

The PCPE Project Encounter Theatre and Therapy



Name of organisation: Encounter Theatre & Therapy (ETT)

Title of project/programme: The PCPE Project: Primary Colour Play & Expression / Positive Cultural Participation and Engagement

Dates of project/programme: September 2013 to present

day

Summary

The PCPE (Primary Colour Play and Expression) Project has its roots in a new model of dramatherapy developed by Encounter Theatre & Therapy over four years of clinical practice in day care and residential settings. PCPE is for Adults with moderate to profound and multiple Learning Disabilities (AwLD). PCPE affects the individual's relationship to the wider culture they engage with, in particular: enablers; friends; home environment; family. The PCPE model provides a responsive focus and aesthetic for exploring diverse and accessible ways to enable our participants to make creative discoveries and to self-advocate.

During 2015 PCPE evolved from 'pure' dramatherapy practice into dramatherapy and live art projects. This allowed ETT to explore the edges of the project's potential - from art applied as a psychotherapeutic intervention to art for cultural wellbeing and development.

The purpose of the project has arisen directly from working with participants - promoting disability awareness; improving social/cultural inclusion; supporting self-expression and self-advocacy.

In 2015:

- ETT completed a Grants for the Arts funded Research and Development phase investigating how PCPE dramatherapy clinical research can be translated into leading edge, age and ability appropriate, sensory-therapeutic theatre.
- Community charity CEDA commissioned a PCPE themed Flashmob. Preparation included 'dramatherapy into performance' sessions, leading to the title #SeeMe#HearMe.
- Phonic FM commissioned a 'Rugby Stories' audio-portrait to extend the reach of Exeter's Rugby World Cup 2015 events. Funded by Exeter City Council, working with CEDA and with the support of Phonic FM volunteers, we further developed the #SeeMe#HearMe theme into a piece of radio art.

Overview

Amerie Rose and Samantha Wraith are co-artistic directors of Encounter Theatre & Therapy and the dramatherapist-artist-facilitators of the PCPE project. They are passionate about maintaining high quality artistry at the core of their work and self-reflexive practice is a key principle running throughout the organisation. They combine their growing expertise in theatrical, therapeutic and leadership processes and bring in specialist practitioners to enhance their work. Their group of advisors and mentors work within the arts and health sector, including Fiona Macbeth, University of Exeter and John Hazlet-Dickinson, Chair of British Association of Dramatherapists (BADth).

The PCPE model champions the importance of self-determination, inclusivity and increased access to meaningful experiences for adults with learning disabilities (AwLD). It rests in six key therapeutic aims and objectives; to develop and explore:

- a sense of group identity
- a sense of self
- peer to peer communication
- emotional literacy and empathy
- relating to others and the environment
- witnessing and acceptance

The facilitating dramatherapists support and value each person in ways suited to them. They work with an ethos of patience and acceptance, giving time for all to express and explore. All sessions are held by the same structure for safety, familiarity and clear boundaries. They use sensory and dramatic approaches to self-expression, soundscaping, non-prescriptive object play, movement and song. This means that the groups get to know each other on intimate and supportive levels, coming to know sounds, movements and games which they discover within themselves and play with together.

PCPE addresses emotional, physical or psychosocial needs, identified by the clients and/or the referring organisation. It is grounded in theories of:

- psychoanalytic and aesthetic forms of dramatherapy
- group process
- sensory orientation and integration
- intensive interaction
- developmental drama

The initial impetus for a research and development phase was an enquiry which suggested that AwLD often engage with theatre adapted from children's performances, discounting their specific adult needs and leaving them culturally under-represented. Within PCPE sessions Wraith and Rose had observed that misperceived ability, over-enablement, and limiting life experiences can have a negative impact on mental health and physical activity. They discovered a deep curiosity about the effects of pervasive cultural deficit on the health and wellbeing of AwLD, and also identified grief and loss as underlying mental health issues for this group, which are often not treated unless acute or chronic.

The R&D phase led towards PCPE being identified as an effective response to the wellbeing agenda, addressing social exclusion caused through the barriers to participation in the arts experienced by many adults with learning disabilities. In turn, this led to further development of a partnership with CEDA through the #SeeMe#HearMe events.

