

Outcomes and benefits of supported self-management for those living with chronic pain and the added value learning experience within multi-disciplinary working for students

Introduction

This paper explores the benefits of a self-management intervention for those living with chronic pain in the community of Bradford. This project, in collaboration with Bradford University pioneered a new approach in the self-management of chronic pain, providing a community-based group within a university environment. As far as we are aware, this is a world first.

Pain Association Scotland is a national charity and delivers professionally-led supported self management education and training providing key coping strategies and helping people explore new ways forward leading to an improved quality of life. These groups have enabled chronic pain sufferers to make changes to their everyday lives in a positive and practical way, resulting in improved levels of coping and wellbeing.

Pain is not just pain. It is a complex experience that affects people and not just bits of bodies. Anything that affects you affects pain and anything that affects pain affects you. Whatever pain is or isn't, it is the experience of living with it that counts. Anything we can do to improve life will improve pain in one way or another." 1

The project had the following aims:

- To help people in the community (including university staff) with chronic pain and long-term conditions including long covid, by providing professionally led, supported self-management sessions.
- To provide students with a practical experience of therapeutic group work combined with a reflective seminar. This was a theory in to practice experience and as way of giving students a vocationally relevant qualification.
- To provide a practical person-centered bio-psycho-social approach that was of interest to all disciplines.



Methodology

The project consisted of a two hour professionally-led group session which would be observed by students.

The group sessions examined classic self-management topics including: Understanding pain, stress, anxiety, emotions, pacing, acceptance, flare up, confidence, problem solving, changing habits, communication. These were delivered in a lively interactive co-creative way.

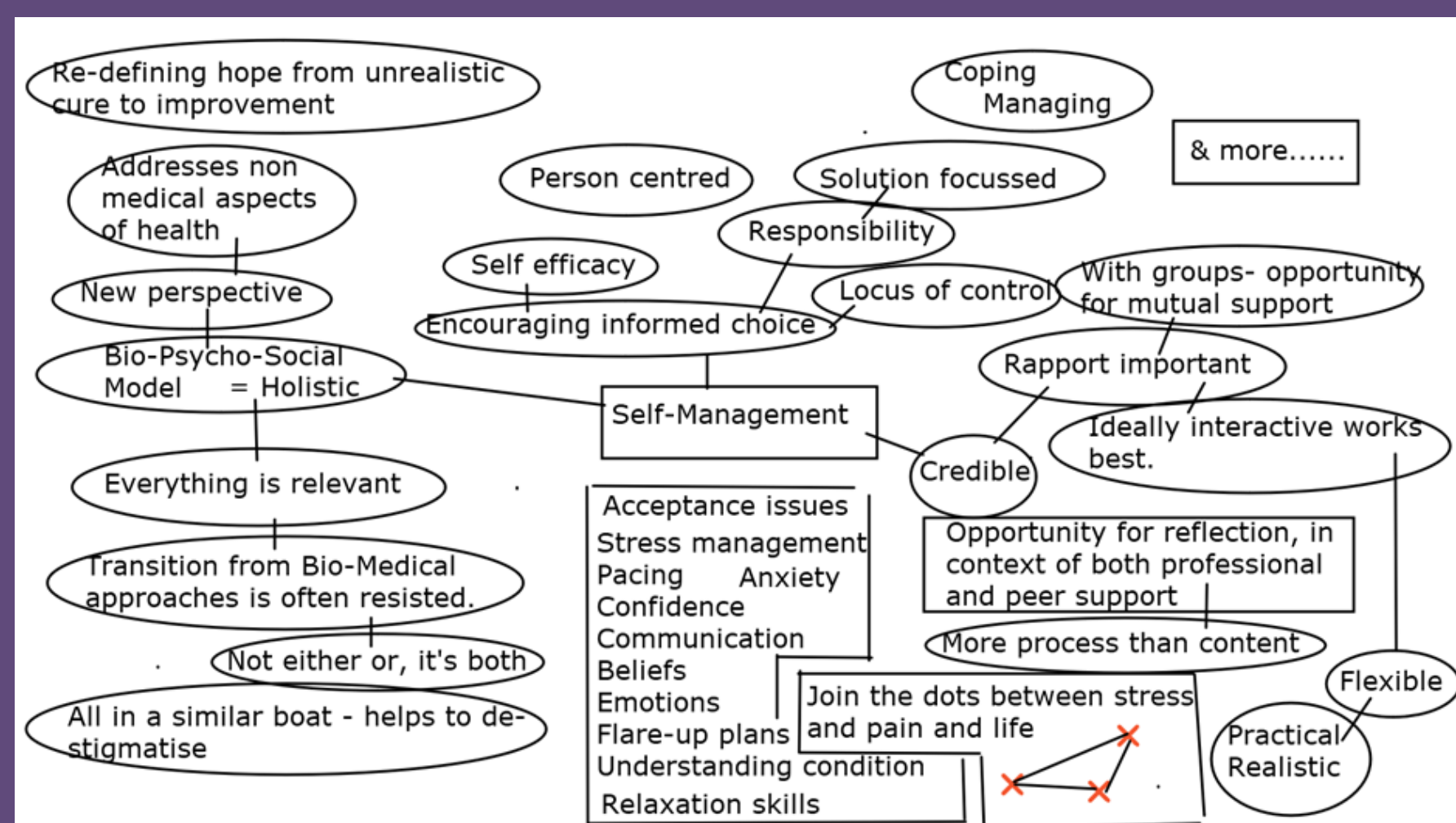
Following the group session, a seminar was given to students who had observed the group session. Topics and themes were discussed, and links were made to their studies. Both undergraduate and post graduate students attended.

