

Theatre Nemo

Hospital Arts Project

Report by Isabel McCue on behalf of Theatre NEMO, March 2010

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Workshop Description

The medium we have found works best in hospitals is animation. The process uses all the art forms such as storytelling, visual arts, building scale sets, making characters, animating the characters and finally finding a voice for your character. Creating an animation requires people develop their communication skills, team work, problem solving, commitment to attend the sessions and a lot of patience which can be a real challenge for people in psychiatric hospitals.

Project Aims

For the participant

- To raise the confidence, self esteem and motivation of the participants.
- To offer skills that will encourage the participant to take part in other activities beyond the life of the project.
- To offer a safe environment to Learn, Create, Express and Enjoy.
- To support recovery.
- Develop skills working within a group.
- Recognise their own potential to learn new skills.
- Increase confidence in trying new activities.
- An increase in wellbeing and motivation.

For the staff

- A greater understanding of how creative activities can impact their patients

We have seen a remarkable change in attitudes to mental health over the last ten years. I am sure Theatre NEMO has had a hand in helping to make these changes happen.

Projects

Stobhill Hospital

Eight patients took part in this project, the engagement and enthusiasm of the patients was encouraging. Three of the patients were particularly unwell at the beginning of the sessions, during the group work the development of peer support and encouragement from fellow patients helped these three to feel comfortable and over the weeks there were clear indications that their confidence within the group was growing, to the point that one of the three took on the role of directing. Directing an animation requires the person to keep track of when characters should be moved and making sure that the image they are capturing has continuity with previous images, they also have to use verbal communication skills to indicate to the animators when to move and when to step back.



The staff at Stobhill Hospital organised a showing of the animation which the patients invited friends and family too. The occasion brought people together in a relaxed social setting it was very clear in this setting how proud the participants were of their achievement and how much some people's confidence had improved over such a short space of time.



Gartnaval Royal Hospital

The group started with 10 but reduced to 8 as one dropped out and one was discharged.

Feedback from participants

"The sessions take my dark thoughts and anxiety away. Getting involved with the other patients is good therapy also. Slight increase in confidence realizing that we could do the whole project."

"Although not involved from the beginning, I have learned model making, movement, camera operation and techniques as well as sound dubbing. Interested in both the technical and artistic elements during production and the support given to me by my peers and facilitators."

"I would have never imagined doing this..."

"Amazing how we started with nothing and now we have a story!"

"I'm really, really enjoying the workshops!"

Feedback from staff

"The sessions have brought several participants out of their shell and an increase in their self-esteem has been notable."

"The workshop facilitators have helped encourage participants to work as a team. This has contributed to an improvement in social skills and interactions."

Leverndale (Report Cheryl McMorris Head Occupational Therapist)

Funding from the Lankelly Chase Foundation allowed Theatre Nemo to complete a ten week animation project within a Low Secure Forensic Ward in Glasgow. Five men with severe and enduring mental health needs between the ages of 40 – 55 agreed to take part. The individuals involved have been in forensic care for lengthy periods of time. They have limited patterns of occupation and little access to community resources. Hence their need to have the opportunity for positive experiences to improve self-confidence. From a therapeutic perspective the group aimed to stimulate the individuals who have difficulty expressing pro social leisure interests and who also required support to function appropriately in group settings.



It was hoped that by creating a relaxed and informal atmosphere people would feel confident in the group setting whilst new mediums. Over the course of the ten weeks, a plethora of activity was experienced. Practical skills requiring manual dexterity and concentration were used in the initial stages when the men were designing their own characters; allowing a graded approach to group activity.

As the group progressed Theatre Nemo staff subtly teased individuals to explore their imaginations and develop characters using pre-made wire and plastercine. Consideration was given to the characters narrative and image making them truly

unique. Interestingly, one individual created his character as a police man with a police dog who was portrayed in the animation as a hero. A story line gradually evolved from ideas being discussed between all involved. Observing this process was both exciting and interesting as it is seldom that individuals in forensic settings have the opportunity to be in control and directly influence aspects of their being without some form of constraints.

Part of the animation involved recording voice over's and singing which allowed the men to see and hear themselves on screen, which for the individuals involved was significant and insightful as one of the environment constraints of the forensic setting is that the men do not freely have access to mirrors! During the recording process the men appeared dramatically more confident when acting and 'in character'. It has been considered that the use of characters provided an opportunity for the individuals to project something of themselves into an inanimate object, allowing them to be someone else. It could also be considered that perhaps any burden of guilt or inhibition was freed whilst acting as a different persona for a short period of time. This stage of the process could be considered from a psychodynamic perspective which utilises exploratory approaches like play to assist with the expression of unarticulated emotions.



