



Qi, Breath and Voice

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Final Report

**Synergy Project:
Afro-Brazilian Dance and Jewish Niggunim**

**Project leaders:
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INTRODUCTION

The project was run as a pilot study to explore how artistic expression could help workshop participants to explore their experiences and feelings on a deeper level and thus release physical and mental tensions and blockages.

The concept was based on findings of previous research in the field of dance and movement as well as group work. The working hypothesis was that “the human body is able to disentangle even the deepest of feelings by using creative tools”¹.

The original proposal had included dance, song and drawing, but the latter had to be dropped due to organisational issues. Thus the pilot study used Afro-Brazilian Dance and Jewish Niggunim (songs without words) only.

Both art forms are rooted in spiritual traditions and consequently live through and for a community, working with group dynamics and generating psychological group support for the group members. In other words, they are by definition geared at providing a basis for the study of group interaction and how it could be used to unravel, and maybe transform, “patterns of behaviour, beliefs, relationships, and emotional states”². Looking at it from this angle, the loss of the drawing seems almost consequential.

Based on the recognition that our society is in a progressive state of fragmentation, ‘community’ in the wider sense of the word has recently received a lot of attention, not just from academia, but also from politicians, the public and the voluntary sector. By choosing to address its workshops to a number of different social groups/communities this pilot study aimed to make a contribution to the ongoing research in the field by looking into to aspects:

Firstly, how the work could be used for building and working with groups in the first place. Secondly, how the safety, support and stimulation provided by an established group could be used to support the individuals in their venture of self-exploration and to take them further into the process than would be possible without this support.

¹ Funding Application, p 1.

² ibd.

A. GENERAL CONCEPT AND SPECIFIC AIMS – WORK IN PROGRESS

A.1. Group work and non-verbal communication

The basic concept - as it was set up and as it evolved at the early stages of implementation - has been touched upon in the introduction.

During early planning and delivery, particular attention was paid to two questions:

- a) Could this work be used to improve our understanding of group interaction and particularly non-verbal communication?
- b) In which way could this work benefit the community and in particular specific client groups?

ad a) The effects of social inclusion and exclusion on health and well-being have been much more widely discussed in recent years. The underlying cultural concepts of the process are obviously highly relevant, but not always easy to puzzle out.

Social interaction as well as interaction with the self (self-perception and reflection) largely depends on conceptualisation and consensus. In other words, they use a more or less complex set of codes. Language and movement (body language) can be described as such codes and are significant for belonging and interaction (group) as well as awareness and acceptance (self).

ad b) The Arts can play a major role in raising cultural awareness and inter-community exchange. But they also provide a fantastic tool-kit for the use of code, the exploration of code and the liberation from and transcendence of code. Used in this way they go beyond informed or even competent social interaction to move into deep exploration of self and other. They can also leave behind language and with it the inquisitive, conceptual mind, leading us instead into the realm of what has been called 'felt experiences'.

The art forms used for this project (Afro-Brazilian dance and Jewish niggunim) work with form, i.e. they set a framework (set of movement, sequence of melodies) and give some guidance - a story or an explanation about the tradition. But as they do not elaborate on the story, as they do not make **this** story the story to be danced or sung but allow each person to find and explore their own story in the movement of body or voice, the form is open. While the dance or song carries on, no language is needed; in other words, one major aspect of 'conformity' is eliminated, while the support of the group is still maintained. Consequently the result is not just artistic self-expression but creative self-exploration.

Rosaria and Polina know about code. They are not only both used to bridge two cultures, their own and that of their host country, they also work with traditions so old and deep they appear alien to the majority of people indigenous to those traditions. Coming from this place of awareness they were able to offer the participants in their workshops the opportunity to try, as it were, some new tools to do an old job - in a new and different way, in a better or more appropriate way or maybe for the first time at all.

They helped the participants to open up to this opportunity by implicitly giving permission to leave behind old tools that had never suited them, did not suit them anymore or had been worn out or damaged; the chance to rediscover some of their own tools that had been forgotten; the challenge of discovering the meaning of tools they had inherited through their

culture or family but never known how to use. Examples to illustrate this will be given later on.³

A.2. Replication

As a funded pilot study the project aimed to investigate the potential of the work, but also make available any thoughts, procedures, methods and results with a view to facilitate replication and achieve a level of sustainability. Details of this process will be found in the chapters on focus groups and evaluation.⁴

A.3. Health and well-being

Particular attention was paid to any changes in health and well-being, behavioural patterns, emotional release and group interaction. The researcher's observations were run along these lines and have been included in the two previous reports.⁵ The facilitators' reflections also refer to these aspects.⁶

A.4. Business community, corporations and organisations

The idea to reach out to businesses and corporations had been vented in the proposal but could not be explored further at this stage. However, the reception of the work so far shows that the prospects using the work in that environment look promising. Furthermore, volunteers and employees of voluntary and community organisations have already benefited in so far as the staff at St John's Community Centre and Oasis were able to participate in the work as well as the evaluation process of the project⁷.

A.5. Young people, educational aspects, cultural awareness and diversity

The aim to involve young people with a view on education and inclusion could not be achieved at this stage. This said, it should be mentioned that the participants of those groups that were established expressed much interest in the two traditions presented, with the open group and the Oasis Project leaning more towards the Candomblé for its relationship with the Samba.

Tellingly, the women joining the Oasis Project, most of whom come from socially and educationally deprived backgrounds, felt encouraged to ask questions and deepen their understanding of the nature of spiritual traditions, the past and the present of other societies and cultures and the effects of working with movement and voice on body and mind.⁸

³ See B.2.2. and B.2.3.

⁴ See chapter B and C.

⁵ See First Project Report (App.1) and Second Project Report (App.2).

⁶ See section B and C.

⁷ See letter from St John's Centre, App.15; see chapter B and C.

⁸ See Polina's feedback, Oasis June 2007: "Singing encouraged discussions about

a) personal reactions (2 participants couldn't stop laughing although didn't mean to show disrespect. I think this was their unconscious reaction to having to be open and honest with themselves and attentive to their feelings – this probably doesn't happen very often);

b) religious views (lots of questions about Judaism, making comparison to Christianity and sharing knowledge and experience of religious events in the past.)

b) equality of men and women;

c) environmental questions (talking about what we personally can do to help the climate change ect...) (App.7.).

Generally, participants took the opportunity to reflect on how they are experiencing their own culture or subculture.

The participants at the St John's Centre were more interested in the European Jewish tradition, partly because some of them are of Jewish origin or practicing Jews, partly because they are more acquainted with this culture. The participants with a Jewish background felt invited to talk about their experiences in the past and present and share some knowledge about elements of the tradition they remembered or cherished.⁹ One participant found that "it has an educational value learning from other cultures... Yiddish chanting, all that Brazilian stuff... nice balance between the different things you offer"¹⁰

Obviously, any on-going work would be effective with regard to raising cultural awareness and promoting understanding of different ways of artistic expression. Participants of all workshops were interested in the cultural and – in the wider sense - spiritual background of both traditions and very willing to explore them in more depth and with regard to their own experience. A participant's comment may highlight this: "Every session was an adventure because it was so new"¹¹. While principally the pilot project has shown that the work as such is open and inclusive by structure, it has to be acknowledged that the deeper processes need time, in other words, the workshop leaders are aiming to offer ongoing courses with a structure of at least 10 sessions per course.

