

## **Piloting a more meaningful kind of questionnaire** **Guest blog**

Ruth Stevenson, of Ruthless Research, presents the third in a series of blog posts about the evaluation of SRN's Write to Recovery project.

One of the first things that we've piloted for our [Write to Recovery](#) evaluation is a brief questionnaire, to be filled in at the end of the programme. Questionnaires are very much a standard evaluation tool as they let the evaluator collect data from a large number of respondents and convert it into useful statistics. Our questionnaire is no different as we will collect a completed questionnaire from as many Write to Recovery attenders as possible, giving us a very strong sample size.



We've also included some very standard questions in our questionnaire, so we can evaluate whether the project has met its strategic aims. SRN told their funder that they wanted participants to feel confident, hopeful and better able to self manage. To see if they achieve this, I have written a set of questions asking whether taking part in Write to Recovery has led to improvements in these areas. This means that at the close of the evaluation I'll be able to say how many participants felt more confident, hopeful, and able to self manage as a result of attendance.

So far so good.

Where our questionnaire differs from the norm is that we have also included a section allowing the participants to evaluate the progress they have made against their own personal aims. We want to know whether the participants got what they hoped to get out of attending Write to Recovery.

An existing activity in session one was thinking of hopes for the programme and it felt natural to convert this into an evaluation activity by asking participants to write these hopes down and place them in a sealed envelope, to be handed back to them during the last session. We then ask participants to record whether they experienced 'a change for

the worse', 'a change for the better', or 'no change' relating to each of their hopes.

Given that the number and content of the hopes could vary considerably, some complex data entry and fiddly analysis is required! But I will be able to say how many participants achieved what they hoped to achieve, but I'll also be able to group and compare and quantify the hopes thematically, for example looking at differing experiences in terms of, say, writing and social skills and self management. We think that asking participants what actually matters to them will make our evaluation more meaningful than it would have been if we imposed our expectations on them and left it at that.

We also hope that introducing a reflective element into Write to Recovery will be enjoyable and beneficial for the participants and having piloted the questionnaire with three groups this seems to be the case. Our facilitator noted that:

**Having the hopes sheet from the first session was really intriguing for participants. Most people had actually forgotten about that activity and, I believe, enjoyed having a token of where they started. I feel it really aided and focused participants' reflection on whether the process has been 'successful'.**

This is an ambitious and different way of doing things, and it is the consequence of starting with a blank sheet of paper and being invited to propose an approach that is best practice both in terms of evaluation and in terms of person-centredness.

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