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The HEART Project Evaluation Report

Having the Courage to put Theory into Practice
Service Users as Action Researchers

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A Summary of this Evaluation Report

This evaluation report covers a range of topics related to the HEART project:

- ❑ The results of the project
- ❑ The evaluation approach
- ❑ The story of HEART
- ❑ The learning from the project
- ❑ How the learning from HEART can impact on future service user involvement processes, policies and practices

The evaluation was conducted mainly though a series of intensive 1 to 1 interviews with over 20 people and a series of feedback meetings/sessions with key stakeholders.

The HEART project is an example of the courage and persistence required to move an idea to reality. Anyone who has been involved in the development of a new project will know how complex, confusing, frustrating and fulfilling the process can be.

HEART (Homeless Empowerment Action Research Team) was established to train current and ex service users (of mental health and/or homeless services) to conduct an action research project. The project aimed to gather the views of 50 people who were currently homeless about their experience and their views about the quality of services they received from organisations in Galway.

The project had a number of key phases:

- ❑ Mapping the experiences of the participants
- ❑ Learning how to do action research
- ❑ Developing the research tools
- ❑ Doing all the interviews
- ❑ Inputting and analysing the information gathered
- ❑ Writing the report
- ❑ Launching & celebrating the whole process

HEART was focused on providing a voice for homeless people – and they did that through the research and report that will be launched in Autumn 2006.

The detailed results of the HEART project are presented in the next section of this report. In brief, these are the key results:

- ❑ The research was done and a report written
- ❑ Participants learn action research skills
- ❑ Homeless people were given a voice regarding their experiences
- ❑ A participant was invited to be on the Galway Homeless Forum and other participants made a number of presentations on the HEART project
- ❑ The project showed that with relevant support and resourcing, people can develop a range of complex skills
- ❑ The HEART research results will inform the sectoral homeless strategic plan for homelessness in Galway
- ❑ Participants felt they had learnt a lot about themselves

The HEART project achieved what it set out to do.

And – any project will learn a great deal as it progresses. The HEART project provided a range of opportunities and challenges to the people involved. The learning is explored in section 5 of this report.

We all need to differentiate between service user involvement; service user participation and empowerment – and – what that means for our policies and practices
- In any process that is truly focussed on service user involvement and empowerment there will be an ongoing challenge regarding who makes the decisions
- In a new project that aims to develop peoples skills, there may be a need for more direction in the beginning. This creates a sense of safety for participants as they come to grips with all the new learning and other participants. As skills and confidence increase then there can be much more joint and autonomous decision making
- People's expectations of themselves (and others) can be both a motivator and an inhibitor to action. If you have high expectations and they are not being achieved as the pace you want – then frustration and tension can result. This can be further exacerbated if other pressures (your health, time constraints etc.) are added to the mix
- The nature and extent of resources (time, people, skills, buildings, ideas and money) provided to a project will affect its performance. HEART received very positive financial support from a range of agencies
- There was a very high commitment of time by many participants and the support team – probably a great deal more than everyone anticipated
- Clarifying roles and responsibilities is essential to the success of a project – and – they need to be continually clarified through the life of a process. There will always be some element of role confusion, conflict and ambiguity. The challenge is to work as close to clarity as possible
- Getting the balance between task and process is always tricky
- Relationship building is essential between all stakeholders. There needs to be time and space for both formal and informal interactions. This is particularly important where people's role power can be perceived as a block to effective working (the us and them syndrome)
- The purpose of a project should always drive the structure you build to support and manage it. We need to experiment more with the kinds of support structures we create – and – be very clear about how they can be effective and efficient

The HEART project has had very positive results and a whole lot of learning that stakeholders have openly shared in this report.

For the future there are a number of ways that HEART can leave a legacy:
- Explore creative uses (while respecting confidentiality) of the rich voices gathered during the interviews
- Use the recommendations from the HEART research report to inform the homeless sectors strategic planning and service provision
- The Galway Homeless Forum develop a strategic plan for service user involvement and participation in the sector

I want to thank all the people who took the time to talk with me (sometimes many times) and share their experience of HEART. Their honesty and openness have critically informed this report.

The HEART project has left a legacy of information and learning that can only help to inform the Galway homeless sectors strategic service delivery in the future.

1.   Start at the Finish – the Results of the HEART Project

It's June 2006 and the HEART project is nearing completion. The draft report has been written and the plans for the launch are being developed. The end of a 2-year journey for participants and members of the support team.

I decided to present the results/outcomes at the very beginning of this report because they are a powerful reminder that through all the confusion, struggle, commitment & expectation of a project such as HEART – there are real and tangible results.

People's sense of the scale of these results may differ but there is common agreement that the HEART project has had an impact.

Let's be very clear – these are what I would call 1st level impacts and are constrained by the fact that the project has only just finished. The longer term impacts that the HEART project catalyses may never be known.

What is clear is that courage and faith are required to commit to and resource a project like HEART. It's easy to talk about the theory of service user involvement – and so much harder to move ideas to reality. That has been the experience for everyone involved in the HEART project. It's been really hard work on so many levels – and – everyone said they would still have become involved knowing the struggle ahead. Of course, the beauty of hindsight has provided everyone with learning and ideas on how the project could have been developed differently. That's why we have this evaluation report.

So – here is a list of results that were identified by the key stakeholders:

* The Project happened and a Research Report has been written
* Homeless People had a say about their experience of homelessness and services
* The Strategic plan for homelessness being developed by the Galway Homeless Forum has included recommendations from the HEART report and this evaluation. They are developing a specific focus on service user involvement
* A range of research skills were learnt by participants
* Participants increased their knowledge about issues of mental health, homelessness & addiction
* Participants understood themselves more as a result of being in the group
* Support Group learnt a lot about project management and process
* HEART participants on key sectoral structure - Galway Homeless Forum
* Participants gave a number of presentations to sector structures and conferences
* Participants made their own choices to stay or leave the project
* People learnt about the challenges of having decision making power
* One participant has gone on to third level study
* Some participants felt an increase in their personal confidence
* Some participants got to know the people behind the roles in organisations
* One participant has become involved in his local housing management committee
* Some participants increased their presentation skills
* Showed that service users can powerfully participate in complex processes
* Issues of service user involvement are getting on the homeless sector agenda
* The HEART report was written and will feed into sectoral strategic plans

2. Evaluation Approach

2.1 Invitation to Evaluate the HEART Project

I was invited to conduct an evaluation of the HEART project. As the project was nearing completion it has been a post hoc evaluation. The challenge of post hoc evaluations is that I need to ask people to draw on memories that can cover a couple of years. Nevertheless, I found that all the key stakeholders in the HEART project were very open to sharing the challenges, frustrations and achievements of their experience.

2.2 Evaluation Approach

As an action researcher/evaluator I am open about a number of dogma that seem to be embedded about evaluation and research:

❖ **Research and Evaluation is always objective** – not true. Even with the best designed tools everyone's perception of an experience is subjective and different. Of course, we can gather numbers and they will give us a 1st level sense of a project. To get to the core of the process and results of a project an evaluator has to provide spaces for people to tell the story, explore the learning, and their sense of future development opportunities. Good practice and quality frameworks can be very useful in providing a context for asking questions and gathering data. They are still not totally objective.

