An evaluation of

The Reading, Writing and ESOL Project.

By Sarah Halsey

Teacher and Project Manager

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Acknowledgements

Executive summary

The evaluation demonstrates that both learners and staff felt that working with the project is beneficial. Learners reported that lessons had helped them to improve their confidence in using their skills, which in turn benefited them in terms of communicating with others. Some learners indicated that taking part in the project had been helpful for their mental health and that the flexible, long term support offered was an advantage of the provision.

Among hostel staff and managers, the project was felt to be easy to implement and support residents to take part in. There was felt to be a significant need for the support offered by the project and benefits to those taking part included feelings of increased confidence and pride in their work.

The unique model of provision offered by the project, based on trauma informed approaches, combines flexible approaches to learning with different ways of taking part in study. This was shown to be successful in engaging learners, even in the midst of lockdown. Throughout the period of delivery on which the evaluation was based, it was not possible to run any face to face sessions and learning took place over the telephone or online. Despite this, 16 learners attended a total of 221 sessions, challenging the perception of this group of learners as 'difficult to reach' and highlighting that engaging and retaining learners is possible with an alternative model of provision. The flexible, one to one nature of the provision was particularly appreciated by learners, who identified significant barriers to study and expressed concerns about accessing existing learning provision in the community.

The appetite for learning among the learners who took part in the project, the recognition of the need for the provision among hostel managers and support staff and the ease of implementing and managing the provision within hostels indicates the huge potential for this approach to be replicated across different services. With continued collaboration, reflection and a shared willingness to challenge perceptions of what might be possible, this project could reach so many more of those who need the support it offers.

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Background to The Reading, Writing and ESOL Project.

'Language gives us the power to change ourselves and others by communicating our experiences, helping us to define what we know, and finding a common sense of meaning.' Bessel Van De Kolk, The Body Keeps the Score

This project was set up to meet the needs of people with experience of homelessness who would like to study literacy and English language and for whom access to existing learning provision is not possible or extremely difficult. The high prevalence of trauma among people with experience of homelessness and the impact this can have on an individual's ability to learn and establish a routine of study demanded learning provision based on trauma informed principles and approaches, such as those applied in this project.

Research tells us that people with experience of homelessness are more likely than the general population to need support with literacy and English. A study by St Mungo's found that 51% of clients lacked basic English skills (St Mungos, 2014), while 88% reported low educational attainment (St Mungos, 2015).
Despite this need, people with experience of homelessness often find this support very difficult to access. This is partly due to a combination of the way in which further and community learning provision is structured and the different commitments and support needs of potential learners.

Similarly, there is a significant body of evidence which suggests that people with experience of homelessness are more likely than the general population to have experienced trauma. Studies have found that up to 85% of those experiencing homelessness have gone through at least one traumatic experience in childhood (Bramley et al, 2015). Experiences of trauma, particularly in childhood, can have a profound and long lasting neurological impact which can adversely impact an individual's ability to learn, both as a child and an adult. Brunzell, Waters and Stokes (2015, p4) state that there are three critical pathways that are affected by trauma. The impact of these affected pathways '…can dramatically affect learning through

- Decreased cognitive capacity
- Poor memory and concentration
- Language delays
- The inability to create and sustain positive relationships with peers, teachers and carers.'

The project was set up to tackle both the inaccessibility of provision among people with experience of homelessness and to ensure that the provision itself recognised and supported learners through the many challenges in learning they may face as a result of their experiences.

What were the original aims of the project?

- Increase support for people living in hostel accommodation to socially distance during the Covid 19 pandemic through the provision of learning materials
- Increase access to literacy and ESOL provision among participants to improve their skills and raise aspirations.
- Increase participation in educational activities among the target group of learners to offer learning opportunities not previously available.
- Reduce social isolation among participants through regular interactions.
- Increase skills needed to maintain tenancies and support greater independence.

What are the specific project outcomes?

The project will support learners in a number of areas including but not limited to:

- Participants will be better able to commit to a regular study routine.
- Participants will improve their reading, writing, listening and speaking skills.
- Participants will have increasing confidence in reading, writing, speaking and listening skills and in using these skills independently.
- Participants will have a greater awareness of further learning opportunities in the community and how to engage with them.
- Participants will have increased confidence in undertaking formal qualifications where that is their aim.

Evaluation strategy

How the evaluation was conducted.

The evaluation of the project was undertaken by myself as the project manager, in the absence of funding which would have enabled a third party to carry out this research. I was aware that this approach would potentially impact the impartiality of responses from those involved and took steps to counter this, such as conducting questionnaires with hostel managers and support workers through Survey Monkey, which gave respondents the option to remain anonymous. It was not possible to apply this approach when conducting interviews with learners and I am aware that the fact I conducted interviews may have influenced learners'

responses. However, this approach does also have advantages, as learners were able to complete their interviews with someone with whom they have an established relationship and therefore may feel more comfortable speaking honestly. Please see Appendices A, B and C for a full breakdown of evaluation questions for learners, hostel managers and support staff.

Who took part in the evaluation?
- 21 members of hostel staff-fifteen support workers and six managers. Five of the managers were working across 3 hostels and the sixth manages the Housing Association's learning provision. The hostels are run by Providence Row Housing Association and The Salvation Army HSU Tower Hamlets.
- 10 learners who have been working with the project for between three and twelve months. All sixteen learners who had been or were working with the project were offered the opportunity to take part in the evaluation.
- As the teacher and project manager, I have provided feedback on my experience of planning and delivering the project, including working with learners, hostel managers and support workers.

Why was the evaluation undertaken?
The purpose of the evaluation was twofold: to identify areas where the project is working
well and where there may be areas for improvement and to gather evidence which could be used to secure long-term funding for the project.

Where and how did the evaluation take place?
Feedback was gathered from learners through one-to-one interviews conducted on the telephone, using WhatsApp video or online using Zoom. Hostel managers and support workers gave feedback online in a SurveyMonkey questionnaire. Please see appendices C and D for a full breakdown of the questionnaires undertaken by learners and staff.
ESOL learners were offered the choice of having a copy of the questionnaires translated into their first language using Google Translate. Some learners chose to take this up and the questionnaires were translated into three languages. In instances where I felt that learners would need a translation of the evaluation information and consent form due to their level of English, this was provided as a matter of course, rather than being the choice of individual learners.

When did the evaluation take place?
The evaluation was carried out between mid-July and early September 2021.

Who is taking part in The Reading, Writing and ESOL Project?

Between November 2020 and September 2021:

- 16 learners took part in the Reading, Writing and ESOL Project.

- 24 learners were referred to the project in this time, with two completing registration but not starting lessons and five learners not taking part following their initial referral. In the case of two learners who completed registration but did not continue to lessons, one learner said that telephone lessons were too difficult and another could not take part for health reasons. In the case of the 5 learners who did not progress beyond referral, the reasons for this in four cases were not known, with the fifth resident stating that telephone lessons were too difficult. Of the learners who registered with the project:

- 35% did not have access to the internet. This compares to 4% of households among the general population.[1]

- 56% had not taken part in any learning or training activities for two years prior to starting to study with the project and 35% had never achieved any qualifications.

- 53% of learners said they preferred to study in a one to one setting, while 29% said that they were happy to study in both one to one and group settings and 18% said they preferred to study in a group. The main reasons given for wanting to study in a one to one setting were not wanting to talk/feeling embarrassed to ask questions in front of others and having more attention from the teacher. Those who liked working in a group spoke about being able to learn from others, share opinions and socialise in this setting.

