



**FLOURISHING  
LIVES**

**The Baring  
Foundation**

Evaluation of Flourishing Lives Reflective Practice Groups

Author: Nicola Naismith

Report Presentation 28 September 2022

# Introduction

In this presentation I will talk about:

- ▶ Methodology
- ▶ People involved
- ▶ Participant ambitions, impact and comments
- ▶ Partner organisation perspectives and comments
- ▶ Conclusions
- ▶ Recommendations

It's useful to be clear about who I am referring to throughout this presentation:

- ▶ **Facilitators** are the people who were responsible for holding the space for the Reflective Practice Groups.
- ▶ **Participants** are the people who attended the Reflective Practice Groups. They could be freelance creative practitioners working for an organisation, volunteers, and/or the teams who work in those organisations.
- ▶ **The group** is the Reflective Practice Group.
- ▶ **Partner organisations** are the 12 independent organisations to whom Flourishing Lives delegated the process of recruiting participants to the Reflective Practice Groups.

Reflective Practice Group(s): RPG / RPGs

Images and graphs: taken from the full report

# Methodology

A combination of quantitative and qualitative research and evaluation methods

- ▶ Desk based research
- ▶ Two conversations with the RPG Facilitators
- ▶ Baseline and endline questionnaires for the RPG participants
- ▶ Two focus groups with RPG participants
- ▶ Survey to organisational partners

# People Involved

The RPGs in this evaluation were initiated and managed by Flourishing Lives

- ▶ 71 participants across 12 individual groups each meeting 3 times
- ▶ 12 organisations across a wide range of art forms and focus
- ▶ Funded by The Baring Foundation

# Reflective Practice: principles and uses

## Reflective practice:

- ▶ Make illuminative sense of practice
- ▶ Differentiate between 1 years experience repeated 20 times, and 20 years experience built from sustained enquiry, interrogation and development.
- ▶ Provide space for deep thinking, evaluating and developing practice
- ▶ Consider future actions
- ▶ Think before, during and after practice

## Groups:

- ▶ Reduce isolation
- ▶ Offer different perspectives
- ▶ Develop understanding of practice
- ▶ Help generate new ideas
- ▶ Provide a space to process emotions
- ▶ Question assumptions
- ▶ Help with stress

# Participant ambitions and impact



Figure 4: Participant survey responses (frequent words): What do you hope to gain from being part of a Reflective Practice Group?

