

Creative Arts Project Hume Region 2000

Women's Health Goulburn North East

An Evaluation Report

By Jacquie Coupé – Arts Therapist



Freeform Artwork

Acknowledgments

This report is based on the Creative Arts Project, Hume Region 2000, facilitated by Jacquie Coupe as arts therapist. It incorporates material from the workshops run with existing and newly-established family violence support groups for women and young people in the Goulburn and north east region during May – October 2000.

This report has been prepared by Jacquie Coupe.

Leunig cartoon (p 5) – permission being sought

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Women's Health Goulburn North East (WHGNE) was established in July 2000. Previously known as NEWomen, Women's Health Goulburn North East is the government-funded, specialist women's health service for the Goulburn Valley and north-east Victoria.

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Creative Arts Project ... Hume Region 2000

Women's Health Goulburn North East

'THE PASTURE'...an evaluation

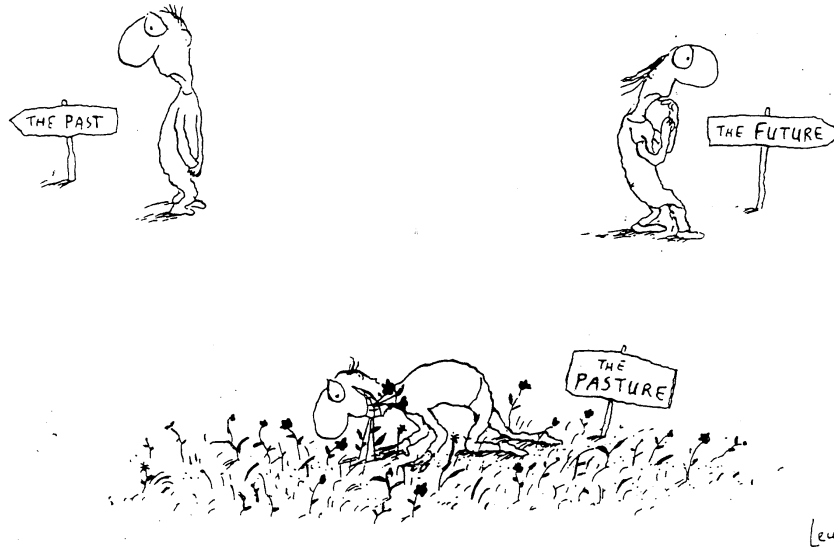
Due to the success of the creative arts project for the 1999 Week Without Violence, another project was developed to incorporate creative arts therapy into existing family violence support groups for women and young people in the GNE region in 2000.

The main objectives of establishing this program

- ◆ To incorporate creative arts therapy into existing domestic violence support groups for women and young people during the period May-October 2000.
- ◆ To support the provision of a range of opportunities for women to share their experiences of violence and address these issues in a positive, respectful environment.
- ◆ To build on the success of the 1999 Clothesline Project by providing more comprehensive creative arts therapy opportunities for support group participants.
- ◆ To ensure that the project is undertaken in a manner that empowers all participants.

Participating groups

Yarrawonga D.V Support Group - established
'The Bridge' Shepparton Young Mums Group - newly established
Relationships Australia Shepparton - established
Wangaratta Victims Assistance Program - new group
Marion Community Shepparton - new group
Broadford Anger/Stress Management group - new group
Broadford Girls Group - established last year, reforming



The Project

'The pasture' is where I met with women to graze on creative arts experiences - visual art, music, thoughts, stories, movement, ritual..... Together we worked in 'the now', bringing with us the sum total of our past, sharing our concerns and hopes for the future. 'The pasture' acted as a 'holding environment' - a safe place to trial ideas, find and test a voice, make mistakes without fear of failure, express and explore creativity.

Creative thinking may simply mean the realization that there's no particular virtue in doing things the way they have always been done. (Roger Von Oech)

My main objectives for working in creative arts were:

- to provide healthy and positive ways to express feelings and release tension/stress,
- to initiate and encourage personal development through making and considering artworks,
- to help discover that increased awareness presents an opportunity for change/action,
- to offer through shared experiences the chance to express creativity.

In this report I aim to support these objectives with outcomes reflected from direct and indirect quotes from participants, in my observations from sessions and reading evaluations, and reflections from other workers.

"The making of art objects can be an acceptable way of experiencing unacceptable emotions." (Handbook of Art, Case and Dalley, p235, 1992, Routledge)

Stress release, a let down of tension, a sigh of relief.....

