing. And to have someone tell you what you've done is enough, you don't have to keep pushing yourself that's been very important to me.

Olivier: We kept a log on each site to support the writing of our regular reports...we kept diaries of work done and who was involved. So there was planning beforehand, with staff and volunteers thinking OK, let's do that, but there was also going with the flow, because we have members who

stay there for a short while so they take responsibility then they're gone...so we always have to revisit things and how do we do that and who's in the group, is it working...Next time, if it happened again, I would have a time-line, much more structured saying look, we start here, we want to achieve that by then. Not that it has to be completely fixed but that would be more of a help. We had a kind of time-line but it was not visual enough and to help members to take charge of things they could see it more and refer to it more. There always the problem of who is in charge and how do you delegate responsibility? And of course we've got people who lack confidence, so to help them I think we could have helped them better to take more responsibility.

### **Communities**

*Respondents discuss how the Ecominds project has supported and strengthened strategies to build bridges into the community and how it has drawn on the extent to which Restore is already embedded in local areas. Some of the ways in which the project has helped to illustrate barriers to further inclusion are also discussed.*

Sam (2): One thing we need to improve on is awareness of the charity and it's a great thing for the charity to have an asset like the garden and it's great for people to come and walk around and spread the word. What's needed is more stuff in the newspapers, local bulletins, *Round and About* magazine, that sort of thing. We benefit the community. We sell stuff, local produce, and crafts, woodwork. We recently had the shop, No Two Things, on the Broadway in Didcot and we supply them with goods.

Jane: Twice a year we have a fete and then we have a bizarre nearer Christmas and we advertise by putting notes through people's doors and the community comes to us and they can see that we're trying to raise money for the different projects. So they get to hear about us from our open days. Last year we had Oxford Playhouse come, put a marque up on the car park and do some little plays for the children.

Adam: When people come and buy produce from us almost everybody is attracted to the arch, the pathway, the sitting area at the end and then that links on to the community gardens and the vegetable production. It's almost like a front cover of a magazine for Restore, it's advertising in the most pleasant way.

Gordon: It's still got some way to go. When we have our open day we reach out to the community and leaflet them and try and encourage them to come but it is slow. That was one of the reasons we

thought if we can get all the educational stuff in that garden and so go to schools in the area, make them aware of the facilities here – and if we got the willow dome children will use it more – and then they themselves will encourage the parents to come along.

Sam (1): I know that there's lots of schools that don't have their own nature reserves and that there's plenty of primary schools looking for new locations to take the kids to. And we've got all these flowers and the pond life and eventually when the ecosystem gets going. So I'll think it'll be a great place to put it out there, oh, come and have a look. I mean you'll have all sorts when that pond gets going you'll have tadpoles, frogs, everything really.

Charlotte: Jan down at Elder Stubbs told us they were taking up the bowling green, do you want the turf? We bombed down there and got it and now it's growing beautifully in our garden.

When we were making the willow dome, March last year, it's on a corner where you can see through the fence and we had lots of people out there and people were walking past going up to the mosque and then walking back an hour later and people were stopping and asking what we were doing, were we building something were we growing something, because it does look very odd. From then on people stop on their way to the mosque or the health centre and look through. People would stop and chat, notice the bowl building.

The gazebo used a lot of wood and I'd not predicted how much it would use. So we got funding for a good amount and then we realised we wanted to clad it slightly differently so we needed more wood. We didn't have the funds but they were building the student accommodation at the same time we were building the gazebo and some of the members started chatting to the builders and some of the builders came over and had a look. Because we had a little scaffolding tower and they had a big one, and they came over and said they could give us some wood. They were taking down their scaffolding and one of our members asked if we could have some scaffolding planks and they said fine. And that was our floor.

Sam (2): Oxford, Manzil Way, they've got a better site and lots of people, the Cowley Road. In Didcot we're kind of tucked away. We put on a fair last year, that's when the mayor opened the garden, and we got, maybe 40 people through the gates. We could have had a lot more. I don't think many people know about it which is a shame because it would have been a nice day out for a family.

Gordon: One challenge to engaging with the community is purely down to location. We're not particularly central, we're a bit off the beaten track. So trying to make people aware of the fact that we're here. One of the ways we get a lot of people here is from the produce from the garden. So come spring-summer we'll get a lot more people coming in to buy produce.

Johnathan: I wonder how much the community know we're here. Because we are sort of stuck out the way in the corner, because unless you come past. I don't think the general public know that we're here and what we're about. We're not allowed to advertise that we're here. Be great to put a big sign that says 'Come in, buy this stuff' but we're stuck putting our little boards out...the local mayor has been very supportive of us, we were his charity of the year. Others in the council have been less so...I'm from Abingdon. When I first started my local GP had never heard of us.

