

37th Forensic Arts Therapies Advisory Group Conference

“Daring to Tread: Maintaining Creativity in Secure Services”

Wednesday 14th June 2017

Fromeside Unit, Bristol

Introduction to Fromeside

Pete Wood, Clinical Director of Fromeside and Tristram Cox, Professional Lead of the Arts Psychotherapies Team welcomed us to Fromeside and gave an interesting introduction to the site and how it has changed over the years. Tristram introduced some themes for the day, generated from team discussions within the Arts Psychotherapies, which centred around how we recognise and work on ‘attacks’ on creative thinking in this setting. In response to an audience question, Tristram clarified what circumstances may lead to a service user accessing Fromeside medium secure or Wickham low secure Unit, and care pathways that service users may typically follow.

Tristram Cox, Alison Ramm and Cathy Goodwin - A Place Apart

Tristram Cox is a Music Therapist and Professional Lead for the Arts Psychotherapies, Alison Ramm is an Art Psychotherapist, and Cathy Goodwin is a Drama Therapist, all working at Fromeside.

Alison, Cathy and Tristram gave a moving and insightful presentation using clinical vignettes and case studies to explore the experiences of service users in the forensic setting, and the importance of maintaining creativity, movement and fluidity in what can sometimes feel like a restrictive and rigid environment.

Alison and Cathy began by considering how the environment in a setting like Fromeside, with its locked doors, high perimeter fence and low stimulus environment, affects both service users and staff. They used an image of an artwork by outsider artist Heinrich Anton Muller to illustrate the feeling of being constrained that can be experienced by both living and working in this environment. The artwork raised the question of whether the cage had been imposed upon the man in the image, or whether he had built it around himself. Alison and Cathy continued by highlighting the need for a containing and stabilising environment for service users, whilst also facilitating movement and growth that is necessary for change. The polarisation of the ‘deadening’ quality of the forensic environment and the creativity that is needed for growth and change was highlighted, and it was suggested that ‘creativity arises out of the tension between spontaneity and limitations’.

Alison and Cathy described the challenges they faced setting up a mixed modality Art and Drama Therapy group on an acute ward, replacing a long term Art Psychotherapy group. Cathy suggested that Drama Therapy, with the introduction of stories and literature into the room, as opposed to the ‘open space’ of Art Psychotherapy, was perceived as a ‘disruption’ to the established order. The ambivalence that can often be created between the desire to want to change and wanting things to stay the same was touched upon, as well as the de-stabilising effect change can also bring to the therapists. Alison and Cathy described a vignette where a service user in the group destroyed his work with an ‘air of threat’ and left the room, not returning. They described a ‘deadened’ and ‘ambivalent’ feeling, and were unable to think. Reflecting on this later they felt the service user’s sadistic attack on his own capacity for thought had been projected onto the therapists, affecting their own capacity for thinking. This highlighted the powerful dynamics that can be played out in a forensic setting.

The archetypes Hermes the Greek messenger, who moves between different realms, and Loki the 'trickster' were used as a fascinating metaphor to remind us of the need for a dynamic element in this kind of work to disrupt the rigidity that can set in and restrict the potential for change.

Tristram presented two case studies of individual long term Music Therapy work. He explained how people seeking care can end up isolating themselves as they become fearful of merging with the caregiver/therapist and experiencing loss of the self. The first case study Tristram presented was Fred, a man who experienced periods of engagement and withdrawal, which highlighted a dynamic often experienced in this setting. Tristram described the transference he experienced which oscillated between himself as the rescuer and as the captor or abuser. Themes of mistrust, fear, and distortion of experience came up in the work, and the focus became the physical environment – his experience of a 'place apart.'

Tristram played us a recording of a very powerful and moving piece created in a Music Therapy session by Fred. The recording conveyed what felt like the 'torturous' nature of the environment, with the jangling keys, rhythmic footsteps and piercing alarms. Audience members were unsure of the origin of the fire alarm that was part of the recording, feeling a need to respond, which emphasized the reality of living in this environment 24 hours a day. Tristram explained how the sometimes intolerable environment represented some of his own internal world, and in making the work, Fred was able to feel some ownership over his physical environment, which could represent his capacity to contain his own harsh criticism.

The bleakness of working in a forensic setting was brought into focus when Tristram revealed that Fred did not make it to the 'other side' of Fromeside, but sadly died as a result of substance abuse. However, the great value of music therapy was emphasised, as a way for Fred to live creatively whilst he was here.

