



Hi there Council, our credible critical friends.



Thanks so much for compiling and designing this very first mission reflection on the Association of Camerados (AoC). Having the Council reflect back to us what's working and what needs looking at for the movement is invaluable for AoC. It helps us think about potentially doing things differently but also on the good stuff where we need to put more emphasis. Really, truly this is awesome stuff because it's so easy to live and work in our own echo chamber in an annex in rural Oxfordshire. Thank you Council.

**A BIT OF BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

This is our very first time at doing this so we're sure how it's structured and worded will improve year on year but we thought before we launch into commenting on the Councils reflections (which are so beautifully and hilariously designed and illustrated Hannah) we'd set the scene a little of what AoC have been doing for the last year, so folk can understand the context of the Council's comments and reflections.

AoC is made up of 4 paid staff who come together everyday in Oxfordshire to...



plan and plot all things camerados and in particular how to inspire, resource and connect a growing movement of people who follow the same set of principles and believe we should look out for each other more to help us through tough times.

In the last year, AoC have continued to test the Public Living Room innovation in 5 hospitals (some in teepees, some in domes) across the country, with over 110,000 visitors



100+ communities across the UK and abroad



Designed a new Living Room in a Box and distributed it to an array of settings from Universities to prisons, community centres to schools, in market squares to doctors surgeries. In short, wherever communities want to host them.

AoC and the Story Department have launched the Camerados Chronicle, a paper for People Who Give A Damn, telling stories of Camerados across the country.

Attended events and festivals such as Wilderness and the Meaning Conference to inform and inspire folk to join and support the movement.

Partnered with Sheffield Hallam University to understand the impact Public Living Rooms have on individuals ... see our evaluation report on the website.

Hosted 2 campfires bringing people from across the movement together.

Launched a new website and an online shop with Camerados merchandise.

Carried out street activity and worked with Practical Governance to launch the mighty Camerados Council.

It's truly been a great 12 months in terms of the movement gathering momentum and Public Living Rooms appearing across the Country in all sorts of settings and being run entirely by people supporting the Camerados mission. We're really looking forward to the next 12 months.

**RESPONSE TO COUNCIL'S MISSION REFLECTION DOCUMENT**

This section is AoC's response to the points the Council have highlighted. We really appreciate the thought and hardwork put in by the Council and recognise much of what is said. Thank you.

**1. MOVEMENT NEEDS MORE OPPORTUNITY TO MEET AND WORK TOGETHER. CAMPFIRE IS AN OPPORTUNITY BUT "TOO MUCH STRUCTURED ACTIVITY" STOPS THIS FROM HAPPENING.**

AoC totally agrees. We learnt from the second campfire and deliberately made the next one mostly social time. Unfortunately we were then criticised by some for not making it worth their while attending. All we can say is that we're really trying to get the balance right. We have social time entirely on the Friday and Saturday evenings and also time for a walk in the countryside but the rest of the time workshops, speakers and asking for advice from the movement. We are repeating that on the next campfire. Plus after guidance from the council on one of our monthly calls we are adding two time slots in the agenda where those attending decide what is discussed.

We will be more explicit, thanks to the council feedback, that in the social time (especially the walk) that people use the principle of "mixing with people who don't look like you" and find strangers and learn from them. Also in the welcome note we will actively encourage people to find kindred spirits that they can call on after the campfire to support each other.



We're pleased to say that after responding to feedback from a camerado at a campfire we have set up regional Facebook pages and they have already led to two camerados meeting up and plotting together in Birmingham. We hope this will continue.

**2. IS THE CHRONICLE TRULY OF AND FOR THE MOVEMENT OR IS IT BEING CONTROLLED FROM THE CENTRE?**

We think this is both fair and unfair(!). Editorially definitely AoC and the Story Dept (two talented folk from the movement) are trying to ensure a tone and character that gives people permission to be irrelevant and also for the paper not to become too similar to others out there - like "The Happy Newspaper" (which is brilliant but it has been done already, and also is not our voice). So yes that is fair the first two issues have definitely been controlled by the centre - by the Story Dept and by AoC.



It is unfair because AoC have really pushed and pushed for the Story Dept to go out on visits and gather stories from the movement however this has proved difficult both because a) the movement does not always respond b) the Story Dept were hit by personal challenges which restricted them going on visits.

