**FLOCK: Non-Clinical Interventions for Wellbeing and Belonging among refugee, asylum seeker and displaced migrant populations.**

Final Report



Image by Julie Nelson

**Flock: Non-Clinical Interventions for Wellbeing and Belonging among refugee, asylum seeker and displaced migrant populations.**

Through our project **FLOCK** we brought together people who have overcome adversity and experience trauma as a result of migration, displacement and associated factors. Group members from the SLAM grounding project learnt ceramic techniques & used the therapeutic medium of clay to create a community of birds and engage in mindful practice. The project was a collaboration between the NHS SLaM Grounding project, Maudsley Charity, Atist Julie Nelson and University College London.

The research aimed to explore the effectiveness of non-clinical art interventions (creating a flock of ceramic birds) on members the grounding community project for refugee, asylum seekers and displaced people, who experience mental health challenges. Through the workshops (facilitated by artist Julie Nelson) we have explored themes of migration, displacement and belonging in refugee and asylum seeker participants. The project maintained its original aims and was in terms of impact, was highly successful.

During the project we:

a) Produced an extensive literature review of existing studies and global health reports around cultural and arts based non-clinical interventions with displaced population groups experiencing trauma. The document also captured differences in trauma-based treatment and differences in cultural expression of trauma. This literature empirically captures the important of arts nature and cultural heritage based approaches to the treatment of mental health, specifically Trauma.

b) Held a series of workshops with a group of displaced people; refugees and asylum seekers, who experience PTSD. These clay bird making workshops, facilitated by artist Julie Nelson, explored themes of migration, displacement, belonging and community. They took place over 3 and formed part of the weekly sessions at the Grounding Project, an award-winning partnership between South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM), the Maudsley Charity and at the venue Roots and Shoots, a horticultural Charity. Group members have survived traumatic events such as war, torture and political violence.

During the workshops, participants learnt ceramic techniques from Julie and developed clay birds. We associated the idea of a flock of birds with the story of a group on a journey and the idea of displacement, movement and connectivity and introduced ornithology alongside ceramics. Artist and Performer Tom Bailey (a former artist in residence at UCL), led one of the sessions introducing work from his performance on bird migration.

c) From a research perspective, we conducted individual interviews with group members about their experience of bird-making and the workshops. We included questions around wellbeing. We also interviewed all of the volunteers, staff and the artist about the workshops.

d) We held 3 flock related events and exhibitions:

- June 2019: An exhibition of photographs from the project and some of the ceramic birds was held at the Maudsley Hospital

<https://www.maudsleycharity.org/flock-exhibition-at-maudsley-hospital-sheds-light-on-migration-stories-for-refugee-week/>

-June 2019, During Refugee Week at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, we held a bird making workshop for members of the public. This was also attended by and facilitated by group members alongside our artist, who were able to teach their new skills to members of the public:

<https://www.vam.ac.uk/event/jkr1D1zb/grounding-project-june-2019>

- August 2019, we had a two week long exhibition of the larger FLOCK at the Lewisham Artshouse. We had a project event during the week and invited the public, policy makers, clinicians, refugees, artist and a wide group of others to attend. We had talks from those involved in the project.

<http://www.lewishamarthouse.org.uk/project-space/>

**Research Findings:**

The research undertaken explored the role belonging has in the consolidation of personal and social wellbeing in displaced populations facilitated by taking part in making workshops and the re-framing of migration through the lens of bird migratory patterns.

Wellbeing emerges from the interactions between a range of elements rather than a solitary cause and it is important to distinguish personal well-being (positive emotion, life satisfaction, vitality, resilience and self-esteem) from social wellbeing (supportive relationships, trust and belonging).We framed our thematic analysis around these personal and social wellbeing related indicators as conceptualised by the New Economics Foundation[[1]](#footnote-1) (NEF 2012). Recent work by Clini, Thomson and Chatterjee (2019) published in the British Medical Journal ‘*Assessing the impact of artistic and cultural activities on the health and well-being of forcibly displaced people using participatory action researc*h’ was also important in informing the analysis. The NEF indicators categorised according to personal and social wellbeing can be seen below:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Personal Wellbeing | Positive emotionResilienceVitalitySelf-esteem Life satisfaction | Loss of important life projects Concerns of economic survival Loss of meaningful structure  |
| Social Wellbeing | Supportive RelationshipsTrustBelonging | Loss of Community Loss of Social Network Loss of meaningful social roles Negative changes in socioeconomic status  |

**Method**

*Research Study Design*

This was an exploratory project exploring in which we were interested in learning more about the effectiveness of non-clinical art-creation based interventions on mental health in displaced migrant populations.

