

Afghani Drama Project Evaluation

Shama Kanwar

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1.0 Introduction

Understanding the context of working with refugees is crucial both in terms of past experiences, and that life in exile produces many new practical and personal problems. The term 'refugee' refers to people who have had to leave the country in which they lived because of violence and repression by the state. They are usually people who have felt threatened for some time by the authorities, or violent groups co-operating with, or under the protection of authorities' (Van de Veer, 1992). Refugees may or may not be individuals who were politically active and who as a result of activities (ranging from armed struggle against dictatorship to shouting slogans at a demonstration) face danger if they returned to their country.

It is important not to generalise about refugees and their problems as this does not do justice to work with the particular complexity of each individual and his / her circumstances. Likewise the theoretical approaches to working with refugees are necessarily varied and need to be adaptable to different settings.

Unaccompanied minors are generally described as 'children under 18 years of age who have been separated from both parents and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible to do so.

The Home Office considers an unaccompanied asylum seeking child as one who is (or if there is not proof) appears to be under 18, is applying for asylum in his/her own right and has no adult relative or guardian to turn to in the UK.

Unaccompanied children arrive into the UK and are known to the authorities or NGOs in the following ways: they have arrived and asked for asylum at the point of entry or soon after; they are in the care of social services, foster carers or community groups; they have been abandoned by relatives, agents or friends and are found with no means of support and possibly living rough; they have been picked up by the authorities; they have lived in the UK for some time with an irregular immigration status and come forward for advice.

Drama therapy gives equal validity to body and mind within dramatic context such as stories, myths, play texts, puppetry, masks and improvisation are examples of the range of artistic interventions a drama therapist may employ. These enable participants to explore difficult and painful life experiences through an indirect approach.

Astrid Valikhani writing about working with unaccompanied minors states:

'These youngsters have a hard life. Many of them have no relatives living in Holland. Their parents were often killed and many, mainly boys, witnessed this killing. They suffer from depression, sleeping disorders, lack of concentration, lack of motivation, confusion and have a hard time adapting. Not knowing whether they are able to stay makes them insecure and frightened.'

The idea of using stories in the context of describing an item of significance both from Afghanistan and from the UK was used to create two contrasting scenes using props. The

scenes were then described and explained by the participants that allowed them to think about their lives back home and in the UK in the context of similarities and differences.

2.0 The Dramatherapy Project

2.1 Key Objectives

To **engage** with hard to reach communities as part of the Community Development Worker remit, particularly unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan.

To **work** with a group of 8 to 12 individuals on a one day dramatherapy workshop to look at the difficulties of coming into the UK and trying to fit into a new culture.

To **highlight** the benefits of using alternative therapies with refugees for CPFT and other agencies involved in refugee work to encourage further funding to be channelled into similar initiatives.

To **deliver** a number of community interventions supported by different agencies across Peterborough once a group of people has been identified and engaged through the initial dramatherapy session.

2.2 Timescales

The initial briefings and dramatherapy session took place over an eight day period, however, the project will have a longer term impact by working with existing support mechanisms and through establishing new ones where necessary.

2.3 Participants

Five Afghani people took part in the actual workshop. This included 3 male unaccompanied minors attending the Peterborough Regional College, an Afghani woman who was also a student there and supported with workshop through interpreting. The participants present at the briefings and subsequent workshop were all students at the Peterborough Regional College, of Afghani background with 60% being unaccompanied minors and the remainder having permanent leave to stay in the UK. All the participants were residents of Peterborough and most lived in the Dogsthorpe area.

2.4 Participant's thoughts on the project

Initially there was suspicion around the project as to the workshop itself and the goals of the overall project despite this being explained to the students. After completing the workshop, all the students voluntarily attended the debrief two days later and talked about what a positive experience the workshop had been and how they would like to do similar things in the future. Comments on the feedback forms included:

'This workshop reminded me of my culture ... and helped me to think about how I can improve my life in the UK'

'More workshops at least once a week'

There was a sense that the group built a level of trust and confidence in each other as the workshop developed. The participants were more open about sharing their experiences towards the end of the day and also talked at the debrief two days later about their feelings and things they would like to happen.

2.5 Management and sustainability

The project will feed into the Yashmin group which is a forum for practitioners that meets bi monthly to discuss Afghani unaccompanied minors in Peterborough. The recruitment of volunteers from the same community is currently taking place to have representation on the Yashmin group and to support people in accessing services through further work.

3.0 Understanding need and existing priorities

3.1 Demand - Awareness of provision and needs

Participants on the day seemed to have some awareness of services in the community and said they would refer to their key workers or social workers if they were unsure about something or needed clarification. During the session it became apparent that the participants wouldn't access a service or group just because it was there and would need time to build up trust and confidence with a particular representative from the group or service before they felt confident in accessing it.

3.2 Supply - What is already available

There are initiatives in the local community that young Afghani unaccompanied minors could access such as a weekly befriending club for asylum seekers and refugees and regular sports activities organised by different organisations. Once again accessing the groups has been an issue. The young people will attend as long as they are instructed to go by an authority figure such as a social worker or teacher but attendance drops off once the onus is on the individual to attend. This may not be exclusive to unaccompanied minors but more of an issue with engaging young people in general.

