



**your dignity**

**be well**

**stay well**

## Executive summary

This report looks at Swanswell's three-day Get Fabulous! workshop, which aimed to raise self-esteem within a small group of female clients.

Many people with drug and alcohol problems suffer from low self-esteem, which can affect both the way they look after themselves, their willingness to engage in treatment, and their capacity to develop the social and human capital which is so important to recovery (Cloud, W. and Granfield, W., 2009)<sup>1</sup>.

Swanswell developed and tested a unique and innovative three-day workshop in Birmingham during March 2010, involving a group of five women. The Get Fabulous! workshop, developed in partnership with a local college, combined health, hair, beauty and fashion activities with exercises in confidence and motivation.

At the end of the Get Fabulous! workshop, **100%** of the women stated their self-esteem and confidence had increased. This is an important factor in developing 'recovery capital' as part of their treatment.

On average, their self-esteem increased by **50%**.

Six months later the group's level of self-esteem was still **38% up** on original estimates.

Get Fabulous! not only offers a successful method of boosting clients' self-esteem, but also has knock-on effects of increasing appointment attendance rates, increasing the number of women entering treatment, and increasing their involvement.



## Report

This report summarises the aims and outcomes of Swanswell's three-day workshop, Get Fabulous!, the primary aim of which was to increase self-esteem with women service users.

The Get Fabulous! workshop consisted of a three-day programme of sessions relating to health, hair and beauty, and fashion, and exercises in confidence and motivation.

Feedback from those who attended the workshop was overwhelmingly positive – all of them reported higher levels of self-esteem. Increased self-esteem can positively influence people's treatment outcomes and has an important part to play in formation of their 'recovery capital' - the 'breadth and depth of internal and external resources that can be drawn upon to initiate and sustain recovery' from substance misuse (Cloud, W. and Granfield, W., 2009)<sup>1</sup>.

## Background on self-esteem

There are many definitions of self-esteem (e.g. Coopersmith, S., 1967)<sup>2</sup> (Bednar, R.L. and Peterson, S.R., 1995)<sup>3</sup>, but for the purposes of this report, we will use this one (Branden, N., 1992)<sup>4</sup>:

*'Self-esteem is the experience that we are appropriate to life and to the requirements of life. More specifically, it is:*

- *Confidence in our ability to think and cope with the basic challenges in life*
- *Confidence in our right to be happy, the feeling of being worthy, deserving, entitled to assert our needs and wants, and to enjoy the fruits of our efforts'*

It's these beliefs that people have about themselves and their evaluations of their 'worthiness' that make them who they are and shape what they can do and who they can become (Burns, 1982)<sup>5</sup>.

Research has shown that higher self-esteem can lead to better health and social behaviour, and that poor self-esteem is associated with a broad range of mental disorders and social problems, including substance abuse (Mann, M. et al, 2004)<sup>6</sup>.

It also highlights that self-esteem is often a two-way thing – i.e. people who don't have a high opinion of themselves can often seek to feel better through use of alcohol or drugs, which can also lead to them feeling bad about themselves.

While research opinion is divided on the links between substance abuse and self-esteem, there is evidence to suggest that people dependent on alcohol have lower self-esteem than those who don't (Charalampous, K.D. et al, 1976)<sup>7</sup>, and that higher self-esteem tends to link to decreased risk of substance use (Carvajal, S.C. et al, 1998)<sup>8</sup>.

However, in simple terms it's generally accepted that if you have higher levels of self-esteem, it's likely that you will be more healthy – both physically and mentally (Mann, M. et al, 2004)<sup>6</sup>.

We know that self-esteem is a very valid piece of the 'recovery capital' jigsaw, due perhaps to its prominence in helping people achieve their potential, as described by Maslow as far back as 1943 (Maslow, A.H., 1943)<sup>9</sup>. While his theory has been refined over time, his five basic levels in his 'hierarchy of needs' remain valid today (see figure 1).

