

**Evaluation Report on Capacitar Training for Grandparents
Programme**

An Cosán, Tallaght West

Capacitar Holistic Health Practices for Grandparents



Centre of learning, leadership and enterprise



Report by Helen Maher

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“The whole experience has been wonderful for me and certainly it will continue in my life and possibly will keep teaching even children and my daughter I will pass on the techniques to them”

Acknowledgements

The evaluator gratefully acknowledges the participation of:

Participants on the Capacitar Holistic Health Practices Grandparents Programme

Tutors and Facilitators: Bernie, Marian & Val

An Cosán Enterprise Centre Manager: Marian Baker

in the evaluation process.

CHAPTER ONE

1. Introduction & Background

Overview of An Cosán

The Capacitar Grandparents programme was delivered by An Cosán in Tallaght West. An Cosán means ‘Path’ and the focus of An Cosán is to provide the local community with *a path*, the core belief being that education provides the only path out of poverty. For 21 years, An Cosán has provided community-based education for adults, which has generated other key activities – namely childcare and enterprise. Established in 1986 in the home of its founders (as the Shanty Educational Project Ltd.,) An Cosán relocated to its current premises in Jobstown, Tallaght West in 1999 and has as its primary aim: *To enable and support the people of Tallaght West in the active transformation of their individual lives and the life of their community through education and training.*

Through the Shanty Education and Training Centre, education and training is offered to over 400 adults per week and through Rainbow House, early childhood education and out-of-school education to 150 children per week. There are another 200 women in training as childcare workers in The Childcare Enterprise Centre.

Area Profile

Incorporating the communities of Jobstown, Killinarden, Fettercairn, and Brookfield – a local population of 21,026, Tallaght West ranks among the top 1% of areas of severe disadvantage throughout the country and is a designated RAPID area where residents are at particular risk of experiencing high levels of poverty and disadvantage and a high degree of social exclusion, with a large percentage of the population on Social Welfare Benefit or low income. The particularly high ratios of lone parenthood in the Tallaght West area are well documented, with approximately 30% of all households, predominately headed by lone mothers. Lone mothers are at specific risk of experiencing high levels of poverty and disadvantage.

The total population for all 15 Tallaght DEDs is 75,000 persons. This is an increase of 5.6% from the previous census. However, the population increase for Jobstown was far more substantial at 35%.(CSO 2002)

Below there are some indicators of the effects of disadvantage, poverty and social exclusion which leave no doubt as to the need for second chance education and training.

Education Attainment

- 15.9% of the population left school under the age of 15. (CSO2002)
- 27.4% ceased education under the age of 17. (CSO2002)
- 4.7% of the population have a third level qualification. (CSO1996)
- Nationally research has shown that rates of adult who are functionally illiterate continue to hold at around 25%. With the exception of Poland, Ireland has the lowest participation rate in tuition at all literacy levels. Only 1% of those in need of tuition access available services.
- There are 3,000 children under 4 with only 300 childcare places available.
- Only 13% of children engage in after school activities

Grandparents in Ireland

There have been considerable demographic and social changes in Ireland over the past two decades. It is clear that these changes have relevance to the situation and experiences of grandparents in our society. According to a recent report published by Comhairle¹, focusing on supporting grandparents caring for their grandchildren, there are a number of specific changes which have impacted on the role played by grandparents in Irish society. In particular, the increase in women's participation in the labour force, the number of lone parent families, the increase in divorce & separation,

¹ Lundstrom, F, (2005) Supporting Grandparents caring for their grandchildren, Comhairle, Dublin

“In some cases grandparents are providing informal care to their grandchildren for the full working week. In other situations they are having difficulty maintaining any contact with their grandchildren where their parents have separated or divorced.

In addition, grandparents can find themselves in the position of full-time carers of their grandchildren for a number of reasons, (e.g. the death of the parent, parental drug abuse, alcoholism or mental health difficulties, domestic abuse or abandonment).”

These social changes are evident with regard to the number of grandparents, in particular grandmothers which are now actively caring for their grandchildren.

Grandparents in Tallaght West

At An Cosán, there was a growing awareness of the dependence on parental support to care for their children if a parent wishes to continue in education, return to education or access employment opportunities. In the same context, An Cosán also became increasingly aware of the role that grandparents play in the lives of grandchildren left in their care for a range of reasons, often in very difficult circumstances.

The programme was funded through a grant from the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

Evaluation Aims & Methodology

The evaluation process was undertaken throughout the duration of the programme delivery. The evaluation supports the strategic objectives of An Cosán for the period 2006 -2008.

The evaluation aims to:

1. Provide a comprehensive documentation of all project actions, activities and outcomes.
2. Review and analyse objectives and actions linked to the project.
3. Review programme implementation including development, administration, management and other controls.
4. Identify the impact of the programme .
5. Make recommendations with regard to the sustainability and future of the programme.

Evaluation Methodology

The approach to the evaluation was based primarily on complementary qualitative social research methods. The evaluation was informed through examining the existing literature on the Capacitar programme. This was supported through undertaking interviews with key informants including programme participants and facilitators. The process of relying on a range of sources ensured that the evaluation has the potential to generate insights from a multiplicity of perspectives with the aim of achieving an in-depth understanding of the positive gains the project has made and the barriers and challenges within the programme. The analysis is supported by quantitative data focusing on the emotional, physical and mental well being of participants.

The range of evaluation methodologies used included:

- *Review* where the research sought to present an insight into and reflect on the philosophy which underpins the Capacitar training approach. This was based on examining existing documentation pertaining to the design and development of the Capacitar programme.
- *Reflection*: The reflection process was undertaken at intervals throughout the delivery of the programme. All of the participants were asked to answer a number of questions which supported their reflection on the programme.
- *Interviews*: The evaluation involved undertaking semi-structured one-to-one interviews with six programme participants, including the education facilitator. The interviews were designed around the evaluation aims as specified above. The central focus of the interviews was to gain an insight into the most successful aspects of the programme in terms of the experiences of the participants.
- *Questionnaires*: Participants completed an extensive questionnaire which has been developed by Capacitar as a pre-evaluation tool. This questionnaire was designed to measure the emotional, mental, spiritual and physical well-being of participants. All of the participants completed the questionnaire at the start of the programme which helped to provide an in-depth picture of the range of emotional and physical problems and stress that participants were dealing with. A sample of participants completed the same questionnaire at the end of the programme which provided data to compare and contrast against the original profile.