Expanding PCPE clinical process into performance process transforms the intended outcomes into a new public context. All participants are supported through a journey

exploring their individuality and their ability to be a valuable member of the public.

Client focus:

- Being part of an ensemble; how to support oneself and each other
- Transitions and differences between being in private (rehearsal room) and being in public (performance arena)

Enabler focus:

- The enabler's role; how to perform alongside the person/people you support
- How 'performing' can enhance the relationship between client and enabler

R&D: The Crane Wife

Partners: CEDA, Dame Hannahs, Exeter Phoenix, The Bike Shed Theatre

Location: Exeter and Newton Abbot

When: September 2014 - March 2015

Process:

Encounter Theatre and Therapy delivered twelve dramatherapy sessions to each of four groups of AwLD. Alongside clinical notes, they kept a sensory ethnographic research record. They then took this material into rehearsal and worked with two consultant artists: Mary Booker (Developmental Drama, 2012) - dramatherapist, trainer, clinical supervisor, poet; Dr. Daniel Stolfi - Founder of The Awesome Puppet Company, dramatherapist, medical anthropologist (UCL- PhD).

Drawing on 'The Crane Wife' Japanese folktale, ETT translated what worked in the dramatherapeutic encounter into ways of engaging an audience with a responsive, age and ability appropriate, participatory theatre experience which was contained within the structure of story and material.

'The Crane Wife' was performed for each AwLD group three times. ETT then further developed the piece for a general public audience, presenting it at the 'From Devon With Love Festival'.

They completed R&D by returning to the rehearsal laboratory to consider the development of a large-scale PCPE performance.

#SeeMe#HearMe Flashmob

Partners: CEDA, Exeter Phoenix, Phonic FM, Princesshay Shopping Centre
Location: Exeter
When: July to September 2015

Process:

The theme was being seen and heard as individuals; celebrating participation and liveness in a new and exciting way. The Flashmob was an opportunity for AwLD to be seen as artists and important community members. It also encouraged participants to 'celebrate who we are': unique human beings living, working and exploring alongside each other.

The PCPE therapeutic aims were applied to five Confidence Building sessions. From this, ETT choreographed a colourful, musical event, suitable for a range of participant needs and abilities. There was a short rehearsal period with a larger group, enabling existing PCPE session participants to role-model their increased confidence and discoveries in self-expression. This led comfortably into the Flashmob event in central Exeter. Phonic FM volunteers attended and began gathering vox pop evidence for the #SeeMe#HearMe audio-portrait.

#SeeMe#HearMe Audio Portrait

Partners: CEDA, Exeter City Council, Exeter Phoenix, Phonic FM, Sound Gallery
Location: Exeter
When: September to October 2015

Process:

The protagonists for this piece of work were two regular CEDA attendees. They were audio tracked as they visited The Fanzone to watch the Tonga/Namibia rugby game, live from Sandy Park.

ETT took the recording into a creative processing workshop with a Phonic FM volunteer. We produced a sensory ethnographic poetic record of the event from our experience of the playback.

ETT facilitated and recorded a PCPE session where our protagonists shared their experiences of the game with their friends.

Finally, ETT and Phonic FM edited all #SeeMe#HearMe audio material and produced a one hour audio portrait. This was shared with the general public through Phonic FM (live and podcast).

Innovation

The PCPE Project is evolving through an organic process. Encounter Theatre and Therapy's future goal is to develop a large-scale, touring, immersive, therapeutic art installation; with supporting PCPE dramatherapy sessions and 'Enabler Awareness Training', delivered by PCPE practitioners based in the locality of the tour host venue. However PCPE, from the perspective of here and now, responds to the wishes and needs of its participants, what its dramatherapists are noticing and how its artist-facilitators are moved by cultural engagement opportunities. This innovative approach contributes to the overall aesthetic and core aim of the project: to provide meaningful arts and health experiences for all participants.

For us, this strong formula supports a collaborative approach and we believe that we contribute a unique example of how to create high quality therapeutic arts events for vulnerable and disadvantaged participants.