**Figure 1:** Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Abraham Maslow's famous concept of a hierarchy of needs suggests that people are motivated to satisfy levels of basic needs before moving onto other 'higher-level' needs. And once all of these needs have been satisfied, only then can people can fulfil their potential ('self-actualisation')



## The workshop

We noticed a common pattern of low self-esteem among our clients (especially women). So Swanswell drug workers developed and delivered a workshop to address this. We called it Get Fabulous!

Five women attended the three-day workshop. The activities they took part in are listed in table 1.

Table 1: Get Fabulous! workshop programme

Day 1	Session
9.30am	Coffee and introductions
10.00am	Housekeeping and ground rules; aims and expectations
10.30am	Start video, audio, written diaries; scaling exercises
11.00am	Workshop on self confidence and self-esteem
12.00pm	Lunch
12.30pm	Beauty treatments
3.30pm	Finish
Day 2	
9.30am	Coffee and debrief; diary updates
10.00am	Style and shopping on a budget
10.30am	Shopping trip
12.30pm	Lunch
1.00pm	Health workshop with sexual health promotions
2.30pm	Complementary therapies and manicures
3.30pm	Self-esteem workshop
4.00pm	Update diaries; informal discussions
4.30pm	Workshop finishes for the day
Day 3	
9.30am	Coffee and de-brief
10.00am	'Makeovers' of hair and make-up
1.00pm	Lunch
2.00pm	Makeover photo-shoot
4.00pm	Final diary updates and evaluation forms/scaling
4.15pm	Group review of the workshop – discussion
4.30pm	Goody bags; workshop closes

## Methodology

As the workshop progressed, the women were asked to rate their self-esteem and confidence using a number of techniques including:

- written diaries
- video diaries
- 'feelings faces' worksheets (i.e. participants list how they're feeling at that point in time)
- scaling exercises (i.e. rating their self-esteem on a scale of 0-20)
- 'ME maps' (a 'ME map' asks people to write down all of their good points: their achievements, parts of their personality they like, things that they are good at etc. Despite being initially embarrassed by this, the women all engaged really well with this activity.

We used this range of qualitative and quantitative techniques as a measure of self-esteem among participants throughout the course of the three days, and also as a follow up six months after the workshop had taken place.

### The results of Get Fabulous!

Figures 2–5 represent a selection of results from the workshop.

