

"know what's out there!"

Paddles of the Grand Program Evaluation

Prepared for

Paddles of the Grand

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Executive Summary

The "Paddles of the Grand" community project, now known as "Bearfoot Waters – Paddles of the Grand," is a social enterprise located in Haldimand, dedicated to promoting unity and individual well-being through artistic creativity and a strong connection to water. This initiative involves the production and painting of two-foot paddles by various community partners, including local high schools, a long-term care home, a blacksmith, and local artisans. The paddles are then made available to local artists and for community painting workshops, with proceeds reinvested into both the organization and the community.

The McMaster Research Shop partnered with Paddles of the Grand to investigate the extent to which participants are satisfied with the paddle production process and community painting workshops. To do this, we conducted semi-structured interviews and surveys to gather data from stakeholders involved in the initiative.

Stakeholders involved in paddle production expressed high satisfaction. Key themes included community involvement, effective communication with the project leader Gina, and the opportunity for students to practice skills learned in school. Long-term care home staff found the sanding workshops beneficial, providing a sense of purpose to residents, fostering community building, and indicating a strong partnership with Paddles of the Grand. The blacksmith emphasized community connection and effective communication with Gina as vital aspects of the partnership.

Participants in the community painting workshops were highly satisfied, attending for reasons such as having fun, unique artistic experiences, and community connection. The workshops met expectations, with participants valuing the atmosphere and togetherness. All participants would recommend the workshops to friends.

Overall, the evaluation of the Paddles of the Grand community project revealed high levels of satisfaction among participants in both the paddle production process and community workshops. The evaluation also highlighted the importance of open communication and flexibility in maintaining positive stakeholder relationships. The participants found value in community involvement, skill development, and the sense of purpose offered by the initiative. Though the feedback was overwhelming positive, Paddles of the Grand should continue to monitor stakeholder satisfaction through regular consultations and feedback surveys.

Introduction

Overview and scope

Bearfoot Waters – Paddles of the Grand, previously Paddles of the Grand, is a community project and social enterprise located in Haldimand, dedicated to fostering unity and individual well-being through a combination of artistic creativity and a strong connection to water. This initiative comprises paddle production, whereby two-foot paddles are created by various community partners, followed by the painting of the paddles by local artists and community members via interactive workshops.

Paddles production involves local high schools, a long-term care home, and local artisans. Students create the paddles in their shop class, seniors in the long-term care home sand the paddles, and a local blacksmith imprints the organization's emblem and applies protective coatings. The paddles are then made available to local artists and the community, with proceeds reinvested into both the organization and the community. The community painting workshops are guided by various artists working with Paddles of the Grand, including Gina Mcintee, the founder. As Gina explains, these workshops are "not just like a normal paint night. You walk away feeling more connected to yourself and the planet and the water."

Recognizing growing interest in its initiatives, The Paddles of the Grand approached the Research Shop with an interest in conducting a formative evaluation of the initiative to gain a preliminary understanding of the effectiveness of the paddle production process as well as how stakeholders currently value the program (if at all). Specifically, the evaluation seeks to understand how well the program is meeting its intended goals, identify areas for improvement, and inform decision-making to enhance community involvement and outcomes.

Evaluation questions

The research is guided by two questions:

- 1. To what extent are participants (teachers, seniors, students, blacksmith) satisfied with the community paddle production process?
 - a. What is working well?
 - b. What could be improved?
 - c. What, if anything, do they find valuable about participating?
- 2. To what extent are participants satisfied with the Paddle of the Grand community workshops?

- a. To what extent are participants satisfied with the content of the workshops?
- b. What elements, if any, resonate the most with workshop participants?

Report Organization

The report is organized into four main sections as outlined below:

- **Methods and Limitations**: Describes the employed process and outcome evaluation methods.
- Findings: Summarizes the evaluation results.
- **Discussion**: Presents a consolidated interpretation of the findings and their significance.
- **Recommendations**: Provides actionable suggestions to enhance workshop customization, ongoing impact assessment, and future evaluation activities for Paddles of the Grand, based on the evaluation findings.
- **Conclusion**: Summarizes the research objectives and significant outcomes.

Methods and Limitations

Methods

Paddle Production

We interviewed stakeholders involved in paddle production to assess their satisfaction with the program. Paddles of the Grand provided our research team with contact information for those involved who agreed to be interviewed. We contacted each of these participants via email, inviting them to participate in an interview.

