



## The Women's Centre Programme, Thematic Summary: Issue 6 | July 2020

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# CO-PRODUCING A COMMUNITY-LED, INCLUSIVE WOMEN'S SPACE: WOMEN SUPPORTING WOMEN

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the sixth, and final, in a series of thematic summaries in which we share what we have heard and learnt from the people that have taken part in our longitudinal, multi-site study into The Robertson Trust's [Women's Centre Programme](#). The Women's Spaces, and this programme of research into their design, development and delivery, were commissioned and funded by The Robertson Trust. This particular thematic summary builds on our second thematic summary which reflected on the [first year of the design phase in the development of Kairos](#). The current issue is designed to capture Kairos' evolution, development and impacts in the period thereafter, from July 2018-July 2020, capturing the phases of re-development and early processes of delivery. In so doing, it provides an overview of the approach taken in Kairos, which is both community-led and women-centred. Thereafter, we outline the mechanisms of governance and research participants' perceptions of influence, and engage with questions of leadership in community-led projects, prior to discussing the dynamics and effects of participation. This thematic summary concludes with a comprehensive summary of the lessons learned across the programme, in terms of what it takes to establish a project of this nature. An overview of the journey of Kairos from its inception, and the approach taken in Kairos is provided in Appendix 1.

## HEADLINE FINDINGS

### APPROACH TAKEN

- Kairos, a project within Active Communities, is a community-led and women-centred space for all women and non-binary persons in Renfrewshire.
- It is an open, dynamic, and collaborative space that is welcoming, accepting and non-judgemental; a space in which kindness is not just a value, but a structuring principle.
- Kairos represents an important example of diverse and differently situated women from the community, coming together to co-produce an inclusive space to support all women and non-binary persons to achieve their potential through opportunities for personal development, collective action and mutual support.
- To build a community-led, inclusive women-centred space, means recognising that different women need to be engaged and included differently, and this implies the need for a continuum, or variety, of opportunities for participation, alongside continuing consultation, and reflection, and an openness to change.
- While Kairos supports vulnerable women, rather than targeting women whose experience meet certain 'vulnerability' criteria, it is inclusive and it is for every woman and non-binary person, a place

in which they can come together, rather than a space that people need to go to when something is wrong.

### **GOVERNANCE, INFLUENCE AND VOICE**

- Active Communities, the host organisation, played a crucial role in supporting the establishment of Kairos, sharing their multiple networks and connections, drawing on their standing in, and their knowledge and understanding of, the local community.
- Ambiguities surrounding the longer-term relationship between the host organisation and the developing project being supported can, however, generate tensions, where, in a context of limited resources, the developing project may become a competitor for future funding.
- The role of the host organisation therefore needs to be clear from the outset and throughout, as does their relationship to the project they are supporting.
- Coproducing an inclusive, community-led space requires the creation of multiple and varied opportunities for participation, influence and voice, and a commitment to continual consultation, collaboration and reflection.
- Reflecting this, many participants choose to transition into volunteer roles, and this is supported by an intensive training programme, facilitating individual development, and contributing to community capacity building.
- While being led by women, there was consensus that a space of this nature requires leadership and paid staff to ensure that it is community-led, and that it remains a safe and inclusive, woman-centred space.
- Leadership in this context necessitates sector specific expertise and experience.
- It also requires a leader who women can identify and relate to, who can act with authority, accountability and take responsibility while also diffusing leadership, sharing responsibility, building capacity and supporting connections between those involved.

### **THE DYNAMICS AND EFFECTS OF PARTICIPATION**

- A diverse range of women are represented in Kairos, both in relation to demographic and experiential diversity.
- While trans-women and non-binary persons, women of colour and of different religious persuasions, social circumstances and ages, as well as women with mental health, learning difficulties and additional support needs are involved in Kairos, Kairos continue to consult and encourage participation from the multitude of women across Renfrewshire, to ensure they are represented and have the opportunity to engage on 'an every-day level'.
- Different women use the space differently, and participation takes both physical and virtual forms. Differences in how women participate tends to reflect the diversity of reasons for their involvement.
- Reasons for getting and staying involved in Kairos vary, but include the nature and effect of the interactions that characterise the space, underpinned by a culture of unconditional acceptance and non-judgementalism. Women also value, and derive benefits from, the opportunity to make a contribution to the wellbeing of other women, and to co-produce a space that makes a tangible difference to women's lives.
- Participation in Kairos has generated a range of outcomes for those involved including engendering a sense of personal fulfilment, of self-worth, of purpose, and of belonging and kinship. It has enhanced social participation and extended women's social networks, and has supported processes

of personal change and development. In addition to supporting learning and the development of new skills, it has also given women new insights into, and understanding of, themselves and others.

## INTRODUCTION

The Women's Centre Programme was initially developed to demonstrate how a gender specific, community-led approach can support women to achieve positive outcomes at an individual, organisational, and community level.

This involved establishing a physical space as a base for activity and adopting a whole community approach which draws on the existing assets and strengths within the community to support all women, and, in Kairos, this includes non-binary people, and those who are at risk of negative outcomes as a result of the specific social or structural issues they face.

The Robertson Trust's interest in improving well-being for women and in supporting the development of two Women's Centres was borne out of their involvement in the criminal justice sector. In particular, their interest was initially prompted by the [2012 Commission on Women Offenders](#).

The Commission recognised that there were a range of interrelated factors which have a specific impact on women involved in the criminal justice system and recommended that Women's Centres were established '*for women offenders to enable them to access a consistent range of services to reduce reoffending and bring about behavioural change*'.

The Robertson Trust then conducted research into existing women's centres in England, and Northern Ireland. They found that, whilst a joined up model of delivery could support women in the criminal justice system, there was a risk of further stigmatising them within their communities by adopting an approach that focussed on their offending. It was suggested that a more holistic approach, which provided support to women 'experiencing tough times' within a wider community setting could provide better results.

From the research, it was proposed that The Robertson Trust support the development of two physical "women's spaces", one in a rural location, and one in an urban location, which would generate learning and provide evidence of the experiences, impacts and effects of community-led, co-productive approaches to engaging and supporting women and girls. The Robertson Trust also provided support to one existing person-centred organisation to develop a women's space. You can find out more about the Women's Centre Programme in our first thematic summary, '[Introducing the Women's Centre Programme](#)' which includes details of who is involved, the intended outcomes of the programme, and the critical factors that increase the likelihood of success. Two further thematic summaries were published in 2018; our second thematic summary explored the learning from the [early phases of design and development of Kairos](#), and our third thematic summary reflected on both [processes of delivery and dynamics of participation in Heart and Soul](#), Cumnock. In 2019, we produced two further thematic summaries: the fourth thematic summary addressed [the development of the women's space within the pre-existing community-led organisation, 'Lochaber Hope'](#), in Fort William; the fifth thematic summary was designed to capture the transition from [Heart and Soul \(as documented in Issue 3\) to Heart and Soul Hub](#). As noted above, this final thematic summary in the series captures the reconceptualization,

processes of re-development and early stages of the delivery of Kairos as a community-led space for women and non-binary people.

## Key Findings

### 1. ABOUT KAIROS: AN OVERVIEW OF THE APPROACH TAKEN

#### Summary

- Kairos, a project within Active Communities, is a community-led and women-centred space for all women and non-binary persons in Renfrewshire.
- It is an open, dynamic, value-led and collaborative space that is welcoming, accepting and non-judgemental; a space in which kindness is not just a value, but a structuring principle.
- Kairos represents an important example of diverse and differently situated women from the community, coming together to co-produce an inclusive space to support all women and non-binary persons to achieve their potential through opportunities for personal development, collective action and mutual support.
- Different women need to be engaged and included differently, and this implies the need for a continuum, or variety, of opportunities for participation, alongside continuing consultation, and reflection, and an openness to change.
- While Kairos supports vulnerable women, rather than targeting women whose experience meet certain 'vulnerability' criteria, it is inclusive and it is for every woman and non-binary person, a place in which they can come together, rather than a space that people need to go to when something is wrong.

Kairos is community-led and women centred and can be further conceptualised as a form of collective co-production. Bovaird et al., (2016: 50) identify collective coproduction occurring -

*'Where co-productive activities result in collective goods whose benefits may be enjoyed by the entire community. Here, the benefits are collective but the inputs by citizens may be provided individually or together'.*

This requires a community-led approach, but, as we go on to discuss under the theme of 'Governance, Influence and Voice', being community-led does not negate a need for professional staff input and support, particularly in a project of this nature, and indeed, this is the very essence of co-production. Moreover, as Kairos recognise, being [women centred](#) is a way of working that is closely related to and consistent with both co-productive and community-led principles. It is a way of working that responds to women's and girls' needs, interests and priorities as they themselves identify and define them, which is inclusive of diversities among and between women and girls, and which actively seeks to include women and girls who are most marginalised in their communities.

*'If you want women to invest in the space, it means investing in them, it means being and feeling heard, it has to reflect them and be of them for women to identify with it, to feel it belongs to them and they belong to it' (Stakeholder).*

*'Having the community drive it forward is more powerful than an organisation having a little steering group and them offering activities to try and get people in' (Stakeholder).*

In realising this approach, Kairos has brought a diverse and growing group of women from the community together to coproduce an inclusive women's space in which 'women support women'. Fundamental to its continued development, and culture, has been the establishment of a core value base and a collective commitment to Kairos as an open, welcoming, and collaborative space, that is inclusive, accepting, non-judgemental and that recognises that everybody has views to express, skills to bring and a contribution to make.

