



Reflections on the work of a member of a WRAP Moray facilitator group by Heidi Tweedie, Community Wellbeing and Recovery Champion

The following is from my own reflections on relevant experiences in terms of my work in Moray as part of the WRAP facilitator group. These are both my first hand experiences and my reflections of experiences shared by fellow colleagues.

Who are we trying to change?

Ourselves – In order to model, and therefore inspire, WRAP principles, a facilitator uses WRAP and the values embedded in this to reflect regularly on their values and ethics, before supporting others in their development. This authenticity is powerful and is what makes inspiring change in others possible, this is key to the peer connection.

Others – supporting individuals to see that wellbeing and mental health is a universal asset that requires attention to maintain and grow, and they can influence this. By giving the same message to anyone regardless of status, role or experience, the aim is to challenge stigma by taking a ‘human being’ approach. Eg. Awareness raising with a group of staff compared to in a small group of those who have used mental health services – the core values and ethics of respect, mutuality, authenticity are identical, however the language, examples, delivery may alter to best support the audience’s needs at that time. Self-stigma limits a great number of people in terms of helping themselves and others, and to affect this you first need to inspire hope and empower them to believe they can make change, professional, carer or individual in crisis, alike.

What constitutes success and failure with regards to change?

WRAP workshops are popular, people attend and many report feeling change in terms of hope for recovery and self-stigma. However, the workshop environment is a bubble and after it people return to their lives away from this supportive peer environment. Straight after a course you can ask how they feel, but longer term it is impossible to say that the specific intervention caused lasting change.

Failure could therefore be defined in terms of unrealistic expectations; there is a requirement for broad criteria if you are to measure change in self-stigma, recovery and hope for individuals or a community, because of the self-defined nature of many of these factors and the time delay from inspiring change to seeing this in action.

Success is getting people to attend sessions and promote WRAP from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences; it’s about getting the community interested and talking about wellbeing and mental health – sowing seeds and believing in their ability to change.

The change we are looking for with WRAP can be very small as our work in Moray is about catalysing something that already existed within that individual. Inherently it is not up to you as a facilitator to change a person, this does not respect their autonomy and can limit

their personal recovery journey, and trying to do this could also constitute failure, however you can support and inspire them to make change themselves.

What impact did setting outcomes and measures have on the process of change?

Setting measures for change can de-energise a natural experience of peer support, ie. At the end of a workshop, when you want to celebrate and reinforce change, you may need to curtail activities to take time to record responses / or, if you have inspired a new facilitator to move forward and deliver their own workshops, the bureaucracy and language of measurement can inhibit their ability to inspire change – it can seem very formal.

However, there are ways of building in measures that continue to influence change. For example using creative methods to reflect on an experience. The output from this can be used both as evidence (number of positive phrases used in a narrative / number of collages created by the group) and if shared more widely it can also be a further inspiration for more change. This lessens the drain on resources needed to measure outcomes.

Of course, this creativity can be a challenge in terms of resources – i.e. the time and imagination of the WRAP facilitator to provide ways to measure change for a group or individual, whilst ensuring they are founded in the core values and principles of WRAP. This shows a need for a supportive network around anyone wanting to lead change, to support an individual's self-confidence and to encourage personal development.

Does the scope of the project determine the level of change?

Yes, if this is too narrow and limits a natural progression in the development of a project. For example, a participant attending a WRAP awareness talk, feeling inspired and asking for more information or another talk for their workplace, but being unable to access this because they are out of area or are not a member a particular group. This is why the wider you can keep the scope of the project the better, in terms of who or what you do, and instead encourage a focus on process and values, the how you do it. This also respects participants in terms of their choice of how change will look and feel for them, they guide you to where they need resources placed in their community.

How does the process of tailoring your project to the needs of your community impact on the change that happens?