Experience

Initially there was considerable interest from both psychology and physiotherapy, but ultimately funding meant that the project was purely for psychology students.

A cohesive group formed quickly with new people coming every month. Members came from both the community and the University and were representative of the diverse ethnicity of the Bradford area. Attempts were made to link to existing NHS and local community services.

In the early stages it became very clear that was better to have students take part in sessions rather than passively observe. This was a welcome development, and the group members were supportive of the students and pleased that they were interested.



The group quickly became self-supporting and engaged with the topics with enthusiasm. And good therapeutic relationship quickly developed between the group and the person leading it.

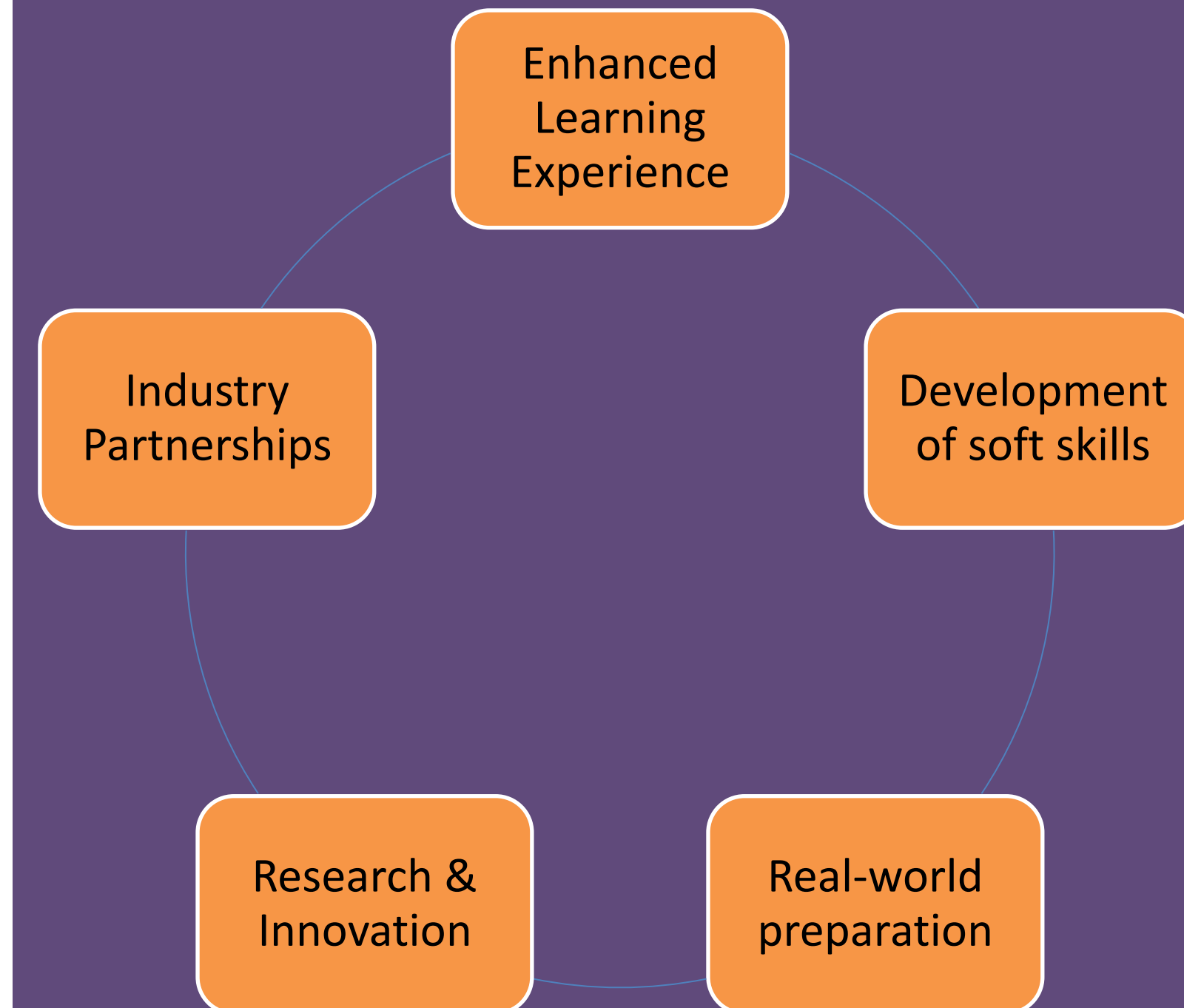
Rather than rigidly follow a set topic, the group preferred to work flexibly and look at whatever came up, this kept everyone interested and sessions relevant to individual needs at the time.