Grounding members participated in a series of 10 ceramic art workshops across a number of months in which they learnt to create ceramic birds. The workshops were framed around the idea of diversity within birds, community and around bird migration. On average 14 participants attended and engaged with the ceramic workshop each week.

Data collection focused on one-to-one semi-structured interviews with 8 clients/participants, 1 creative practitioner/artist, 1 link worker, 2 volunteers and 1 clinical psychologist and 1 horticultural specialist. These were conducted post-intervention and then transcribed*.*

Data was thematically analysed and informed using the NEF wellbeing framework (O’Reilly and Parker 2012).

**Findings**

Through speaking with all of the members of staff and group members themselves, the social benefits of the workshops were very important. Making friends, speaking about the past, and using the therapeutic clay to create and learn about birds in a safe space allowed some a sense of peace and focus.

**Summary of key participant themes:**

The ability for displaced populations to feel a sense of belong in their new host society is integral to their ability to derive positive personal and social wellbeing (Thornton & Spalding 2018). From Wilcock’s (1999) dimensions of occupation: doing, being, belonging and becoming (discussed in the literature review); ‘doing’ highlights, the role that making and participation in creating arthas in allowing for individuals to be in the moment and feel a sense of belonging. For many participants the FLOCK project was a chance to make something out of clay and to completely focus on one creative task before them.

*“I think it’s very good because as I said, it takes your mind off from everything else in life and you just concentrate on what you’re doing and if you make mistakes nobody is there to blame you.”* Participant

The task lent thus itself to facilitating concentration and the clay work was informed by mindfulness techniques. Concentration and feeling occupied allow people to settle into the present. This is particularly important given that living with PTSD, means the ability to focus can be compromised.

“*Yes the workshop is good because it made you relax and it made you concentrate and it helps you a lot, your way of being*.” Participant

Many group members said the art creation helped them feel relaxed. One member told us working with clay helped their hands feel less pain- a symptom of past transition they had endured.

*When I am bird-making I am very very happy. I’m busy I forget anything everything I forget stress, I forget flashbacks, I forget problems, I forget my pain because I have to do some work.*

It is the ability to relax that could be construed as the participants feeling comfortable in this environment that in turn could mean they felt they belonged there.

The International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ITSS) has a three phase model of trauma in which treatment outlines stabilisation and integration and this non-clinical intervention of ceramic bird creation seemed to administer a level of stability and an activity that enabled active concentration and social interaction. Previous projects (Clini, Thomson and Chatterjee 2019) also found that non-clinical cultural interventions lent themselves well to enable narrative integration. While there were some entire group discussions during the project workshops, what the workshops seemed to facilitate most was a space for social interactions and discussions amongst smaller groups of members.

“*I am very glad to be participating for this wonderful session. Because we, I myself erm am the victim of torture survivor so this is a therapy for me, I don’t have any therapy in place but making birds is like a therapy so to go back right back erm one of the worst thing is torture is in making silent, no talking. So by participating and making the bird this is my voice to reclaim.”* Participant

Furthermore, the use of the analogy of bird migration with human migration, of flocks of birds with the grounding community, and of variation of bird species with diversity of members within the group, meant that talking about challenging topics though indirect references and in a non-triggering became possible. These conversations were important. It seemed that the creative activity formed a stabilising moment for many participants. By making ceramic birds into a flock these objects were used as an apolitical vehicle that was used to reframe and discuss migration and which leads to belonging.

*“you look at birds they have more freedom than human beings, they can fly anywhere and go anywhere.”* Participant

“W*e are here, different nationalities, different culture, different language but by making bird we are one. One united.”* Participant

The representation the birds had for each individual was highly interesting – they ranged from freedom, the intuition, to pride, peace and courage and cleverness. The reframing of migration in the apolitical term of bird migratory patterns was integral to the project’s success. It gave all members of the group a different way of seeing their own journeys.

The ability for participants/clients to learn a skill, and their perceptions of learning the new creative skill of making a clay bird gave some participants the idea that they could pass on this knowledge.

“*It was a good experience, I just wanted to carry on to the end so that one day I can help another community and teach them how to make birds.”* Participant

One participant had purchased clay outside of the lesson and was teaching their child the skills they learn from the artist. The idea of skill development was important as it gave the participant purpose but also their bird transformed into a tool for community building. The transference of knowledge and social interactions enabled a commonality to develop and connections to solidify.

