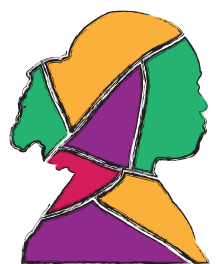




Making a Difference

Impact and Effectiveness of Peaced Together



*Peaced
Together*



Peaced Together was developed in 2012 by Heidi Singleton, a teacher in East London.

After a difficult time in her life, she found hope and restoration through the creative process and started writing Peaced Together.

Originally from Northern Ireland, Heidi spent many years working as a music specialist teacher in an East London primary school. She rediscovered her love of craft and creating things through projects with her three children.

Peaced Together is part of Community Resources, an organisation established by LifeLine Church to grow creative solutions to local issues. It helps local people establish projects that will benefit their community.



What is Peaced Together?

Peaced Together is a creative arts course for women. It encourages women to reflect on their lives and set out on a journey from brokenness to hope. The course has been running since 2012, and has been delivered to **794 people at 18 locations**, not only in the **United Kingdom** but also in **the Republic of Ireland and Dominica**.

Peaced Together's vision is to 'bring hope, peace and purpose through the creative arts and reflective discussion to those who have experienced brokenness'.

To achieve its vision, Peaced Together values are:

- having a heart and compassion for the broken
- restoration and healing
- being accessible so that all can attend
- creating a safe environment
- enabling churches to engage with the broken in the community.



Approach taken to evaluating Peaced Together

This report covers data that has been collected between May 2016 and July 2017. The data was collected from 135 participants, spread over 8 locations in the UK.

To evaluate the impact of the course, participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire at the beginning and end of the course, to track changes over the 10 weeks. This questionnaire was based on the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) (www.healthscotland.com), which measures mental wellbeing, covering both feeling and functioning, and the Five Ways to Well-being (www.foresight.gov.uk and www.neweconomics.org – Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing project).

In the questionnaire, participants were offered the majority of responses on a linear scale of 1 (strongly disagree), through to 5 (strongly agree). If their score was higher at the end of the course, this showed improvement for the individual.

Participants were offered nine statements relating to confidence, each with a linear scale. The statements covered different aspects of confidence, ranging from confidence to say what they were thinking through to confidence to access services or confidence to make steps towards volunteering, education or employment.

Impacting our communities

While there were individual outliers, **every linear question resulted in an overall increase. This demonstrated the positive impact of the course.**

Of the 135 participants who completed the questionnaires, 90% showed an increase in at least one aspect of their confidence levels.

Participants said:

- ❖ “[Peaced Together has] given me a framework to think about life events, confidence – I can do things and finish them!”
- ❖ “It has given me the confidence to try new things.”
- ❖ “I believe Peaced Together has improved my confidence in creativity and craft work.”
- ❖ “My confidence has improved and I feel better about getting out and about more.”

The questionnaire asked how strongly participants felt that they belonged in their family, friendships or community. At the end of the ten weeks, **92% of participants reported a positive impact on their relationships.**

This is a key part of the healing process for many people, because, as stated in the Five Ways to Well-being report, *connecting to those around you* is the first of the five steps to mental well-being. In addition, **90% of participants said they had made more friends as a result of taking part in Peaced Together, and 69% were less lonely.**

90%

increased confidence

92%

positive impact on relationships

90%

made more friends

69%

felt less lonely





Another two steps towards mental well-being are *take notice*, and *keep learning*. These create a sense of achievement and can help build confidence. Art and crafts encourage you to take these two steps, and this carries on beyond the ten weeks, shown by **61% of participants are more confident to try new arts and crafts.**

93% felt more positive about their life, themselves, or their future.

- ❖ *"[I am] just being given space to create and appreciate my gifts from God."*
- ❖ *"I feel happy and have made new friends I can talk to and build new relationships."*
- ❖ *"I believe Peaced Together has improved my confidence in creativity and craft work."*
- ❖ *"[I have] loved meeting with people weekly in an organised setting and building relationships."*
- ❖ *"[I am] leading a craft activity at a community event."*
- ❖ *"I have more confidence now in my abilities, outlook and relationships."*

61%

confident to try new crafts

93%

felt more positive

The course also has a positive effect on the wider community, as **80% of participants felt more connected or more able to take part in their community**, with many of them eager to *get more involved in volunteering*, and *give back to the community*. This is another of the five steps, which helps to improve mental well-being and helps to build new friendships and social networks.