Profile of learners taking part in the evaluation.

Learners who took part in the evaluation were between 21 and 51 years of age, with an average age of 33. 70% of learners had English as a second language, with 30% speaking English as their first language and wishing to focus on improving their reading and writing skills. 50% of learners had achieved a qualification in the past, though in many cases they did not know the name of this qualification.

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[1]Internet access – households and individuals, Great Britain: 2020, Office for National Statistics, Internet access – households and individuals, Great Britain - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)

Analysis/outcomes

The main themes to emerge from the evaluation were:

- Barriers to learning.
- Learners' hopes and ambitions for the future.
- Existing support and the need for the project.
- Increased confidence in the use of skills.
- Language for communication.
- The need for long term, flexible provision.
- Benefits to mental health and wellbeing.

Barriers to learning

When registering with the project, learners were asked if they had an additional learning need, or if there was anything that might make it difficult for them to study (please see Appendix D for the full registration form and a breakdown of the categories offered to learners). In response to this question:

- 40% of the respondents reported having an additional learning need. This is compared to 17% of adult learners at colleges[2].
- 30% of respondents identified substance use as a barrier to learning
- 30% of respondents identified mental health or physical health as a barrier to learning.
- 60% of respondents described difficulties in staying focused on one thing for too long.
- 90% of respondents identified at least one barrier to learning from the list presented

In a number of cases I found that learners did not disclose potential barriers to learning at registration and it was only after I began working with learners and established a relationship with them that learners discussed these with me, or I became aware of them through a learners' patterns of engagement. Research has shown that experience of trauma can cause difficulties in focusing attention (Perry, B, 2006), as well as an increased risk of problematic substance use and physical and mental health issues (Van Der

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[2] AoC College Key Facts 2021-22.pdf

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Kolk, 2014, p351). Through working with learners on this project, I have seen that these barriers often result in:

- inconsistent attendance, often because of ill health, substance use, or conflicting appointments.
- learners needing multiple reminding of the days and times of lessons and sometimes confusing days and times despite these reminders.
- Learners having difficulty recalling the content of lessons.
- Learners attending lessons having used substances beforehand.

A recognition of the need for provision which can meet the needs of these learners, based on trauma informed approaches, was the basis for the founding of The Reading, Writing and ESOL Project. Working with learners on a one-to-one basis allows for a highly personalised service and for the days and times of lessons to be flexible, to support learners as they work towards consistency of attendance. Lesson content and the pace of learning is adapted to suit the individual learner. Crucially, as a teacher, I understand that missed lessons or inconsistent attendance does not necessarily indicate a lack of interest or commitment on the part of the learner and try to work with them to enable them to continue their study. As a result of this flexible approach, attendance at lessons, particularly among those learners who took part in the evaluation, was relatively high (see Lesson attendance and Study Routine, below). These challenges would result in significant barriers for those wishing to take part in learning provision offered by FE and community learning providers, which requires learners to maintain consistency of attendance at lessons which run at fixed times on fixed days.

Learners themselves highlighted concerns about accessing other provision in the community, including having teachers that change regularly and the fact that class sizes may be large:

'… [studying at college] is too much. This is one to one cos I can explain myself, talk to you. When you go to other places you get someone new, they want to know your s**it. You get one teacher, then you get another. I like to stick to one teacher that I know. The teacher knows where you're coming from, your background, what level you're on. In lessons you know how to work with me.'

'In library more people and the teacher not have just you, have 10, 20 people. You have just one.' [The learner said that he did not want a qualification because…] 'for take qualifications I need go college'.

Lesson attendance and study routine

Despite the many challenges learners face in taking part in learning activities, attendance data for the project overall and particularly for the learners who took part in the evaluation shows a significant commitment to lessons (for the purposes of recording attendance, only lessons which were confirmed with the learner have been counted as attended, cancelled or rearranged).

Among all the learners who took part in the project:

% of sessions attended	Number of learners who attended
Less than 50%	31%
More than 50%	69%
More than 60%	50%
More than 70%	31%
More than 80%	13%

Among the learners who took part in the evaluation, attendance was consistently high:

% of sessions attended	Number of learners who attended
Less than 50%	10%
More than 50%	90%
More than 60%	80%
More than 70%	50%
More than 80%	20%

It is clear that there were higher levels of attendance among learners who took part in the evaluation, demonstrating that this group were able to adapt to a routine of study relatively successfully, though not without challenges. It should be noted that the views and voices of learners for whom attendance was most difficult are not represented in this evaluation and as such there is still more work to be done to understand the barriers they faced in attending sessions.

We can see that in both groups, the majority of learners attended 60% or more of sessions. A third of learners who did not complete the evaluation attended 70% of lessons and 70% of the learners who took part in the evaluation attended 70% or more of lessons. It has been difficult to find attendance data in relation to FE colleges with which to compare these statistics, however, a report of attendance data from

2017/2018 stated an average of 80% attendance at English and Maths sessions in colleges. [3] It is to be expected that the attendance at lessons offered by this project would be lower, given that the target learner group face multiple barriers to accessing and sustaining participation in learning, however it is striking to note that a number of learners, both within and outside the evaluation group, met, or came within 10% of meeting, this target. It is important to state that the flexible nature of the provision allows for lessons to be rearranged, sometimes at little notice, to enable learners to attend lessons. This adaptability has been crucial in ensuring learners have been able to access and sustain study.

One hostel manager highlighted the difficulties of establishing and maintaining a routine with learners when asked about the challenges in implementing the project:

> Setting up a routine, lack of facilities…that can be used virtually, [the] tutor had to adapt to their habits for those with substance misuse…those who binge drink. They miss lessons during the period but as soon as they are sober they want/happy to engage immediately. '

The most common reasons for nonattendance (where one was given) were not being well and having another appointment. This reflects the challenges faced by learners with a significant number of commitments and support needs.

Hopes for the future

When asked what they wanted to get from taking part in the course and their goals for the future, learners expressed the following ambitions:

- 80% were interested in getting a qualification in literacy/English
- 70% were interested in doing training or volunteering or starting work in the future
- 60% were interested in studying somewhere else in the future.
- 30% wanted to improve their skills more generally
- 20% identified being able to communicate with family and friends as important to them.

These responses reflect the range of motivations learners have for taking part in the project. For the significant number seeking to achieve qualifications, work, volunteer and continue to study in the future, the project supports them to build the skills needed to make these ambitions a reality. This includes building self-confidence and resilience to deal with challenges, adapting to a consistent routine of study

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[3] AoC Attendance Survey – analysis, David Corke Director of Education and Skills Policy, Association of Colleges PowerPoint Presentation (aoc.co.uk)

and attendance at lessons and developing communication and critical thinking skills. For many learners this support needs to be offered on a consistent, long-term basis in order for them to identify the steps needed to achieve their goals and to reach them.

Existing support and the need for the project

Despite the desire to take part in learning activities, 76% of learners said that they were not receiving any support for learning or training at the time of registering with the project. In addition, of those who took part in the evaluation:

- 70% of respondents said they didn't know much about other places they could study.
- 50% said they didn't know much about where to get information about places to study.
- 60% of learners responded that they did not know much about the names of qualifications they could achieve for English language or literacy.

As one learner said when speaking about learning support:

'I'm interested [in studying elsewhere] but I don't know how to go about it or where to go…This class is the only support I get.'

As well as offering support in relation to reading and writing and English language skills, the project also aims to raise awareness among learners of other learning opportunities in the community and the qualifications they can work towards. Based on the responses from learners in this evaluation, this support to link in with wider community provision is very much needed.