A.6. Performances

One prospective of the project had been to carry the work to the level of performance. Performance can take many shapes and follow many agendas, depending on context. In the first instance, the simple joy of sharing may be enough. On other occasions, experiencing the pride and satisfaction of well-supported (by the group and the form) self-expression can take the performer to a new level of confidence and liberation.

The project did not quite reach the performance stage, although it was touched upon at St John's Centre, where Polina gave a performance with her Yiddish Choir for the participants of the project and other interested parties. The project participants joined the choir in the singing of the niggunim they had learned.

B. FOCUS GROUPS

B.1. Issues around access to focus groups, group building and continuity

Due to a number of factors the project found that it had limited choice with respect to the focus groups it had anticipated to work with in the proposal or attempted to build in the early stages of implementation¹². A major factor was publicity, i.e. advertising to the wider public (open sessions, young people, people over sixty); another to get attendants to commit to take part regularly and thus afford the group with the continuity needed for an ongoing process.

a) Open sessions were offered throughout the whole trial period and received good feedback. In spite of some fairly intensive advertising (limited only by budget restraints) they did not

⁹ See Polina's summary for the St John's Centre (App.6)

¹⁰ See App.9.

¹¹ See App.9.

¹² See Proposal for Funding, p4.

attract enough people to establish larger groups. Unfortunately low and irregular attendance meant that the facilitators were unable to use group dynamic and group coherence as a supporting element in the work as much as they would have liked. It also proved difficult to establish enough continuity to assess the benefit the work may have had for individuals over time. Nevertheless, the team found the open sessions very valuable, because they allowed for a rather more experimental and thus challenging mode of working, which would not have been appropriate for the other groups¹³.

Rosaria described her experience in this way:

"I found the open sessions useful as participants opened more than I expected sharing what they felt throughout the session. However, it is quite difficult to get very deep considering that there is not a continuing attendance of the same group so issues around trust and familiarity with the group are not cultivated, despite the fact that participants always felt at ease with each other. It may be that the open sessions are used as a call for trying different things and not expect too much depth from them, which was what we originally thought."¹⁴

Participants of the open sessions generally gave very positive feedback. They expressed much interest in the work and showed - during the session and in the questionnaires - that they had been able to engage with it in a self-expressing and self-exploring way¹⁵. Some participants expressed the wish to have the opportunity to engage more with this work and suggested a residential. However, in general the sessions were perceived as open drop-in classes with no commitment attached – an approach quite common in the field (arts, body work, movement and self-development/healing) and the location (Brighton).

The conclusion is that firstly, the fact that with Brighton is an extremely vibrant scene with an immense amount of art, healing and self-development courses on offer needs to be taken in account. Secondly, the independent of this precondition the set-up itself did not instigate or even suggest on-going commitment. For future projects the facilitators may wish to consider what could be done to set a framework for non-specific groups, which would encourage members to attend regularly over a given number of sessions. This would deepen the work and allow for the different orixas to be woven together creating a broader basis for personal development. Similarly, the dynamic of the niggunim as a form of communal singing could be brought to bear on participants' ability to freely use their voice for self-expression. Both could lead to a point where participants could be encouraged to perform.

b) The very positive response of the only participant to attend the trial workshop for **people over sixty** led to concerted efforts to advertise the work for this focus group, but again access proved to be an issue.

In response to the difficulties with participant recruitment (which are expected to be overcome as the work becomes better known), the decision was made to seek the co-operation of organisations in the voluntary and community sector with the aim to gain access to a specific clientele or even pre-established group. Otherwise, it was felt, the continuity needed to assess the impact of the work might not be achievable within the framework and time limit of the pilot project¹⁶.

This co-operation was very successful on the whole, although not without its own difficulties. But there was continuity and a building of relationships took place which helped to overcome

¹³ See B.2.

¹⁴ See Rosaria, Final Comments, 7.7.07

¹⁵ For details see ibd.

¹⁶ See Second Project Report.

organisational problems. The project has been assured that it find support in the future with those who participated in the pilot study – service users and volunteers/staff alike.

B.2. Responses from the different focus groups – adaptations to meet specific needs

In all groups there was some initial shyness and anticipation when the work was first introduced. Also the workshop leaders needed to explore the needs of each group and adapt the work accordingly.

With all groups, the facilitators kept to the principle of introducing the tradition and the form and then give space for the participants to engage with the form at their leisure.

It is note-worthy that the participants' feedback shows that members of all groups appreciated this opportunity to begin their self-exploration internally, allowing time and space before moving on to be overtly expressive using more and more body language or vocal harmonies. Both forms - the energetic, internal one and the expressive open one - are, of course, forms of sharing and both are non-verbal simply using movement and sound. It was perceived that verbal feedback given after the sessions often flowed from this 'felt experience' rather than the thinking mind. Such 'speaking from the heart' affected the group atmosphere positively and helped to develop trust, which may be the most essential element for group building. This helped less confident individuals to find the strength and confidence to open up more over time.

B.2.1. Open sessions

The participants joining the open sessions usually felt fairly comfortable and confident with at least one of the two activities, i.e. the singing or the dancing, having had either a longstanding interest and practice with the art form or at least some recent experience. Resting in the security this gave them, they were on the whole quite proactive, confident and reflective, picked up on the explorative element in the work quite quickly and generally felt comfortable with working in a group or even expressed the wish to intensify the group work.

Comments on the feedback sheets went like this:

- *“Rosaria and Polina know these traditions and feel them deeply – the openness of the sharing gives a wonderful space. Now I fell both peaceful and trembly.”*
- *“ I really appreciated the care and sincerity of Polina and Rosaria and how you made me feel included and not at all judged. You created a great atmosphere of openness and fun.”*
- *“Very new, interesting experience with the niggunim for me. I have never done it before. Very powerful!”*
- *“ I knew about the dancing part from before. Was bit scared and curious about the singing part. [...] Dancing was great, choreography. The niggunim brought me to another space! “*
- *“It was a good balance [between dance and song] but I would have liked to do a day or ½ each to really develop movement and voice work. I really enjoyed the workshop very very much; felt energised and uplifted, also very emotional with the singing.”*

- *“ I think I had blocked out the fact that we would sing. I was imagining Polina would sing as we danced! If it had been 4-6 months ago there’s no way I would have sung. But I felt very supported by Polina, the group, and forced myself.”*
- *“ I would be interested to try sessions with more participants. [...] Would like to sit at a table and sing into the evening [...] I would be interested to attend a residential.”¹⁷*

During the open sessions the facilitators were able to use modelling to encourage the participants to open up to the work.