- ❖ *"It has helped me to have a more positive outlook on life and to realise I can make something beautiful out of a bad situation."*
- ❖ *"I now want to find volunteering work."*
- ❖ *"I volunteer at playgroup now."*
- ❖ *"[I will] look into volunteering opportunities which I have been wanting to do for ages."*
- ❖ *"It's helped me recognise that positive things have come out of negative events in my life; it's good to try new things even if they don't turn out perfect or mistakes are made, it's still unique, has beauty."*
- ❖ *"Today I volunteered to help with sewing and have promised to show [her] basic hand sewing skills."*
- ❖ *"[I am] confident to make more positive choices, and try new things."*

80%

felt more connected

Case Study – Marcia's Story

Hope is a cornerstone of Peaced Together. Giving people time and space for hope to begin and to grow is one of the most important aspects of the course.

Marcia has been on Peaced Together twice. As a single mother of four with painful past experiences, thinking about the future used to be almost unbearable for her. *"I tried to take each day as it came, but never liked to look ahead – it was too scary."* She chose to do Peaced Together for the second time last year as she realised there was more for her to get from the course.



During part two of Marcia's Peaced Together journey, one particular session forced Marcia to think about the concept of 'hope'. During the session, she really struggled with the idea. She had recently been homeless and had struggled with depression. To dare to dream that there might be something better in her future than the difficulties she had lived through was challenging. She couldn't think of any hope she held that she could work towards. But the seed had been planted in Marcia's mind and several days later she came running up to her trainer. **"I've found it! I've found my hope! I want to learn to drive."**

For Marcia, learning to drive is about so much more than just a practical skill – it signifies freedom and independence for her. It was the first time she could see that taking on a challenge and seeing it through would equip her for the future. Marcia says, **"Before Peaced Together I didn't like myself. I never thought I could be good at craft."** But she soon found that she was. **"I realised I could sew! Learning new skills made me think that maybe I could try new things. I realised I could make anything I wanted if I put my mind to it. I never would have taken driving lessons if it wasn't for Peaced Together."**

So much has changed for Marcia since doing the course. **"I look at life so differently now,"** she says. **"I don't look at the bad stuff. You can make new things from old. I accept myself now and I don't beat myself up about things."** Marcia now makes her own cards to sell and volunteers at The Hub (the venue where she did Peaced Together), running craft activities for others at a community café event. She calls The Hub "my sanctuary."

She is one now of our staunchest advocates, **"I encourage a lot of other women to do Peaced Together. Anyone can benefit from this course, regardless of whether they have faith or not."** She talks about why she did Peaced Together twice: **"The first time I did it I was still finding it hard to trust people and I couldn't let go. The second time I processed the things we talked about more deeply and found a hope for life. I could start dreaming about my future."**

Peaced Together won't fix everything in life, but it equipped Marcia with new ways to deal with situations: *"I still struggle with depression sometimes, but I handle it better now."* Marcia recently failed her driving test, but that doesn't matter. She booked another test as soon as she could. When you believe you are going somewhere good, the knockbacks won't stop you from moving towards your goal. Like her Peaced Together journey, it might be second time lucky!

Marcia's advice for anyone considering doing Peaced Together is **"Just do it – if you wait until life is settled you will never do it!"**



Case Study – Samantha's Story

On a recent Peaced Together course, one of the women taking part, Samantha, had suffered domestic abuse. She had low self-esteem and couldn't make eye contact or speak to the group at the first session.

The next week we were looking at 'Beauty out of brokenness' and started talking about makeup. We discussed how sometimes we use makeup as we think it makes us more beautiful. Someone suggested that not wearing makeup for a day might challenge us to think about what makes us truly beautiful.

We have a weekly community café at the venue where we run Peaced Together. Samantha came along to the café that week, without any makeup on. Nobody realised at first, but people kept asking her, **"You look nice, what have you done?"**

She told me later that for fifteen years she had used make up as a mask, never daring to let anyone see her without it. **During the 'Beauty from brokenness' session, she suddenly realised she didn't need makeup to feel beautiful.**

As the course progressed and Samantha opened up, Peaced Together had a wonderful effect on her life. She started joining in with discussions. The week we talked about 'Thankfulness' she was able to be thankful for the marriage that had caused her such grief as it had also brought her two lovely children. She told me afterwards that **she has started being deliberately thankful whenever life is difficult as she finds that it lifts her spirits.**

Samantha is an artist and kept a scrapbook of the journey she had been on during Peaced Together. At the start, her pain and anguish was evident and she used a lot of black and white. One of the trainers challenged her to see if her art could change as her thinking changed. By the end of the course she was using bright colours that reflected the joy she was increasingly feeling.

Samantha became good friends with another woman on the course who had been through similar challenges. They both became more confident and seemed happier each week.

Towards the end of the course we did some weaving, which we usually use to cover notebooks. Samantha and her friend rebelled! They refused to use their weaving to cover a book – they felt it was beautiful and needed to be framed and displayed where everyone could enjoy it.