❖ **Research and Evaluation is Power Free** – not true. An evaluator has a lot of power (position, expertise and influence) as they are the ones gathering information, making decisions about what is used and what isn't; who gets to be involved and who is excluded; how information will be used; what recommendations to make etc etc. This power needs to be acknowledged and each evaluator makes decisions regarding power sharing in the evaluation process.

The evaluation approach I developed involved a series of steps:

❖ Meeting with the support group to clarify the evaluation aims and process. As a result of that meeting we changed certain timing stages of the evaluation.

❖ Given the budget and the nature of the HEART project I decided to conduct 1 to 1 interview with all key stakeholders. That included participants who had left the project; the support group; and members of the consultative committee – 25 people in all over 4 days were interviewed. Interviews ranged in length from 30 minutes to 2 hours. Participants were given as much time as they wanted to talk with me.

❖ Everyone interviewed was given my email address and invited to send me any other thoughts and comments about the project should they arise. A number of people did contact me to provide additional thoughts and ideas.

❖ I decided not to develop any surveys as the interviews had provided a real depth of information as well as the session and meeting notes provided by the support team.

❖ One of the things about evaluations that I think frustrates people is that they give their time for interviews and surveys and then they may not see the result until a report is written. People can feel powerless about how the information is utilised. I provided a feedback cycle that attempted to give people some real power in the evaluation process beyond being informants. I summarised my sense of the HEART project; key learning and

recommendations for the future and presented it to the remaining participants, facilitator and support team. Over 2 hours they wrote and talked about my findings with me – and provided me with an additional depth of information and confirmation that I had 'got' the project.

❖ I also presented a 2 hour synthesis of my findings to a dozen key stakeholders in the homeless sector including – Galway City Council, HSE - West; Galway Partnership, COPE, Galway Simon, Threshold, Dept of Social and Family Affairs. A very stimulating discussion ensued and people felt that the feedback had been very useful.

❖ Met with HEART participant, facilitator and support team for a final summation of my findings and process.

❖ I wrote this report that can be used as an information and strategic document.

❖ The draft of the report was sent to the support group and remaining participant for their feedback.

❖ Final report will be sent to all stakeholders.

Evaluations take people's time and I am very grateful for the time that everyone gave to this process.

2.3   What is Value and who defines it?

The HEART Project from planning to writing the draft research report took nearly 2 years.

A long time I hear you say – well, that really depends on so many things including the fact that this was an action research project that required time to train and develop a group of service users as the action researchers – as well as set up an office system from scratch.

It's now June 2006 and I have received a draft of the action research report. For some people that would be the key and only real result they would value. For others the process of learning - what has felt for some like a long struggle – has been the real result.

People left the project for a range of reasons and some would define that as a failure. Once again – it depends. Making a choice to leave something that you have invested time and energy into takes courage. Leaving something is as healthy a choice as staying. Every participant that I interviewed said that even with hindsight and given the range of experiences they had in the project, they would still have chosen to be involved in HEART.

As an action evaluator the question of VALUE often arises.

For some stakeholders their value bottom line is about numbers, how much money was spent, how long it took, how many people were involved – all valid value elements if they are linked to a deeper qualitative analysis.

For other stakeholders their value bottom line is about the quality and nature of the process as well as the quality of any tangible products.

Some stakeholders ask me to evaluate whether a project has been a success or failure. I don't tend to work or think within those parameters.

As an action evaluator I am more interested in the stories of peoples experiences and their perceptions of the learning within that experience. I do have a sense of

good practice in training and managing projects so that will inform the discussions I have with people. In the main, people are well able to tell me what they have learnt and how they would improve process in the future. My job is to gather all the strands of the conversations and make some kind of synthesis that people can use to inform policy and improve practice.

3. Key Recommendations – Ideas for the Future

The Power Sharing Dilemma – Direction, Negotiation & Autonomy

I feel that projects of this level of complexity need to start with a strong sense of guidance. It is participant centred not participant led to start. As people become more confident and comfortable with themselves and the group – then you can move to more participant led processes. This is always underpinned by principles of communication and collaboration. I think it would also be useful for project teams, managers and participants to explore and discuss models of service user involvement and power sharing with each other. To make explicit some of the constraints and opportunities of putting theory into practice.

Resources – People, Time, Money & Buildings

Money – continue to have a resource partnership approach

People – Keep some form of record of the labour time donated by organisations and turn it into a real money/investment number. The three organisations probably contributed multi thousand of euro worth of staff time. This needs to be made more explicit

Service organisations need to formally free up time from other work for the staff involved in such projects and develop a formal support and monitoring process for those staff.

Action Research Training & Group Development Facilitation

The group development and research training processes should only overlap if workers are in the project for more than 10 hours a week. People felt under pressure and made their own choices about what to prioritise –

Roles & Responsibilities

Clarifying roles and responsibilities linked to the structure of a project is the first step.

The next step involves an ongoing conversation and observations about how these roles are working. Seek out and identify when role confusion, ambiguity and conflict are happening. Try to understand what is at the core

That more opportunities for formal and informal relationship building be developed between the different project structures.

That participants receive a number of information and discussion sessions on the broader background of the life issues they and their peers are experiencing.

That key facilitators are invited to be on the support group as this provides are real opportunity to clarify progress and any role confusion.

Process & Task – Getting the Balance

We never get the process and task balance right.

It's an ongoing conversation about priorities, opportunities and constraints.

I believe that we do not spend enough time on relationship building and process development in projects and organisations. And I can hear you say – 'but there's never enough time' – and I'll reply 'look at what happens when we only focus on the task'.

More time needs to be taken throughout a project for process development. This involves processes to create

Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation

An evaluation framework needs to be developed from the start of a project. It should include all key stakeholders and involve meaningful points of reflection and learning.

This report should be sent as a companion document to the HEART research report to all key stakeholders. If possible both reports should be posted on stakeholders websites and copies made available on CDROM.

HEART as a Catalyst for the Future – Where to Next?

Transform & Use the Data

Hours of conversation from the interviews have been taped and transcribed. There is a wealth of Voice contained here that could be transformed and used to:

- ❖ create a wider audience to hear about people's experiences of homelessness
- ❖ develop prevention and awareness materials for programmes in schools, agencies, and with the wider community
- ❖ create a creative mobile exhibition of sound/voice and written word

I would recommend that the Galway City Homeless Forum 'own' and develop the data. It is the only structure I can see that represents all key stakeholders in the sector – although I'm slightly unclear about who runs and coordinates it.

Sectoral responsibility for Service User Involvement

I believe that the HEART project has catalysed a range of learning regarding service user participation, involvement and empowerment – and this has been explored throughout this report.

The HEART project as a structure no longer exists so who should be responsible for developing a sectoral strategic approach to the topic? Once again I see the Galway City Homeless Forum as the only representative structure in the sector.

I recommend that the Galway City Homeless Forum take responsibility for developing a 3 year strategic plan regarding service user involvement, participation and empowerment – and – that this recommendation become part of the Homeless Action Plan for Galway City.