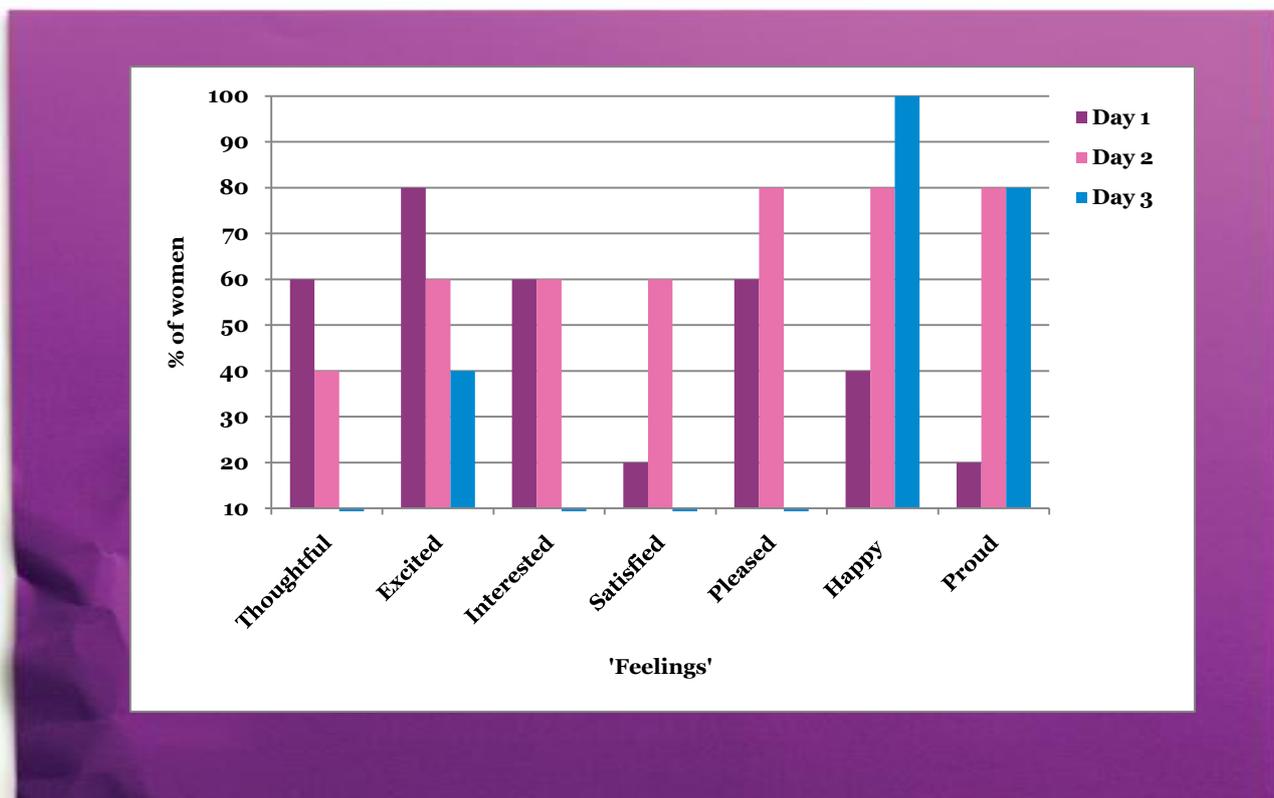
Figures 2–3 represent the moods of the women over the course of the three days, using the ‘feelings faces’ chart.

Figures 4 and 5 represent a quantitative measure of participants’ self-esteem based on them assigning numerical values (on a scale of 0-20).

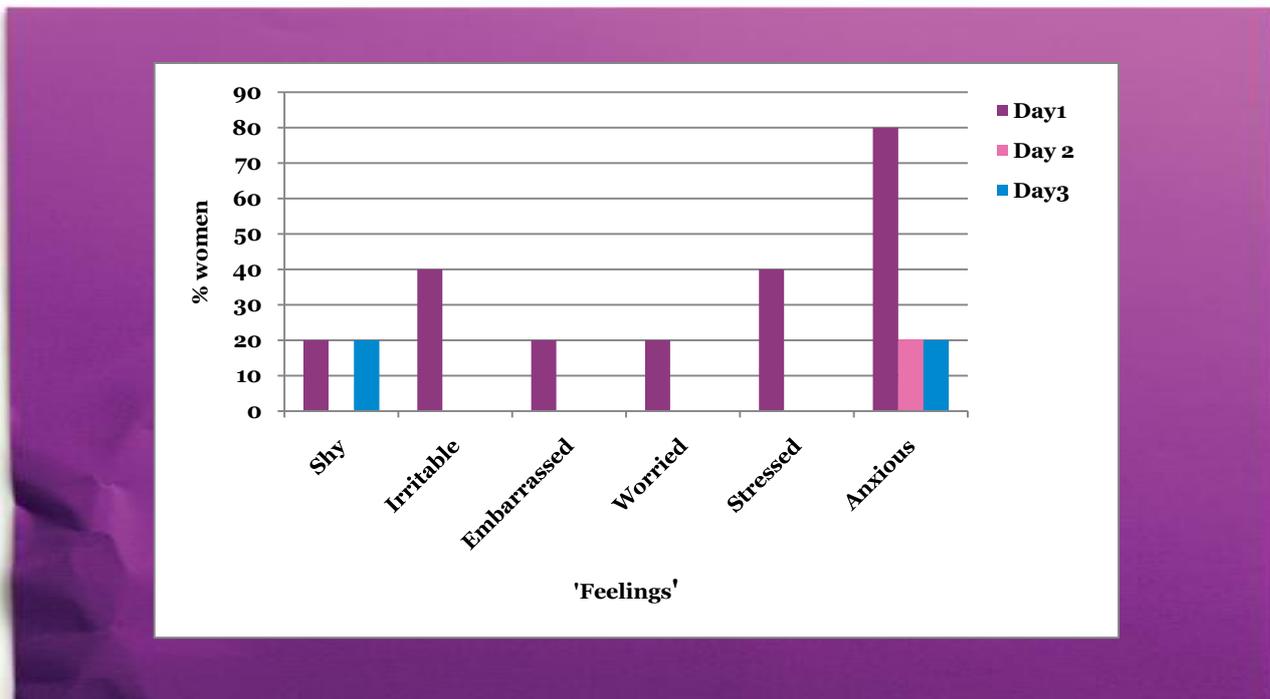
Note that the full range of feelings they could choose from included: upset; satisfied; interested; loving; affectionate; stressed; bored; pleased; thoughtful; shocked; dreamy; guilty; sick; silly; excited; embarrassed; shy; surprised; confused; smart; irritable; lonely; anxious; brave; disappointed; jealous; peaceful; tired; proud; worried; mad; happy; sad; and scared.

