



LAY SUMMARY

CREATOR Study: Agreeing meaningful changes in Arts Therapies

Background: Persons attending adult community mental health services are asked to fill out questionnaires at the beginning and then again at the end of art or music therapy. These questionnaires are used to help understand whether the sessions they attend are helping them or not. The answers to these questionnaires may also help managers to compare effects of the arts therapies to other types of therapies. This offers the opportunity to better understand the role the arts therapies play in helping people.

The issue: How can arts therapists and persons attending therapy work together to agree and review meaningful changes that can be brought about by taking part in music or art therapy?

The study queried whether using repeated questions, which focus on symptoms, risks and/or wellbeing, may limit opportunities to really understand the ongoing changes that can happen whilst attending the arts therapies. Previous studies show that when an arts therapist and person(s) attending make images or music together the person(s) attending can experience nurture, flexibility, personal growth, and enjoyment in using the arts. These studies suggest that using the arts can enable the person attending to share emotions that might be harder to do using words. They highlight that through the process of making images or music together the therapist and person(s) attending can build shared understandings. Sharing these understandings can strengthen connections with wider communities.

However, there are limited guidelines for arts therapists on how to work with the person(s) attending therapy to agree and review the meaningful changes that can be brought about by attending the arts therapies. Looking more broadly at studies in community mental health this appears to be because of the need to balance a process of building shared understandings with service demands for reporting on reliable and valid changes.



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This study therefore set the following aims:

- To build shared understandings about how we can make it easier to agree and review what can be brought about by attending the arts therapies in adult community mental health,
- To refine and strengthen a framework for agreeing meaningful changes in arts therapies.

What did we do? We facilitated four workshops over seven months. The workshops aimed to bring help seekers and providers together to think about the research questions. We invited all participants to be co-researchers. Being a co-researcher is about making meanings together, sharing power and allowing different voices to be heard. Using art, music, and words the co-researchers in each workshop were looking for different ways to:

- build shared understandings about what arts therapists and persons attending need to be able to work together to agree, and regularly review, how music and art therapy help,
- strengthen and refine a framework developed in the Community Arts Therapies team for agreeing and reviewing meaningful changes in the arts therapies.

Thirteen people took part, including persons who have attended therapy, arts therapists, managers, and support workers. At the end of each of the first three workshops between 3 and 5 actions were agreed. The actions suggested ways to change how the arts therapist and person(s) attending agree and review meaningful changes in the arts therapies. In between each workshop the arts therapists taking part in the study were asked to try the proposed actions in practice. They shared their experiences of doing this in an online group. They agreed any dilemmas they



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had noticed putting the actions into practice. These ideas were used to help shape the next workshop.

In the final workshop five arts therapists and one person who had attended the arts therapies looked at the ideas from the first three workshops. They agreed which ones were the most important ideas and brought these together into five principles. They also looked at a proposed framework which brought together the main themes from the workshops. Using art, music, and words they worked together to agree what worked well in the framework and what needed to be improved.

What's new? Five principles were agreed (Figure 1) which were shared at two exhibitions within the NHS board where the research took place alongside the proposed framework and arts-based responses.

Figure 1: Five principles agreed in the final workshop.

PRINCIPLE 1: COMMUNICATING HOW THE ARTS THERAPIES HELP; including persons with lived experience and communicating between disciplines.

PRINCIPLE 2: CREATING PERMISSION and ACTIVELY USING THE ARTS; using the arts and humour to slow things down.

PRINCIPLE 3: CO-SHAPING; having a framework in place that enables flexibility.

PRINCIPLE 4: REFRAMING whilst RECOGNISING THINGS CAN CHANGE; learning to acknowledge feelings so we can live with them.

PRINCIPLE 5: CO-CREATING SOMETHING TO TAKE FORWARD; lots of different ways to share what happens.