Woodworking: Leadership (principals, vice-principals) and teaching staff from two high schools involved in producing paddles agreed to be contacted for interviews. We interviewed one teacher and one principal from the same school.

Sanding: Staff from two long-term care homes involved in paddle sanding agreed to be contacted. We visited a long-term care home to conduct in-person focus group while sanding. We also interviewed three recreationists from the other long-term care homes via Zoom.

Blacksmithing: The Blacksmith involved in the project agreed to be contacted and was interviewed.

Due to the limited sample size, semi-structured interviews were used to understand participants experiences. A semi-structured approach allowed us to ask follow up questions and seek additional clarification and allowed for additional exploration beyond the initial interview questions (see Appendix A, B, and C for interview guides)

We conducted interviews primarily via Zoom, unless otherwise noted. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the research team. Thematic analysis was used to determine key themes. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that focuses on identifying common themes; one researcher read through the transcripts, identified initial codes, coded the transcripts, and then re-examined the codes and sorted them into final themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Community Workshops

To assess participants satisfaction with the community workshops, we developed an eight question post-workshop survey designed to assess their satisfaction with the workshop content, structure, and overall experience (see Appendix D). Participants were each given a paper survey at the end of each workshop, and they were informed that their participation was voluntary and anonymous. The surveys were collected from the participants at the end of the workshop.

We used descriptive statistics, such as means and frequency distributions, to summarize participants' responses. For the responses to open-ended questions, we used content analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns in participants' qualitative feedback. Content analysis refers to the process of systematically deriving structure and significance from survey data, extracting themes and relationships, and formulating grounded conclusions with practical applications (Bengtsson, 2016).

Limitations

There are a few limitations to be aware of when interpreting the results: our participant population, uniformity of results, and some methodological limitations.

Participant population: Particularly for the interviews about paddle production, the small number of participants may mean that some responses are biased. For instance, the staff interviewed about paddle production in the high school were both from a school which has been working with Paddles of the Grand for several years. As we did not interview any staff from schools that are newer to this collaboration, our findings may reflect benefits and barriers of established programs and not fully capture these elements for school joining the program: for instance, we would not have captured any feedback about the initial program set up, as both staff members interviewed joined the school after this

partnership was established. Additionally, it is important to note that for both the woodworking and sanding, we interviewed staff and not the volunteers directly doing the work, so some opinions on the process may not be captured.

Type of feedback. The feedback received from the interviews and surveys were overwhelmingly positive. While this indicated a strong partnership between Paddles of the Grand and their various partners, this may limit the strength of the research team's recommendations. To mitigate this issue, we can modify the survey to include a question along the lines of "what was the most important part of the workshop for you?" Responses from this question can be analyzed to determine which aspects of the workshop impact the participants the most. This gives Paddles of the Grand the opportunity to see what aspects of the workshop are drawing participants in and what can be made more marketable.

Methods and research instruments: Participants for the first long-term care focus group had difficulty answering questions. The participants who attended the focus group had not previously attended any sanding workshops, and those who regularly attend the sanding workshops chose not to participate; this may be because they had previously had a sanding workshop in the morning, so were not interested in a second workshop that day. Additionally, some of the participants may have had conditions or disabilities that made it harder to engage in a focus group (e.g., dementia, hearing loss, etc.). Thus, for this part of the process we relied on staff testaments instead of participants' perspectives.

Findings

Stakeholder satisfaction with the paddle production process

In this section, we discuss participant satisfaction with the paddle production process. We divide the feedback according to each stage of the process: woodworking, sanding, and blacksmithing.

Woodworking

The first stage in the production of the paddles is the woodworking, which is primarily completed by local high school shop students and supplemented by a local woodworker.

There were three themes discussed by both participants interviewed when discussing their level of satisfaction with the program: community involvement, communication with Gina, and practicing skills.

