

## **Transcript Camerados: what is a public living room and how to set one up**

Sam Moon, Camerados: A Public Living Room can pretty much be anywhere. They can be outdoors, they can be indoors, and it's a space where people can be alongside one another without agenda.

They might be hosted in a sense, but they're un-staffed, so no one's really in charge, and it's a great place where you can just go and be, and be alongside others, just have fun, be silly, have a cup of tea and maybe have a squabble over what's your favourite biscuit.

I have a ball gaming public living room called Gamerados and also run some pop up public living rooms which I've done during various events in Norwich, and also have a regular public living room, an outdoor public living room, alongside a bike project.

Maff Potts, Founder, Camerados: We're about looking out for each other, that's the whole purpose of the movement. It's not a service we have people who are social workers who are camerados, we have people who are community workers, have people working in business.

Most people are just ordinary folk who in their neighbourhood, want to do something that isn't necessarily married to a service, a church or faith, or a condition: they just want to be a human.

I set this slightly mad movement up in my bedroom seven years ago after being disillusioned of working in very traditional institutional services for 20 years. There are people all over the world now being camerados.

Public living rooms - we have 133 now, and you can set one up too. We give you a box, phone call with Yvonne in the office, all you have to do is add people and furniture.

Sam Moon: I'd just say do it, do it, and have fun with it. There's lots to camerados everywhere so being able to have conversations with lots of different people doing it, we're able to share what we're thinking, get ideas from one another, support one another.

From the association of camerados you get a banner, and you get cushions and cushion covers and badges and all the things that help really create a public living room space.

One's I've run, people have stumbled across them, they found them and wandered in. The outdoor ones, when you will pass a sofa in the street, or banner or a footpath or a park dressed with a rug, table, and a sitting room lamp, it creates a very very interesting thing where people feel it's comfortable to come in and sit down.

What I really like about it is how accessible it is. There's not an element of who the important people are, it's very much people being alongside one another and cheering one another up.

Maff Potts: so we started doing these public living rooms, like the ones you've seen, everywhere we could think of to see if they would work: a park in Camden, hospital in Blackpool, a prison, we did it everywhere.

What we learned was you need a simple set of principles which you put on the wall. People don't just naturally look out for each other. The whole notion of getting to be mutual and just be human is not natural to us anymore. So we have a set of principles which help.

*Principle 1 - If we see someone struggling, we ask them to help us.* A number of times in my career I've been faced with people who are right at the edge of life, their toes are over the cliff and they cannot see a way forward. And I say, 'listen I'm very sorry to hear you're having a tough time, can you do me a favour.' And there will be something I need to have advice on. Within 10 minutes they are telling me to calm down as 'Maff, I've got some ideas.' When you say 'can you do me a favour?' what you're saying is, 'I trust you.' 'You have value.' 'I don't have all the answers.' 'I need you. We need each other.' Instead of what we normally do which is 'I've got everything, I know what the answer is, what you want to do is.....'

*Principle 2 – No fixing one another's lives, we are just alongside one another.* It is extremely rare in the public realm to have somewhere where someone isn't fixing you. The public living room is a secret place of no fixing. We're just alongside. Now, amazingly, what happens is, ideas, solutions - they start presenting themselves in the course of conversation because you connect with someone and through a 'no agenda' conversation things occur to you. Put under the pressure of fixing and solving your life, that's not a pressure that many people can really deal with, let alone come up with anything that useful.

*Principle 3 – I't OK to be a bit rubbish, we share our failures without worrying.* Our life, our society, has made it absolutely impossible to be a bit sh\*t sometimes. We don't talk about it, we certainly don't put it on Instagram. You then have these things that turn up, and these things they're called shame and guilt and pride. They're not all hugely positive, folks, but the effort and the money and the resource is that going to covering our ars\*s is so corrosive and so damaging. So in a public living room we're all rubbish together.

*Principle 4 – We mix with people who don't think or look like us* Mixing with people who are not like you, it broadens your mind, it increases your tolerance, and it makes it OK to not be not be fantastic all the time, to be rubbish, to have different feelings. You know you don't have to be perfect, you can just be yourself.

*Principle 5 – Remember to have fun, it keeps us human* To be silly is to be human. (Plays keyboard and sings: 'Move in your chairs!....') Well, I think we've pretty much exhibited that one.

*Principle 6 – When we disagree, level with each other respectfully* I don't know when it happened but in public discourse somehow that stopped from being OK. So in public living rooms if I hold a different opinion it's OK. If I'm not happy with how someone's behaving in a public living room, I get to point at the poster and say it's okay for me to disagree with you.

There's a friend of mine who is a camarado, he runs a few public living rooms in Norwich, and he always introduces himself by saying 'Hi, I'm Sam, and my favourite biscuit is a hobnob.'

We've made a T-shirt dedicated to Sam's idea because what happens next is the person besides them says 'Oh hello, I'm Susan, and I'm a bourbon person, and everyone starts to giggle. And then the next person is a ginger nut, and then the next person....then before you know it they get to a level which is a little bit more human, and connected, and understanding of each other, and they really talk about stuff because they remember they are people.

Sam Moon: so if anybody was thinking to start a public living room I'd say do it. I'm happy to have a conversation with you, there's lots of other camerados out there, and also the association of camerados are very much going to be there cheering you on and championing you, and be able to support you with resources, which they will send you.