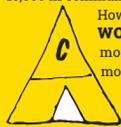
This has been disappointing as the AoC have said many times that the paper is way too much about AoC activities and not enough about the activities of the movement. All we can say is that it is not what we wanted but we wanted to get an issue out there to inspire people. Hopefully future issues can have more stories from around the movement and we would love to hear ideas from

**3. HOSPITALS AND SCHOOLS ARE BIG INSTITUTIONS THAT SOUND IMPRESSIVE TO EXTERNAL FUNDERS BUT ARE THEY REALLY THE RIGHT KIND OF ORGANISATIONS FROM WHICH THE MOVEMENT CAN GROW. OR ARE THEY ECLIPSING THE COMMUNITY ALTERNATIVE?**

AoC think that hospitals definitely did eclipse the community work in 2018 and since completing the hospital work with the innovating NHS partners and launching the PLR's in a box the community PLR's have certainly taken off, therefore this is a fair assessment but we strongly disagree that we did it to impress funders.

We focused on hospitals because in our prototype years we discovered that the highest concentration of people going through "tough times" in any community was in the local hospital. Patients, visitors and staff were all experiencing tough times but not connecting with each other to get through them. By the very nature of it's work hospitals reached a high number of people with the widest range of problems among the most diverse group of people - everyone gets sick regardless of creed, colour or background. The downside to focusing on hospitals was that we didn't pay sufficient attention to getting the boxes out to communities, the upside is that 110,000 people have used a public living room compared to approx 10,000 in communities.

However despite that statistic we are MORE committed to our community work going forward without a doubt. We believe that the relationships are potentially more transformative in communities as the people using PLR's are less transitory and more intentional and regular.



Schools is a red herring on this issue as we have treated them like a community and not given them much more time than communities, so they haven't been a distraction.

**4. WE ARE CONCERNED THAT THIS DRIVE NOT TO BE SHACKLED BY A FUNDER COULD TEMPT THE AOC INTO RUNNING DOWN THE FUNDING TOO QUICKLY. LIMITING ITSELF OR PUTTING ITSELF AT RISK UNNECESSARILY. WANTING TO MOVE THINGS ON QUICKLY IS GREAT, HOWEVER OUR SENSE IS THAT BIG STRATEGY DECISIONS ARE STILL MADE CENTRALLY...WHAT IF THE AOC MOVED RAPIDLY INTO A SUPPORTING AND CONNECTING ROLE AROUND STRATEGY? STRATEGY CAN EMERGE FROM THE MOVEMENT AS WELL AS BE DECIDED CENTRALLY.**

Great challenge here. We think this is dead right and what should happen in the future, and what has partially happened already. We rewrote the principles at the very first campfire and have put things like the newspaper to consultation at the campfire also.

We set up the council precisely because we wanted the voices of the movement to challenge AoC on it's direction.

It is a very good challenge though that strategy is still decided by the AoC Directors and this is true. We think this is mainly a phase we are in. We have only recently begun to have a movement at all, people have come and gone and it is still a very early and unstable movement that is not remotely consolidated. The AoC's approach to co-production in this period is to put stuff out there and then change it according to how the movement use it - we have built our strategy based on that conversation - what works for people in their neighbourhood.

For example our constant iteration on language (the names "public living room" and the definition of "camerado" both came from the movement); the tools we use (we redesigned the box after movement told us it was too heavy etc); the campfires, the website and so on.

However when the movement is more consolidated we think the council are right we should put the strategy to them to feedback on before it's set in stone. We are not a federation or a co-operative and would be fearful of going in that direction as it increases the politics and bureaucracy and the mission gets lost. However as the AoC want to "inspire, resource and connect" part of that resourcing should be "strategy" and therefore when the movement is more robust AoC should factor in input from the movement when considering future strategies.



**5. "OVER TIME THE AOC DOES NOT REDUCE IN SIZE OR CAPABILITY BUT THAT IT CONTINUES THE SAME SIZE BUT DECREASES IN SIZE AND SCALE RELATIVE TO THE MOVEMENT - IN FACT THE AOC CONTINUES TO DEVELOP AND GROW BUT IN DEPTH AND CAPABILITY RATHER THAN IN ABSOLUTE SCALE"**

We agree entirely. The AoC does not need to grow in staff numbers but needs to grow in learning, capabilities, training, development etc.