- *Critical Analysis* with regard to the key findings arising from the review, reflection and interview process.
- *Action Research* whereby it is intended that the outcomes of the review will have practical recommendations with regard to the future of this particular programme.

Expected Outcomes of the Evaluation Process:

It is expected that the evaluation process will provide an overview of the grandparents programme through a comprehensive documentation of the programme activities. At the same time the evaluation will provide an insight into some of the key learning points from the implementation of the programme, and in particular, analysis of the impact of the programme.

Overview of Capacitar Programme²

Capacitar means “to empower”. Capacitar teaches wellness practices, team building and self-development to awaken people to their own wisdom, strength and resources. The methods are based on a holistic model of healing and a popular education methodology. Capacitar field-tests and evaluates its programs and manuals with people in grassroots communities.

Capacitar Is

- A spirit of empowerment and solidarity.
- A network connecting people on 5 continents
- An organization—Capacitar International with an office in California and an international team of trainers
- Teams, coordinating groups and multipliers—in over 30 countries
- People who live with the Capacitar spirit multiplying the practices in their lives, work and communities.

² Sourced from Capacitar International via website: www.capacitar.org

Capacitar body-mind-spirit practices include:

- Tai Chi meditation, Pal Dan Gum and body movement
- Visualization and breathwork
- Active Listening and simple psychotherapeutic skills
- Acupressure for alleviating pain and stress
- Fingerholds for managing emotions
- Emotional Freedom Technique and Thought Field Therapy
- Hand massage, seated massage and Polarity
- Work with the energy system and chakras
- And other wellness modalities

How Capacitar Works

Capacitar

- Responds to invitations based on needs identified by communities
- Collaborates with established groups and with other economic and social development efforts.
- Models alternative uses of power, as well as sensitivity to culture and traditions.
- Develops programs collaboratively with local people recognizing that an idea conceived and born within a group has the energy to move that group.
- Learns from local people's experience in adapting practices to the needs and culture of their communities.
- Trains and empowers people to be the popular educators and multipliers in their own communities.
- Connects grassroots people through an international network of solidarity building relationships of cultural and personal understanding.

A Holistic Model

Capacitar recognizes the energy field interconnecting all being and the unity of body, mind and spirit within the person. Health and wellbeing result from the harmonious flow

and balance of energy in the system. With stress and the trauma of life, the natural flow of energy is blocked resulting in pain, illness and emotional problems in the person, as well as in the family and society. Each person has within themselves an inherent wisdom and power to heal and return to balance and wholeness. Ancient practices, such as Tai Chi and acupressure, can promote health and wellbeing in the individual and the community.

Popular Education

Capacitar uses popular education in its programs. Popular education is a dynamic educational method developed by Brazilian Paulo Freire empowering people to awaken to own their wisdom and power. It is used extensively with grassroots people in Latin America and Africa. Popular education forms the basis of Capacitar's learner-centered approach. Using wellness practices, such as Tai Chi and acupressure, Capacitar teaches "body literacy" to reconnect people to their own wisdom and capacity. An important aspect of popular education is the multiplier effect. Whatever a person learns they are encouraged to pass on to their families and communities, empowering the learner, contributing to the community and multiplying the work.

Capacitar & An Cosán

The Capacitar training programmes were first introduced to Ireland through An Cosán. The first Capacitar training programme was held in An Cosán. This was the start of a process that led to the establishment of Capacitar Ireland which is the local office for Capacitar International. To date, An Cosán have run a number of Capacitar programmes with a particular focus on training childcare workers to support children who have experienced stress and trauma in their lives. The setting up of the Grandparents programme is quite exceptional as it is the first time there has been a Capacitar training programme which specifically targets Grandparents and recognizes the challenges they face.

Report Structure

The aim of Chapter one is to provide an introduction to the programme including an overview of An Cosán and Capacitar, developing an insight into the roles that grandparents in Ireland play in childcare, an overview of the evaluation aims and methodology. Chapter two provides an insight into the challenges facing participants and an overview of the programme content. The third chapter discusses the programme impact and outcomes. The final chapter outlines the conclusions and recommendations for the evaluation.

CHAPTER TWO

The focus of this chapter is to gain an insight into the specific content of the programme and to provide a detailed profile of the programme participants and their needs.

An Cosán noted that it was evident when the programme commenced that these grandparents were under enormous stress. Some were caring for their grandchildren on a full time basis, others part-time. All had children living with them at some time throughout the week. The majority of these grandparents were also themselves parenting alone³.

At the beginning of the programme the participants were asked to complete a pre-evaluation questionnaire which focused on a number of key areas including their emotional, mental, spiritual and physical well being. The data generated from the questionnaires provides a comprehensive insight into the challenges that many of the participants faced prior to undertaking the capacitar training⁴.

With regard to emotional, mental and spiritual wellbeing, participants were asked to consider if they felt that they need a lot of improvement, need improvement, feel that it is satisfactory, very good or other.

The age profile of the group ranged from 42 to 73. This illustrates the diversity of the group and also supports the fact that some of the women were actively taking care of their own young children while simultaneously taking care of their grandchildren.

³ An Cosán Report to Department of Social and Family Affairs, 2008

⁴ The questionnaire template is reproduced in Appendix I.

