

2018 Enspiral Summer Festival

Report and Recommendations for Enspiral Foundation Ltd



Introduction

Two years ago [EXP](#) Ltd (an Enspiral venture owned and operated by Ants, Billy and Silvia) asked the Enspiral network for a mandate to host Summer Festival in 2017 and 2018, and to organise these events (Loomio conversation found [here](#)). To formalise this arrangement EXP Ltd entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Enspiral Foundation Ltd (MOU found [here](#)).

This document is our report back to Enspiral Foundation and to the wider network (last year's report can be found [here](#)). This document is intended as both a summary of the 2018 event and as a completion/reflection document on the two year experiment of having an Enspiral venture organising Summer Festival. At the end of this document we make a number of recommendations about the future of retreats for the Enspiral network.

We would like to thank everyone who has been involved in hosting these events over the last two years, all the people who have turned up and actively participated, as well as everyone who has invested in creating such a strong culture of gathering at Enspiral.



2018 Event Summary

What: Summer Festival
Where: Silverstream Retreat, Upper Hutt
When: January 30th - February 1st 2018
Who: 70 people from 6 countries

The 2018 Summer Festival followed the same basic format of previous Enspiral Retreats: an open invitation, welcome, check-in round, orientation, Open Space workshops, sharing/story circle, homegroups, and a group check-out round.

Changes to this year's event include no celebration night (replaced with a house party in town following the retreat), no group sensemaking process on the last morning (replaced by parallel stream goal setting workshops), and a curated Open Space Market Place (an attempt to make the most of only having one day of Open Space workshops).

This year's event was a smaller event than both the 2016 and 2017 Summer Festival's (which had around 100 people at each). This reflected a year in which the size of the Enspiral network contracted for the first time as some Members and Contributors chose to move on. For this reason there was some uncertainty about how many people would participate in this year's Summer Festival, who the participants would be, and therefore what the right format was for the event.

A memorable feature of this year's retreat were the site works taking place at Silverstream Retreat. These were loud as well as visually impactful. They detracted from the quiet ambience required for a good retreat. The venue had hoped that the site works would be completed by the time we arrived, but unfortunately that was not the case. In recognition of the significant impact that the site works had on our group the venue has agreed to discount their invoice by 50% (a saving of approximately \$7k). This was discussed several times at the retreat.

On a more positive note, this year we also had a number of filmmakers participating in the retreat and the team from Digital Storytellers in Sydney created a beautiful artifact which captures so much of what Enspiral and Summer Festival are all about. The film can be viewed [here](#).

Organisation and Hosting

As noted in last year's report, a primary goal of having EXP organise the Summer Festivals in 2017 and 2018 was to see if a more professional, event management approach (a few people being paid rather than lots of people volunteering) to organising our gatherings could help reduce the overall organisational 'burden' on the network. Last year EXP deliberately did not mobilise a team of volunteers to make Summer Festival happen, instead the request for Enspiral Members was to turn up, participate fully, and host the people that we had collectively invited.

We still think this approach has merit. Network wide 'swarming' to organise events can produce magic, and it also tends to be stressful and exhausting for everyone involved. It also requires a whole new role called "the person who coordinates all the coordination." However we also noticed that by removing this approach we removed an important opportunity for Members and Contributors to bring their creativity and skills to the organizing of the event.

With all that in mind this year we tried a hybrid approach where Billy (wearing his EXP hat) committed to handling the logistics and basic facilitation, while Ants (wearing his GSD working group hat) convened a working group of people who wanted to shape and host the event. The emergence of working groups as means to focus and organise people's contribution feels like an important step forward. However this particular group did not really form and responsibility for making decisions about size, price, format, and focus reverted to the GSD working group, several of who are also on the Enspiral Foundation Ltd board.

Ultimately the decisions all got made and important tasks like setting up a Loomio group for participants were done, but this probably reflects the commitment of various individuals rather than us (Enspiral) having good processes or having a high functioning project team. It feels important to acknowledge that there was also confusion between EXP and the GSD about what tasks actually needed doing and this led to some duplication of effort and unnecessary stress.

Responding to Change (AKA: making it up as we go along)

After initially sending out an invitation for the same 4 day retreat format as the previous two events, a decision was made by EXP and the GSD working group to shorten the event to 3 days, and to have a celebration event in town after the retreat. We also introduced an 'offsite price' for people who only wanted to come for the day. All this was done with the goals of reducing the price and making the event more accessible for busy people.