Both support and management staff expressed that there was a need for the service offered by the project.
- 86% of support staff said there was either a moderate or significant number of residents needed support with reading and writing or English language skills.
- 100% of management staff responded that there was a need for the service

One hostel manager stated:

'I strongly think a service of The Reading, Writing and ESOL group is necessary. In a normal circumstances none of the clients engaging would have attended a college or classes to improve

their English, this is their feedback. A personalised service has not only helped them to learn but also boosted their confidence and [helped them to] build a trusting relationship with the tutor.'

Hostel staff also pointed out their inability to support residents in this area. One support worker observed:

'We have a number of residents with very little spoken English, and more lacking confidence or ability in their reading and writing, for whom we have no language support at the hostel except limited members of staff who are able to translate for them.'

This observation highlights that without the development of literacy and English language skills, residents are dependent on hostel staff for support and as such will struggle in this area when moving on into independent accommodation.

There was a difference in views among support and management staff in relation to the availability of support with literacy and English language learning from other services.

- 53% of support staff said that it was difficult or very difficult to find suitable support in this area for residents.
- 33% of managers said there was very little provision with 67% saying there was a reasonable amount of provision.

This perhaps indicates different views on what is meant by 'available' provision, as both support staff and managers pointed out that while literacy and English language support continued to be available during the Covid pandemic, it became more difficult for residents to access:

'Due to COVID a lot of ESOL & other classes have been on pause/moved online & many residents are unable to access them.' Hostel support worker

'Pre- covid there was a sufficient amount of provision however since Covid, it has changed and it has not been an easily accessible.' Hostel manager

In addition, hostel managers and support staff expressed that other provision, while available, did not cater to the needs of this group of learners as the project does, through offering one to one, personalised

support. The fact that residents may feel intimidated accessing support through other providers was also raised.

> 'There is provision of Literacy courses however college courses can be intimidating to residents, some prefer one to one support [to] accommodate their support needs.' Hostel manager

> 'Services are not flexible and fail to understand our client's support needs.' Support worker

> 'The residents sometimes struggle to engage however this project allowed them to build trust with Sarah and the lessons were done according to the pace that they wanted....' Support worker

In year two of the project, I will continue to focus on building relationships with other FE and Community Learning providers. This may present opportunities for collaboration and exploring possibilities to increase the accessibility of this provision and the qualifications it can offer, for people with experience of homelessness.

Increased confidence in the use of skills

At the point of registering with the project and as part of the evaluation survey, learners were asked how they would describe their confidence in their reading, writing, speaking and listening skills generally and how they would describe their confidence in using these skills independently. The second question was included in recognition of the fact that many learners rely on their support workers, friends or online services such as Google Translate for support with their English language or reading and writing. A key aim of the project is to support learners to feel confident using these skills independently. The options for responses to both questions were not confident, quite confident and very confident.

Confidence in skills generally.

30% of learners described an increase in confidence in relation to reading and writing skills, with 20% describing themselves as very confident in writing at the time of the evaluation and the number of learners describing themselves as not confident decreasing by 30%.
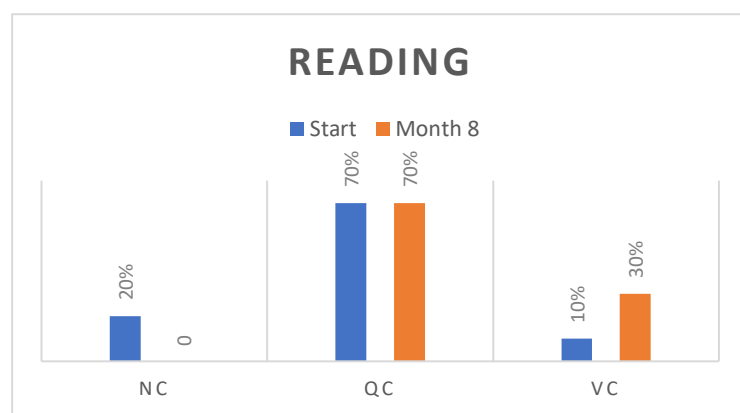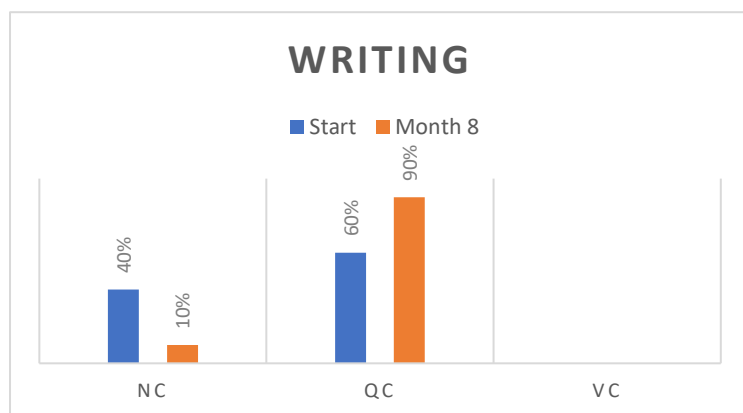
WRITING

■ Start ■ Month 8

	NC	QC	VC
Start	50%	50%	
Month 8	20%	60%	20%

READING

■ Start ■ Month 8

	NC	QC	VC
Start	20%	70%	10%
Month 8	0	80%	20%
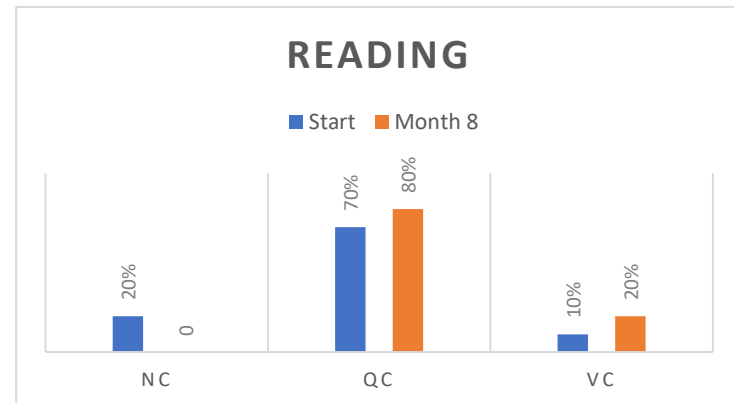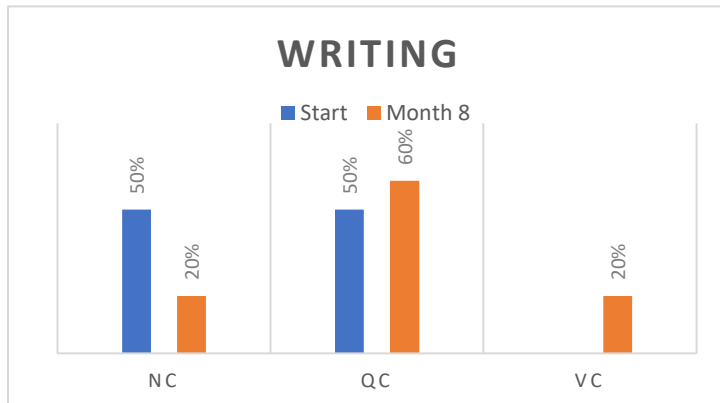
The number of learners who described themselves as quite confident in their speaking skills rose by 40% when surveyed for the evaluation. It should be noted that the number of learners describing themselves as very confident also fell by 10%. This may have been as a result of learners feeling more comfortable to speak honestly about their skills or the fact that, having begun to study, they felt their skills needed more improvement than they had previously thought. Confidence in listening skills was the area which saw the least change in reported levels of confidence, with the number of learners feeling very confident remaining the same at 30%.