In one of her reflections Rosaria described one such occasion:

“I felt that it took me a bit longer to get into the first goddess, feeling more concern with the framework and the safety for the participants. Whereas often I get lost in my own moves, this time I followed the original routine more closely. Anecdotally, one of the participants commented on this and thought that it would be good if I could get more into my own moves so that, in that way, I would give the permission to the participants to experiment a bit more; interesting aspect to keep in mind. However, on the other side, there was another participant that felt that she needed more structure to be able to feel confident in the class and she felt this security was provided as it was. All participants shared the view that they needed more time to get immersed in the moves and they will be interested in one-weekend workshop to do so.”¹⁸

Most participants were able to pick up on the modelling and use it in an affirmative way. They also engaged with the archetypal aspects of the orixas and shared their reflections on what had been going on during the session and afterwards.

Rosaria’s noted:

“The feedback was very positive and there was a greater feeling of group work. We stayed longer than usual talking at the end of the session. One of the participants emailed us few days later saying that she was unable to do anything else for the rest of the day. She had lots of plans and she just managed to relax, feeling energised but not been able to be out there in the world. It was the first time she did something like this (she is in her sixties). She felt energised and relaxed and she said that staring at the wall is not something she does! I ensured her that it was a positive development to recover energies and look after oneself.”¹⁹

Polina commented on the same session:

“To be honest, we extended the session by 30-40 minutes as we couldn’t stop sharing thoughts and feelings. The session went really well, as we are now really used to the structure and our material so we can play with it and improvise more as workshop leaders.”

¹⁷ See App. 3.

¹⁸ See App. 14.

¹⁹ See App. 15.

B.2.2. St John's Community Centre

The mostly elderly or even frail participants at St John's Centre seemed to think that dance or song was not a tool – to use the metaphor introduced earlier on – that was available or useful to them at this stage in their life. There was an air of polite reservation and mild scepticism indicative of British culture²⁰, but also of the weariness and impediments of old age. There was also a sense of low expectation. The energy could have been described as 'sinking'. Interestingly, there was one participant who initially displayed an attitude of rebelliousness and even disruptiveness, which - on hindsight - could have been a reaction against this pull of low energy.²¹

The facilitators, though challenged, did an excellent job in adapting the work to the ability and state of mind of the participants. Polina assessed the situation in her feedback on the first and after the tenth session:

" Because of certain abilities of the group, we paid a lot of **attention to detail** when teaching."²²

"We had to adjust our teaching to this particular group and make it more suitable for their age. Rosaria taught her movements sitting down. I started with really simple tunes."²³

It made a big difference in terms of energetic input that the workshop leaders engaged with the participants without losing or diminishing their youthful liveliness in the least. The approach proved very successful, because even in the first two sessions it became clear that this clientele was very perceptive to the more subtle messages of the work and had the potential to benefit from it quite quickly.

To quote Polina's first and final feedback again:

"The group members felt very engaged although sometimes couldn't follow every movement or voice tasks. This makes me think that they mostly respond internally... More happening inside rather than outside."²⁴

"The progress with this group was really obvious. By the end of the course, we did some standing up exercises and dancing [...] From my part of the workshop, we developed from 3-4-note tunes in the space of a musical fifth to 16-bar niggunim with a range of 1,5 octaves."²⁵

Rosaria's assessment of the work runs along the same lines:

The sessions at St. John's were very popular. Participants really enjoyed them and it was noticeable the progress made in terms of mobility and relationship within the group. Centre workers mentioned that they were nicer, more relaxed and somehow happier since the sessions started. [...] I consider this group to be exquisite in terms of how they embraced the different components of the project and made it theirs. They did not really go deeper into their feelings openly but there were some incidents that showed that they were giving some thought to the process they were going through. Example of this was the fact that one of the participants (the one that had been repeatedly disruptive) brought a picture from her wedding, which was triggered by one of the sessions' tune and

²⁰ Compare Rosaria's final conclusions (App.9): "I consider this group to be exquisite in terms of how they embraced the different components of the project and made it theirs. They did not really go deeper into their feelings openly but there were some incidents that showed that they were giving some thought to the process they were going through."

²¹ Rosaria's reflections on session 14.3.07: "There was one particular participant that was very enthusiastic, so much so that she was really making laugh the rest of the participants. This was fine at the beginning but it was becoming a bit of a distraction to the objective of the exercise. I tried to encourage her to make more outrageous moves building on what she was doing and she seemed to calm down and deepen in her own experience."

²² Session 2.3.07

²³ Summary after 10 sessions.

²⁴ Session 2.3.07

²⁵ Summary for St John's Centre.

conversation that followed. This participant also offered to pay for the sessions to help with the funding."²⁶

A particular issue was a shortness of breath, common in the elderly, which was explored, discussed and addressed by both facilitators. Rosaria commented on the issue as follows:

"During the movement session I put extra emphasis on the need to inspire and expire freeing the lungs from all air. The singing session picked up on that and we worked on breathing with more emphasis than usual. The male participant was complaining of a chest infection and he was encouraged to participate in the session in his own rhythm."²⁷

By the 4th session things had fallen into place. Rosaria wrote in her reflection:

"The movement session commenced with a gentle warm up followed by Ossayn, the wizard, healer. Movements were rhythmical and energetic and the group followed them at their convenience. There was a cheerful mood although focussed attention by all. It was interesting to observe the performance of one of the participants, who has been reported as being quite disruptive. She started the session being quite comical and her disruptive manners were quickly converted to a more focussed approach. It was also observed that she encouraged the person next to her, whose physical abilities were quite constraint, to join in. One of the members of the staff reported that it is quite unusual for her to, firstly join an activity without complaining and secondly, invite her friends to join in. [...]
The singing session was very well embraced. The voices were stronger than in previous sessions and attendants were very enthusiastic. Positive feedback again and attendants showed their interest in attending future sessions."²⁸

The progress of the group became steady and very obvious during the second part of the course. The participants had become lively, engaged and much more communicative.

Polina reported about the session in early May:

" I taught the most complicated nign for this group so far. It was longer than most previous ones. The range was 1 octave, which you don't expect older people to get in the beginning. But it sounded absolutely fine and even inspiring when we got to the highest note. There was a lot of smiling in the group while singing, and even some movement to go along with the singing. We also linked up the 2 parts of the session in the end by talking about shoulders and how we should relax them when moving, sitting and singing."²⁹

In the second half of the course the participants themselves started to realise the benefits of the work for their health and well-being. The improvements had been recorded by the researcher during her last observation for this group.³⁰ The facilitators confirm the ongoing process in their final feedbacks:

"...most members expressed that the sessions were very therapeutic"³¹.

"Participants were aware of the physical benefits of participating in the sessions and they wanted to continue. There were also comments about the emotional benefits."³²

²⁶ App.9.

²⁷ Session 18.4.07

²⁸ Session 25.4.07

²⁹ Session 2.5.07

³⁰ See Second Progress Report, App.2.

³¹ Polina's reflections, see App.6.

³² Rosaria's final reflections, see App.9.