If the sector, through the Galway City Homeless Forum, does not take collective responsibility for furthering a sectoral approach to service user involvement then it is doing a major disservice to its service users, workers and managers. I sensed in my presentation, to agencies that there was

4.   The Story of the HEART Project

4.1   How it all started & a timeline of key activities

The HEART project began as a series of conversations between Bill (COPE) and Helen (Mental Health Ireland MHI) in the early part of 2004. MHI had conducted 2 service user action research projects in the preceding years in County Galway.

A more detailed description of the HEART phases is available in their research report that should be a companion document to this one.

January to June 2004 – A series of meetings between COPE, MHI, a Pathways participant, and the HSE West (Health Promotion and Public Health) were held to tease out the potential for an action research project using homeless service users as action researchers. The group wanted to build on the learning from the 2 Pathways projects. A number of other organisations were also involved in these formative discussions – Galway City Council Homeless Unit; Mental Health & Older People's Services HSE West; Galway Simon Community.

July to September 2004. A number of features in both local papers and local radio generated interest amongst both service users and providers. Information leaflets were placed in services and venues frequently used by Homeless people. Current and past service users were contacted via outreach work by resettlement workers and by attending residents meetings. A number of open information evenings in a central location gave individuals a chance to find out further information about the project. One to one sessions were held with the support team and those individuals who were interested in order to further explain the project.

October to December 2004 – Six people join the project. The project began with a series of group development and mapping experience exercises facilitated by a professional facilitator. Each individual was involved for 10 hours a w eek in the project and gave 2 hours to the group development and mapping exercises. At the same time a researcher was employed to begin working with the group on action research training and developing the research plan.

And – at the same time the group worked from a number of venues before accessing an office in the Galway Partnership – which they found and negotiated themselves. The office management system also has to be established. Some people are working up to 25 hours a week. The group chooses the name HEART for the project. It means – Homeless Empowerment Action Research Team.

January to May 2005 – Participants are involved in a range of action research training activities (Designing research tools; IT skills; interview techniques; sampling methods; fieldwork techniques; report writing). The group facilitator works for a few hours a week with the group until May 2005.

May to July 2005 – 3 members of the team conduct 50 interviews with service users.

July 2005 to April 2006 – All the interviews are analysed (spss & qualitative). 2 participants remain on the project.

April to June 2006 – The report is written as a collaborative effort between the 2 remaining participants and 2 members of the support team.

This is the briefest of snapshots for what was an intensive learning and action process for everyone involved.

4.2   HEART's goals

The Vision of the project was:

"Getting to the HEART of Homelessness"

The mission of the project was:
"To empower Homeless People through inclusion, a voice in the process of change to current provision of services"
There were a number of key goals:
- ❖   To conduct action research led by service users
- ❖   Have the research results inform Galway City Homeless Forum strategic plan for homelessness
- ❖   Empower homeless people/service users through – inclusion and a voice in services development and change
- ❖   Be part of a partnership between service users and service providers
- ❖   Act as a catalyst for organisations to explore opportunities and ways to involve service users in policy, practice and resource planning and development

4.3   The People involved in the HEART Project

The Action Researchers - The service user team consisted of 6 people who had shown an interest in being part of an action research project. There were 3 women and 3 men. All but one person had been homeless, a number had experience with addiction (drugs/alcohol), one person had experienced domestic violence abuse and a number had mental health issues. One person had participated in the Pathways project. Every person stated a strong commitment to being part of a project such as HEART and felt that they could make a difference and provide a voice for homeless people. The group received expenses to participate 10 hours a week in the project. Some people worked from 20 to 30 hours a week.

The Coordinators – a decision was made to model the coordination structure on the Pathways model. Two of the service users were invited to be coordinators – one because of previous experience on Pathways and the other because he has experienced homelessness.

The Group Facilitator – a professional facilitator was engaged to work with the group for an initial period of 5 sessions to aid the group formation process. She was subsequently hired by the group to extend her work to include a mapping of experience process over a period of months in 2005 – and for briefer sessions in 2006.

The Action Research Trainer – a professional action researcher was commissioned to train the group in research skills. She was subsequently hired to support the group as they put their new skills into action during the design, fieldwork and analysis phases of the project.

The Support Group - The HEART project was designed by an interagency group including representatives of COPE, HSE Western Region and Mental Health Ireland. This support group met frequently with coordinators throughout the project – and infrequently with the whole team – although they were always available for 1 to 1

support which people did use. In the last 6 months of the project the support team had very close contact with the research team.

Consultative Committee - This committee included all agencies working with Homeless people in Galway such as COPE, Galway Simon Community, Galway City Council, HSE , Western Region, (Mental Health and Older People, Health Promotion, Social Work, Public Health, Primary Care, Corporate and Public Affairs) Mental Health Ireland, Galway City Partnership, Cuan Mhuire. This group met with the HEART team coordinators every two months to receive feedback from HEART and to act as an information resource, provide support and encouragement and to disseminate information back to their own organisation about the project.

Staff in Homeless services – acted as a link and support to organise interviews as well as after interview support if a person wanted to talk.

5.   The Learning From the HEART Project

5.1   Introduction

This section will cover a lot of ground and is embedded in a framework of good practice regarding training, user involvement and group development.

In conversation with key stakeholders it was very clear that people had learnt a great deal in the process of their involvement in HEART. Some of the lessons were hard and left people with feelings of anger and regret – and even then - one participant told me how it had helped his own personal development.

In life we can't take all the paths that are available and open to us - and HEART was no different. You can adapt as situations arise and circumstances change but you can't make too many substantive changes (e.g. radically alter the purpose or structure) without giving the initial decisions time to be tested.

HEART was not intended as a test bed for theories on structure, decision making and group formation – but that's what happened. I have a feeling that people focused on the good idea of the action research and service user involvement, did some planning to ensure good group and process development – and were shocked at the amount of struggle that ensued.

There were deeper level group process and structural issues that became more evident as everyone reflected on the last 2 years. These will be explored in the rest of this report.

Everyone I interviewed contributed to this learning as well as providing their thoughts on what they would have done differently – that takes courage. People wanted to be able to share their experience so that other service user action research programmes could be run as well as other service user involvement initiatives.

5.2   Service User involvement, participation & empowerment – clarifying the differences

Let me start by exploring three key terms that we all use but rarely define because we assume we all have the same understanding – never assume, always clarify. (I have included excerpts from a paper I wrote and presented on Service User Involvement in the Homeless Sector 2006. Email me for a copy).

Service user involvement, service user participation & empowerment
The terms service user involvement and service user participation are often used interchangeably. In participation theory they are seen as three distinct terms that refer to different levels of power access to a process.

Service user participation refers to people taking part in some activity or acting as informants in a consultation process.

Service user involvement usually refers to the users activity having some form of impact on the service process. Involvement is higher along the power-sharing continuum than participation.

Participation will not guarantee any changes – Involvement will.