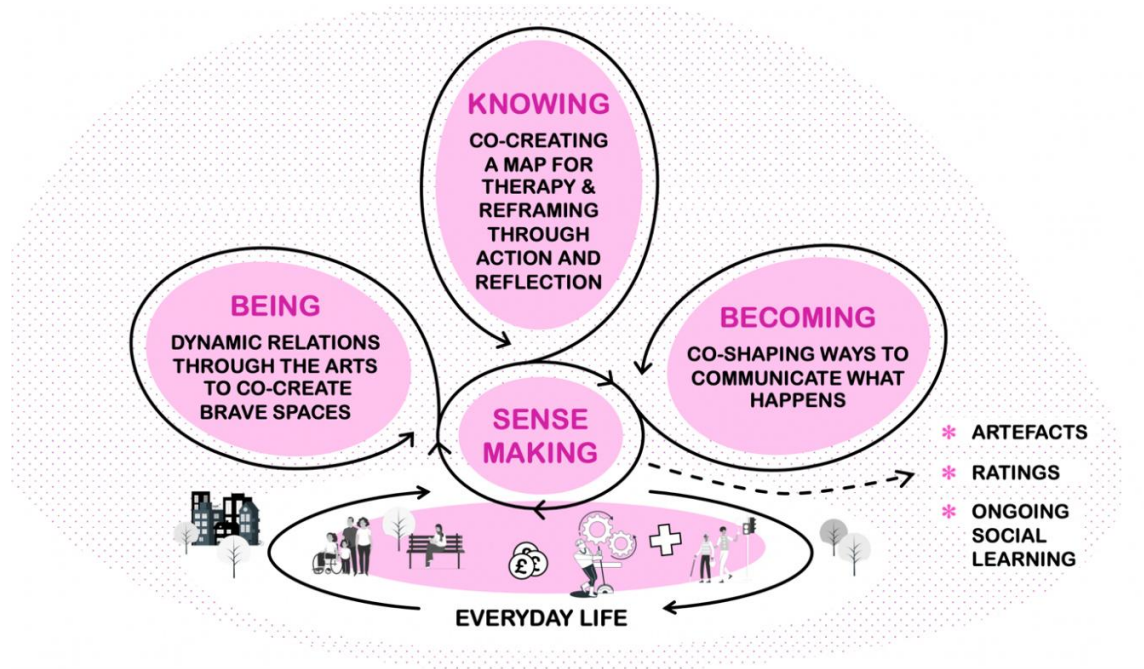
Building further on responses to these five principles, to the draft framework and questions asked in the exhibitions the lead researcher designed the final framework (Figure 2).



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Figure 2. A framework for agreeing meaningful changes in the arts therapies.



The framework outlines how arts therapists and person(s) attending therapy can agree and review meaningful changes in the arts therapies. It brings together the ideas that co-researchers agreed on in the research. The idea of *being* in the first loop suggests that making images and music with a therapist can help to build brave spaces with the person(s) attending. The idea of *knowing* in the second loop emphasises that by working with images and music and talking about this the therapist and person(s) attending can make a map for therapy. Making a map together can help to signpost what might be brought about by attending the arts therapies. It can be important to go back to this map in between making music and images because making sense will happen at different times in the process for different people. The idea of *becoming* in the third loop is about finding a way to share with others what happens in a way that makes sense to each person attending. This might include sharing things that are made in therapy (artefacts), numbers that reflect any changes (ratings) and things that have been learnt about how we cope or don't cope when things happen with friends, families, colleagues. The framework emphasises that sense making can help to connect what happens in



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the arts therapies with everyday life at different points in the therapy journey.

Why is this important? The findings will be used to implement best practice in agreeing and reviewing meaningful changes in the arts therapies in adult community mental health services. Co-creating practice guidelines will help to build services that are person-centred and seek different approaches to building meaningful evidence. They will help practitioners and researchers to think more about what can be learnt working through the arts to build shared understandings. New ways of agreeing and reviewing what can be brought about by attending the arts therapies may enable the person(s) attending to make sense of what has been brought about by attending the arts therapies within their everyday life.

What's next? Embedding the findings into practice guidelines will support ongoing changes within the arts therapies and help to develop further research studies. Further studies might explore how therapists and persons attending use the arts to build brave spaces. They might explore how the arts therapist and person(s) attending use these brave spaces to make a map to agree and review what changes could be brought about by attending the arts therapies. They may look at how persons attending and their therapists rate changes agreed on a scale of one to ten at the beginning and end of therapy and how this helps to document meaningful changes over time. They may look at how music and images made in arts therapies are shared with wider supports to understand more how this can help to communicate the ways that being in the arts therapies support changes in everyday life. Further studies should also look at how using apps on personal phones might make it easier to agree and review meaningful changes that connect therapy with everyday life.

To ensure that future studies are meaningful persons who have attended the arts therapies, previous co-researchers and members of the empowerment group will be



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invited to join an advisory group. This group will strengthen the ideas from the CREATOR study to help design and deliver future studies in the local NHS board, across the UK and globally.

Who led the research? The study was led by Emma Maclean, Queen Margaret University (QMU)/NHS Lothian as part of an educational qualification funded by *NHS Lothian Research Futures* and sponsored by QMU. She can be contacted for any questions on EMaclean@qmu.ac.uk

The study was supervised by Professor Erna Haraldsdottir (QMU) and Dr Caroline Dickson (QMU).

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