

# Catherine Chalmers, Art Therapist, North Edinburgh Art Therapy Service

## First Steps into Research Gateway Award



### Tell us a bit about yourself and your career to date

I qualified as an art therapist in 2001 and have been working in community mental health services in NHS Lothian for more than twenty years. My main role is to provide both individual and group art therapy interventions, particularly with those who may find it difficult to express or connect with their thoughts and feelings, using the art making as way to support curiosity in oneself and in others through verbal, non-verbal and creative expression. I also work as a lecturer on the MSc Art Psychotherapy training at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, with a focus on supporting practice-based learning.

### What is the focus of your Gateway Award?

I am going to be joining a research team at Edinburgh Napier University led by Professor Thanos Karatzias. The study is called 'Psychological Interventions for Complex PTSD And Schizophrenia-Spectrum disOrder' (PICASSO). PICASSO is what is known as an 'Umbrella trial' to test whether Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD) symptoms are causally related to psychosis, and to develop more effective trauma-focused psychological interventions for psychotic symptoms by treating underlying experiences of/reactions to trauma. An Umbrella trial involves running several individual randomised controlled trials at the same time.

I'll be involved in this work from March to end June 2023.

### What motivated you to apply for this Gateway Award?

I am looking for a new challenge at this point in my career and am very motivated to move into research, building on my considerable clinical skills and experience. I was excited at the opportunity to learn from a current research project, particularly actively working with psychological trauma as this is an area of clinical interest.

### What are you hoping to get out of the award you have received?

I am looking to build foundational research skills, experience, and knowledge to support me in further research training opportunities and I believe First Steps Award opportunity could literally be an important first step for me! I am particularly interested in the relationship

between mental health, physical health and trauma and I am excited to be able to work with the PICASSO project and for the opportunity to build new research and clinical relationships.

**What difference do you think having this funded support will make to your understanding of research?**

I am looking to develop a greater understanding of the processes involved in developing, delivering, and evaluating new treatment approaches to support more effective and accessible pathways for psychological therapies. The PICASSO project team have been incredibly welcoming and supportive, and I am excited to be able to support and learn from them. Having these funded, protected days to work with the PICASSO project team and a financial award to access relevant training opportunities, conferences, etc feels like a real investment in me as a practitioner which is wonderful!

**What do you hope to do in the future and how do you thinking this Gateway Award will help you achieve this?**

I am hopeful that I will gain in research skills, experience and confidence that will lead to future research opportunities. I see this Award as being a great opportunity for myself as a practitioner but also that it has the potential to benefit and support the work of the wider NHS Lothian Arts therapies team and the Arts therapies evidence base.

**For more information please contact:**  
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