In December 2017, one month before the retreat, only 28 people had registered for Summer Festival. Then in January we saw an additional 42 people register! So while the outcome was fine and our (EXP's) feeling is that the event was a success, it feels important to point out that there was considerable uncertainty about what the right size, price, format, and focus should be for this year's retreat. We even questioned whether there should be a retreat at one point.

Another key question the organisers had was whether to focus on Enspiral 'core work' or whether to repeat the more open/accessible approach suitable for newcomers. Ultimately this decision was made for us because many more people who were new to Enspiral ended up registering, so we went that way instead.

Financial Realities

It's often hard to talk about money in a community context without sounding ungrateful, but it feels important that we (EXP) are transparent about the financial realities of organising retreats because we think money will continue to be an issue and retreats are such an important part of Enspiral culture that we (Enspiral) need to come up with a way of reconciling this issue.

In reflecting on the 2 year experiment in 'contracting out' the event organising it's important to say that it hasn't been great for EXP financially. Organising the Enspiral Summer Festival's was never intended to be a money making endeavour for EXP. We did it primarily to lift what we perceived as a stressful organisational burden off the network, and to get the retreats out of the Enspiral Foundation Ltd's already complicated financial accounts.

The 2017 Retreat was a \$40k project (see Financial Summary at the end of this report) for which the three of us were 100% financially liable for. That event involved 4 days of facilitation and well over 4 days of preparation for two people. Our income for organising that event was \$2000 each for Billy and Silvia. EXP as a business made \$150 profit on organising the retreat. For a commercial client we would normally charge somewhere between \$8000 and \$16,000 for this kind of project (depending on how aligned we felt with their mission). For us to charge market rates for this event would require ticket prices around \$600 per person rather than around \$400 per person.

Based on last year's experience, and hearing concerns about the price, and knowing that this year's retreat was going to be smaller than recent years, we (EXP) went into this year's event expecting not to be able to pay ourselves at all. Our budget forecast was based on having 40-50 participants, we were really just hoping not to make a loss. It's fair to say that this resulted in us being frugal about the time and effort that went into organising and hosting the event.

As it turned out there was a late run on tickets (thanks to everyone who invited people) and 70 people registered for the event. The 2018 Retreat was a \$25k project (see Financial Summary at the end of this report). We ended up being able to pay ourselves \$3000 which was great, and return a surplus of nearly \$3,000 to the Enspiral network (in addition to the \$6,137.71 refund from the venue).

Personal and Network Realities

Adding to the financial concerns was the fact that both Silvia and Billy were in the process of stepping back from being actively involved in Enspiral 'core work' and consciously putting boundaries around how much time we were gifting to network projects. At the same time Ants was stepping up his contribution to Enspiral, joining the Foundation board and really driving the GSD. This meant that the people who make up EXP were not really available to take the 2018 Summer Festival to the next level. The result is that we went for a 'good enough' option.

Our noticing is that that EXP is not alone in this. It feels like all the Enspiral Ventures are pretty maxed out just taking care of business. Given this context it's amazing that we have the collective energy to organise retreats, manage our shared finances, and strengthen the network. It feels like Enspiral is in a cycle of consolidation and contraction. We think this is a positive shift and that it will be stronger for it.

Resourcing and Risk

The question of 'how to resource the core' of Enspiral is not straightforward. We are probably still learning what core work is, and what it requires from the people doing it. Then there is the question of the best structures for the core, and how to sustainably resource it. This is outside the scope of this report, except to say that from EXP's perspective **retreats need to be considered as 'core work' and resourced adequately**. This can be done centrally (from the Foundation) or distributed (from people who buy tickets) but whatever the mechanism, **more resource is needed**. This might be time, it might be money, it might be partnership.

The other central issue is who carries the risk. Prior to Summer Festival 2017, Enspiral Foundation Ltd carried the financial and reputational risk on behalf of the network. For the past two years EXP Ltd has carried the financial risk and probably shared some of the reputational risk. We think that there is some benefit in the people who are organising being responsible for the financial outcome, rather than the Foundation underwriting the event.

Summary of Feedback

Unlike last year we (EXP) have not surveyed participants after the retreat. Instead we have summarised feedback received at the retreat directly from people who attended (thanks everyone) and also from comments made on the Summer Festival Loomio (thanks Matti).

