



GOOD IDEA

Therapy takes drama out of the transition from care

JACK COFFE PHOTOGRAPHY



Care leavers take part in an interactive exhibition at Southwark Playhouse, showcasing the impact of dramatherapy

Provider Young Futures
Name Dramatherapy for care leavers
Summary A project in London is helping care leavers overcome their anxieties about moving into independent living by using dramatherapy to explore difficult situations and scenarios they may encounter

The prospect of leaving care is often a daunting one for many young people making the transition to independence, but a London-based community interest company is using the art of dramatherapy to help those struggling most to make the move.

Dramatherapy – a creative psychological therapy – is used by various organisations, including the NHS, to help clients think creatively about their problems, and Young Futures is using the technique to help 16- to 21-year-olds leaving local authority care placements to develop the emotional resilience required to develop successful adulthoods.

Kelly Jordan, lead dramatherapist at Young Futures, says the nine young people she works with at any one time are often in a vulnerable position when they are referred to the service by their local authority.

“They are either at risk at home, have made themselves unintentionally homeless or seeking asylum, but for whatever reason they don’t have anywhere to live,” she says.

“The young people who come to us have very difficult lives and are in a very vulnerable position in terms of their future, and are probably not in work or education.”

The organisation provides the therapy as part of a packet of measures, which includes accommodation – a one-bedroom flat is provided for each client as long as is needed – and access to a key worker, who provides support on issues such as benefits, education and housing.

To help them overcome their problems, Jordan visits the young people in their flats to deliver dramatherapy sessions – a move she says is unusual but vital to their therapy.

“The biggest asset of dramatherapy, which is very adaptable, is that you can work the service around the needs of young people,” she explains. “For some young people, their home is where they work as they struggle to be out in the world and find it really overwhelming to be among other people.

“It becomes really anxiety inducing for them to make a trip [outside] – that’s why a lot of them are not in education, employment or training.”

As a result, the aim of Jordan’s sessions are quite often to help young people to attend meetings outside of their home, giving them greater independence and access to training or work opportunities.

Jordan says that each session is driven by the young person and their needs, and uses a “creative toolbox” to tap into their difficulties.

The sessions will involve a variety of talking, role play, puppetry or using objects to represent people or situations to help the young people speak about and deal with their problems.

“If someone is just really very shy and doesn’t want to talk or perhaps has a difficulty with speech or language, dramatherapy is a fantastic way of being able to work together, and build a relationship and trust – that’s when the words come,” Jordan explains.

“In my experience, it usually takes between a year and a year and a half of working with them before they become much more able to say how they feel and describe their situations.”

Mental health support

Jordan also uses dramatherapy to support young people with mental health needs, helping them to understand their problems and become more self aware. It’s proving to have a positive impact.

“There’s a young person I’ve been working with for a year and a half and she’s now able to go to her own external meetings,” she says.

“That’s a huge achievement for her. She’s got mental health problems and used to be at risk of suicide but she hasn’t been admitted to hospital for the last nine months and is going to university soon.”

To showcase the impact of dramatherapy, Young Futures recently hosted an interactive exhibition at the Southwark Playhouse.

The exhibition was inspired by the work of nine young care leavers, and gave them a platform to voice their thoughts and feelings.

Jordan says the event, the first of its kind, was emotional for everyone involved and hopes to organise another next year.

“It was quite a big deal for the young people because they were able to bring their families along,” she says.

“There was a lot of emotion and a huge amount of pride in what they’ve achieved.”

By Laura McCardle



An exhibition gave care leavers a chance to express themselves