To make figures 2–3 easier to read, we’ve left out any feelings that weren’t chosen, and have categorised those regarded as ‘positives’ and ‘negatives’ in order to give an indication of trends ‘before’ and ‘after’ the workshop.

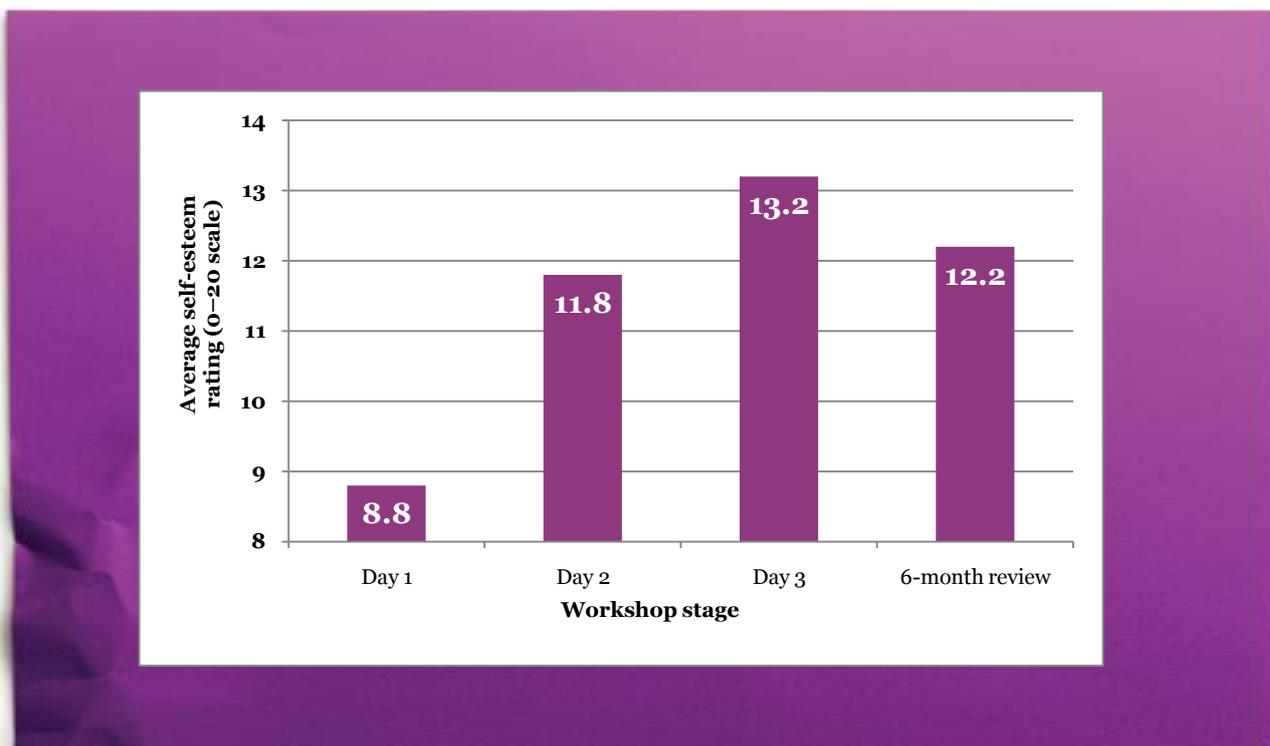
**Figure 2:** ‘Positive’ feelings recorded over the course of the three-day workshop. Of particular note here is the marked increase in ‘proud’ and ‘happy’ from Day 1 to Day 3.