Positive Vibrations

- Great people
- Great process
- Great network
- Great movies

Retreat Duration

- More time together
- More getting to know each other
- More days of Open Space
- More outdoor/nature activities
- More time to work on Enspiral

Concerns with Venue

- Handling of waste
- Noise in general and dining room noise specifically
- Location too close to roads
- Consider having a retreat near Auckland

Open Space

- Longer session times (60-75 mins is short)
- Allowing the market-place to self organise rather than being curated

Social Process

- Only having one facilitator is problematic
- More icebreakers/getting to know people time
- Asking the group to make decisions at the start of a session is hard
- Large circles are not necessarily welcoming/feel safe
- More options for alternative kinds of engagement/connection

From our perspective we agree/share all these criticisms and concerns about both this year's and last year's event. Retreats are ambiguous spaces that are trying to meet many peoples personal needs, AND also trying to meet a large number of collective needs all at the same time. Some of these needs are conscious and can be articulated, others we only discover along the way (if we're lucky), and others are much harder to know or name.

What we hear in all this is that **people would like a longer, better organised, more thoughtful, more diverse retreat.** Then the question is can we (Enspiral) resource that sustainably?

The Future of Retreats at Enspiral

EXP is grateful for the having the chance to serve the Enspiral Network over the past two years in this way. We've learned a lot and hopefully the network has too. Here are some high level reflections and recommendations from us:

1. Don't Lose the Rhythm

When EXP asked the Enspiral Network for a mandate to host the Enspiral Retreats we proposed hosting both Summer and Winter Retreats for two years. For whatever reasons the outcome of this process was a mandate to host two Summer Festival's and that the Winter Retreats would remain a collective responsibility. While there have been some excellent Winter social gatherings and Stewardship retreats, we (EXP) think it's important to note that the pattern of six monthly Summer and Winter Retreats has been broken for the last two years. Not only has Winter Retreat not happened, but Summer Retreat became Summer Festival - with a focus on hosting and associated responsibilities for Members. Perhaps an unintended consequence of this experiment is that there hasn't been an Enspiral Retreat (where most people have a lot of context and we work on Enspiral) for two years?

2. Retreats are Where the Magic Happens

Communities have always gathered, to remind themselves of who they are and why they matter. Perhaps the challenge is how to shift the culture from 'will I go this year?' to 'it's just what we do'. One way of doing this is to pay for the retreat in advance through membership fees. This way I don't have the financial incentive to not participate. Without retreats it's hard for people to grasp what Enspiral is and why they want to be part of it.

3. Organising Retreats can Be Easy

Retreats always feel like big things to organise but they don't need to be. EXP took on organising Summer Festival 2017 and 2018 to demonstrate that it can be easy and that a couple of people can do a reasonable job - especially if other people come along and know how/where they can easily add value. The key to this from our perspective is getting into a rhythm - knowing what needs to be done (because it's pretty much the same every year) and not trying to reinvent the process of gathering from first principles every time. This was easy for EXP because we do lots of events. It's harder for people who are not in the habit of organising events.

4. Retreat Working Group

A small working group with a multi year mandate and some financial resourcing should be able to carry this important work forward. We recommend that their primary task should be 'sensing the field' and choosing a theme or 'key note' that will best serve the Enspiral project at this time. Everything else is logistics (facilitation, date, venue, format, price, roles, etc). Logistics are a great place for people to contribute and feel involved. People who show up for logistics are usually good people to invite into the deeper holding work.

5. Choose a Format and Stick to It

We think the Summer Festival format is a good one. Four days feels like the right compromise between accessibility and depth at the moment. We tried three days this year and it felt too short. Five days would be a great stretch goal for real renewal of culture. Despite Summer and Winter potentially having a different focus, we recommend that the same format (ritual opening, large group/small group, Open Space, sharing/story circle, celebration, ritual close) be used for both. This helps stabilise and deepen the cultural container and removes uncertainty and unnecessary decision making.

6. Winter Core Retreat

We think that Winter Retreat is essential and that this should be dedicated to working on Enspiral 'core work'. A tight boundary around this could be that you have to be part of a Working Group to attend Winter Retreat. A loose boundary could be that you have to have participated in a Summer Festival before you can attend a Winter Retreat. We think that anyone who was at the Enspiral Core Workshop on the final day of this year's Summer Festival could speak to the tantalising potential of having more time together. Ideally the people who participate in Winter Retreat and do the work should be mandated to make decisions there and then.