It is vital to inspiring any change that you respect and empower the existing strengths of the individual or community you are working with. WRAP facilitators do not see themselves as experts in other people, but in their own experiences and how to use this best to inspire change. It is core to our work to focus on process and therefore you need to spend much less time tailoring a project to the community, because your practice should slot easily in to existing structures, best suiting what exists and building that community's capacity. This is especially true in regard to the benefits of a facilitator also being a peer of that community – they are not outside of it and therefore best placed to meet need in an organic response.

Is the scope of the project a key factor in achieving the change you want to see?

How can co production marry up with funding needs to make change happen? (How do we balance the expectations of funders with the expectations of people taking part?)

We need to influence change in some of the processes and criteria funders want measured and the timescales they use for this. The ability for true co-production is stymied by a lack of awareness by funders of the challenges inherent in this approach. For example, in applying for funding there is an expectation for structures (legal status of a group, bank accounts etc...) to already be agreed and ready before work can begin on a project, or even before funding can be applied for. True co-production needs to have started before this point to harness its full potential for change – the individuals you want to influence need to be the leaders, creators and applicants, and in order to achieve this there needs to be support and funding prior to the point of structure creation. Otherwise there is not the sense of ownership that will make change possible in that community.

For example – it has taken our group almost a year to open a community bank account from which to hold funds. The aim was to hold an account to enable us to appropriately deposit small donations for publicity materials and awareness raising. However, our very irregular meetings and focus on other areas of work have caused challenges in the physical signing of mandates, as well as providing the wide range of evidence required by the bank. The time taken on this detracts from the volunteer post-holder's time and energy available to do the work that the group formed to achieve, that of promoting WRAP locally. Each meeting is taken up with so much bureaucracy that members drift and feel de-energised. We are now at the point that we may never open an account as the evidence has become impossible to provide and our members are disheartened by the barriers they have faced.

A potential solution many groups use is to have an umbrella or host organisation, but experience of this has proved challenging as there can be a power imbalance with hosts impacting on the flexibility and the autonomy of the group, potentially restricting access to their funds and moulding projects to fit their own wider organisational or corporate aims (whether intentionally or not).

If there was a more flexible, less regulated, way to access funds for our group's aims we believe change would happen more readily. It is well understood that regulations are there to ensure that funds are properly spent, but these regulations are now preventing the most cost-effective community actions and tying funds up in larger charities who have slower change mechanisms.

Overall, this is about funders understanding it is not what you do that affects change, as much as it is how you do this. Supporting this approach to change requires open communication, mutual respect and flexibility between both parties, funders and those seeking their resources from communities. This is challenging but not impossible to achieve, with time and decreasing bureaucracy the major resources that need investment.

What conditions are needed for change to happen? What are specific examples of that from your project?

The current sense in Moray is that people, on the whole, are ready for change, but that they are prevented due to barriers caused by inaccessible or inflexible resources, rather than an unwillingness to try new approaches.

In Moray there is identified need for more WRAP workshops and other similar peer based educational services and supports. The community has asked for this, the statutory services are very supportive of the ideas, there is a very strong national and international evidence base for these, but despite this desire these ideas are slow to develop. There is no one institution or group preventing this happening, but rather an issue of under resourced leadership from the community. There are many people willing to agree it should happen and that they are happy to support such a project once it exists (i.e with funding, partnership working etc...), but very few who have the resources (mostly internal ones such as self-confidence) to carry out that vital action.

How does networking/working as a network help or hinder change?

Our network of facilitators support each other by sharing information, support, ideas and contacts. What hinders our ability to affect change is often related to resources rather than being in a network. Wider than this, being part of a range of community based networks is vital to building the trust needed to access certain groups with messages to catalyse change. This again relies on a peer experience and connection, rather than any formal 'work' related contact – i.e. I feel more able to share messages of hope and recovery with new mothers because I now help to run the playgroup they attend.

What can hinder change is creating new networks that simply create bureaucracy and stymie naturally occurring connections. These can also use up resources, not just funding for activities, but also the very vital resource of individuals and their time and motivation to take action. People can feel there is too much talk and no action. This highlights the importance of first focusing on taking messages to existing groups rather than creating new as a first response to need for change.