'..I was releasing tensions I wouldn't normally be able to...I didn't stop painting till I was exhausted...'

'..I do communicate my deepest feelings in my art...'

'I seem to smile a lot when I come here...I don't smile as much otherwise.' [Erin]

'I wouldn't normally open up like this, but I have and it's fun.'

'I give myself permission to make a mess.'

'I liked...being able to express my feelings through the use of crayons on paper and the company of the group, even though it is hard to express my feelings.'

'I enjoyed myself last week for it was relaxing and I did sleep that night.'

'I enjoyed being able to put things that were in my head down on paper or on a leaf etc instead of always having to verbalize which I do everyday all the time.'

'I was able to redirect my energy, which was all over the place into a positive creative flow, which calmed and centred myself.'



Autumn Leaves Revisited

Most participants found that once they got over their initial feelings of inadequacy in 'doing art' they felt increased measures of self worth/value, often compensating for the lack of worth and control they felt within their patterns of abuse.

'It's amazing what you can do when you put your mind to it.'

'I didn't realize it at the time but I've actually drawn my emotions here. This encapsulates my feeling of sadness and anger.' [Dianne]

'Just acceptance and being able to be yourself.'

'With a bit of imagination I can do things..'

'I can't draw, but I'm pleased with my efforts.'

'I never thought I'd pick up a paint brush again!'

'Even though I'm not very good at anything, it still helps to take an active part in the group activities.'

'I enjoyed messing with the paints even though I can't paint...'

'..showed me that in quiet times I am capable of achieving creative work. I feel proud of my work.'

'Art has helped me a lot to know I have something.'

'..art work...came from me and [was] about me...' [I learnt in today's session]...a deeper insight of myself.'

Lesley admitted that coming to group helped to build inner resiliency after suffering from Post Natal Depression.

In some ways, once the door of creativity opened, some clients stuck in one perceived reality were able to move more freely from one idea/space to another, thus enabling the possibility of change as an idea and/or reality.

'...confidence through [this group] experience to take on board a big building project.'

Tab had never considered opera as a TV viewing option before, but during the course of our program, took time out to relax and watch it one day when there was nothing else on....

'I never knew there was a story to it... I spent 2 hours engrossed, and then really relaxed...'

'For others to understand what goes on in my head and soul, I have to be able to speak out about issues in my life and join in with verbal comments.'

Tab found that instead of perpetuating a bad mood in the same way she usually did, she decided to 'find something I feel I can do' which manifested as some art work.

'..self esteem has improved helping me to make my own decisions.'

'..I needed a release on the painting day...wasn't sure what was happening but later on reflection...things came quite clear...about what was happening... I used this to help discuss feelings with my partner...'

'The creative side of our group was a self approval of myself to know I can do anything - made me feel positive...'

Jenny said: *'I should put into practice constructive and creative ways to relax and comfort myself. It is very important to be kind to myself and give myself the opportunity to express my feelings.'*

On taking risks: *'When I'm set a task I haven't done before I panic, instead of just having a go. I will know next time...'*

Creativity involves breaking out of established patterns in order to look at things in a different way. (Edward De Bono)

On becoming creative through the group experience

'Creativity allowed me to pull things that were in a mess and reorganize or discard.'

'My artistic motivation returned..' '..expressing thoughts and feelings more efficiently through...communication.'

'..being resourceful..'

'..relating to music in a different way..'

'..being able to get involved...'

'..using and exploring colour.'

'..how to mix colours and get really nice colours.'

'..using art to express emotions.'

'..laughing at all sorts of statements...this was one of the best aspects...' [Liz]

'Fun that I never imagined.'

'To change mood.'

'Transferring feelings into pictures.'

'..looking at things from a different perspective...'

Ways clients found this group different to others in which they'd been involved

'..the way it makes you feel comfortable and safe being with this group...'

'..not judgemental, more sympathetic and understanding.'

'The ability to laugh when things are not o.k.'

'Everyone has a lot to contribute and it's good to know you're not alone.'

'..Excellent to be with a group of women.' [Liz]

'..shared personal things that I don't talk about to anyone else.'

Links with other workers

Some workers expressed that creative arts therapy introduced to them new ways of experiencing group work, engendering insight into the value of creativity and exploring personal preconceptions. Many workers enjoyed the creative energy that could be shared amongst more than one worker, and preferred a co-facilitator role rather than a sole facilitator.

'..I felt I was a real part of the group rather than just a worker.'