The volunteers, staff and stakeholders we spoke to unequivocally described Kairos as warm, welcoming, inclusive, democratic, enabling and empowering; women report that they feel listened to, cared for, and valued and, for many, it has engendered a sense of purpose and generated a sense of belonging. Without exception, the women engaging with Kairos describe it as a safe space for all women and non-binary people to come to, to feel 'at home', as 'part of a family'; a relational space that enables them to open up; a space in which kindness is a structuring principle, where women help and support other women; but also as a space in which they can learn, they can try things that they might not try otherwise, meet people they might not otherwise meet, and that allows them to push their own boundaries and 'realise their potential'. Underpinning everything that takes place in Kairos are the core values of uncritical acceptance, inclusion, and non-judgmentalism. These values define the culture and shape the dynamics of interaction at Kairos and have informed the approach taken:

- **The Vision: Women supporting women to be the best they can be**
- **The Mission: A world where all women achieve their potential**
- **The Ethos: Love, Laughter, Friendship and Support**

Different women need to be engaged and included differently, and this implies the need for a continuum, or variety, of opportunities for participation, alongside continuing consultation, and reflection, and an openness to change. As such Kairos is continually evolving, and any description of what happens in Kairos must be understood as a snapshot taken at a given time. With that noted, at present, the kinds of opportunities available at Kairos include drop-in spaces for women to informally come together; focused discussion groups, 'Let's Talk', covering a range of topics; the creative café where women have the opportunity to share skills and try out a range of crafts; Kairos Kitchen with a focus on sharing world food recipes and ideas; as well as consciousness raising and direct action via the Equalities Collective, and an intensive training programme for volunteers. Kairos have also worked collaboratively with external projects such as Paisley Museum, on '[Our Museum Reimagined](#)' and Glasgow Women's Library on the project '[Making Her Mark](#)' which has included research into 'the lives of ordinary, working class women from history'. Across the women we spoke to, the personal development course, developed by the Project Manager, 'Beautiful Women, Beautiful Me' was considered particularly important. This is a value-led, consciousness-raising, personal development course with an emancipatory focus, which explores gender norms and how women are situated and socialised; perceptions of personal identities, concepts of resilience and experiences of overcoming adversity, drawing on self-experience. It challenges assumptions around various social issues to support the emergence of non-judgemental attitudes through the development of a greater understanding of and insight into the causes and consequences of such issues and it explores ideas of belonging and community, and of what makes a loving community. A further course has been developed and delivered entitled 'Fierce Women' focusing on women's rights and history.

*[Kairos is] a place where you can come and relax and come and learn, come and connect with other women, come and rediscover what you might want from your life. Also a place that's taking action, so not just a talking shop but somewhere where what we talk about leads to change. And somewhere really that is about informal education, training, learning, skilling up women and drawing on their strengths. So always asking that question, what do you like to do, what are your skills, what are your passions? And going with that in whatever direction it may take us (Manager).*

All of these activities and opportunities have been directly shaped by the interests of Kairos' women, and often led by volunteers, and participants, and while they are of value to the women in and of themselves, we learnt that it is in participating together in these activities and opportunities that women can engage in transformative learning<sup>1</sup>, share skills, offer mutual support, experience belonging, develop a sense of ownership and build a sense of community. Building on this, Kairos have avoided the label of a women's centre which, it is thought, can discourage participation and engagement due to connotations of need. Indeed, it was widely recognised by all those we spoke to that Kairos eschew all forms of labelling and categorisations of women, recognising that not only are 'we are all "vulnerable" at different points in our life' but that such classifications can be divisive, and create inequalities.

*'I have a real problem with the polarisation of you're a professional and you have lived experience when a professional can have lived experience and people with lived experience can also have professional experience, if that makes sense?' (Manager).*

Rather, working within a women-centred approach, Kairos '*looks at the whole woman and avoids compartmentalising ...this is a woman who has justice experience, this is a woman who has got an addiction. It's this is a woman and what's going on in her life and how can we support her in a way that she needs with the things that she's prioritising right now. So rather than us being the experts, we ...can guide women as an expert in their own experience'* (Manager), not least because 'lived experience', need or vulnerability is not always disclosed, visible or readily identifiable. Indeed, it was suggested that while a woman may have certain aspects of lived experience, '*that doesn't mean that's how I identify, and that I tell everyone about that'* (Manager). While, then, the women of Kairos support vulnerable women, rather than targeting women whose experience meet certain 'vulnerability' criteria, it is inclusive and it is for every woman and non-binary person, a place in which they can come together, rather than a space that people need to go to when something is wrong.

Relatedly, the people we spoke to articulated significant differences between Kairos and other organisations and groups, from the vantage point of both professional and personal experience. In Kairos, participation is not dictated by pre-defined criteria, nor is it time limited or subject to availability of places. Women in Kairos are free to engage how and when they want, and without any expectations in relation to who and how they should be, or what is required of them.

*You are who you are and it doesn't matter where you've been or what you've done, in my experience that does matter in other services. You're not judged at Kairos. Everyone is made to feel that they are important, that they matter and other services that I've used, you are more of*

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<sup>1</sup> Transformative learning, as a theory, delineates the process of "perspective transformation" into three dimensions: psychological (changes in understanding of the self), convictional (revision of belief systems), and behavioral (changes in lifestyle) (Clark, 1991).

*a number. It's more like, you're in the door, get you sorted and get you back out. There's no caring or compassionate side to things (Staff).*

Moreover, in Kairos, women build multiple relationships characterised by reciprocity, solidarity and the mutual exchange of support, rather than developing a transactional relationship with an individual providing a service to them.

*'People want opportunities to be able to help other people and make a difference and I think that's one of the things that might be missing from lots of other spaces, that you come in to be helped, and people don't always want to be helped, they want to be able to make a difference to other people's lives' (Manager)*

Two volunteers described Kairos as 'a second home', with a further volunteer noting that Kairos is 'your own space', which they contrasted to attending a service or group where there are distinct differences between those providing a service or facilitating a group and those consuming it. Indeed, while participants and volunteers have benefited from their interactions with Kairos, so too have other women, whose relationship to, and reasons for interacting with, Kairos have been quite distinct. In essence, Kairos is about –

*'Offering a real and full experience for all women, so that, when they do come, they feel cared for, they can come to one to one support, they can come to a course, they can arrive in crisis and leave as a volunteer, so it offers more than just what an organisation might usually and you can stay connected with it...[Moreover] it's not just about the women that arrive seeking support, it's about women that arrive via other means that can get the support that they need from us and feel safe enough to do it [Manager].*

Critically, then, what sets Kairos apart is its value-driven culture, ethos, and the nature of support and breadth of opportunities for participation available, but also its governance modalities.

## **2. GOVERNANCE, INFLUENCE AND VOICE**

### **Summary**

- Active Communities, the host organisation, played a crucial role in supporting the establishment of Kairos, sharing their multiple networks and connections, drawing on their standing in, and their knowledge and understanding of, the local community.
- Ambiguities surrounding the longer-term relationship between the host organisation and the developing project being supported can, however, generate tensions, where, in a context of limited resources, the developing project may become a future competitor for funding.
- Coproducing an inclusive, community-led space requires the creation of multiple and varied opportunities for participation, influence and voice, and a commitment to continual consultation, collaboration and reflection.
- Reflecting this, many participants choose to transition into volunteer roles, and this is supported by an intensive training programme, facilitating individual development, and contributing to community capacity building.
- While being led by women, there was consensus that a space of this nature requires leadership and paid staff to ensure that it is community-led, and that it remains a safe and inclusive, woman-centred space.
- Leadership in this context necessitates sector specific expertise and experience.
- It also requires a leader who women can identify and relate to, who can act with authority, accountability and take responsibility while also diffusing leadership, sharing responsibility, building capacity and supporting connections between those involved.

In this section, we detail the governance arrangements underpinning, if not structuring, the operation of Kairos, commencing with a discussion of the role and contribution of Active Communities, the host organisation within which Kairos is situated, prior to outlining the various mechanism through which women can, and do, shape and influence the design, development and delivery of Kairos and women's perceptions of influence and voice in these processes. We conclude this section with a discussion of the place of, and need for, leadership and paid staff in a community-led project of this nature.

## 2.1 The Role and Contribution of the Host Organisation

The role of the host organisation needs to be clear from the outset and throughout, as does their relationship to the project they are supporting. Uncertainties in relation to both the role of, and longer term relationship between, the host organisation and the initiative or project being developed can breed tensions and distrust. Indeed, the longer term role of, and relationship to, Kairos was ambiguous in the early phases of the design and development of Kairos, and this has been an area of learning for all involved.

*'At one point [it was thought] that Kairos might eventually go separate and be its own organisation...the more [Active Communities] got involved, that was going to cause a lot of issues I think for Active Communities as the host organisation...so now Kairos is very much part of Active Communities...I think having a host organisation where the project would eventually go independent...would be quite difficult...I think it would have caused issues with competition between the two' (Stakeholder).*

One of the key themes emerging from our interviews with stakeholders and staff was the 'crucial' contribution that Active Communities made to the establishment of Kairos, due to their reputation across professional and community groupings, their multiple connections and networks, and their knowledge and understanding of the local community, and experience in working with diverse groups. Moreover, some commented on the alignment between their approaches and values.