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Manipulation & Therapy were seen by Arnstein as methods to cure and educate people with less perceived power
Informing & Consultation were viewed as first steps in citizen participation but became tokenism if there was no real feedback or change
Placation involved co-opting individuals onto committees and decision making structures but the power holders still decided the legitimacy of advice they received from citizens
Partnership saw power redistributed through negotiation and planning/decision making was shared
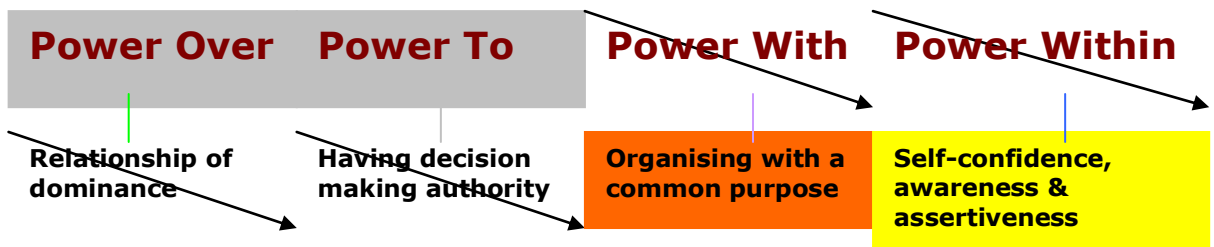**Delegated Power** had citizens having the majority of seats with the delegated power to make decisions
Citizen Control involved citizens having power to develop and manage processes

Empowerment is not the natural result of participation or involvement. This term is misused and misunderstood. In fact many user activists would claim that participation in consultations has disempowered people as they see little change occurring as a result of their time and effort. People know when a process will be empowering and when it is tokenistic.

Participation, involvement and empowerment involve different degrees of power sharing.

Another power model provides us with another piece in the puzzle that is the service user/service provider interaction. All these models and definitions not only give us insight into the learning from the HEART project but could also underpin the development of a sectoral strategy on service user involvement.

Power Over	Power To	Power With	Power Within
Relationship of dominance	Having decision making authority	Organising with a common purpose	Self-confidence, awareness & assertiveness

In my experience, **power within** must be developed in order for any involvement or empowerment strategies to succeed – and I don't just mean for service users. I believe that underdeveloped power within is very real for many service providers and is often visible through a range of behaviours including defensiveness, always going by the rules, objectifying and even demonising their clients/customers, psychosocial distancing, a refusal to explore new ways of working, and a fundamental belief that people can't change.

For many service users the belief in themselves as powerful has been eroded by a range of life experiences – and unfortunately some of this erosion has been at the hands of the very people who should be serving them. If you come to a space where hope is too painful then your willingness to participate or become involved will be very low. The sense of power within has diminished and any faith in the systems will or skill to listen and support them has disappeared. Building your sense of **power within** and **power with** takes an internal and external commitment of resources – time, energy, skill, resilience, ideas, money.

In terms of the HEART project they attempted a number of things to do with the power models I described:

- ❖ Wanted participants to feel empowered – really develop their Power Within
- ❖ Were trying to work at the high end of the service user continuum – veering between partnership and delegated power
- ❖ Were committed to service user involvement
- ❖ Wanted to work together for a common purpose – Power With

This requires a huge commitment on the part of everyone involved and presumes a set of skills and experiences that everyone didn't necessarily have and some people chose not to develop.

All these principles of power and participation were deeply held by the support team and participants. The challenge was that these concepts are very intangible are require a commitment to process that not everyone could make. There's a whole skill, attitude and behaviour set that needs to be developed over time.

5.3   The Autonomy/Direction Dilemma

One of the very real issues that affected the project was what I have termed the autonomy/direction dilemma. Essentially, this is the ongoing struggle about who makes the decisions on pretty much every matter to do with the running of a project.

When you link this dilemma with the preceding discussion on service user involvement and power theory then the difficulties become apparent.

As one of the support group said:

'it was really difficult...we didn't know where our influence began and ended.. we wanted to be supportive and not too directive ... we had so many meetings about whether we were the ones to make a particular decision or should it be the HEART team...'

In my experience as both a project manager and action evaluator I have come to really understand something that is critical to the success of any partnership process. I believe that in our real wish to encourage involvement and empowerment we often set up a process/project that increases rather than decreases people's struggles.

I have been involved and evaluated countless service user projects and there are two mistakes that are commonly made:

- Don't spend enough time building relationships and trust between all stakeholders
- We try and move service users too quickly to empowerment

I remember an old man in a fantastic cross generational arts project in North Sligo yelling at me one day in a group reflection session ' you're the teacher why don't you earn your money and make some decisions instead of asking us all the time'.

Fantastic learning – what I learnt that day is that many people who have not had the experience of power sharing in decision making want to feel safe and see some direction at certain phases of a project. In this project the support team said they constantly struggled with the issue of who made what decisions – and in hindsight they increased the burden of expectation and responsibility on the service users by giving too much autonomy at an early stage. This was completely reinforced in my discussions with the service users. They felt that too much decision-making power was given to them in the beginning and they would have

preferred a bit more direction from the support team as they built up their confidence. That's the power of hindsight. The diagram below is my attempt to visually show the dilemma
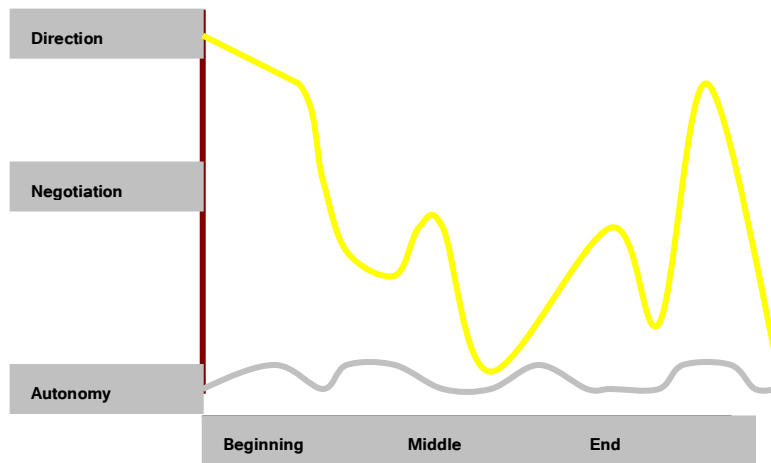
This is a combination of direction, negotiation and autonomy. The level and nature of decision making power will be linked with peoples skills, experiences and the particular situation. On the HEART project more direction and structure at the beginning would have created a safer space for participants to develop their power within and power with each other and the support group.

This is a little like learning the trapeze without the net.

Giving the group substantial decision making autonomy was based on sound ethical principles of service user involvement – the practice just didn't work for the group. Having a large measure of autonomy at the beginning of the process was both liberating and a struggle for participants. People had a wide range of experiences, skills and confidence in such a process.

This service user involvement project involved the development of action research skills with a group of people that (apart from 1 person) had never done research. If I was training anyone in a new skill set there would be a mix of directed learning regarding tools, techniques and design that highlighted good practice – and – adult learning and decision making processes where individual and the group were given decision making responsibility.

It can be hard to see this when you're both beginning and in the midst of a new project. You want to let people feel they are part of an empowerment process by

giving them legitimate decision making power. The participants meanwhile are trying to get to know each other, set up the office, learn new skills, understand what the whole project is about, and manage their own physical and emotional life issues.

