

Human Henge: Stone Henge as a healing environment in the 21st Century

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Human Henge is a collaborative project funded by Heritage lottery fund, run by the Restoration Trust in partnership with BU, English Heritage, Richmond Fellowship, National Trust, and supported by the National Trust and Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust.

Mental health and heritage



Historically asylum landscapes were designed to act as aids to recovery that facilitated the return of patients to a functional role in society. This led to the creation of a recognised specialisation in landscape gardening (Rutherford 2005: 62).

E.g. the grounds of Brislington House in Bristol, opened as a private asylum in 1806 (Hickman 2005: 47), where landscape feature designed by Edward Long Fox included pathways, walks, leisure facilities, and a grotto were created in the hope of improving the emotional state of patients (Hickman 2005: 59).

As new clinically-based approaches to mental healthcare gained popularity in the mid twentieth century so the focus on environment and landscape as therapeutic tools declined (Collins et al. 2016). But this is now changing and over the last 30 years there has been renewed interest in the role of therapeutic landscapes built upon new research (Collins et al. 2016: 675).

Human Henge

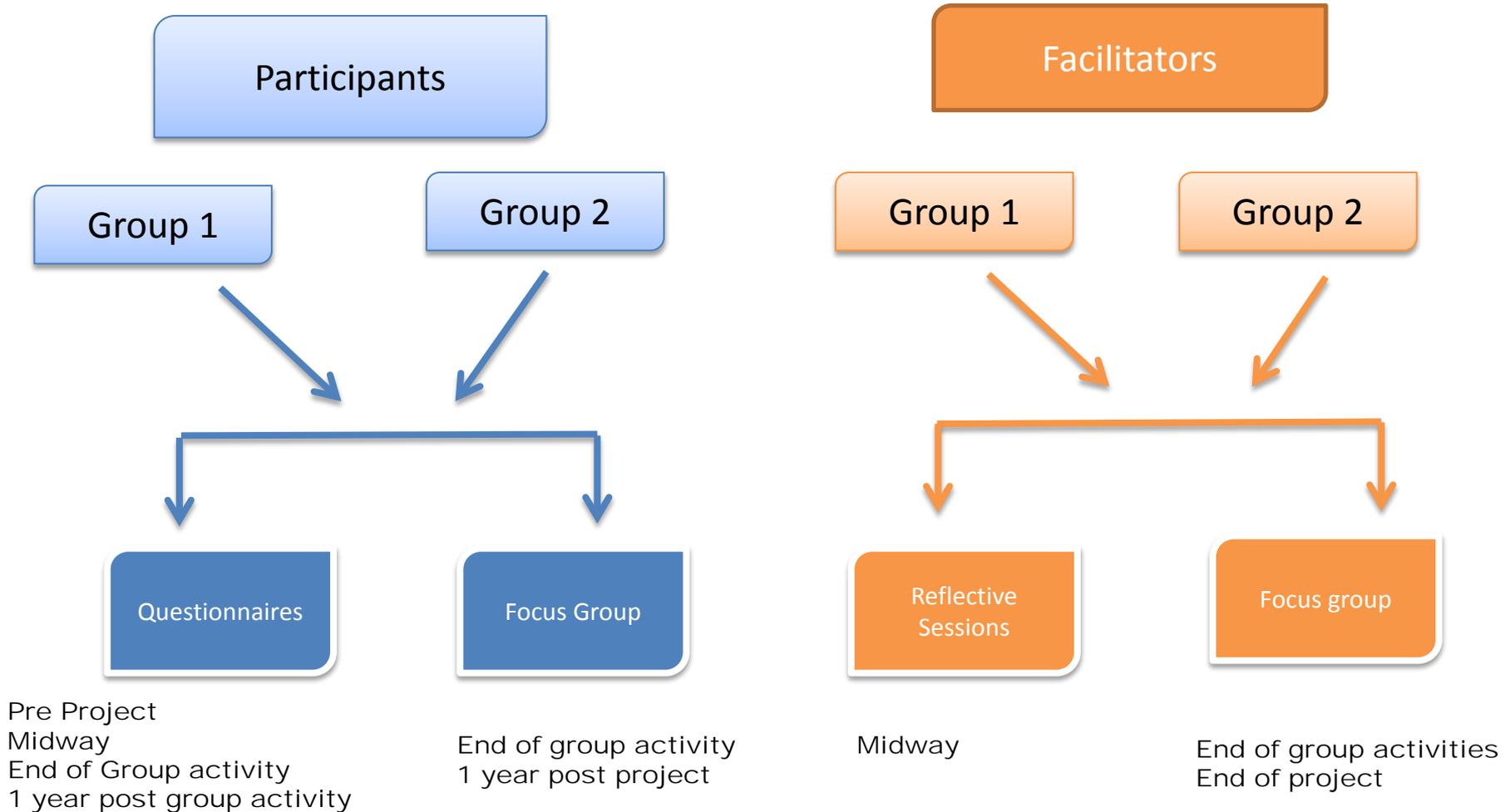
- Drawing on the ideas that Stonehenge was a place of healing in ancient times, Human Henge takes insights from various traditions and cultural contexts to create an immersive experience.
- Over ten weekly three-hour sessions two facilitated groups, each of up to 16 local people with mental health problems walk the landscape. Reaching through time to other humans whose traces are illuminated by accompanying pre-historians, curators and musicians, each group makes meaning and draws inspiration from the terrain, monuments, weather, soundscape and each other.



