Evaluation Exchange

Report on the outcomes of the self-evaluation peer support project delivered in partnership between IRISS (Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services) and Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS)

"Evaluation is everything. Everything we do we should evaluate."

Written by:

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Members of Evaluation Exchange:

Sharon Colvin – 3D Drumchapel
Helen Carlin – Rowan Alba Ltd
Sue Green – Capability Scotland
Laura Lebec – Quarriers
Jacky Smith – Sense Scotland
Jan Williamson – Streetwork UK
Jacquie Winning – PLUS

For some of the time
Elaine Park – Mental Health Network (Greater Glasgow)
Susan Maclaren – Moray Council (Looked after children/Education)
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Facilitators
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Summary

Evaluation Exchange was set up by IRISS (Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services) working in partnership with Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS). We brought together a group of practitioners from social services sector with a real self-evaluation project to undertake. We wanted the participants to assist each other to plan and/or undertake the evaluation and build their capacity to self-evaluate. We were also interested in learning about and sharing 'what works' in peer support for self-evaluation.

After a rigorous recruitment and selection process *Evaluation Exchange* started with a full day session on 31st October 2012 and followed up over the next 5 months with four half day session that explored issues around self-evaluation including methods, credibility and analysis and issues around peer support including process, challenges and benefits. The sessions were supported by regular contact between group members via the project 'basecamp', an electronic communication forum, and blog. Ten people were recruited to *Evaluation Exchange* and a core group of seven remained involved throughout.

All the participants improved their understanding of evaluation and increased their confidence in taking evaluation forward in their organisation. By the end of the project participants' own increased understanding was filtering through to their respective organisations. Participants reported attitudinal change, they had engaged evaluation project teams and they had put monitoring and evaluation plans in place. *Evaluation Exchange* generated learning about the components of successful peer support works and the participants actively expressed the benefits of peer support in helping them work through the challenges of self-evaluation. The learning about the role of peer support in supporting self-evaluation will contribute to future work by IRISS and Evaluation Support Scotland.

Aims of Evaluation Exchange

Evaluation is a key mechanism for assessing performance and identifying areas for improvement and increasingly this work is being done by the organisations themselves, rather than being outsourced. In 2012 IRISS asked ESS to join them in running a peer support project to develop the skill of participants to self-evaluate and create learning about 'what works' in peer support for self-evaluation. We hoped that the peer support group would be drawn from voluntary, public and possibly private sector social services organisations that had a specific project they needed to evaluate. In practice most of the people who joined the group and all of the main participants were from the voluntary sector.

The planned **outcomes** of *Evaluation Exchange* were:

1. Members of *Evaluation Exchange* will have improved evaluation skills and confidence.
2. Members of *Evaluation Exchange* better understand the benefits of self-evaluation and are more able to communicate these benefits.
3. IRISS and ESS better understand the role peer support can play in supporting self-evaluation and capture and share this knowledge.

Evaluation Exchange was not a training programme. The detailed content of each session was created and largely led by participants, particularly as the programme developed. The role of the IRISS and ESS as facilitators was to keep the programme on track, provide short inputs to kick start learning and to capture evidence about the impact of *Evaluation Exchange*.

IRISS took the lead on all recruitment, project management, administration and communication about the project. ESS helped promote the programme at the start to ensure good participation from the voluntary sector and built in learning from ESS's previous experience of peer support for evaluation. Both organisations shared the facilitation role within the sessions.

IRISS has developing a separate resource to share learning about peer support.

What did we do?

IRISS received 24 'expressions of interest' in *Evaluation Exchange* from people in social services organisations with different experience levels, backgrounds and values. The project was aiming for core six participants but we recruited ten to allow for the possibility of withdrawal. Participants were chosen who had an interest in evaluation and a specific evaluation project to undertake. IRISS selected ten people to take part and sent them a questionnaire about their evaluation experience, working role and hopes for the process. This helped us tailor the first session to their needs.

We held five sessions between October 2012 and March 2013.

Session 1 was about making sure everyone understood the aims of *Evaluation Exchange*, got to know each other and set ground rules.

Participants presented their projects and evaluation questions and began to support each other on their evaluation questions. They identified ideas to cover at future sessions. The session included the "So What" game – an interactive game to increase understanding of outcomes.