Emotional Well being

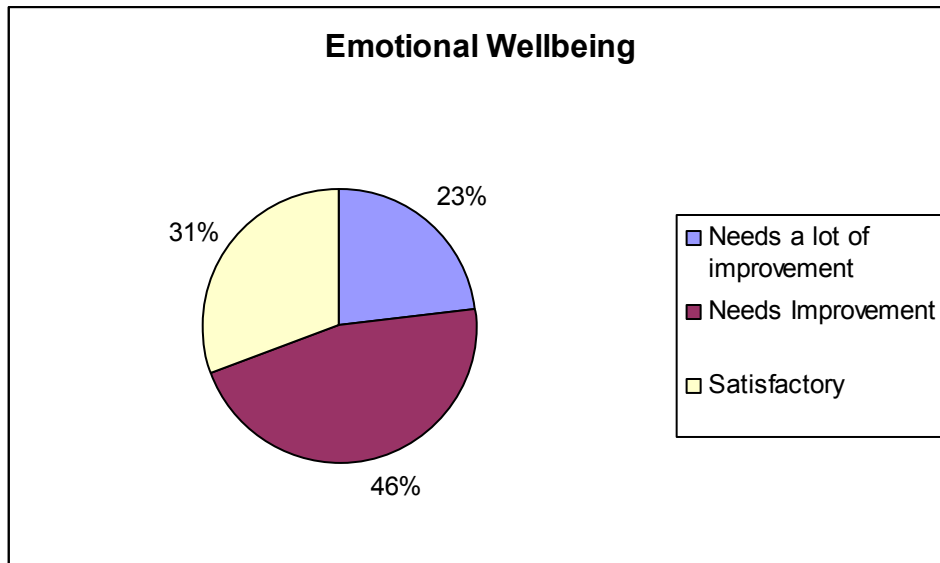


Figure 1

It is significant that none of the participants stated that they felt their emotional well being was good. The highest response rate was 46% which stated that their emotional well being needs improvement.

Mental Well being

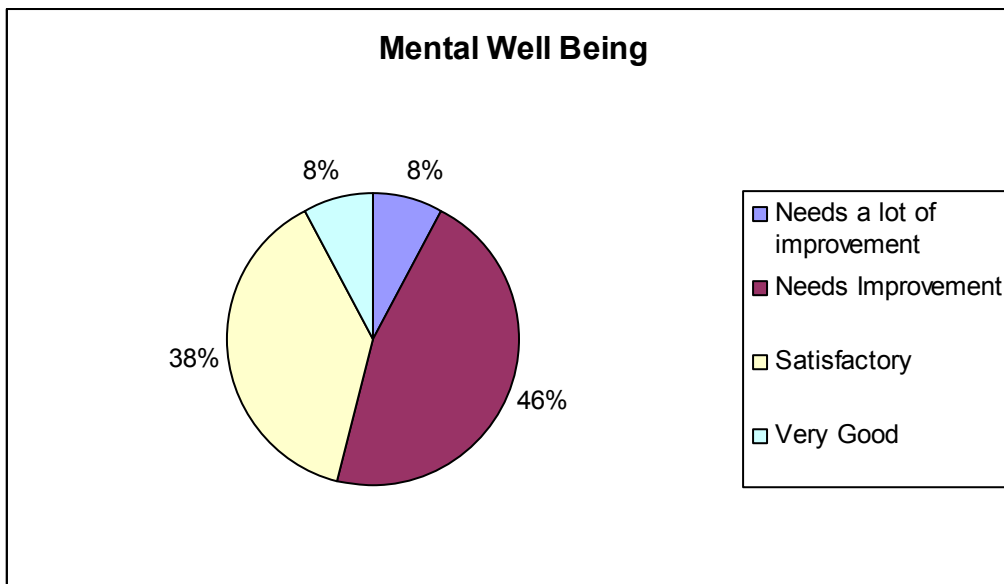


Figure 2

Participants were asked to consider their mental well being in terms of the range outlined above. The findings were similar to the emotional wellbeing, in that, 46% again stated that their mental well being needs improvement. However there is a higher rate of 38% who feel their mental wellbeing is satisfactory. A minority of respondents acknowledged that their mental well being was very good and similarly 8% also stated that they need a lot of improvement.

The participants also provided an insight into some of the key issues for their mental health which included problems such as schizophrenia and negativity.

Spiritual Well being

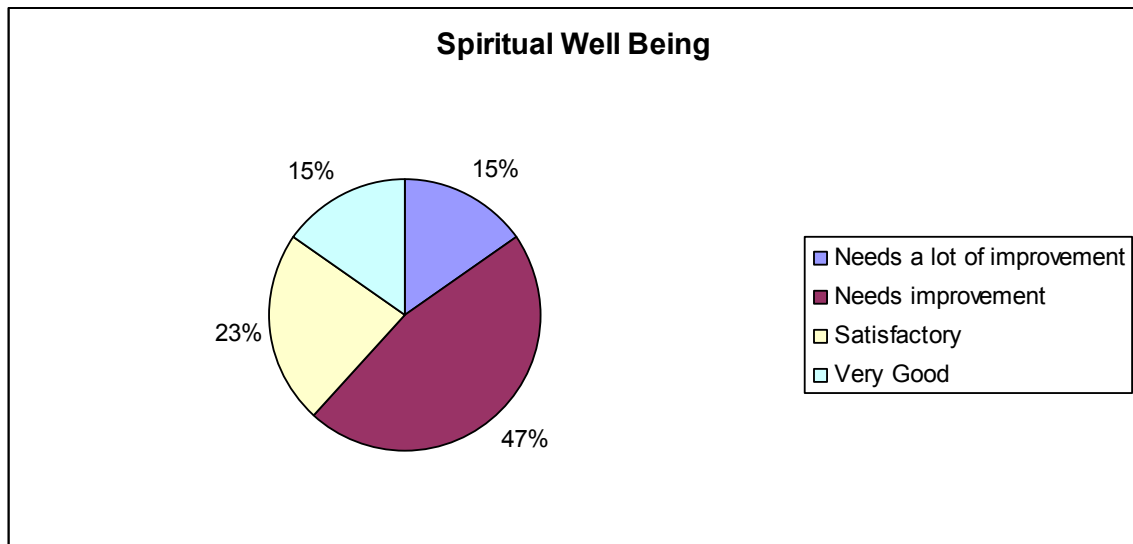


Figure 3

The data on spiritual well being again points to the fact that many of the participants felt that they need improvement, indicated by 47% of the respondents. The percentage of participants who felt satisfactory was 23%. There was an increase with regard to those who stated that their spiritual well being was very good and the equivalent who felt that they need a lot of improvement, with 15% affirming in each case.

