



Working for Health

Theatre and mental health

Presenter

The Giggle Factory, a project based in Haverfordwest which uses the power of theatre. The group is made up of people with experiences of mental health problems. Coordinator Gill Dowsett explains.

Gill

Forum theatre is one part of theatre of the oppressed. Augusto Boal des devised forum theatre as one of the first types of theatre of the oppressed, and that's a way of working that helps people to identify and, deal with external oppressions. We always start with a circle, unless of course we're working with a big audience. But it as far as possible we'll work, we'll start with a circle which is a very safe space and it's a very equal space, and it's a very tribal, you know it goes back a long way, like sitting in a circle round the camp fire, and it's, it has a sense of, I don't know it creates, sets the flavour for the way that we're going to work.

Group leader

What we're going to do, is we're just going to start in a circle and it's going to be name, number, how you're feeling.

Jo

I'm Jo. I'm feeling about eight. I'm finishing antibiotics and I'm beginning to feel better.

Jenny

I'm Jenny. I'm feeling about six, seven

Elvis

I'm Elvis. I feel about seven nine-ish.

Reuben

I'm Reuben. I'm feeling about seven. My teeth are a bit dodgy.

Hannah

The technique, forum theatre, is, whereas you put on a piece of theatre about someone that's having a problem at a time, and they show their problem, and then we re-run that sketch, and ask people to take the place of the person that's got the problem, and see if they can deal with it in a slightly different way, to see if the outcome would be better.

Gill

We don't take a tin opener and open it for people we give them the tin opener for themselves and, if they want to look they can look, and if they want to get a bit deeper they can, an if they don't, that's fine. My experience is that people are really good at taking responsibility for themselves, if they're given that space and encouragement to do so.

Tracy

When I actually came to the forum I couldn't even stick up for myself, but now I'm getting to the point where I can stick up for myself. So I just like bringing my stories along to theatre forum, because they're really understanding and, they're really, well and they really help you.

(extracts from forum theatre session)

'You must remember that Tracy'.

'Our dad's definitely not your dad, mum's told me'

'Yeah, your dad's DEAD!'

'I just found out my dad's dead'

'For heaven's sake child, you don't ask questions like that'

'I wanna know'.

Richard

At the end of the first workshop, I thought what the hell am I doing here? This wasn't really my scene. As I took part in the discussions and games and the acting, I suddenly realised, this was a wonderful way of getting out from inside of you feelings which had been trapped, and I suddenly realised it was happening to me, and it's helped me immensely.

Hannah

The first thing that struck me about it, was I didn't know who was actually the patients or the clients, and who was there to help them. You really couldn't tell the difference which was really surprising for me first of all, because you think that you'd be able to notice who was sort of crazy and who wasn't like but, really you realise that we're all a bit crazy.

Ruben

There are people here today, that I worked with on the first group, and I can tell you that they were hiding behind their chairs, and that they couldn't say their names, that they couldn't even show their face, to the circle or to the group, because they were so petrified because they'd never been allowed to be put in a position where they were able to talk for themselves, not even to say their own name, because people talk above people and about people, and not to them. I think what forum gave me, was my confidence, and with better interpersonal skills, you know, I feel far more, at ease with myself and empowered to actually make the changes in my life that I wanted to do.

Hannah

When they get to get up and act, and maybe they will be one of those people that you know have been in the group for the first two sessions, have been really quiet and not really said much, really shy, and then they get up and they're in a role of being powerful and strong and shouting and you know, and it really empowers people, it can make people feel really good after, even though it's acting, and it's not really the people that are oppressing them in real life, it makes them feel good to shout at the people that are acting as their oppressors, because they get it out of their system.

Alais

You're also, thinking about, how you might have changed something, or how you might have done it differently and that, I think that can, I mean that certainly for me gives me a lot of hope for the future. It has the potential to be really political as well, and to really, for people to stand up and say no, I'm not happy with this aspect of the system or, I'd like to change that aspect of the system, and to do it in a way that feels safe really.

Lee

I think it's really really good work because it gives people who perhaps wouldn't normally have the chance to speak, a chance to let their views be aired, and through the medium that theatre forum uses, the forum theatre, and the theatre of the oppressed and so on, it gives us the chance to take their message out to places where their message should be heard but often isn't.

Tracey

Rather than just sitting around and not taking it anywhere yeah I reckon it's important that it gets outside in the community because, there's a lot of stressful things that's going on at the moment on the outside like people, like myself that walks down Haven driveway and sort of

gets picked on and get called a divvy and all that sort of thing, and I reckon that's important that, you try and get that through to people's heads, and prove that you're not a divvy and all that sort of thing, and yet you are more capable of walking the streets just in the same way as they are.

Gill

We can take theatre to places and allow people to look at the effects of certain policies or, or look at gaps in policy, and the damage that can produce, or that that has and hopefully create new policy that will change things for people. I'd like to take some stuff to the Welsh assembly, to draw the attention to them, of some of the problems that we're facing.