It meant that several topics were often merged in to each other and covered in ways that were relevant to peoples' issues at the time.

Students attended in different ways. Some came for the 3 x 2 hour sessions required for their certification whereas some others, especially MSc students were especially interested and attended most sessions.

Results

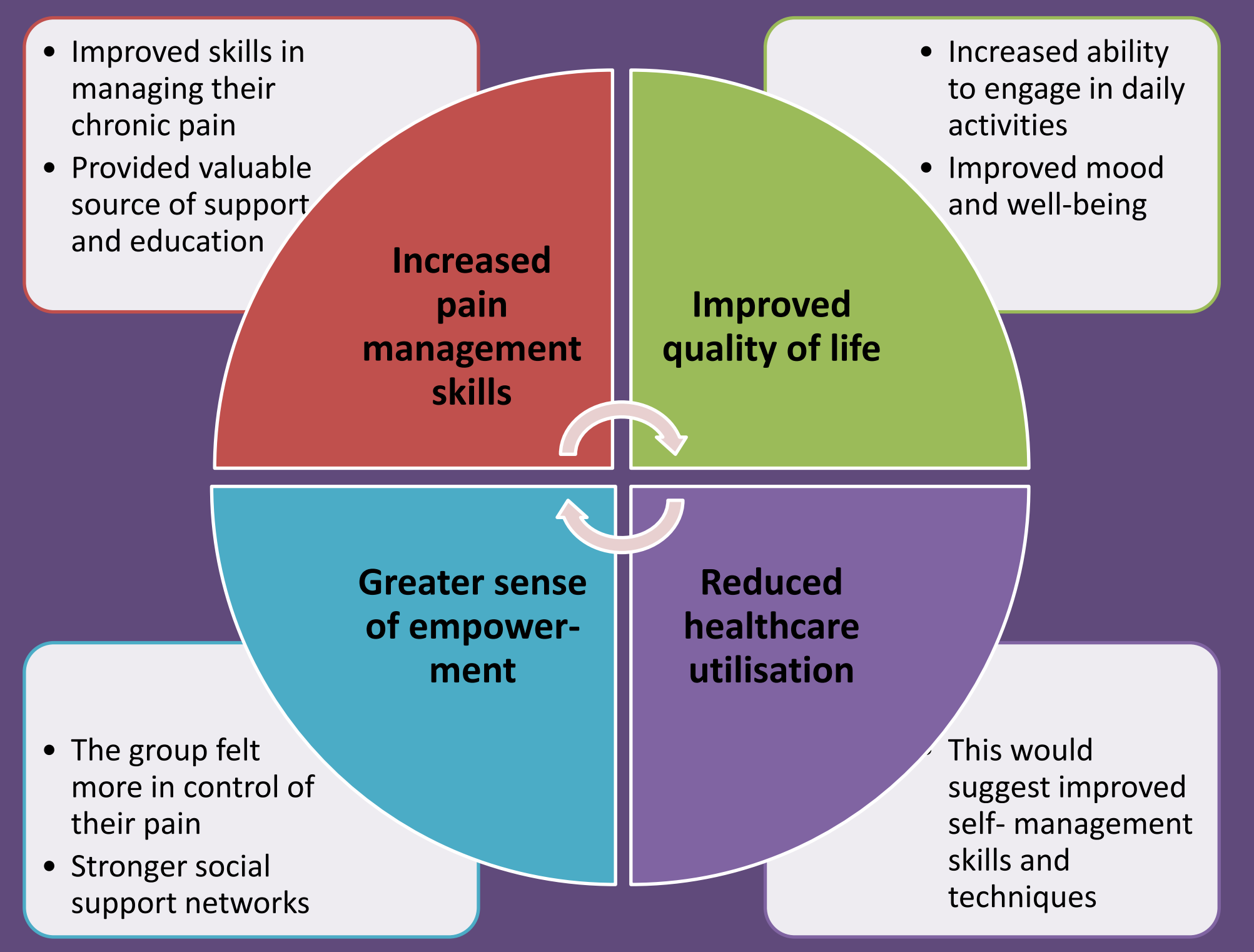
Student Feedback



This is so special to me, it's the only place I feel truly understood

I love the way we can talk things through back and forth....it's different to normal lectures

