



ESTEEM Monitoring & Evaluation Report August 2020 - Written by Alex Mahoney (youth staff member)

This report covers the last yearly quarter at ESTEEM, and contains my own observations as a young adult, from activities and drop-ins. I have been working in Monitoring & Evaluation at ESTEEM for over a year now, and during that time, I have learnt a lot about the other young adults who come to ESTEEM, how we support them, and where we can aim to improve as a charity. ESTEEM is a very adaptable environment - I've found that the feedback I pass onto the team is always received with the goal of taking action to make positive changes and experiment with different ways of running activities and services for young adults.

The ways that I gather information include:

- Talking to young adults about drop-ins
- Setting up feedback activities (such as describing the session with a word, or dropping a ball in one of 3 baskets related to how they felt during the drop-in)
- Making recurring observations e.g. how many people are attending?, Are there any new faces? Are people engaged with the activity?, Are we doing everything we can to make sure everyone feels included?

I feel like my role has helped have an impact on how ESTEEM operates and adapts. During the COVID situation, I have worked closely with other staff members and young adults at ESTEEM to work around the barriers that come with running drop-in sessions online.

Summary of Drop-in Activities

Over the last couple of months, ESTEEM has adapted to the challenges of the lockdown situation to ensure that we are still able to provide online support and continue drop-in sessions for young adults in a way that does not put them at any risk. Additionally, we are continuing to offer one-to-one support from staff, as well as mentoring & counselling through online services.

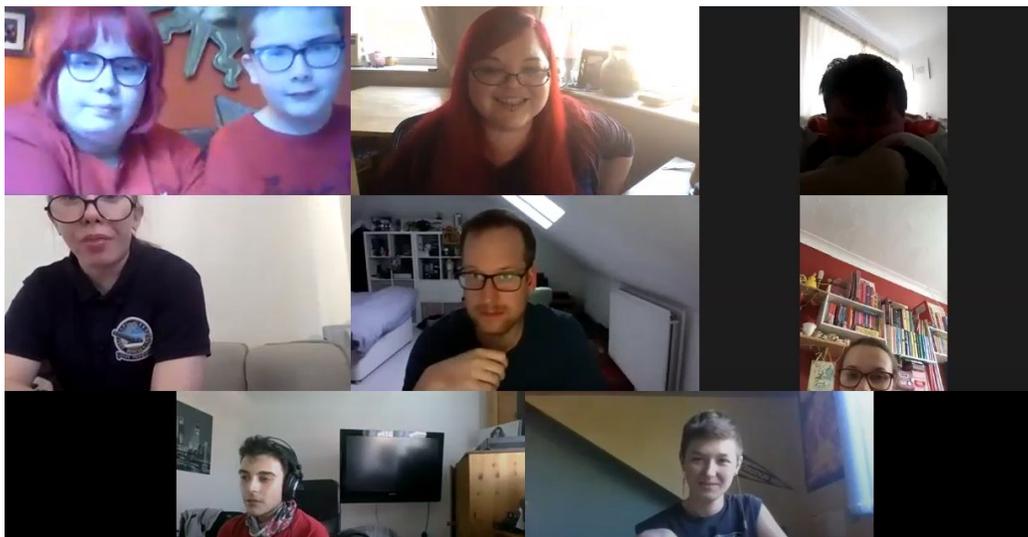
One of the ways that the charity has accomplished this is by setting up a 'fun activities' calendar that young adults can choose to opt in to, and be notified when a new activity is starting. These activities include meditation, yoga, a weekly quiz, a selfie run (or walk) club and creative/life skills workshops (such as painting, cooking and dance sessions). More recently, we have had a new member of staff who has been running in-person activities like volleyball and paddleboarding, which have been a lot of fun and a breath of fresh air after doing activities solely online for so long. I have found that these



in-person activities have been great for my own mental health, and I've noticed some new faces attending the outdoor activities compared to the online ones, where we usually have a recurring group of young adults during sessions. I think that these activities have been a success for the most part, and have been a good way of engaging with ESTEEM members and giving them some fun opportunities during the lockdown.

