



CaraCare

A safe place for children to grow

**Group work Report Written by Alys McLennan
Rediscovering the Power Within
Yoga Therapy Program
May 2017**

YOGA

As I often tell my students, the two most important phrases in therapy, as in yoga, are “Notice that” and “What happens next?” Once you start approaching your body with curiosity rather than with fear, everything shifts.”

— Bessel A. van der Kolk.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would firstly like to thank the young people who bravely participated in this therapeutic yoga group work program. Each of these young people shared their personal experiences with great trust and dignity within the sacred circle during the course *Rediscovering the Power Within*.

To Kylie Hennessey, you shared your wealth of knowledge in a generous way to support these young people in a creative way to promote healing and growth. Thank you for your donation of the physical room as well as your time, spirit and wisdom. I look forward to working with you and Concord Yoga Studio in future endeavours.

I would also like to thank the CaraCare board who supported this pilot project and funded it from start to finish.

Finally, I would like to thank Mary Jo McVeigh who identified my skills in facilitating this movement therapy group before I knew I had them. You always allow the CaraCare staff to shine, so that we can continue to support the healing potential of CaraKids.

With gratitude,
Alys

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The CaraCare *Rediscovering the Power Within* Program was devised by Yoga therapist Kylie Henessey and facilitated by Kylie Henessey and trauma therapist Alys McLennan. The main aim for this program was to assist adolescent females who self harm to use mind-body practices in trauma recovery. It was understood that this aim would be met by using a joint approach of yogic practices and psychotherapy. This would assist the young people to develop a sense of their inner power and internal wisdom to increase healing processes with a rediscovered sense of hope, personal acceptance, self regulation and interoception.

Yoga therapy is becoming increasingly popular as an intervention for mental health and trauma issues (Macy, Jones, Graham & Roach, 2015). Yoga therapy promotes the integration and exploration of the internal and external domains (mind, body, emotions and relationships). Indian yogis have long suggested that yoga supports people to live in a manner with personal internal happiness and external coherence (Setty, Subramanya & Mahadevan, 2017).

A study on 180 Indian high students provided evidence that yogic practices can be used to encourage positive expressions of emotion in adolescents aged 12-16 years (Setty, Subramanya & Mahadevan, 2017). By providing psychoeducation and four-weeks of yoga classes, this study found that adolescents gained a better sense of self-control over feelings of anger, aggression and violence resulting in increased pro-social coping strategies such as empathy, preparation, and better recognition of internal and external social cuing (Setty, Subramanya & Mahadevan, 2017).

Spinazzola, Rhodes, Emerson, Earle, & Monroe (2011) also suggest that yoga therapy can assist adolescents to better cope with their emotions. They conducted a therapeutic yoga program in residential youth care for young people between the ages of 12- 21 years. Findings suggested that through the combination of trauma-informed therapeutic interventions with yogic practices, that youths were better able to build more positive attachment interaction and implement self-regulation strategies (Spinazzola, et. Al., 2011).

Practice recommendations from a metadata review by Macy et al. (2015) include;

- Incorporating meditative yoga practices in the intervention.
- Providing service for a minimum of 2 months
- Provide formal classes with a trained yoga instructor
- Provide in combination with therapeutic interventions.

This metadata review suggested that research is in support of yoga therapy as a useful intervention associated with positive outcomes for those suffering from depression and anxiety Macy et al. (2015).

As *Rediscovering the Power Within* meets all of the above stated criteria, it is believed that this CaraCare program is in line with current research. Mind- body

practices, psychoeducation and meditation are all components of this CaraCare program. Further to this, the integration of theory and movement allows for a safe atmosphere promoting healing and growth through creative engagement styles.

Purpose of Report

The aims of this report are

- To document the appropriateness and effectiveness of a yoga-therapy program.
- To observe the progress of the young people who were engaged in this pilot *Rediscovering the Power Within* group work program.
- To include the opinions of the young people who completed the group.
- To identify and evaluate the process of delivering *Rediscovering the Power Within* group work program in the future with young people who have experienced trauma.

Method of Data Collection

The data was collected in a mixed methods approach.

- a) Qualitative data was gathered using pre- group and post- group evaluation questionnaires.
- b) Quantitative data was gathered using child feedback responses at the closure of each session.

Participants

Of the 4 young people who engaged in this group:

- The age range was 12 to 17 years
- 1 youth was Australian and 3 youths indicated mixed ethnicity
- 3 of the 4 participants lived with biological parents
- 1 child was in out-of-home-care
- 2 of the 4 youths were primary victims of abuse
- 1 of the youths was responding to an acute grief experience
- 1 of the youths had yet to disclose the triggers of her self-harm
- The primary forms of abuse that children were exposed to were neglect, domestic violence.
- Other types of co-morbid abuse included physical assault and sexual assault.
- Relationship to offender; birth parents and partners of birth parents

Key findings

The feedback from the young people was considered positive. Each participant suggested that they enjoyed attending the weekly group sessions and meeting other young people. Despite ongoing disruptions to each of the participants (e.g. hospitalisation and absconding) the main aim of this group work program was met. This was demonstrated in the qualitative feedback which suggested that the youths actively engaged in practices learnt in the therapeutic groupwork program, in their everyday life.