*'They have been so open with their networks and partnerships and that has been crucial for Kairos' development because they are so embedded within Renfrewshire...within that community...and really understand the local community with all its nuances...and they have that respect' (Stakeholder).*

*'I think [Active Communities]' reputation and trust from the community has helped with getting all the partners involved and encouraged people to get involved with Kairos'. (Stakeholder).*

Indeed, while in the early stages, some of the women involved in Active Communities, engaged in and supported Kairos, so women involved in Kairos are similarly benefiting from involvement and participation in other Active Communities projects. A Kairos Development Team member is also represented on Active Communities' board, and Kairos staff attend Active Communities' team meetings. While Active Communities have been a significant influence on the development and establishment of Kairos, there is increasing evidence of mutual influence, the sharing of expertise, and the reciprocal exchange of support between the two:

*'There's a bit now of [Active Communities] learning from the way Kairos is working as well, which is good' (Stakeholder).*



*'We tell women all about Kairos but we tell them all about Active Communities and what they do as well...like if someone said, do you do exercise classes, well Active Communities do these kind of things, so they do the memory café and the mindfulness courses, the walking groups, jogging buddies, so... we'll say you've got all that as well' (Staff).*

Together, then, while different in focus, this partnership means that Active Communities and Kairos can provide wide ranging opportunities for women.

## **2.2 Mechanisms of Coproduction**

In addition to the governance role of Active Communities, there are multiple structures or opportunities for women, volunteers, staff and stakeholders to shape the ongoing development and delivery of Kairos. Through the period of Kairos' early development, the *Advisory Group* played a key role in enabling stakeholder participation and partnership in the developmental phase. At the same time, the Manager of Kairos established the *Development Team*, comprising volunteers tasked with the strategic and operational development of Kairos. Running alongside this is the *Equalities Collective* who are the direct action, campaigning, or activist arm of Kairos. Kairos also have a substantive cohort of *volunteers*, 'who are on the ground supporting women and they meet regularly to do a whole host of different things, from plan events to organise the delivery, to fundraising' (Manager). There are also a range of opportunities for *non-volunteering participants* to have their say. Moreover, Kairos have widely and regularly consulted the *non-participating local community of women*. In what follows, we share the descriptions provided to us as to how each of these mechanisms operate in terms of shaping the development and delivery of Kairos, and women's experiences of their participation in them. We then engage with our research participants' understanding of the role and contribution of staff, whether and why leadership, of a particular form, is required in a project of this nature, how it works, and what it looks like

### **Advisory Group**

During the developmental stages, Kairos benefited from an Advisory Group comprised of a range of leaders (stakeholders) across different sectors in the area.

*'[The Advisory Group] was set up to help us get everything in place going forward...partners looked at what Kairos were delivering and what was coming in from the Development Team and consultation with the women to make sure there is no duplication' (Stakeholder).*

The role of the advisory group related to both information sharing and strategic development but, as Kairos moved into the delivery phase, and became more established, so the need for regular meetings with those comprising the Advisory Group lessened as the need for regular information-sharing meetings became less necessary. At the time of interviewing, Active Communities were pursuing a strategic partnership agreement, with Renfrewshire Council, which would include the identification *'of key people at the council that we link with, so if there were any issues or anything we needed help with, then we would have someone to go to' (Stakeholder).*

### **The Development Team**

The Development Team are a closed group comprised of 12 volunteers who initially met on a monthly basis, and now meet bi-monthly. The Development Team get together to plan out the quarter's

activities, and latterly, longer term strategic plans, based on their consultation with other groups and women within Kairos.

*[They are] 'the group of people who've been taking decisions about how Kairos is going to develop, what activities they are going to do, how we're going to organise and look at the aims and ethos of it as well...thinking of short and long term aims of development planning for any activities we've been doing' (Volunteer).*

One Development Team member described their experience of these meetings as interactive and collaborative: *'we're never sitting round a table for long. Within 15 minutes, you're into groups working out, chunking up a challenge or issue' (Volunteer).*

### **The Equalities Collective**

The Equalities Collective are an open group, comprising 13 volunteers and participants. This is a diverse group, including women who work during the week and women from outside of the area. Described as an activist or campaigning group, one of their most publicised areas of work is in relation to their research into and subsequent awareness raising public campaign highlighting the phenomenon of women's ['invisible work'](#). For Kairos,

*'They're quite a unique and distinct group because they're focusing on a particular thing that's quite separate to everything else that's happening within Kairos, although it's linked...they're the people that are making change' (Manager).*

### **The Volunteers**

A *significant* number of participants transition from participation into volunteering, and some are a participant on one day and a volunteer on another day.

Volunteers generally lead on or offer support in workshops and activities, and there are two core roles within this: supporter or welcomer. The 'supporter' will *'buddy up with other women that need additional support, so that might be we've got a blind volunteer who needs a buddy every week, so one of our other volunteers supports her to volunteer' (Manager)*. The role of the 'welcomer' involves *'sitting and mingling with women, making sure everyone's included or welcoming women on the door and making teas and coffees and things like that' (Manager)*.

When we asked stakeholders, staff and volunteers why participating women wanted to get more involved in the form of volunteering, a range of reasons were identified. Some of these reasons referred to the women's sense of ownership of, responsibility for and belonging to Kairos, which incentivised them to 'give back'; and a sense of empowerment as an outcome of their participation which seems to convey to the women transitioning into volunteering roles that they have a contribution to make, and that they can make a difference, and can help in the way they themselves have been helped.

*'They believe in it...in what it stands for and what it can go on to do...they're all part of it, so it means something to them' (Stakeholder).*

*'Because they feel like they are a part of something and they want to be treated with respect and love. They feel as if they matter, so they want to give back' (Staff).*

One volunteer attributed this phenomenon to '*picking up on the collective responsibility*', suggesting that Kairos' culture of support and solidarity is contagious, which two volunteers specifically attributed to their participation on *Beautiful Women, Beautiful Me*, which seems to have the effect of empowering women, and connecting women together, such that they feel motivated to support other women to achieve the same outcomes.

*'For me, it was going through the Beautiful Women, Beautiful Me course...I think that journey of exploring what it is to be a woman...talking about our troubles, what got us there, our personal relationships and stuff, I think maybe moved us on to want to do things...when you finish these courses, you actually just want to send that out there...If I can get these benefits, how many others lives can it change. You grow a little strength there and when you feel like that you want to spread it...you want to take people's pain away' (Volunteer).*

For another, the broader culture and effects of participation in Kairos (discussed further below) engendered similar effects:

*'They've empowered them so volunteering is the next step and possibly after that is maybe getting a job' (Volunteer)*

Kairos have established a large cohort of volunteers, capped at 25, and like the Development Team, have gradually taken on more responsibility. They are supported by frequent check-ins and volunteer meetings in which they '*bring up any issues*' (Volunteer), plan activities, and reflect on how things are going. While mutual support and mutual helping can be understood as a structuring principle in terms of the relational dynamics within Kairos, and the 'responsibility' of all who engage there, unlike participants, volunteering is a more formalised helping role than the more normative, organic mutual helping that characterises the culture of Kairos. That said, it was suggested that this, and the intensive training programme that volunteers participate in, was the principal distinction between participants and volunteers; not only were all volunteers at one time participants, and indeed one employee has transitioned from participant, to volunteer, to paid staff, but as observed by the manager, '*the way that most women participate is through voluntary work*' and, indeed, as we observe above, a noteworthy finding emerging from our own analysis of the data was the significant number of women transitioning from participation to volunteering.

*'The way that women participate most is through voluntary work and lots of people have commented on how our volunteers don't feel very different to our women...I think, well, that's the point. That is exactly the point of why we exist and the model that we're using is that there isn't any difference other than a vast amount of training and experience, there's no difference between a volunteer and a participant. Volunteers know that there's a set of boundaries and that they're not going to be pals with participants that come along but they're all women in the community, so they're all going to be equal and be able to support each other. And the volunteers are getting a lot from volunteering and being helped. I offer a lot of one to one support to the volunteers to help them volunteer well...there's something interesting for me about being able to really support people to volunteer well and realising that as even more significant sometimes than the support that we offer women coming through the door. That the support that we can offer a volunteer to volunteer well is life changing' (Manager).*

That support, in the form of training, includes participation in Active Communities' induction, and the more issue-based bespoke training programme developed at Kairos. Volunteers identified that they had

received training on a range of issues or skills-based approaches from leadership training, to listening skills, and safe talk, to training on autism awareness, domestic abuse, mental health and dementia, criminal justice, and suicide prevention. As noted, there are regular opportunities to participate in personal development courses such as Beautiful Women, Beautiful Me and Fierce Women. The importance of training for volunteers should not be, and has not been, underestimated, in terms of ensuring a value-driven ethos and culture (as elaborated above), and connecting that to norms of interaction, *how women should relate to one another*, and awareness raising, to ensure volunteers understand *'the issues that women might face when they come along'* (Manager), which *informs the nature of support they can offer*, and the limitations to that.

Moreover, we also learnt that investing in training is also a mechanism of investing in and conveying recognition of the contribution of volunteers, and this is reinforced other means such as the volunteer awards. However, it is also about skill development and building individual, and by implication, community capacity:

*'I think the fact that they have got all of that training hopefully encourages some of them to then think about employment and moving on' (Manager).*

#### **Participant and Non-Participant Consultation**

*'What will happen is we'll have certain volunteers, they'll be on duty that day and [staff and volunteers] mingle among them and see what they're doing and listen to what they are saying...ask did you enjoy that? Or is there anything that you would like to be doing? Because we want to hear what people want to do. It might be something we've not thought of. [Manager]*

The staff and volunteers we spoke to referred to a continuous process of consultation and reflection with women participating in workshops, groups and events. There is a graffiti board where people can write down ideas and a suggestion box to post proposals and provide general feedback, and there are also numerous informal opportunities for participants to share their views in the course of naturally occurring interactions. One staff member offered the following example of such interactions -

*'[Manager] might say at a drop-in ...if she's speaking to the whole room...any suggestion that anybody has, we're open to any suggestions' (Staff).*

Over the past three years, Kairos' volunteers and staff have continuously participated in considerable levels of community consultation with non-participating women in the community and wider stakeholders. This has ensured that it is not just those engaging with or participating in Kairos who shape the approach taken, but differently situated women from across the community more broadly.