*“As I said it gave me a sense of purpose as well at the same time being around people with the similar ideas as well… it does take your mind of everything else. It makes you be happy when you make something with your hands as well.”* Participant

“*it helped us a lot to bond with each other.”* Participant

By building a group/creative community of bird-makers this in turn might have decreased social isolation and facilitated the expansion of the participant’s social networks as they were able to form new connections with people during the workshops.

Beyond this, groups are further formed by shared experiences alongside shared skills. The NEF discusses that wellbeing is bolstered by skill-development as this is linked to self-esteem and personal wellbeing (NEF 2008) and the ability to impart social capital.

The detailed collection of these themes can be seen below, with selective quotes from particpants :

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Theme | Sub-Themes | Quote |
| Belonging | Making/Occupying/Distracting | “*I think it’s very good because as I said, it takes your mind off from everything else in life and you just concentrate on what you’re doing and if you make mistakes nobody is there to blame you.”* Participant“*Yes, peaceful not only that it gives you perspective on life and I swear you know what I mean it takes you away from anything else going on in your life.”* Participant |
| Relaxing/Concentrating | “*I concentrate which is quite difficult most of the time… I mean concentration and forgetting maybe whenever you have your things, you know you always thinking about things …it’s just that concentration, I was able to concentrate much more than normally.”* Participant“*Yes the workshop is good because it made you relax and it made you concentrate and it helps you a lot, your way of being*.” Participant |
| Learning/Teaching | “*that is a skill. Or you know you learn something new*.” Participant “*Do you feel like you learnt something new, a new skill? Yes, plenty of new skill, because now when I am with someone, I can teach people how to make birds as well*.” Participant“*It was a good experience, I just wanted to carry on to the end so that one day I can help another community and teach them how to make birds.”* Participant |
| Trauma | Therapeutic Stability  | “*I am very glad to be participating for this wonderful session. Because we, I myself erm am the victim of torture survivor so this is a therapy for me, I don’t have any therapy in place but making birds is like a therapy so to go back right back erm one of the worst thing is torture is in making silent, no talking. So by participating and making the bird this is my voice to reclaim.”* Participant*“you look at birds they have more freedom than human beings, they can fly anywhere and go anywhere.”* Participant “W*e are here, different nationalities, different culture, different language but by making bird we are one. One united.”* Participant |
| Creative narrative integration |
| Personal Wellbeing | Positive emotionResilienceVitalitySelf-esteem Life satisfaction | “…*it does take your mind of everything else. It makes you be happy when you make something with your hands as well.”* Participant |
| Social Wellbeing  | Supportive RelationshipsTrustBelonging | “*So you like the routine of erm? Yes the routine, it’s not only that but the people I going with.”* Participant*“As I said it gave me a sense of purpose as well at the same time being around people with the similar ideas as well… it does take your mind of everything else. It makes you be happy when you make something with your hands as well.”* Participant“*it helped us a lot to bond with each other.”* Participant*“No, this is our home. Because we are the same bird, the same people, we are sharing and guide here. I come outside I cannot talk because they don’t know my pain but If I tell my story for her, she know my pain and she has the same pain.”* Participant |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Personal Wellbeing | Positive emotionResilienceVitalitySelf-esteem Life satisfaction | **5 Ways to Wellbeing (NEF 2008)***Connecting* - social interactions and group formation during the workshop*Giving* - teaching other how to make the bird*Learning* - learning to make the bird*Being Active* - active over passive making*Taking Notice* - concentrating |
| Social Wellbeing  | Supportive RelationshipsTrustBelonging |

**Practitioner Themes:**

**Overarching Themes relating to the FLOCK project**: *Trauma, Belonging, Personal Wellbeing and Social Wellbeing*

These themes are similar to those of the participants however they come from the perspective of practiconers. Practiconers placed much emphasis on the supportive environment and relationships that were observed/developed through the building of trust and the stabilising influence the project had. Practitioners observed that participants were fully absorbed and engaged with the creative activity. This was reflected in their congruent ideas of how to measure the success of the project: via observing active participation of the clients and their engagement/weekly return to the project, despite being under no obligation to do so.

By being in the moment, participants were observed to be absorbed in the task at hand and this could be seen to distract them from other stressors that might trigger their PTSD. Traumatized individuals find it “*hard being in the moment and there was a lot of being in the moment going on [in the project]*” (Volunteer*)* .The concept of being present is articulated by the ‘flow state’ (Csikzentmihaly 1991), where total absorption in an activity which permits the mind to be distracted from the worries and anxieties it may have been preoccupied with before, enabling the mind to have rest as well as a shift in perspective of their perceived control and self-esteem.

