Head Office: The Fort Offices, Artillery Business Park, Park Hall, Oswestry, Shropshire, SY11 4AD.
Email: enquiries@peoplesvoicemedia.co.uk
Website: https://peoplesvoicemedia.co.uk
Company No:3083575
Charity No:1059681

""Keep encouraging people to add their own unique twist to Public Living Rooms"
Insight Briefing: June, 2020

Camerados are working with People's Voice Media as part of an ongoing learning process that seeks to better understand how the movement works, how it can be developed further and the impact that the activities of the Camerados movement make. This short insight briefing focuses on Public Living Rooms (PLRs) and is based on 10 stories gathered from members of and people connected to the Camerados movement between April - June 2022. The stories have been gathered using the Community Reporting methodology, which is a digital storytelling approach rooted in lived experience. We've also weaved into this insight report reflections from an online Learning Exchange we ran in April 2022. This workshop involved 14 people who have set up, organised or supported PLRS in some way. These people were mainly in the UK; one contributor from outside of the UK. The topics covered in this insight briefing include the uniqueness of individual PLRs, what people have learned from setting up PLRs, and how the Camerados principles are adopted in PLRs.

"Having the option to pick and mix what's in the box would be good"
Celebrating the uniqueness and individuality of individual PLRs and Camerados

A theme that emerges in the stories, is that a Camerados space enables people to be who they are and embrace their individuality, whilst at the same time creating a sense of belonging. As one first time attendee of a PLR explained, "today was my first time visiting a public living room. I felt very welcomed and supported... Thank you for accepting me as me." It was commented on, how this environment left people free to just dip in and dip out when they felt like it. There isn't the pressure of "commitment".

A Camerado involved in PLRs felt that it was key that Camerados keep "encouraging people to add their own unique twist to their PLR". To further enhance this, they felt that they should start "having options to pick n mix what you receive in your box depending on where you're doing your living room". This sentiment was echoed by another Camerado who received items in their box that they were unable to use due to the restrictions in place in the space the PLR was being hosted. They felt it had "wasted money". Furthermore, a few people felt that there were missing items from their PLR boxes and in the knowledge exchange, PLR boxes for pop-up or outdoor spaces were also muted as an idea for the future. Therefore, having the ability to individualise the contents of PLR boxes may be a better use of resources and this could also reinforce individual and unique nature of each PLR - strengthening the permission given to Camerados to make them their own. As one Camerado explains, "it's about people knowing that this space is theirs and they have space to be there and look out for each other and they can make it theirs". Echoing this, a person who is trying to set up a PLR in a library was attracted to it because they felt it would help them create a "space being a bit more owned rather than used."

"It is a normal thing to fail, isn't it? We didn't always get it right."
Learning about how PLRs work and why they matter to folk

The principle of 'It's okay to be a bit rubbish', was something that a number of Camerados involved in PLRs spoke about. This principle in particular "takes the pressure off" the Camerados who are setting-up PLRs and gives people the confidence to learn as they go. However, for some people there were still barriers in place to setting-up a PLR. As one Camerado explained:

> People over think it and worry about where they will host it, who it will attract and what they need to do. Not everyone has the confidence or skills to do it. There are barriers for people doing it. Extra workload is too much of a commitment. People are suspicious of things that

Head Office: The Fort Offices, Artillery Business Park, Park Hall, Oswestry, Shropshire, SY11 4AD.
Email: enquiries@peoplesvoicemedia.co.uk
Website: https://peoplesvoicemedia.co.uk
Company No:3083575
Charity No:1059681

> are coming in from outside their area and the fear around 'What if no one comes?' is a massive barrier.

Another key barrier to PLRs in last 18 months has been the COVID-19 pandemic. This has been firstly because of the various restrictions in-place but also because of the changing in way that spaces work and priorities of different organisation shifting.