Ideas for the Future

I feel that projects of this level of complexity need to start with a strong sense of guidance. It is participant centred not participant led to start. As people become more confident and comfortable with themselves and the group – then you can move to more participant led processes. This is always underpinned by principles of communication and collaboration. I think it would also be useful for project teams, managers and participants to explore and discuss models of service user involvement and power sharing with each other. To make explicit some of the constraints and opportunities of putting theory into practice.

5.4   How expectations Help & Hinder a Project

Expectations are interesting things that are internally and externally derived and driven.

Expectations can help a person and a project when they act as motivators to action. They hinder you when they create such a sense of stress that your actions are inhibited.

To want to be part of a process that offered a real voice on homeless services for service users was one of the prime motivators for both participants and the support group. I also believe that the organisations that were represented on the advisory committee had (and have) a commitment to these principles even if they are harder to enact in larger organisational environments.

This expectation of being involved and participating in something that was important impacted on participants in a number of ways:-

- ❖ It sustained some people when they felt they were going through a rough patch
- ❖ It gave people a sense of purpose and value in the process
- ❖ When time and other constraints started to impinge on the task some people became very frustrated with themselves and each other
- ❖ Some people said that their own high expectations of themselves and the project created stresses that made them unwell and may have added to the reasons for their exit from the project.

People had different expectations and understanding of themselves and each other and this caused tensions. This would have been further exacerbated by time and role confusion issues that arose at times.

Two participants stayed nearly to the end of the process. They would have had very clear expectations of themselves in the process and a wish to see the process finished.

As one of them said:

'HEART … it's important…I wanted to give something back … want to make a difference'

And another participant:

'Most difficult task I've ever done … (I'd) still have participated … it's the most important thing I've ever been involve in.'

5.5 People leave projects for different reasons

Six people started the HEART project and at the time of this evaluation (May 2006) there were 2 participants remaining.

People leave projects for different reasons. Making a choice to leave something can be healthy. A number of people left because of other life issues that were causing them distress and needed their attention. One person left as a result of struggles and tensions within the project. Most of the participants stayed through the initial group development and action research training process – to around June 2005. One participant had breaks because of physical ill health.

All the participants I interviewed (5 of the 6 – 1 was unavailable) said that they had enjoyed elements of the HEART project and felt it was important as a means of giving homeless people a voice about their experiences and services. All participants were told that they were welcome to return to the process at any time.

5.6   Resources – People, Time, Money & Buildings

The HEART project received commitments of time, money, buildings and people through its 2-year life.

Money - Let's start with the most tangible resource. The table below provides detail on the financial contributions from a range of organisations – a good partnership approach to resourcing the project. This money was needed to resource the HEART project over 24 months:

- ❖ Facilitator, Trainer and Evaluator fees
- ❖ Office equipment and supplies
- ❖ Administration costs
- ❖ 6 Participant expenses
- ❖ Office hire
- ❖ Promotion and selection costs

Heart finances

20-Jul-04	Galway City Partnership	5,800
6-Sep-04	Combat Poverty Agency	5,802
6-Dec-04	Dept. Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs	3,000
7-Dec-04	Mental Health & Older People - W.H.B.	10,000
7-Dec-04	Health Promotion Unit - W.H.B.	11,000
15-Dec-04	Health Promotion Unit - W.H.B.	6,000
15-Dec-04	Health Promotion Unit - W.H.B.	4,000
22-Dec-04	Corporate & Public Affairs - W.H.B.	10,000
5-May-05	Galway City Council	5,000
01-Feb-06	Anonymous Donation	50
30-Dec-05	Public Health - H.S.E.	10,000
14-Oct-05	St. Stephens Green Trust	6,000
	Cuan	500

	Mhuire	
08-May-06	Galway Simon	1,000
04-May-06	S.V.P.	500
24-Apr-06	Threshold	1,000
24-Apr-06	COPE	1,000
08-Jun-06	Health Promotion Unit - H.S.E.	500
		81,152

People – One of the intangibles that never seem to get calculated into the real resource costs is the in kind labour of people in projects. Two particular groups of stakeholders in the HEART project gave substantial in kind labour to the process.

The **participants** gave a lot more than the 10 hours a week that they received expenses for – some were doing up to 20 hours a week. When the group size lowered to 2 people they received expenses for a 25-hour working week.

The 4 members of the **support group** gave substantial amounts of time – at their organisations expense – to the project. In the last month or so of the project, 2 of the team were working with the remaining participants on a nearly full time basis to write the report. There is an opportunity cost to this intensive labour input – other work may not get done as a result of making the HEART project a priority. The organisation needs to realign and manage the workers workload – e.g decrease caseload or allocate a day a week in recognition of the time needed to give to the project. There also needs to be a formal support and communication process within the hosting organisations at the highest management level to ensure that the staff are not overworked and the project is run well.
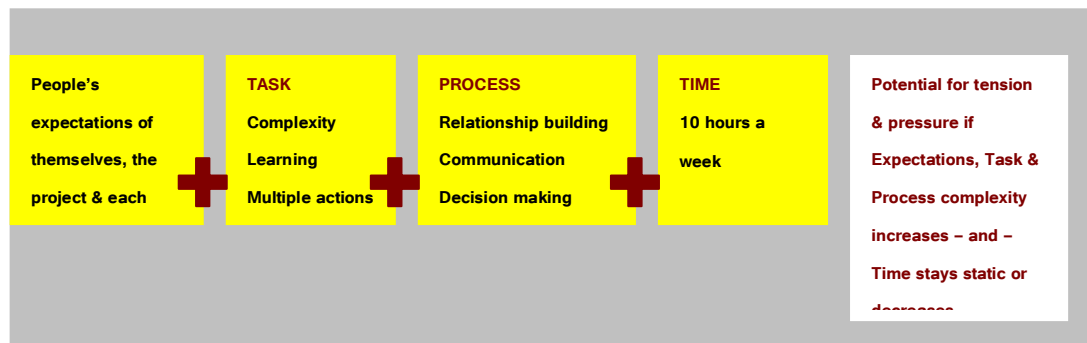
The workers and their organisations (COPE; HSE and Mental Health Ireland) are to be congratulated for committing their staff resources to the project. I don't think they were aware of quite what a commitment it would be.

Buildings – the team 'lived' in a number of spaces in the initial stages of the project and finally settled in an office space provided by the Galway Partnership. The office was a central point for the team to meet, work and communicate – and was a tad small for constant interactions. Having said that, it was a great hub of other community groups that the team could mix with and meet.

