

# ARTS IN HEALTH

## PROMOTING THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF LAC/ LAAC



### **Cre8 – An integrated approach to work with vulnerable young mothers using Art Therapy, Infant Massage and Relaxation techniques**

#### BACKGROUND

The Cre8 Project grew out of Arts In The City, a project which provides participatory art activities specially developed and designed with the needs of young Looked After and Accommodated children and young people. The aims of Arts In The City include developing social networks and building skills and confidence. In addition to removing barriers to accessing and participating in the Arts, the project seeks to achieve outcomes for young people in relation to their mental health.

Removing barriers to access is at the heart of the programme and though many young people do engage with the project, young parents identified the lack of a crèche as being one reason for being unable to participate in the Arts activities on offer.

#### YOUNG PARENTS

We originally sought funding to provide crèche facilities to enable young parents to access Arts in the City. It was the funding provider who highlighted the fact that an opportunity had presented itself to include parenting skills as part of the programme. This allowed us to build on the ability of the arts programming to engage otherwise hard to reach clients and introduce parenting skills programmes in a relaxed, sensitive environment. Over the following three years we attempted to integrate more traditional programmes into Cre8, however evaluation demonstrated how young peoples vulnerability and emotional distress prevented them from fully engaging. We realised that we could best support young parents by providing a stepping-stone approach more tailored to individual needs. By improving emotional wellbeing young parents would become more able to take advantage of opportunities available in their community. To achieve this we introduced a combined approach using art therapy, baby massage and relaxation techniques.

## ART THERAPY

**“The process of art therapy is based on the recognition that man’s most fundamental thoughts and feelings, derived from the unconscious, reach expression in images rather than words.” Margaret Naumburg (1958:511)**

Images offer another form of communication particularly helpful for people who find it difficult to express themselves in words. Art therapists are also trained in psychodynamics, the study of how people behave in groups, and are aware of how body language and relating to the therapist and other group members expresses the state of mind. Unlike an activity based group where the focus would be on the product, in art therapy groups the emotional well being is of most concern.

Sheena McGregor’s desire to train as an Art Therapist grew while working as the art tutor in Barlinnie for 8 years. It became evident that the most violent young men had almost all been put into care at an early age, and quite often had been the only one in their family, with other siblings being cared for by extended family. 20 years later they still felt resentment and rage particularly against their mother, which became projected onto female partners and their own children. It made her realise that if appropriate therapeutic intervention work had begun at the time of the trauma these men may have been spared a lifetime of unresolved rage and fear.

Statistics for young people who have been in care demonstrate that an ever-increasing number become parents themselves at a young age, and that these children are more likely to be taken into care also. For these young parents, parenthood is likely to revisit the abuses and deprivations of their own childhood. Therapeutic intervention at this stage offers an opportunity to address issues that may prevent the development of healthy bonding and attachment to their children, helping break the cycle.

A lot of research and statistic can tell us about outcomes for children and young people leaving care, but I wonder do we fully comprehend and acknowledge the trauma experienced in being taken into care?

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