The participants themselves expressed this as follows:

- *“it is a combination of keep fit and singing”;*
- *“ it made me feel loser on my neck”;*
- *“the movement was not strenuous, it was very nice”;*
- *“it pushed people beyond of what they could and that was good. Sometimes the activities are far too easy”.*³³

The cultural aspect of the work took on a specific shape, because St John’s Centre draws its clientele from the area around Palmeira Square, where one finds a large Jewish community.

“Culturally, the Eastern-European part of the workshop was more familiar to the group than the Afro-Brazilian. This group was more into singing as they were more familiar with the concept and more used to singing in general. [...] Singing niggunim was so in tune with where the group wanted to go, and we really used them to change the mood from boredom to joy, from sleepiness to energy, from sadness to acceptance.”

This made the Jewish part of the workshop more attractive, but brought its own challenges. Polina was well aware of this and reflected in her final feedback on how this situation affected the course:

“Some of the members had Jewish origins, most knew about Jewish culture, synagogues and Jewish weddings. People liked to share their memories. One old lady even brought her wedding pictures to show to the group. For this very reason I had to be quite careful with the choice of niggunim as I didn’t want to touch too personal and sensitive memories, so by the end of the course we knew a lot of “happy” niggunim, not just “sad” ones. The fact of cultural memories and connections also led us to philosophical subjects. We discussed what makes a tune sad and where the sadness hides, whether it’s our own perception and subjectivity that we project onto music. We also spoke about sad memories, letting them go, living in the present moment, being old but happy, being limited by body but free in mind. [...] We came across a difficulty with balancing our theoretical context of the sessions with the group’s desires. Because there was so much personal about the Jewish part, we sometimes had to carefully lead conversation away from somebody’s personal thoughts and memories when it endangered our timing.”³⁴

For future work these issues will have to be considered, particularly if it is to be taken to a deeper level.

B.2.3. Oasis Project

According to Rosaria’s comments the first session with this group started with some apprehension on all sides:

The session was essentially different to anything we have been doing as part of this project. There were four attendants and two members of the staff. Attendants were either drug dependent or partners of drug dependent people. We started the session outside talking about the project and the goddesses that we were going to work with. The atmosphere was somehow anxious and there was loads of nervous laugh. [...] During the spoken feedback, participants mentioned that they thought that it was better than they expected and they expressed they would like to do more. [...] One of the members of the staff mentioned that she was feeling a bit apprehensive at the beginning, before commencing the session but she felt very relaxed and enjoyed it in the end. [...]The singing session was more challenging as some

³³ ibd.

³⁴ See App.6.

participants had already mentioned that they did not feel comfortable singing. Despite this, everybody joined in straight away and after finishing the session, said that they would have liked to repeat it more the learned niggun.³⁵

Clearly this group needed a different formula of delivery. Looking back one has to appreciate that more information about the background of the group would have been needed in advance to assess needs and obstacles and to develop strategies.³⁶ However, the project was a practice-led study and the point was to rely on the power of the work first and foremost. The facilitators did this, but not without a certain amount of struggle.

The need for a differentiated approach was perceived and dealt with. After the third session Polina came up with six memo points for a change of approach for this group:

1. Simplified description of background of the culture of niggunim.
2. More emphasis on emotional and communal sides of singing.
3. Repetition of the same tune through several sessions as the group possibly found niggunim completely unfamiliar and now is just getting used to it and starting to enjoy familiarity.
4. More freedom to react and even not to participate during the singing.
5. More singing to each member of the group to make it more personal.
6. More sharing of my own personal views and background as I found it encouraged trust, relaxed participants and even simply satisfied their curiosity.³⁷

Although this group provided continuity to allow the for evaluation of change over time³⁸, the general feeling of volatility and resistance of the clientele, on the other hand, made the process of group building difficult. But it also highlighted how efficient the work was in settling people down, because those participant who had joined some sessions were not only easier to deal with but also 'repaid' the project by actively engaging in including and stabilising newcomers. It was for the facilitators to realise this and relax into the process. Rosaria's comments reflect the learning curve well:

"This [second] session was challenging in the sense that there were people from the previous session and new participant who worked at very different levels. It was interesting to see that the person that was giggly in the first session was far more into the session this time and explained to the new person that she felt like her before but now she felt very comfortable with the workshop theme and structure.³⁹

[At the third sessions] The participants were quite distracted. Energy levels were very different, there were two participants that felt unwell and the talking levels were continuous. Participants followed the moves, including some voice exercise, starting working together. At the end of the representation, they mentioned that there were very tired. They were focused at that time.⁴⁰

"These two sessions were also challenging.[...]"

³⁵ Session 27.4.07

³⁶ Information only surfaced over time, as Polina reports in her final reflections: "As the workers of the centre admitted, these people weren't coming there only by their own will. They had to attend a certain number of sessions in the centre having been sent there by social workers. The fact that they choose our course was very pleasing. But still, they were difficult to control: a lot of chatting, always wanting to stop for a cigarette or coffee, not really wanting to work. So we had to insist on doing things sometimes. Everything came into place in the end, and we even had a couple of volunteers in the group to help us with discipline. Also, it worked better in smaller groups (less status games, less nerves, more space in the room, more attention)". (App.7.)

³⁷ Polina's reflections, Oasis, session 1-3, 2.6. 2007 (App.13).

³⁸ Polina's final feedback for the Oasis Project (App.7.): "We had a committed group of the centre's clients who would either come every time or attend most of the sessions by the 2-3 session. Occasionally we had 1 or 2 new members in the group who either stayed or left... So I would say, the core group was 5 clients plus 1-2 Oasis workers."

³⁹ Rosaria's reflections, Oasis, 4.5.07 (App.14).

⁴⁰ Rosaria's reflections, Oasis, 18.5.07 (App.14).

[At the first session of these two] some participants mentioned very openly that they were generally frustrated, angry, tired because of how their week went. The facilitators talked about this and the need to be empowered and take things how they come on the proviso that if one changes one's attitude towards difficulties, there is an obvious empowerment. Participants took this on and appreciated the comments. [...]

The session started with some singing. Although there had been some participation in the last session, there was some obvious rejection to the activity today. Participants that started singing stopped after a while saying that the song had been sung before and they wanted something different. When this happened, they did not want to sing anymore. [...]

[At the second sessions of these two], there was a new participant that did not take part in the session. After talking to her, she mentioned that she did not feel comfortable with the whole project (Oasis), it was not her place to be there and she was in obvious denial. She stayed observing the sessions and at some point she was crying but she did not participate."⁴¹

By the end of the seven-session course both facilitators had a much clearer picture of the energetic field of the regulars amongst the participants and the dynamic of the group.

"With regard to the sessions at OASIS, it has been a very interesting learning process. Participants went from playing around to really share their feelings, to withdraw, and finally to use the sessions to share their situation, ask for advice to other attendants and support each other. [...]