When I talked to a young adult about their drop-in experience at the beginning of this quarter, they gave a lot of positive feedback, but did suggest that drop-in activities could be catered to everyone's energy levels at the beginning of the session, as sometimes participants would feel too tired to focus properly on some of the more demanding activities. I have been told by a lot of people that they feel more tired when doing drop-ins online, compared to in-person. I think this could be because it requires more attention, and can sometimes feel like there is more pressure on you. We have taken this feedback into account, and one of the changes we have made in regards to this is setting up a chillout space during the drop-in activities, as well as a break halfway through the session where people can take a few minutes to have a drink and refresh themselves.

One of our staff members has been running a quiz that takes place at the end of the week. This quiz is definitely the most popular activity for members of ESTEEM, and I have seen a lot of people attending it - even people who may not usually join other activities and drop-ins. It's a lot of fun, and it really gives us something to look forward to at the end of the week, when there's a new quiz coming up. There are also prizes that are sent to both the winner and last place contestant during these quizzes. I think that the opportunity to team up and compete is quite exciting, and it is a very social activity, which could be one of the reasons why it is so popular.





It has sometimes been challenging for young adults to join the online drop-in. There have been a lot of barriers, such as internet connection and using the Zoom service, that have prevented them from joining, resulting in smaller numbers during the sessions. However, having less drop-in participants has also allowed for a controlled discussion space between young adults where they can talk about recent events and topics that are important to them in a safe environment, and staff can learn more about the views and perspectives of these young adults.

I have observed some of the barriers that have prevented young adults from joining the drop-in activities, including:

- Lack of resources
- Concern that the online drop-ins will not feel the same as in-person ones.
- For some, a feeling of intimidation when placed into an online group of people they are not familiar with
- Stress and anxiety due to current conditions
- Some confusion around how activities are being run and how to join
- A lack of motivation

All of the above points are things that have been discussed with team members, and we have been working to overcome these barriers and encourage young adults to take part in activities. A lot of it comes from uncertainty and the effects of being in isolation for such a long period of time.

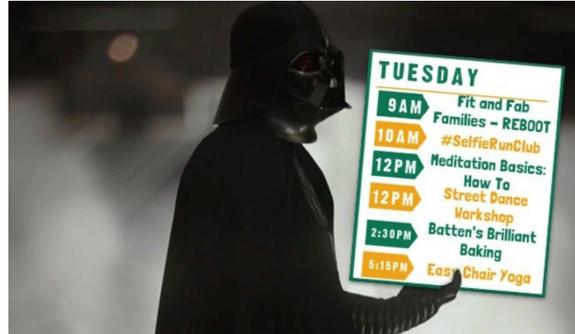
One of ESTEEM's young adults told me *"I've found the online activities quite nice, with the whole lockdown it means we can still do drop-in, just over the phone. It's nice to see all your old friends from ESTEEM"*. I think that this is an important point, because some of the young adults who use our service only get the opportunity to see each other through ESTEEM, so having a space set up where we can talk to each other is a really positive thing.

Impact had on ESTEEM in my role

I have been working with drop-in staff to evaluate drop-in sessions, which has helped us to look at things from a different perspective and try new methods for getting young adults to join these sessions. A short survey was sent to young adults using our services, asking which media platforms they were using most frequently, and we used the results from this survey to prioritise our presence on the most popular platforms, so that young adults can see all the activities that are happening during a week. We have also assigned one of our media team members with the responsibility of sending out daily images to these media platforms which highlight the day's activities, often in a fun and humorous way. I think that this has been a great way of letting young adults know what is



happening at ESTEEM, and although it hasn't alleviated all of the barriers we are facing, I have found that it has made it easier to see the activities that are happening each day.



One of the great posts made by a young adult from ESTEEM's media team.

The process of moving from in-person drop-ins to online activities has been a challenging one, but one that the staff at ESTEEM have been committed to. It's been really great to see everyone putting in the extra effort to keep ESTEEM going strong, from both staff members and young adults. A lot of young adults have been running activities of their own during this time, such as game nights. I think that it is important to note how young adults have been taking responsibility to run these sessions and have demonstrated their ability to lead activities with confidence.

It is apparent that young adults have been struggling with the lockdown situation. From the conversations I have had with them, some have talked about feeling stressed, and expressed a lack of motivation and purpose in these times. This is another reason why the online drop-in activities have been so important. In the sessions that I have been to, I have observed an increase in participants' motivation and wellbeing by the time an activity has finished, and having these drop-in activities to look forward to during the week has been important for keeping a feeling of routine and normality in these times.

