



CaraCare

A safe place for children to grow

`Having Your Say'- CaraCare Writing Group

Violence, abuse and neglect can silence children and young people where they are not seen or heard. `Having Your Say' is an opportunity for children and young people to recognise, find and express their voice through writing in a safe, supportive and creative space.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would firstly like to thank the children who participated in this group, 'Having Your Say' who were so focused, enthusiastic and inspirational throughout the process. The resultant newsletter, named by the children, CaraKids-For Kids By Kids is an amazing publication and a credit to all involved. We would also like to thank the children who agreed to be interviewed by the CaraCare editorial team; they provided great information and insights for all children and young people. Some special mentions to Tiffany Dunk (Journalist) who came to speak to the children about writing and spoke at the launch and Vanessa and Elinor for assistance with contacts and layout. Finally many thanks to the Harvey Norman, Generic printing department for their wonderful support and great printing.

Much Gratitude

Mary Jo and Amanda

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The adult's CaraCare Newsletter was developed biannually to update people and organisations on CaraCare's work, groups and activities. To fit with CaraCare's philosophy on children's participation and empowerment it was decided to also develop a CaraCare children's newsletter annually. To do this, Mary Jo McVeigh, CEO of CaraCare decided to facilitate a writing group, which would be led, named, developed, written and designed by the children and young people. To support this process Amanda Boyd, Trauma Counsellor would assist with the recruitment, preparation and co-facilitation with Mary Jo.

Purpose of Report

The aims of this report are

- To document the participants of the first CaraCare Writing Group-'Having Your Say'.
- To document the process and progress of the children engaged in the first CaraCare Writing Group.
- To include the opinions, voices and ideas of the children who completed the group.

Method of Data Collection

The children and young people chose the methodology for the evaluation, which was a focus group. It was a co-evaluation model led by the three participants who chose questions formulated by the facilitators on key topics.

Participants

Five participants started the group, two dropped out after the first session. There were many attempts to contact the carer of these children but there was no response. Three remained for the duration of the process.

- All were exposed to domestic violence, one experienced CSA and one neglect.
- The age range was 9 to 13 years
- There were 3 girls

- Relationship to offender – 2 Fathers, 2 mothers, 1 swim coach.

Key findings

Three themes emerged from the evaluation of the writing group; the experience of independence, the relationship with the adult facilitators and the sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy as a result of being part of the group.

The three young women who participated in the writing group spoke about their experience of independence throughout the life of the group. They appreciated the choices they were given in the creation of the newsletter. They particularly enjoyed the freedom to have control of the design and content of the newsletter.

They valued the collaborative and inclusive relationship with the facilitators noting they enjoyed the fact that the adult facilitators were not overly directive. They found that the group was a good balance of help and guidance and independence.

They also noticed their achievements in completing tasks and writing skills and logo design. They particularly enjoyed the launch of the magazine; the sense of occasion, meeting the dignitaries who attended, the opportunity to be given a choice on public speaking, the acknowledgment of their hard work and creativity.

Conclusion

This group was an enjoyable and creative process where three young people who had experienced trauma were given a space and a platform to express their views and write about what was important to them. It also provided an opportunity to learn new skills in interviewing, writing, design and leadership. The facilitators witnessed these three young women leading, creating, consulting, negotiating, compromising and supporting each other. It was an honour and a privilege for Mary Jo and Amanda to be part of such an inspirational process.

Chapter One: INTRODUCTION

Practice Framework for the writing Group

Age is a social construction with adults occupying a position of power and authority over the lives of children and young people. In this social positioning children and young people are often deemed as incompetent and adults 'are presumed to be competent unless there is evidence to the contrary,' (Coppock 2002, p.150). Miller, (1986, p.7) argues that the view of members of subordinate groups includes amongst other aspects, "dependency, lack of initiative, inability to act, to decide, to think.'

This viewing of children and young people allows adult professionals to occupy the position of oracles of children and young people's healing process and, 'children continue to be passive recipients of care from what is essentially a paternalistic service', feeling they have, 'little to no choice regarding treatment', (LeFrançois, 2008, p.213), which ignores them as self-determined knowledge generators in their healing process.

One of CaraCare's core founding principles is embedded in a human rights approach to trauma. The human rights framework CaraCare employs starts with the recognition that children and young people have the right to live free from the ravages of maltreatment. It acknowledges that the effects of maltreatment oppresses them, robbing them of their self-agency and compromising their right to live in physical, emotional, social and spiritual harmony with themselves and others (Mc Veigh, 2015).

In this human rights framework CaraCare believes it is absolutely essential for children and young people to be leaders in their healing process and as any oppressed group to 'participate in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as subjects of transformation.'(Friere, 1970, p.108).

This was a child/youth led group where the children/young people decided what they wanted to name the group, how long they wanted it to go for and what direction they wanted it to take.

The 'Having Your Say' writing group consisted of the following elements:

1. Children's participation-child/young people led on all levels
2. Interviewing ideas and skills
3. Mentoring from journalist and facilitators
4. Skills development in writing, design and leadership
5. Newsletter Launch

Chapter Two: OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

'Having Your Say' was the first CaraCare writing group. It initially had five children and young people writing had the participation of 3 children in the first. The group was held on a Tuesday from 4-6 or 4.30-5.30pm at Cara House, Concord.

The group was held for 9 sessions on the following dates: 29/11/16, 06/12/16, 13/12/16, 31/01/17, 07/02/17, 14/02/17, 28/02/17, 02/05/17 and 24/07/17-launch and celebration

2:1 Aims

Through providing a safe, supportive and creative space, the facilitators focused on supporting the children to recognise and find their voice, their leadership qualities and to develop skills in writing and design.