*'They've done a lot of consultation. Although there's the core group...they've done a lot of consultation as well as online surveys and they've been out and gathered women's views. So it's not just based on those [participating] women's opinions, they've done a lot of community consultation' (Stakeholder).*

#### **Perceptions of influence, voice and ownership**

Across the volunteers we interviewed for this study, everyone affirmed that Kairos is led and shaped by the women who participate and/or volunteer there, and this was similarly commented on by both staff and stakeholder groups. In turn, volunteers were unable to identify any areas that they could not have

a say on. It was also noted that women experience a sense of shared commitment to each other and a sense of ownership towards Kairos. Correlatively, the volunteers we spoke to felt that they were able to exert an influence, to the extent that they felt inclined, on the development and delivery of Kairos and there was consensus that the voices of women participating and volunteering in Kairos are heard, and listened to.

*Well, you only have to see them when they got the unit and the amount of people that turned up to help paint it...I would say, there's definitely ownership of the project. As soon as the group got the unit, I mean, they found the workmen who could help with the flooring, putting in the new kitchen, getting furniture. All that was done within the group. They did fund-raising, bag-packing at the local supermarket, they had like a Just Giving page set up where local people donated as well. (Stakeholder).*

Similarly, yet more broadly, all the volunteers we interviewed felt that existing decision-making processes were inclusive, and therefore nobody had any suggestions as to how these might be improved to ensure that they were fully inclusive. This does not mean that everyone has the same opinion, or that everyone is always in agreement. Decision-making, and the resolution of differences, in Kairos reportedly occur through supportive conversations and discussion, and it appears to be a process of learning together, and a commitment to listening to each other, trying to understand each other's perspective and constructively challenging any assumptions that may emerge.

*'It's about trying to engage with people and say to them, well that's maybe the way you believe but try and think how it must be like for the other person, and try and just talk and understand where someone is coming from if they have got an issue, or maybe something has happened...and their understanding of it is one way but it's actually another way. So open communication is always going to be the key thing and understanding, sitting down and saying, well what do you think and getting their side of the story' (Staff).*

Where a consensus about a decision has not been reached, staff and volunteers have mentioned the use of a confidential ballot.

*'We put a voting system in place within the development team, so if there's a key decision to be made, we anonymously voted on that decision' (Manager).*

*'Sometimes it's a secret ballot...if there's been conflict and disagreement about things but generally people do come to a decision and people have been happy with that's the decision and we just go with that' (Volunteer).*

### **2.3 Leadership of a Community-led Space: The Role of Staff and Volunteers**

The initial idea at the inception of the project was that, over time, Kairos would be volunteer-led. Three years on, and with the experience of co-producing a community led women's space, we asked stakeholders, staff, and volunteers whether Kairos could or should be entirely volunteer-led, and what difference employing paid staff makes. There is of course a normative dimension to note here, which was highlighted by not only the manager, but three of the volunteers we spoke to. All four referred to the rights of women to be paid for the work they do, and how much of the work women do, and what they contribute, is undervalued, reflecting a focus of the work of Kairos' Equalities Collective. This has important implications for how we understand what a community-led women's space really means, and the role of volunteers and paid staff within that.

Interestingly everyone we spoke to identified the need for a Manager, for leadership, and commented on the value of paid staff, highlighting the nature of the space, and how professional leadership and paid staff facilitate, rather than negate, the community-led approach, and enables the continuation of Kairos as a safe space, informed by a women-centred practices.

Some people felt that leadership and paid staff were necessary, for reasons relating to the need for accountability, reliability, and continuity, to ensure that the space was run effectively. Recognising the burden that would otherwise fall on volunteers, some felt that relying on volunteers might perhaps be an imposition or obligation beyond what can be reasonably expected of people volunteering their time, who may have less time commitment than paid staff, and whose expertise and experience might differ from that required of paid staff, all of which they felt were required for the effective planning and organisation of workshops, groups and activities for those participating in Kairos.

*'Some people don't know if they're going to turn up on the day and that can be quite dangerous then if you've got no-one to keep control of what's going on in terms of keeping things running smoothly' (Volunteer).*

*'There is a permanency about it that people know there is always going to be [Manager] and the staff, there's always going to be one of us there, whereas if it was just volunteers. They can come and go, and there may be less continuity and structure' (Staff)*

*'You are relying on people to turn and volunteer. [Staff] do all the organising but they get paid so that's their job. I think you do need people paid to organise and run the workshops...have things in place for people who come to Kairos. I don't know if this particular project would be good just run by volunteers' (Volunteer).*

Beyond the planning and running of the space, and the efficiency and effectiveness of that, staff and volunteers identified the need for leadership, to ensure a value-driven vision, focus and culture. As the above volunteer implies, and as others identify below, this is particularly pertinent to a space of this nature, in terms of its aims, ethos and vision. One volunteer noted that the absence of such leadership, and the knowledge and experience that comes with it, could alter the relational dynamics, and thus affect the diversity of women engaging in Kairos, and in turn, its essence.

*'You need someone with that sort of feminist vision and who wants all women to participate because if you didn't have that, if you didn't have [manager] going back again and again to women and the justice system or people with mental health issues, you might end up with a women's guild or an art club or something so I don't think it would've represented so many different types of women' (Volunteer).*

Relatedly, the Manager noted that while an issue based collective of women, concerned with a shared cause, was unlikely to require professional leadership, the very essence, purpose and nature of Kairos did, which implies and reinforces the need for a co-productive element to the governance of community-led project of this nature 'for it to be community led', as the Manager explained.

*'I think you need someone that's committed to it full time and ...I think it's about defining what community led means. I think if it was issues based, if it was for a cause...or something had happened to women in the community and they got together to fight for that, it would be different. I think that wouldn't need a paid leader. But, because it's not issues based, it's a space, I think it needs someone to co-ordinate it that's got to be here because it's a thing that could*

*very easily fall by the wayside. I think it needs someone with experience and knowledge and a certain understanding of what it means to support people for it to be community led, if that makes sense... I'm not sure it would exist if there wasn't somebody in a leadership position that was being paid... I think that when you're just creating a space that there's not really any urgency, so it needs someone that can help organise it, that has to be there' (Manager).*

Other people, similarly, indicated that professional leadership and paid staff were necessary to ensuring the continuation of Kairos as a safe space and preserving its culture and ethos.

*'I think there always does need to be somebody there in the background in a paid capacity, a professional capacity, who's there to keep it a safe place.' (Stakeholder).*

*You need someone in authority there because what if something dramatic happens. Who would we turn to? We've all got our own problems you know? (Volunteer).*

The idea of keeping it a safe space is particularly important. It is inevitable that women will come to Kairos with different, pre-existing beliefs, values and attitudes that may not necessarily tend towards inclusion and acceptance; that may be judgemental, and influenced by societal stereotypes. Indeed, as we observe in the following section, many volunteers commented on the transformative impact that Kairos has had on their values, attitudes and beliefs, in terms of their understanding of and tolerance towards other women. If Kairos is to be for all women and non-binary persons, there is a need for leadership to ensure that, through training, awareness-raising courses and events, and informal interactions, the essence of Kairos as an inclusive and accepting relational space is sustained, by challenging preconceptions that women may hold towards or about other women, and by continuously raising awareness and re-affirming the importance of inclusion and equality.

Taking a more strategic but correlative stance on the contribution of paid staff to the diversity of women engaging in Kairos, and the sustainability, in terms of relevance, of Kairos over time, one volunteer commented that having paid staff would enable the expansion and diversification of what Kairos could offer and be, increasing their reach to more women with diverse interests, and in different ways. Another volunteer observed that this has already happened since the recruitment of three staff members, in the form of Kairos Kitchen and the development of a Recovery Space, but also in opportunities to access one-to-one support: *'because there is more of them, if you want to talk to anybody, you can take one to the side and just talk to them'* (Volunteer).

Given the significance of effective leadership, we identify some of the characteristics, skills and experience that our research with those involved identified as critical, while recognising that this is an area of continued learning.

### **Leadership skills:**

Kairos is community-led, but being women-centred it also needs to be value-led. Both staff and volunteers need clarity of focus, objectives and intended outcomes which implies not only the need for structure but the need for direction and, as part of that, leadership, which was confirmed by stakeholders, staff and volunteers alike. We asked all groups of research participants, what exhibiting leadership in a community-led initiative requires.

This included

**a) The ability to lead and engage in a way that enables a community-led, woman-centred space to**

## **emerge and flourish.**

For the people we spoke to, this meant:

*'Not doing to or saying how it is or should be done – letting people have their space and shape it' (Stakeholder).*

*'It's more than [her expertise], it's the way she interacts with people...she's empathetic, she holds her space...she's not ego driven in any way. She's there for the purpose of Kairos. It's not about her. And her emphasis is on lifting the women up...how can I give you the tools or the platform or confidence to own the space?'* (Stakeholder).

*'It's making sure that everyone is alright. Being there to be in the background, pulling all strings and making sure that everything is happening the way it should be happening and that things are running smoothly...that needs to happen for the space to be there and keep going'* (Volunteer)

*'The way she holds herself...as a leader, she leads by example, not by telling you what to do, and doing something different. The most important thing is that you can talk to her about anything'* (Volunteer).