When I asked a young adult if they were satisfied with the support ESTEEM has been offering, they told me:

"I feel like they have done really well, we get 1-1 support and we have a whatsapp group so we can text someone if anything happens. During lockdown I was going through an experience that I found quite intimidating and all the staff members were really supportive of me through it and helped me so much, I feel that everyone is getting the support they need at the moment."

Looking forward to the next Quarter and what it will entail



The next quarter will be one where we can hopefully see the lockdown start to ease, and ESTEEM begins to take the correct actions to re-integrate face-to-face support for young adults in a safe and responsible manner. In the meantime, we will continue to offer activities & workshops over the internet, as well as counselling, mentoring and one-to-one support.

We have begun to open the building to staff members with a maximum of 6 in the building at one time, which has allowed us to return to a more traditional working environment, and speaking from my own experience, allowed for more productivity.

The Youth Management Team has also begun meeting in person at ESTEEM again, and we've taken this opportunity to have some really in-depth meetings and discussions in regards to our current project, which I will talk a little bit about in the next section.

YMT Zine

ESTEEM's Youth Management Team has been hard at work this quarter, creating a monthly zine as part of a community outreach project. The goal of the zine is to reach out to members of the local community with interesting activities, articles and interviews that will allow them to learn more about what is happening in their local area and the people who make up the community.

So far we have released two zines, which can be found on our blog at 'esteem.org.uk', with a third issue in progress. Gathering resources and conducting interviews for the zine has been an experience that the team has found really interesting, and I feel that we've all learnt a lot along with the readers of the zine. We've overcome a lot of challenges in the process, and through communication and effective teamwork, have been able to work more efficiently with each new zine issue.

In July, I was voted in as chairperson of the YMT. This responsibility is very important to me, and has given me the opportunity to take what I have learnt from my other roles within ESTEEM and apply my knowledge to a leadership position. There are a lot of times where information can be applied between roles. For example, findings during my time as a researcher can also be shared in YMT and Monitoring & Evaluation, so there is quite a symbiotic relationship between these positions. The work that I've been doing over the last few months has felt really fulfilling, and I've found that having many roles within ESTEEM has really improved my confidence and helped me to discover and acknowledge what skills I have to offer.



ESTEEM Research Report

During this quarter, I was also involved with the publishing of ESTEEM's research report, which explores a youth citizenship crisis and includes the views of many young adults that come to ESTEEM. We gathered the research for this report over the course of 8 months through interviews, activities and participatory action research methods.

During this report, we worked closely with young adults as they identified the barriers that they face as citizens. In addition to this, they also offered solutions to these barriers that can be applied to other young adults and society as a whole, as well as what enables them to succeed.

The key issue that young adults felt needed to be addressed was mental health. We found that there were mixed responses from young adults in regards to mental health care. While some reported that they had received the resources that suit them and help them to work towards a healthy recovery, others reported what they described as appalling care from mental health services, and not being offered anything they see as substantial to their recovery, with a lot of emphasis being on medication and group therapy, which doesn't suit some people. We found that this problem stems from a "one-size-fits-all" approach from mental health services, likely due to lack of government funding.

The full report is available on the Resources tab of our website at 'esteem.org.uk'.

Conclusion

By attending and observing activities over the last few months, interviewing young adults, working within other roles at ESTEEM and going through feedback with staff members, I have seen the ways that the charity has developed its methods of supporting and communicating with young adults over the lockdown period. There are areas that we are actively working on to improve, such as extending support to the younger members of ESTEEM who have not been attending many activities, which is something that was brought to my attention when interviewing a young adult about drop-in.

It has been great to see how ESTEEM has gone the extra mile to continue extending support to young adults through lockdown. Many young adults do not currently have access to the services that they need and I feel that ESTEEM has done a really great job of trying to fill that void and continue to help young adults, as well as preserving the community that we have built in an online environment. It has been a learning experience with a few hurdles along the way, but I have seen staff working hard to overcome these challenges, and I think that the organisation has done a great job of working around



the COVID situation safely and professionally. It has been really fulfilling for me to be a part of this process and learning what other young adults need from ESTEEM right now, and I feel like my role has had a positive impact on both the charity and myself.

If you would like to enquire further about my findings this quarter, you can email me at alex.mahoney@esteem.org.uk

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