

PRoF Award abstract – Call 2018

Deadline for submission: Thursday March 1st 2018 (12 o'clock noon)

Please send to: PRoF-Award@uzgent.be.

Converge

1. Research Outline

Acronym	CONVERGE
Project name in English	Converge
Pitch (1 sentence)	A university and a mental health service provider working together to offer educational opportunities to people who use mental health services in order to aid recovery.
Executive summary (max. 10 lines)	<p>Converge is a partnership between the UK's York St John University and Tees, Esk Valley and Wear NHS Mental Health Trust delivering educational opportunities to people who use mental health services. Students and staff teach our courses and support those who participate. We offer courses in sports/exercise, music, theatre, dance, fine art, creative writing, life coaching, research methods and stained glass. We run a choir (Communitas) and a theatre company (Out of Character).</p> <p>The Converge model: Converge matches the 'core' business of its key providers: the university educates its students; the health service has a valuable, non-stigmatising and cost-effective provision for its clients.</p> <p>Converge website: www.yorks.ac.uk/converge Out of Character website: http://outofcharactertheatre.squarespace.com</p>

2. Cause and context of the research

In the City of York, UK, approximately 26,000 adults have a mental health problem. They have considerable skills and experience that is lost because of the impact of mental illness. However, they can find it difficult to access good quality educational opportunities. The stigma that surrounds mental health and the social challenges that face a new student can seem daunting. The stress of starting in higher education for people who have experienced mental health problems has been clearly documented by Jacklin, Robinson et al (2007).

The transition into higher education, the social pressures, the fear and possibility of relapse combined with the pressures of assignments and exams can make it difficult for students to sustain a full-time three year degree course. When people have long histories of mental health problems or have had acute episodes that are sensitive to stress and changes, these difficulties are compounded and can seem insurmountable. Crossing the border from the mental health system into education is for many a difficult journey.

Many of the Converge participants are entering university premises for the first time or are returning to study after a long period of illness. The project is providing a supportive opportunity to build up confidence and to consider possible futures in education. For this to happen there needs to be support and flexibility of provision. Converge seeks to provide this through peer and student 'buddy' schemes and through a mixture of taster and longer courses.

It is the intention of this project to promote inclusion and social participation by inviting mental health service users into the university to the mutual benefit of university students and participants. Converge provides a model of how a university can work in partnership with mental health service providers.

3. Innovation results achieved

A summary of the outcomes for 2016-17 are as follows:

A total of 318 people completed our courses.

81.33% of people who started our courses completed.

There was 74.83% attendance at our classes.

Converge offered 37 courses and provided 592 hours of direct teaching contact.

85 university students were involved in the delivery of courses and the support of participants.

The Converge Mentor Scheme comprises 10 Converge students who recorded over 100 instances of support.

32 university students were involved offering support to 65 Converge students.

Converge won the Tees, Esk and Wear Valley National Health Service Mental Health Trust 'Non Clinical Team of the Year' Award.

12 Converge students have now moved on to higher education.

Out of Character members regularly perform mental health simulations for nursing students and health professionals at the University of York.



The Converge model has now been adopted in other cities in the North of England and in Portland, Oregon in the USA:

Newcastle <https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/converge/converge-partners/converge-at-northumbria-university-newcastle/>

Leeds <https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/converge/converge-partners/converge-in-leeds/>

Pacific University, Portland, Oregon USA

<https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/converge/converge-partners/converge-at-pacific-university-oregon/>

Converge now employs nine individuals with lived experience of mental health problems.

Over 80 Converge students exhibited or performed their work at the York St John University Create 17 Arts Festival.

Communitas, the Converge choir performed at York Minster at Christmas 2017.

Out of Character theatre company performed 'Objects of Terror' (about the treatment of mental health in institutions across the last 250 years) at York Theatre Royal to audiences of 300 people.

Formed the Converge Research and Evaluation Team with university staff and students.

The International Centre for Community Music carried out primary research into Converge music courses (details on website).

Converge publishes two newsletters with editorial team consisting of Converge students alongside university students.

Out of Character, the theatre company of Converge, now provides a 'simulated patient' service to universities and colleges training health and social care professionals.

Company members are provided with scenarios and develop convincing characterisations of mental health crises or assessments. Members' own experiences of mental health problems informs the work and gives the performances authenticity. They also provide feedback to the trainee health professionals to improve their interaction with patients.

This work is highly valued. A lecturer at the University of York Nursing School comments that the simulations are 'an invaluable experience for the students.'