*A very strong element of feedback on community relations was the idea that relationships were mutually beneficial. Members vividly articulated how the Ecominds project helped them contribute to their local areas, as well as how their local communities had invested in them.*

Jane: They support us and we support them. We're doing something by the things we're making selling and doing. It gives people a chance to buy things and some of the wooden toys are really good, and the plants, such a variety of plants.

Sam (1): It's perfect at the moment how the pathways go across and then you've got that bench so you can just sit there and just take in all what's around you. And it's just really relaxing. If you're not in the mood to talk to other people you can just sit up there. Especially during the summer people just go up there and sit up there and talk.

Louie: We got a fair bit of sand off them. When we did the block work, we had a load of sand off him...we went over and said you got any sand? We went over with about eight wheelbarrows and came back and used that. They were really nice actually, like anything we wanted.

Sam (2): It's a community garden. You do see people coming up and walking around...and they might ask who's responsible for this garden? It's really lovely. And that would be good for Restore.

Becky: Having somewhere like this in a sort of not so nice part of Oxford – you know we haven't got all these nice big buildings and museums – it's just like a little getaway, this garden. And I think that really does provide a lot for the community, you know if you don't want to be in the hustle and bustle of everything.

Andrew (2): In Didcot, most of the stuff where they've got all of their growing stuff was all derelict and most of the allotments in that part of town were pretty shabby. And now because they've sort of fixed up that section of it and there are people around then the other allotments have largely been taken up and are being sort of tarted up by people. So where it was previously derelict it's become a place where it's nicer to be around.

Adam: It gives you hope, if you can turn this weedy bit of ground into a productive area. There living things, plants. Even the wormery, you have to tend that. There's hundreds of worms depending on your tending to them...Other people tend the garden and to see how excited they are to see their plants growing. The satisfaction of seeing others happy. It brings other people joy. It's a primitive thing because every gardener must feel it.

Susan: It's a really nice area, its friendly. Well, if it wasn't friendly you wouldn't get people bringing their kids here having their tea and having something to eat. You get the elderly people as well. They must support it because if they didn't they wouldn't come.

Sam (1): It's a hidden gem. You would not expect it. When my doctor first told me about the place he said Didcot and I was like oh, it's a bit too much are there going to be crowds of people. But it's a hidden gem because it's in the middle of nowhere.

Robin 91): I know it's hard to see the place from the road but then again you don't want to open it up do you. It's kind of like a secret garden.

Robin (2): They know coming here is a nice place. I see people coming in here on a regular basis. If you go down the Cowley Road there's nowhere anywhere else that's like this, with a garden and so on. Nowhere else can offer a garden to sit in and a lawn to play on...I think it benefits the community as well as people who are not very well. So it's doing a twofold job.

### **Addressing social exclusion**

*The stigma attached to outsider groups such as people with mental health problems runs deep in the culture. Here, members reflect on how that affects them and on how Ecominds begins to address this.*

Sam (2): When I was first diagnosed, she told me you've got this illness and I walked out. She gave me all these leaflets, I was in complete denial. I was young, in my early twenties and I just rejected everything she said and I threw it all away. It took me about five years later to realise my problems were still there. I was ill. But initially the idea of having a mental illness carries a lot of baggage. And your initial reaction is what is everyone else going to think if they heard I was ill? I think a lot of young people face that problem...and how would you come to a place like this because how would you tell your friends, you know, the whole peer group thing...In my case it took me a while to come round to the idea that help's available. It's difficult, the first few days when I came here you feel completely out of your comfort zone, you tried to adjust with strangers but over time you get to

know people and then you enjoy each other's company more and more and it becomes a lovely atmosphere to come to. Getting over the initial steps is the hardest part.

Sam (1): Some people don't understand mental health. Some people think its people in straightjackets, but this shows that they're not and that people should take the time. So anyone can come into the garden and buy vegetables and look around...You hear about things in the papers of people flying off the handle and hurting people or themselves. There's definitely a stigma...I've got a few friends who know my problems and then there's some people who I just hide it from.

Jane: I think people have got funny ideas about people who've got mental health problems. I think there's still a bit of a stigma there really. But by doing all these different things we make people aware that we are normal people at the end of the day, it's just that we've all got illnesses that relate to mental health.