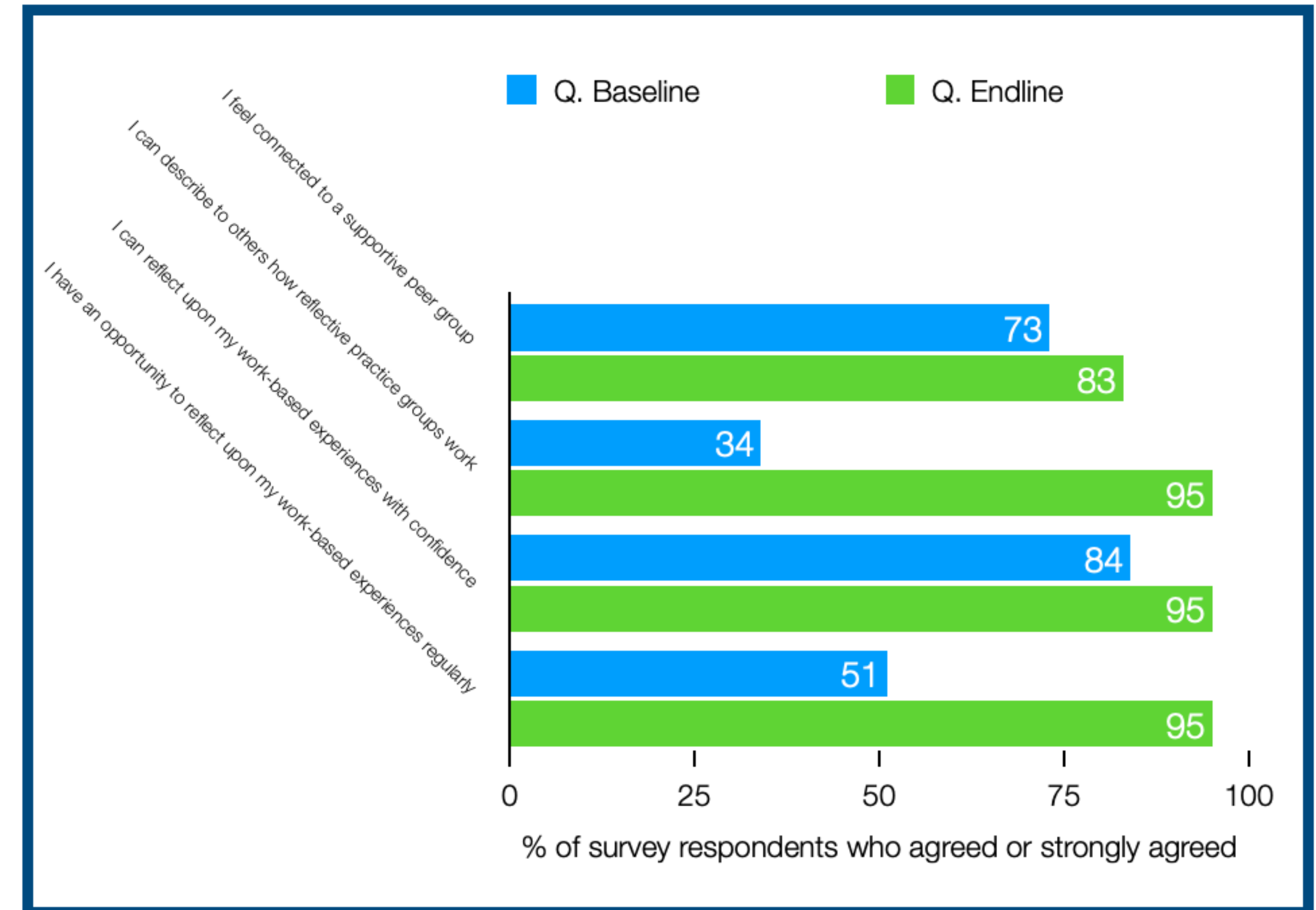


Figure 5: Participant survey responses: Baseline and endline data comparison across 4 core questions

# Participant comments

## Benefits, challenges and developmental

### Benefits:

- ▶ Sharing situations from work
- ▶ Feeling more connected to a diverse network of colleagues.
- ▶ Greater confidence
- ▶ Managing difficulties
- ▶ A sense of togetherness which reduced feelings of isolation
- ▶ Positive change in team dynamics
- ▶ Knowing colleagues a little better
- ▶ Take time out and take a step back
- ▶ Individuals felt heard, seen and understood.

### Challenges:

- ▶ Desire for more structured exercises
- ▶ Duration of the work was highlighted
- ▶ Fear that things shared and learned may not be put into practice