3.3 Linking supply and demand: issues and implications

Although there are groups and services in the local community that the young people could access, there seems to be a lack of ownership and accountability. As it stands, the young people don't have a stake in the groups they are asked to attend and therefore do not feel a responsibility towards the groups. Momentum is difficult to maintain as they do not have a structured home life with family members or other adults to encourage them to attend groups. During the sessions, participants talked about sleeping all the time when they were at home as they didn't want to get into trouble on the streets and didn't feel they had anywhere to go outside of College.

The group also talked about feeling part of their family and wider community or tribe while in Afghanistan but felt that everyone protects their own interests rather than supporting other Afghani boys when they come to the UK. The boys in the group talked about having a small group of friends and acquaintances that they socialised with and only spoke of one or two people they would confide in if they were feeling low in mood or had a problem.

The group shared their experiences of visiting their local GP surgery where it was felt that they couldn't communicate their problems effectively even in the presence of an interpreter.

Having spoken to participants during break times on a one to one basis, they seemed to have difficulty in expressing issues relating to their mental health as they seemed to be looking for physical terms to describe these in, such as a 'discomfort in the head' and 'something like pain but not pain'.

4.0 Recommendations towards a sustained impact and next steps

4.1 Recommendations from dramatherapist

Jean-Francois Jacques who is a qualified dramatherapist has worked with asylum seekers previously and was involved in facilitating the pre meeting, workshop and debrief for this project. Jean- Francois provided a report for the project that included the following recommendations:

- Continue with activities that will help to address their social isolation and to strengthen their social bonds in the UK.
- Create spaces where their feelings and emotions can be expressed safely. Creative expression through drama gave young people an opportunity to give forms to difficult feelings and to identify effective ways of coping.
- An ongoing creative support group could support the creative expression of young Afghani people (through storytelling, art work or drama) and help them to restore a sense of self-worth and find ways of bridging the gap between their past, present and future.

4.2 Participant ideas

Participants expressed an interest in taking part in similar projects in the future. Although they weren't forthcoming with ideas, suggestions around regular meetings where similar activities would be organised were supported.

4.3 Community Development

The Community development team will support the young people and the Yashmin group to work together in helping people to access existing services and groups as well as having regular representation on the Yashmin group.

4.4 Next steps

To be completed after Yashmin group meeting on 2/02/11.

Appendices

Appendix 1.0

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust
January 2011

Dramatherapy workshop with Afghani unaccompanied minors: Developing personal narratives, identity and belonging

Workshop final report and recommendations

Aims of workshop:

The workshop aimed at supporting young Afghani boys recently arrived in the UK to create a bridge between their past and their present by developing personal narratives that would help to identify resilience factors from their country of origin and psychosocial stress factors in the country of arrival.

The workshop aimed at identifying ways of improving the integration of young Afghani boys in the UK and how their personal social and health needs can be best met.

The workshop also aimed at reflecting on the personal experience of coming from another country and settling into the UK.

Finally, the workshop aimed at providing a fun day with other Afghani students also attending Peterborough College.

Outcomes:

- Eleven Afghani young people were originally selected to attend the workshop. Six of them attended the pre-workshop meeting and engaged in an hour long introduction session. Five young people attended the actual workshop, including interpreters. They also took part in a post-workshop meeting to discuss ways of implementing the outcomes of the workshop.
- The workshop helped to creatively explore important aspects of the culture of origin, difficulties and problems associated with settling in the UK, and ways of helping the integration into a new culture.

- The workshop gave an opportunity for young Afghani boys to get together and creatively explore their common experience of settling in the UK.
- The workshop helped to identify important aspects of the Afghani culture such as family and community relationships, religious and cultural celebrations, respect of elders, and relationships with others built on trust.
- The workshop supported the expression of feelings and emotions associated with leaving the culture of origin and settling into a new culture. Feelings of loss and loneliness were clearly expressed through the dramatic work.
- The workshop helped young Afghani people to engage in a common creative experience, to feel empowered through the sharing and validation of personal stories, and to gain in confidence through personal creative expression.

Recommendations:

- The workshop highlighted the social and emotional needs of young Afghani boys. Isolation and lack of understanding create additional difficulties to the multiple problems associated with exile.
- In that respect, it seems important to continue with activities that will help to address their social isolation and to strengthen their social bonds in the UK.
- Equally, it seems important to create spaces where their feelings and emotions can be expressed safely. Creative expression through drama gave young people an opportunity to give forms to difficult feelings and to identify effective ways of coping.
- An ongoing creative support group could support the creative expression of young Afghani people (through storytelling, art work or drama) and help them to restore a sense of self-worth and find ways of bridging the gap between their past, present and future.

Jean-Francois Jacques
Dramatherapist

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e-mail: Jefjacques@aol.com

website: www.out-side-in.org.uk

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