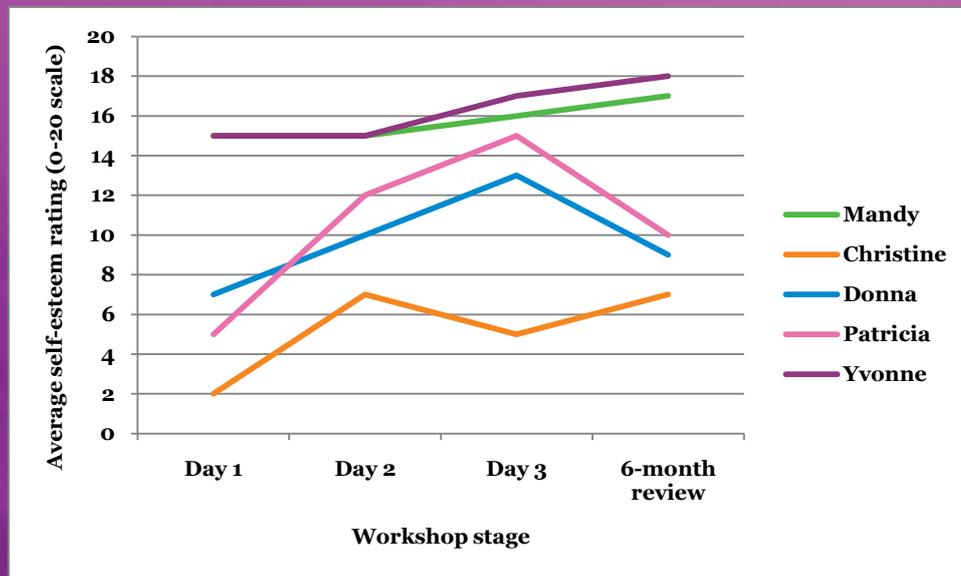
**Figure 3:** 'Negative' feelings recorded over the course of the three-day workshop. Of particular note here is the marked decrease, and elimination in some cases, of several negative emotions almost immediately after Day 1.



**Figure 4:** Using the 0-20 self-esteem rating scale, average self-esteem ratings across the group as a whole **increased by 50%** by the end of the workshop, with only a slight decrease to **38%** more six months later.



**Figure 5:** A full breakdown of the individual self-esteem ratings during the workshop and at the six-month post-workshop follow-up stage indicate varying results, but with an overall trend of increased levels of self-esteem



At the end of the workshop, all of the women swapped contact details and promised to keep in touch with each other. They all said that the part they had enjoyed the most was the ability to make new friends with people in similar situations. Each of them wanted to continue to meet the rest of the group on a regular basis to provide support to each other. We believe that if this was done on a more formal basis by holding a regular support group, this would continue to add to their recovery capital and help improve outcomes for clients.

Six months later, while the group average self-esteem rating **was still up 38%** (on the original value), this varied somewhat between the women, depending on their personal circumstances. All of them said that a monthly peer support meeting would help in keeping the benefits of the workshop going.