Research question that framed the project...

“Does a creative exploration of historic landscape achieve sustained, measurable mental health and wellbeing outcomes for people with mental health conditions?”





Participants

- 24 people participated (12 in group 1 and 12 in group 2).
- 5 participants did not complete the project for a variety of reasons
- Participation in the research element of Human Henge was voluntary and participants were free to choose to participate in the project and not the research element, or indeed could choose to opt out of any one section of the research process.
- In total, 23 participants (n=12 men, n=11 women) were involved with the evaluation of the impact that Human Henge had on their mental health. However not all of these completed all parts of the research process

	Group 1	Group 2
Age Range	26-77	35-54
Mean Age	51.23	43.30
Male	9	3
Female	4	7

Questionnaire

- The Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (Tennant et al. 2007) to measure mental wellbeing
- In addition interests in history, heritage, and archaeology.
- Baseline questionnaire, middle, at the end of the 10-week programme, and 1 year after the programme.

STATEMENTS	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
I've been feeling optimistic about the future	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling useful	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling relaxed	1	2	3	4	5
I've been dealing with problems well	1	2	3	4	5
I've been thinking clearly	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling close to other people	1	2	3	4	5
I've been able to make up my own mind about things	1	2	3	4	5

Initial Findings

- Attraction to participating in Human Henge was:
 - Stonehenge itself, learning about it and its history (n=8),
 - for personal development reasons (n=8),
 - interest in history (n=5).
- Fears of Participation:
 - 9 participants expressed feeling apprehensive about the project;
 - due to their anxiety (n=4)
 - feeling worried about being in a group setting and meeting new people (n=5).



Feelings at the end of the project (1)

- At the end of the project the participants responses to the question ‘what aspect of the Human Henge project have they liked most, identified a variety of responses. These related to :
 - Stonehenge itself (n=9),
 - surrounding landscape (n=9),
 - being with people and making friends (n=7):

“Fresh air, ancient landscapes, experimental archaeology - all providing a wholesome and simplistic early life focus for the group to chat, laugh, have fun, dance and sing”

“Meeting new people; understanding more about my mental health by talking to others with mental illness”

“Becoming part of a group with participants and feeling belonging, walking in the fresh air, learning about ancient history”

Impact on mental health and wellbeing

End questionnaire when asked “if they felt that Human Henge had had an impact on their mental health or overall wellbeing”

- 56.5% (n=13) identified that it had a positive impact upon their mental health and wellbeing,
- 21.7% (n=5) were unsure
- 5 did not complete this question.