Physical Energy

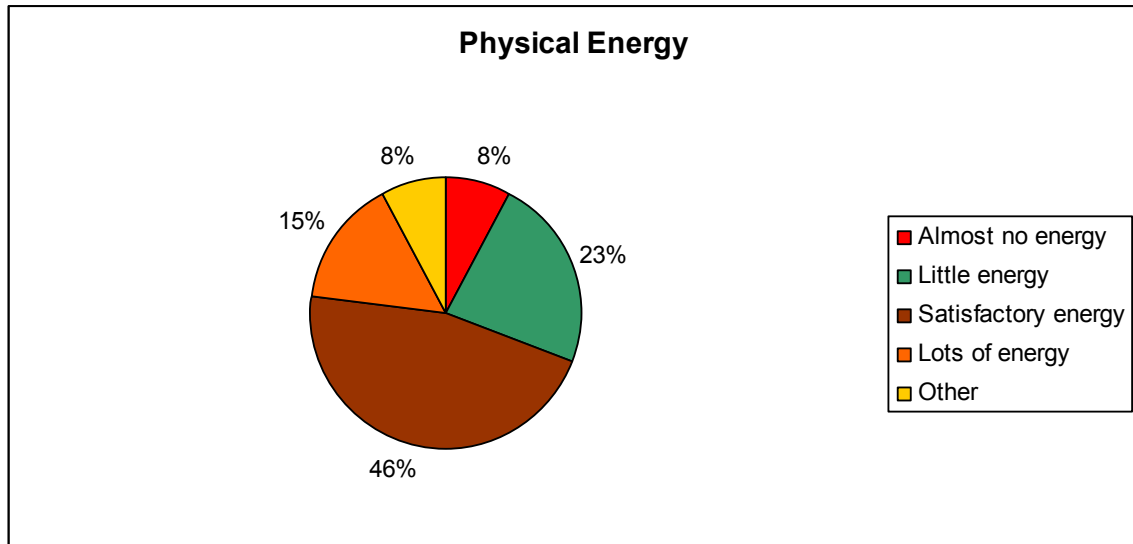


Figure 4

With regard to physical energy participants were asked if they had almost no energy, little energy, satisfactory energy, lot of energy or other. In this case the highest outcome was that participants felt they had satisfactory energy with a 46% confirmation. They were also results to indicate that there is a significant number of participants that struggle with physical energy levels with 23% stating that they had little energy and 8% having no energy. Some of the participants indicated that they are hopeful that their energy levels will improve through the capacitar programme. 15% of the respondents had lots of energy which is quite low, however when combined with those who felt satisfactory the overall picture of physical energy does not appear to be as problematic as the emotional and mental difficulties and stress.

It is evident from the data generated through the questionnaires that the grandparents living in the community face many challenges in their daily lives. The evaluation process also demonstrated the complexities of the women's lives due to many different problems which impacted on the levels of stress they experienced.

Motivation for attending the programme

At the start of the course the participants were asked what had motivated them to participate in the Capacitar programme. There were a range of responses to this question which demonstrates the appeal of Capacitar. It is evident that many of the women would not really have known what to expect from the programme, but at the same time, they were reaching out to participate because of the focus on relaxation and healing. Some of the participants outlined their reasons for attending as follows:

“I was interested in the idea of Capacitar and was looking for some time for myself and some form of relaxation for myself. I didn’t know anything about Capacitar or what to expect”.

“I had a very traumatic year. My brother died and my mother-in-law got sick and then both my parents got very sick and it was all very hard to cope with so I was almost on the verge of a nervous breakdown. A friend told me about the course and I thank her for letting me know because my doctor had wanted to prescribe tranquillisers for me which I did not want to take”.

“I came onto the course mainly to get out and mix with adults again because I left my job to look after my grandchild and I am at home a lot”.

“I started the course because of my supervisor at work. I had a lot of tragedy in my life and she suggested that it would help me”.

These responses demonstrate that there are a variety of reasons for choosing to participate in the programme. For some of the participants there was a very specific need due to traumatic experiences and events in their lives, while for others it was based on the need to take time out for themselves and to learn to relax more.

Grandparents Programme

The Holistic Health Practices for Grandparents is the first Capacitar programme that has been specifically developed for grandparents. The programme was developed on the basis of an identified need in the Tallaght West community which presented through observation and experience of working with women who were participating in childcare training programmes.

This programme was designed to introduce grandparents to simple wellbeing practices that can be used in daily life in the home, with children and with grandchildren. Capacitar training aimed to help grandparents to manage their stress levels and to equip them with a range of techniques to use in caring for their grandchildren:

- ❖ Profound relaxation techniques to help reduce stress levels
- ❖ Breathwork techniques
- ❖ Awareness of food intake and impact on energy levels
- ❖ Gentle exercise techniques to improve general wellbeing⁵

The general aim was that participants would develop a number of Capacitar mind, body and spirit practices, which would support them and help them to lead healthier lives.

Programme Content & Structure

The programme is based on four units delivered over 30 weeks. The programme took place once a week for two and a half hours. The units are:

Unit 1: Wellbeing practices to improve mental focus and physical wellbeing

Unit 2: Wellbeing practices to promote emotional balance

Unit 3: Wellbeing practices to cope with stress, heal the body and improve energy flow

Unit 4: Wellbeing practices to nurture the spirit

⁵ Purpose of the programme as outlined in the overview of proposed programme, An Cosán Holistic Health Practices proposal to Department of Social and Family Affairs, 2006

The programme is based on a range of complementary holistic health techniques including⁶:

- Tai Chi
- Meditation
- Pal Dan Gum and body movement
- Visualization
- Breathwork
- Emotional Freedom Technique
- Acupressure for alleviating pain and stress
- Fingerholds for managing emotions
- Salute to the Sun
- Hand massage

The weekly sessions also included an opening circle which allowed all of the participants to share their thoughts and feelings. This was achieved within a very supportive environment.

Tai Chi

The Tai Chi movements are energy exercises which help to relieve stress and to open and balance energy flows. Through regular practice the movements can support healing and harmony in the body.

Pal Dan Gum and body movement

Pal Dan Gum is a series of physical exercises which come from ancient China & Korea. The purpose is to promote health, strength, long life and spiritual awareness. There are a number of complementary benefits if the exercises are regularly undertaken. These include relaxation, improved circulation, more flexible muscles and joints, improved posture and increased energy.

⁶ Overview of practices adapted from Cane, P (2005) *Living in Wellness – Trauma Healing: A Capacitar Manual of Body Mind Spirit Practices for Stress, Trauma and Compassion Fatigue*, Capacitar International

Visualisation

Visualisation focuses the mind on healing images to bring about physiological changes in the body, mind and spirit.