Further sessions, designed with the participants, largely followed the below format:
- group catch up: how's it going with your evaluation, evaluation questions, successes and challenges
- facilitator input: activity/interactive learning session
- a creative evaluation of the session itself

Session 2 was about increasing awareness of practical peer support processes and improving knowledge of self-evaluation practices and methods. Participants talked about their on-going evaluation, there was a discursive input from the facilitator on outcome indicators and a structured sharing exercise that encouraged active peer support and used the existing skills of the group.

Session 3 explored participants' preferences for different methods of peer support and looked at creative evaluation. Participants discussed their on-going work, there was a short input from the facilitator on evaluation methods and a card activity that explored individual peer support preferences. The session finished with a creative evaluation using SCVO' "Big Picture" map. Participants were asked to "choose a vehicle, location or anything else that represents where you are on the evaluation journey".

Big Picture Map from SCVO

Session 4 examined the link between outcomes and need and discussed how to make self-evaluation credible, for example by harnessing the service user voice.

Participants discussed their on-going work. The group engaged with a "Problem Tree" exercise, which is an exercise to break down into chunks, the need, or situation that a project is set up to address (see later for an example). This helps identify the outcomes of a project. Participants also undertook a creative evaluation using objects to represent learning supported by a written description on a 'luggage ticket' (ie what is the participant taking away with them).

Session 5 was the final session and involved reflecting on participants' progress on self-evaluation and what we have learned about peer support.

Participants discussed their on-going work, the group engaged with a "Diamond Ranking" exercise and a supportive interview activity. The facilitator closed the project by discussing next steps including use of learning and participant contributions to the reporting and dissemination process.

From the start of the project we set up a Basecamp site and a blog. Basecamp is an online project management and collaboration software package. This facilitated file sharing, communication and discussion between participants. The blog served as a space for keeping a record of each session (written by Emma from IRISS) and for writing posts aimed at consolidating learning from the group (written by Tom from ESS). The blog can be accessed through the link below.

http://blogs.iriss.org.uk/evalexchange/

What difference did we make?

This section of the report summarises our evaluation findings. The evidence in this section comes from the seven participants who attended most of the sessions. In order to evaluate our outcomes we:

- Set indicators for each outcome
- Measured participants' baseline skills, confidence and understanding (outcomes 1 and 2) using a baseline questionnaire before the first session and a discussion at the first meeting.
- Measured progress or not against the outcomes by recording participant feedback throughout the project (some anonymously). In the final session participants engaged in a peer interview process.

Outcome 1 – Members of *Evaluation Exchange* will have improved evaluation skills and confidence

Indicator: Participants understand the basics of evaluation and can set evaluation questions

At the first session it was clear participants had a good basic understanding of outcomes. However most were less clear about the range of ways they could go about evaluating outcomes and in particular how to measure soft outcomes and make evaluation meaningful for the people they worked with. A few had set questions for their own evaluation but most had not.

By the end of *Evaluation Exchange* participants said they had significantly increased their understanding compared to the baseline. Participants all had:

✓ Learned how to go about measuring soft outcomes

   "I was really keen to find out how to measure soft outcomes and [session 2] really made it clear in my head" – Participant 1

✓ Expanded their understanding (and confidence) about making evaluation relevant to service users

   "I learned [there is] no right and wrong way and there can be a creative/fun way to do things. I did not originally see evaluation as service-user led but this is the way to do it." Participant 2

✓ Learned about how to plan evaluations and set evaluation questions:

   "I found [session 2] particularly useful looking at … setting outcomes and deciding what tools to use to gather the required information. I had previously overlooked the importance of groundwork at the start of the process." Participant 3

"[I learned about] building evaluation into my everyday working existence. Making it more integral rather than an add on." Participant 4

Indicator: Participants can undertake evaluations and address specific evaluation challenges

In general most participants had not made a lot of progress in **doing** their evaluation by the end of *Evaluation Exchange*. However they all had used *Evaluation Exchange* to get to grips with **how** to do their evaluation. All were ready and confident to start and some had started.

For example, one participant had made progress in addressing her significant data collection challenges. She had held a focus group with three service users. She used two BSL interpreters and braille for third service user. She used symbols to help communicate with people with learning disabilities. She said that being part of *Evaluation Exchange* really motivated her to get it done.

A second participant had not started her evaluation but had all her plans in place. She had set up a group of service users to support her evaluation. They had agreed on a hybrid model of user research where the participant will do the work and bring it to the group.