Conclusions

The results from the evaluation of this group show that *Rediscovering the Power Within* had positive outcomes for the young people participating. The main aim of the group, to assist adolescent females who self harm to use mind-body practices in trauma recovery, was understood to be met. Recommendations for facilitating future groups are for the weekly sessions to be increased to 1.5 hours in duration.

Chapter One: INTRODUCTION

Rediscovering the Power Within

The target group was adolescent females aged between 12- 18 years who were engaging in self harm behaviours.

Activities included:

- **Psycho-biology of trauma and stress**– youths learnt about the effects of stressors on their general bodily functions.
- **Body Talk**- youths learnt about their body signals, cues and early warning signs.
- **Body Maintenance**– adolescents learn about positive ways to look after their bodies.
- **Mind- Body Connection**- yogic practices highlighting the mind- body connection were utilized.
- **Breathe**- psychoeducation and yogic practices were utilized to assist the youths to develop a sense of agency over their emotions.
- **Aurasoma**- olfaction sensory input was used to reduce the impacts of trauma triggering
- **Grounding**- yogic grounding practices were taught
- **Introception**- yogic visualization and body scanning techniques were taught.

Chapter Two: OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

This evaluation report details the participation of 4 youths in the pilot program of the CaraCare Rediscovering the Power Within group. The group was held on Mondays from 4-5pm at Concord Yoga Studio from 01 May- 26 June 2017 (week of 19 June was a long weekend therefore 8 weeks in total).

2:1 Aims

The main aim for this program was to assist adolescent females who self harm to use mind-body practices in trauma recovery. This was to be done via the combination of psychoeducation and yogic practices within a safe, predictable and comfortable setting.

2:2 Participants

To honour the confidentiality of the young people who attended the group there are no individual or identifying images of them in this report. Photographs of the group process have been included for parties who provided consent.

The total number of youths referred to the group was four. One youth who was enrolled had her day-release rights revoked and therefore could not attend the group. Two youths absconded periodically and therefore did not attend every session. Two youths self harmed periodically and had brief entry to hospital care so they therefore were unable to attend each session. One child had significant child protection issues arise and was unable to complete the full program. Therefore, only two of the four participants completed the group even though they missed some of the sessions during the 8 week program.

Figure One: Demographic details of children

AGE	GENDER	LIVING CIRCUMSTANCES	ETHNICITY	TRAUMA HISTORY	OFFENDER
12 yrs.	Female	1 OOHC	1 Anglo-Australia	1-Sexual Abuse	Birth Family x2
14 yrs.	Female	3 Family	1 English-Australian	2-emotional/psychological	Partners of Birth Mother/Father x
14 yrs.	Female		1 German-Australian	2- Physical Abuse and Domestic Violence	
17 yrs.	Female		1 Greek-French	2- Neglect 1-Grief 1-Undisclosed	1x Unknown

2:3 Facilitators

Two facilitators were used in this group work program consisting of one clinician from Cara House and one yoga therapist from Concord Yoga Studio. Alys McLennan is a qualified Trauma Counsellor and Kylie Henessey is a qualified dance teacher.

2:4 Process

The general structure of the group was devised by Kylie Henessey and Alys McLennan delivered psychoeducation to support the weekly yogic practice outlined. Due to the inconsistency in attendance of the group participants, the general structure and topics covered were flexible or recapped depending on the needs of the youth each week. Group facilitators debriefed about their observations about the participants, the weekly content and the overall group each week. Although these observations were helpful to devise a general plan and account for issues that arose, facilitators were required to be flexible in approach depending on participation.

2:5 Session Structure

Each week focused on a different topic but general structure included-

- Break-afternoon tea
- Welcome activity- all group members met in a seated circle and shared something about their experiences across the week before reflecting on the previous session.
- Discussion- group agreement was referred to. Psychoeducation linked personal responses, trauma/ toxic stress to the yogic practice which the group were to focus on through the session. Adolescents were encouraged to share thoughts and feelings as well as ask questions.
- Yoga movement activity
- Yoga relation activity
- Closure activity- the young people shared their thoughts about their experiences in the group session
- Final week- certificate ceremony and group celebration

Topics included-

- Psycho-biology of trauma and stress
- Body Talk
- Body Maintenance
- Mind- Body Connection
- Breathe
- Grounding
- Introception

Chapter Three: EVALUATION

3:1 Measures

The data was collected in terms of both a process and outcomes evaluation. A mixed methods approach was utilised to meet these evaluative objectives.

Quantitative data was gathered via weekly open-ended questions or feedback throughout the course. Some prompts were provided to assist the young people i.e. liked, didn't like, change.

Qualitative data was gathered via structured questionnaires with the young people at pre-group and post-group stages. The questionnaires measured the young people's capacity to recognise and respond to their internal body cues and their capacity to engage in self care. A sud-rating scale was used to show the strength of the presence of each of the factors explored.