Breathwork

The programme included teaching a number of different breathing techniques and exercises which are used to unblock, balance and increase energy.

Meditation

The meditations were complemented through the visualisation and breathwork exercises and were a regular element of the programme.

Emotional Freedom Technique⁷

The emotional freedom technique is based on a combination of energy field theory and meridian theory from eastern medicine. The technique involves tapping or pressing points on channels of energy. It is used to unblock and heal strong emotions, fears, anxiety, anger, addiction, and trauma. It is also useful for alleviating physical body pain.

Acupressure for alleviating pain and stress

The acupressure techniques which the participants were introduced to involved learning about a number of finger pressure points. These were specific points to relieve symptoms of stress.

Fingerholds for managing emotions

Fingerholds are a tool to use daily in difficult situations and as a means of unblocking. Through each finger there is a channel of energy which is connected to an organ and related emotions. The technique is based on holding a finger which represents the emotion that is presenting while breathing deeply and working with the energy flow. This

⁷ Emotional Freedom Technique was developed by Gary Flint

supports healing and may bring calmness in order to allow the appropriate response to be taken.

Salute to the Sun

The salute to the sun is an ancient yoga practice which energises the body, mind and spirit through connecting to the cycle of nature. The movement involves several simple stretches.

Hand massage

The hand massage draws on the knowledge of acupressure and reflexology to relieve many emotional and physical health problems.

Isabel's Day

Isabel's Day is a day of relaxation, meditation, self-care and learning, organized and facilitated by An Cosán. It includes nurturing of body mind and spirit and is offered to participants at An Cosán on a regular basis. The day takes place at the home of Katherine Zappone & Ann Louise Gilligan the founders of The Shanty. The participants on the programme attended Isabel's Day and found it inspiring.

Conclusion

It is apparent that the women who participated in the programme were experiencing multiple levels of stress and trauma in their lives. The programme content offered the possibility of finding effective and innovative ways of healing the trauma and coping with the stress. There were many positive outcomes for the grandparents involved. The following chapter outlines the impact in detail.

CHAPTER THREE

“I noticed that participants got stronger in themselves. They changed from thinking that they had to do everything their sons & daughters expected them to do and began to realise that they had a choice. They started to value themselves more and take better care of themselves. Other obvious things were that they reported sleeping better and finding their own personal space”.

The focus of Chapter Three is to determine the significance of the programme through analysing the outcomes in the context of the original aims. The analysis aims to develop an understanding of the primary benefits of the programme outcomes with regard to the impact that it has made on the lives of women who have participated.

The general aims of the programme were to:

- Develop an understanding of Capacitar body/mind/spirit theory and practices.
- Use and practice the skills and knowledge of Capacitar within and outside the group

PROGRAMME OUTCOMES

There is considerable evidence to demonstrate that this programme has been very successful on a number of different levels. It is quite difficult to quantify the impact of this programme on the individual women’s lives as there were so many benefits observed. According to one of the participants:

“Everything that I learn at the Capacitar course is a bonus”

The evaluation process in itself seems an inadequate mechanism to illustrate the extent of the programme’s outcomes. The interviews and the observation of the programme at intervals throughout its delivery, proved that for all of the women who participated, this programme was a life changing experience that provided them with essential skills for coping with the levels of stress and trauma in their lives. In this regard the programme is invaluable.

Overall Outcomes

The women who participated have benefited considerably through their experiences on the programme. The range of benefits identified, include emotional, physical, mental and spiritual improvements in the women's lives. The general outcome of the programme was that the women felt empowered to make decisions in their lives, to be more assertive and to practice the techniques they had learned in order to lead more relaxed and less stressful lives on a daily basis.

The specific benefits identified are as follows:

Confidence & Self Esteem

At the beginning of the programme it was evident that many of the participants had low levels of self-esteem. Through their participation on the programme the women learned how to value themselves more and to become more assertive around their own needs. This was hugely beneficial for the participants as it was very much part of the process of developing mechanisms, not only for evaluating the roles they played in the lives of their grandparents but also with regard to realising that they had a right to take time for themselves and to focus on their own personal development.

Participants outlined:

“I have the confidence now to apply for jobs. I intend using my Capacitar techniques to keep relaxed and motivated”.

“After this course I am more assertive”

“I feel that getting older is not so bad and we as older women have a lot to offer.....about myself I need to give myself credit and time out”

“I learned that I have a lot of qualities, knowledge and experience that I have gained over the years”

Empowerment

The empowerment of the women who took part in the Capacitar training is a key outcome of the programme. Many of the participants noted that they

“I learned to be empowered, that I have the power to change”

“I have learned to take a deep breath sometimes and not to jump in to say I will do it and put myself under more pressure”

“It is about prioritising things and seeing what really needs to be as opposed to what has to be”

“Although it should have been obvious to me anyway, participation in the Capacitar group, taught me that I was not alone in having to cope with huge and unwanted difficulties in life, and through that knowledge I received encouragement to deal with my problems”

Communication

Throughout the programme, there were many opportunities for the women to share their experiences and to listen to each others stories. The programme continuously created a space for the sharing of problems, difficulties and also the positive effect that the new techniques were having on their lives. The result of this was that many of the participants noted the impact that this learning had with regard to their ability to communicate in general:

“I overcame my fear of communicating and the challenge of talking up for myself”

“I learned how to listen and how to share”

“When I was low there was always someone to listen without interruption”

“I learned about the art of communication of sharing information in a confidential group setting”

“I learned about camaraderie, about sharing and listening”

Group Support

The level of support within the group was achieved very early in the programme as the group bonded very well. The facilitators built up trust within the group and created the conditions to support participants to be open to each other and to be non-judgemental. This enabled the communication process to unfold at deep levels. Participants observed:

“It is very good to have a group of people, you see that you are not on your own with things, you realise that people face the same sort of struggles but its how you manage those struggles or how you meet them that makes the difference”

“I needed the support of the group to move on in certain situations”

“Through all the sharing in the group I feel that we have become very close, we have a lot of trust in each other”

“The safe space and the interaction with others in the group is very important to me”

“I appreciate being able to express how I am feeling without any judgement”