I felt that these groups really helped workers to orientate themselves to a meta-verbal approach, and they experienced personal gains using creativity to reorganize/reassess a variety of issues.

I had an opportunity to bring Karen Roben, musician and arts worker, to contribute to a music therapy round. Karen's work was an interactive love-life story based on personal themes. I enjoyed co-working with her, and most women enjoyed the experience.

On leaving the group, at closure, and after

'I walked out the door and the special feeling didn't stay with me for long enough.'
[Jenny]

'[I'm] going away with new ideas, being able to approach things in a different way.'

'I finished on a down note- but worked through it.'

'Laughter and humour was one of the best aspects.'

'Just the most timely experience for me.' [Liz]

'The challenge was what I thrive on.' [Fay]

'..this is a small moment in history but you've touched my heart and life forever.'

'Thanks for being part of the starting point.' [Liz]

See 'Creative Arts Project' in the HUME Region Family Violence Prevention Newsletter June 2000, where Liz integrates insights about herself through artwork. Liz went on to do further studies.



Free Drawing by Liz - Creative Arts Project 2000

Victoria claimed that the group 'kick started' her - she went on to finishing restoring her vintage car, got her license and went back to school to address her reading and writing issues.



“Harmeel” (Aboriginal for Harmony) by Victoria

- Wangaratta Victims Assistance Program

Some artworks were finished, framed and then given to others as presents. Other artworks were accepted as they were, some were discarded, some kept.

Expressed needs for the future

‘More group work’. Many clients felt too much pressure in individual therapy/counselling. They expressed the fact that in groups you have a choice in *‘..sharing things if we want to and keeping things to ourselves also.’*

Women felt that the group environment offered friendships, tolerance, support and encouragement to try something new.

‘More ongoing creative groups.’ Some expressed that it felt that everything ended as soon as everyone started to open up.

‘Go for longer and have the capacity to explore and build on the great stuff...’

‘..I need more creativity and laughter!’

In conclusion

Once again I found this a very powerful experience.

I believe that these programs should be running continuously so as to be integrated with life. Many women felt frustrated with short term programs from which they derived benefit.

I'm convinced that ongoing creative experiences can have a beneficial long lasting effect on empowering people to make creative choices in their life in different ways.

These groups definitely inspired greater understanding of self and others, in some cases activating inner transformations.

In most cases there was congruency between what one was doing and saying.

On engagement I believe that clients were able to merge and separate according to their individual needs, empowering participants to express their uniqueness.

No client left because of the program; however several women left for personal reasons.

Finally, many clients chose to accept the symbolic and metaphoric images they created as part of themselves, and through creative expression came to understand some of the more hidden, elusive parts of themselves.



Oneself as a Tree

APPENDICES

The following appendices are samples of two women's personal writing in response to the program. They were written as part of the evaluation.

Appendix 1

THANKS JACQUIE

*Thanks, Jacquie!
How wonderful this has been.
All together sharing, caring
Not a cross look or a word.
Kindness,
Supporting one another, surely, silently.*

*Just the most timely experience for me.
A happy and creative time.
Causing, enabling us to relax
Quite comfortably,
Unexpected fun, laughter and recognition
Interesting, involving
Excellent!*

*21/06/2000
Shepparton*

Appendix 2

My name is Diane, I am 51 years old and I have been a victim of abuse all my life. To survive the pain and the anger of all the violence around me, I have suppressed my own emotions, and as a result of this, I now suffer major depression.

I decided, after long term therapy, to join a stress and anger management group in the hope of overcoming my fear of anger and to learn to express my feelings in a positive healthy way.

The first two sessions addressed guidelines and an introduction of members and their expectations. Three weeks into the course we were introduced to Jacquie and art and craft.

In the past, I have used art and craft as a means of relaxation and enjoyment, but since my illness, my concentration, motivation and my creative side have been effected, and I find it very difficult to work in this area. However, I asked myself "HOW IMPORTANT IS IT?" It was important, because it was part of a commitment to the course and my health.

As the weeks went by I was becoming very frustrated, I was not really enjoying it, but then I looked, REALLY LOOKED, at the work I was doing, not for the enjoyment of time out to do something for myself, which is what I believed it was all about, but at what I was expressing in my work

It was all there!!

My confusion, loneliness, sadness, a little joy, and always hidden deep in my work my ANGER AND PAIN.

I began to see that most of the pain came from repressed anger. Because of the art and craft involved in the course I can now see my inner self more clearly, and I am learning to express my emotions in a positive and healthy way.