There is a very interesting way they have to deal with pressure, which is very much playing at being "naughty" and "have a laugh", which for the purpose of the session can be disruptive. However, I felt that that was what was needed at that time and some times they were more focused than others. [...] It seemed that the dancing and the singing were an excuse to come together. They all mentioned that it was a good way to wind down. It made me feel that we needed to be gentle with this group and very much leave them to take the development of the sessions."⁴²

"It took us about 4 sessions to completely gain the participants' trust and build some common language. During the same time the participants were getting closer to each other, so by the end of the course it felt like some friendships were made, a lot of personal sharing has been made etc. It became a welcoming group.

Real relaxation into the material started gradually and slowly, but I would say only after 4-5 sessions. Obviously, this client group requires much more preparation work before we even touch the surface of our principal of personal development.

In my opinion, real digging into the personal development only started on the last session! So it was a shame to interrupt the course. Still, our achievements were already quite obvious."⁴³

Polina provided a summary of the insights and the adaptations the team came up with for this group, which is given here in abbreviated form:

- a) The more familiar the material was, the better it worked with the group.
Dancing on its own was more familiar to them, but even within the dancing part they preferred a popular tune and familiar samba movements. This was expected, and Rosaria played around it, nicely balancing between popular culture and the Afro-Brazilian tradition.
- b) Niggunim were obviously completely unknown to them.
I reduced the theoretical part and tried to pay as much attention to just singing, breathing, being together in a circle of friends as possible.
- c) The concept of expressing one's feelings through singing on its own was very unusual to most of them.
So we used a lot of variation in this part: sometimes just singing at them while they were relaxing with their eyes closed, another times singing and shouting

⁴¹ Rosaria's reflections, Oasis, 15.06. and 29.06.07 (App.14).

⁴² Rosaria's final reflections (App.9).

⁴³ Polina's final feedback for the Oasis Project (App.7).

as a whole group, from time to time singing to each member of the group separately.⁴⁴

The facilitators and the observing researcher noticed that singing touched something very deep in the participants of this group, but that they did not trust themselves enough yet to explore their emotions more deeply. One participant cried several times during a session saying that there was a profound sadness in the song. Another refused to sing a tune taught at a previous session, although (or because?) she had told the group that she had been singing it to her baby.

Although the work had its difficulties for both the facilitators and the participants, quite a lot was achieved in a short and, I would like to emphasise, non-invasive way. This was important, because the participation in the Oasis Project was not voluntary, although the choice to do this particular workshop within the project had been that of the participants.

From the point of view of the original concept of the study, it was interesting to observe just how important it is to build a group under a positive agenda and use the group energy to engage and stabilise the members. Exclusion is a major issue for people living under the cloud of substance abuse. Often the experience of being excluded pre-dates the present situation of substance misuse and consequently inclusion needs to be handled with care and should never be invasive or constricting.

Polina pointed this out when she reported on the achievements of the work for the Oasis Project:

"The group formed into a **small community** where the women shared experience about what they were going through with us and with each other and get support. [...]⁴⁵

The workshop place became a **safe place** for them where we could discuss things like anger, love, behaviour, nature and people, fear, support, family.

The women learned something new about completely **unfamiliar cultures**. There were lots of questions and discussion about religion, traditions, and different backgrounds.

There were participants who **started to sing** although they never used to before. One of the participants mentioned that she had been singing one of the niggunim to her baby.

The group started to **express themselves** through movement a lot and really enjoyed it.

The group developed a special attitude to singing. I would call it **appreciation**. Not everybody joined the singing, but all members found the singing part relaxing, calming down, warm

In general, this group was more comfortable with dancing as it was far less challenging for them. But we weren't only looking for comfort. It felt to me that the deeper work had just begun.

And she added:

"I really wish we could continue this work, as there would be a lot to develop. Some of the group got quite nervous when we sung and then successfully overcame their first reaction. Some even mentioned

⁴⁴ Polina's final feedback for the Oasis Project (App.7).

⁴⁵ Her evidence here is that : "On the very last day Rosaria and I met one of the participants on the street just before the session. She was with her family and her baby. She was very happy to show her baby to us. Then at the session another member showed us a picture of her baby. I couldn't stop myself from showing a picture of my son... so this was a very touching moment of sharing." ibd.

that they had fear of singing. But everybody joined in one way or another. They opened up and relaxed into the tunes.”⁴⁶

The fact that this group would have benefited from longer sessions and an ongoing scheme has also been emphasised by Rosaria in her final reflections.⁴⁷ In her observations The researcher who in her observations had come to the same conclusion would wish to strongly recommend that an ongoing program be supported.

The participants themselves had arrived at a point of appreciation, as Polina poignantly described the reaction, and asked if there would be more sessions after the summer break.

The researcher suggestion is that the work with this group would benefit from a strong emphasis of the aspect of ritual. For this to work, the facilitators need to relax into the power of the tradition and let this work take its own way. Having said this, it needs to be recognised that personal commitment of the participants and a certain amount of group stability will be needed for the process – and so would more experience for the facilitators in this field. A further recommendation therefore would be to make sure they receive all necessary information and muster as much support as possible from the agency they are running workshops for and afford themselves some research with regard to the recognised needs and issues of the target clientele.

C. ISSUES OF MEASURING AND EVALUATING OUTCOME

As a funded pilot study the project aimed to investigate the potential of the work for future development, but also to make available to the wider public any thoughts, procedures, methods and results with a view to facilitate replication and achieve a level of sustainability.

As is often the case in practice-led research the parameters for evaluation and the methods of measuring outcome had to be developed during the process. Initially this project used **feedback questionnaires** for participants and a number of observation sessions done by a researcher experienced in energy work, breath and voice work, group facilitation and complementary medicine.⁴⁸ The **workshop leaders** supplied written **reflections** on individual sessions and a final overview after the study had been concluded. Furthermore, when it became clear that the project would have to rely on the voluntary and community sector for access to pre-established groups, **staff** was invited to participate and give **feedback** with respect to their own experience as well as the changes they might observe in their clientele. Finally, for the Oasis Project, it was thought that more qualitative feedback might be gained by guiding the participants to engage in some **self-reflection**. For all groups and at all stages **verbal feedback from participants** was encouraged and **non-verbal expressions** and **changes in condition and attitude** taken note of.

⁴⁶ Polina’s final feedback for the Oasis Project (App.7).

⁴⁷ “It would be very interesting to see how it would work after working with them for a year or so, see how the relationships within the group develop, how they come up from their shell and how they deal with difficulties that life throws at them.” See App. 9.

⁴⁸ See App.1 and 2.

C. 1. Questionnaires, feedback sheets and self-witnessing

The questionnaires developed for the **open group** were revised early on and a few procedural aspects clarified.⁴⁹ However, the lack of numbers made it difficult to get enough data to explore more specific aspects of working with this group and develop the questionnaire further.

A questionnaire for an open **Over-Sixties** workshop had been under discussion, but could not be brought to fruition because not enough people could be recruited to make the group viable.

