

Art Therapy for BPD

Creating images helps process intense emotions and memories, and Art Therapists are trained to guide and support the process

Art Therapy is a specialised form of healing that involves the action of creating.

In Australia, Art Therapists must hold post-graduate qualifications and are legally registered as psychotherapists. Internationally, Art Therapy has proven to be a safe space and tool for many people, including those who are non-verbal, experience extreme distress and emotional dysregulation or have experienced trauma.

Creating images help process intense emotions and memories in ways that are often less harmful to the participant.

Art therapists understand that the creative process itself is healing and are trained to facilitate the art making process, allowing the people they are working with to share what feels safe. Unlike verbal therapists, Art Therapists can silently witness the person's process. The person creating art decides if they engage the therapist in verbal conversation around the work, either way there is healing.

I've never personally accessed Art Therapy as treatment despite three decades in the public mental health system. Art Therapists are rarely found in public systems, meaning this tool for recovery has not been available to me, or millions like me. This is systemic failure of the Australian public health service. Art Therapy cannot be claimed as a Medicare item and is only largely available through private health

insurance and in some cases, the NDIS, under which a diagnosis of BPD alone does not normally meet eligibility criteria. This means it is a privilege that few have access to.

Yet, in many European countries, including the UK, it falls under public health services (Springham et al., 2012). International studies show that people with complex issues thrive from this form of therapy, becoming 'transformed' in the process.

A review surrounding Art Therapists' reaction to People Living with BPD by Springham (2015) concluded that Art Therapists are aware of the stigmatisation of BPD but record lower levels of treatment anxiety than other clinicians. Art Therapists reflected the need for specific tailoring of treatment, structure and understand the importance of their relationships with BPD clients



Repetitive Shape/Line

Download drawing handout: <https://bit.ly/3coirbh>

(Haeyen, 2018). People living with BPD have noted traumatic memories and invasive thoughts can be processed by creatively expressing about them, expelling them safely without doing harm. This is well documented, and people describe this process as 'evacuation of pain' (Eastwood, 2012). [... cont >](#)



Continuous Line Drawing



Story Drawing

My self-harming behaviours lasted over 25 years and drawing about the emotions and urges attached to them stopped me engaging them in that moment. Many people undertaking art therapy report replacing or reducing their self-harming behaviour with art practice, as I did (Morgan et al., 2012). Art is also a communication tool. I still struggle to ask for help. It is common for me to hand my therapist an artwork to open a dialogue. Using art to ask for support works for me.

Using my lived experiences and education from my Masters of Art Therapy, I have created workshops where I lead groups in specific art-based skills to manage distress. They include **Continuous Line Drawing** - which helps shift 'emotional brain' states, **Repetitive Shape/Line Drawing** - which allows anxiety and overwhelming emotion to settle, and **Story Drawing** - which can help unlock experiences we cannot speak about. These practices by Mahlie Jewell and others are available to download for people living with BPD to use free of charge at http://bit.ly/GraphicsForGood_Resources.

Art therapy is a legitimate profession that helps to save people's lives, contributes to verbal therapies and provides a safe environment to process challenges. The implementation of nation-wide Art Therapy interventions, available in all public services is cost effective, recovery-orientated and well established in academia. Qualified Art Therapists in Australia can be found via the registration body, http://bit.ly/ANZACATA_find_a_therapist

If you wish to attend a workshop by me, visit <http://www.facebook.com/groups/dbtART/> to join.

References:

https://bit.ly/ArtTherapyBPD_references

Mahlie Jewell (NSW) 

Family Connections

Sharing insights while training clinicians and carer-peers to support people living with BPD

CONFERENCE

The inaugural Australian Family Connections conference *"Bringing Families Into the Picture"* was recently held at Orygen in Melbourne by [NEA BPD Australia](#).

Professor Daniel Flynn (Ireland), Robert F Krueger (USA), Beth McCrave, M.S. (USA) and Lynn Courey (Sashbear Foundation, Canada), along with Australian clinicians shared their insights to provide a well-rounded summary of helpful interventions for people living with BPD and their families/support/carers.

The day concluded with a panel representing the Australian BPD Foundation, NEA BPD, Orygen and BPD Community looking at what 'Bringing Families into the Picture Means' and what we need to work towards in the future.

Professor Andrew Chanen agreed the success of the day was undoubtedly the focus on family perspectives. "Involving parents was not an afterthought. We can't make progress with complex problems such as BPD without including everyone". (Ref: <http://bit.ly/OrygenUpdateMar2020>)

LEADER TRAINING

Prof. Daniel Flynn, Beth McCrave, M.S. and Lynne Courey presented the 2-day leader training workshop to train clinicians and carer-peers to facilitate groups for family/friends of people living with BPD.

Workshops were held in Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney in February 2020.

Karen Bailey (SA) 



Your thoughts?

"Flip the Script - Change the narrative on BPD"

What does this mean to you?

It is an effective theme for BPD Awareness Week 2020?

Please email your comments to bpdawarenessweek@gmail.com
www.bpdawareness.com.au/