SPEAKING

■ Start ■ Month 8

	NC	QC	VC
Start	30%	40%	20%
Month 8	10%	80%	10%

LISTENING

■ Start ■ Month 8

	NC	QC	VC
Start	30%	40%	30%
Month 8	20%	50%	30%
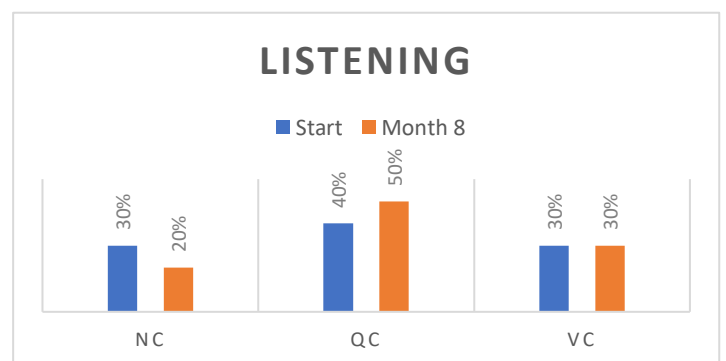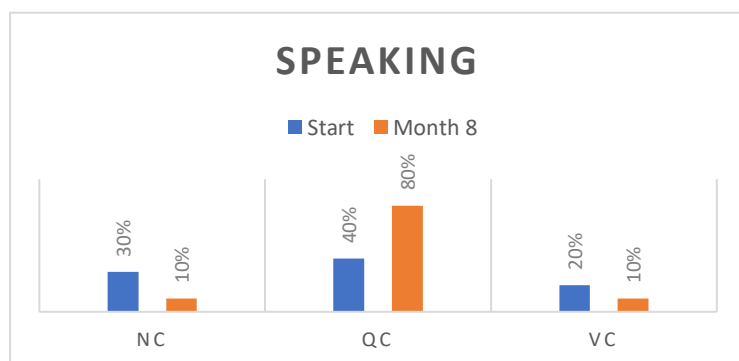
Confidence in using skills independently

The results show that there was a 20% improvement in overall levels of confidence using reading skills by the time of the evaluation and a 30% increase in learners describing themselves as quite confident in writing skills at the time of the evaluation. The fact that no learners described themselves as very confident in writing at any stage perhaps reflects the fact that longer term support is needed to help learners reach and sustain high levels of confidence in using this skill.

WRITING

Start Month 8

NC	QC	VC
40% / 10%	60% / 90%	

READING

Start Month 8

NC	QC	VC
20% / 0	70% / 70%	10% / 30%

At the time of the evaluation there was an improvement of 30% overall in learners' levels of confidence in using both their speaking and listening skills independently. There was a 20% increase in the number of learners describing themselves as very confident in their speaking skills and a 30% increase in the number of learners describing themselves as very confident in their listening skills, with no learners describing themselves as not confident at the time of the evaluation.

LISTENING

Start Month 8

NC	QC	VC
30% / 0	60% / 60%	10% / 40%

SPEAKING

Start Month 8

NC	QC	VC
30% / 0	60% / 70%	10% / 30%
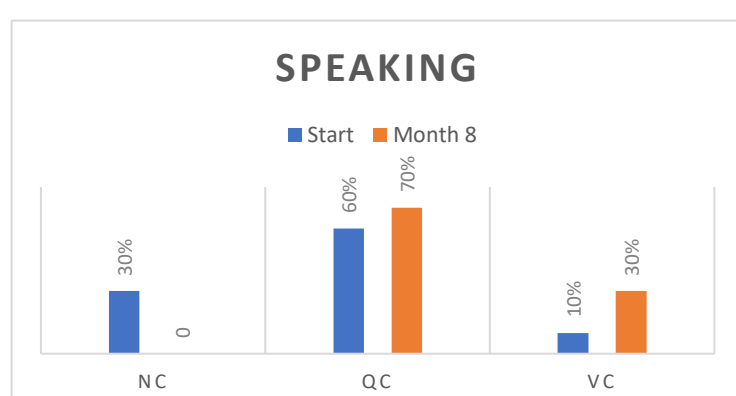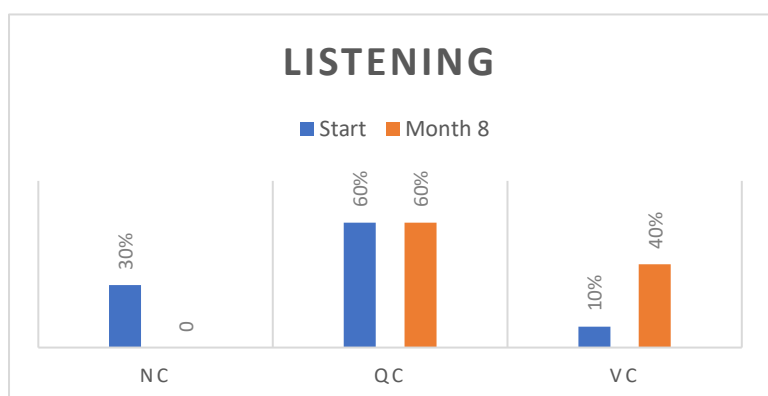
86% of survey respondents among support staff said that residents taking part in the project had become more confident.

> 'The resident is proud to be doing something for himself. He feels that he has learnt quite a lot since he started...' Support worker

The impact of improved confidence.

When interviewed as part of the evaluation, learners identified a number of benefits in improved confidence and language skills. These included being able to communicate with family and friends, being able to get a job and being able to express feelings and communicate with healthcare professionals.

> 'Yeah I have that confidence to speak English with my family and friends and to get a good job. I need more but now I have that confidence to get a good job, I just can't find one.'

> 'When I'm talking with my doctor before I always use translation. Now I can talk without my translation system sometimes. Without communication I cannot tell what I'm feeling inside…before many times I was sick but I can't tell everything to doctor because inside I not enough vocabulary.'

> 'Yes, I learned a lot. Having more confidence in writing, able to write text messages to friends and family…When I write I use the methods you taught me a lot … I store them in my head. This has helped me in a lot of ways.. especially when it comes to sending messages to friends and family…I couldn't [join in] conversations [e.g family WhatsApp messages] … I never used to message anyone because I had no confidence. They used to message back that I was so rude. I used to feel so s**t.'

In addition to improved confidence in using skills, learners identified a number of other advantages of working with the project. These included being better able to communicate, benefits for their emotional and mental health and improved employability skills.

Language for communication

Some learners highlighted the importance of being able to communicate, both in verbal and written form, to be able to express their feelings and opinions in their everyday lives:

> 'Without communication I cannot tell what I'm feeling inside. If I'm educated I have knowledge, if I can't express [it] this is not useful for me…First I need language then I can… say who I am, what I am inside. Without language I can't express my ability and myself…Now, this project, you help me…Now I can say what I need.'

'Most communication, especially social media, it all about messaging, written. It's not through voice… If I liked something, I couldn't write a comment. Social media's a big platform now. People write comments and share their views. I want to share my views but I can't do it [because] it's all written.'

The need for language to connect with others, share views, opinions, feelings, abilities and knowledge is identified by both learners as incredibly important. The increasing use of social media in making connections with others is recognised as another area in which language skills are integral to accessing and being part of, online communities.