Both women had gone from low self-worth and distrusting the world to recognising they had value and deciding the world needed to see it. Heidi said, "I've never been so glad to see rebellion!"

Stories from Peaced Together

"On the day I stepped through the door to begin the Peaced Together course, I had just been through the worst six months of my life. I had a very close and recent bereavement and was exhausted with grief. A friend came across the course and suggested it could be of help to me. To this day, I don't know how I attended or even got through that first evening, but I'm glad I did. If I hadn't gone I never would have experienced the support, friendship, kindness and guidance that helped me survive.

The content of the course often seemed especially relevant to my situation. Looking at difficult life events from a new, different perspective slowly gave me the beginnings of a new outlook. There were essays, talks and poems, incorporating relevant craft projects. **It was also helpful hearing other people's stories, I gained the strength to**

see that I could survive and go forward with my life. The support and kindness given to me by the group meant so much that I began to look forward to our weekly meetings and came away just that bit stronger every time.

I found being at home, alone, very difficult and happened to come across a job online that would possibly suit my situation. Had it not been for Peaced Together, I know for sure I would not have had the confidence to apply. I was offered a post!

It is still very early days and I am finding my way in this new life – I often have very difficult and distressing days. **But I now have purpose with a new job, a new outlook the course has given me and lovely friends I met there. Peaced Together will always be very special to me, because, in many ways, it saved me."**

"I was on the first course to be run in Abridge. When I was invited I was just coming out of a bout of depression and thought, "That's the last thing I need to do – arts and crafts are not my thing!" But the course leader was very persuasive and I turned up along with three others, one of whom I knew and two I had never met before.

By the end of the first evening I knew that I had made two new friends. We were already able to encourage each other and listen to each other's stories – and in my case accept help from all of them.

A few weeks later my depression had gone completely. I had made my first-ever cushion and with help had even used a sewing machine! I was very proud of my treasure box.

It did not make me rush into making needlework or art work my new hobby but **Peaced Together did make me realise that doing things as a group and accepting each other's encouragement and help makes life so much better.** So I say thank you to God for the way in which all of them helped me to find joy again. It was great!"



Stories from Peaced Together

"I spent most of the ten years before joining Peaced Together unemployed due to ill health, and most of that time unable to get out and about without someone to help me. This was very isolating and my confidence in being able to meet people or join things had shrunk with every year that passed. **It felt like my life was slipping away and it certainly wasn't how I wanted it to be**, which was extremely sad.

Four months ago while playing around online I saw an advertisement for Peaced Together, and something made me enquire without really looking beyond the words women and craft. As the course started that week it seemed likely that it would be full, however by divine intervention there was a place free, and I took it. Once someone had been organised to take me there and bring me home I tried not to think about it until the day so that my anxiety didn't get the better of me.

On the first evening, not knowing what to expect was quite nerve wracking, but my friend said she would sit and wait for me after dropping me off so I knew there was an escape route! Naturally I assumed the other ladies were all leading 'normal' lives, and I was the odd one out. However, **even in the first week as we talked through the topic I realised that everyone was struggling in their own ways - with bereavement, health issues, family issues, financial issues, anxiety and depression.** In spite of this they all had such a lot to offer and they all wanted to have a greater, more peaceful, powerful sense of themselves.

By the time the ten weeks had finished I had made some new friends, had access to a great network of other local Peaced Together ladies through a closed Facebook group and was invited to regular social support craft meet-ups.

Doing Peaced Together helped me embrace the things that I am good at which led to me approach a local organisation about volunteering and using my strengths. They were really pleased to have me, and I love being useful again. I definitely wouldn't have had the courage to ask them for a position before doing the course."



Conclusion


We are excited to see the impact the Peaced Together course is making in the lives of many women and are committed to continue developing to ensure this impact continues. Having evaluated our data, we have now adapted our questionnaires that the women complete to simplify them (for example, not asking for information we will not use) and to include the SWEMWBS (Short Warrick & Edinburgh Mental Health and Well Being Scale) so that we can get a national comparative measure. We will also ensure that the data we collect is in line with the new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) that comes into force on the 25th of May 2018.

At our central hub at LifeLine Community Resources in Dagenham, Essex, we have piloted new material with children, teenagers, men and speakers of other languages, and we are seeking to share these materials nationally throughout 2018–2019, so that we can continue to grow our impact and see many people's lives be transformed.

We also continue to expand into different contexts, with our locations reaching survivors of domestic violence and sexual violence, women on probation, respite care for parents of children with special needs, mental health and many more.

Our vision continues to be **bringing hope, peace and purpose through the creative arts and reflective discussion to those who have experienced brokenness.**





**If you are interested in
becoming a licensed Peaced
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running Peaced Together in
your area, please get in touch!**

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