As mentioned in the Second Progress Report, feedback questionnaires did not feel appropriate for either the groups at the St John's Centre or the Oasis Project at this stage of involvement.⁵⁰ However, with a view to the consistent development of the group at **St John's Centre**, i.e. the growing interest in the traditions, the increased confidence and assertiveness and the progressive readiness to follow the invitation to listen to their own inner self and share the result, it is feasible that some feedback could be gained from the participants in the form of a questionnaire using simple scales or tick boxes, should the work continue. Actually, at this stage of their journey being asked for feedback in this form may be experienced by the participants as empowering rather than a tedious task too difficult to even attempt. However, it will take some detailed evaluation of the insights gained so far to produce a questionnaire that can be used to reflect outcome qualitatively if not quantitatively for the purpose of further fine-tuning of the work and more in-depth research.

The issue of evidence and how to gain it was discussed between the facilitators and the researcher throughout the project. For the group at the St John's Centre the researcher suggested that some feedback be gained from the staff - on their own experience with the work and regarding any changes they may be able to observe within the group. The facilitators picked up on this idea⁵¹ and developed a short feedback sheet for the purpose.⁵² It was a bit disappointing not to have these individual sheets returned and the conclusion was that it might have been asking too much from the very busy volunteers to do yet more paperwork. However, we did receive a summarising letter from the St John's Centre that gave some good insights into how the work was perceived.⁵³

For the **Oasis Project** a completely different approach seemed to be needed, partly due to the attitude of the participants, partly due to the complex issues of their situation. The facilitators suggested that the participants should be asked to engage in some sort of self-reflection between sessions- a sort of homework.⁵⁴ The researcher suggested to try a procedure used in counselling and psychotherapy, which encourages the client to reflect on his or her experiences and, by writing down a short note, drawing a picture or a symbol or making a note of anything else that they felt could represent the essence of their experience, give testimony of the process they are going through. Such self-testimony is considered to induce and enhance self-assessment and self-regulation. The facilitators discussed this and introduced the participants to the idea. They were encouraged to keep their notes in a safe place and asked not to look at them until the end of the course, at which stage they would be invited to

⁴⁹ See First Project Report (App.1.)

⁵⁰ See App.2.

⁵¹ Rosaria's reflections, St John's, session 25.4.07: "Members of staff were encouraged to keep track of any visible changes in the performance of the attendants, being physical dexterity, emotional or of any other sort".

⁵² See App.4.

⁵³ Compare chapter B. See App.

⁵⁴ See App.5.

go through all their notes and reflect on their journey. It would then be up to them if they wanted to share whatever conclusion they might have drawn with the group.⁵⁵ The team were not sure if this would work for the participants or if they would even try. As it turned out, some liked the idea, but in the end none of them offered any feedback on it. . It was difficult to determine who had not even tried and who just did not wish to share their thoughts. At the final session the energetic field was already showing signs of dissipation. The wish to continue the work was expressed by most participants, but some of them will leave the Oasis project after the summer, because their situation has improved and they are no longer required to attend. Generally, it has to be acknowledged that for this client group any extra task seemed to be a task too much – as is true for many other client groups in the medical and therapeutic field, where it is well known that exercises for clients to do at home are an issue unless a good “selling point” can be found. In other words, clients need to be able to feel or anticipate the benefit of their effort, the more so the more they struggle with motivation and positive anticipation, physical pain or lack of energy. To help people to experience genuine satisfaction is therefore part of the healing, but also has to be part of the agenda of any researcher, the workshop leader or therapist, all of who depend on meaningful feedback.

C.2. Verbal feedback by participants

In the light of hard evidence, such feedback should be recorded on tape. However, this was a pilot and if at a later stage it should be decided to engage with research on a more scientific level, procedures would have to be worked out.

As it was, verbal feedback was either made a note of by the researcher at her observing sessions or by the facilitators. It has been presented in the previous reports and can be found in this report in chapter B.

Facilitation of good feedback is an art in itself and the team discussed this throughout the work. To give just one example: Fairly early on the team noticed that it needed to hold back with its own comments so that the participants would have a chance to voice their experience first. Otherwise, it was feared, their feedback may lose some of its authenticity. But it was also noticed that on some occasions some kind of opening or initiation was needed to get the process moving. The facilitators played this by ear. They may wish to look into existing protocols for facilitating feedback as the work continues.

C.3. Participating observation by the researcher

The researcher, in her observations, took note of the verbal feedback of the participants but also observed any non-verbal statements and expressions of emotional involvement. She also used her professional experience to read signs and symptoms significant for physical, mental and emotional well-being, assessed the energetic field and observed changes in the dynamic of the group. Arguably, it is very difficult to verify evidence of this sort, but it certainly gains validity when confirmed by results or feedback from other sources collected independently. Scientific research, as requested for the allocation of certain medical funding and the verification of claims with respect to improvement of health, would of course require a different approach – as well as much more funding.

⁵⁵ See Rosaria's reflection, Oasis, 4.5.07: "Participants were encouraged to keep some sort of record about how they felt after the session and keep it in a safe place. Members of staff were also asked to report on any changes that they may experience in the participants to see the effects of the workshop work."

Most of the researcher's evidence and the conclusions that were drawn from it were presented and discussed in the two previous reports, so that the facilitators could benefit from any insights gained while the work was still ongoing.⁵⁶

C.4. The facilitators' reflections

The facilitators provided the researcher with regular feedback about the sessions, for the records and to fill her in on what had been going on since her last observation. They also provided a final overview at the end of the trial run. These reflections have been quoted extensively throughout this final report and will be attached to it in the form of appendices.

By definition, these reflections are impressionistic and subjective and of, what is usually called, anecdotal quality. This fact does, however, in no way diminish their value as a research tool in the context of this pilot study. Rather they give evidence that the study not only investigated the possible benefits of the work – as offered at this stage - for the different client groups, but also succeeded in exploring how a project that intends to use the arts to improve peoples' life could be best set up and run

The reflections also show the deep understanding and the enthusiasm both Rosaria and Polina have for this work, a fact many participants in all groups commented on more or less explicitly.

C.5. Development and replication

The facilitators have made a point of being extremely honest with their self-assessment and the evaluation of the outcomes of the work at its different stages. This will help their own work to grow and deepen. It will also inform those in their endeavours who already work or wish to work in similar ways. The researcher, having worked in this field for a many years, would like to point out that this sort of research is badly needed to help structure and co-ordinate the many efforts made to provide better services to those most in need of them. The reason for the lack of concerted action in this field lies, like so much else, with the lack of funding available.

⁵⁶ App.1 and 2.

CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

The pilot study has achieved a lot in a relatively short time.

Feedback from participants of all groups was very positive. They liked the work and they rated the quality of the delivery of the work very highly. Their feedback also shows that the work improved their physical, mental and emotional self-awareness and had a noticeable effect on their well-being. For the group at St John's and the Oasis Project observation gave evidence that there were changes in attitude towards self and others. Consequently, group building and group interaction was found to improve as the work went on, even though the circumstances proved to be less conducive than anticipated.