A community led / co-productive approach then is not only enabled by the various mechanisms or structures of governance detailed above but requires careful leadership as the foregoing extracts imply. In particular, it also means fostering the kinds of relationships that shape the culture, and in turn the outcomes, and this means holding the space, acting with authority, being accountable and taking responsibility while diffusing leadership, sharing responsibility, building capacity and supporting connections between those involved, as the Manager recognised:

*'The volunteers and staff are reliant on me and they do need me. But the women that come along, don't. And there's something I think really important about that, that, actually, it's about the volunteers and staff's relationship with the women that is the important one....I want [women to] have relationships with different people...[and for women and volunteers to] not feel like I am the powerful one in charge, that instead we are all together. And I appreciate that it's never going to be completely that way because I do have power and responsibility'* (Manager).

**b) the need for a leader that diverse groups of women can identify with and relate to, and who can convey a sense of safety, fairness, and openness, and display kindness and acceptance, strength and compassion.**

*'It needs quite a caring and calm person, non-judgemental'* (volunteer)

*'The way she leads by example in the sense that she shows us how to be strong, she is also very fair'* (Volunteer).

*'Inspirational, loving, approachable, you can talk to them. They don't judge you'* (Volunteer).

In this context, the manager suggested that *'it's got to be someone that's been an outsider or felt like an outsider'* (Manager). This perspective was reinforced by a volunteer who noted the importance of leadership and staff that women could identify with, and between whom mutual empathy was possible:

*'Someone who's sympathetic with what's going on, who's had the same troubles, which a lot of them*



*have had so they have that understanding, which is what Kairos is all about' (Volunteer).*

**c) The need for a leader with relevant knowledge, experience and engagement skills.**

*'[The Manager] has a really good knowledge and understanding about diversity, about social inclusion...she's really good at engaging, she listens, she's got fantastic eye contact, she smiles, she laughs, which is so important' (Stakeholder).*

**3. DYNAMICS AND EFFECTS OF PARTICIPATION**

**Summary**

- A diverse range of women are represented in Kairos, both in relation to demographic and experiential diversity, enabled by their commitment to and culture of inclusion.
- While trans-women and non-binary persons, women of colour and of different religious persuasions, social circumstances and ages, as well as women with mental health, learning difficulties and additional support needs are involved in Kairos, Kairos continue to consult and encourage participation from the multitude of women across Renfrewshire, to ensure they are represented and have the opportunity to engage on 'an every-day level'.
- Different women use the space differently, and participation takes both physical and virtual forms. Differences in how women participate tends to reflect the diversity of reasons for their involvement.
- Reasons for getting and staying involved in Kairos vary, but include the nature and effect of the interactions that characterise the space, underpinned by a culture of unconditional acceptance and non-judgementalism. Women also value, and derive benefits from, the opportunity to make a contribution to the wellbeing of other women, and to co-produce a space that makes a tangible difference to women's lives.
- Participation in Kairos has generated a range of outcomes for those involved including engendering a sense of personal fulfilment, of self-worth, of purpose, and of belonging and kinship. It has enhanced social participation and extended women's social networks, and has supported processes of personal change and development. In addition to supporting learning and the development of new skills, it has also given women new insights into, and understanding of, themselves and others.

In this section, we explore the dynamics and effects of participation in Kairos. We begin by focusing on who is participating, and who is not, with particular attention to issues of representativeness and diversity. We turn then to explore how women engage, prior to sharing how they experience their relationships with other women in Kairos, and the dynamics of support therein. We then discuss reasons as to why women get involved, and why others don't, concluding with a discussion of the impact and effects of participation, in terms of women's perceptions of the difference it makes.

**3.1 Who is Participating? Representativeness, Inclusivity and Diversity**

Kairos' emphasis on the inclusion of all women is central to their culture, philosophy and mission and is key to their impact.

*'It's not a space for certain women to come and have tea together...it's about creating a community of women that are diverse, that have a whole range of experience, that are supporting each other and empowering each other, to go beyond, whatever way that might be, to have progression change' (Stakeholder).*

The women we spoke to highly value the diversity of women engaging in Kairos, which appears to contribute to a number of positive outcomes for participants and volunteers. In general, there is consensus that being part of a group of diverse and differently situated women increases understanding of others, challenges assumptions, and contributes to personal learning, and enhances awareness of one's self, and one's own positionality. The volunteers we spoke to identified areas of similarity and difference between them, and it is through the recognition that comes from both social identification and the valuing of difference, underpinned by a culture of acceptance and an openness to learning and sharing, that a sense of belonging and acceptance can flourish.

A diverse range of women are represented in Kairos, in relation to demographic characteristics but also experiential diversity. Demographic diversity includes participants and volunteers comprising people of a range of ages, and life stages, people of colour, and trans-women and non-binary people, as well as people with mental health issues, with learning disabilities and additional support needs. People's social circumstances, backgrounds and life experience histories also differ widely, reflecting, it was suggested, women of Renfrewshire more broadly.

*'For us, over time, more and more women have come in, who are diverse. We've got trans-women coming along, non-binary people, women of colour... There's a wide age range, and women who are single mums, who are on low income, who're working, even women from outside of Renfrewshire come along, women involved in the criminal justice system, survivors of domestic abuse. (Manager).*

In part, the level of diversity in Kairos can be attributed to their culture of inclusivity, which is strongly emphasised in their publicity materials and online presence, and enabled by the broad range of opportunities to get involved reflecting women's different interests, alongside, as we note below, targeted efforts to include the voices of, and engage, all women and non-binary people. However, it was also recognised that this is a work in progress and that there are areas for development in terms of increasing diversity and ensuring that Kairos is representative of, and therefore inclusive of, the cross-section or multitude of women living in the wider Renfrewshire area.

One volunteer felt that although Kairos is 'getting there' in relation to the diversity of women engaging, encouraging diversity and promoting inclusivity in Kairos remained a core focus, and an organizational value. Another volunteer echoed this saying –

*'They are making strides towards it...I would say it has become diverse...they are constantly talking about how to evolve or improve. With Kairos, it's not like, ok we've ticked these boxes so we are tickety-boo with all our procedures and stuff and just leave it like that. It is about engaging with women and talking to them, like for example about mobility issues...they are still growing' (Volunteer).*

Across the people we spoke to, then, there is a strong sense that Kairos is moving in the right direction in terms of the diversity of women engaging. There are areas for development, and certainly, Kairos are aware of this and are continually consulting and evolving to widen access opportunities for participation

among differently situated women and groups. Kairos have consistently collected monitoring data to identify diversity gaps, and this has informed their consultation process.

*'When we were getting our responses and when there was gaps in the information that we were getting back, we'd actively go out and say, we need women of colour to fill in this survey cos we don't have your voice included in it' (Manager).*

We asked our research participants what groups of women they thought were less evident in Kairos than others. Some volunteers commented on the limited number of younger women participating, and another volunteer felt there was scope to include more people experiencing different forms of marginalisation. One stakeholder noted a growing Syrian and Polish community in the area, which she suggested might be unrepresented in Kairos. The Manager also identified that while women of colour and women of diverse religious persuasions were consulted, included and engaged in Kairos, they were comparatively under-represented in Kairos 'on an everyday level'. Efforts have been made to engage a more diverse group of women, including WICE (Women Included Connected and Empowered), the African Women's social group in Paisley, and while Kairos and WICE have collaborated on some events and activities, this does not occur on the every-day level sought. Kairos' Manager further observed that *'outwardly if you looked into Kairos, you wouldn't think 'they're not inclusive of women of colour', you would think that they are very inclusive cos we've got women of colour very involved in us. But for me, it doesn't feel like they're involved enough'*. She suggested that this may be attributed to Kairos' activities being primarily designed by white women, and not having an activity that meets the needs and interests of a more diverse group of women. Despite efforts, it is a work in progress and it is hoped that the recruitment of paid staff will enhance their scope and capacity to encourage regular, 'every-day' participation from a more demographically diverse population.

Much time, reflection, consultation and engagement has been and continues to be spent on ensuring that Kairos is inclusive of all women and non-binary people. For example, Kairos attended Free Pride to convey that they are open to LGBTQI people; with regard to the Muslim community, they have tried to engage with the local mosque, but have not had a response to date. While justice-experienced<sup>2</sup> women have been and are actively involved in Kairos, stakeholder, staff and volunteers have experienced some challenges in terms of involving / sustaining involvement of justice-involved women. Nonetheless, at the time of interviewing, Kairos had delivered workshops in statutory social work spaces, and engaged 11 justice-involved women. One stakeholder explained that it takes justice involved women a *'long time...to be stable in terms of alcohol or drug use, mental health. Others, a smaller number, are living in relationships of coercive control, domestic abuse, where it's really difficult for them to attend anywhere that's not a compulsory part of their order'* (Stakeholder). Another stakeholder identified the need for many justice-involved women to develop trusting relationships in order to feel confident in being accepted, which is likely to reflect both the self- and social-stigma that many experience and encounter. Similarly, Kairos' Manager further noted

*'justice experience, in particular, is a thing that most don't want to talk to you about... generally most of the justice experienced women that come to us, which they're going to be there, they're going to be everywhere, but they're not going to tell us. So I think it's difficult it being that limited because there'll be a whole host of women that we're working with just now that are*

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'justice experienced' refers to those who have experience of involvement in the justice system, but are not themselves currently involved in it, whereas the reference to those who are 'justice-involved' refers to those who are currently involved in the justice system, and in this context, justice social work services.

*[justice experienced] but we just don't know it. Does it matter whether we know it or not?... all the conversations I've had to have with people who are justice experienced at Kairos that want to be involved is, please don't tell anyone about it, I'm really anxious about it, no one knows, do they? And that tells me for sure that the people that are justice experienced that come long are not going to tell anyone cos there's so much shame attached to it'.*

As noted previously then, labels can polarise and reduce perceptions of equality, but there are real issues here of shame and stigma, and how such labels, whether anticipated or applied, can inhibit or discourage participation.

