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"We try to wear the principles like shoes, to ensure we are applying them in our daily lives"

Insight Briefing (October, 2022)

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 makes. This short insight briefing is based on 30 stories gathered from members of and people connected to the Camerados movement between July – September 2022. The stories have been gathered using the Community Reporting methodology, which is a digital storytelling approach rooted in lived experience. The stories in this insight briefing are largely about the 'principles' that underpin the Camerados' movement. Topics covered in this insight briefing include how people connected with specific principles, how these principles supported Public Living Rooms to thrive and how people have utilised these principles outside of Public Living Rooms.

Getting alongside: "This isn't about fixing, this about being alongside and when we do that, we realise we can be together"

The Camerados principles have helped people to learn and grow. One story teller speaks of entering a new country and not knowing anyone. This led to extreme loneliness. Once they joined the Public Living Room (PLR) they felt relief and happiness as they were building a support network. They felt that the principles were key in creating this environment, particularly the principle about not fixing one another and instead just being alongside. This individual felt that this principle helped them to feel relaxed as they didn't have to 'do' anything. They could just enjoy the environment and no-one was trying to 'fix' them. They could just be themselves with no pressure. This changed their lives as they made connections with people in the new country that they now call home. Another Camerado explained how before connecting with their local PLR, they had felt lost and now after attending the PLR for almost a year they have friends whom they share ideas with.

Other storytellers suggested that these principles enabled people to grow and thrive. One Camerado discussed how the alongside principle was a huge learning curve, not just in a PLR setting but outside of the space too. They spoke about a scenario where their friend was going through a tough time and they felt the urge to tell them how to respond. It was only when discussing it with a fellow Camerado that they reflected on this approach as they asked 'what about the principle of just being alongside?'. The storyteller immediately reflected and realised that being alongside is actually the key to supporting friends.

Another Camerado talked about how they held a PLR with the intention of fixing people (or at least trying to deliver some form of service alongside the PLR) and no one turned up. They realised after how important this principle is for people and by doing something that went against the principle, it discouraged people from attending.

From the stories gathered, it is clear that the 'being alongside/no fixing' principle is one of the core ones to the movement and one that is often forgotten in everyday life.

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It's okay to be rubbish: "The its okay to feel a bit rubbish principle fits so well within a hospital setting for those who work in the hospital"

One Camerado who had set-up a Public Living Room in a hospital for the staff team spoke about it's success; they felt the key principle to this success was that it is okay to be rubbish. Workers turned up and felt no pressure to be a certain way. All day in their job role they are expected to be positive, and this Public Living Room just gave them a space that they felt okay to not be 100%.

Although some other storytellers were not fully aware of the principles, when the principles were shared with them, they felt that the principles just came naturally in the PLR. For example, storytellers shared that in a PLR environment, they felt okay to say actually I could do with some help here. They stated had it not been for PLR they feel the community events that were born out of the PLR would have not been possible. The principle of it being okay to be rubbish meant there was no pressure to be okay and there was no need to put on a pretence. This created an atmosphere that allowed others to feel comfortable to speak openly. This empowered the group and led to them applying for additional funding to support ideas for community activities that had been suggested in conversation in the PLR.

Beyond Public Living Rooms: "To have fun and be silly is essential for everyone "

Many of the storytellers discussed how the Public Living Room had given them a space in which to learn, grow and be themselves. At first the principles can just be a conversation starter but they then develop people, with many bringing the principles to everyday life. As one storyteller explains, the principles help us to learn how to create more equality and how to be together respecting each other but at the same time being mindful and understanding of our differences.

The PLRs themselves – through adopting the principles - create a space in which confidence grows and thrives. One storyteller spoke about how they very rarely left their house but PLR was one of the few exceptions. They felt they wanted to attend as there was no pressure and they could just be themselves. Part of this welcoming space, is having the principle that allows people to be silly and have fun, thus creating a relaxed environment. The fun principle was important to people making friends in the space and connecting with people.

A storyteller also noted how the 'disagree respectfully' principle brough home to them how imperative it is that we understand that we all have different views. Yet despite these differences, Camerados talk about how this principle helps us to navigate these differences and be mindful of each other.

Key learnings from the stories

From the stories, the key learnings about the Camerados movement are:

- The impact of the principles extends far beyond those who go to Public Living Room when people take them into their everyday lives

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- The principles are viewed as a great guide not just for how to set-up Public Living Rooms but other settings and spaces too
- The principles help to create an environment where ideas are shared and are grown
- Whilst some Camerados may not be fully aware of the principles, they appear to be being implemented naturally

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:

- Highlight and emphasise the importance of the principles for not just those who attend events but the impact they can have on the wider community – **encourage people to take them into their everyday lives**
- Find ways to share that the principles can have a positive impact at bringing communities together and how they help create positive environments outside of Public Living Rooms – **encourage the spreading of the principles beyond Public Living Rooms**
- To support more active engagement with the principles so that people connect with consciously and see how they can take them beyond Public Living Room spaces, it may be apt to think of ways that the principles could be encouraged to be discussed in general conversations – **encourage people to talk about the principles and also examples of how they've used them in their lives**