The need for long term, flexible provision

Learners also spoke about the advantages of flexible lessons and the fact that improving skills takes time, which is something that the model of provision allows for. The need for time to build a study routine and build up to attending lessons regularly was also highlighted.

'It's like you are building a wall and each lesson is a brick and each lesson builds the wall. It's not hard but it's slow.'

'When I started I thought very quickly I learn everything but I realise day by day I need more time. Time is a big fact.'

'Sometimes I miss lessons because I feel sick, I feel depressed. We can do it another day or another time…'

'My timing was really bad a few times because of my sleeping, insomnia. I want to have a good timetable, I don't want to cancel any lessons. It has become easier. Now when I know I've got a lesson, I'm prepared.'

The trauma informed basis of the project recognises how trauma can impact different areas of learners' lives, including their physical and mental health, ability to remember appointments and retain information covered in lessons. Based on this understanding, applying a model of provision which can adapt to

learners' circumstances, while supporting them to build trust in the service and begin to adapt to a study routine over time, is crucial to retain learners and support their development.

Benefits to mental health and wellbeing

Some learners identified ways in which the project benefitted their mental health and wellbeing:

'Many times I feel bad then you say relax, take a breath and I feel better.'

'Relaxation helps me relax before English class.'

'It's helped me through difficult times…Sometimes my mind's somewhere else and I can't focus, you help me get through it, you help me to focus. Sometimes…I don't know what I'm f**kin' doing, you give me something to do and it helps me… I was looking forward to your phone calls, seeing how you were, collecting my homework.'

'Relax for my head. Communication, no stress, no panic. Big help for me.' (I asked the learner if he felt that the lessons were calming and he said yes).

These responses reflect feedback which I also received anecdotally while teaching. Learners spoke about the fact they looked forward to lessons and the social interaction they offered. This is another important aspect of working with a group of learners who often experience loneliness and isolation. During the Covid 19 pandemic and lockdown, this increased hugely due to the closure of day centres and drop in services, which often provided much needed opportunities for social interaction.

Learners also speak about the benefits of breathing exercises sometimes incorporated into lessons to help emotional regulation. Embedding these activities reflects the trauma informed ethos of the provision and the understanding that learners will be unable to take in and retain information if they are anxious or stressed. Doing these activities in lessons also gives learners techniques they can use to help them with emotional regulation in other situations.

One learner spoke about the anxiety she felt before starting classes and how this had disappeared over time:

'When I first spoke to you my tongue was shaking. I can't talk you because I had a fright inside...When I have no idea what is going on next I have fear but now I have little bit confidence…Now I'm not afraid of you…'

Another spoke about the positive feeling he had as a result of the work he had done and being able to look back over it:

'It would be nice to sit down together and look at all the work we've done. Each lesson when I look at my book, I think I've done something good.'

Project implementation and management

Feedback from support and management staff demonstrates that the project was easy to establish and to implement, highlighting the potential for the model to be duplicated across other services.

- 100% of management staff agreed with the statement 'The process of establishing The Reading, Writing and ESOL Project in the hostel/hostels was easy and straightforward'
- 66% of management staff said that it had been easy or very easy to offer the support of the project to residents.
- 86% of support staff respondents said that the referral process was 'very straightforward.'

Managers highlighted the importance of clear communication, flexibility and the fact that the support of the project was offered to residents during the pandemic as particularly positive.

'It wasn't easy to begin with it takes a while to establish a good relationship but shortly afterwards it worked…it was not easy to establish a routine [and] this continue to be the case for some but the tutor is flexible and supportive it worked very well. '

'The Project Manager was clear on how the project would be delivered and there was minimal paperwork to complete.'

'Staff have found Sarah very helpful and they have seen from the residents that have taken part how much they have enjoyed it. They also appreciate that the project could be delivered during a challenging time with the pandemic.'

The most important aspects of the project.

Hostel managers were asked to rate what they thought were the three most important aspects of the project from a given list. This was asked to gain feedback on what aspects of the project were the most important to retain as it develops and what could or should be changed. Among respondents:

- 83% chose the offer of one to one support
- 67% said that it was the offer of English language and literacy support and the fact that the project was founded on trauma informed principles
- 50% chose the offer of flexible days/times/lengths for the lessons

These responses highlight that three of the four elements managers valued most about the project are aspects which make it unique among learning provision. They are some of the key aspects which allow the project to reach and work with learners for whom other learning provision is simply not accessible.

Most important aspects of the project

Aspect	Percentage
DECREASED ISOLATION THROUGH REGULAR CONTACT	
INCREASING AWARENESS OF OTHER OPPORTUNITIES TO STUDY…	
SUPPORTING RESIDENTS TO BUILD ROUTINE.	16.67%
OFFERING CHOICE IN RELATION TO STUDY (E.G. ONLINE,…	16.67%
THE FACT THAT THE PROJECT IS FOUNDED ON TRAUMA…	66.67%
THE OFFER OF FLEXIBLE LESSON DAYS/TIMES/LENGTHS.	50.00%
THE OFFER OF ONE TO ONE SUPPORT.	83.33%
SUPPORT FOR READING AND WRITING AND ENGLISH…	66.67%

What makes this project unique?

The project is unique because of its innovative approach, founded on trauma informed principles. It engages and retains learners often described as 'difficult to reach', challenging this perception through an alternative model of provision. Between December 2020 and August 2021, learners attended 221 sessions, despite the project launching during lockdown and running throughout a period of restrictions preventing lessons in person.

The trauma informed approach places the learner/teacher relationship and the building of trust at the centre of provision, recognising that without this, no meaningful work can take place. In lessons, alongside

language and communication skills, learners are supported to develop organisational skills, self-awareness, self-reflection and critical thinking through being supported to:

- Remember and attend lessons.
- Store and organise learning materials.
- Practice exercises that support emotional regulation.
- Reflect on their learning environment (both in sessions and when studying independently). For example thinking about the type of learning environment that helps them to learn (perhaps being somewhere quiet, having privacy and not trying to study around others who may be distracting).
- Consider the impact of substance use on their learning and wellbeing.

These skills and ways of thinking are highly transferable and benefit learners in many areas of their lives, outside of learning.

Despite extensive research, I have not found other provision combining these elements and working specifically with people with experience of homelessness. This evidence of unmet need was reflected in evaluation feedback from hostel support workers and managers. 86% and 100% of respondents respectively stated that there was a need for the service.

Areas for improvement

The main areas for improvement identified by learners were:
- The provision of face-to-face and group lessons.
- Having lessons more than once a week
- Offering certificates for participation and achievement.

The main area for improvement identified by support staff were:
- The provision of face-to-face lessons.
- The provision of electronic devices to support learners to study online.
- The need to advertise the sessions more widely.

Many of the improvements suggested by learners and staff have been acted on. Face to face lessons are now taking place in hostels where risk assessments allow for this. Learners' still engaging with the project at the end of 2021 received a certificate of participation and letter summarising what they had studied

during the year. Hostels have been provided with marketing materials to advertise the service to residents. Unfortunately, provision of electronic devices is not possible due to budget constraints of the project. However, the increased availability of face-to-face provision may mean that for many residents this is not necessary to access lessons. The provision of group lessons may be explored as the project develops, however, this is dependent on teaching capacity and assessing ongoing risk related to Covid 19.