*“When you have been traumatised often you haven’t had your consent that’s been out of your control.” (Practiconer)*

*“Our group members having kind of some expertise in this and then being able to pass that expertise on some people were looking really proud that they had mastered something, they had that self-esteem.” (*Practitioner)

This is particularly relevant for displaced populations with PTSD as perceived control, enabled by a supportive environment might foster a feeling of stability and therefore rest any persistent physical stress response to the trauma (such as raised cortisol levels) The ability to be present and absorbed in the activity of making has a dual outcome of possibly solidifying participants’ self-efficacy to make, improve self-esteem and have perceived control over their environment and activity.

*“You know people can stabilise in terms of the setting is stabilising, the group is stabilising, and we teach techniques and the activities are stabilising so we are layering up.” (*Practitioner*)*

The constant psychobiological reaction the body has when suffering from PTSD causes it to be at a constant low-level of stress. The first phase of trauma treatment focuses on stabilisation and feeling they were “*being welcomed and that kind of sense of belonging and inclusiveness.”* (Practitioner). This conception of belonging could also be formed through social wellbeing. By the consolidation of supportive relationships, the dampening of social isolation and the encouragement of social connection which was consistently observed throughout this project by all practitioners, a community was built.

*“I think that so much of the group is about people being together in a sense of community*.” (Practitioner)