7. Venue

The Silverstream venue (like all venues) has some less than ideal aspects - catering is average, dining space is average, constraints on BYO alcohol, etc. This year we also had to deal with major siteworks happening right beside our meeting space. But Silverstream is also close to the city, it has a range of accommodation options, it has a lot of space and some really nice spaces, is affordable, and (most importantly) we are getting used to it and learning how to make it work for us. We recommend sticking with this venue until a clearly superior option is found. We suggest that any process of finding a better venue is done separately/in parallel from organising the next retreat so that the organising group can get on with it and not have to spend time on 'the venue decision'.

8. Story Circle vs Sharing Circle

This aspect of the format always makes a big impression people and its often mentioned as a highlight of the retreat for some people. We think it would be useful to decide which of these best serves this community and then design around that choice. Both are great options, but combining them can be problematic. A story circle is a space for telling an anecdote about the past that shaped who you are as a person. While these can be powerful to tell and to hear they can drift towards performance or public speaking. A sharing circle is a space to share what is most alive in you right now as a person. While this can be powerful to speak and to listen to they can drift towards a shallow check in or a deep catharsis. Again both are powerful forms but the point we're trying to communicate is that as a facilitator they really need different introductions and have different risks that need to be managed. When both are happening at the same time it can be confusing for the participants, the facilitators, and for the culture. Enspiral has both forms present in its retreat culture at the moment. A potential solution is that Summer Festival uses 'story circle' and people have 5 mins (and a timer). It's lighter and more playful. Winter Retreat uses 'sharing circle' and people take all the time they need. It's heartier and more edgy.



Conclusion

On behalf of EXP we would like to thank our friends, colleagues, and collaborators in the Enspiral network for trusting us to organise the last two Enspiral Summer Festivals. It's been a great experience for us and we hope that it has served the development of this amazing project that we are all a part of.

The challenge of convincing busy humans to take 3-5 days out of their lives to reconnect with people, place and purpose is non-trivial. Our experience is that it is essential for the invitation to be powerful and emphasise that retreats are:

1. Essential - to understanding, connecting, and creating the future (it's not optional)
2. A Bargain - cheap at twice the price/how can you put a price on love (it's not expensive)
3. Development - this is where/how you learn meta skills and competencies (it's not just fun)
4. Work/Impact - this is where how we change the world (it's not just time out)
5. A Gift - this is where we receive feedback/support/insight (it's not draining)

As we (EXP) pass the baton of retreat organising back to our community we want to wish the next group who steps up to organise the next retreats all the best with this important work. We hope that the ideas captured in this document are useful. We offer them in the spirit of the gift, not as a 'you should'.

On a more personal note if we as individuals can contribute any guidance or advice going forward please contact us directly.

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20th February, 2018



Financial Report 2018

Trading Income

Sales: Tickets	22,090.18
Total Trading Income	22,090.18

Operating Expenses

Accounting	500.00
Advertising, Design & Marketing (new website)	1000.00
Catering (Home Cooking Plus)	1,934.08
Contractors (prep and admin time)	1000.00
Entertainment (party supplies)	210.61
Misc Expenses (coloured fabric)	239.13
Printing & Stationery	271.68
Subscriptions & SAAS (Lil Regie online booking fees)	722.15
Facilitation	1,000.00
Venue (includes venue catering)	6,137.71
Total Operating Expenses	13,015.36

Net Profit	9,074.82
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Notes:

1. The Net Profit of \$9,074.82 includes the \$6,137.71 refund (50%) from the venue and a \$2937.11 surplus from the event
2. All figures are exclusive of GST



Financial Report 2017

Trading Income

Other Revenue (t-shirts)	797.43
Sales: Tickets	40,711.83
Total Trading Income	41,509.26

Operating Expenses

Advertising, Design & Marketing	2,532.50
Bank Fees	890.08
Catering	17,338.66
Contractors	4,000.00
Printing & Stationery	1,145.21
Professional Development & Conferences	460.00
Subscriptions & SAAS	47.39
Travel - National	512.66
Venue	14,432.95
Total Operating Expenses	41,359.45

Net Profit	149.81
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