The main improvements identified by myself as the teacher and project manager were:

- Improved communication with hostel managers and support staff, particularly in situations where learners disengage from lessons or support workers' availability changes (for example while they are on leave or if there is a change to their role).
- Clarification of the procedure to be followed in the event that learners disengage from sessions (for example the time period for which their lesson slot will remain available to them before being offered to another learner) and how this will be communicated to learners.
- To Develop a more regular monitoring and evaluation framework to identify areas of strength and improvement and increase the possibility of securing funding for the project.
- To source Reflective Practice provision as a source of support for ongoing development and in line with the trauma informed approach of the project.

Adjustments to original project outcomes.

There were challenges in measuring and providing some of the support envisaged at the start of the project. This was particularly in relation to the following outcomes:

- Participants will improve their reading, writing, listening and speaking skills.
- Participants will have a greater awareness of further learning opportunities in the community and how to engage with them.
- Participants will have increased awareness of and opportunity to undertake formal qualifications where that is their aim.

Participants will improve their reading, writing, listening and speaking skills
Measuring learners' improvement in their skills was intended to be achieved through the completion of an assessment at the start of their involvement with the project, which would be repeated as learners continued their studies. This was not possible for two reasons. Firstly, procuring a standard initial

assessment for both literacy and ESOL was difficult. In the case of literacy, this was eventually secured but for ESOL I had to create my own. In addition, as all lessons were taking place over the telephone or online, I was concerned that completing an assessment in this context would cause learners stress and anxiety and may lead to disengagement and/or a lack of reliable outcome, as I would not be with learners to ensure that they fully understood the assessments and completed it independently. For these reasons I took the decision to assess learners skills on an ongoing basis, through my interactions with them and the work they completed. While this was successful in giving me an accurate sense of what level learners' skills were at, it meant that completing ongoing standardised assessments at specific times while working together was not possible as a means of assessing skills development.

Participants will have a greater awareness of further learning opportunities in the community and how to engage with them

In the case of the second outcome, the challenges were both in relation to learners' readiness to consider or undertake further learning in the community and in the nature of the provision available. As I began working with learners, I came to learn that for many of them study skills themselves were a key area of development. People needed help with skills such as:

- having the resources needed at the beginning of their lesson (a pen and paper/notebook).
- making sure they had the worksheets sent for the lesson.
- ensuring they were somewhere comfortable and quiet for their lessons.
- dating and storing their work securely.
- remembering the day and time of their lessons.
- communicating to me if they could not attend their lesson.

For this reason, although I spoke to learners about the fact I could support them to study elsewhere and provided information for the small number of learners who wished to take this on, for many learners establishing the skills that would support them in a different learning environment in the longer term became our focus. As such the project adapted its focus in this area to provide support most needed/useful to learners.

In addition, when researching other provision in the community, much was being offered online, with one provider I was aware of offering telephone lessons. For courses such as those at colleges and libraries, there were specific times learners needed to register and begin studying, which often did not fit with

learners' routines. Many also had waiting lists for attending courses. These aspects of other types of provision meant that in many cases they were not accessible to learners. Also, some learners expressed that they needed flexible provision as they may begin work, so registering with a course that they had to attend on a fixed day and time was not feasible.

Participants will have increased awareness of and opportunity to undertake formal qualifications where that is their aim

Many learners spoke of wanting to achieve qualifications when registering with the project and I had hoped that this was something I may be able to offer through the project, in a way similar to other adult community education providers. To this end I met with a number of community and further education providers to discuss the possibility of working together to offer learners qualifications. In each instance the model of provision offered by other learning providers was such that collaboration in this way was not something that could be taken forward. However, going into the second year of the project, this continues to be an area of focus.

Learning and future direction

Based on feedback from learners, support staff and my own reflections as the teacher and project manager, the following areas will be explored as the project develops.

- Continue to develop face to face provision and explore the possibility of group provision, depending on funding and capacity.
- Continue to develop the monitoring and evaluation framework for the project, including collecting regular feedback from learners, hostel support staff and managers.
- Develop tools to monitor and evaluate learner progress on an ongoing basis, including quarterly progress reviews for learners.
- Liaise with hostels regarding including a research element in funding bids, to identify the number of residents in need of support with reading and writing and English language skills.
- Further exploration of the opportunity to offer accreditations. Being able to offer accreditation to learners would be both benefit learners for whom accreditation is a priority and potentially attract new learners to the project.

- Liaise with other agencies involved in learners' support to ask for feedback on lesson themes and topics and skills they feel learners would benefit from practicing in lessons.

- Embed language for wellbeing into lessons to support learners to gain the language and skills they may need in particular situations (for example when visiting the doctor, speaking about their substance use, mental health or feelings). Explore the possibilities of asking for input from a therapist or counsellor, health professionals and drug and alcohol workers to ensure this is done in a way that is safe for learners.

- Increase awareness of how trauma informed approaches may be utilised in adult learning and education through planning and running information sharing sessions with other agencies.

Pedagogical development

As a teacher, I have identified the following areas for development of my practice:

- Increase my knowledge and understanding of effective ways of working with neurodivergent learners.

- Develop ways of exploring the possible impacts of trauma on learning with learners where appropriate.

- Explore ways of embedding participatory approaches into lessons with learners and working with learners to develop a co-produced curriculum.

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Appendix A
Evaluation questions for learners

- What did you think about the process of registering for the lessons (making a time to register, completing the form)? Please choose one answer.
  - It was difficult (there were a lot of questions, it took a long time)
  - It was ok but it could be better (please tell me how)
  - It was easy (the questions were easy to understand and it didn't take too long)

This is what the first two pages of the registration form look like

THE Reading, Writing & ESOL Project

Registration form

If there are any questions you don't want to answer or you don't understand, we can talk about them together.

1. Name: Unique Learner Number (for use by teacher):
2. DOB:
3. Contact details (telephone number / e mail):
4. Preferred language:
5. Are you able to access the internet regularly? Yes ☐   No ☐
6. Who helped you with housing? Tower Hamlets ☐   City of London ☐   Other/not sure ☐

7. What are your skills? What are you good at?

8. What would you say is one of your greatest achievements/the best things you have done up to now (this doesn't have to be to do with learning)?

9. Did you go to…
School? ☐   College? ☐   University? ☐

10. How old were you when you left school?

11. Do you have any qualifications (GCSEs, O levels, A levels)?

12. Have you ever been told, or thought, that you have an additional learning need (e.g. dyslexia, ADHD, Autism)? I can tell you more about these if it's helpful.

1

13. In general, how would you describe your experience of learning? What was school/college/university like for you? What was good about it? What was hard?

14. When was the last time you took part in any learning/educational activity (year and month, if possible). Where was it? What was it like?

15. What would you like to get from taking part in this project? There is no right or wrong answer-it might be to be able to stay in touch with family or friends, get a qualification or to help you get a job.

16. What topics/subjects are you interested in? This could be sport, art, history, mechanics, films…

17. Do you prefer to learn: 1-1? ☐   In a group? ☐   Both ☐
Why do you think this is?

18. Is there anything you think might make it difficult for you to study?
Busy life ☐   Drug or alcohol use ☐
Physical or mental health ☐   Work ☐
Living in noisy environment ☐
Not having things I need (e.g. paper, pens) ☐   Something else (please tell me) ☐
_____
What do you think would help with this?

19. Are you interested in any of the following:
Getting a qualification in literacy/English ☐
Studying somewhere else in the future (e.g. college, university) ☐
Doing training/volunteering in the future ☐
Starting work in the future ☐

2

What did you think of **the information** in the Welcome Pack (about relaxation exercises, where to find other study activities, the Privacy notice) Please choose one answer.