During the interviews **practiconers were also asked about their views on the wider benefits of the grounding roots and shoots programme as well as a description of some of the important work that took place during these sessions.** The quotes below summarise some of the key themes that emerged from interviews.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Theme | Sub-Theme | Quote |
| Trauma | Being Present in the Moment | *Volunteer*I don’t know their whole stories of lots of people as you’re very much in the moment with the work, which is one of its strengths I think, and you just learn little bits and pieces about people’s livesI think what worked well was I think again it was sitting around the table all erm doing something together which is very creative and getting absorbed in that. And enjoying it. And I think for people who have been traumatised who find it quite hard being in the moment there was a lot of being in the moment going on. And an opportunity to express quite deep feelings through making something and I felt that very powerfully when you looked at what people made, and they all seemed so different and expressive of something quite deep.*Practitioner*we would teach strategy and we do that in the at roots and shoots in this garden so it might be things like how to cope with a nightmare, how to be grounded in the present how to remind yourself you’re here now in the present or how to understand how depression can come from avoiding lots of stuff and then you feel down and you’re not connected to other people so you feel lonely, this more, not really going into the traumas*Artist* I loved the fact that people seemed to be absorbing themselves in the makingactually for a lot of people it was a nice moment to quiet to just make |
| Therapeutic Stability | *Practitioner*The first phase is all about stabilisation and trying to help people manage their symptoms and manage their distress and understand it a bit more and feel a bit more connected to the present so before you would even think about talking about trauma memories you need some of that in place, some of that stabilisation in place so what’s great about the project is we offer that in this community setting so we can do, rather than doing one to one stabilisation is an hour a week, there is only so much a therapist can do there’s this we can kind of expand that principle but you know people can stabilise in terms of the setting is stabilising, the group is stabilising and we teach techniques and the activities are stabilising so we are layering up what we can provide… So that is something you might be returning back to throughout therapy and even after therapy, in terms of having a stable base is important and being able to stabilise your feelings is also really important, so it is important throughout.*Practitioner* Best way of supporting people with trauma. So just thinking about that, being a different based approach. So, first of all starting with, you know, helping a person to be stabilised…. erm horticultural therapy is part of that, you know it is a very grounding activity.*Volunteer* I suppose it brings that sense of stability that they wouldn’t have otherwise. Yeah so things like a loss recently or people have been having issues with benefits and things like that and feeling quite unstable in that sense. Having a group there and it being this ongoing thing that you have been coming to for however many years can be quite nice, people can access that when things aren’t as maybe as good or they don’t have that stability elsewhere.it gives them that sense of stability and knowing they have someone they can come to every week who is going to do everything in their remit to help them and if there is something that they can’t do they will point them in the right direction they will write letters they will be advocates for them and I really think that that is kind of, so important and amazing that it’s a service that is offered and there. |
| Personal Wellbeing | Building Agency/Self-esteem (ergo resilience) | *Volunteer*I think they like all of it but I suppose everyone is individual in that, some people have preferences for different parts of the gardening one of the good bits is that people can be doing very detailed fine work sitting down or they can be digging, doing quite energetic work that kind of incorporates everyone and if some people are feeling a little bit drawn you can do something quite solitary or something a bit more in a group so it is very very creative and adaptable.Although I think some people chose not to come as some people, I think who didn’t come during those weeks have now started coming back to the groupNo it’s not constantly there in the background and in fact the course has addressed that quite constantly and how we tend to make refugees, that they can’t do anything for themselves that they can’t look after themselves and that there is a real danger in that mindset as actually people do have their own resources and inner strength to care for themselves and think about what they have been through they have survived and managed to survive and it’s a way of othering someone really, they are not some...so I have thought about these things on the course which has been very helpful actually.*Practitioner*The first phase is all about stabilisation and trying to help people manage their symptoms and manage their distress and understand it a bit more and feel a bit more connected to the presentasking permission and consent is really important as well when you have been traumatised often you haven’t had your consent that’s been out of your control so that’s important.I hadn’t made a bird before and some clients were helping me to make my bird and kind of showing me how to stick the head which was quite difficult, actually it was really nice to have our group members having kind of some expertise in this and then being able to pass that expertise on. some people were looking really proud that they had mastered something, they had that self-esteem*Artist*I did feel people would gain a huge amount of self-esteem from seeing their work actually being displayed somewhere*Volunteer*I think it was a really positive experience and everybody felt quite, seemed to feel proud of this thing they had made. |