Relaxation

A key objective of the programme was centred on supporting participants to develop effective relaxation skills. Many of the exercises encouraged the women to learn effective relaxation skills such as Tai Chi, Pal Dan Gum, meditation and breathwork. The women reported that they regularly used these techniques and had also shared them with some of their family members. Some of their observations were:

“It has helped me to relax, I have used a lot of the techniques and I try and do a bit of tai chi every day and I really feel the benefit in myself from doing it”

“I learned how to relax and that I could, whereas before I found it very difficult”

“The course made me more outgoing and relaxed”

“It made me relax and think about life in a different way”

Reflection

Throughout the programme participants became more reflective through keeping their own personal journals which encourage them to document their response to the sessions on a weekly basis. This established a reflection process which was further reinforced within the weekly sessions through the opening round whereby the women would reflect on their week and identify issues that had affected them during that time, acknowledging their feelings and learning from each other. One of the women outlined the value of reflection as follows:

“Another thing which is good is having been asked to jot down a few words every week in our notebooks, it makes you reflect on what has happened and reaffirms what you have learned”

Motivation

It was observed that the participants are more motivated with regard to many aspects of their lives. They are motivated to take substantially more care of their well being and to prioritise their needs. In general, the group are motivated to continue to learn and to practice the techniques they have gained. They are also motivated to be more informed about childcare practices

“I have learned a lot of knowledge about Tai Chi and taking control of myself and thinking positive”

“I learned that even with my life experiences there is always something more to learn second time around as a grandparent”

Emotional well being

As outlined in the previous chapter in Figure 1, many of the participants had felt that their emotional well being needed improvement. It is also evident, both from the data and through observation, that there were high levels of emotional stress and trauma within the group. The pre-evaluation questionnaire illustrated that many of the women felt sad on a regular basis, they had flashbacks, bad memories and less interest in the things they used to enjoy. The positive emotional benefits from the programme are quite remarkable. The

women are more positive in their outlook and in their ability to deal with the day-to-day difficulties in their lives. They also feel more competent in terms of finding ways to cope with their emotions.

According to the participants:

“The programme made me think more about life and it made me not think about worrying and to take one day at a time”

“I am better able to cope; I don't get so uptight or annoyed about things or working myself into a state. I can leave things happen, if things are not done it's not the end of the world, I am just more grounded”

“I learned to make sure that I have time out for myself each day no matter what”

“I have become more positive in a situations which was quite challenging and tending to get me down”

“Learning the different capacitor practices has been very healing for me”

Caring for Grandchildren

The programme has provided participants with useful skills and insight for caring for children. Many of the women noted that the relaxation exercises supported them to be better carers.

“I only have one grandchild but I certainly see myself very differently around him in comparison to what I used to be with my daughter”

Stress management

It is interesting to note that participants began to use a number of the exercises as a means of coping with the stress in their lives, both on a regular basis or as the need arose. For some women the tai chi movements were the most effective whereas for other women it was the Pal Dan Gum or the fingerholds that they began to adopt. The participants were individually drawn to some of the exercises more than others due to the personal

improvements they noticed. Many of the women noted the overall impact that the programme had on their general stress levels:

“I practised at home and I find the exercises good for stress”

“It has been a huge benefit, when I am very stressed out I would think about the class I have next Tuesday”

“What has been important for me was learning how to deal with stress”

Physical benefits and Energy levels

The pre-evaluation questionnaire identified a number of health problems within the group. On completion of the programme participants suffering from conditions such as asthma, high blood pressure and arthritis noted an improvement in their health.

Unexpected outcomes

There were also a number of specific activities and outcomes as a result of the programme. These included:

Further Training & Employment

Some of the participants have found part-time work and also decided to undertake more training. This is directly due to their experiences within the programme. They have increased confidence and also determination to focus on their own personal development.

“I have overcome certain difficulties which means I am now able to partake in a full-time training programme”

“When this programme is over, I will do a spirituality course”

Next year I hope to participate in another course for an older age group, and hopefully to be a better grandparent”

“Hopefully in September, I will have a part-time job. This is the first job outside the home that I have ever had”

From these statements, it is evident that the programme has motivated the grandmothers to commit to participating in other programmes.

Participation in Events

Another significant outcome occurred through participation in conferences and exhibitions. Two of the women addressed Aontas conference speaking about their experiences of the capacitor programme. This was a very valuable experience for the participants as it was very good for building confidence and also encouraged the participants to reflect on what they had gained through Capacitar.

On completion of the programme, the group have attended the Aontas Older Learners Network in Galway with the objective of linking with other groups.

Grandparents Group

Since the programme finished in June, the women have already begun to actively work towards establishing a group for grandparents. This group has the potential to continue to support the women involved in the Capacitar programme and also to reach out to other grandparents in terms of support and advice. For many programmes this is a desired outcome but often very difficult to initiate or sustain. In this case, it is envisaged that the group will succeed in achieving their aims as a result of the motivation and enthusiasm they have gained from participating in the programme.

Registered childminders

During the year ten of the women registered themselves as childminders with the county childcare committee. This was very significant as many of the grandmothers didn't see themselves as childminders before they had started the programme, in spite of the fact that they were childminders. Another outcome of this process was that the whole group completed the childcare quality awareness programme. All of those that registered, were

eligible for a grant from South Dublin County Council which enabled them to do simple things like put a gate on the end of the stairs or buy a fireguard or educational toys.

Programme Delivery Methods and Approach

“Capacitar is a popular education programme. The approach was to create a safe learning environment. Participants worked on themselves individually, in pairs, and as a group doing Tai-Chi for example”⁸.

The programme throughout was focused on the needs of the participants and this is evidently a central aspect of the positive experiences of the women in the group. The delivery methods were consistent with community education principles and encouraged the women to learn at their own pace while also challenging them to engage in new and creative ways of learning, and to develop new skills.

Support for participants

Participants stated that they felt supported throughout the programme by the individual tutors and facilitators, the programme co-ordinator and the strong relationships created within the group. The non-judgemental & safe space created was particularly significant to create the conditions for supporting participants to gain the most benefit from the programme. At the same time there were also very important practical supports in An Cosán which were of assistance to the women, including the crèche facility, the hospitality and the availability of counsellors.