**6. A RELATED ISSUE MIGHT BE ADDRESSING ANY GUILT THAT REMAINS ABOUT THE MEMBERS OF THE AOC MAKING A REASONABLE LIVING**

We thank the council for this thought however we feel we do make a reasonable living. It is a good provocation however and we will certainly keep an eye on this if we are successful in receiving a grant for the next five year as it is our intention to taper the grant down after 3 years according to the needs of the movement. If this is too early then we have made provision to counter this. We do not however want to make the AoC the goal and keep the focus on the movement.

**7. THE PEOPLE ON THE COUNCIL NEED TO BE SELECTED BY THE MOVEMENT WITHOUT INFLUENCE FROM THE AOC**

We totally agree. In fact when we set up the Council we did so via Practical Governance entirely because we wanted to protect the council's independence at all costs and remove any suggestion of AoC interference.

**8. THE COUNCIL NEEDS TO BE ABLE TO CONNECT Laterally TO DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE MOVEMENT - WITHOUT BELIEVING IT HAS TO GO THROUGH AOC**

We totally agree and would love to see the movement do that more. Originally we hoped this would be done through connections made at the Campfires and more recently through camerados website forum. Unfortunately the latter hasn't worked and the former has had limited success. AoC are going to set up geographic FB sites for folk in the camerados movement so people physically close to each other can connect without going through AoC and hope that platform has more success.

**9. THE COUNCIL NEEDS TO MAINTAIN ITS INDEPENDENCE AND ALSO AVOID BECOMING PART OF THE HIERARCHY, WITH ITS OWN INFLUENCE.**

We totally agree. We believe by not giving the council any legal responsibility we are freeing it from feeling any hierarchical responsibilities. The only hierarchy should be within the company and organisation that is AoC where there are Directors and staff with roles and line management reports.

**10. SOME AREAS DON'T SEEM TO HAVE ENOUGH SPARKS TO TAKE THE PUBLIC LIVING ROOMS FURTHER, IS THIS A LACK OF KNOWLEDGE OR SUPPORT? OR LACK OF CONFIDENCE... NEEDS PERMISSION.**

The truth is AoC don't know the answer to this yet. Some areas have been slower to take up the mantle for example the SouthWest but others have forged ahead in NorthEast and SouthEast. This could be due to the fact that in these early days of setting up the movement AoC decided to "go where the good energy is" and some areas have been very proactive in inviting AoC to inspire and explain the camerados mission to communities and folk have then made it their mission to spread the word. AoC haven't had many requests from the SW or much from Wales to go and visit and explain about the movement so we can imagine that's part of the problem. However, the Council is right, AoC is moving into another stage of development now and all areas of the UK should be given 'permission' to join us. Thanks for highlighting this and if the movement can help us work out how to get into those areas through connections they may have, AoC would be really eager to hear more, as much of this year's success and spreading of the movement has come via word of mouth references and folk attending events AoC is presenting at.



**11. LACK OF SOCIAL MEDIA CONNECTION AND PRESENCE Laterally IN THE MOVEMENT**

We have noticed this too and it is strange and concerning. Camerados from one area do not re-tweet and support other camerados very much. We asked some camerados why this was the case and they said it had not occurred to them to do anything other than use social media for anything other than themselves, which is alarming. We hope this changes as the movement and awareness grows. Absolutely this is worth exploring more because AoC do not want to be constantly on 'send' we want the movement to be stepping up to promote the principles and the mission too - thank you for the nudge.

**12. LACK OF STORIES BEING SENT TO THE NEWSPAPER**

We totally agree. See above comment about why the newspaper is not "of the movement" yet. We hope this comes up at the next campfire.



