

EmpowHer Project Report

AN INITIATIVE OF WOMENSPACE, SANDGATE

SUPPORTED BY OFFICE FOR WOMEN

QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT.

2024



TABLE OF CONTENTS

EMPOWHER PROJECT REPORT.....	1
PART ONE: OVERVIEW	1
PART TWO: THE SESSIONS.....	3
PART THREE: FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS: A SAMPLE.....	9
CONCLUSION	13

EMPOWHER PROJECT REPORT

November 2024

PART ONE: OVERVIEW

The EmpowHer Program (March-October 2024) took a comprehensive preventative and remedial approach to addressing and supporting the health, mental wellness and emotional well-being of women of different generations referred to as 'participants'. With a holistic focus, it combined health and nutrition, creative therapies, relaxation and meditation. It gave participants skills to decrease stress, build confidence, regulate emotions and establish wellness processes in their day to day lives. This will hopefully support social cohesion in families, communities and society.

The initiative aligns with the Queensland Women’s Strategy supporting participants to build resilience and overcome the barriers that inhibit their participation in family life, work, study, community and citizen affairs.

The plan, delivered by Womenspace, was to deliver 8 workshops and two information sessions. In fact, 19 workshops were delivered, each having an information component.

Each workshop had the intent of providing support, knowledge and self-help skills to women and girls in the North Brisbane region who struggle with sub-clinical conditions including poor physical health, anxiety, depression, grief, fear, isolation and other life-stage and lifestyle stressors. These issues can often be overlooked in over-subscribed referral systems and clinical triage.

The workshops enabled participants to connect with each other, to support their journeys as active empowered human beings. This social support system can be invaluable in helping individuals feel understood and less isolated in their struggles. It promotes community, confidence, connection and belonging. This is often a missing element in the lives of women and girls.

A further objective was to foster and maintain a strong local network of experienced practitioners to share current research and education and to strengthen the effectiveness of their practice in small community settings.

Finally, the intent was to co-create a set of tested resources to be made available online for wider accessibility. This was seen as a way to reach a wider audience and extend the impact beyond face-to-face workshops and information sessions.

Intended delivery vs actual delivery:

<i>Intended Delivery</i>	<i>Actual Delivery</i>
<i>Round 1 4 x 3-hour Workshops</i>	<i>Round 1 4 x 3-hour Workshops</i>
<i>Round 2 4 x 3-hour Workshops</i>	<i>Round 2 3 x 3-hour Workshops</i>
	<i>Round 3 3 x 3 hours</i>
	<i>Round 4 4 x 3 hours</i>
	<i>Round 5 5 x 3 hours</i>
<i>2 Information sessions</i>	<i>Information input as part of each workshop</i>
<i>Collaboration of 5 local practitioners</i>	<i>Collaboration of 15 facilitators</i>
<i>Workshop Participants 30</i>	<i>Workshop & Info Participants 264</i>
<i>Info Sessions 70</i>	

This is an extraordinary outcome and great value for the funding.

For the participants, the feedback, as indicated below, was very positive, and suggests that the objectives of the project were reached. The participants were all keen to see the project continue beyond the two planned stages. They gained and consolidated skills in taking charge of their physical health, nutrition, breathwork, relaxation, stress reduction, emotional regulation and creative expression. They also enjoyed the collective approach to exploring and discussing health and wellbeing issues.

For the facilitators, the project was an outstanding success. It brought together 14 local practitioners and one visiting artist, all of whom had different styles and skills. They included a GP, social worker, psychologist, yoga teachers, and creative arts practitioners of various kinds.

For Womenspace, this was a project which expressed the multi-dimensional focus that is the intent of the organisation. It raised the profile of the issues, the facilitators and the organisation. It took on a life of its own as participants became active in making suggestions and some changes to format. It is something Womenspace would want to build upon.

The feedback is summarised in Part Three of this report.

PART TWO: THE SESSIONS

Each session was structured in three parts:

- Informative input
- Creative expression
- Deep Relaxation and Mindfulness.

8 March 2024 Planning with Facilitators

First information session with EmpowerHer project facilitators; invitation to participate and to collaborate with each other, contributing ideas for content, focusing on development and strengthening skills to decrease stress, build confidence, connection and belonging to 4017 community.



12 April 2024: Second planning meeting with facilitators confirming program of Round One.

Round 1 (Saturday workshops)

27 April - Dr Bernadette McShane delivered four workshops. In this first one she discussed

“A typical morning in a GPs office” with a particular emphasis on the issues and concerns women bring to their GP.



“Make your mark” Kylie Davidson, artist, enabled participants to create a range of art tools from natural resources and to experiment with them.



Overview of “Benefits of yoga” followed by Deep relaxation by Suellen Howarth

4 May - Dr Bernadette McShane “Holistic emotional and mental health”

“What does spirituality have to do with health and wellbeing” with Suellen Howarth



“Creating artist book” with Kylie Davidson

11 May – Family Constellations” with Yael Reiss

History behind the “Womenspace Spiral”, followed by painting additional seeds with Ludmila Doneman.