### Case studies

Mandy and Christine’s stories illustrate the positive impact that the Get Fabulous! workshop can make to someone’s life.

#### Mandy: trying something new

Mandy has been in treatment for over four years, during which her engagement and attendance in treatment has varied. Just before the workshop, her self-esteem and mood were low after a very emotional and traumatic period.

For Mandy, the workshop was a very positive experience. She says:

***‘I loved meeting new people and going to the spa and shopping. I now know that I can make time for myself and meet the girls again.’***

In the six months following Get Fabulous! Mandy’s engagement and attendance at Swanswell appointments improved. She was taking fewer illicit drugs, and stayed stable on her medication. A year on, she’s remained in treatment, despite some tough personal circumstances. Her stabilisation

on her methadone prescription has really improved and is something that her doctor has commented on.

She is considering trying out some short courses, with a view to going to college.

***'I've learned that it's not hard to actually get up and try something new,'*** she says.

#### **Christine: reaching out of the comfort zone**

Christine has been in treatment with Swanswell for almost two and a half years. She was extremely anxious at attending the workshop and had been suffering with her mental health for a number of years. Her drug use had been sporadic; her main triggers being when feeling low in mood.

The workshop helped Christine to know that there were other women suffering with their emotions as she does. At the end of the workshop she said: ***'I was really pleased I made the step to do something I felt anxious about, and hope to carry on challenging myself to reach out of my comfort zone.'***

12 months on, Swanswell drug worker Jade Aston says Christine has 'positively blossomed'. She has taken part in a jewellery-making course, as a result of which her designs were showcased in a shop in the Jewellery Quarter of Birmingham. She now has the confidence to call out bingo at a local community centre and has taken part in a local history project (including speaking on a DVD and collating stories from the past through Birmingham archives).

#### **What the women said**

Here are some extracts from the women's diaries during the workshop period, which demonstrates the difference it made to their self-esteem and confidence.

*'...I now know that I can make friends easily and feel a lot better in myself.'*

*'I've got self confidence and can do it by myself.'*

*'You can do anything when you go for it.'*

*'I can do things I thought I couldn't before.'*

*'I can do whatever I want if I put my mind to it and it's not just me that has problems.'*

*'Just getting me there was an achievement...for someone like me it would help to have something more long-term.'*

*'I do think back and draw on my experience [of the workshop] when I am feeling depressed...and remembering how I felt helps to lift my spirits.'*

## What we learned

The workshop improved the women's levels of self-esteem, and within three days this led to them setting their own goals and treatment objectives. In addition we learned that:

- all of the women said they had really benefited from meeting other people in similar positions and wanted to carry on meeting up to support each other
- a limit of six people per workshop is comfortable
- the workshop would feel less 'rushed' if extended to five days
- physical interactions with the group and external contacts (e.g. hairdressers, beauty therapists) must be handled sensitively
- the women particularly valued the session on sexual health, particularly the debate element and the information they received about STIs

## Conclusions

As a direct result of the workshop **100%** of the women recorded **higher levels of self-esteem**, with the group average rising by **50%** by the end of the workshop. Six months later, the group's level of self-esteem was still a healthy **38% up** on its starting level.

Get Fabulous! is an effective way to increase people's engagement in treatment. Working in a more intensive, informal format breaks down barriers and allows strong therapeutic relationships to develop quickly.

For the women who took part in our pilot, making friends with others in similar situations and supporting each other was just as important as becoming more confident and feeling better about themselves.

## What's next

On the basis of the initial pilot, we've been commissioned to run an extended version of the programme to include a rolling series of three-day workshops (on a monthly basis) tailored for women, men and carers. We're also hoping to include follow-up peer support groups as an added benefit for those taking part.

The Get Fabulous! workshop model is a successful way of boosting people's self-esteem, with potential extra benefits to be had in increasing clients' involvement and engagement in their treatment.

## References

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