Tristram presented a final case study, conveying Clive's journey to maturation and social responsibility through Music Therapy. The power of metaphor and use of lyrics were explored, for example the significance of the choice of song title 'dark side of the 'sun'', symbolising the split off elements of himself as the 'son'. Themes of freedom and restriction came up through the work, symbolised through the musician and the bank manager, which Tristram linked to the archetypes 'Sanex', representing youth, curiosity and creativity, and 'Puer', representing structure, authority and grounding. Presenting Clive's accounts of how music therapy had helped him in his own words felt very apt, and added richness and authenticity to the therapist's description.

The powerful potential of the Arts Therapies for facilitating expression, self exploration, growth and change in this often restrictive and rigid environment was clearly evidenced through these engaging presentations.

Suzi Sparham – “Only connect! Live in fragments no longer” – Supporting a culture of creativity and enquiry in challenging situations

Suzi Sparham is a group Analytic Psychotherapist and Supervisor. Now retired, she is working in private practice and offers consultancy and supervision to organisations.

Suzi provided an engaging and thought provoking presentation from a more theoretical perspective, exploring the key question of what promotes our capacity for creativity and what hinders or blocks it?

Suzi used the ideas and work of artist Grayson Perry throughout the presentation, admiring his ability to be playful, and linking this to the work of Arts Therapies in a forensic setting. In defining the role of an artist, Grayson Perry quoted a child saying that “artists notice things”. Suzi extended this to suggest that as therapists our role is to ‘notice...and to notice that you notice’.



Suzi referred to Henri Rey’s idea of the ‘brick mother’ to explain how the forensic setting provides physical, chemical and emotional containment for patients. This is a frame for which the work of therapy can begin. Suzi brought in Winnicott’s ideas around the essential role of play in normal human development, and the link between play, creativity, aliveness and discovery of self, to emphasize the important of facilitating play and creativity for people who may have had this developmental path disrupted in childhood. She considered the impact on the development of her patients whose

childhoods were characterised by abuse and deprivation, resulting in an impaired ability to think, reflect, empathise, manage emotions, and develop a sense of self.

Suzi reminded us of the danger of finding ourselves in the grip of powerful projection processes in the forensic setting if not given a space to process. She suggested ways to encourage staff away from quick ‘system 1’ thinking, which can lead staff to being drawn into acting out projections, for example staff at Winterbourne view becoming the perpetrators. Instead she suggested the encouragement of more reflective ‘system 2 thinking’ enabling staff to recognise these dynamics. Suzi gave an example of a time she had been drawn into a dynamic of boundary violations and described the shame she experienced on ‘waking up’. She emphasized the importance of reflective practice for staff groups to process these feelings and to support the capacity for thinking. However, she also described how resistance to these groups that can sometimes come about through processes such as fear of really feeling the emotional atmosphere in which they work, and how it may be affecting them. She also drew attention to the need to communicate effectively across the boundaries of different disciplines and cultures within an organisation, in order to enable an environment of play and creativity for both staff and patients. Suzi finished by stressing that in order to continue offering emotional containment for our difficult patients, we need to have our own spaces for containment and support that are an integral part of our environment.

Discussion from morning presentations

The team were congratulated on presenting and evidencing the work they do. Audience members reflected on how moving the music was and on the value of actually seeing and hearing the creative work. In attendance at the conference were other professionals working at Fromeside in addition to FATAG members and Arts Therapists. Responses from other professionals in the room highlighted the importance of working together and communicating across professions, having an open dialogue, and finding a shared language, which Suzi emphasized in her talk. The conference provided a valuable opportunity for this. In addition to the importance of finding a common language, the difficulty of finding this common language was also discussed. A music therapist reflected on the challenge of conveying the non-verbal elements of the work during ward rounds without her tools - the musical instruments. A doctor in the audience commented that there is space for creativity in the work they do, and a psychologist commented that she will take on the idea of dialogue as a creative exchange into her sessions. An audience member was struck by the need for staff self care in order to

create a caring environment for others, a theme that recurred throughout the day. There was discussion around the value of reflective practice, despite the tendency for this to sometimes be defended against.

Afternoon workshops and seminars

The Cat's Cradle: Where is hope held within a forensic setting?

Lin Revington is an Art Psychotherapist working at Fromeside.

Voices on the inside; Dramatherapy workshop

Melanie Beer and Cathy Goodwin are Dramatherapists working at Fromeside.

This experiential workshop focused on the different 'voices' held within the forensic mental health system, from the 'Collective Voice' of the System to the voices of the clinicians and service users within it. Participants were invited to reflect on their own experiences of these 'voices' and to embody their responses through sound and movement. Participants worked together to create moving sculpts for each voice before coming together to create a 'Collective Machine'. The 'Collective Machines' were captured on film and used to support the group to reflect on what they had created.