Time – Nobody expected the project to run to 2 years – the time calculated was more in the 18-month range. There are a number of reasons why the project took the time it did:

- ❖ Workers were engaged to work for 10 hours a week. This completely underestimated the draw on peoples time as they attempted to – get to know each other; participate in the mapping experience process; learn action research skills; set up the office; do administration; attend external meetings; prepare and five presentations etc etc
- ❖ The total number of participants decreased as the process moved to the fieldwork stage leaving less people to do all the work involved
- ❖ Some participants needed time out from the project to deal with physical and mental health life issues
- ❖ Any process that involves learning new skills and developing confidence in their execution will take time – and the HEART project was no different.
- ❖ Process issues within the group took time to identify and resolve

I think that there were a number of critical elements of the HEART process that may have exacerbated the time/action equation. The diagram below provides a sense of these elements - all of which are explore in this report.

| People's expectations of themselves, the project & each | + | TASK
Complexity
Learning
Multiple actions | + | PROCESS
Relationship building
Communication
Decision making | + | TIME
10 hours a week | Potential for tension & pressure if Expectations, Task & Process complexity increases – and – Time stays static or decreases |

The initial time constraint of 10 hours a week added a sense of pressure that people felt tended to exacerbate any group tensions or hold ups to the task. As one person stated:

'Everyone (participants, team & facilitators) were seriously constrained by the amount of hours we had per week to try and accomplish such a huge task.'

It is to all their credit that people gave extra time – but this was not consistent nor was it mandatory.

Ideas for the Future

Money – continue to have a resource partnership approach

People – Keep some form of record of the labour time donated by organisations and turn it into a real money/investment number. The three organisations probably contributed multi thousand of euro worth of staff time. This needs to be made more explicit

Service organisations need to formally free up time from other work for the staff involved in such projects and develop a formal support and monitoring process for those staff.

5.7 The Action Research Training & Group Development

I was not able to view the Group Facilitator or the Action Research Trainer as they worked with the HEART team, as this is a post hoc evaluation. Having said that I had a number of opportunities to talk with the 2 professionals and watch them engage in my feedback sessions.

The quality of the work done by these 2 professionals was excellent. They both had a strong commitment to a user centred approach of learning and engagement.

I viewed the group facilitator's session outlines and reports and found them to be clear and very process driven. The Mapping the Experience process was very well done and included the use of images and colours to creatively explore each person's experience of homelessness. The one difficulty was that it was very rare that the whole team attended a session. People would be absent, arrive late or leave early because of the pressure of other tasks in their 10-hour working week. This was unfortunate as it was a key process for relationship building and understanding.

The HEART workers told me that they enjoyed the sessions even when the memories they evoked made them feel pain, loss and shame. The workers chose to employ the facilitator after her initial 5 weeks session and that is a very positive indicator of her impact and connection with the team.

I viewed the research training programme as well as the research tools developed by the team – with the assistance of the research trainer. The quality of the survey design; pre-test process; sampling methodology and interview training were of a very high standard. As an action researcher myself I did not see any flaws in the training or implementation of the learning in the research process.

 I was particularly impressed when I talked with one of the team about the interview technique training. I asked her how she dealt with her own feelings and responses when an interviewee spoke in anger and sadness about a service. Was there a temptation to engage in a kind of 'service bashing' conversation. She was very clear that in their training they covered this area and were taught to listen and respond appropriately – to hold their own feelings apart from those of the people they were interviewing. They did a lot of role-playing in the learning process and received feedback on their approach.

Both professionals said that they had learnt a great deal over the life of the project. One thing that caused some confusion (and I will cover this in more detail in the next section) was who was responsible for 'holding' the group process. Who was meant to identify and process tensions, struggles and difficulties? Both women held the process when they worked with the group – even when they weren't sure it was their responsibility.

Another difficulty – and this is one of those hindsight learnings – was the overlap between the group development process and the action learning process. People felt pulled in 2 directions and with only 10 hours a week they tended to make choices about what got priority time and attention –sometimes to the detriment of the group formation process. The impact of this would be felt throughout the rest of the project.

Ideas for the Future

The group development and research training processes should only overlap if workers are in the project for

more than 10 hours a week.

That a support process be embedded from the beginning and involve both group and 1 to 1. The support

facilitators should be external to other positions.

5.8   Roles & Responsibilities

Performance in anything is affected by internal (skills, expectations, needs, knowledge & attitudes) and external (time, money, circumstances, people) factors.

Roles and responsibilities in projects need to be defined and constantly monitored. In a project and particularly one as complex as the HEART project, there are a number of issues regarding roles that can help or hinder a process:

Role Ambiguity & Confusion – this is evident when people say things like ' I don't know what I'm supposed to do' ' they think that's my job and I think it's something else' 'we're not clear about whose role it is to do…'

How you perceive your role and how others do can cause a great deal of confusion, tension and frustration.

In the HEART project there were a number of points of role confusion and ambiguity:

Between the Coordinators – I believe that each coordinator saw their role differently and this was partly due to their different approaches to the project. One would have had a strong process orientation and the other a strong task orientation. This became a recipe for tension and pressures for the coordinators and the team with the result that one coordinator eventually left the project. These tensions were exacerbated by the time pressures; the different experiences and skills of the workers; and the expectations the coordinators placed on themselves. A complex mix of internal and external factors. The tensions in style and approach of the coordinators did affect the group and required ongoing mediation and time for the support team.

Between Coordinators and the rest of the team – the coordinators sometimes had a sense that their authority and influence within the team was low because the other workers saw them as 'one of us', a service user. So, while they may have had position power they did not necessarily always have influence or expert power. This issue arises in many projects and is not specific to a service user led process.

Between the HEART team and Support team – There were a number of times when role confusion regarding the role of the support team caused tensions between the two groups. It was felt – once again in hindsight – that the support team could have had a more direct link with the whole team from the very start. In the beginning they tended to work through the 2 coordinators, which makes sense if you want to let them establish their authority and work. What happened was that any struggles were communicated to the support team a few days or a week after they happened so that they reacted in a delayed way. It is important to note that members of the HEART team rejected formal support processes from the beginning. Only one participant had experienced how a support process could work (in Pathways). In hindsight all participants said that they would have wanted some form of support from the beginning. Having said that there were many instances of the two groups working well together.

Between the core team and the Consultative Committee – The consultative group met every 3 months during 18 months of the project. They would admit that their attendance varied from high to none over that time. Members of this group would have expressed to me a sense of not really being sure what they were meant to do (even though a clarifying paper was written some time during

the process). Some also felt that opportunities to utilise their skills were not taken up by the project. I think this is related to a deeper gap in the process of relationship building between the different groups of stakeholders – and I will explore this in more detail in the next section.

There was a sense of distance between this group and the other groups of stakeholders. Once again this was partly to do with relationship building and also the nature and roles of the different structures within the project.

The coordinators were members of this group and were the formal representatives from the project. One of the coordinators felt that the group weren't truly supportive of the project and its eventual outcomes. I think this sense of distancing was also to do with a somewhat over formalising of the structures for such a small project and this is discussed in the next section.

The representatives on this group have high position power in the homeless sector and certain roles to play within their organisation's mandate. Given that the participants had no real opportunity to 'see' the people behind the roles, and, there were meetings where attendance was very low – it is understandable that they would 'read' this as a lack of interest in the project. It's amazing how many complex signals are sent in a project – and how easily they can get confused and misunderstood.

Role Stress – confusion and ambiguity can cause stress within and between people. Now, stress can be a positive thing if it motivates people to clarify issues and move on to action. This did happen in the project (I don't want you to think that the whole project was a morass of confusion and stress). As I've already mentioned – there were a number of factors that made clarification difficult:
- ❖ time pressures
- ❖ people prioritising the task over the process

In notes from an early meeting between the group facilitator and participants they (participants) clearly stated that conflict scared them and they really disliked confrontation. Changing that mindset and building confidence in conflict spaces takes time that the group were not willing to give.