Community involvement was cited as a major reason for continuing the partnership with Paddles of the Grand. As Participant 1 stated, "[Gina's getting everybody involved...] like that connection part." This theme was evident through four subthemes: within school involvement, outside of school involvement, seeing the whole process, and connection to water. Within the school, participants expressed how this project has led students to get involved with related initiatives. For instance, art students at the school have previously used the paddles as a part of their portfolios for assessment. Beyond the high school students, it was expressed that this project is "a great relationship between the high school and the community" (Participant 2). For the students, being able to see the whole process is an important part of seeing how their work connects to the community: "They enjoy seeing the product when it's done; that way they get to know what it looks like rather than just a bunch of wood" (Participant 1, in reference to when the paddles are completed and painted). They later shared that seeing the reach of the Paddles beyond when they are first created "pumps up the kids a little bit, right, to know that they're doing them gives them a little boost in confidence" (Participant1). Related to the community, is the connection to water. Participant 2 shared that "I think it's a really great connection because we are basically around a lot of water and the importance of what the Grand River has, you know, meant, I think not only to this community but in general to, you know, other communities and other cultures" (Participant 2).

An important part to this partnership that both participants discussed was the **communication with Gina**, both in creating new initiatives, and in setting capacity. For instance, Participant 2 discussed how Gina and them sat down to discuss other ways to incorporate Paddles of the Grand, which included an "art soup' day, which is our two

elementary schools come in and they spend a day here with our grade four and five students and they work with you know...an introduction to kind of all the arts, visual arts, dance music, visual arts, those pieces. And {Gina] actually came in for the day and kind of each of the elementary schools kind of worked through that as an initiative at that level" (Participant 2).

With sometimes limited capacity to make paddles, due to time or whether the classes run each term, both participants noted an appreciation for the communication with Gina around capacity. Sometimes we just aren't able to [make as many paddles as they need] and they're very responsive and very respectful and very appreciative of anything we can support" (Participant 2). As Participant 1 describes it, "we booked an appointment, we went [...] and all four of us sat down, hashed out the details, figured out what needs to happen" (Participant 1).

For the students, this project is primarily a way of **practicing skills** that they learn in their courses. For some younger students who take part, they may get to use tools, such as the router table, that they are less familiar with using. The benefit shared about this kind of project is that "they're still learning new stuff and get the practice and demonstrate a lot of the old stuff, which is super needed in a trade" (Participant 1)

Sanding

The staff we spoke to at the long-term care facilities spoke positively about the paddle sanding workshops. The overall experience was depicted through three main themes: a sense of purpose, community building, and strong partnership.

The first reason for a positive experience was because the workshops give the long-term care home a **sense of purpose**. As one staff member noted, "Sometimes the social roles that [the residents] had in the past are lost and they feel they can't contribute. [The workshops] give them that sense of purpose that they can still give back to their community and use those skills that they have."

Another reason for the positive feedback was the **community building** aspect and the opportunity for residents to build rapport with their peers, staff members, and community members outside the long-term care home. One focus group participant noted, "[The residents] feel comfortable with each other and sharing their stories. It's a nice way to bring everyone together and give back to their community, which I think is important to them. [...] It builds rapport between the residents too, being able to have conversations with peers. [...] If there's someone who's a bit down, for example, they could go to their friends that go to that program. So, it also builds that connection and those relationships as well."

The third indicated reason was the **strong partnership** between the long-term care homes and Paddles of the Grand. Participants shared that coordination between the long-term care homes and Paddles of the Grand have been smooth and positive. As one participant noted, "It's been very good communication [with Paddles of the Grand]. I haven't had to worry, and I've been able to gather support if I needed to." Another staff member noted Paddles of the Grand's flexibility and patience with workshop timelines, "[They] give us lots of notice of when [they] want [the paddles] done. Sometimes, [the workshop participants take longer] to produce the paddles so it's a time crunch when we have to get them out the next week for a project but we try to make it work the best we can. [They're] very adaptable. If we can't get them done, [they're] okay with it. [They'll] have some kind of back stock ready to go just in case."

All focus group participants rated their experience with the workshops as 4 out of 5. As noted by one participant, "[the overall partnership] is very cohesive [and] very involved." Another participant noted, "It's a wonderful initiative. [...] It's not easy bringing that many people together and coordinate all of this." The participants shared that including high school students into the sanding/painting stage could improve the workshops. As noted by one participant, "[We] wanted to bring in some high schoolers. [...] We have been talking about bring those high schoolers in to [build] connection with the residents for their volunteer hours so hopefully we can lean into that. [...] That's how we could advance or change the program a little bit because it's just the seniors right now."

Blacksmithing

The final stage of the paddle production is blacksmithing. The blacksmith we interviewed created and stamps each paddle with the program's logo. The two main themes that were discussed in the interview were community connection and communication with Gina.