The four main aims of 'Having Your Say':

- Children to inform the group and lead the group in the naming, ideas and direction.
- Children to find their voice through interviewing, writing, drawing and creative design.
- Children to create the first Cara Care Kids Newsletter/Magazine.
- Provide an opportunity for children to enjoy the group based on the four founding principles of CaraCare-love, joy, hope and gratitude.

2:2 Participants

The total number of children referred to the group was five. Five children participated in the first session and three children completed the entire group and were members of the CaraKids Editorial Team. It is important to note that there were several attempts to reconnect with the two children (after the first session) via their carer but there was no response.

The biographical details are contained in figure 2:1

AGE	GENDER	LIVING CIRCUMSTANCES	ETHNICITY	TRAUMA HISTORY	OFFENDER
9 yrs.	1 girl	1 living with Mother	2-Anglo Celtic and Australian	3 children witnessed DV, 1 child-CSA 1 child-neglect	Fatherx2 Motherx2 1 swim coach
13 yrs.	2 girls	1 Kinship Care 1 Living with Mother	1-Assyrian/African/Caribbean		

Figure 2:1 Biographical details of children

2:3 Facilitators

Two experienced clinicians were used in the facilitation of this group. Mary Jo McVeigh, CEO of Cara Care and Cara House Concord and Amanda Boyd, Trauma Counsellor, CaraCare and Cara House Concord.

2:4 Processes

Recognising children as the co-creators of their own healing process, CaraCare prioritises children’s participation in the running of the group sessions. This group was unique in its delivery and was based on the clinical principles of participatory practices on all levels of the process. This included, what to name the group, the design of the logo, how long the group would go for, what articles to write, whom to interview, the evaluation methodology and how the launch would run.

2:5 Session Plans

Following the participatory model, the children and young people determined the session plans with some suggestions and input from facilitators.

The sessions included:

- A welcome and group agreement, getting to know each other and ideas for Newsletter name and content.
- Designing Newsletter logo.

- Planning and writing content.
- Meeting a Journalist
- Interviews for Newsletter articles.
- Design and Editing
- Newsletter Launch

Chapter Three: EVALUATION

3:1 Evaluation Methodology

The three participants chose the methodology for the evaluation. Their choice was to evaluate the group using focus group methodology. The focus group consisted of the three young women and the two adult facilitators. The young women chose the evaluation themes for discussion from a list generated by the adult facilitators, adding some topics of their own for discussion.

Conversation flowed in the focus groups between all five participants centred on questions formulated by the facilitators on the key evaluation themes.

3:2 Examples of Focus Group Questions.

Examples of questions that were chosen for the focus group discussion were as follows:

1. What attracted you initially to a writing group?
2. What are your opinions about the structure, it too structured/unstructured?
3. What about the content?
4. Consultation-what was it like asking other young people?
5. What were your learnings and/or what did you notice about yourself during the group?
6. How did you find the facilitation?
7. Any ideas for improvements for future groups?

Chapter Four: RESULTS

Process Notes

After a group brainstorm and decision-making process the children named the Newsletter- CaraKids-For Kids by Kids, and decided that the target group would be children but also readable by adults. They created their own CaraKids logo. They developed the content and decided on articles, opinion pieces, interview themes and design.

Answers from Focus Group questions

Question 1

What attracted you initially to this group? A writing group?

One participant said-`Mum told me, I was happy as really like writing`.

Another participant said `I liked writing, talked about it, I feel like I have a lot to say. Liked the idea of developing a newsletter, something in print and getting practice and experience in writing`.

Another participant said that `I saw the flyer first and thought I can't be bothered doing it but then I spoke to you (MJ)-which engaged me more`.

Question 2

Do you think the group needed to be more structured? What about the content?

One participant said `More structure would depend on age and size and how confident participants were`.

Another participant said `This group is good the way it is, I liked the flow`.

`I felt included, included without forcing`.

`I liked that we got to choose what our article was about, choice. The article wouldn't have come out aswell if we were told what to write`.

Another participant said `The content worked well, the mixture of articles, invitation article, opinion piece, journalist, photos, interview of young person`.

`Liked that adults didn't tell us what to do`.

Question 3

What were your learnings and/or what did you notice about yourself during the group?

One participant said `I surprised myself, how capable I was at writing and completing an idea, I followed through, I completed it`. `I noticed-'I can do this`.

Another participant said `I learnt things through writing styles, learnt different styles of writing`.

Another participant said `I was really impressed when the logo was completed. The logo was consultative and good as you got to see what other people thought of it`.

Another participant said `I liked consulting each other-free choice`. `I liked doing my own projects and my ideas coming through. No one was saying-that is bad`.

`Liked interviewing and coming up with questions, questions in moment`.

Question 4

How did you find the facilitation?

One participant said 'I liked it'.

Another participant said 'Got help but it wasn't like you were doing work for us-you gave us options'.

Another participant said 'It was a good balance of help, guidance and being independent'. 'A very good balance'. 'Good to have a choice, felt included.'

Two participants said 'Liked afternoon tea'.

All said 'The launch party was great, loved the candle, liked the food, and liked the speech, good to have a choice around public speaking'.

Question 5

Any ideas for improvements for future groups?

One participant said 'Have someone who knows about design and have software on computer'. 'I learnt a lot about design but it would be good to do it at Cara'.

Two other participants said 'Have a Cara laptop for group. Have the option of using a computer or journal'.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- An Annual CaraCare Children's Newsletter led and written by children and young people through a group process.
- To take-up the children and young people's recommendation about a CaraCare laptop computer available for use in the group.
- Mentoring?