**13. TOO MUCH CONTROLLING BEHAVIOUR COULD REALLY PUT A DAMPNER ON THINGS, LIKE CAMERADOG HERE (PIC OF DOG PEEING ON A CAMPFIRE NAMED "THE MOVEMENT")**

We love you cameradog... We love cameradog. And we agree entirely. We think about this DAILY. We came up with "inspire, resource and connect" in order to keep ourselves on the straight and narrow and away from delivery - get out of the way of the movement! There is much dancing, whooping and hollering at AoC when the movement interprets the mission in a way that fits with their community. This is linked with the 'core and adaptable' AoC are so keen to support; core being the principles and adaptable pretty much everything else with AoC resources such as the PLR in a box as a starting kit. AoC are constantly trying to step away but ensuring that at this early stage of movement adoption the critical parts of being a camerado are not lost ... it's a fine balance to walk but we hope not to be too controlling the more the mission is understood.

**14. LET PEOPLE EXPERIMENT - DID AOC RESTRAIN HOSPITALS BY NOT WANTING THEM TO USE IT FOR "VENUES" AND ACTIVITIES" BUT "STAY PURE TO THE CAMERADOS IDEALS" AND KEEP IT AS A NON AGENDA PUBLIC LIVING ROOM.**

This is a great challenge. We perhaps have to be more explicit that the public living rooms can absolutely be used as a venue and for activities as long as there is always space for some people to come in and NOT take part and just "be". Bristol Student Union listened to us and have done this very effectively.

We believe the PLR model allows communities a significant level of adaptation to fit the neighbourhood's needs but the core of camerados i.e. the principles need to always be present to enable the model to function properly. If an activity takes over the entire PLR and events are constantly hosted at the detriment to those who just need a space to connect and just 'be' during tough times, the PLR will fail to support the camerados mission. AoC has witnessed this first hand in one hospital and several community PLR's when the innovation was in its early days of development and folk just become confused as to what the space meant. It's a subtle thing but it's really important to the mission that everyone is made to feel welcome to a PLR, if they are part of an activity/event or not.

**15. POWER OF CO-CREATION - THE EXAMPLE OF HOSPITAL WAITING ROOMS (AN AOC INITIATIVE) NOT WORKING VERSUS BRISTOL SU (AOC ONLY ADVISED BUT BRISTOL SU BUILT IT) DID WORK AND IS MOST SUCCESSFUL TO DATE**

We totally agree. We need to always make sure we are light touch and only provide catalyst resources, advice, inspiration and the principles. We mustn't encroach on design too much. And we must listen and learn to what works for PLR's and share that with the movement and iterate our own resources accordingly.

**16. TOOLS FOR CONNECTING AND ENCOURAGEMENT - THE FORUM IS POOR AND THE CAMPFIRES ARE "BIG GESTURE EVENTS"**

We totally agree about the forum. We re-designed it as a result of this feedback however it is still poorly used. We will keep trying but this is a very accurate observation.



We take the campfire feedback seriously. We certainly haven't intended them to be purely "big gesture events", that's a surprise to us. Perhaps we are holding them too tightly and attendees and AoC are at odds in terms of expectations. However, we'd also like to reflect that we have listened to the movement and introduced 2 open sessions for the movement to bring whatever topics they wish to discuss to the event and also introduced external speakers as a response to feedback. We will however continue to try and understand what works best for folk but know we can't please all the people all the time.

**17. CAMPAIGNING AND PUBLICITY - MAFF ISN'T EMBRACING HIS ROLE, SOCIAL MEDIA IS SPORADIC**

We agree on both counts. Maff finds it a difficult tension - like the Council's comments in this review he too believes in not being too controlling and yet being the face of the movement suggests it is "led" and is about him. He needs help with this. Our social media is not structured and is sporadic, the council is right. We tried hiring a comms manager, then we tried a social media associate, however neither of them sounded like us and we became too corporate. We believe that our voice on social media is right but because it is done by Maff it has to fit round the rest of his work and therefore does not happen often enough. We do need to address this and will keep trying. If we receive ongoing funding we will probably give someone else the responsibility in the office. Thanks for the feedback.



**18. DIVERSITY - DIVERSITY WOULD GROW IF THEY ASK FOR HELP MORE FROM THE MOVEMENT AND USE "TWO EARS AND ONE MOUTH"**

We agree. We would absolutely love movement members who have certain skills to help us out but AoC have been shy in asking in some respects a) because the movement is just so new and we haven't learnt to do that yet and b) because folk in the movement aren't really communicating back to AoC as to who's in the PLR's and therefore we don't know the skills out there. It's a great challenge though and we will definitely start putting out requests for help, just like we did with Story Department when we got to know them.