Sometimes just clarifying roles isn't enough. Other strategies need to be put in place and here are a few options:
- ❖ change roles and positions
- ❖ decrease expectations and task elements – the scale and scope of the work
- ❖ bring in new people/person to aid process and task
- ❖ explore what other projects are causing pressure (time, structure, pace, planning etc)

Finally, the pressure experienced by both the Coordinators was high. The role ambiguity – being coordinator, participant and service user – was stressful to them. The burden of responsibility as well as their own and others expectations made it difficult for them to do their jobs. Their different styles caused tensions and were further exacerbated by the time pressures. Their persistence and commitment is to be commended – and they both said they learnt a lot about themselves and other people.

In discussions with both coordinators we explored what options they would have preferred:

- ❖ having one coordinator – maybe a service user or maybe a paid worker from a service

- ❖ having 2 coordinators – one is a service user and one is a paid worker from a service

The coordinators would then be responsible for holding the process and focusing the task actions.

5.9 How Purpose needs to drive Structure

This is my mantra. Too many projects (and this happens in statutory agencies and EU projects as well) tend to establish structures that hinder rather than help the process. Ireland has a tendency to develop very conservative and hierarchical structures – even for very creative projects. Some of this is for legal reasons and I also believe that people don't perceive how critically structure impacts on successful results. Also, people tend to create structures they know.

Purpose should drive the structures we create.

So – when developing a new project (and reviewing a mature one) you need to look at what you're trying to achieve and then create the structures needed to support and enhance the process.

Let's look at some of the key HEART project purposes:

- ❖ to train service users as action researchers
- ❖ to support principles of service user involvement and empowerment
- ❖ to affect planning and connect into the homeless sector
- ❖ to be accountable

Now – I believe that the planning group developed their structures in good faith and linked to the purposes stated above. The diagram below shows the structures that were developed.
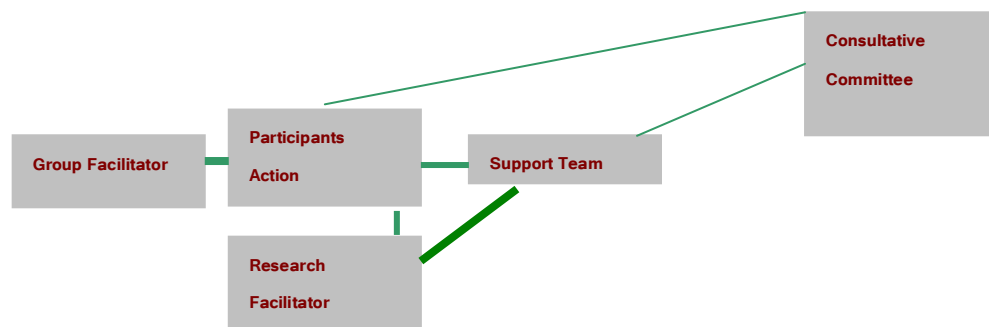
The green lines show close and direct formal communication and decision making flow. The thin green line between the participants and Consultative committee shows that there was a representative from the participants but no whole of group contact. The group facilitator and research facilitator had direct contact with the participants. They also had contact with the support team – and – I don't believe they had any contact with the consultative committee.

The weak communication links between the different structural elements would have exacerbated people's feelings of confusion and frustration.

Once again the time element rears its ugly little head. It takes time to communicate – whether face to face; in writing or via email.

Relationship building – is a critical element to the success of any project. I want to emphasise how hard people worked together in their teams. My sense of the gap in relationship building relates more to the links between the different elements of the project structure. Most of the participants and the members of the consultative committee never got the chance to get to know each other – to have the time and space to see behind the roles and meet the person – to diminish the sense of us and them.

Where a participants did get to know a member of the consultative committee it was usually in an informal way when they visited the office. I saw for myself the result of this informal relationship building when a participant, myself and a member of the consultative committee met by accident. The two people were delighted to see each other – chatted about how they were and the participant then said he would be contacting the person to chat about some support for another project he was involved in. Now that's empowerment in action! The consultative committee member has very real position and influence power and the participant felt comfortable and powerful enough to engage on an equal level.

There is a need to create informal and smaller sized opportunities for people to interact, get to know each other and begin to understand the range of challenges and opportunities that each is faced with in making the project work. The challenges in doing this relate to time factors – and – to peoples (both service users and service providers) own sense of their power within. Sometimes it's easier to stay behind our roles and structures and not be known. Yet, if people are truly committed to empowerment then they will need to have the courage to engage in meaningful relationship building processes. There were so few times created and available to do this in the HEART project – very few informal and fun engagements.

In terms of the relationship building within the action researcher team, there are a few points I'd like to make:

- ❖ it was a very varied group in terms of people's backgrounds, confidence, participation skills and experience
- ❖ some people had previous experience in the power of being involved in group development process – most didn't
- ❖ the mapping experience was a skilled process of engaging the group in a process of understanding each other. Unfortunately the group was rarely all present during the sessions
- ❖ a number of participants made it very clear that they did not want to 'waste' time on process work – they saw the task as being more important

A gap in the process of understanding and relationship building within the team was the lack of a broader contextualising process. What I mean by that is that the Mapping experience was very personal and powerful but it did not (and wasn't meant to) provide the participants with the bigger picture on issues of:

- ❖ addiction
- ❖ homelessness

- ❖ mental health
- ❖ violence against women

As one participant said
'the team were not informed of each others backgrounds(confidentiality). We were 6 months into project b4 we realised where each other had come from ... difficult as we didn't understand each others little foibles and/or right wrong buttons that could be pushed..'

Issues of confidentiality are important (and the whole area of confidentiality needs debate – but that's another paper entirely) so I'm not necessarily recommending that participants receive in depth personal knowledge of their peers. What I am recommending is that there could be a few sessions where the causes, impact and potential behaviours of the life issues be presented and discussed.

Ideas for the Future

That more opportunities for formal and informal relationship building be developed between the different project structures.

That participants receive a number of information and discussion sessions on the broader background of the life issues they and their peers are experiencing.

That key facilitators are invited to be on the support group as this provides are real opportunity to clarify progress and any role confusion.

5.10 Process & Task – The old balancing act

We never get the process and task balance right.

It's an ongoing conversation about priorities, opportunities and constraints.

I believe that we do not spend enough time on relationship building and process development in projects and organisations. And I can hear you say – 'but there's never enough time' – and I'll reply 'look at what happens when we only focus on the task'.

When we give the task our priority focus then process issues may seem to be ok until we reach a point of difficulty – and – we experience the results of our lack of attention on process. Conflict, anger, confusion and all sorts of struggle ensue. They will arise even when a group spends time on process. The difference is that if we spend time building our relationships with each other; understanding our similarities and differences; gaining trust – then our capacity and willingness to work together to deal with the problems will be higher than if we really don't know or trust each other. We can have courageous conversations that really make a difference.