"Although evaluation not concluded, well on the way." Participant 5

Another had reviewed all their existing information, designed her evaluation tools and arranged interviews with service users:

"I've learned a lot that is useful for the evaluation we are currently undertaking but will also have a positive impact for [organisation] going forward." Participant 6

Participant 7 had made less progress due to challenges within her organisation *"this is the downside of working for a large organisation"*. However there were positive impacts within her organisation (see below).

One other person also struggled with the time to implement all she had learned but she had written new outcomes, indicators and measurement tools for funding applications.

"I used resources gained from the sessions including creative evaluation techniques." Participant 4

Indicator: Participants say they are confident about evaluation

No one was completely unconfident about evaluation at the start of *Evaluation Exchange* – they had a good basic understanding and were not scared of evaluation

in theory. But several were daunted about knowing where to start with their specific evaluation project. Some admitted to finding evaluation a bit boring!

By the end everyone said they were more confident about doing their evaluation:

> "[*Evaluation Exchange*] has taken away the fear factor … I now look forward to doing a good evaluation." Participant 1

> "Being part of the group has changed by mindset that evaluation should be built into everything we do rather than an add on." Participant 3

> "Used to think of evaluation as a black hole but now feel that it can be fun." Participant 5

Indicator: Participants' own goals for the peer support set are met

Participants identified their goals for *Evaluation Exchange* at the start and four major themes emerged:

- Undertake a useful and meaningful evaluation for us and our clients
- Give us confidence and motivation to keep going with our evaluation
- To have the opportunity to share learning with peers / give us broader or new perspectives
- To find out about new tools and methods

At the end of *Evaluation Exchange* all participants said their goals had been met.

> "*Has met all initial expectations, sharing knowledge, experience, creativity and expertise of the group.*" Participant 2

> "has led to focus and a clear plan" Participant 6

Conclusion about this outcome

Of course we can only know for sure if we have achieved this outcome if participants sustain their enthusiasm and conclude their evaluations successfully. However most participants had devised a monitoring and evaluation plan and some were already conducting focus groups, arranging interviews and designing questionnaires. Even for those who had not seen much concrete progress, there was a real perception that involvement in *Evaluation Exchange* had increased their own and their organisation's focus on the importance of evaluation.

Outcome 2 – Members of *Evaluation Exchange* better understand the benefits of self-evaluation and are more able to communicate these benefits

Indicators:
- *Participants can state a specific benefit of self-evaluation*
- *Participants can give an example of bringing others on board (eg in their organisation) with evaluation*
- *Participants say they can explain evaluation to manager, funder, etc.*

Some participants faced challenges at the start of *Evaluation Exchange* in getting either colleagues or service users on board with evaluation and helping them to see the benefit.

The achievement of this outcome was limited by the fact that no participants had completed an evaluation. So they did not (yet) have a concrete evaluation product with which to get others on board or that showed the benefits of evaluation. But nevertheless we made significant progress against the indicators.

For example participants had seen the benefits of involving service users in evaluation:

"Benefits to asking people what they think […] Gave a different way of thinking" Participant 6

There were plans to further emphasise the importance of evaluation internally with one group member planning to showcase their evaluation work at an upcoming conference and another seeing the techniques and knowledge gained at *Evaluation Exchange* used across their organisation to achieve consistent application of outcomes.

By the end of the project the participants had become confident in communicating the importance of evaluation to their respective organisations:

> *"There's no doubt about it, if I had not come to this we wouldn't have got anywhere. People are talking about it. People are aware of how important it is."* Participant 5

> *"Within my team we have used some of the material that was used at the Evaluation Exchange. The 'so what game' used with managers to think about outcomes and we have plans to see how service users can be involved in 'auditing' services."* Participant 2

Some felt more able to talk about outcome and evaluation with funders:

> *"How to develop outcomes has been really useful and has fed into funding applications in recent months."* Participant 6

One person felt the learning gained from *Evaluation Exchange* about evaluation had made an impact on her colleagues and potentially on the whole organisation:

> "*There's now an appetite for evaluation. People are enthusiastic … [my own] evaluation steering group see Evaluation Exchange as really positive. They will roll out some bits around outcomes and techniques with a view to making this consistent across the organisation."* Participant 7

Outcome 3 – IRISS and ESS better understand the role peer support can play in supporting self-evaluation and capture and share this knowledge

Indicators:
  • *We have a list of elements that constitute peer support and how they assist evaluation*
  • *We have a set of case studies that describe how peer support has supported evaluation in individual organisations*
  • *We have lessons to share with others (practitioners, Government)*
  • *Others tell us that our lessons are useful and can be used to inform future peer support work*

We have not completed actions to achieve all the indicators but there has been significant success in relation to the first two indicators. We generated learning about what makes for effective peer support **and** participants fed back strongly that peer support had played a significant role in supporting their self-evaluation.