Reflection & Evaluation

“By setting a regular cycle of reflection and action in which a group are constantly celebrating their successes and analysing critically the causes of mistakes and failures, they can become more capable of effectively transforming their daily life”⁹

⁸ Programme facilitator

⁹ Hope & Timmell, 2003

The action of reflection and evaluation is essential to the long term success of projects. The Women's Leadership Programme demonstrated good practice through a commitment to these objectives within the context of the programme actions and also specifically with regard to skills development of programme participants. The programme established a process of undertaking evaluations with participants throughout its implementation.

Difficulties Identified

It is noteworthy that when asked about any of the barriers or difficulties that arose within the programme, none of the participants could find anything that they felt was challenging or needed to be changed. According to participants:

"I wouldn't change anything, it works well because of the way it is set up"

"I wouldn't like to see anything about it changing"

"I wouldn't like to change anything, I love it all"

One of the findings that should be noted is that the level of extreme stress and trauma that participants were experiencing on a continual basis was not anticipated prior to the course. This required the facilitators to be very skilled in supporting individual participants and the group as a whole.

Conclusion

The programme outcomes which have been identified in this chapter provide an understanding of the depth of the programme impact on the participants both as individuals and as a group. It is evident from the numerous statements which the women have made that the Capacitar programme resulted in significant benefits within their lives emotionally, mentally, spiritually and physically. The women feel in a better position to cope with the stresses and difficulties within their lives and to provide adequate care for their grandchildren, and, equally important, for themselves as older women.

CHAPTER 4

“It would be lovely to have a follow up programme, as I feel no one wants to leave. It has been such a wonderful class where we’ve all got so much out of it to help relieve our stresses in life”

In conclusion, there are several important elements to this programme that have contributed to making it very valuable and worthwhile to the participants and their families in particular. It is evident that the women who participated in the programme looked forward to attending each week and gained a lot from the process.

There are a number of recommendations outlined with regard to the programme.

Evaluation Questionnaire: Findings on Programme Completion

At the end of the programme, participants completed the same questionnaire that they had when the programme commenced. The objective was to try and measure the emotional, mental, spiritual and physical changes that may have occurred during the programme. The results indicate that there have been significant improvements in the participants well being in comparison with the pre-evaluation findings outlined in Chapter Two.

Emotional Well Being

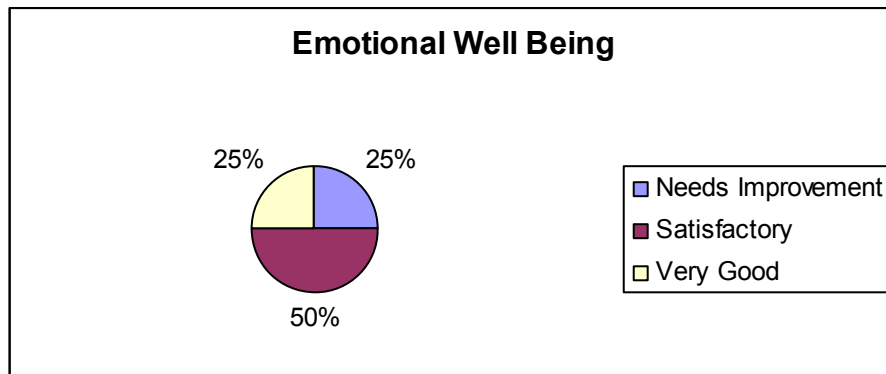


Figure 5

The participants emotional well being has improved considerably when compared with the figures from the pre-evaluation. There is an increase in participants who feel that

emotionally they are very good and also satisfactory. There is a decrease in participants who feel that their emotional well being is very good.

Mental Well Being

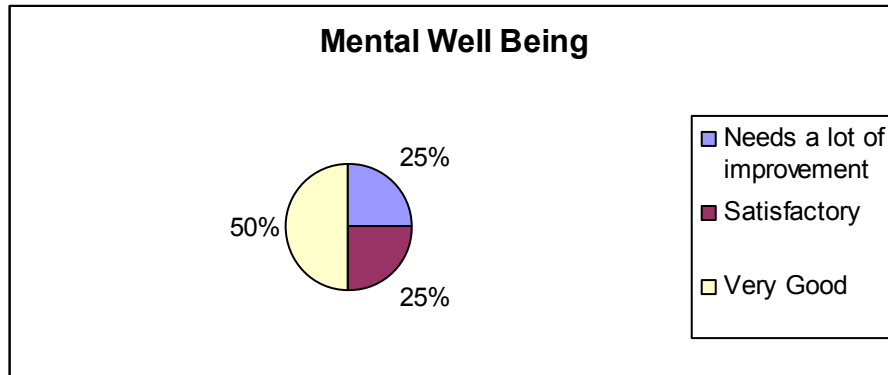


Figure 6

The figures for participants mental well being indicate a substantial improvement when compared with the earlier results. In particular it is noteworthy that 50% stated that their mental well being was very good whereas only 8% had stated this prior to the programme.

Spiritual Well Being

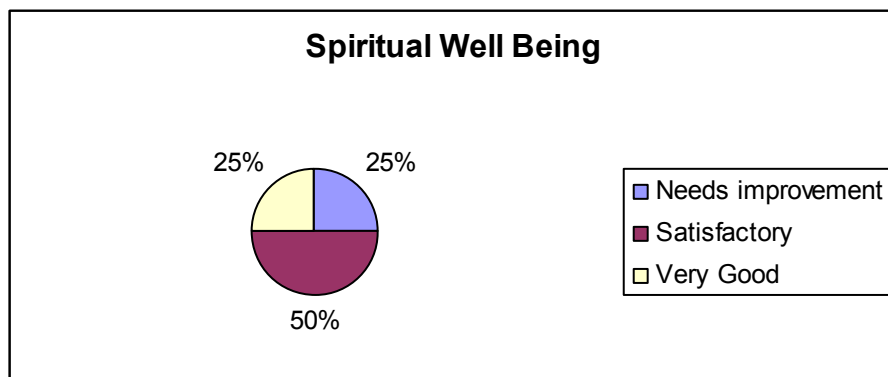


Figure 7

With regard to spiritual well being, there are also improvements to be observed. More participants felt that their spiritual well being was satisfactory, increasing from 23% in

the pre-evaluation to 50%. There was also an increased number of participants who felt that their spiritual well being was very good. Again those who felt that their well being needed improvement had decreased.