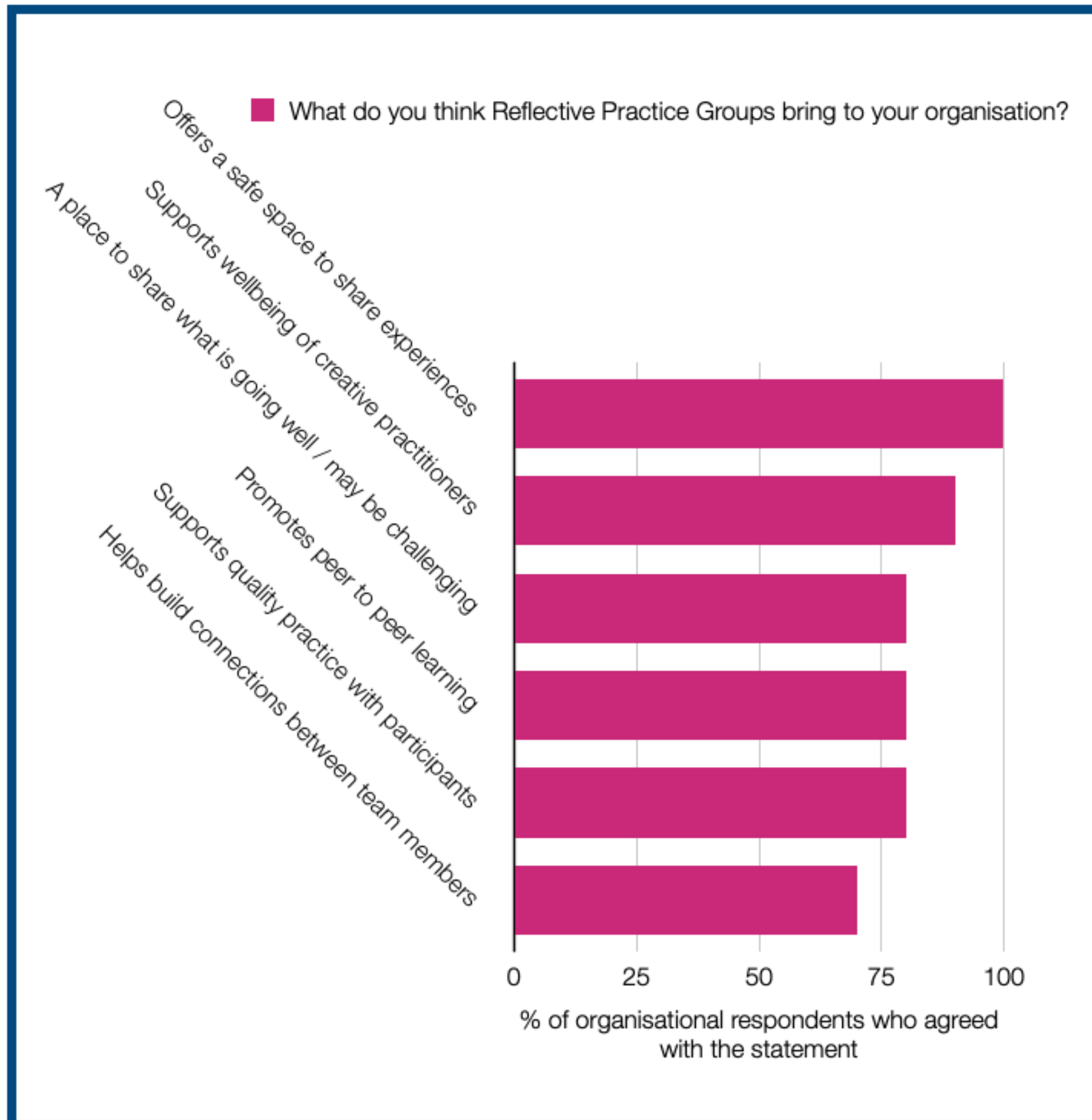
### Developmental:

- ▶ Communicate ambitions for change
- ▶ Integrating what has been experienced
- ▶ Overall sense that it's OK to fail
- ▶ Intent on trying to separate work and home
- ▶ Importance of taking time to reflect
- ▶ Advocate for reflection time
- ▶ How evaluation processes could expand.

# Participant focus groups

- ▶ Overwhelmingly there was appreciation for the opportunity to reflect in a very safe space, and one where empathy was promoted.
- ▶ Participants were reminded why they do what they do: the purpose of the work and sense of pride
- ▶ Those newer to this area of work felt grateful for the tips and approaches suggested by others whilst the space also allowed more experienced participants to reflect on prior professional experience and bring it to the fore
- ▶ There were increased levels of confidence, and the groups were seen as a place for moral support
- ▶ There was a desire for greater attendance when groups were operating with two people, but also an appreciation of the smaller groups of four which allowed dialogue to go deeper and be more extensive
- ▶ Pace was also mentioned: not packing in too much meant there was enough space to consider things meaningfully and participants learnt new skills from the way the facilitators ran the sessions and held the space - described as artful and with kindness, which in turn promoted kindness between the group participants.