For #SeeMe#HearMe ETT experimented with adopting an artist commission brief to strengthen the core identity of PCPE. The Phonic FM commission was an opportunity to support AwLD to create new meaning from their experiences of the Rugby World Cup 2015 events in Exeter. Their creative processing workshop was an experimental approach to interpreting and editing recorded material and challenged the norm of how radio is produced. The resulting one hour audio portrait is an effective platform for AwLD to share with a wider audience their personal journey through a significant local event. It is available online, leaving a lasting legacy within the cultural record of Exeter hosting the Rugby World Cup 2015.

Participation

Participants' involvement in this project is based on invitation and not expectation. This is key to the therapeutic success and forms the basis of ETT's relationship with clients and support staff. ETT offer physical and vocal exercises, free-play with session materials, group games and musical instruments. The right to choose is always encouraged, respected and celebrated as a valued means of self-advocacy.

Support staff / parents are encouraged to step into the role of Actor-Enabler. This means following the lead of the individual they are supporting, participating in ways they are comfortable to do so, and role modelling positive relationships and choice-making.

Clients are supported to strengthen their choice-making; communicate their needs, wants and preferences to the group; and discover new likes, dislikes and abilities.

R&D: The Crane Wife

Participants engaged initially as active research participants and then later as audience members.

ETT engaged with 24 AwLD, 16 enablers, 13 artists and 75 general public.

#SeeMe#HearMe Flashmob

Here a subtle shift in role dynamic happened as participants progressed from

therapy clients and enablers into a performance ensemble.
We actively engaged with 22 AwLD, 10 enablers and 4 volunteers.
The event was witnessed by a passing audience of approximately 350 and attracted a stationary crowd of approximately 75.

#SeeMe#HearMe Audio Portrait

Participants knew from the offset that we were working together to produce a radio show.

ETT engaged with 16 AwLD, 6 enablers, 2 family members, 4 volunteers, 16000 (estimated) live audience, 79 Podcast audience.

Outcomes

ETT assess their projects at key stages within the delivery combining clinical and sensory ethnographic records with oral and written feedback from participants, partners and volunteers. At the end of each project they make an internal assessment to consider what comes next and how to deliver best practice.

ETT have noted three predominate outcome themes:

Individual empowerment

An enabler reported that her client with very limited verbal ability was "...asking for help and actually making choices independently of needing to be pushed into making choices."

Another noted "K appeared nowhere near as demanding as she has done in the past. It was nice to see genuine interactions and turn-taking happening."

Broadened sensory variety and personal vocabulary

"She seemed to open up. She had opportunities to say what she wanted to happen and what she didn't want to happen in her environment... [and had] opportunity for self-evaluation - the things we like about her and what she likes about herself."

A non-verbal client acquired 'lots of communication skills' - listening to the drum, taking in instructions, using eye contact, laughter, exchanging small sounds, passing a ball.

Increased staff confidence:

"PCPE helped me to gain insight into [my client's] intentions through non-verbal communication"

"It definitely made me feel more liberated and creative, not so stuck in a rut. Using what we have to an advantage. Just having fun and increasing quality of life."

"It was great to see staff developing in confidence and real relationships between them and service users began to shine through."

Alongside participant outcomes, PCPE has led to a deepened awareness of issues pertaining to disability, self-advocacy, and public perception and increased awareness of the contribution of the disabled community to artistic and cultural life:

#SeeMe#HearMe

CEDA Centre Manager:

"The anticipation of the Flashmob was electric with many CEDA users being very animated and happy to be the centre of attention, something they might not normally be within everyday society... Small things like Rob remaining awake and alert throughout the entire event demonstrates that when someone is engaged in something they enjoy, they will actively take part and not get bored or disengaged. I was really happy with all parts of the #HearMe#SeeMe project and felt all activities were fully inclusive, positive and engaging not only for those associated with CEDA but the wider public."

Members of the public (vox pop):

"I'm seeing a lot of incredibly beautiful people... it gives me a sense of peace and understanding."

"A real celebration of everything, of life, of the Rugby World Cup which is terrific to see."