> *"[Evaluation Exchange] has led to focus and a clear plan. It's been beneficial meeting members of other organisations. Maybe surpassed expectations."* Participant 5

"Got lots of ideas – good to see evaluation is a challenge for many people not alone in this. It takes time to get it right." Participant 4

During the third session the group engaged in a card activity that explored individual peer support preferences. Each participant was asked to choose 3 options from the list presented in the picture below:
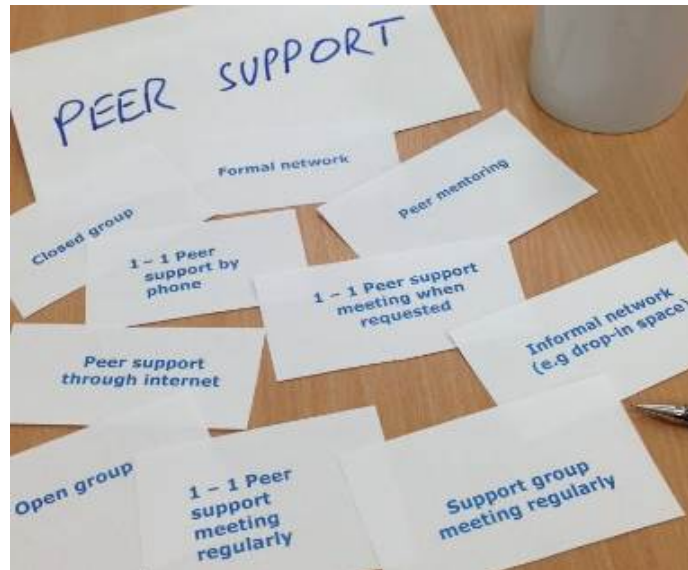

The two most popular choices for the group were "1-1 peer support meeting when requested" and "Peer support through internet". After some enquiry by the facilitators it was found that the participants took the word "internet" to mean email rather than a forum. Most of the other options got 1 or 2 votes apart from "Open group" and "Informal network" for which there was no support.

The group felt that regular meetings and belonging to a formal, closed group had helped them progress their evaluations. Their *Evaluation Exchange* work was always a high priority because they knew that they had another meeting coming up where they would be asked how they were getting on.

"Getting away from the office and taking time to listen to the ideas and experiences of others has been inspirational in helping me to move the evaluation of my project forward." Participant 4

Beyond this time the group felt that while the biggest benefits of peer support came through small personal relationships cultivated through the building up of trust and shared goals, they were keen on the idea of being able to access support as it was needed rather than blocking out time for on-going meetings.

In the last session IRISS and the group came up with the elements that make for successful peer support - drawing from participants' experiences. This will be published separately by IRISS in due course. But in summary the elements are:
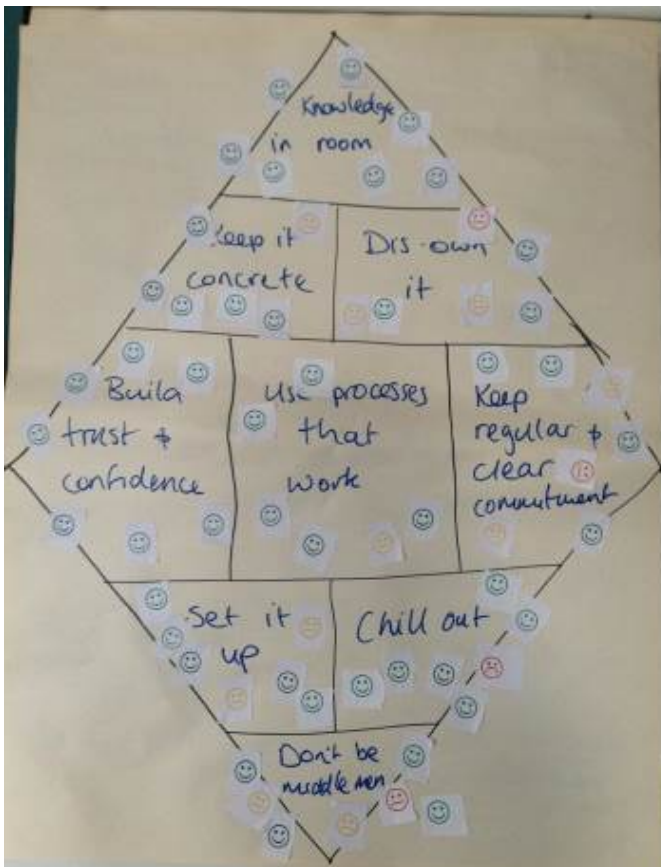
- The knowledge really is in the room
- Keep it concrete
- Dis-own it
- Build trust and confidence
- Use processes that work
- Stay regular and clear on commitment
- Chill out
- Set it up
- Try to cut out the middleman