There were several dimensions of **community building** mentioned in the interview. The blacksmith discussed their view of the larger project as "trying to help people understand each other, trying to create art for people to be able to look at and appreciate." They also mentioned making connections and getting new blacksmithing clients through Gina. For their work, they are compensated by Paddles of the Grand, but made it clear that they would still participate even if compensation was not provided, saying, "at the end of the day, it's still a good program for the community." This focus on community was emphasized throughout the questions, including when asking about potential areas for growth: "I think any logistical improvements to make it more businesslike would take away from the community side. [...] if you wanted to make it more regimented, all of a sudden, you're taking away from the volunteer aspect, you're taking away from the community aspect."

The **communication with Gina** was also discussed as a positive aspect of the partnership. The black smith emphasized the strong communication them and Gina had; for instance, they discussed a recent life event that had occurred, and that it was easy to contact Gina and let her know that they would need a short hiatus from the work to focus on family, which was treated as a non-issue by Gina. During the interview they mentioned several times the flexibility allowed for. For instance, when picking up and dropping off the paddles, they said "either I'll contact Gina and she'll either come pick it up or if I'm on my way to work I'll bring it to her drop it off at her workplace." Thy also discussed communication around the capacity to do the work, saying "Gina will message me and say, hey, you know, I got 12 to 30 paddles to burn. Would you mind if I drop them off?" This open dialogue between the two parties was mentioned at various other points too as part of the positive aspects of this partnership.

Community Workshops

We surveyed a total of 26 participants that came to two workshops in June and July 2023. Only one out of the 26 participants had attended the workshop before.

Participants were asked to identify all the reasons for attending the workshop (see Figure 1). Over 50% of respondents indicated that they attended to have fun, for a unique artistic experience, and to connect with their community. Less than half indicated that they attended to connect with water, or for other reasons than the ones shown (e.g., accompanying a friend or family member; curious about what Paddles of the Grand was about).

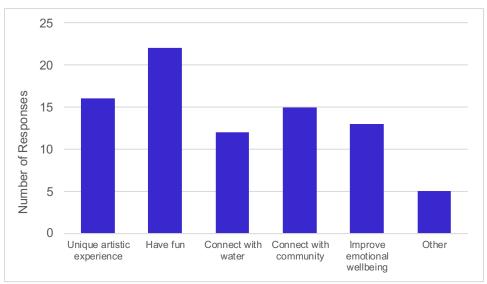


Figure 1: Responses to select—all-that-apply question about participants reason for participating.

The next question asked whether the workshop met the participant's expectations, and the option to elaborate on why or why not was also given. Only one participant chose not to answer the question, and one participant answered 'no,' giving the reason that they "thought the workshop would be different." The reasons for why it did meet participants' expectations include aspects of the relaxing and calming atmosphere. Many individuals also shared the experience of having fun during the learning process itself. Another core theme found amongst responses was the concept how we're all interconnected.

Participants indicated a high level of satisfaction with the way the workshop was run (see Figure 2). Almost all participants said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the content of the session (including the process, instruction, and materials, and the creative processes and painting activities during the workshop, and the overall workshop process. The elements enjoyed the most from the workshop were teachings, class style, painting, atmosphere, and togetherness. Several participants also indicated that they enjoyed "everything". All the participants indicated they would recommend the workshop to a friend.

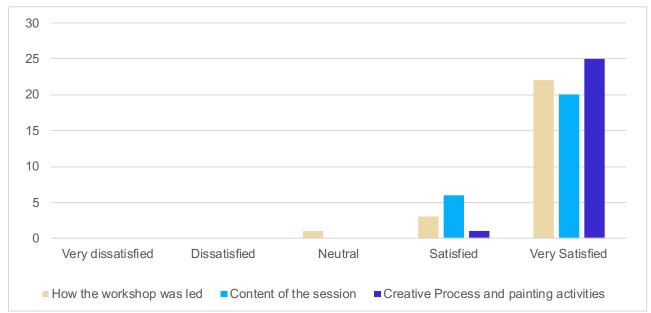


Figure 2: Participant responses to satisfaction across three elements of the workshop. The figure presents the responses to the Likert-scale question in which each option was given specific points. The blue graph represents the neutral responses, red is the satisfied responses and green is very satisfied.