18 May – “Self Esteem” with Yael Reiss



Followed by Yoga Nidra and art activity related to topic of self-esteem with Suellen Howarth

Round 2

15 June – Lisa Elms “Move forward while letting go of attachments” talk followed by creating a collective painting/collage.



Yoga Nidra with Suellen Howarth

22 June – Jan Hughes “Become aware of how to define your dreams and ambitions”



Followed by Georgia Woods offering a guided meditation and four step tool RAIN for practicing mindfulness and compassion.

29 June – Stephanie Alberti “Find out what your body secretly knows about your life and future”.



Followed by clay work and Yoga Nidra with Suellen Howarth.

Round 3 Creative Sunday workshops

Note: Participants requested a shift from Saturday Workshops to Sundays and suggested a change of name to “Creative Sundays”.

7 July – Lisa Elms - Healing of a garden setting inspires painting “Bunch of flowers”.

14 July – Karen Roberts - “Goddess Emerges” – faces (created by use of alcohol ink) emerge from a background of words/story.



21 July – Donna Hawkins - collage of ‘Devine Feminine’ – sharing of stories ‘written’ in images.



Round 4

4 August – “Feminine Heart” - First of three slow stitching workshops with Eve Baker, making time to exchange memories of clothes swapping, practicing old crafts, playing games, making music. Making time to contemplate, reduce anxiety, stress, depression.



11 and 18 August – “Female Figure with Feeling” - Marilyn Cass teaches drawing through forming emotional connections. Use of charcoal, perfect medium to reflect human nature. Small video on Womenspace Facebook.



<https://www.facebook.com/WomenspaceAust/videos/497868942988971>

25 August – “Dirty hands and calm mind” – Suellen Howarth’s workshop of sculpting with air-dry clay is rounded by Yoga Nidra session.



Round 5

8 September – conclusion of Women’s Health Week with Eve Baker creating “Contemplating Cloth”.

15 and 22 September – Design and start of the Womenspace mosaic “Opening the new door”

The contribution of visiting artist Barborka Kova shifted the focus to a collective mosaic design and creation. All participants participated in the design, and all worked on the mosaic development. Mosaicking was new to everyone, and joy and confidence were evident in the calm, friendly, yet focused work of the group.



29 September – “Supplements, potential harms, and potential benefits”- presentation by Dr Bernadette - Followed by Suellen Howarth’s Yoga Nidra



3 October – Final, third session of slow stitching with Eve Baker



PART THREE: FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS: A SAMPLE

Rather than correct spelling and articulation the comments are just as they were presented. Much of the feedback was the same across the sessions, so this is just a summary of what participants were saying.

Overall: Thank you. This program holds such meaning for those presenting and it shows. It is enormous undertaking to develop, and I wish I could get more comments to help but can't.

Good: Art segment to compliment discussion segment (today).

Improve: more time, less schedule; kettles off during yoga.

Other comments: I wonder...being a space for building community, that bearing (?baring) one's deep troubles...???

The program has been wonderful.

Learning self-improvement, self-discovery.

I have loved the overall: Health - Dr.; Body – Yoga; Mind – Yael's sessions and loved the arts of each session.

Enjoyed every moment.

Empowering women through connection & learning.

I would like to learn more about Health Mind and Mindfulness. Thank you (heart)

Most helpful – Confirmation on how far I've come.

Ways to improve? – Can you improve on perfection? Great energy, respect, sharing etc.

I used reflexologists, in past. Maybe benefit others to hear about them? Good format not too long.

Most helpful: Information from Dr Bernadette regarding interpreting Blood studies for Iron and B12

Family Constellations: Whilst quite a risk to facilitate this session in such an experiential way to people who do not know each other well, it was done most professionally and follow up was offered by the practitioner for all attendees if any issues came up for them.

Also, a testimony to WS that people felt comfortable to share difficult experiences and emotions.

The creative component of each session was great as it allowed for integration and opportunity to connect with others in a more light-hearted way.

All of it reflected philosophy of WS.

Most helpful? – being given opportunities for creative expression and a chance to be creative. Building community and creating relationships

Ways to improve? – more trauma informed workshops; mental and emotional safety and awareness; opportunities for self-directed and driven pattern; more opportunities for deeper connection and chats.

Although I have gone on journeys to the Self before, the program with Yael was a very deep present way to connect with even deeper hidden layers.

I appreciate the organizers who have searched the area for our benefits in this workshop.

As with all therapies more time is always required when a group is processing and sharing.

It was very healing to feel the connected respect of the other participants.

Most helpful – enjoyed the art and being surrounded by women.

Ways to improve? – in some ways it would be nice if the program was lighter and just focused on connection of women and not personal trauma. Invitation to yoga needs to be more trauma informed.

Yael's workshop/session was most effective. A skilled therapist indeed, establishing boundaries, trust, before diving deep. Taking a risk perhaps, but as most had been yo previous sessions, there was clearly a sense of a group, a cohort, a bunch of friends already.

How to improve? – Look at purpose, i.e. to increase awareness of Womenspace and the great diversity of offerings there. If we want to reach out to a younger age group we need to advertise in avenues they frequent

Posters, local radio interviews, etc. SANDBAG, LIONS, church etc.