Focus Group

A small and informal focus group was conducted and facilitated by two external occupational therapy staff to gain an overview of what the individuals involved thought of the project. The focus group covered;

- how people felt about participating in the project
- if Theatre Nemo was different from other groups
- if there was anything people would change
- if the individuals noticed anything about each other
- would people do it again

Feelings Prior to Starting Group

A mixed response was described. Most appeared motivated to participate, one individual stated he felt he was not a very arty person and felt it was something strange that he had not done before. Another stated "it was a dream to participate in the project", as he reported having an interest in animation since he was a teenager.

What Made Theatre Nemo Different

Emerging themes evolved with everyone describing positive comments. The celebration of work was thought to be very significant for two individuals. One discussed celebrating the achievement of making the animation and DVD and being able to show this to his peers and staff. This theme was further enhanced by another individual who stated "I enjoyed spending time with my family at the premiere of the film, as a result I have made more of an effort to see my family on a regular basis". The third participant reported he was not afraid to suggest new ideas, and was willing to listen to other people's ideas "I felt like people were listening to my ideas".

Suggested Changes

The majority stated they would not change anything about the group. One individual said he would like to have made the film longer, by writing a more detailed storyline and would like to have attended the group for longer. All involved stated they would like to be part of the group again.

Changes in Each Other

Collaborative working emerged as the key theme, "I noticed that all the patients involved in the production of the film all worked together and helped each other" another individual stated "I noticed that all the patients who made the DVD have a better relationship with each other".

Conclusion from Hospital staff

We have had the good fortune to be involved in two 12 session animation workshops with theatre nemo and are now commencing our third. The workshops have provided our patients with an opportunity to engage by the supported participation in an unusual and stimulating project. They were actively encouraged by the enthusiastic facilitators to work cooperatively and collaboratively as part of a team and have developed their communication skills e.g. the need to negotiate with each other, listen to each other's views and ideas, be respectful of each other, build working relationships and provide feedback to each other. For many of the patients in forensic mental health services there are limited opportunities to be involved in such a unique project. For the patients who do not have the skills or abilities to engage in other activities or are chronically unwell and have minimal motivation the project with theatre nemo has been an opportunity to engage in a fun, creative and successful activity. The workshops had a proven success rate of attendance and engagement, with patients who previously struggled to maintain interest in any activity themselves becoming animated about their participation.

Theatre Nemo are passionate about improving the lives of individuals with poor mental health. Their input within this low secure ward provided the men involved with an opportunity to demonstrate to their families, the clinical team and their peers what they are able to achieve.

The men managed their own insecurities and at times through the 10 weeks were observed transforming these into an entirely different presentation! The men involved have inspired their remaining peer group to consider future attendance with occupational therapy and it is fair to say the culture of the Theatre Nemo is embedded within the ward environment.

We have thoroughly enjoyed the workshops with Theatre Nemo and are hopeful to continue and develop the partnership work that has been created so far.

Rowanbank

Is the medium secure unit and again the staff were excellent and had communicated well with the staff at Leverndale so had a good idea of what the project offered and were able to evaluate it well making sure all the staff knew when we were coming in and also gave evaluation sheets to all staff that would be coming into contact with the patients to find out if there was any different patterns of behaviour after the workshops. As with Leverndale the staff advised 4 patients would be ample and although we thought we could have facilitated a higher number we had to take the word of the staff. And as these men really needed a lot of encouragement and support it probably was the right number.

Evaluation Questions and Answers

Any notable changes in the participant's mood?

- More able to express opinions and ideas as sessions progressed
- Appearing more relaxed and offered increased spontaneous interaction
- Keen to be more involved and arrives promptly for start of sessions
- Reports from nursing staff have been positive regarding patient speaking positively regarding sessions. Observed that participant became more animated when discussing project and would agree has increased quality of life

Any indication of increased motivation during the rest of the week

- Participant R has asked to partake in more art sessions I feel he now has the confidence to do this as a result of his participation in the Theatre NEMO project
- I was surprised and happy to observe R using the video and laptop equipment
- S turned up promptly for all sessions,
- J Thought and planned project ideas out with sessions and independently.
- S will engage in a conversation within a group setting more easily
- S now arrives for sessions in the community centre a lot earlier than before
- S was very happy to have made a film in the NEMO project
- J will initiate a conversation now on a regular basis, I feel that J now has the confidence to put forward his own ideas in a group setting.

What difference has taking part made to the confidence or attitude of the participants?