This point is where the most development needs to occur to gain best results with respect to research into group interaction. The team agreed that one important precondition for the evaluation of outcome was continuity of participation and sufficient group size. Future projects will have to explore how this can be achieved and how existing information about the group background and the participants' needs may be used to develop strategies to procure standardised feedback.

However, the work itself does not depend on such a rigid framework to benefit a wider clientele. The workshop leaders have shown that their artistic traditions can provide valuable experience with respect to self-awareness and self-development. There is evidence that the work helped to improve well-being and health, self-confidence and social interaction. They have proven that the work can be adapted to the needs of a very diverse range of client groups and that they are able respond appropriately and effectively in the spot, as it were. They have made plausible their claim that inclusion can be improved by using activities based on non-verbal communication, because it helps to circumvent cultural and social stereotyping and compensate for language, speech and other communication problems.

The most successful of the three groups in terms of clearly observable and immediately felt benefit for the participants was that at St John's Community Centre. It is to be hoped that this group can continue and others be set up for similar user groups.

With the help of the pilot project, founded by the Arts Council, Synergy's work has now come to a point where it can be deepened by developing a structure for courses that run over a longer period or in the form of retreats. This would enable the workshop leaders to build a clientele stable enough to move forward any research that may result from the pilot. Running established groups over time would also enable them to conduct comparative studies and to share the insights with other people working in the field.

The educational aspect of the work and the engagement of young people should be pursued, but again would need some structured planning and cooperation with agencies involved in this field.

For all groups the idea of using performance as a tool for raising cultural awareness, group interactivity and participants' confidence should be considered and taken forward.

APPENDIX 1 First Project Report (April 2007)

A. TASTER DAY AND TRIAL RUN (9.12.06)

1. Starting out

The project leaders and the researcher held an initial meeting in November clarifying objectives and discussing parameters and observation procedures.

The project understands itself as exploration into the possibilities of personal development through non-verbal communication within a context of previous research. Its aim is to keep the learning process as transparent as possible to allow for self-evaluation as well as sharing results with other projects and supporting replication.

Initial observation criteria/parameters for the project were formulated as:

- Happiness and contentment of participants during class
- Changes in performance in the course of the session
- Demonstration of emotional release or distress
- Group dynamic and bonding

The researcher, who is experienced in voice, body and energy work, took part in the taster workshops as observer as well as participant to gain a deeper insight into the nature and process of the work. Any feedback from her side, it was hoped, would be useful for the fine-tuning of the observation and evaluation procedures with respect to the aims of the project.

Apart from the observation notes from the researcher we were looking for feedback during and after sessions from participants and workshop leaders.

The taster day was designed to test the venue and explore the potential of the work with two diverse target groups: an open drop-in class and a workshop for people over sixty.

A first basic questionnaire for participants, developed by the project leaders, was provided (see App.1).

2. The workshops

2.1. Open Session (6 participants, all female, one in a wheel chair)

2.1.1. Set-up

- The timeframe was 3 hours with a break between the dancing and the singing, which was used for a brief feedback and to chill out, relax and talk.
- Two female goddesses from the Afro-brazilian tradition had been chosen for the dance; one Niggun (song without words) in three parts was taught during the singing session.
- Warm-ups for body and voice were provided for each session respectively.
- An opening round of names, experience and expectations was used to settle the group and introduce the work.
- Participants were encouraged to give themselves permission to join in the work to the extent they felt capable and safe.

2.1.2. Participating observation (researcher)

a) Dance:

The dance movements were allowed to evolve out of the chosen divinities, Oya and Oba, in a very clear and consequential way. The dance form (in 4 distinct movements) was taught and shared before it was opened up to exploration. For this part participants were explicitly encouraged to stay with each movement as long as they needed to get into the mood for the next step. This method proved to be an extremely effective tool to promote

self-exploration, because not only were we allowed the freedom to practise the different movements at our own pace, but also to expand into the emotion expressed in the respective part of the story. I observed that not just myself, but also other participants were much pleased to be given permission not move to the next element before the potential of the previous one had been brought to fruition.

We were thus enabled to dance through the story while exploring our own relationship with whatever emotion or state of mind seemed relevant in this moment in our own time. Although we all danced our own dance, the group quickly developed energetic coherence. We felt held by the group, the workshop leader, the story and particularly the music and the rhythm.

The effect of this set-up could be observed as a change in the quality of the energy in the room. The group was clearly moving into a state of “phasing”, to use a term coined by modern physics. Although everybody was dancing their own story at their own pace, they did so within the story of the goddess creating a sense of synchronicity and, indeed, synergy.

This initial observation I found confirmed when the group moved from Oya (strength and joyful triumph in the face of adversity) to Oba (need to acknowledge and deal gracefully with defeat through deceit). The energy changed with the story, but the sensation of energetic coherence or phasing of the group was quickly re-established when we moved from the learning stage to the explorative state for Oba.

It was striking to see how effortlessly the lady in the wheel chair became enveloped in the dynamic of the stories and the group’s synergetic experience. As she had a very natural way of joining in she picked up the movements, body expressions and rhythm along with the group using and adapting them to her own ability. There was no need to adapt the form as such, which in my opinion underlines the strength of the approach of the work.

b) Singing:

Polina skilfully moved the group into a more contemplative state without loosing any of the momentum. The group was gathered in a supportive, almost intimate circle while hearing about the Yiddish tradition of Niggunim singing in family and community. Although they have no words, Niggunim still have a story to tell. This is done through the dynamic of the tune, the harmonies typical of this tradition and the singer’s vocal expression and technique.

We first learned the three parts of the tune, after which we entered into communication by using them as a round. At this point it felt that somehow more movement was needed and we started to walk around the room - first in a circle with the wheel chair as a centre of movement and then freely – meeting one another while singing. The rising and falling of the dynamic of the song was beautifully expressed in this set-up and its profound effect could be observed when we all met again in a circle for free improvisation within the framework of our chosen Niggun. Considering that the group had met just an hour and a half ago, that some of us had very little singing experience and that apart from myself no one had sung any Niggunim before, the group reached a level of harmony and integration, which can only be described as astonishing. Opening the form to improvisation while allowing less experienced singers to hold the main melody worked very well. It can be seen as a reflection of a good group coherence. Moving around the room while singing without words provided a meeting place for people in which they could communicate on a deeper level.

At the end of the session, the members of the group seemed very emotional, some touched and elated at the same time.

2.1.3. Participant feedback

2.1.3.1. Verbal feedback in the group

There were two rounds of verbal feedback, one after the dance and one after the singing.

Some participants commented on the difference in the quality of the energy while dancing the two divinities, thus confirming the researcher’s observation. Most commented on the growing coherence of the group. Most had welcomed the settling down into the much more contemplative mood for the singing after a dancing session that had stirred up a lot of emotion and energy.

The question was raised, if they felt that the sequence dance- song had been right or if they felt it should have been the other way around. The general feeling was that the sequence was right, because the singing had provided a place from which to move beyond (rather than out of) the dance experience. They felt it had been good to let go and calm down and still to arrive at an equally exciting but quieter, deeper space.