| Social Wellbeing | Supportive Environment and Relationships | *Volunteer*There is definitely a lot of support through letters of support for benefits and I think their asylum claims as well, although I haven’t been aware of them during the time I was there but in the past, there is time at the beginning of each Monday that if people have got something they are worried about or something has come in the post they, we ask them to bring it in before the gardening part of the group gets started so we can support people with that. Practitioner is writing masses of letters, which increased with the changes with the benefits. And it is very overwhelming for all of usYes and also signposting people but mainly it is about supporting people with what action needs to be taken and help to manage their anxiety and the way it makes them feel because it makes them feel awful about themselves – it can be very triggering and people don’t believe them or what suffering they have been through and why they are so disabled.The lunch is such a central part of the day. I think it is really important that we all sit down and share that together and talk and support each otherYeah, I think it is hugely supportive and meaningful to everyone. And I think a lot of people drag themselves there some days because they don’t feel great and I think in general they are really pleased that they came.*Practitioner* So people tend to attend that course first, so they have a few basic skills and then we would come to the Monday, the ongoing gardening and community group as a way of really reinforcing that safety and belonging and feeling kind of, with other people who have experience something similar so that would be the phase 1 if you like,With many traumas you are going through that in an isolated way so sometimes the trauma itself is quite isolating so for example if you have been in prison you know that may be that you have been kept in isolation or if you have been trafficked you have the sense of being, or going through things on your own so I think it is quite important to update you knowledge that now I’m not in it on my own I’m with other people*Practitioner* enabling people to develop creative skills or appreciation etcetera so it’s giving people opportunities. Sometimes there’s a mixture of things going on, something about the group thing in that kind of creative activity so you could erm there’s something about the sharing that kind of people do things creative together sharing together there’s the group process there’s also the opportunity of where you’re going into a cultural venue or another kind of setting and being welcomed and that kind of sense of belonging and inclusivenessHaving those trusting relationships where you can work together and recognising people’s different skill sets are, for me that’s essential that collaborative working.l I think the erm the conversation the sometimes emotions, some of it seemingly joy or looking at the faces, pride, they opened up about certain things, they could trust us in some ways talking to us about things, I think that what impressed me as well which was really important was meeting new people and that kind of sense of what is that about, it’s that kind of feeling part of a bigger family or community and belonging there’s quite often the social element of relationship stuff kind of that something that comes from creative workshops and creative work*Practitioner* sharing a meal together which is a really important time. Erm yeah it’s erm it’s a very special feel to it and I think people really enjoy it, initially they were thinking that people find it hard to eat on their own, don’t eat very much but actually they feel they have more of an appetite when they’re together and they feel a sense of family you know. Yeah a real sense of kind of supporting each other*Volunteer* you kind of know that everyone who is there is there for some form of mental health support… it’s kind of just about maintaining and having that community support which then in turn helps your mental health in general. |
| Preventing Social Isolation/Social Connection | *Practitioner*With many traumas you are going through that in an isolated way so sometimes the trauma itself is quite isolating so for example if you have been in prison you know that may be that you have been kept in isolation or if you have been trafficked you have the sense of being, or going through things on your own so I think it is quite important to update you knowledge that now I’m not in it on my own I’m with other people…I think that you know a lot of our clients have lost their, have lost family they may have lost pretty much everybody from their family of origin and so there’s something about putting down new roots as well and actually meeting other people and kind of forging new relationships and new connections erm that’s really important*Artist* people almost prefer to befriend people from a different country completely than the same country because there might have been, obviously they might have been on different sides of a war, but some countries have had huge splits of communities so you wouldn’t know who to trust*Practitioner* I think that so much of the group is about people being together in a sense of community*Volunteer* It seemed; it was lovely as well this everybody being around the table you could chat a little bit more easily while you were making things. This is a very social and this kind of mindful thing of making the birds and working with the clay.the connectivity would definitely resonate with me for the flock project but in terms of the personal one I think self-esteem is quite relevant to it as well, people being quite proud of what they have made, taking photographs and showing them off to each other and encouraging each other and things like that and I suppose that’s kind of linked to the social. |
| Belonging | Learning/Teaching | *Practitioner*I hadn’t made a bird before and some clients were helping me to make my bird and kind of showing me how to stick the head which was quite difficult, actually it was really nice to have our group members having kind of some expertise in this and then being able to pass that expertise on some people were looking really proud that they had mastered something, they had that self-esteemIt was a bit of a leveller in a sense, there were no hierarchies, in fact as you said in some instances a (? was returned?) – you were being taught how to make the birds.P - Yes I was and that’s really nice as it was normalisation as we are all just learning together.*Practitioner* I suppose the main two aspects is the opportunity to exhibit, the learning together to make the birds*Practitioner*enabling people to develop creative skills or appreciation etcetera so it’s giving people opportunities. Sometimes there’s a mixture of things going on, something about the group thing in that kind of creative activity so you could erm there’s something about the sharing that kind of people do things creative together sharing together there’s the group process there’s also the opportunity of where you’re going into a cultural venue or another kind of setting and being welcomed and that kind of sense of belonging and inclusiveness |