- o There was too much information/it was confusing.
- o It was ok but it could be better (please tell me how)
- o It was helpful/gave me information that was useful.

Some pages from the Welcome Pack

What do you think?

Tick ✓ in the box below that describes how you feel.

How confident do you feel in the following areas?		Not confident	Quite confident	Very confident
Reading and understanding (e.g. letters, newspapers, information leaflets, websites, text messages)				
Writing and being able to say what you want to (e.g. letters, e mails, text messages, filling in forms)?				
Speaking and being able to say what you want to (e.g. talking to friends or support workers, in the shops, at the doctor)?				
Listening to and understanding what people say (e.g. understanding what people say to you, what you hear on the television or radio)?				

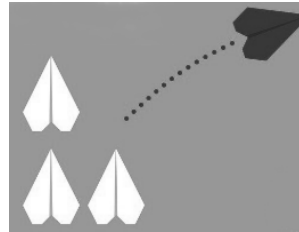Is there anything you would like to say about this?

Using your skills independently.

Tick ✓ in the box below that describes how you feel.

How confident do you feel about…		Not confident	Quite confident	Very confident
Reading and understanding **without help from anyone else?**				
Writing and being able to say what you want to **without help from anyone else?**				
Speaking and being able to say what you want to **without help from anyone else?**				
Listening to and understanding what people say **without help from anyone else?**				

Other ways to study.

Tick ✓ one answer for each question

How much do you know about…	I don't know very much	I know a little bit	I know a lot
Places you could study? Tick ✓ one of these answers ➞	1. I don't know any other places I can study.	2. I know the names of some other places I could study (not many).	3. I know the names of lots of other places I can study.
Getting information about where you could study? Tick ✓ one of these answers ➞	1. I don't know how to get information about places to study.	2. I have some ideas of how to get information about places to study but I do not feel confident to do it.	3. I know how to get information about other places I could study. I feel confident to do it.
Registering to study? Tick ✓ one of these answers ➞	1. I don't know how to register to study anywhere.	2. I have some ideas of how to register to study in some other places, but I don't feel confident to do it.	3. I know how to register to study in other places. I feel confident to do it.

Getting a qualification.

Tick ✓ one answer for each question

How much do you know about…	I don't know very much	I know a little bit	I know a lot
Names of qualifications? Tick ✓ one of these answers ➔	1.I don't know the names of qualifications I could get.	2. I know the names of some qualifications I could get (not many).	3. I know the names of the qualifications I can get.
Getting information about qualifications? Tick ✓ one of these answers ➔	1. I don't know how to get information about qualifications I could get.	2. I know how to get information about qualifications but I do not feel ready/ confident to do it.	3. I know how to get information about qualifications I could get and feel ready/confident to do it.
Where to get qualifications? Tick ✓ one of these answers ➔	1. I don't know where I could study to get qualifications (the names of colleges/organisations where I could study).	2. I know where I could study to get qualifications (the names of colleges/organisations where I could study) but I do not feel ready/confident to go to these places.	3. I know where I could study to get qualifications (the names of colleges/organisations where I could study) and feel ready/confident to go to these places.

Interview questions

- Do you think that the lessons are helping you in the ways you wanted them to when you first registered? (I will remind you of what you said at registration when you were asked 'What would you like to get from taking part in this project? There is no right or wrong answer-it might be to be able to stay in touch with family or friends, get a qualification or to help you get a job.').

- Apart from helping you to get better at reading and writing/ English language, what else have these lessons given you? Do you feel they've helped you in the way you thought they would when you started? Have they helped you in any other ways?

- Is there anything that has made it difficult for you to study/come to lessons? If so, what do you think would help with this?

- What do you enjoy most about the lessons?

- What was it like studying in lockdown? What was good about it? What was difficult?

For learners who have stopped or decided to take a break from lessons:

- If you feel comfortable to say, can you tell me what were the reasons for taking a break or stopping lessons?

Many thanks for taking part in this evaluation.

Evaluation questions for Hostel Management Staff

* 1. I agree to take part in The Reading, Writing and ESOL Project evaluation

☐   Yes. Please give the name of the hostel where you work below.

☐   No (please do not continue with the survey)

Name of hostel ⌷

* 2. I agree to my comments/quotations being used when the project is being spoken/written about (for example in the evaluation report, on the website, in funding bids).

☐   Yes and you can use my first name

☐   Yes but please don't use my name

☐   No, please don't quote any specific things I say

If you are happy to, please leave your name. ⌷

3. What were the main reasons for your decision to work with The Reading, Writing and ESOL Project? Please give as much information as possible

4. What is your response to the following statement 'The process of establishing The Reading, Writing and ESOL Project in the hostel/hostels was easy and straight forward'?

○   Strongly disagree

○   Disagree

○   Unsure

○   Agree

○   Strongly agree

Please explain the reason for your answer

5. Based on your observations and any communications from staff, how easy has it been to offer the support of The Reading, Writing and ESOL project to residents?

○   Very difficult.

○   Difficult.

○   Easy

○   Very Easy

Have you been given any feedback from staff you would like to pass on?

6. To what extent do you think there is a need for the services of The Reading, Writing and ESOL group among your residents? 0

○   There is no need/very little need.

○   There is a moderate need.

○   There is a significant need.

Please give any more information you would like to

7. How would you describe the level of literacy and ESOL learning support that is easily accessible to residents (excluding The Reading, Writing and ESOL Project)?

○   There is very little provision.

○   There is a reasonable amount of provision.

○   There is a lot of provision.

Please give any more information you would like to

8. What are the benefits of offering support of this nature to residents? What are the challenges?

9. Please tick which 3 of the following aspects of The Reading, Writing and ESOL Project you think is most important. 0

☐   Support for reading and writing and English language skills.

☐   The offer of one to one support.

☐   Increasing awareness of other opportunities to study in the community.

☐   The offer of flexible lesson days/times/lengths.

☐   The fact that the project is founded on trauma informed principles.

☐   Decreasing isolation through regular contact.

☐   Offering choice in relation to study (e.g. online, telephone, independent learning).

☐   Supporting residents to build routine.

Please explain the reason for your answers.

Appendix C

Evaluation questions for Hostel Support Staff

* 1. I agree to take part in The Reading, Writing and ESOL Project evaluation

○ Yes. Please add the name of the hostel where you work below.

○ No (please do not continue with the survey)

Name of hostel:

_____

* 2. I agree to my comments/quotations being used when the project is being spoken/written about (for example in the evaluation report, on the website, in funding bids). 0

○ Yes and you can use my first name*

○ Yes but please don't use my name

○ No, please don't quote any specific things I say

*If you are happy to, please leave your name.

If you have referred a resident to the project, please **answer questions 3-10.**
If you have not referred a resident to the project, **please answer questions 7-10.**

3. What was your experience of referring residents to the project?

○ The referral process was confusing/complicated.

○ The referral process was quite straightforward but could have been easier.

○ The referral process was very straightforward.

Please tell me more about your experience and suggest any improvements below.

4. What was your experience of printing and giving forms/learning materials to learners?

○ It is difficult.

○ It is ok but could be easier.

○ It is very straightforward.

Please tell me more about your experience and suggest any improvements below.

5. Thinking of the residents you support who are taking part in the Reading, Writing and ESOL Project, have you seen any changes in their levels of confidence in their reading and writing or English language skills? 0

○ I haven't noticed anything.

○ They have become less confident.

○ Their levels of confidence have stayed the same.

○ They have become more confident.

Please tell me more about the reasons for your answer below.