"Very uplifted, I think everything should be inclusive in society, the barriers have got harder and harder and to encompass everybody and we need to push them back again [...] Anything that highlights that they have exactly the same feelings and needs to be part of things and enjoy things is really important [...] anything like this that really encourages people to open their hearts and minds is fantastic."

Learning

As a young social enterprise, developing the skills and resources necessary for comprehensive research and evaluation has been a challenge for ETT. As PCPE has developed they have learnt to embed this into projects from the onset and to let their methods evolve as symbiotically as possible with their work. An example of this is vox pop. This arose as a natural method for capturing experiences of the #SeeMe#HearMe project for the audio-portrait and required few additional resources.

As ETT build upon their successes, they will make greater use of the tools and models available, such as Theory of Change and logic models. Whilst they always consider the impact of their work, they would like to be more rigorous in outcome measurements, to identify gaps in knowledge and to draw upon arts and health community knowledge to inform their practice and access wider opportunities.

As PCPE has expanded into arts projects, ETT have learnt to consider the wider impact of the work. The starting point for this is the internal culture of clients/participants. It is possible to widen this circle of attention to organizational

culture by supporting and considering enablers, working practices and environments. Furthermore, by giving weight to the socio-cultural impact of the #SeeMe#HearMe project ETT have discovered a new campaigning angle to this work, paving the way for future projects to involve cultural leadership; amplifying the voices of participants as they are moved to create a healthier world through a more equal and inclusive cultural sphere.

Critical success factors

PCPE has grown out of dramatherapy into an adaptable project. The core model's clarity - its structure, principles, values and aims - has given ETT the framework through which to learn from their participants and partners, giving scope for growth to emerge. Nothing is learnt in isolation, our discoveries in one project aspect inform another.

The project's sensory focus is not only imperative for ETT's understanding of how to support the health and wellbeing of AwLD, it has also provided a route to understanding research needs and the sensory-therapeutic performance based trajectory of the work. As PCPE develops, ETT are learning how to support each individual's own 'sensory-culture'; their engagement with others, the environment and society as perceived through the senses. This has led to a reinterpretation of PCPE from 'Primary Colour Play & Expression', to the wider project umbrella of 'Positive Cultural Participation and Engagement', the aim of which is to support health and wellbeing through fostering inclusive cultural engagement.

For 2016, Exeter City Council have awarded 'Arts Project Funding' towards a second #SeeMe#HearMe Flashmob in September. ETT will substantially raise the visibility of the event and engage with a broader range of participants and organisations. They have also been invited to take on project management of The Audience Club, a forward thinking members group which supports AwLD to attend mainstream, age appropriate performances in Exeter.

ETT are looking forward to adding enabler training and organisational consultancy to the project portfolio in 2017.

Funding and Resources

R&D: The Crane Wife

Total Budget - £17,031

Financial support:

Grant - Arts Council England / Grants For The Arts <£15,000

Grant - UnLtd for Social Entrepreneurs

Fee - CEDA

Ticket Sales - The Bike Shed Theatre

Support in kind:

CEDA - promotion, staff, co-ordination

Dame Hannahs - graphic design

Exeter Phoenix Arts Centre and Release SouthWest - reduced or waived venue hire rates

The Bike Shed Theatre, Dame Hannahs and CEDA - use of space for sessions

Other attending support agencies (including family) - provision of enabler staff and transport

Other - website set-up and management, artistic mentoring, business mentoring

#SeeMe#HearMe FLASHMOB

Total Budget - £1062

Financial support:

Commission - CEDA

Support in kind:

CEDA - promotion, co-ordination, staff, transport

Gillian Taylor PR - film and photography

Phonic FM volunteers - vox pop interviews with audience and participants

Princesshay Centre Management - venue, PA, security staff

#SeeMe#HearMe Audio Portrait

Total Budget - £750

Financial support:

Commission - Phonic FM through Exeter City Council funding

Support in kind:

CEDA - co-ordination, staff, transport

Encounter Theatre & Therapy - voluntary production

Exeter Phoenix Arts Centre - use of space for sessions

Phonic FM - mentoring, editing

Sound Gallery - edit suite training

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