General Outcomes of the FLOCK Project and the wider Grounding project:

The aims of the project were holistically focused on improving the wellbeing of participants. The diverse nature of the group was firmly established. The approaches to the bird’s representation as a metaphor for migration and the re-framing power it has to outline a positive discourse of the naturalness of human migration was well explored by all practitioners. (I have still to write up about the grounding project)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **General** | **Quotes** |
| **Aims of the Project**  | *Volunteer*well to support the mental health of the very vulnerable group of people. Who have really major and long term issues with their mental health and through the horticultural therapy and the group I think as well, the power of that group you know it is very sustaining and supportive I think. For people, they can get very isolated and who struggle badly, very very badly with symptoms who feel very isolated in their everyday lives and suffered a lot of hardship as well.*Practitioner*I guess the aims now are to try and reach for women and for men so we don’t have gender we don’t have we don’t only accept one gender you know. We take all different backgrounds as well, so we are definitely trying to meet a broader need. I think definitely because there are the guidelines for PTSD have been evolving over the last 10 years or whatever and so they have recently been updated as well to talk more about stabilisation and complex PTSD as a diagnosis is kind of coming out now and there’s this emphasis on not just doing memory processing work but people needing to have that emotional stability and a safe space to do the work so I think whether that was, I’m sure that was in people’s minds, but that is more explicit in my mind now, that we are really trying to work to something that is recommended by trauma experts in the field that you do need this kind of stabilisation to take place so I guess that’s now more explicit.*Volunteer* it’s kind of a big community support I think, that’s how I have interpreted things anyway. I feel like a lot of people come because they feel like being around the other group members or the volunteers or Practitioner. Getting to catch up with people and I guess that sort of support from people, erm…and then also everybody really enjoys the gardening aspect of it as well. I feel like this kind of, people feel quite productive and accomplished and things afterwards, erm ye. |
| **Diversity of the Project** | *Volunteer*Really diverse, in terms of age, gender and ethnic background, very diverse and I think that is one of its strengths, in general people are very poor. They have got very limited access to income and extremely poor and their access to income which is mainly through benefits is precarious and constantly under threat and I know that causes a huge stress on the group because every year they are being reassessed for benefits and some of them have been denied benefits which they have had for a long time and that’s really hard and the majority of all the group are not born in the UK and I think the majority have come here to seek asylum through often many of them have been tortured in their countries of origin.*Practitioner*It’s a real mix which is really nice. So we have, and we don’t, not everyone is has refugee status some people may be asylum seekers some people may be claiming humanitarian asylum on humanitarian grounds so you had maybe LGBT clients before who were claiming asylum on being persecute for their sexuality. So you know there is a range of reasons why people might be there but in term so nationalities or people’s country of origin we have a group of middle eastern clients; Iran or Iraq. We have some clients from African places across Africa so it could be Guinea or Sierra Leone erm from we have a few from Vietnam and places like that and we have had some clients from Nigeria and Bosnia.*Artist* I think they were mixed, there were sometimes where we had, the other interesting aspect of the work is not knowing who would turn up so were there going to be 2 people or 10/12 people*Practitioner* Yes I think it is actually quite diverse, I would say we have people across the board of different backgrounds, quit a few from west Africa then we have quite a few clients from Iran and quite a few from Bosnia. Yeah, and then some from eastern Africa as well like Chili but yeah we have people, some people who are actually highly educated from quite an affluent background you know some people have done degree courses or studied in their country, some of them have had to stop study but erm you know and then some people didn’t really have the opportunity to go to school and actually aren’t able to, we have a couple of people who aren’t able to read or write. They come from very rural backgrounds, but it is a real mixture who is there.*Volunteer* so they are all asylum seekers or refugees who are in the project and it’s quite mixed I would say in terms of places of origin. Yeah different countries in Africa I suppose and a few people who come from the middle east and a couple of people from eastern Europe as well, so it is quite mixed. |
| **Bird Representation** | *Volunteer*I think it was symbolically, a very symbolic thing and also real which is very lovely so about the symbolic nature of the group of birds, the flock coming together and thinking about ideas of migration in birds which were, which is much more benign than ideas of migration amongst human beings which is so much more political*Practitioner* I think that the bird analogy works really well with that because you know it is about the diversity, there is some much diversity in our group and that there is something that holds people together and I think that you know the flock is a really nice metaphor for that but also just to you know everyone’s part of it by being able to produce the bird and that doesn’t really matter which social class or in fact people who have displaced at really challenging in terms of where you then are and how you are positioned in society you’re not allowed to work, your identity and all sorts of things, so many of so much kind of loss and so much confusion around that, that you know being able to be part of something and have an equal part I think is really nice and going to the V&A that was like probably the most middle class setting you can find but like how nice for us all to be there producing something in this very respected and such a prestigious institute*Practitioner* the idea of thinking you know migration and movement and the kind of you know thinking about birds and people and you know we all migrate, people have always moved around. And birds have a monopoly but well all animals – I thought we could think about migration in a positive way that yeah it is something that happens and so thinking about birds and the way that they move, they settle in different places and you know it seemed like a really nice, sort of metaphor to think about.*Volunteer* yeah so it was about erm kind of making these birds together as a group and kind of on the theme of migration and community erm and creating this kind of this flock. That had this kind of common theme that we were this one group that was all together and maybe all the birds would be a bit different, but they made this flock I guess |