Louie: When people come into the garden and it's beautiful and it's got the gazebo and everything, and the path and the flowers, and people go wow! Gosh didn't expect this from people with mental health issues. So I think it sets an awareness that we can actually do stuff, we're just poorly at the moment.

## **Members of the Public Questionnaires**

### **Questionnaire responses**

The questions most directly addressing the key outcomes from the questionnaire are numbers 2, 3, 5 and 7. The results for these are outlined below. Where numerous answers have been given to the same question, responses are counted in each appropriate category. For example, for question '3) What do you enjoy about visiting the Beehive and garden?' some respondents included both 'Beauty of garden' and 'Atmosphere' in their answer. In such cases, both opinions have been captured separately to give a fuller picture of elements of appreciation since they are both connected and separate answers – the 'beauty' of the garden may add to the 'atmosphere' but can also be considered as a separate enjoyment.

<b>Question</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Total responses for each</b>
2) How did you find out about the Beehive and garden?	Passing by	6
	Friend told me about it	4
	Local worker told me	4
	Others	4

3) What do you enjoy about visiting the Beehive and garden?	Beauty of garden Atmosphere Food Supporting a good cause	12 10 6 3
5) What do the new gazebo and willow dome add?	'Nice to look at' 'To the local attraction' 'To the café experience' 'Beauty and interest' 'Children's play' 'Children's learning' 'Useful in bad weather' Don't know	4 3 2 2 2 1 1 6
7) If your friends and colleagues don't visit, why is that do you think?	Don't know it's here Restricted by opening hours	9 1

#### **Section 4: Discussion**

##### **The strengths of qualitative data**

Though long appreciated in the Social Sciences, the value of the narrative approach to health care problems is also increasingly being recognised in the bio-medical research world (see for example Hurwitz et al, 2013). The nature, credibility and value of a specifically oral history approach to narrative research have been fleshed out by a feminist analysis of interviews with women (Anderson and Jack, 2006). Much of this insight is useful in the mental health context. The subjective nature of oral history interviews can make the researcher aware of the culture, norms, assumptions and contexts of interviews and society more generally, enabling interviews to capture respondents' reflections on several issues key to this evaluation, most notably how respondents experienced and understood the nature of stigma and how this project had addressed it.

Anderson and Jack (2006, 137) argue that it is from within the subjectivity of feelings that the 'idiosyncratic interaction between self-image and cultural norms' are expressed. Within the subjectively expressed self-reflection at the heart of oral history interviews lies an individual's relationship with culture and society, illuminating an individual's relationship with society beyond the interview. As Anderson and Jack argue, 'The categories and concepts we use for reflecting on ourselves come from a cultural context' (Anderson and Jack 2006, 136). When working with people with mental health problems this can give us insights into a cultural context that has historically demeaned and stigmatised those bearing the label. The subjectivity of oral history, in shifting the interview emphasis from information-gathering to facilitating the 'dynamic unfolding' (Anderson and

Jack 2006, 140) of the participants' viewpoint, can begin to reveal and challenge cultural assumptions (Anderson and Jack 2006, 133).

Having highlighted the value of subjective data, a tremendous amount of essential, objective detail was gathered through the interviewing process. Respondents recounted, as Portelli points out, what they 'wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, what they now think they did' (Portelli 1981: 99) during the course of the project, painting a vivid and holistic picture of the project's evolution.

## **Key findings and outcomes**

### Achievement and Empowerment

The data very powerfully suggest members were significantly empowered by the project and how it was organised by Restore staff. Key elements of this were how the project enhanced group work and how this supported personal development; how having a specific time-limited and outcome-focussed project added structure to time at Restore (for both members and staff); and how practical frameworks translated into personal/intellectual ones. There are many powerful statements of this. My own particular favourite is:

Jane: I would watch the men doing the gazebo...we were all doing it. It was a collective thing. There was a group of us doing the mosaics. There were the men doing the gazebo, we were working as a team.

For Jane, the act of witnessing what others are doing is as important as other ways in which she participates. She contributes and is empowered by watching others take part.

Useful reflections on how the project was run and ways of strengthening projects in the future were also evidenced in the data, with Olivier in particular providing an overview of possible improvements.

### Community Engagement

The data describes very clearly how the project enhanced Restore's efforts to include members in their localities, with on-site attractions key to drawing in communities and breaking down barriers. Ecominds-enhanced gardens were described as 'assets', 'a front cover of a magazine' advertising Restore, 'a hidden gem', an 'oasis', a 'getaway', a 'secret garden' and a place which 'gives you hope'. A very strong theme emerging from the data was the clear articulation by the members of the

mutuality of relationships between the Fleet Meadow and Manzil Way sites and their surrounding communities, captured most succinctly by Jane's 'They support us and we support them' formulation. What stigmatised groups, such as people with mental health problems, bring to society and perceive themselves to be capable of bringing is a little researched but, I believe, important topic for the future of health and social care provision generally.