I would prefer to have one module per session because I like to go deeply into things.

I really like clear structure and crisp intros and then to let loose!

I love you are bringing women together in this way.

I like to hear about purpose of things – and the slow of them, the story of where 'we' came from, who 'Eve' is! where we are, where we are heading.

The newcomer to today's session: "What a privilege to be able to attend the session today. I'm hoping there will be more opportunities for me to come to Womenspace events in the second half of this year."

One participant took evaluation form home to enable more reflective responses, shown below:

a) How were the workshops helpful?

- The workshops were informative, especially the practical insights from Bernadette.
- Yoga Nidra brought us to the present moment – shifting in and out of different modalities, ways of learning – we were able to begin to learn deep stillness and quiet of the mind. This opens to another world that is a resource for each person. A wonderful skill and space.
- Arts practice shifted our mind space again, reinforcing the learning of each workshop and building connection in an easy, chatty way. Art activities require a different sort of focus again, building our ability to learn on many levels and to trust the body, mind and unconscious to take from the experiences what we need.

b) What are the main ways that we could improve these workshops?

- Building on our individual experience and extending to the group experience – more group reflection, in pairs and whole group. *We do this in the arts activities, which are wonderful – maybe we could come together at the end as a full group again and reflect on the last three hours.* Connect us back to the other Women Space activities – Coffee and chat, Friday arts group, Writers group, weekly yoga, Mah Jong – all the opportunities for connection and building community.
- Reflecting on shared experience as women, and as humans of a particular age and experience.
- Thinking about how our shared experience builds community. What do we want for our own present and the future? How do we build the community we want to live and thrive together?
- How do we support each other in practice? What are the actions that are part of our everyday?
- Arts activities give us the time and space for individual reflection alongside a group experience. How does this inform us about taking the learning from these workshops out into our life with family, friendships and community?

The walls overheard: "Womenspace founders would be happy to see this program".

One participant wrote a poem at the end of most sessions, to share with all participants what was moving in her.

EmpowHer Poem	Bettina Nissen	EmpowHer Poem	Bettina Nissen
Iron		Stepping out onto the empty canvas	
Iron hearted		Hesitant, unsure	
Numbers foretell our energy levels		Until, intoxicated by colour and curiosity,	
But what do they know?		Sensing the strange gift of selecting	
The language of numbers		favourites from the garden	
tell the internal life of a cell		We sigh together.	
predict living on a cellular level.		There is a Leap of Faith	
Vitamin B12 and methyl in the binding, binding game		And each at their own take tools – brushes, scalpels – and start to play.	
protects us.		Buzzing like bees around the nectar	
We cannot make serotonin without methyl.		We hear the voices of women gathered together.	
Transformation.		Creativity.	
Our cellular structure is as individual as the stars		Out of the mist the painting emerges...	
Each constellation is unique		Vines, floral tributes	
Miraculous the way the stars line up.		Memories stacked one upon the other	
Warning! Warning! Warning!		We see our reflection in each other.	
An overdose of B6 is toxic		Arms triumphant	
It causes deep pain and brain fog.		She calls to us.	
We are all done.		Across continents and timeless landscapes	
We are all one.		She calls to us.	



Making New friends



Three generations of one family working together.

CONCLUSION

The EmpowHer Program, funded by the Investing in Queensland Women grant from Office for Women, Department of Health, successfully brought together 14 local wellbeing and medical practitioners along with local artists to deliver enriching experiences to over 200 participants between April and October 2024.

Feedback from participants and facilitators was overwhelmingly positive, confirming that the program addressed critical needs related to mental wellness, emotional health and overall wellbeing. A greater sense of connected between women of the 4017 and North Brisbane region was an explicit outcome which also contributed to joy and feelings of wellbeing.

Beyond these immediate benefits, the program fostered future opportunities: its creative outputs enabled Womenspace, along with program participants to contribute to the Sandgate Art Society's 2024 Creative Trail, an annual highlight in the community.

The program cultivated a sense of community amongst facilitators and participants, many of whom are now committed to continuing the journey initiated by EmpowHer. For instance, the mosaic-building sessions not only reinforced the program's teachings but also encouraged participants to engage in collective creative expression as a form of collective activity.

A key benefit for Womenspace was that Womenspace was endorsed as an exciting source of information and creativity of benefit to all women. The format of (i) information input, (ii) Meditation to calm and centre the mind (iii) focused expression through artistic media really worked. It has since become a pattern structuring many activities.

Challenges remain. Many participants face barriers that hinder their ability to contribute even minimal fees for the workshops. Facilitators too said that whilst they could see that working with groups of women in this way was far more effective than one on one clinical sessions, they would not be able to offer their services at such a low fee in an ongoing way. Some facilitators admitted to 20 hours of unpaid preparation for their (lowly paid) 3 hours of delivery. Womenspace also financially subsidised the program in several ways, especially given the extended delivery over a period of several months. The 2024 delivery therefore rested on a significant input of volunteer time. This all underscores the necessity for funding to sustain these vital programs.

We extend our gratitude for the support that made this initiative possible.