Limitations and Difficulties of FLOCK and AT Grounding

Future research direction and adaptation may include higher levels of training for volunteers around the benefits of arts based non-clinical interventions. The problem of measurement came up as establishing objective/quantitative measures of experience are difficult in this population. Currently active participation and engagement of the participants is the barometer for success in the minds of the practitioners. Another interesting outcome was the non-therapeutic framing of the non-clinical intervention but the accidental therapeutic outcomes it had on the participants.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Limitation/Difficulties** | **Quote** |
| **Emotionally draining work/need for specialist training** | *Volunteer*Practitioner is writing masses of letters, which increased with the changes with the benefits. And it is very overwhelming for all of usErm...it is just the emotion, the extent of the need in the group and I wrote in my dissertation essay, my masters essay on the placement on the quiet suffering there is a lot of that going on and you absorb that as a volunteer even if you aren’t explicitly talking about it with people. So I think I find it very emotional, very very emotional.*Artist*I haven’t specifically worked with people who have perhaps PTSD. |
| **Problem of Measurement** | *Volunteer*I think it is just an impression really, and anecdotal more than anything as it is very hard to measure and there isn’t much measurement that I am aware of within the actual activities on a Monday but I think we did do some forms at some point, I do think they measure members mental state periodically but it is not really, it is a bit of a chore, everyone finds it a bit of a chore, it doesn’t seem to really equate to what is happening.I think everyone is very familiar with those forms as the members have done them endlessly.They do it because they’re know it helps the project. It needs to be done. *Practitioner*I mean I think that where it is difficult to measure, it is difficult to measure I mean one thing I have in mind is peoples engagement, people actually coming and erm participating and I think that’s if, erm, if people didn’t find it helpful or weren’t enjoying it they kind of wouldn’t come they do, so there is a voting with your feet kind of thing so that makes me kind of think that people did enjoy and it was effective in bringing people together and giving people new experience I think that was quite a good measure and just the quality of the work – I think that, you could see you know wrapping up their birds really carefully or you know really being quite protective of what they have done and you know I think that people you know a lot of our clients, some people it was just that, it was just a fun thing and people were kind of chatting but for others there was a real pride in what they had achieved and I think that would be something that you could see definitely and observe erm. And yes and how the people talk about you know this kind of opened up different types of conversation like you say that idea of it being more of a leveller we are not here to talk about trauma or that you’re the patient it’s actually much more creating about something together. I think that that is something that stood out for me.*Practitioner*I think that on one hand the literally production of the birds you could say these are all the completed birds, the care, the attention the engagement for an hour and a half or more you could say that is the crucial, in many ways, the fact that people despite the fact it wasn’t every week although we had breaks they still came*Artist*I just feel this sense of warmth from everybody… it was a really nice connection with everybody but erm yes I don’t know maybe, I think obviously the [clients] sitting down and the level of focus (active participation)*Practitioner* Proof is in the pudding! the amount of people who came every time was quite incredible and they stayed, and they engaged.*Volunteer* I suppose just like on a very kind of baseline level nobody is making people come to these, so if they weren’t enjoying and didn’t want to do it people would not just turn up. So there is that, I think also then people when they were in the room, there was a really good energy I felt and you could, people were kind of talking about them a lot a had that sense of pride over the birds that they were making. You know remembering what their one was and wanting to keep working on it and helping each other you kind of got a general vibe that they were enjoying it. |
| **Safeguarding Vulnerable Audiences** | *Practitioner*Concerns would be; could this be a triggering subject, the idea of peoples journeys for example or erm would people find it could it be kind of invalidating in some ways to be talking about this in terms of birds or you know would it be minimising or could it just be overwhelming |
| **Non-therapeutic intentions having therapeutic outcomes** | *Practitioner*It wasn’t meant to be a kind of treatment but anything to help people feel connected, present, calm and safe and enjoy themselves is going to hopefully be therapeutic in some ways, it has that benefit but it wasn’t meant to be a therapy to mental health*Volunteer*And so I think it has that function but I think it was also you know it was like a creative therapy it was just like, it seemed to me to be very therapeutic for people to express something of how they were feeling and also getting very absorbed in you know the very physical and I think for everyone really enjoyable activity of working with the clay. |

**Project outcomes, exhibitions and impact:**

There were a number of impact related project outcomes. These are detailed below:

For our V&A event approximately 60 people were taught on the day and contributed ceramic birds to the larger flock

Our main Lewisham Artshouse exhibition was well attended with around 60 people at our special event and an additional 100 over the 2 weeks.

We had a listing in the New Exhibitions of Contemporary Art which has a very large following: <http://www.newexhibitions.com/>

There will be a forthcoming article in Ceramic Review which is an American publication. They highlighted our exhibition on twitter: <https://twitter.com/ceramicreview/status/1170017618327146497>

We established new links with the organisation Counterpoints Art; a leading national organisation in the field of arts, migration and cultural change. <https://counterpointsarts.org.uk/about/>

The collaboration, allowed a strong partnership to be created with the SLAM Grounding Project and UCL.

Blogs and News:

<https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/grand-challenges/2019/09/03/ceramic-birds-tell-stories-of-loss-exile-migration-and-hope/>

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/news/2019/sep/can-creating-art-help-your-wellbeing>

Exhibitions:

<https://www.maudsleycharity.org/flock-exhibition-at-maudsley-hospital-sheds-light-on-migration-stories-for-refugee-week/>

<https://www.vam.ac.uk/event/jkr1D1zb/grounding-project-june-2019>

<http://www.lewishamarthouse.org.uk/project-space/>

Some important social media posts:

<https://twitter.com/jnelsonstudio/status/1169549985312071680>

<https://twitter.com/maotweets/status/1172293580116807684>

<https://twitter.com/jnelsonstudio/status/1170256838534881291>

<https://twitter.com/maotweets/status/1172288572033912832>

<https://twitter.com/HumeraIqbal1/status/1163413790677000192>

<https://twitter.com/HumeraIqbal1/status/1140245743099404288>

We have a series of images associated with the project.

1. <https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/8d92cf44e70b3d16e6_rgm6bpd3i.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)