

**An evaluation exploring The Life Rooms model of partnership working –
summary document**

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Dr Joanne Worsley and Professor Rhiannon Corcoran

Department of Primary Care and Mental Health

University of Liverpool



Executive summary

As there are many voluntary organisations and community based assets within the Liverpool City Region, the introduction of The Life Rooms aims for the full participation of arts, voluntary and community organisations in the local health economy. As The Life Rooms has over one hundred partnerships with voluntary, community, and corporate sector organisations, this evaluation explores The Life Rooms model of partnership working. Routinely collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics, and in order to identify key elements that contribute towards successful partnership working and the impact of partnerships, semi-structured interviews with service users ($n=7$), partner organisations ($n=16$), and Life Rooms staff members ($n=10$) were conducted. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. Five overarching themes were identified from the interview data: ‘Quality of partnerships’; ‘Benefits of partnership working’; ‘Facilitators’; ‘Challenges of The Life Rooms model of partnership working’; and ‘Making things even better’.

As a network supporting people holistically in non-medical ways, successful partnership working under The Life Rooms model is inclusive and accessible, responsive to service users’ interests and needs, and involves collaborative working with co-designed content, aims and outcomes. The key principles of partnership working are mutual trust and respect, shared values and goals, and regular communication between partners. Benefits of partnership working and the challenges of The Life Rooms model of partnership working are outlined below.

Benefits of partnership working

1. ***A cost-effective and sustainable way of working***: As the Life Rooms provide a medium where smaller organisations can operate, this approach adds social value by contributing to the wellbeing of individuals, communities and society. There are also benefits for the NHS as this way of working has the potential to reduce clinical costs.
2. ***Broadening opportunities***: Crucial to partnership working is developing a shared goal to widen opportunities for the communities they serve. Engagement with The Life Rooms supports and facilitates people to access community organisations that are appropriate. Partnership working facilitates this transition as many partner organisations have programmes running in the community that Life Rooms users can attend. Community provision provides a bridge to independence, which is important for prevention and long-term recovery.
3. ***The promotion of psychological wellbeing***: Receiving tailored support from the partner organisations and attending courses facilitated by partner organisations at The Life Rooms enables people to develop stronger senses of mastery, personal growth and purpose in life. Creative courses facilitate feelings of accomplishment and achievement because learners developed their artistic abilities, began to believe in their skills, and gained a real sense of satisfaction.

Challenges of The Life Rooms model of partnership working

1. ***Equality in partnerships***: Some partners perceived Mersey Care to be the dominant partner. In order to achieve best practice collaboration, The Life Rooms need to address such perceptions, as partnerships perceived as unequal may not sustain.
2. ***Threat from Mersey Care expansion***: Partners expressed concerns for voluntary organisations that may not be able to continue their provision if The Life Rooms provide it as part of their core service offer. The Life Rooms might consider similar models, such as Person Shaped Support (PSS), as it would be beneficial to look at synergies and working together more closely.
3. ***Communication***: Due to the array of partners, Life Rooms staff can struggle to keep communication flowing smoothly. In order to enhance working relationships, it would be beneficial for Life Rooms staff members and partners to get to know each other on a personal/professional level. Newsletters for both partners and users of The Life Rooms would also be beneficial.
4. ***Insufficient resources***: Issues with staffing capacity when supporting sessions were highlighted. Partners delivering courses value the presence of Life Rooms staff members supporting each session in order to provide support if an individual becomes distressed. For some partners, teaching in this environment was unfamiliar, and as there was no formal induction process, they encountered difficulties during the first few weeks. Each partner should be given a clear induction, and a starter pack would be beneficial for those delivering courses.
5. ***Referrals***: Partner organisations sometimes receive inappropriate referrals from pathways advisors. Whilst considering whether specific individuals are eligible for support from each partner organisation, pathways advisors also need to ensure that they do not inundate smaller voluntary organisations with a high volume of referrals as different organisations have different capacity levels.

Conclusions

Working with partners provides pathways to independence, enables people to grow in confidence, removes barriers to social inclusion, and facilitates better health and wellbeing. Although some partners expressed concerns around the expansion of Mersey Care, The Life Rooms provides a framework that is streamlined, enabling people to move smoothly between health and community support. The success of this approach illustrates that multiple bodies play a role in supporting healthcare by bringing their unique skills, expertise and programmes together to ensure there are multiple options to support the multiple different aspects of people's health.