6. Do you think that taking part in lessons has had a positive impact on residents in other areas of their lives (outside their reading and writing/English language skills)? If so, please give some details below. If you can give particular examples, **without using residents' names**, that would be very helpful (for example, one resident looks forward to the session every week…)

7. Please answer **both** of the questions below.

A. Thinking of **all** the residents you support (not just those working with the project), what number of them would you describe as needing support with their English language or reading and writing skills? **Please choose an answer from responses 1-3.**

☐ 1. None/Very few

☐ 2. A moderate number

☐ 3. A significant number

B. How easy is it to find suitable reading and writing and English language support for your residents? **Please choose an answer from responses A-D.**

☐ A. It is very difficult to find suitable support

☐ B. It is difficult to find suitable support

☐ C. It is easy to find suitable support

☐ D. It is very easy to find suitable support.

Please tell me more about the reason for your answer.

8. Is there anything you think could be changed to make the project better or more accessible to residents? Please give details below.

9. Is there anything you think could be changed to make it easier for staff to refer and support residents in working with the project? Please give details below.

10. Please answer **both** of the questions below.

A) Have you faced any particular challenges in referring residents to the project (for example residents preferring face to face lessons to over the telephone, residents not being able/wanting to complete paperwork)?

B) Have you referred residents who have not completed registration? If so, do you know why this happened? If so and the resident is happy for that information to be shared, please give details below

Appendix D
Learner registration form.

THE Reading, Writing & ESOL Project

Registration form

If there are any questions you don't want to answer or you don't understand, please tell me.

1. **Name:**   **Unique Learner Number (for use by teacher):**

2. **DOB:**

3. **Contact details (telephone number ☎ / e mail ✉):**

4. **Preferred language:**

5. **Are you able to access the internet regularly?   Yes ☐   No ☐**

6. **Who helped you with housing? Tower Hamlets ☐   City of London ☐   Other/not sure ☐**

****

7. What are your skills? What are you good at?

8. What would you say is one of your greatest achievements/the best things you have done up to now (this doesn't have to be to do with learning)?

9. Did you go to…

School? ☐   College? ☐   University? ☐

10. How old were you when you left school?

11. Do you have any qualifications (GCSEs, O levels, A levels)?

12. Have you ever been told, or thought, that you have an additional learning need (e.g. dyslexia, ADHD, Autism)? I can tell you more about these if it's helpful.
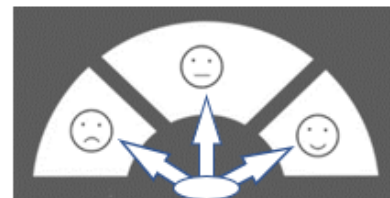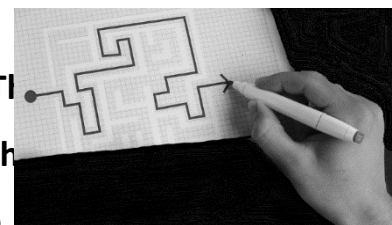
13. In general, what has learning been like for you in the past? What was school/college/university like for you? What was good about it? What was hard?

14. When was the last time you took part in any learning/educational activity (year and month, if possible). Where was it? What was it like?

****

15. What would you like to get from taking part in this project? Th... is no right or wrong answer-it might be to be able to stay in touch with family or friends, get a qualification or to help you get a job.

16. What topics/subjects are you interested in? This could be sport, art, history, mechanics, films…

17. Do you prefer to learn: 1-1? ☐   In a group? ☐   Both☐

Why do you think this is?

18. Is there anything you think might make it difficult for you to study?
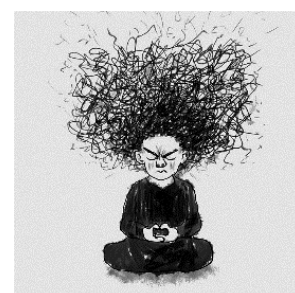
Busy life ☐

Physical or mental health ☐

Living in noisy environment ☐

Not having things I need (e.g. paper, pens) ☐

Drug or alcohol use ☐

Work ☐

Something else
(please tell me) ☐

_____

What do you think would help with this?

****
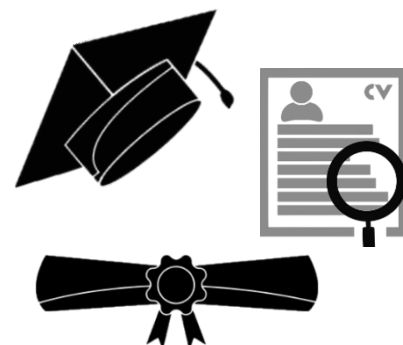
19. Are you interested in any of the following:

Getting a qualification in literacy/English ☐

Studying somewhere else in the future (e.g. college, university) ☐

Doing training/volunteering in the future ☐

Starting work in the future ☐

20. Are you currently receiving support from anyone else to help with learning, training or employment? If so, can you tell me about it?

****

21. Do you think there is anything I need to know for us to be able to work well together? For example, do you find it difficult to:

sit in one place for too long? ☐
control anger or frustration? ☐
stay focused on one thing for too long? ☐
Something else (please tell me)? ☐
_____

If so, is there anything you think would help with this (for example shorter sessions, taking a break if we need to)?

22. I will need to contact your support worker to complete your registration and let them know that we are working together. I will ask them to tell me if you are having any problems taking part in the course once you start.

If I have any concerns for your wellbeing or the wellbeing of anyone else while we are working together, I will talk to you about this. I will also make your support

worker and other appropriate services aware if I need to.

I will also ask your keyworker for their opinion on how the work you are doing on this course is helping you. Please can you tell me the name of your support worker/key worker?

My keyworker's name is:

****
*****

23. As part of joining the project you will receive a Welcome Pack with any of the resources below to help with your studies. Please check (x) the items you would like:
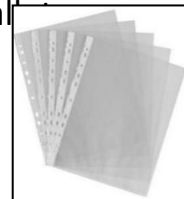
Writing pad/
notebook

☐

Pen

☐

Folder

☐

Plastic wallet

****
*****

24. How your information will be used

The information asked for in this form will help us to work together. Please check (x) to show you are happy for the information to be used to:

- o Help me contact you ☐
- o Record your learning experiences and needs up to now and your goals for the future ☐
- o Help me understand other things in your life that may affect your studies ☐
- o Share information with your support worker as needed ☐
- o Refer you onto other courses or for more support or register you for a qualification ☐
- o Tell partner agencies and funders about the project (this will always be in an anonymised, your personal details will not be shared) ☐

The information will be stored in paper form, in a locked document box and electronically, on a laptop specifically for this purpose, equipped with Microsoft Office 365 and Norton

Antivirus for security purposes. It will be kept for six months after you stop working with the project. You can ask to see the information kept about you at any time.

Learner declaration.

I understand how the information collected about me on this form will be used and stored in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018. I understand that my support worker will be made aware of my registration onto The Reading, Writing and ESOL Project and that if my teacher is concerned for my welfare or the welfare of others she will contact my support worker or the appropriate agencies if she needs to.

To be completed by the teacher (if filling this form in electronically):

Verbal consent: As it is not possible for us to sign this form together at the moment, I have gone through this form with you verbally (we have talked about all the questions). I have explained how your information will be stored and used and you have agreed to this.

Box checked to show verbal consent: ☐   **Date:**

We will sign this form together when we can meet face to face.

Learner signature: Date:
Tutor signature:

Learner signature: Date:

Staff signature: Date:
(if completed with a hostel staff member)

Tutor signature: Date: