



Feedback Report on Pilot Singing Group

Group Name: Rising Up-Singing Out
Dates: 9/4/18, 16/4/18,30/4/18, 21/5/18
Facilitators: Mary Jo Mc Veigh
Community Partner: Damien Leith

Introduction

As well as the direct personal harm suffered, abuse silences children and young people. One of the main tactics that adult perpetrators of abuse often use is to threaten children with further forms of violence to keep the abuse a secret. Children are forced to lie to protect themselves or others and convinced that no-one will believe them if they disclose abuse.

This singing group program provided a platform where children and young people to reclaim aspects of their lost agency, feel heard and express their struggle through the abusive experience in their words.

Moreover, it was conceptualised in the belief that resilience is dynamic and can be promoted is important when supporting children who have experienced early adversity, (Flynn, Dudding, & Barber, 2005).

Ungar, M., Liebenberg, L., Ikeda, J. (2014), highlighted the significance of resilience-based group work that may not show a decrease in presenting symptoms but promotes in children and young people an overall sense of well-being. Patterson, M., Preyde, M., Maitland, S.B., Penney, R., Ashbourne, G. (2016, p. 542) study reiterated this point in their findings that “recognised that these vulnerable youths can identify and report happiness in their lives, despite the significant challenges they experience including their mental health disorder.”

Malekoff (2016) invites professional group facilitators to ‘get over themselves’ and create space for children and young people’s voices. The main emphasis for this group was exactly this, creating space for children and young people’s voices, in the form of a song. Under the compassionate and talented encouragement of Damien and the gentle coaching of Mary Jo three young people wrote and performed a song that they can not only be proud but had a profound effect on them.

Group Data

AGE	GENDER	CARE STATUS	ETHNICITY	TRAUMA HISTORY
12	M	OOHC	Aboriginal	D&A effected at birth. Multiple care placements.
13	F	Living with mother.	Philippines-Australian	Sexual assault
11	F	Living with father.	Anglo-Australian	DV & death of her mother
15	F	Birth family	Greek-French	DV
13	F	Birth Family	Greek-French	DV

Please note that five young people started the group but due to non-attendance by two young people only three eventually completed the group by writing and recording the song.

Referring Agencies:

NGOS X 4: Settlement Services International; Burwood Family support; Life Without Barriers; Cara House

Feedback from the participants.

The three participants who completed the group were extremely enthusiastic about the group. Two of them prepared speeches for the final session that had everyone in attendance in tears. Their feedback forms recorded the following feedback:

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
What did you enjoy	The singing. Getting to make my own song. Getting to meet someone famous, (Damien). Visiting a music studio	Everything. I really like Mary Jo. Best part-working with other kids, writing a song and going to a recording studio.	I learnt lots of things. It got me inspired not to doubt myself
Not Enjoy	Going on day I have school (I'm not in the mood 😞)	I enjoyed everything	Nothing
Advice to CaraCare about running this group	Nothing, CaraCare staff were really friendly and understanding	More singing please !!!	Damien, he is the main reason I learnt to be confident. He was making me feel ok, I can do it.
Advice to other children & young people about doing groups at CaraCare	Not to worry. It's an amazing experience. Not to be embarrassed everyone feel the same.	I would tell them to try them as they are very good.	I had lots of fun hanging out with Damien, Mary Jo and the kids at the studio.

Conclusion

This group was the first singing group held at CaraCare. The nature of the group rested upon encouraging the emotional and physical voice of the young people to take priority over an adult driven agenda. Therefore, apart from planning the dates of the sessions the group content rose from the dynamic relationship between the singer-song writer (Damien) and the young people. The CaraCare facilitator (Mary Jo) used her skills within the enlightened witnessing of the group dynamic to ensure the care of safety and care of each young person.

Undoubtedly, the success of the group was due in large part to Damien's skills not just as a singer/song writer but his ability to engage the young people. His compassionate and patience approach to them allowed them to gain confidence in writing and recording. One participant particularly blossomed under his guidance, and in a very short time her confidence increased dramatically, to the point that she has now joined the school choir.

Damien's generosity in sharing his skills also flowed into the hours he put in over and above the group sessions. As a result, each young person was presented with a USB with a recording of the song as sung by them and a version song by Damien. The words to the song are contained in the appendix of this report.

Upon reflecting on the group Damien and Mary Jo noted that the lack of singing ability of some of the participants may have initially hindered the group process as the young people were very unwilling to sing. We considered that a song writing group may be the best way forward. However, the last session and the young people's feedback highlighted the importance of giving children and young people the opportunity to push past their fear to a place of increased confidence.

Recommendation

It is the recommendation of the facilitators of this group that a singing group is put on the CaraCare annual calendar. The group be divided between children and young people who want to write and those that want to sing. In addition, a professional singer/song writer be engaged to co-facilitate the group with a CaraCare trained trauma therapist.

Mary Jo Mc Veigh CEO
24/5/2018

References:

Flynn, R. J., Dudding, P. M., & Barber, J. G. (2005). *Promoting resilience in child welfare*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press.

Malekoff, A., (2016). On getting over oneself and creating space for all voices in group work with adolescents. *Social work with groups*, 40 (1), 1-12.

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Patterson, M., Preyde, M., Maitland, S.B., Penney, R., Ashbourne, G. (2016). Self-reported personal well-being of youth accessing intensive mental health treatment. *Child and Adolescent Social Work*, 33 (6), 535-545.

Ungar, M., Liebenberg, L., Ikeda, J. (2014). Young People with Complex Needs: Designing Coordinated Interventions to Promote Resilience across Child Welfare, Juvenile Corrections, Mental Health and Education Services. *British Journal of Social Work*, 44 (3), 675-693.

FREE TO BE WHAT WE WANT TO BE

Verse 1 & 2:

I don't know who you are, but you look kinda familiar.
I have been here before but it seems brand new. I'm feeling. Down, down,
down.
I asked why you find it hard to accept me for me.
Who do you think I'm supposed to be.
I'm feeling down, I'm feeling down.

Chorus:

What if we were free to be what we want to be.
Strong enough to break from our misery.
Everything would be just like a dream, our dream.
Nothing ever has to be how it is.
Run away from your troubles, that's not ok.
I hope some day things are gonna change, just like a dream.

Verse 3:

You don't take me seriously, what do I gotta I do for you to know?
I've got a voice. I'm someone you should listen to.
Don't take me down. Don't take me down.

Repeat Chorus

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Verse 4:

We can make believe we're already there.
We can break away from feeling scared.
It's not far out of our reach.

Repeat Chorus.