Courage – A case study of one man's courageous journey into the world of music and sounds

Rowan Armes and Hannah Merriden-Colman are Music Therapists working at Fromeside.



Hannah introduced the seminar, welcoming the participants to the Music Psychotherapy room in the Malago centre at Fromeside. The theme of courage was considered as well as the concept of music bringing us to layers of our experience, sounding out layers of our psyche.

Rowan then described a long-term piece of work in which recently there had been something of a breakthrough after several years of only very minimal change. After building a picture with some background, description and recorded excerpts of his music she then focussed on describing one recent session to clearly show the process of using music improvisation, words and imagination to bridge unconscious and conscious experience. The detail in the single session allowed the group to see how the symbolism of the creative experience led to the service user courageously contemplating a significant psychological shift.

Following the case study, the service user's request to hear some feedback was put to the group. As the group considered their responses there was a sense of warm gratitude towards the service user in agreeing to share his work. One participant then suggested creating a shared piece of music as a form of reflective response. A short improvisation was then created as a courageous sounding out of the group's emotional responses

Introducing Themes and Structure into Art Psychotherapy Sessions

Marian Liebmann is an Art Psychotherapist who has worked at the Inner City Support & Recovery Team in Bristol. She has also worked in the Probation Service.

Marian provided a workshop in Fromeside's Art Psychotherapy room exploring the use of themes in sessions. The workshop began with a discussion around the pros and cons of using themes in Art Therapy. Ideas were shared about the containing potential of themes, providing a structure for people who may find an 'open space' in art therapy intimidating or persecutory. Consideration was also given to potential transference issues with the Art Therapist who sets themes being perceived as authoritative, particularly in a forensic setting. Several more interesting considerations were explored by the group. Marian gave examples of how she has used themes in her work, including group generated themes, process or material based themes, and themes with more emotional content.

Marian facilitated the selection of a group theme which was decided on loosely and interpreted in different ways by workshop members. We were given the opportunity to use art materials in the room to explore the theme. Time was given for reflection on the artworks created. The workshop provided an enjoyable, playful and engaging way to think about the appropriateness of using themes and how they can be introduced and worked with in Art Therapy sessions.



Plenary

Alison said she felt well supported and encouraged and thanked FATAG for enabling the day. Tristram drew attention to the value of having the MDT together. Again discussion around maintaining connections across professions emerged. The potential for splitting in organisations was brought up, and the importance of noticing this and working collaboratively. Discussion focused on how language is used across teams. We heard from the perspective of an occupational therapist, who felt that the vocabulary arts therapists use in MDT meetings can sometimes feel alienating and secretive, and the conference was an opportunity to understand better. How to dispel this 'secrecy' was suggested as an interesting thought to keep alive. An audience member pointed out that even within our own professional languages we express things differently, and it is a myth that we all mean the same thing and understand each other perfectly. Kate reminded us of the most important tool we have, which is our ability to think together with others. Tristram reflected on the importance of sharing creative work, but holding in mind the impact of this on the service user who has given permission for the work to be shown, and ensuring the content of the work is not too fragile. It was suggested that seeing the work mirrored back can be both useful but potentially difficult for service users.

Business Meeting

- Kate Rothwell was thanked again for her hard work and inspiration as FATAG convenor. Her valuable contributions, including the numerous presentations she has given over the years, and the Forensic Arts Therapies Anthology (her legacy!) were acknowledged.
- Lucy Gibson-Hill, Jessica Collier, and Lorna Downing will be taking on the shared role of convenor.
- How to move forward with FATAG was discussed, including how to make it work financially.
- The idea of holding a conference at The Tavistock clinic was suggested
- Members reflected on meeting at a location away from London for this conference. It was noticed that fewer FATAG members were able to attend, although this gave the opportunity for other internal staff to benefit from the conference.
- The possibility of alternating London and non-London venues was suggested
- Opening up the conference to non art therapists was also suggested, though there were mixed feelings about this idea
- Putting out a theme and asking for proposals for future conferences was suggested
- A discussion around FATAG and social media took place. It was generally felt that FATAG'S presence on Facebook and Google groups would help promote it, although some members felt unsure about engaging with social media, preferring email communication.
- A survey will be sent out to collect views and ideas from other group members



Report written by Emily Stanworth. Contributions to the afternoon workshops from:
Rowan Armes and Hannah Merriden-Colman (Music Psychotherapists)
Cathy Goodwin and Melanie Beer (Drama Psychotherapists)
Marian Liebmann (Art Psychotherapist)
Lin Revington (Art Psychotherapist)