### **3.2 How do Women Engage in Kairos? The Nature of Participation**

As at November 2019, in the period 2018-19, 113 women had been directly engaged in Kairos, and 'over 200 women [in total] from an initial contact once, to coming every week' (Manager). While the number of times an individual woman might attend Kairos on a given week might vary, most people we spoke to seemed to attend Kairos around 2-3 times a week. However, some people's engagement in activities such as *Making Her Mark* is about research and is largely undertaken online, and some people participating in the Equalities Collective do not get involved in other activities, underlining the versatility of Kairos, as a space, and thus the nature of participation therein. Covid-19 related restrictions has of course also altered the nature and patterns of participation and this has included a range of online activities and socially distant means of communication e.g. via social media or messaging services. This has proven a challenge for some participants and volunteers both in terms of their comfort with, or capacities to engage via such technologies, to which staff have responded and supported through other means. However, going forward, it represents an opportunity for innovation and diversification in both the nature and mechanisms of engagement. While, then, Covid-19 has brought virtual spaces to the fore, as Kairos' Manager noted, pre-Covid, participation was already fluid and dynamic – such that one can contribute and be of the space without being physically present in it.

*'Participation is not being like a strict, right you've got to do this, you've got to come to this meeting to participate. Actually, it can be in people's own time because I think people want to belong to something but they can't always be here. So outside of here, they can still belong to the space and do things for the space without being in it' (Manager)*

In practice, women use the space and participate differently, and how people participate is closely related to why people participate.

*'So there's a huge chunk of people that come to say that they're helping and they want to be the helpers but they've slowly come to realise that, actually, a lot of them have said out loud, I came here to help people and I realise that it's helped me. Then there's people that come and they really want to be doing things, so they really want to be actively participating all of the time and they will be involved with Kairos 5 days a week doing different things, whether as a volunteer or just a participant. There's women that pop in just for the music quizzes, so a couple of friends come every time there's a music quiz cos they like a music quiz, so they'll come together (Manager).*

### **3.3 Relational Dynamics and the Dynamics of Support**

*'Here they uplift you and, if you fall, they are here to catch you' (Volunteer).*

To support, according to the dictionary, is not only to help but to hold up, to raise up. This is manifest in numerous different ways in Kairos, but it always starts with a 'warm welcome'.

*'A warm welcome is noticing that someone's arrived, answering the door with a smile and welcoming them to the space and introducing them to everybody that is around in the space, making sure that they feel at home, that they know where everything is, that they know how to help themselves to things, making them a cup of tea, sitting down and having a chat with them about what they do. Just kind of – it's like a big hug, letting someone know that they're being held when they first arrive and that there's a team of people now that have got you and that you're going to be cared for when you're here' (Manager).*

Beyond the approach to welcoming others, 'women supporting women' is about sharing experiences, and providing mutual support and understanding, as much as it is about the formalised helping and support afforded by volunteers or paid staff. There is also evidence, however, of mutual support within the volunteer cohort e.g. volunteers supporting differently abled volunteers to volunteer, and formalised support of the volunteer cohort from staff. Thus women support women is occurring at each level and is part of the fabric of the relational space.

The nature of relationships within Kairos can be described a sense of 'we-ness' (Weaver, 2015), meaning solidarity, equality, togetherness and community and unconditional support.

*'So when women come to me and say, Kairos has changed my life, I don't know where I'd be without it, I say, it's changed mine too. And I think there's something really important about that, that it's not us and them. It's not – well, this hasn't changed my life cos this isn't for me cos I'm a professional. Do you see what I mean? That actually this has a huge impact on my life and when I get to sit in a course and facilitate Beautiful Women and hear from women, it changes my life as much as it changes theirs and it's the togetherness, it's a we're in this together and it's not me who hasn't lived. It's me who has lived and I'm with you in it' (Manager).*

Underpinning this relational space, as noted previously, is the quality and impact of the personal development courses, such as Beautiful Women, Beautiful Me. One stakeholder commented on *'the power that comes out in those from everyone just talking...it's a facilitated discussion but the power in it is the sharing of experience...the peer to peer support of each other and the sharing of stories...[it creates] a feeling of belonging. Like you are not alone'*. A volunteer also picked up on this. Referring to the quality of the training *'people come...and they do change their minds...they come with stereotyped ideas, we all do that, and then somehow it's quite clear that some of those attitudes aren't going to work in Kairos...so you can see people changing, changing their ideas'*. She further observed that participation in this course enabled the forging of strong relationships, due to the experience of sharing and the development of trust and respect. It is this desire for human connection, for learning, and for sharing and giving back that underpins many of the reasons for women's involvement in Kairos.

The nature of support within Kairos enables a certain kind of relationship to flourish. Relationships were described as open, accepting, supportive and friendly and by some in kinship terms.

*'Loving. They accept you for who you are. We're like family' (Volunteer).*

*'There's all the support they get while they are in Kairos ...it does feel like that large family type approach' (Stakeholder).*

Volunteers also describe their relationship with other women at Kairos as characterised by sharing; sharing experiences, sharing support, sharing skills and sharing learning. Many women also derived a sense of social connectedness from the relationships they developed there, and a feeling that *'you're not on your own...people think about you and care about you'*. This sense of solidarity emerged strongly and is perhaps a defining characteristic of the relations within Kairos.

*'Whatever your background, you will be supported by the women who come to Kairos. Everyone has their own story...their own struggles and issues, and at Kairos that is understood and no-one is judged.'* (Staff).

The dynamics of support cohere around peer support or mutual helping which is about feeling supported, rather than receiving a service, and is focused on supporting each woman to realise her aspirations. One stakeholder gave an example which we have summarised to protect the anonymity of a woman experiencing a 'distressing situation', who attended some of the activity based groups/workshops.

*'I think that just by attending them, that boosted her confidence. She was saying she did not have to speak about what had happened to her, she didn't tell anyone...just while she was there, she met other women and she was chatting to other people...and I think it gave her a wee bit of time out, some respite, to cope with the situation'.*

Volunteers and staff explained to us that their participation in Kairos conveyed both understanding, and acceptance.

*'It's somebody to talk to and it doesn't matter if you were to have a cry, you can. You just want to be left alone, you can go and sit in a wee corner or go outside...and no one will criticise you, so that's good'* (Volunteer).

*'You're not pushed into 'tell me your story', ... you are who you are...you come in and if you want to share something you share it. It's respect for each other...no matter the diversity in the way they live their life or whatever...and that goes hand in hand with the trust. I think it's because you are allowed to come in and be yourself and you don't have to justify your reason for being there ... you are what you are and we all have flaws and we all have things going on and everything is accepted'* (Staff)

### **3.4 Why Women Get and Stay Involved**

Reasons provided for involvement / participation were primarily articulated in reference to the relational and cultural aspects, how the nature of their interactions with other women that shape the culture of Kairos, make them feel, in terms of being and feeling accepted on her own terms.

*'Women feel comfortable, they feel like they belong...they laugh, they can just be themselves'* (Staff).

*'It's that place you just can feel like you don't have to be someone else'* (Stakeholder).

*'It is about sharing, love, joy, and togetherness...a oneness, as women, as a community, and as people'* (Volunteer).

For some, beyond finding a space in which they can be themselves, and be respected and valued for it, the relational environment of Kairos goes further, in terms of building connections with other women and reducing social isolation, or 'escaping from everyday life' (Volunteer).

*'I think people are feeling more and more isolated because there is a lack of community and when you come in to Kairos it is not like that. It's like women from all walks of life...It doesn't matter where they have been, what they've done, you just forget what's outside and just come in and be' (Staff)*

Across the groups we spoke to, experiencing a supportive relational network was a powerful motivation for participation and many emphasised the impact of the specific dynamic of not having to disclose why they were there. This again connects back to Kairos' distinctiveness as a space for all women which is criteria led and which eschews labels, so people don't know why you are there, and you don't have to say if you don't want to. One stakeholder epitomised this in reference to a specific example:

*'There's a woman I spoke to just last week who was saying she loves going there because nobody knows her story, they don't know why she wants to go there...I think that's really important as well, that nobody knows why they are there but they're getting the support naturally. They don't have to talk about why they need or want the support' (Stakeholder).*

Indeed, women also referred to engaging with Kairos as a support in their own personal recovery from multiple issues including alcohol use, trauma, depression and anxiety.

For others, participation is about giving back and a desire to help, and the value is in interacting with and supporting others and building a space that makes a difference.

*'The volunteering aspect has the dual role of getting peer support but getting something out of what they're giving to Kairos as well' (Stakeholder).*

*'people are willing to put something in, to get involved because they are seeing things happen ...lots of [services] consult all the time but you never see anything actually changing, whereas here they can see things have been put in place' (Stakeholder).*

Indeed, one volunteer identified ideological reasons for getting involved, which was connected to the grassroots, community led approach, and to issues of social justice.

*'I was just really intrigued by this idea of it evolving from what people wanted and needed...I've worked in areas of deprivation...and I feel that some people just don't get the opportunities and the good deal they should get and women are at the bottom of the pile really often and yet they are the ones that are keeping everything together.'* (Volunteer)

One stakeholder captured these differences in reasons for involvement in the following terms:

*'[For some] they need to be part of something and they need to belong to something. With others it's more about the need to give back because they've had support in the past and they want to be involved in something that supports other women or they've had that lived experience and want to change lives, change the world, be up there changing their community. For others it's just they want a place to come and have a cup of tea and a chat, it's not about anything...they don't want to be involved in any other thing. But for some...it's actually their passion and drive to make a change in society' (Stakeholder)*

### 3.5 Barriers to Participation

The people we spoke to identified various reasons that might inhibit women's participation in Kairos. Among these were themes of time and timing of opportunities, if they are working or have particular caring responsibilities.