There were no suggestions given by participants to improve the workshop, and 10 out of 26 responded that there was no need to change anything about the workshop. The last survey question gave the participants the opportunity to provide any additional feedback about the workshop. All the participants that left a response to this question commented on what they liked about the workshop. Figure 3 (below) is a word cloud of the responses, with the most common theme being "enjoyable".



Figure 4: Word cloud generated by categorizing general themes seen in the additional feedback section of the survey.

Discussion

The evaluation report assessed the Paddles of the Grand community project, focusing on stakeholder satisfaction with both the paddle production process and the community workshops. Overall, interviewing stakeholders in the paddle production process revealed that participants are highly satisfied with the process. A cross-cutting theme was Gina's strong relationships and effective communications with all the stakeholders, which was viewed as crucial to the project's success. The open dialogue between Gina and stakeholders allowed for collaborative decision-making and accommodating capacity constraints, contributing to positive working relationships. This finding suggests that if Paddles of the Grand were to continue to grow, it must maintain its ability to foster open, flexible, and mutually beneficial relationships with its stakeholders in the paddle production process.

In terms of the value stakeholders get from being part of the paddle production process, all touched on a sense of community involvement and/or purpose. This was particularly

meaningful for long-term care home residents who may have lost opportunities for social roles in the past. For students, the project serves as an opportunity to practice and enhance their skills, especially for those using tools they were less familiar with. This aspect aligned with the educational objectives of the high school programs involved.

Participants in the community painting workshops expressed high levels of satisfaction. Reasons for attending included having fun, seeking a unique artistic experience, connecting with the community, connecting with water, and other motivations. The workshops met participants' expectations, with many finding the atmosphere relaxing and enjoyable. Key elements participants appreciated included the teaching style, painting activities, atmosphere, and the sense of togetherness. Participants unanimously indicated they would recommend the workshops to friends. No participants provided critical feedback of the community workshops.

The report acknowledged certain limitations in the research process. These included a small participant population for interviews, potential bias in responses due to the limited sample, overwhelmingly positive feedback, and methodological limitations such as difficulty in conducting focus groups with certain participants. Paddles of the Grand should continue to monitor participant satisfaction of the program through semi-regular consultations with stakeholders in the paddle production process and feedback surveys at their community workshops (see Appendix E for an updated version of the post-workshop feedback survey.

Overall, the findings indicate a high level of stakeholder satisfaction and positive outcomes associated with the Paddles of the Grand initiative. The sense of community involvement, effective communication, and skill development contribute to the success of the paddle production process and community workshops. The workshops, in particular, are well-received by participants, offering a unique and enjoyable experience. The positive feedback suggests that the initiative aligns well with its intended goals of fostering unity, individual well-being, and community connection through artistic creativity and a strong connection to water.

References

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- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Appendices

Appendix A: Teacher and Principal Interview Questions

Teachers:

- 1. Tell me about yourself and the classes you teach.
 - a. What classes (grade level)
 - b. How many students
 - c. How did your school get involved in Paddles of the Grand?
- 2. What, if anything, do you value about the partnership?
- 3. Are there any parts of the process that you think could be changed or improved?

With respect to your students:

- 4. From your perspective, to what extent do you think they enjoy, if at all, being involved in paddle production?
 - a. Prompt: Do they seem engaged?
- 5. How does it compare to other projects that they would complete for this class?
- 6. Are there any unique skills this project teaches them?
- 7. From your perspective, what are the benefits to participating?
 - a. for the students
 - b. for you
 - c. for the school
- 8. From your perspective, are there any drawbacks to participating?
 - a. for the students
 - b. for you
 - c. for the school
- 9. Is there anything else you'd like to add with respect to the value of the program or the paddle production process?

Principals:

- 1. How did your school get involved in Paddles of the Grand?
- 2. What, if anything, do you value about the partnership?
- 3. Are there any parts of the process that you think could be changed or improved?
- 4. From your perspective, what are the benefits to participating?
 - a. for the students
 - b. for you
 - c. for the school
- 5. From your perspective, are there any drawbacks to participating?
 - a. for the students
 - b. for you
 - c. for the school
- 6. Is there anything else you'd like to add with respect to the value of the program or the paddle production process?

Appendix B: Long-term Care Resident and Staff Interview Questions

Residents:

- 1. Have you come to these sessions before?
- 2. What do you like about sanding the paddles?
- 3. What do you dislike about sanding the paddles?
- 4. Do you feel like you learned anything from the workshop?
- 5. Do you think it's a good thing to have these sessions in this home?
- 6. Do you think others would benefit from participating in this workshop?