Group participant Feedback



Scan the code below to see the video



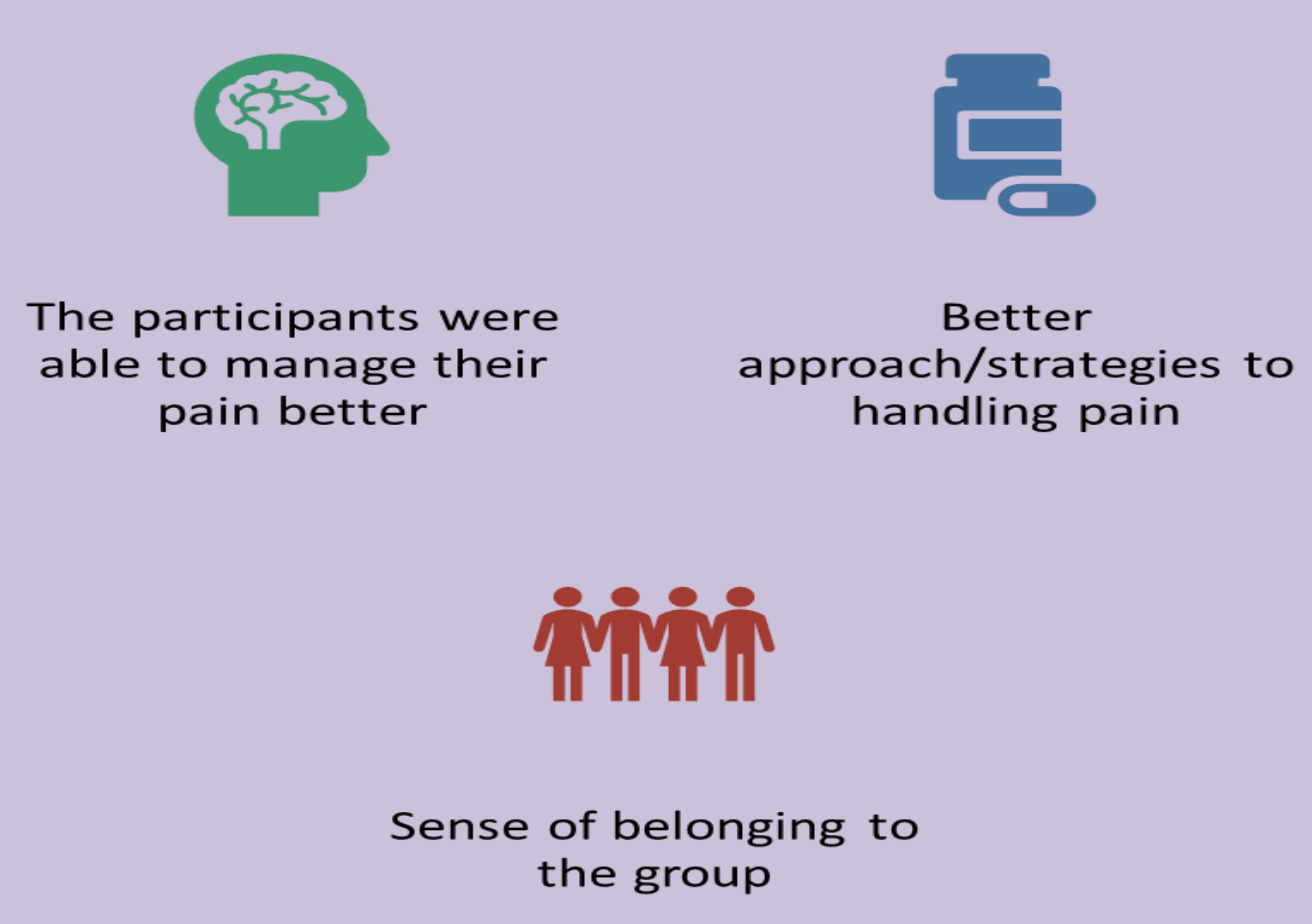
Conclusion

The project was successful in delivering a community group allied to a powerful student experience.

Members from the community gained support and improved their health and well-being and benefitted from being able to highlight to future healthcare professionals the issues chronic pain patients live with on a daily basis.

Students gained valuable practical insights and understanding and able to experience real-life scenarios. In addition to this, they were able to learn the practical elements of the theory.

The University benefitted by giving back to the community as well as providing students with the extra-curricular practical based learning and development.



References

1 Sizer, P 2019 - Chronic Pain the drug free way. Sheldon Press an imprint of John Murray Press. ISBN 978-1-847-09479-7