The order of importance of these points was agreed by using diamond ranking, where categories are rated in order of importance using a diamond template, resulting in one single most important category, two categories in second place, three in third, two in fourth and one in fifth (the least important) – see picture.

Participants rated *Evaluation Exchange* on each of the elements we had identified as being important to a successful peer support group. We did this using a traffic light system, where green meant *Great*, amber meant *OK* and red meant *Not So Good*. As you can see from the picture, the project did pretty well!

Here are three longer quotes as case studies to show how peer support works and how it helped with self-evaluation [author's bold]:

"There was a **clear focus** for the peer support group which was clear from the application to join stage. All members had a project to evaluate and wanted to draw on the support and **knowledge of others** in the sector. Suggestions for topics for discussion at the next meeting were agreed by the group at the end of each session. An example of this was evaluation methods and involving service users. **Ground rules** were agreed by the group at the first meeting. The group was non-judgemental and supportive and **everyone was willing** to share experiences which helped to establish relationships and build trust and confidence. There were some facilitated sessions which I think were beneficial and provided context and knowledge to inform our evaluations. The group split into **smaller groups** during each session to discuss progress with our evaluations and receive support, there was no facilitator present in the break out groups. The support network was **time limited** from the outset. Dates were scheduled in advance at regular intervals. There was a **relaxed atmosphere**, helped by meeting to have

lunch before each group.   I think the group became increasingly relaxed as time went on and we got to know each other more." Participant 6

 "From the outset the purpose of the group was **clear**. The **application process** helped ensure understanding and commitment from participants. The first meeting was a good balance of forming a new group, gleaning expectations and setting a flexible framework for future meetings. Evaluation and Peer Support remained at the core of the discussions but a degree of **flexibility** ensured that the focus of the meetings was relevant and responsive to what the group identified as emerging topics. This enabled discussions on topics such as capturing unintended outcomes.   It became apparent very early on in the process that there was a **good mix** of people within the group, all of whom were very willing to contribute their thoughts, ideas and support. This is testament to the **trust and confidence** that existed within the group. There was an **informal** approach adopted by the facilitators and this set the tone for a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Having **lunch** prior to the start of the meeting was a good way to help participants settle in for the meeting." Participant 4

"At the first meeting we had opportunities to introduce where we were in in relation to our individual evaluations. We were then given the chance to group up in a way that made sense to us and the opportunity to **self-select** meant we could join people that we felt we could **share knowledge** and good practice with. We continued to build on this over the future months. Sharing **lunch** at the start of the meetings meant it always got the meetings off to a good **relaxed** start. Using **different venues** also was a good idea as increased **ownership** by the group. The **criteria for joining** the group at the outset was set up in advance and meant we had had to spend time considering why we wanted to join and what we hoped to be able to both get from the group and contribute. This meant that the group was committed from the start. Short and concise **inputs from the facilitators** (Tom and Emma) were really helpful to keep us moving on and add to our knowledge. **Creative methods** were used which gave us ideas that we could easily take back to the workplace." Participant 7

Unexpected outcomes

For some participants an unexpected outcome was that participating in *Evaluation Exchange* had raised the credibility of their project:

"Feel that there is recognition by the Council and [organisation] because of the association with IRISS and ESS." Participant 5