Physical Well Being

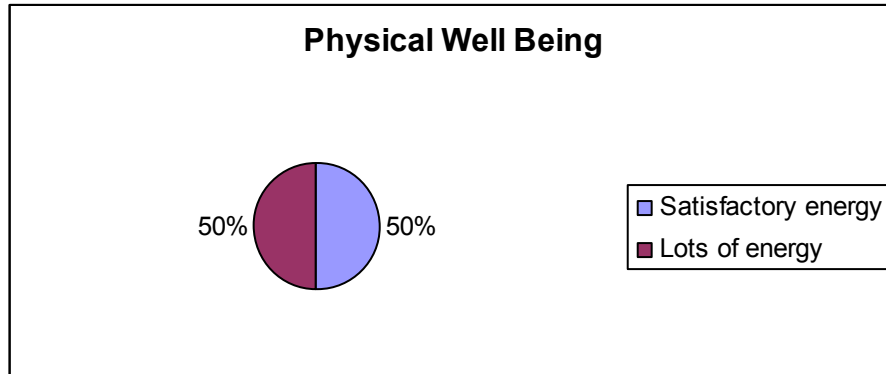


Figure 8

The figures for physical well being also illustrate a significant increase in participants well being. On completion of the programme participants found that they have a lot more energy. Only 15% reported having a lot of energy prior to the programme, this has now increased to 50%. None of the participants stated that they had little physical energy.

POLICY ISSUES

There is very little recognition of the role grandparents play with regard to providing childcare. The European Anti-Poverty Network noted this issue when undertaking consultation prior to the development of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion in 2007. Research commissioned by Comhairle also supported this fact, calling for the recognition of the role that grandparents play.

“There is a need for promotion through information and research of the vital role that grandparents and the wider family play in the emotional lives of children”¹⁰.

It is the conclusion of this report that it is vital for grandparents to be able to access support for the difficulties they face in actively caring for their grandchildren. This could

¹⁰ Lundstrom, F ‘Supporting grandparents caring for their grandchildren’, Comhairle

include financial and emotional support. According to Comhairle, it is essential that there is data gathered to determine the number of grandparents in Ireland and the extent to which they are involved in caring for grandchildren.

“To enable policy developments which reflect current needs, an estimate of the number of grandparents in Ireland and the level of care they provide to their grandchildren is needed. This can be done either through a question on the Census or by adding a question on to a national survey”.

This report concurs with the suggestion proposed by Comhairle as a necessary step towards acknowledging the role of grandparents in childcare and also as part of a consultation which would ascertain the needs of such grandparents.

Recommendations

The central recommendation is that the programme should continue to run in An Cosán as it has proved to be a life changing invaluable experience for the participants in many ways.

The specific recommendations are that:

- The programme should qualify for mainstream funding.
- There should be statutory recognition of the contribution that grandparents are making and cognisance of the fact that it is a saving for the state.
- The group receive some support initially from An Cosán with regard to the establishment of their own group.
- There should be guidance for the participants on completion of the programme with regard to further training and similar opportunities.
- The course could be developed further or there may be another programme which participants could attend in An Cosán.

Conclusion

This evaluation was undertaken throughout the delivery of the programme through attending some of the participant's sessions, observation, interviews and questionnaires. It has been very valuable to witness the transformation that has taken place within the group, to listen to the positive stories and experiences and to confirm that An Cosán has undoubtedly made a significant impact on these grandparent's lives through the Capacitar programme.

The statistical data generated through the evaluation questionnaires illustrates that there has been considerable improvements in the quality of the women's lives that they are now in a better place in their lives, emotionally, mentally, spiritually and physically. The interviews demonstrate that these women appreciate the knowledge that they have gained and that they actively use the techniques on a regular basis. Both the quantitative and qualitative findings illustrate that this has been an invaluable and life changing experience for all involved.

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APPENDIX I

AN COSÁN: CAPACITAR PROGRAMME FOR GRANDPARENTS PRE-EVALUATION

Questionnaire outline

Thinking back to your personal sense of well-being, body-mind-spirit emotions at the beginning of the Capacitar programme how would you describe the following:

PART 1: HOW DO YOU VIEW YOUR LIFE?

Please circle the statement that reflected your wellbeing.

1. EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

- A) Needs a lot of improvement
- B) Needs improvement
- C) Satisfactory
- D) Very good
- E) Other (explain) _____

2. MENTAL WELLBEING

- A) Needs a lot of improvement
- B) Needs improvement
- C) Satisfactory
- D) Very good
- E) Other (explain) _____

3. SPIRITUAL WELLBEING

- A) Needs a lot of improvement
- B) Needs improvement
- C) Satisfactory
- D) Very good
- E) Other (explain) _____

4. PHYSICAL ENERGY

- A) Almost no energy
- B) Little energy
- C) Satisfactory energy
- D) Lots of energy
- E) Other (explain)_____

PART II: DEALING WITH EMOTIONS

Please circle the word or phrase that most accurately describes how you would have dealt with the following emotions

1. I deal with grief:

- A) very well
- B) well
- C) satisfactorily
- D) poorly
- E) no grief in my life

2. I deal with fear:

- A) very well
- B) well
- C) satisfactorily
- D) poorly
- E) no fear in my life

3. I deal with worry / anxiety:

- A) very well
- B) well
- C) satisfactorily
- D) poorly
- E) no worry or anxiety in my life

4. My self-esteem is:

- A) very good
- B) good
- C) satisfactory
- D) fair
- E) poor

Did you have difficulty with any of the following?

Symptoms	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	All the time
Shoulder Pain					
Headaches					
Neck or Chest Pain					
Nausea or stomach pain					
Back pain					
My mind goes blank					
Nightmares					
Flashbacks / Bad memories					
Less Interest in things I used to enjoy					
Crying a lot					
Shortness of breath					
Difficulties falling or					

staying asleep					
Symptoms	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	All the time
Stomach problems					
Racing or pounding heart					
Feeling very sad					
Body pain or soreness					
Problems concentrating					
Worry about the future					
Feeling very tired					