3:2 Administration

Quantitative Data

At the start of the group the pre-group questionnaire was administered by having a conversation with each young person individually. One young person did not attend pre-group interview as her day leave from the hospital was revoked the day of her interview as well as the afternoon of the group commencement. No young person opted to have their parent present during this interview.

During the final session, the post group questionnaire was administered. The same rating scale was used in the pre- group and post- group questionnaires for consistency and familiarity reasons. The young people marked the scale ratings themselves or asked the group facilitator to assist.

Qualitative data

After each session, the youths were asked for their feedback about the program. Direct quotes from the adolescents were gathered which is considered a rich source of data, highlighting the lived-experiences of the group participants.

Chapter Four: RESULTS

The results of the evaluation were intended to have a two-way focus, quantitative and qualitative. Post group data was unavailable for comparison as the young people were not available for the final session due to a range of issues including; the general nature of self harm, child protection intervention and general illness. Therefore analysis and discussion is restricted to main anecdotal and qualitative feedback.

NOTE: The identities of the participants will remain safeguarded for confidentiality purposes.

4:1 Pre and Post Group Data results

Questionnaire results:

Two participants were unable to be included in the overall quantitative data results as a) Participant 6 did not attend all sessions and b) Participant 7 did not attend the pre-group interview. Result summary is as follows:

Figure Two: Pre and Post Questionnaire Data for Participants

	Recognition of Internal Cues	Practices of Self Care	Open-ended Question Responses
Participant 1	Pre group-Occasionally Post group-Not available	Pre group-Occasionally Post group-Not available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · I had to do a speech at school and I was really nervous because I was going to talk about my experience with depression so I did some deep breathing and imagined I was doing the warrior pose. · I use deep breathing every night before bed to help me relax and calm down.
Participant 2	Pre group-Sometimes Post group-Not available	Pre group-Sometimes Post group-Not available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · I was having a fight with my best friend at school and I kept thinking she was never going to talk to me again so I stopped and used the breathing technique which helped to calm me down enough so that I could talk to her.
Participant 3	Pre group-Occasionally Post group-Not available	Pre group-Never Post group-Not available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · After coming here I realised that people can be nice to me so I went back to school for the first time in a year and a half and I'm going to look for a part time job.

			· I use the breathing before bed every night because it helps me to feel safer rather than worrying that people are going to come into my room at night.
Participant 4	Data unavailable	Data unavailable	Data unavailable

4.2 Weekly Qualitative Data

Youth feedback results:

Each week when participants were asked what could be done differently the children would all in unison shout “that it goes for more weeks”.

Figure Three: Quantitative Data for Child Participants

Participant	Week number	Qualitative Reflection
Participant 1	5	“I really like yoga. I did it in hospital and so it’s good to be able to do it out of hospital too”
Participant 2	4	“I like the relaxation bit at the end”
Participant 3	2	“I like meeting other kids”
Participant 4		Data unavailable

Chapter Five: DISCUSSION

5:1 Data analysis

Analysis is restricted to qualitative statements gathered across the duration of the course. The qualitative data was a rich source of information on the young people’s lived experiences of being a part of the *Rediscovering the Power Within* Program. Weekly feedback suggested that the young people enjoyed engaging in the yoga practices. Anecdotal information suggested that each of the participants were able to apply the theory and practice learnt in *Rediscovering the Power Within* to contexts outside of the formal group setting. The young people discussed some significant positive outcomes despite not completing each of the sessions, including better sleep,

re-entry to school after a significant hiatus and increased capacity to regulate emotions during stressful social events. This may suggest that the facilitators were able to create a safe and structured program that was flexible enough to support individual learning and psycho-emotional needs. Therefore, the main aim of the group work program was met and the therapeutic format of *Rediscovering the Power Within* was appropriate, engaging and enjoyable for the participants.

5:3 Limitations

The limitations of the data were as follows:

- Regular disruptions to group composition and attendance occurred due to self harm absconding from home. This impacted the weekly structure and content covered.
- No participants were available for post group data collection due to: the nature of self- harm, significant child protection issues in the home environment and general illness. This resulted in post-group data not being available for analysis and review.
- One registered participant had her day-leave from hospital revoked at the inception of the group work program. Therefore, no questionnaire data was collected for comparison.
- Small numbers of participant's means data cannot be globalised.
- As this is the pilot program, capacity to compare this program with another is not yet available.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the findings from the data analysis, interpretation of the results and facilitator observations and discussions.

It is recommended for CaraCare to host future *Rediscovering the Power Within* programs. The group work activities were all appropriate and were founded upon trauma and yogic theories and principles. Despite not completing each session, participants were able to implement their in-group learning to external contexts and this was considered to increase positive interactions and coping.

During the next *Rediscovering the Power Within* Groups:

- 4-6 participants should be recruited.
- Six participants should be the maximum capacity to support individual needs and group dynamics within the available space.
- Sessions should be increased to 1.5 hours in duration.
- The program should remain eight weeks in duration

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