*'Often it is time...one of the sad things in the questionnaire was people who were carers saying that they felt very lonely because they couldn't get out to do things' (Volunteer)*

For these people, location might also be problematic. One stakeholder commented that *'If Kairos is Renfrewshire wide, just being a shop in Johnstone is a barrier to being a Renfrewshire Project'*.

*'When we first did our consultation, the barriers to coming along were time, travel, how to get here, childcare, working commitments. We are only open one evening and one day a week. So it is really limited in terms of access just now (Manager).'*

However, with the recruitment of staff, and the additional development of Kairos as a virtual space, these barriers to participation could be alleviated. Indeed, while not everyone has access to, or feels comfortable using, technology, it might also support those who might wish to engage, but as yet are not ready or do not have the confidence to do so. It is possible that online or virtual mechanisms of engagement could be a pathway to participation for those who feel *'they're not in a place in their life at the moment that they feel confident enough within themselves to come into a group setting because it is a difficult thing to just walk through the door...and you don't know anybody' (Staff)*.

Of course, it is also true that not everyone would wish to get involved.

*'Sometimes it's just out of your comfort zone. Like if you're not a talker or a sharer for let's all get together and talk about women's stuff. That's not for everyone. I don't think it can be for everyone...[or] be all things to all people and it's not set up as a service, so we're not there to offer counselling, we're not a service provider' (Stakeholder)*

*'I suppose the reason that people wouldn't get involved is cos they don't feel like it was for them, like it didn't have anything to offer them. So they might have judgements or assumptions that they've made about what it actually is. They might think that it's something that you only come to if you need it, people might think that' (Manager).*

### 3.6 What Difference Does Kairos Make?

Many of the people we spoke to observed or experienced an increase in personal confidence, which was sometimes referred to in terms of empowerment – enabled by being 'given the tools' to improve or develop by 'equipping people to do things in their life that may be they are not coping with or that they're finding a bit difficult' (Stakeholder). The women we spoke to identified a kaleidoscope of impacts which included a sense of personal fulfilment, staying active in retirement and finding both occupation and a sense of purpose, and the impact of Kairos on supporting recovery and enhancing social participation, but mostly women referred to their extended social networks, and the development of new and significant relationships alongside a sense of belonging and kinship.

*'I've a whole new bunch of friends, a group of really amazing women and people that have come into my life...I was in a place where I really didn't have anybody around me, as in family and*



*friends. I had contacts and services helping me out but I didn't have that kind of feeling of belonging...It's more like a wee family (Staff/Volunteer).*

Through the relational context of Kairos, women described experiencing a sense of social recognition, 'feeling seen' and understood, which one volunteer attributed to the discovery of shared experience, experienced as a source of, and resource for, support that allows her to feel normal.

For many, then, the impact is on how Kairos makes them feel, and this feeling was described in terms of a warmth, a sense of belonging, and a sense of mattering, of value, and this is often about the culture of acceptance that characterises Kairos, feeling supported and appreciated, all of which have the effect of increasing confidence. Women report feeling safe to be themselves, to open up, and as one volunteer suggested, *'being allowed to be different rather than trying to fit in and all be the same'*. For another, participation in Kairos conveyed to her that she 'mattered', while yet another felt that contributing and making a difference made her feel 'worthwhile'. What emerges then is the coproduction of a culture of support, and a valuing of difference, and an ethic of care and these dynamics shape women's experiences and contribute strongly to the impact.

A few women referred to the transformative impact that participation in Kairos had on their lives. A staff member said that *'Kairos has changed my life'*. A volunteer said that she has gained more of an understanding of others, and respect for difference, which has *'given me a different outlook, and taught me not to jump to conclusions'*. Another volunteer noted that *'you just see people growing before your eyes'* which she related to women achieving things that they did not feel capable of previously, and increased levels of self-belief and self-realisation. While participants shared numerous concrete examples of this, to prevent identification, we have not included them here. However, this resonates with concepts of empowerment and indeed this terminology was used by some. What this reflects then is the enabling effect of mechanisms of participation, and the supportive space. Of course, this does not happen overnight. As one volunteer commented *'changes comes slow and reflection and realisation take time...I think that's what I appreciate the most, the time to learn, the time to reflect'*.

*I think we'll have an impact on a lot of women's lives in a way that can't really be measured. So moving women from a point of despair, hopelessness, suicide to giving them a reason to live and that's already been evidenced so far... And it's [women's] individual stories that make me realise that women are searching for something and when they find Kairos, they realise that it's their home. ... I think it's important for us to recognise that the small things are the huge things and that we don't need to say that we've got this many women into employment but we've kept this many women alive and we've given this many women a sense of purpose. (Manager)*

Indeed, one volunteer said that

*'Before going to Kairos, I was sort of going into myself. I was sleeping most of the day and just staying up at night...when I was on my own. But going to Kairos, that made me 'wait a minute, I've got to get up, it's a Kairos day'. Another said 'I was just plodding along...and then I'm like no, this needs to change and it was just getting out...meeting new people again and thinking, I'm ready for me, I think...doing something different that's just mine'.*

Central then to the impact that participation in Kairos has engendered is enhanced social participation and social connectedness, both within the community of Kairos, and in the community beyond it.

*‘Kairos engages women in a community where they might have felt completely dislocated for God knows how long and start to recognise that there are other women within that community that they can connect with...it gives women that sense of ownership and place’ (Stakeholder)*

*‘[Women] learn about other things that they can get involved in that they would otherwise never have found out about if they hadn’t gone to Kairos...that’s a really big thing, getting women plugged into their own communities to fulfil their potential’ (Stakeholder).*

## Summary of Key Learning

The learning from the development phase was initially captured in an evaluation by Weaver and Lightowler at the University of Strathclyde and summarised [here](#). We distilled the key findings into a list of key elements that a project of this nature requires in the early stages of development. These key elements informed the ongoing early development of Kairos. Based on the learning from the development and delivery phases of Kairos, the following provides an update from preceding thematic summaries on what it takes to establish projects of this nature.

### Host organisation and Project Manager

- Appoint an host organisation, which in turn recruits a Project Manager at an early stage, both with sufficient capacity, skills and experience

Building on our research to date, we have identified that:

#### *The host organisation’s role is to:*

- Employ and line manage the Project Manager and oversee the administration of their employment;
- Provide both administrative support and a space or base from which the Project Manager can work;
- Maintain regular contact with the Project Manager, and provide regular specialist supervision, pastoral care and guidance;
- Support the engagement of women using their own networks and pre-existing relationships with stakeholders, local groups and community members;
- Actively support the Project Manager to empower and guide the community to develop and lead on the project;
- Facilitate integration within the host organization, while supporting the development of an independent identity.

#### *The host organisation should have:*

- A pre-existing working relationship and open communication with the funding organisation, and strong links to and connections with the community in terms of presence and engagement, but critically trust and a mutually respectful reputation;
- A background in community engagement and development, experience of project development *with* communities, not simply *in* communities, and, preferably, volunteer training and management.
- A value set reflective of the overarching approach and ethos of the programme, which is

inclusive, non-judgmental, accepting, kind and empowering.

Distilling the learning from these and other views shared with us, we propose that **the leadership skills required of a Project Manager for a project of this nature include:**

- Encouraging and facilitating all women and non-binary persons to share and explore different ideas and examine the practicalities behind each idea and in so doing, setting realistic parameters;
- A problem solving, solution focused and strategic approach, that is inclusive, participatory, guiding, facilitative, kind, understanding, reflective and supportive;
- The capacity to work alongside people to develop a shared vision and the ability to communicate and continuously reinforce that vision and its underpinning values;
- The ability to help people to see things they might otherwise not have noticed and ask the kinds of questions that no-one else is asking, to encourage people to think differently;
- Maintaining a focus on values and purposes and ensuring a focus on the broader vision and outcomes.

### **Key Characteristics and Qualities**

A good **Project Manager** is someone who is:

- Warm, engaging, fair, enthusiastic, committed, motivated, reflective and respectful; who is dynamic, proactive, and able to work independently and take responsibility.
- A good listener and inclusive of and open to all ideas, individuals and institutions, an ability to pull people together, ensuring everyone feels part of it, but who can constructively challenge people who are judgemental and critical, and be persistent with the same people in their commitment to encouraging a culture of kindness, inclusion and acceptance and a commitment to diversity.
- Open to learning and knowledgeable, yet creative, innovative, flexible and resourceful, and who has a solution focused nature.
- Exhibits the qualities, character and experience that other women connect and identify with.
- Approachable, empathetic, kind, compassionate and friendly and responsive to people's diverse needs, skills, strengths, respectful of their perspectives and experiences, and therefore able to enhance and support the development of cooperative and co-productive relationships between differently situated people.

### **Core Skills:**

#### *Communication and engagement skills:*

- The ability to connect to, and negotiate with, diverse and differently situated women and to build a cohesive and cooperative community of support;
- A core skill is the ability to regularly communicate with people at every level from the women involved, to stakeholders, to policy makers and influencers. This requires multi-layered interpersonal and communication skills, including the ability to communicate and collaborate with a diverse group of people in different ways yet in a participatory, transparent, inclusive, constructive and respectful manner.
- They should have the ability to transfer their skills and knowledge through formal or informal training and pro-social modelling, facilitate skill-sharing between people, and adapt their skills

and knowledge to the local context and needs of the community.