To overcome such barriers, Camerados provides support to people setting up PLRs and encourages PLRs to learn from one another via visits. As one new PLR organiser has said - "the team have always been very quick to respond and very supportive even though we've said it's not been going quite as well as we had hoped". Despite this, the individual felt that there was a "disconnect" between how the Camerados team spoke about PLRs in terms of their "feel" and how they felt in reality. Through visiting other PLRs, this individual feels it is "helping us to figure out what a PLR does look like, not what it's supposed to look like".

Within the stories, there is evidence that PLRs mean a lot to people and help people through tough times. As a Camerado puts it:

> It looks like we're just sitting on our arses and doing Jack shit but we're doing something with no agenda. We're looking out for each other. It's a big thing - you can't see it from a distance can you but it's there.

This quite a pertinent comment in many ways. First it highlights the importance of no agendas and human connection through chatting. Second it identifies a key learning point for the movement and PLRs - to understand how PLRs work and their importance, you have to experience them - not watch from the side-lines. How to create the right 'feel' is best achieved experientially - not conceptually. More so, creating a space for conversations is good for people. As one Camerado explained, "after the pandemic… I just wanted to be in the company of other people and just chat". And what's wrong with that?

"I love the principles and I promote them in my life as much as possible" Reflections on the Camerados Principles

Many Camerados felt that the Camerados principles draw people in - or at least, they are what drew them in. People relate to them they give people the permission and scope to just be human with each other; "we know Camerados is just about being human". Another Camerados said, that their PLR has "given me permission to sit down and talk to people instead of trying to work to support people". People's involvement in PLRs have supported them to learn how to adopt and live out the principles. For example, one Camerado said that "I struggled with the not fixing to start with", but this feeling was short-lived as PLR gives them space to just sit down and talk to people with no expectations.

One storyteller said when they read the principles, they immediately felt like they connect with what they do; "I was looking for Principles that fit what we do and it was like 'oh there they are', someone's done them for me". Seeing them written down validated their own feelings and reinforces a sense of belonging with Camerados. This feeling was strengthened further by hosting the PLR, as one Camerado described PLR as the "most powerful community engagement thing they had ever done". They went on to describe how the no fixing principle in particular is key - "helping people discover their own answer to their own problems is a powerful thing… people have to find their own path don't they?".

Furthermore, Camerados are taking these principles outside of PLRs and into other spaces. As one person stated - "I love the principles and I promote them in my life as much as possible". More so,

Head Office: The Fort Offices, Artillery Business Park, Park Hall, Oswestry, Shropshire, SY11 4AD.
Email: enquiries@peoplesvoicemedia.co.uk
Website: https://peoplesvoicemedia.co.uk
Company No:3083575
Charity No:1059681

for 'professionals' involved in PLRs, the principles are asking them to think about how they can be adopted more widely. As one Camerado explains:

> It isn't a professional thing, it isn't a work thing and that's really nice but a challenge as well because I think we're so used to just being a certain way. So now it's got me thinking that when I am doing stuff at work can I bring some of that to it.

The genuine connection people have with the principles and then being a set of principles of ways of being (not rules for a space), is what is helping people take them beyond the realms of PLRs.

Key insights from the stories

- PLRs are not a 'one size fits all' - they are all unique
- PLRs are spaces where people can be themselves - they are human spaces
- Conversations and connections matter - this is how people can help each other through tough times. The importance and simplicity of this should not be underestimated
- Although the premise of a PLR is simple, the barriers to people setting up their own shouldn't be underestimated - not everyone has the skills, resource, time etc. to do it
- PLRs have to be experienced to be understood - they are not something that can be understood at a purely conceptual level
- The principles are a core part of what creates PLRs and they support people to set-up PLRs
- The principles impact on people's lives beyond PLRs - they are transferable to other settings

Recommendations based on the stories

To support the development of the Camerados movement based on the insights from the stories, we would recommend the following:

- **Continue:** Promoting the principles as a fundamental part of the Camerados movement and how the 'feel' of the PLR space is created.
- **Strengthen:** The understanding that all PLRs are different and can be unique, and the sharing of learning and ideas across PLRs.
- **Explore:** How the PLR boxes could be more 'customisable' and if boxes aimed at 'pop-up' or 'outdoor' PLRs could be developed.