### Stigma

Research suggests that the stigma associated with mental health problems often has a bigger effect on people's lives than the condition itself (Dean, 2012) so that finding and assessing ways of addressing stigma are very important. Stigma has been conceptualised as an 'attribute that is deeply discrediting' (Goffman, 1990: 13). Rogers and Pilgrim (2005) noted that people with mental health problems are stigmatised in particular ways, including for their lack of social competence (Pilgrim, 2009: 156). A survey in 2003 (Dean, 2012) showed that attitudes towards people with mental illness are worsening. For example, 89 per cent of respondents agreed that society has a responsibility to care for people with mental health problems while the figure in 2000 was 94 per cent.

As a result, data captured here concerning stigma are of immense importance. Members' reflections show a great depth of insight into the nature of the problem and how it arises. Also, there is a tremendous willingness to understand the ignorance that underpins mental health stigma in an effort to support the ignorant towards a fuller appreciation of mental health issues. The Ecominds project powerfully provides opportunities to prove false notions of social incompetence, perhaps most vividly expressed by Louie:

When people come into the garden and it's beautiful and it's got the gazebo and everything, and the path and the flowers, and people go wow! Gosh, didn't expect this from people with mental health issues. So I think it sets an awareness that we can actually do stuff, we're just poorly at the moment.

### Questionnaires

As a snap-shot of public awareness and opinion the questionnaire was also very useful. Responses to question 3, What do you enjoy about visiting the Beehive and garden, illustrate very clearly the key attractions of the, now enhanced, Beehive offering, with 'Beauty of garden' and 'atmosphere' reflecting extremely positively on members' and staff achievements. Also notable are answers to how people found out about the facility and why people don't come, both of which taken together suggest that more advertising in local areas would increase numbers of visitors.

## **Section 5: Future Recommendations and Conclusion**

### **Future Recommendations**

Arising from the data there are four areas which might be considered for future development:

- i) Member involvement
- ii) Restore Profile – Outreach and Partnerships
- iii) Public Events
- iv) E-profile
- v) Narrative Research and Dissemination

#### **Member involvement**

As discussed in Section 4, one of the great strengths of Restore, vividly illustrated by the Econminds project, is the extent to which members are encouraged and supported to take on responsibility. The data powerfully reflects the multifaceted benefits of this. The data also suggests that there is potential to develop this to a greater degree, with a number of members expressing a desire to take on wider roles.

#### **Restore Profile – Outreach and Partnerships**

Given the attraction of the Fleet Meadow and Manzil Way sites and the potential of this to include members in local communities, one of the ways in which developing responsibilities may be possible is in terms of outreach to raise the Restore profile higher in order to encourage more visitors. An example of this at the Didcot site concerns the development of working with a specific community partner, namely local schools. A determination to do this was expressed, interestingly, by both staff and members. For example, Sam (1) clearly articulated the potential and far-reaching educative value of Fleet Meadow to local school children, indicating a desire to play a role in realising this. Member involvement in an outreach strategy has the potential to both strengthen the strategy as well as benefit those involved.

#### **Public Events**

The data illustrated the great value of the numerous public events already run by Restore. Members expressed not only an appreciation of them but also ideas for improving turn out at them, with suggestions for extending publicity materials and methods. This was especially true of Fleet Meadow where members had a very clear analysis of some of the problems the site faced in terms of becoming more well-known and included locally. Again, finding ways of harnessing members' energies would be beneficial.

#### E-profile

It became clear during research that members and volunteers had already begun to disseminate what Restore had to offer via various E-media, both to people with mental health problems and to the wider community via Restore's E-media. Numbers of members clearly felt this method of communication to be important and finding ways of including members in that would be beneficial.

#### Narrative Research and Dissemination

This researcher has been very impressed by the quality and potential value of the data gathered during the course of this report. I feel the wider scientific community would benefit from it also.

#### **Conclusion**

This report supports the view that the Ecominds project has significantly impacted on the strength and effectiveness of Restore's work. The interview and questionnaire data collected strongly indicate that each of the Ecominds outcomes – Achievement and Empowerment; Community Engagement; Addressing Stigma – have been addressed in very positive ways. The findings clearly demonstrate the value of such projects and vividly illustrate their benefits to members, staff and local communities.

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