The HEART project tried so many ways to build relationships within the core team. In the early days many of the participants stated that they did not want to spend a lot of time on the process stuff – they wanted to be doing what they saw as important –the research training and tasks. And given that the support group were working from a model that gave the group a lot of decision making power – the process development was given less emphasis than the tasks.

The other difficulty is how do you 'tell' people how important process work is when they have never experienced it! To a lot of people it seems like airy-fairy stuff – until difficulties arise. The group had varied skills in conflict management and many were very open about their wish to avoid any unpleasant confrontation. This creates an artificial sense that everything is ok.

The group was offered and some took up the opportunity for 1 to 1 support from the support team. Others had negative feelings and experiences as service users with the whole idea of 'support' and rejected any form offered. Yet, when I talked to the participants they all said that they either appreciated the support or would have wanted more. I think a deeper discussion at the beginning with the group about what process, task and support could be, would have been useful. I believe that any future projects should have support processes built in from the start.

Members of the support team said that (once again in hindsight) they all should have worked directly with the entire group from the beginning to provide more guidance and collaborate on key decision making. This is linked to the autonomy/direction dilemma I mentioned in a previous section. The support team were strongly committed to giving the participants decision making power so they stood back to give them the space to do this. The trade off is that they were not directly present in the group formation and relationship building phase.

I want to emphasise that the HEART project was not all about struggle. People did get to know each other and a lot of work did get done. Once again time pressures really forced people to focus on that they saw as important – and – task is so much more tangible than process.

Ideas for the Future

More time is taken throughout a project for process development. This involves processes to create understanding; build relationships; and build skills in being process oriented. That is – communication, decision making and conflict resolutions skills.

Task skills are just as important to develop – project management and time management

5.11 Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation

We're coming to the end of the report and this is the nearly last but not least section.

Planning, monitoring and evaluation are critical elements of good practice for projects.

The HEART project support team spent a lot of time planning the actual project in 2004 and into 2005. They also monitored progress, as did other stakeholders involved.

This evaluation was summative and post hoc. I think the lack of a formal evaluation framework from the start was a gap in the projects good practice. Clear evaluation points would have provided all key stakeholders with the time (I know – there were time pressures) and the space to reflect on many of the elements that I have discussed in this report. It would have enabled people to agree on any substantive changes that were needed while the project was in action.

Some of the support group members reflected on a sense that they may have tried to deal with all the struggles alone and without the support of the consultative committee. This could be for a range of reasons that include - the perceived power (high) of the members of the consultative committee meant that support group members were concerned that the project would be ended because of the struggles and a perceived sense that the project wasn't successful. I believe this is closely connected with other comments I have made about relationship building and trust. In a very real way the support group was right – the members of the consultative committee have position power and could have made a collective decision to withdraw their resources.

Because this committee was distanced through time and connection with the other stakeholders there were much fewer opportunities to truly engage with the project. I can't predict what the group would have decided but after meeting many of them I believe they would have understood the struggles and given the process time – and they could have provided some extra support and advice.

If more reflection and evaluation points had been created then perhaps this distancing would not have been felt and there could have been an even more meaningful exchange of support.

This post hoc evaluation has provided very real learning from the HEART project and everyone involved is to be congratulated for their participation. It is worth noting that while the 2 Pathways projects were the models for the HEART project they were never formally evaluated or their learning documented.

This evaluation report can be used as a learning document for other organisations thinking of embarking on a complex process. The lessons learnt in this project are not unique to HEART. They are experienced in different ways by any group that works to create something in the world. The difference is that all the stakeholders in the HEART project were prepared to share the unvarnished sense of the opportunities and challenges they experienced. This report is not a story of people always being happy and unstressed as they work on a complex project – it's the truth of the complexity that we all face as we try to make a difference.

Ideas for the Future

An evaluation framework needs to be developed from the start of a project. It should include all key

stakeholders and involve meaningful points of reflection and learning.

This report should be sent as a companion document to the HEART research report to all key stakeholders. If

possible both reports should be posted on stakeholders websites and copies made available on CDROM.

6. The HEART Project as a Catalyst for the Future

The HEART project as it was – has ended. The publication of the research report and the launch are very visible signs of ending and celebration.

So – where to next?

People were very concerned that the learning and efforts of the HEART project not be lost. How can they act as a catalyst for the future. I see 2 key ways:

Transform and Use the Data

There is a wealth of information that the team gathered in their interviews and conversations with service users.

Hours of conversation from the interviews have been taped and transcribed. There is a wealth of Voice contained here that could be transformed and used to:

- ❖ create a wider audience to hear about people's experiences of homelessness
- ❖ develop prevention and awareness materials for programmes in schools, agencies, and with the wider community
- ❖ create a creative mobile exhibition of sound/voice and written word

These are just suggestions and what I am trying to stimulate is a sense of how the information could create a multiple of ways to communicate the experience of homelessness to diverse audiences.

Of course, any development would have to be informed by the service users permission to use their voices and maintain their privacy.

The question of who owns the data from the research is an interesting one. Given that I support a transparent and cooperative approach to partnership. I would recommend that the Galway City Homeless Forum 'own' and develop the data. It is the only structure I can see that represents all key stakeholders in the sector – although I'm slightly unclear about who runs and coordinates it.

Sectoral responsibility for Service User Involvement

I believe that the HEART project has catalysed a range of learning regarding service user participation, involvement and empowerment – and this has been explored throughout this report.

The HEART project as a structure no longer exists so who should be responsible for developing a sectoral strategic approach to the topic? Once again I see the Galway City Homeless Forum as the only representative structure in the sector.

I recommend that the Galway City Homeless Forum take responsibility for developing a 3 year strategic plan regarding service user involvement, participation and empowerment.

I see a number of stages to this process:

- ❖ an initial mapping of current policy and practice regarding organisations and their service users. The mapping would also look at the constraints and opportunities that present themselves in developing better practice on service user involvement.This would be informed by a good practice framework developed by the Forum. There is a wealth of literature on service user involvement that could inform this framework including information I wrote in the early sections of this report.

- ❖ The mapping is not a deep level audit. Rather, it is a scoping exercise that gathers information on tangible policies and practices.

- ❖ The HEART research report has a depth of information on service users perception of services and this could inform the mapping process.

- ❖ It would be good practice to have a service user/s working with the person/s doing the mapping.

- ❖ Once the mapping scoping exercise is completed the Forum needs to explore what future developments are really an organisational responsibility and which are a sectoral/partnership opportunity. This is not about mandating what organisations should do – it's about exploring what can be done together. For example. A sectoral participation education programme looking at power and process and the tools to engage service users and providers – presented to service users and providers. Developing good practice tools that workers and managers in organisations could use to develop better service user involvement practice.

- ❖ Forum develops a sectoral strategic document that highlights key priorities for collective and collaborative partnership action from 2007 t0 2010.

If the sector, through the Galway City Homeless Forum, does not take collective responsibility for furthering a sectoral approach to service user involvement then it is doing a major disservice to its service users, workers and managers. I sensed in my presentation to agencies that there was a willingness to work together to further the issue of service user involvement.

I also recommend that this process be included as a critical action within the Homeless Action Plan for Galway City.

I want to thank all the 25 and more people that gave their time, energy and enthusiasm to this evaluation process. I hope I have done your comments justice.