

ART INTO WRITING PROJECT 2018/19

By Jane Walker

This tool was commissioned as part of the Words Work Well for All project (2018-2019) funded by Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership via the Wellbeing for Longer in Glasgow Fund. Jane facilitated 24 weekly two and half hour sessions, in blocks of eight, during the project. Participants were introduced to art materials, and with the art work they produced generating writing.

The idea of this project was to encourage people to try something different and new, and give them confidence to participate. Often we begin the sessions by having the participants copy what the facilitator is doing step by step to produce a nice piece of art. When they see the results, their abilities are reinforced. It's good for the facilitator to have experienced the task before hand too.

Example Exercises

We make a Boat, on the theme of 'Letting Go' –

We make a boat, using various friendly materials. The idea, being we sail it away into the sea, or on a river, along with a copy of what they have written.

It shows that sometimes it's not so difficult to let things go at the same time.

Then, sometimes a boat may be fragile, and may fall-apart, but that too is a good learning experience, supporting them to strengthen, rebuild and launch their boat and their writing bit by bit, and that not everything needs to be done in one fell swoop.

Often people will just want to make things, and not write, or not share their writing and that is okay too. The objective is to encourage them to venture into something new. Occasionally someone may say 'mine is rubbish' and the facilitator has to respond. Any response offered on art or writing is always gentle, picking out the many positives in what they have created.

Hearts (I believe this may have been an exercise given by Ted Bowman at a Lapidus Facilitator Training weekend. I've also used this in a psychiatric hospital setting).

Everyone is given a template of a heart – made earlier, in different sizes and colours. The participants were asked to choose one. All materials were hidden away, and I also chose a heart as I always participate in the exercises. I asked them to rip the hearts up, and we discussed what it felt like to rip up your heart. The exercise brought up a lot of thoughts and discussion. During the exercise it's important to watch everyone, and how they are coping as it can be an emotional exercise for some. I then handed out tape and scissors (always be aware when using scissors in exercises; count them in and count them back). I then asked them to put their hearts back together again, which they all did. However, I couldn't work out how to piece my own heart together, and was honest and shared it with the group.

Two participants offered help, and we managed to put my heart together again, and everyone started clapping. I was emotionally touched, at how happy everyone was that I had asked for help, and that together we had achieved the goal. I then wrote about not being able to put my heart back together and shared it with them. This had a profound effect on one of the participants who said later that if she hadn't experienced that workshop, she may not have come back.

Another learning point from this exercise is the importance of being genuine and honest in workshops, nothing should be staged. As Lapidus facilitators we try to be honest, genuine and caring, at all times, even if that means having to be assertive with a participant sometimes for the good of the whole group.

I believe it has been a perfect creative mixture, combining art with writing, and participants have enjoyed the opportunity to try both without feeling intimidated. With writing it is also important to consider diversity of language, and for those who may be reluctant to write, encourage participants to write in their own language – whatever flows.