Some comments from Converge participants:

Jack:

"Don't let a lack of confidence or self doubt prevent you from doing something so potentially life changing."

"I love learning new skills and the courses have helped me to fine tune the skills I already had."

"The art I've done at home and have sold wouldn't have happened without Converge."

"I'm getting a nice group of friends and sharing skills."

"I've gained confidence in myself and my own abilities – I'm striving to overcome my self-doubts. Everyone is so encouraging."

Rod:

"Do it. It's the start of something wonderful."

"Converge gives a creative atmosphere and the opportunity to work in groups and build confidence."

"It's helped to give me a positive outlook on life."

"I've met so many inspiring people."

Eden (female):

"I started during the summer on a public speaking course with Nick Rowe. Prior to Converge I had been pretty much housebound for almost two years, so thought I'd throw myself in at the deep end and try to overcome my fear of talking or even making eye contact with different people. I'm so glad I did. I managed to speak for five minutes about York women's charity KYRA (my saving grace on moving to York) and was given very positive feedback. My recovery started."

"Every minute of time spent here has made my recovery journey ever closer. Let's see if it can work for you too. You will be welcomed with open arms and will forever have a sense of a loving, supportive Converge family."

"Converge has shown me that I do have the ability, passion and talent to move on to bigger and better things in my life."

"I love being part of this buzzing, supportive community."

"Do it! Try it! Nothing ventured – nothing gained. Say goodbye to self-doubt and welcome the opportunity to be the beautiful you!"

Converge has now developed a Research and Evaluation team, a group of people with lived experience of mental health difficulties who have received training in research methods from York St John University.

Supported by University academics, the team uses research techniques including interviews, questionnaires and focus groups. It also uses creative approaches in supporting people who may find it difficult to express themselves or take part in evaluations.

The Converge Research and Evaluation team are now able to offer a bespoke service to other external organisations and groups focusing on the most important outcomes for them and providing a professional evaluation report. It can also use creative methods such as theatre and art to disseminate the findings.

Converge is committed to providing robust evidence for the efficacy of its provision. However, with such a varied and complex intervention, it is difficult to adopt one measure that would demonstrate its impact on the mental health and wellbeing of participants. Accordingly, we provide a range of evidence, both quantitative and qualitative, that suggests that Converge is having a significant impact on mental health and wellbeing.

Publications related to Converge

Rowe, N. (2010). Bridging the Divide: Supporting people who use mental health services to enter higher education. In M. Cooper (Ed.), *Changing the Culture of the Campus: Towards an Inclusive Higher Education – Ten Years On*. London: European Access Network.
<http://ray.yorks.ac.uk/1151/>

Rowe, N. (2011). Border Crossings: Arts and health work in a university. *Journal of Applied Arts and Health*, 1(3), 241-250.
<http://ray.yorksj.ac.uk/546/>

Rowe, N, Forshaw, N and Alldred, G (2013). A return to ordinariness: how does working alongside people who use mental health services effect students' attitudes to mental illness? *Journal of Applied Arts and Health*. <http://ray.yorksj.ac.uk/548/>

Rowe, N. (2015). Creating a Healing Campus: A Partnership between a University and a Provider of Mental Health Services. *University Partnerships for Community and School System Development*. (Vol. 5, pp. 119-134). Online: Emerald Insight.
<http://ray.yorksj.ac.uk/id/eprint/1154>

Asghar, M. and Rowe, N. (2016). Learning from the unfamiliar: How does working with people who use mental health services impact on students' learning and development? *Journal of Further and Higher Education*. (In Press) <http://ray.yorksj.ac.uk/id/eprint/1540>

Higgins, L and Willingham, L. (2017) *Engaging in Community Music: An Introduction*. London: Routledge

Pendle, A, Rowe, N, & Britten, D. (2017). Coaching in a non-clinical setting with coachees who access mental health services. *International Journal of Evidence Based coaching and Mentoring*, 15(1)
<https://ray.yorksj.ac.uk/1736/>

Rowe, N. (2017) Converge. In Higgins, L and L.Willingham. *Engaging in Community Music: an introduction*. Pages 111-113. New York and London: Routledge.

Stannage, E. (2017) Precariousness and Groundedness in arts in mental health. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*. Vol 22, No 1 153-156.

Cotterill D, Coleman, L. (2017) Creativity as a Transformative Process In: Long C, Cronin-Davis J, Cotterill D. eds *Occupational Therapy Evidence in Practice for Mental Health 2nd ed.* Wiley.