Another person reported an impact on attitudes to learning generally:

"[my being part of Evaluation Exchange] inspired colleagues to feel part of something bigger and energised others to get involved in external projects in terms of training and wider learning. More of a culture of people going to learning structures and bringing learning back to team." Participant 4

Case Study – Helen Carlin, Rowan Alba

Helen is the CEO of Rowan Alba Ltd and in her application to join *Evaluation Exchange* she stated a desire to evaluate their Thorntree Street service which is a unique "home for life" for former street drinkers. Initially Helen had been focussed on external evaluation and the use of validated tools but after exchanging ideas and perspectives with other group members and learning more about self-evaluation Helen quickly became very enthusiastic:

> *"With the support of the group I now have good objectives, clear timescales and I have got staff and directors on board… what a doddle!"*

Helen's enthusiasm and desire to link the learning from *Evaluation Exchange* to her own organisation was evident by the volume and quality of her interactions with the group within and out with the sessions. In response to the summary blog post on the third session of *Evaluation Exchange* Helen posed this question:

> *"Just thinking in terms of my evaluation… what anyone thinks of trying to work out where the guys might be if they hadn't come to my project?"*

Evaluating preventative services is a major challenge but this was an opportunity for sophisticated discussion that both ESS and IRISS felt must not be missed. A 'Problem Tree' exercise was incorporated into the fourth session examining a core issue for the Thorntree Street service: "Street drinkers are at severe risk of poor health, premature aging and death" (pictured on next page). While the exercise was facilitated by Tom from ESS and to some extent led by Helen, the whole group contributed to the 'Problem Tree' process. The two major results were a new understanding for the group of the link between outcomes and need and some new insights for Helen about the work of her own project.

> *"This exercise has really shown me just how much work we do and how big an effect we actually have. It was great that everyone today could see the difference we make to these guys".*

During the final session of *Evaluation Exchange* we asked the participants to explain where they had got to with their evaluations and to reflect on the progress they had made. Helen had already ensured that evaluation would play a big part in the organisations near future:

> *"[this project has] increased my understanding enormously of how to do evaluation, and significantly reduced the fear factor… which was big! The group worked really well and it was great to have the chance to talk things through and get expert advice back. An away day for the service is planned for 19th April and that will have a focus on evaluation."*

The 'Problem Tree' for Thorntree Street created during session 4 of *Evaluation Exchange*. This is a brainstorming exercise to help unpack he causes and consequences of the issues and needs an intervention is addressing in order to hone the central problem (flipchart on the right). The group then identifies the outcomes to achieve that would show the problem is being addressed (the flipchart on the left).

Learning

What Worked

ESS and IRISS wanted the experience for the participants to be distinctly different from that of a training course but for everyone to make progress on their evaluation challenges and have a common understanding of key concepts there was a need for some focussed learning activities.

The format of the sessions worked well for the participants. The 'basecamp' program was useful for facilitating contact between group members and for highlighting blog updates, while the blog itself was a good way of consolidating and contextualising the learning from sessions.

For the first few sessions we included 'facilitator input sessions' gradually scaling them back as the participants' confidence and understanding increased. This phased

structure ensured the necessary learning happened early and allowed the group to go forward together on an equal footing. The interactive nature of the sessions also served to reinforce the idea of the group exploring issues and challenges rather than the facilitators training the participants. During the project the participants enjoyed facilitator input on outcomes, indicators and methods and they explored 'Problem Trees', clustering peer support and different levels of service user involvement in evaluation. They had also engaged with a range of creative evaluations incorporating visual, physical, verbal and written approaches.

The facilitators established themselves as credible supporters rather than experts, a baseline understanding of key concepts was created and participant growth and project ownership was promoted. This desire for the whole group to feel ownership was the key driver for the decision to offer participants the chance to host sessions. While this occasionally presented geographical and transport challenges it fitted with the style of the facilitators, sessions and the project.

Reflections from the Group

Due to the recruitment and selection process the project had a motivated cohort of participants right from the start:

> "I feel very strongly, we KNOW it's making a difference so we want it to continue. So we NEED an evidence base."

The group demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of their working environment and a passionate enthusiasm for the challenge of evaluation:

> "Evaluations should make sense to the people we Work with – that should be at the centre. But is it? Or is government/funders? Reconciling service and service user outcomes is difficult, it's a process."