#### *Value base:*

A good Project Manager, and indeed, paid staff has:

- a value set reflective of the overarching approach and the skills to be able to talk about values with women to guide the emerging culture and ethos which is inclusive, non-judgmental, accepting, kind and empowering;
- a commitment to social justice and community participation;
- a belief that by working together people can constructively effect change;
- a respect for diversity and difference, and the value of inclusion.

#### *Experience:*

Our research to date based on the views of stakeholders, staff and volunteers since the inception of Kairos, suggests that, at the very least, a good Project Manager needs experience of:

- Working in the women's sector and understanding of gender specific work which implies at the very least an understanding of women's needs and group dynamics and what it means to be women centred;
- Community engagement and development and what it means to be community-led, in context.

### **Engagement**

- Agree an inclusive, visible and clear plan for engaging stakeholders
- Engage with all stakeholders in the early stages to assess the need and appetite for a Centre, including with 'ordinary women'
- Visit other women-centred organisations to learn what others are doing, how and to what effect

### **Communication**

- Develop a communication strategy to ensure the flow and regularity of information between all key stakeholders, both formal and informal using a variety of media and approaches
- Agree a consultation plan that identifies who and how key stakeholders, communities and target groups will be engaged, perhaps including focus groups or surveys

### **Shared vision and mandate**

- Help people understand why you exist and what your values are, and get them together as often as you can
- Enable stakeholders to visualise what the next steps might be, by developing a shared vision in the early stages or providing a sufficient steer
- That vision should be task focused and clear rather than abstract and intangible; it should focus on the why and the how rather than simply the what.
- Beyond activities and events, the vision should be underpinned by a set of core values and a focus on the outcomes, on what it intends to achieve rather than simply how it should work
- Ensure a clear and shared understanding of the mandate for the work and mechanisms for the regular communication of that vision to a range of stakeholders

### **Relationships**

- Support fun, passion, enthusiasm and commitment amongst all those involved
- Develop strong relationships, trust and understanding between the project funders, the host organisation, other agency representatives, and women from the community
- The manner of relating is critical to the building of sustainable and constructive relationships; it should be accepting, inclusive, non-judgemental, and kind
- Actively include every single person, making sure that they are participating in a way that feels best for them
- In addition to encouraging community participation in the development phase, the establishment of cooperative relationships that are fundamental to the development of a project of this nature requires that the Project Manager and core group participate reciprocally in what communities and groups are already doing. Mutual exchange and support are the foundations of relationships

### **Clear roles and decision making**

- Establish a core group of women who will lead on the development of the Women's Space
- Ensure people feel they know what they can and can't do – as well as what they ought to be doing and when
- Identify task-focused roles and agree the expectations for the different roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder (or stakeholder group) involved
- Offer a continuum of opportunities of participation and involvement that reflects the needs, skills, strengths, capacities and experiences of a diverse group of women
- Ensure a continual sense of progression and impact to maintain momentum and support retention. This can enable a sense of ownership, commitment and collective efficacy.
- Agree clear structures and transparent processes for making decisions and for communicating the decisions once these are made

### **Project planning and monitoring**

Ensure a project development plan is devised, which includes:

- Events and activities across local areas using a range of methods that bring women together to encourage dialogue, participation and the development of relationships with and between different groups of women. Events are not an end in themselves but a means to facilitate participation and engagement.
- Milestones and core tasks that reduce ambiguity surrounding expectations and responsibilities, that are sufficiently structured to enable progression but remain flexible to respond to the needs of the community
- Clear boundaries and outcomes that can guide project development to provide a context shaped by those intended outcomes
- Opportunities to reflect on and raise concerns about progress at an early stage
- Opportunities for training and personal development that include procedural and professional concerns as well as a developmental, awareness and consciousness raising focus.

### **Sustainability**

- Consider sustainability in the early stages, in terms of long-term funding and leadership to continue the work so that the project is not wholly reliant on Trust funding. This should include strategies to realise both the social and economic objectives of the project

## Find out more

Find out more about the programme on the Trust's [website](#), or follow The Robertson Trust on Twitter [@RobertsonTrust](#) for updates. You can also follow Kairos [@Kairos\\_women](#)

### Acknowledgements

Active Communities in Renfrewshire; Paul Hamlyn Foundation

## Appendix 1: Kairos - the journey so far

- 2004** The Trust begins to support developments within Scotland's criminal justice sector, including specific support for women with convictions and their families.
- 2012** The [2012 Commission on Women Offenders](#) recognised the range of interrelated factors that coalesce to have a specific impact on women involved in the criminal justice system. The Commission recommended the establishment of Women's Centres 'to enable [women] to access a consistent range of services to reduce reoffending and bring about behavioural change'.
- 2013** Trust staff visited existing Women's Centres in England, and Northern Ireland. They learnt that a more holistic approach to providing support to women within a wider community setting may have better results than focussing on vulnerability or offending alone, and could avoid further stigmatising individuals within their communities.
- 2015** The Trust undertook activities to identify two sites. This resulted in identifying Cumnock, a rural area, as a site for a centre. A second potential site was not taken forward after a period of consultation.
- A process [evaluation](#) was undertaken by Weaver and Lightowler (2017), which focused on the development and design phases of the Women's Centres. It employed an action research methodology and resulted in lessons for The Robertson Trust about what a project of this nature requires in the early stages of development.
- 2016** Renfrewshire was identified as the second site, this time in an urban area. [Active Communities](#), who have a strong record of and commitment to community engagement and development, were recruited as the host organisation. The Trust engaged with a range of stakeholders to raise awareness of the Women's Centre Programme, to share plans for the development of a women's initiative in Renfrewshire and to explain the gender specific, community-led, multi-agency approach and to encourage engagement.
- 2017** A Development Worker was recruited and participated in a range of training opportunities and visits to see how related projects and initiatives operate and to what effect. A series of stakeholder consultations and meetings took place to identify and agree the location for Kairos and to raise awareness of the project. Active Communities opened their own hub in Johnstone, supported by The Robertson Trust, which they shared with Kairos until August 2019. In 2017, with the support of Active Communities, key activities in Kairos further included engagement with a diverse range of local community groups and organisations likely to become involved with the centre. Outreach activities and events were held with the purposes of raising awareness, encouraging engagement and supporting the participation of local women. This resulted in the establishment of the 'Leading Ladies', a group of women intended to drive the development of Kairos.
- 2018** An advisory board of key stakeholders was established. Engagement with a diverse range of key stakeholders, local agencies and community groups and local women continued and a social media presence was created. A range of engagement strategies in the form of activities,

public events, targeted focus groups and taster sessions were put in place to encourage participation by a diverse group of women, to establish a core group to shape the development of Kairos. However, Active Communities recognised that the approach taken by the then Development Worker resulted in difficulties in maintaining a regular core group to lead its development, which necessarily hindered the progression of Kairos, as a community-led, inclusive women's space. Ultimately, the Development Worker concluded employment with Kairos. Later, a Project Manager was appointed who adopted a different approach to support the development of Kairos. The Leading Ladies group was refreshed and reconvened to form a 'Development Group' and an 'Inclusion Group'. Many of these dynamics and experiences are captured in the second thematic summary.

From that point, the Project Manager worked collaboratively with the Development Group, and the Inclusion Group, subsequently renamed the Equalities Collective, alongside wider stakeholders and community partners to reconceptualise and re-develop the space and encourage participation from a more diverse demographic. This involved a multi-layered approach, which has been maintained since, which, in the early stages included sustained and intensive community engagement via a range of means, collectively re-negotiating the values, ethos, and aims underpinning Kairos, and embedding a value-driven culture of inclusivity, and commitment to diversity, reinforced by training and awareness raising. Activities commenced in 2018 by the Project Manager, and continued throughout 2019, included visits to and learning from existing women's spaces, re-configuring mechanisms of governance, and providing a range of training, personal development and consciousness-raising opportunities.

**2019** 2019 was a year of considerable growth, learning and transformation. The Project Manager focused on working collaboratively with women to consolidate and diversify governance structures, encouraging women's leadership of and engagement in community awareness raising and broader developmental opportunities alongside a diverse range of activities, events and engagement opportunities, and projects with community partners. These processes fundamentally established Kairos' identity as a 'safe space' in which women come together to support other women, and this has been enhanced and consolidated by a sustained and active social media presence, which had begun in 2018. At the same time, building on the increasing number of women participating in Kairos, and their growing cohort of volunteers, they identified, renovated and relocated to their own premises, and invested in the recruitment of staff.

**2020** The space at Kairos, how it is used, and who engages with it has continued to evolve and by the end of the first quarter of the year, a diverse group of women were actively participating in various ways with Kairos, and an equally diverse range of activities, events and opportunities for interaction were coproduced. However, this year has been tumultuous for everyone as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. For Kairos, it has involved the temporary suspension of existing and new projects, such as the Recovery Space, and necessitated a transition to principally online and socially distant forms of communication and engagement from March. New forms of engagement and further diversification of opportunities for participation as a result of Covid are elaborated on below.

## Appendix 2: A note on methods

This longitudinal, multi-site evaluation took a participatory action-research approach, using mixed methods. This thematic summary was informed by the following methods:

- Analysis of monthly project diaries between September 2018-November 2019 maintained by the Project Manager and the Programme Manager at the Trust

- Two observational study visits in June and July 2019 to observe and develop a greater understanding of the activities undertaken, interactions and dynamics between staff, volunteers and participants at Kairos;
- Ten semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted in September 2019 with ‘Stakeholders’ involved in the Advisory Group, Active Communities and The Robertson Trust, Kairos’ Manager, and Staff.
- Mobile diaries with nine volunteers over three weeks in March 2020 and eight in-depth follow up interviews with mobile diary participants during May-June 2020.

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<sup>i</sup> To cite: XXXXX