Reason, M. and Rowe, N. (2017) *Applied Practice: Evidence and Impact in Theatre Music and Arts*. London: Bloomsbury.

Bond, M (2017) Addressing Mental Health at Universities Through Exercise. *PsychReg*. Available at <http://www.psychreg.org/mental-health-universities-exercise/>

4. Link to the PRoF values

A non-stigmatising solution:

Converge is a non-stigmatising solution to the problem of social isolation of people who use mental health services. It challenges the dynamics of social exclusion and the stigma and expectation that surrounds mental health by offering an opportunity to participate in university life, to learn and recover new hope for the future. The mental illness label is damaging and corrosive and the Converge project offers a structured programme of support within a socially valued environment to challenge this.

The issues of identity are central to the history and experience of people who have used mental health services. The impact of labeling, over-definite or premature diagnosis (particularly of schizophrenia and personality disorder), and the stigma attached to these conditions have often been more of a problem for people who use mental health services than the actual 'mental health problem' itself. Converge adopts the following principles to combat stigma:

- 1. Work with people in socially valued roles** as students not clients in therapy. The aim needs to be, where possible, to employ people who are stigmatized or disadvantaged in paid or voluntary roles that challenge the prejudices attributed to them. The independent living of people with mental health problems is hampered by the stigma that surrounds mental illness, reduced expectations and the resultant loss of self-esteem. One of the most effective responses to this is to engage people in roles and environments that are valued by society that confer respect and renewed expectations. The Converge project engages people as teachers, mentors and researchers with the aim of enhancing

confidence and aspirations whilst also providing an inspiration to others overcoming mental health problems.

2. That activities take place in places and institutions: that are valued by society: universities remain places of hope and optimism. They challenge the damaging and stigmatizing nature of mental health problems. One person writes about the course: *'I liked that it was at a university. There are not that many routes into university for me so that was exciting! I never got the chance when I was younger.'*

3. To bring people together: Just as advantaged groups do, disadvantaged groups often spend most of their time with those in a similar position. Theatre and the arts generally can provide a means to bring people in contact with each other across social and health divisions.

Anti-loneliness:

The comments from participants above (see 3. Innovation Results Achieved) illustrate how Converge combats loneliness and social isolation which is one of the most serious consequences of mental ill health. Further comments illustrate this:

'Converge has been the best thing to support me. It has helped me to stay out of hospital by providing activities which engage me as a whole person. It also gives me a community to be part of'.

'Converge is a 'strong island'. There is no judgement and therefore you can be open and safe'.

'Out of Character (Converge theatre company) gives me a feeling of belonging'.

'Converge helps to build community. I feel more human and myself, able to express myself more and find interesting and loving people'.

Interdisciplinary working and impact on health care:

Converge works in close partnership with university staff and students across the campus and with the local National Health Service Mental Health provider.

The Chief Executive of Leeds and York NHS Trust has commented:

'Converge brings service users together with full-time students of York St John University where participants are offered top quality creative courses. Converge offers ways in which service users can develop skills in a supported and exciting educational environment.'

John Clare, Director of Mental Health Services, York, writes:

'Through innovation, creativity and passion, with moral support and not much money from agencies, a genuinely recovery-focused method has grown, people from all backgrounds with all sorts of abilities learning together and creating art work of real value. This is a great project with a genuinely exciting future.'

Other indications of the recognition of Converge by health providers and others is as follows:

2014: Converge **Winner** of the Medipex Innovation in the NHS Award (Mental Health).

2015: Converge shortlisted for Health Service Journal Award in the category 'Acute or Community Service Redesign'.

2016: Shortlisted for York Cultural Awards in the Diversity and Equality category.

2017: Out of Character Theatre Company Shortlisted for York Cultural Awards

2017: **Winner:** Non-Clinical team of the year. Tees Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Trust.

2018: The Director of Converge, Nick Rowe, awarded a **National Award** (MBE) for 'services to people with mental health problems in Yorkshire and the North East of England'.

5. Applicable IPR rules

This submission is an innovation in mental health care offering a transferable and robust model in which the interests of a health care provider and a university can converge providing real benefits to both and offering value for money. It is now at a stage of potential expansion across other cities and countries.

6. Information on the partners

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Note:

If your project is selected as laureate for the Award Symposium, a powerpoint presentation that reflects the project as suggested will be required (in advance), including a future plan how the funding will be used.

If your project is selected as the winner of the Award, you will be invited to present the results achieved thanks to the award during the Award Symposium of the next year.



Addendum: Contact information

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