“Renewed an interest in the past an interest I’ve long neglected”

“It has enabled me to be supported whilst going out. Learnt I can manage well and feel more confident trying new things”

“Too soon to say, but it's moved me forward in thinking and understanding myself and in ideas for the future”

Feeling close to people

	Baseline %	Middle %	End %
None of the time	26.1	8.7	8.7
Rarely	30.4	13.0	21.7
Some of the time	26.1	30.4	17.4
Often	8.7	26.1	21.7
All of the time	4.3		13.0
Missing data	4.3	21.7	17.4

Focus Group Activities

- Within the focus groups a variety of different activities were included to ensure that each participant has an opportunity to share their thoughts and these activities included
 - a creative activity, based upon photo elicitation. As part of this participants picked a photo which said something to them regarding their Human Henge experience and identified words associated with it
 - personal reflection
 - Focus group discussion, which was audio taped, transcribed and analysed using Braun and Clarke process of thematic analysis.

Written records of
our time give it
more meaning.

An excellent routine;
routine is the key to
all mental well-being.



Some questions are
beyond answering. The depth
of mystery after all is what
entices us here.

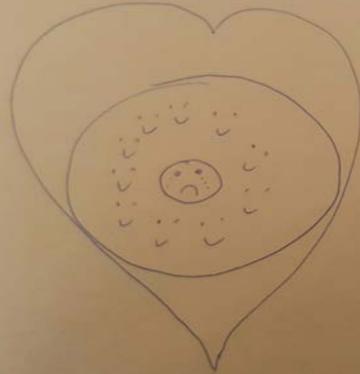
A stable period of mood, engendered
by special moments of cultural celebration.

As our ancestors did to
marvel at the rising of the sun -
the life giver.

A difficult task it is to comprehend
ancient beliefs and understanding of the
landscape and stars.

Feeling freedom to relax in a group
allowing for the future to have a
better outlook, it was just
right being at one with the
earth, seeing amazing things
all about nature &
enjoying learning about
history from experts.

"Jagged
Stranding Stones"



Personal Reflection Activity

- 13 participants completed this.
- Themes emerged from this related to locating oneself; rekindling passions, isolation and sense of sadness.
 - In locating oneself; this location was either within or with others, identifying that the project had enabled them to consider and reflect upon themselves and aspects of themselves they had lost through their mental illness.
 - It rekindled passions they previous had, and this included photography and a love of nature they had previously lost.
 - However for some participants this positivity was tinged with sadness in that the project was ending and this provoked anxiety regarding what next.
 - For one participant, the project reinforced his feeling of non-belonging and isolation and moving forward it is important to explore the group versus individual aspect of cultural wellbeing further:

“The project made me feel very lonely and inadequate as it reinforced my belief that being with other people is too stressful. Often times I had to walk away so that I could enjoy the pleasure of being alone. The landscape and history encouraged me to read as much as I could about the people of the Neolithic. It rekindled a lifelong passion about history this alleviated the distress I felt as everyone else enjoyed the communal singing and dancing”

“I have loved being part of a group that has been so supportive and understanding and consistent. I am devastated it is over!! I have enjoyed learning new things with interesting people and having something to look forward to each week. It’s been nice to have something NICE in my life. I am crying as I write this. I don’t want it to stop!!”

Focus group Themes

- 5 Themes
 - feeling special
 - challenging myself
 - being human
 - impact on mental health and wellbeing
 - fear for the future.
- *“This is the first time I’ve done them and you’ve really influenced me to go into a shop and say “Look this is what I’ve got, do you wanna buy it off of me?” And I think that’s awesome that is. And then a couple’a weeks ago I did actually take my cards into a shop in ***** and they bought almost a hundred of my cards and it was really exciting for me”*
- *I like the walking and talking and learning all at the same time and being a human being rather than as ***** said an illness or a condition or a client or an end user y’know I’ve actually been a human being for three months” Female participant Focus Group 2*

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