- R Confident and relaxed and able to share feedback ideas and opinions.
- T As sessions progressed became more confident, vocal in sharing ideas and opinions and using new equipment
- S Is now confident enough to put forward ideas during a session
- R Out with session times talked excitedly about progress of animation sessions arrived promptly and keen to participate
- T Keen to share ideas and to listens to feedback constructively

- T Appeared to take others views and ideas more seriously offering pleasant interaction
- J appeared able to listen to others views and ideas and respond well to these

Feedback & Testimonials

“Theatre Nemo stands out from other organisations because their workshops tackle the very mental health issues that our society finds it so difficult to even talk about – let alone turn into a drama or workshop performance. Theatre Nemo does not shy away from the pain of mental health, stigma and suicide in its work – but does balance this with messages of hope to lift others from despair. They never give up on these messages, or on those budding artists and performers who they take on so willingly. Theatre Nemo is a living example of how true person-centred working can have such deep and enduring results for those who never thought it possible.” – **Dougie Paterson**, Programme Manager, choose life, NHS

“Theatre Nemo have a friendly, unpretentious way of working, treating people as people and not merely as criminal or psychiatric categories. This genuinely engages often hard-to-reach individuals, enabling them to sense qualities in themselves that they may not have known they had, or lost sight of. These are strengths which state-based professionals often lose. No-one else is doing quite the same things as Theatre Nemo, and it deserves support to continue doing for them, for the good of its individual beneficiaries, and as a contribution to the quality of life in Scotland.” – **Mike Nellis**, Professor of Criminal and Community Justice, Glasgow School of Social Work

“Theatre Nemo have provided an amazing intervention for some of Glasgow's most damaged and vulnerable men. I personally have been moved by how the guys have engaged so enthusiastically with the Theatre Nemo projects the sense of togetherness and teamwork I have witnessed amongst the men and the commitment they have towards each other is tremendous - they are realising the importance of depending on each other to 'do their bit' and to trust again - one of life's most important lessons.” - **Kenny McGeachie**, Mental Health Services Coordinator,

“I'm glad I was able to attend the showing of the animation at Leverndale as planned and got the opportunity to see "Rocket Science." Congratulations to all concerned. You do an excellent job, and it reminded me of why we do the jobs we do.

The animation presentation showed talent and creativity. This work is so important to encourage confidence and give individuals a sense of involvement and working as part of a team.

The achievement of having an outcome and a finished product highlights and demonstrates how this facilitates the recovery process of those experiencing mental health problems. Congratulations to all concerned” - **Richard Leckerman** Breathing Space –National Development

Quantative information	
Low secure	
Unit	5 Male patients 30 - 55 Years
Medium	5 Male Patients 30 - 55 Years
secure	4M &6 F Patients 20 – 55 Years
Gartnaval	2M& 6 F Patients 20 – 55 Years
Stobhill	
Measures of	Staff at all hospitals evaluated the projects getting feedback from ward staff and

<p>success</p>	<p>clinical staff. Of the 28 patients attending 27 were reported to have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gained confidence being able to take a step forward and try other activities. • Communication skills enhanced • Social skills developed • Some reported to be better able to communicate emotional issues to councillors and consultants.. • In all cases the social aspect of working together to create something that they had control over came out very high. <p>1 patient from the medium secure unit dropped out after 4 weeks saying he was now bored. Staff reported that they were surprised this man came to as many as 4 sessions as his attentions span is very low.</p>
<p>Aims</p>	<p>One of Theatre NEMO aims is to help the public and policy makers to understand some of the wider issues that affect the lives of people with mental health issues, such as the isolation and the stigma they feel, the difficulty they have in taking part in community activities.</p> <p>One of the ways we do this is to perform short pieces of drama showing some of the problems people face. This year we were invited to speak and facilitate workshops at the Forensic conference in Aberdeen, and also wrote and performed a piece describing the lack of support for families who are caring for a family member with a mental illness and how this lack of support in the community can lead to the person doing something that takes them into the criminal justice system. These have all been greatly received.</p> <p>The occupational therapists from the medium and low secure units have been so impressed that they have got together to write up a report and have been sent to speak at other conferences to speak about the work of Theatre NEMO.</p> <p>These conferences were funded by the Scottish Government and information about the contribution from Theatre NEMO has been written up in the reports the NHS are putting in to government.</p>
<p>What next</p>	<p>The O.T from the low secure unit is going to look at the possibility of getting funding and permission to bring some of the men out to our premises where they could take part in the community workshops.</p>
	<p>I have suggested to the Hospitals that if they could find 50% of the funding for projects it means we will be able to facilitate twice as many workshops. Two of the hospitals have put in successful funding bids for this coming year.</p>