The increasing commitment of the participants to credible self-evaluation being at the heart of their organisations practice was very welcome:

> "Everything we do, we should evaluate. Evaluation is everything."

By the end of the project all of the participants were reporting some progress in their evaluation challenges. The general feeling was that *Evaluation Exchange* had been a valuable use of their time and energy and had had direct positive effect on the progress made:

> "I learnt a lot from this group that I wouldn't necessarily have got from a training session."

Challenges and Changes

Early on in the project a few of the members pulled out due to a number of reasons including promotion at work, health, time and distance involved in travelling to the meetings and competing priorities. This had been planned for in terms of numbers but not in terms of the makeup of the group. From the second session onwards the group was made up entirely of participants from the voluntary sector. In terms of meeting the project outcomes this wasn't a problem but both ESS and IRISS had hoped that the different perspectives would lead to some 'crossover' learning between public sector and voluntary sector participants. A greater proportion of recruits from the public sector would have been beneficial.

Basecamp proved to be an incredibly useful project management tool facilitating discussion between group members, easy file sharing, blog post reminders and swift responses to queries. However at the third session some of the participants indicated that some support in the use of "Basecamp" would have helped smooth the communication between group members and generally made sharing of information and opinion easier. The processes involved were not overly complicated but the software was unfamiliar to participants. Email and phone support was available to the participants who had problems using the software but this problem could have been avoided with a brief guidance note.

Primarily the blog was designed to be a summary where the learning from the sessions could be consolidated (IRISS contributions) and also a chance for some of the key learning points to be drawn out and put into context to reinforce the importance of the discussions happening within the group (ESS contributions). We had hoped that on top of this the blog would also have guest contributions from the voluntary or public sector in order to further enhance the learning of all group members. Despite several attempts and clear guidance on what we were looking for this was not achieved.

The 'Problem Tree' exercise was a big success in terms of learning for all the group members and in terms of insight for the project representative who provided the core problem for the exercise. The idea of doing a 'Problem Tree' was discussed with this participant ahead of the session but the core problem was only discussed 15 minutes before the exercise was delivered. The problem statement was therefore not as defined as it might have been. It was good enough for the exercise and there was no interference with the process of the exercise or the learning from it but there was potential for greater insight had the problem been discussed in deeper detail ahead of the session making it clearer and easier to work through.

Conclusion

We had initially imagined that the participants of *Evaluation Exchange* would help each other throughout an evaluation. In fact no participants had completed their evaluation by end of *Evaluation Exchange* and some were just starting. This was partly because *Evaluation Exchange* only lasted 5 months and partly because participants spent the time in *Evaluation Exchange* planning and thinking through the "how" and "why" of their evaluation.

Nevertheless the project clearly had a positive impact on participants' evaluation skills and confidence, their ability to discuss the realities of evaluation practice and their current evaluation challenges. The facilitators saw the participants work through many evaluation activities and explore each other's 'live' evaluation challenges. Our notes of the progress made and photographs of activities and thought processes have been summarised and presented in this report. The participants told us that the project contributed to their desired outcomes and led to the establishment of project teams and planned events. We have evidence of forward movement in the evaluation tasks described in the 'expressions of interest' and deeper thinking about their own roles in meeting the evaluation challenges of their organisations but what we don't have is a completed monitoring and evaluation plan.

The process of discussing and planning an evaluation appears to have had an impact on the participants' organisations and colleagues and the kudos of being part of a national peer group put a focus on evaluation that might not otherwise have happened.

It would be valuable to follow up with the group members in six months to a years' time in order to determine whether or not the momentum generated by this project has translated into concrete progress and results.

There is always potential for greater success or deeper learning. Because the public sector members were unable to continue after the first session we lost the opportunity to learn about peer support amongst people from different sectors.

The project costs were reduced by participants hosting sessions but staff time and materials represented a significant investment from IRISS in particular. This would be a consideration in any future evaluation peer support network.

In terms of outcomes, group members' learning and participant feedback this project was a success. Evaluation questions have been resolved, evaluation work has moved forward and confidence in the tools and processes of self-evaluation has increased. There is a desire among the participants to continue to support each other via their expressed preferred peer support methods: 1-1 support when required and internet/email support.

There is particularly powerful learning about the value of peer support to help people feel confident and able to do evaluation, which ESS and IRISS will both continue to build into the future work.