

PRoF Award abstract – Call 2015

Converge

1. Research Outline

Acronym	CONVERGE
Project name in English	Converge
Pitch (1 sentence)	A university and a mental health service provider work together to offer educational opportunities to people who use mental health services.
Executive summary (max. 10 lines)	
<p>Converge is a partnership between York St John University and Leeds and York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (LYPFT) delivering educational opportunities for 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 and business start-up. We run a choir and a theatre company.</p> <p><i>Converge</i> offers a model of collaboration between a university and a mental health service provider that makes a real difference in the lives of users of mental health services, full-time students and the university community. Each can learn from and alongside the other. It matches the 'core business' of its key providers: the university educates its students; the health service has a valuable provision for its clients.</p>	

2. Cause and context of the research

In York 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 (HE) for people who have experienced mental health problems has been clearly documented by Jacklin, Robinson et al. (2007). The transition into HE, the social pressures, the fear and possibility of relapse and the pressures of assignments and exams can make it difficult for students to sustain a full-time three-year degree. When people have had 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

Converge offers educational opportunities to people who use mental health services. The following document sets out our outcomes for the academic year 2014-2015.

Converge offered 28 courses and provided 440 hours of direct teaching contact.

A total of 121 people (72 individuals) completed our courses.

We recorded 520 instances of support given to Converge students.

We involved 64 university students in the delivery of courses and the support of participants.

We offered courses in theatre, dance, music, fine art, creative writing, business start up, psychology, sport and life coaching. We support a theatre company, Out of Character and a choir (Communitas) of over 50 members.

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.

The following is a summary of our findings:

Attendance and Retention: 76.6% of people who started our courses completed. We achieved 81% attendance to our classes.

NHS Mental Health Service Usage: we conducted a pilot study of six Converge students, which measured NHS mental health service usage over a period before and during involvement in Converge. Five of the six students have significantly reduced their use of NHS mental health services following involvement in the project.

'My Next Step' interviews: 21 Converge students participated in 'My Next Step' interviews and were supported in achieving their personal goals in creative arts/education. Out of these, 17 achieved their goals, 3 are in the process of working towards their goals and 1 was unable to continue due to personal circumstances.

Highlights for 2014-15

- Converge won the Medipex Innovation in the NHS Award (mental health)
- Converge invited to present and speak at 2 Conferences.
- Converge was shortlisted for The Times Higher Education Award, *Excellence and Innovation in the Arts* in 2015
- 7 Converge students have now moved on to higher education.
- Converge students now have library membership and Associate Student status through the Students' Union.
- Over 50 Converge students will perform or exhibit their work at the York St John University *Create 15 Arts Festival* and the *Love Arts York Festival* to a combined audience of over 100 people, both on campus and at prestigious external venues, for example, York Theatre Royal.
- The Converge choir has performed at three public venues; The National Railway Museum, York; The Guildhall and at the Leeds and York Partnerships Foundation Trust Annual Members' Meeting and Trust Awards at York Racecourse.
- *Out of Character Theatre Company* performed *More Tales from Kafka* to a combined audience of 150.
- *Out of Character Theatre Company* performed at *The International Network Towards Alternatives and Recovery Conference* at Liverpool University in June 2014.
- We completed and evaluated our first *Health Body, Healthy Mind* course. Fifteen participants attended at least one session.
- We appointed Peter Byrom-Smith as our 'Composer in Residence'.
- Converge was awarded £8000 by the Santander Trust to develop courses for mental health service users in 'Starting your Own Business'.
- Converge published its first newsletter, edited by a York St John Creative Writing graduate, which was distributed to over 100 NHS staff, keyworkers, service users and their families.

- The Converge Mentor Scheme was set up in November and has nine Converge students involved. Mentors have promoted Converge to several local mental health organisations and acted as Master of Ceremonies at Converge events.

Comments from Converge participants:

- Converge is a safety net.
- Converge helps and encourages me. It makes me want to live and want to give.
- The freedom to create and to 'play'.
- Converge has definitely supported me. I started the choir whilst still in hospital and it supported me to come home.
- Converge has been the best thing to support me, it has helped me to stay out of hospital by providing engaging 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 judgment and therefore you can be open and safe.
- Out of Character 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.
- Converge helps me to build an appropriate social network of friends and people to contact.
- I have found that I have come out of my shell due to the considerable skills of the staff.
- Now I know when I am wobbly and I can catch myself.
- Converge treats you holistically and as a whole person, engaging all of you, so I feel more of a human being.
- Thank you Converge for seeing me as a man and not just a statistic!
- What has aided me in finding some sort of peace for myself is the work I do with friends involved with Out of Character and its directors.
- I would not be as well as I have had I not been in Out of Character Theatre Company with the friendship and knowledge of the group as a whole.
- I have been able to do things I didn't think I could do. I have been encouraged, not pressurized, and it's been a revelation.
- My main help has not been doctors, it has been the fantastic help and advice and friendships made possible by Out of Character and staff alike.
- Converge reduces stigma and it doesn't go on doctors' notes!



- A safe place to build confidence.
- I believe that I am in a lot better place now than I have been for years with the help of my theatre work with Out of Character. Members and staff have helped me to become a more open and social person who has the permission to be me, and it is both a strange and wonderful experience.

4. Link to the PRoF values

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

Anti-loneliness: The comments from participants above illustrate how it combats loneliness and social isolation, which is one of the most serious consequences of mental ill health. The following comments illustrate this:

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Interdisciplinary working and impact on healthcare: Converge works in close partnership with university staff and students across the campus and with the local NHS mental health provider. The Chief Executive of Leeds and York NHS Trust wrote the following:

Converge brings service users together with full-time students of York St John 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.

The Care Quality Commission wrote in their report of mental health services in York:

The Community Mental Health Teams have developed an excellent partnership working with York St John University through the 'Converge' partnership.

5. Applicable IPR rules



This submission is an innovation in healthcare offering a model in which the interests of a university and a healthcare provider can converge, providing benefit to both and offering value for money.

6. Information on the partners

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Addendum: Contact information