Staff:

- 1. What, if any, was your favourite part of the workshop?
- 2. What, if any, do you think can be improved?
- 3. Is there anything you hoped would have happened in or after the program that didn't happen?
- 4. In what ways has this workshop contributed to the long-term care home from a staff perspective?
- 5. Describe your experience coordinating with the Paddles of the Grand staff. What parts were positive/productive? What can be improved/removed for future workshops?
- 6. On a scale of 1-5, how successful/satisfying did you find the workshop for staff. Explain

Appendix C: Woodworker/Blacksmith Research Questions

- 1. Tell me a bit about yourself.
 - a. Experience
 - b. Type of work
- 2. How did you get involved in Paddles of the Grand?
- 3. Please walk me through your role in paddle production.
- 4. Why do you choose to participate?
- 5. What, if anything, are the benefits of this partnership for you?
- 6. What, if anything, are the disadvantages of this partnership for you?
- 7. What aspects of this partnership is most important to you?
- 8. Is there anything you would like to see changed about this partnership (e.g., logistics/coordination, compensation, etc.)
- 9. Is there anything else you'd like to comment with regards to Paddles of the Grand and/or your role in it?

Appendix D: Community Workshop Survey Questions

Paddles of the Grand Post Workshop Survey											
1. Why did you choose to attend this workshop (check all that apply):											
For a unique artistic experience	To connect with my community										
To have fun	To improve my emotional wellbeing										
To connect with water	Other (optional) :										
2. Did the workshop meet your expectations?											
O Yes											
O No											
Why or why not?											
3. To what extent were you satisfied with											
	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied						
How the workshop was led and the qualifications of the workshop organizers?	Ο	0	0	0	Ο						
The content of the session, including the process, the instruction, and the materials?	0	0	0	0	0						
The creative process and painting activities during the workshop?	0	0	0	0	0						
4. What elements, if any, were most engaging a	about the wo	rkshop?									

5. What elements, if any, would you like to see changed for future workshops?

6. Have you attended a Paddles of the Grand community workshop event before?

- O Yes
- No

7. Would you recommend this workshop to a friend?

- ⊖ Yes
- No
 No

8. Please provide any additional feedback about the workshop:

Appendix E: Community Workshop Updated Survey Questions

Paddles of the Grau 1. How did you hear about this workshop?	nd Post Wor	kshop Sur	vey					
G Facebook	\bigcirc	Poster						
Word of mouth	Ŏ	Other:						
2. Why did you choose to attend this workshop (check all that apply): For a unique artistic experience To connect with my community								
To connect with water								
3. Did the workshop meet your expectations?		-						
O Yes								
O No								
Why or why not?								
4. To what extent were you satisfied with								
	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied			
How the workshop was led and the qualifications of the workshop organizers?	0	0	0	0	0			
The content of the session, including the process, the instruction, and the materials?	0	0	0	0	0			
The creative process and painting activities during the workshop?	0	0	0	0	0			
5. Describe the workshop in three words.								
6. What elements, if any, did you enjoy about the workshop	0?							
7. What elements, if any, would you like to see changed for	future worksho	ops?						
8. Have you attended a Paddles of the Grand community w	orkshop event t	pefore?						
Ves No								
9. Would you recommend this workshop to a friend?								
◯ Yes								
Νο								
10. Please provide any additional feedback about the works	shop:							

Appendix F: Community Workshop Additional Resources

These are two ways for participants to access an online version of the survey.

Link to google form:

https://forms.gle/Z9AWC2xEVjLr4DSB7.

QR code linked to google form:



Appendix G: Children Community Workshop

Set up:

- 4 poster pages, each with one question
- Each child received 3 coloured stickers. The coloured stickers each match with one question, so children can answer that question using that sticker.
- For question 4, markers can be provided for kids to write a word/draw a symbol. For younger children, assistance should be provided.
- 1. How do you feel about this session? (emojis)
 - Sad
 - Happy
 - Bored
 - Frustrated
 - Excited
- 2. What did you like about today?
 - Painting
 - Being with friends
 - Hearing about water
 - Learning
 - Relaxing
- 3. Would you like to come to this event again?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Maybe
- 4. Use one word to describe today.

Example poster: the text on the poster is red, so children use the red sticker to answer the question. Children answer by placing their sticker near the option that best matches how they feel.