**19. IN A PRACTICAL FORM, INCLUSIVITY ALSO MEANS BEING CONSIDERATE OF EVERYONE'S DIVERSE NEEDS WHEN CAMPFIRE PLANNING (ACCESS, DIET, ALCOHOL ETC).**

This challenge feels a bit hard for AoC to hear as we have endeavoured to accommodate everyone as best we can each time we've hosted campfires.

We've catered for people with:

- different food requirements
- provided soft drinks as well as alcoholic
- pre-warmed people that alcohol will be available at our events and asked folk who are drinking to understand that for some it's difficult to be around alcohol so please behave appropriately
- sought out appropriate accommodation for folk with very specific physical and mental needs
- provided specialised transport for those with specific needs
- been mindful of individuals mental health issues when creating the agenda, after listening to feedback
- always asked people to contact us if they have any special requirements.

AoC have also introduced a doodle poll so folk attending the next campfire can vote on certain aspects of the weekend, so we hope the movement can see we're trying to listen and provide what is requested. We will however keep trying to improve.



EVERYONE IS WELCOME HERE

**20. AND, JUST AS FOR THE COUNCIL, WHEN IT COMES TO AOC RECRUITMENT IT'S ABOUT LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELD TO ENCOURAGE DIVERSITY - AND THE SAME GOES FOR PARTNERSHIPS. CAN WE REALLY CLAIM TO BENEFIT FROM THE ADDED VALUE THAT DIVERSITY BRINGS IF WE ONLY COLLABORATE WITH PEOPLE JUST LIKE US?**

We couldn't agree more and it's something we've always been aware of, hence stacking the decks when launching our original PLR's by purposefully inviting a cross section of society to our events specifically to make folk understand EVERYONE is welcome. But goodness gracious it's tough and the whole movement has to be mindful about it when setting up their PLR's as it's sadly something that doesn't happen easily.

We'd really like to see people from all ages, genders, religions and socio-economic backgrounds accessing the PLR's and we all have a responsibility to address this.

**AND FINALLY...**

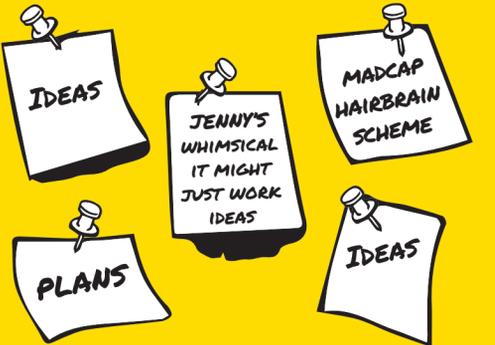
**REFLECTIONS BY AOC ON ITSELF AND ALSO THE MOVEMENT THAT HAVEN'T BEEN COVERED BY THE COUNCIL.**

- At this early stage of movement building AoC often reflects that it is often on 'send' much of the time with information, ideas, resources and requests but hears very little back. For example AoC believes the best way to explain what the camerados movement is all about is through behavioural stories gathered in the Public Living Rooms but this doesn't happen, except in hospitals where people wrote to us in their hundreds. We'd really love the movement to help us understand why this doesn't happen and work out a way to move this forward.



- For folk close to AoC, it sometimes appears there is a bit of a parent/child relationship that develops and movement members wait for permission from Maff and Jenny in particular to step up. Genuinely we don't know if this is our fault but we would like the Movement to recognise that AoC sometimes need help too because we are innovating and iterating constantly in the development of the movement and don't always have the answers.

- One reflection AoC have on themselves is whether as a team we move on from one idea to another too quickly. The entire team is creative and we are never short of new ideas and that coupled with the culture of 'launch, test and iterate' which runs through the core of the team means that sometimes we can try something and move on too quickly before it has chance to bed in.



Thanks Council for investing your time, energy and skills into pulling together your reflections. Everything you highlight to us is of interest because we, at AoC are learning all the time how to inspire and support a movement of unconnected people across the UK and further afield to embrace a set of principles and behaviours we really value and want to live by so hearing back from you is invaluable. Here's to the next time round when who knows what will have happened!

**ONWARDS AND UPWARDS CAMERADOS!**