# Partner organisation perspectives



- ▶ There was complete agreement about RPGs being safe spaces to share experiences (100%)
- ▶ For each subsequent question there was 70% or above agreement with statements concerning what RPGs bring:
  - ▶ Supports wellbeing
  - ▶ A place to share what is going well / may be challenging
  - ▶ Promoting peer to peer learning
  - ▶ Supports quality practice with participants
  - ▶ Helps to build connections between team members.
- ▶ 90% said they would consider allocating funds to support future groups
- ▶ 90% thought it was beneficial that the RPGs were run independently of their organisational structure

Figure 6: Organisational perspectives survey responses



# Partner organisation comments

## Benefits, challenges and developmental

### Benefits:

- ▶ Space to untangle knots
- ▶ Generate understanding
- ▶ Helpful to have an external facilitator
- ▶ Appreciation of the opportunity
- ▶ Share experiences outside of organisational structures
- ▶ Opportunity to deeply explore the work and the impact it can have
- ▶ Important nature of this kind of space in which to process experiences.

### Challenges

- ▶ Issue of allocating time to attend groups
- ▶ Keenness to attend at the outset, but as project work developed it was harder to keep the space / prioritise sessions.
- ▶ Some participants had reported that the sessions were not so helpful for them
- ▶ Felt they had done this sort of thing before
- ▶ Didn't seem to be any progression
- ▶ Some team members in senior or supervisory roles didn't feel comfortable in the space.

### Developmental

- ▶ Formally split the purpose of sessions
- ▶ Good take up of the RPG as they already had an established culture of reflective and collaborative learning
- ▶ Keenness to develop a more clinical element
- ▶ Interest in being part of the conversation about how this work develops in the future
- ▶ The need to make space for reflection and wellbeing
- ▶ Look at embedding it within projects.

# Conclusions

- ▶ The research evidence base for the effectiveness of Reflective Practice shows a range of interconnected benefits including providing space for deep thinking, preventing stagnation, promoting self-awareness and constructing professional knowledge.
- ▶ These benefits and others have been indicated across this evaluation.
- ▶ The key condition for effective RPGs, and on which all else builds, is that of a safe space in which to reflect - which is established by working with highly skilled and experienced facilitators.

- ▶ Over half of participants had not attended a group before, so this initiative has reached individuals new to this way of reflecting, which is key to supporting the sector.
- ▶ The ambitions of the participants before starting the group were proactive, and this indicates a willingness to engage in the process.
- ▶ After the three sessions participants reported a range of benefits with some reporting a small number of challenges.
- ▶ Both organisations and participants shared insights and ideas about how groups could operate, indicating stakeholders feel invested in the development of future iterations.

# Recommendations

Accessing arts funding has always been challenging, and is even more so given recent events. However it is important to remember the foundations of arts and health, and participatory arts provision - freelance creative practitioners and organisational teams. Support for their wellbeing is paramount, both in their own terms and in relation to working with clients. To support the sector and the individuals who work within it, it is recommended:

Allocating further financial resources for Reflective Practice Groups so a greater number of people have access. This could be via fundraising, embedding the cost in grant applications for arts and health projects, or through the provision of dedicated funds to a suitably experienced external provider.

Prioritising the conditions for good attendance: the importance of 'free at the point of access' must be maintained and complemented with paid time to participate, either via organisations or through the provision of bursary funding or similar to ensure equity of access.

Supporting the connections between Reflective Practice Group participants - on completion of the RPG - via the formulation of a participant-led, organisationally-supported alumni for ongoing engagement with the work and each other.