2.1.3.2. Written feedback (questionnaire)

The feedback on the questionnaires over all was very positive. All liked the venue. Some people had enjoyed the dancing more, while others had liked the singing best; but generally it was felt that the combination had created a special quality.

One participant commented that she had not liked the “therapeutic” content of the singing session. We would have liked to know more about how she came to feel this. But sadly nothing had been mentioned during the verbal feedback session, and as the questionnaires had been kept anonymous, we did not even know whom the comment came from.

Energy work is very subtle and it is important to honour all inner movements of participants. So the comment was taken seriously and it informed our discussion about questionnaires as well as content presentation in the context of religious, social and cultural diversity. Consequently, we checked with participants known to us already, who said that they had not perceived of any “therapeutic” subtext.

As mentioned in the researcher’s feedback, there had been a ‘hesitant’ or ‘sticky’ moment in the group at some point, which was resolved by asking the group to move around the room. At the time it had not felt strong enough to demand explicit attention. We may assume that the group dynamic help deal with the energetic side of the issue, although it did not afford a final resolution for our participant.

2.2. Session for over Sixties (1 participant, female)

2.2.1. Set-up

In adaptation to the target group the timeframe was reduced to one hour and thirty minutes. The venue was the same. Our only participant was a woman in her seventies, who suffers from severe shortness of breath due to a heart condition. Despite her limitations, she was very enthusiastic and determined to try the work.

2.2.2. Researcher’s observations and participant’s feedback

The traditional teachings say that in energy work inner movement corresponds to outer movement and vice versa. In other words, the form can be adapted to the need without losing the benefit. Rosaria’s work validated this view. She used the same two goddesses, but adapted her work allowing for smaller-scale and slower-pace movements, which were done sitting down. Obviously, the session was physically less dynamic; however, it was observed that the energetic movement ran along the same lines as described above. The transition from Oya to Oba produced a similar change in energy, albeit on a much subtler level. This is a phenomenon generally observed when working with older people. Considering that we lacked the energetic benefit of a group, the effect was profound.

After the session, the participant said that she enjoyed the experience very much and felt energised enough to move on to the singing after a little break. On a physical level, she particularly mentioned an easing of joints and a release of tension.

Polina also worked sitting down, using the same Niggun as with the open group. The meditative aspect and the opening up to the mood were strong, but – again - not as pronounced as with the group. However, the participant, who comes from a Jewish background, felt (or re-felt?) a bond with her cultural-religious tradition, which seemed to give her great joy. She expressed great satisfaction with her experience overall.

For the workshop leaders and the researcher the experience of working in this set-up proved also very valuable. It was, for example, noticed that the participant had needed to be explicitly encouraged to gauge herself and find her own pace with her outer movement. She was so enthusiastic that she let herself be carried away by her inner movement risking not to pay enough attention to her outer condition. Again, this is something often observed with older people and needs to be considered. Interestingly, the singing, which also needs a fair amount of breath and body tone, did not seem to affect her breathing nearly as much.

The phenomenon of interrelation between emotional states and effectiveness of breathing is not unknown. The question arising is rather, how observations on this subtle level can be objectified and followed up; and how insights can be used to improve the work and promote good practice within this framework.

2.2.3. Workshop leaders' impressions

Polina's first impressions were that, from the workshop leaders' point of view, the workshop structure (dancing followed by singing) had worked well (apart from being validated by the participants' feedback). She emphasised the free movement and communication and the harmonising as elements of successful group work. She also pointed to the response to the "krekhtsn", a particular technique in Niggunim singing, correspondent to a sigh. Participants had opened up to this technique very willingly, dipping into a well of feeling which, in this tradition, is released into the music.

Rosaria was most intrigued by the interplay of energy called up thought dancing the two goddesses in sequence and "will be interested in mixing up Oya with other gods and goddesses that are more pacific and less problematic than Oba to see what reaction is observed in the class and development of the session."

3. Evaluation of the Taster day

Generally, it was agreed that the venue suited the work in most aspects and provided good access in terms of public transport as well as disabled access.

3.1. What was learned

a) Open session –

- The basic structure of workshop (dancing followed by singing) seems to work.
- The work by its own nature achieves a good group dynamic (phasing), but attention needs to be paid to the more subtle flows.
- There is the need to respect participants' reluctance to enter into a therapeutic field.
- We can leave it to the work to address what needs addressing.
- Choices/combinations of divinities can open an interesting field of dynamic and deserve closer observation and consideration.
- There is the need for improvement of methods of observation and collection of data to be able to record subtle movements of energy.
- We may wish to consider non-anonymous feedback sheets to establish a record with regard to the effects of ongoing work.
- For this to come to fruition we need some continuity for the group.

b) Over Sixties

- Working with older people consideration is needed for those with more serious health and social issues. (In)capabilities and attitudes may have to be picked up in the process of the session and work adapted on the spot.
- Workshop leaders need to be aware some of these may be difficult to assess or foresee.
- Group continuity seems even more important, because of the previous point, but also to use the group dynamic and holding power to support the individuals.

3.2. Action to be taken

- development of more specific questionnaires, including questions about health or the need for specific support or adaptation.
- fine tuning of the existing questionnaire to allow to measure progress over time
- organising venues and access for specific groups (womens' group and older people)
- advertising the open group and try to get a steady clientele
- workshop leaders will provide written feedback on all workshops
- the researcher will continue with participating/observing role, but shift focus onto observation

B. SECOND OPEN SESSION (17.02.07)

1. Set-up

Venue and basic set-up were the same. There were seven participants, all female. One had taken part in the taster day. The researcher participated and observed, stepping out of the group more regularly than in the previous session. Polina took some fotos with permission of the group. We used an improved questionnaire (App.2).

2. Dancing

Rosaria used two male gods for the dance, Exu (the Trickster) and Xango (the God of Thunder) – in this order.

Her own feedback on the session was that “the group was more restricted during Exu and explored the cheekiness of the god in a very contained way”, whereas Xango “opened up not only the regal character but also feelings of pride and self-assurance”.

As the observing/participating researcher I can confirm this, and I would like to also mention the feeling of ease and being comfortable with myself. I also noticed expressions of this in the other participants. At first sight it could have looked as people were struggling with the form (steps) when dancing Exu. But closer observation clearly pointed to a reluctance to enter into the energy of the Trickster; whereas Xango’s expansiveness simply washed away all the concerns about form. Part of this effect could have arisen from the fact that Exu is mainly acting out to effect others. I felt that he is pulling his energy into his upper body from where it is being dispersed. His energy is boundless by the power of disregard. Whereas Xango’s power is boundless by royal nature. Consequently Xango’s energy felt firmly grounded but very mobile, thus supporting the group in its desire to get into a state of phasing. There were lots of smiles and other non-verbal communications. There seemed to be space enough for everybody – including the horses.

Participants’ verbal comments after the dancing were

“I feel more alive”

“ I needed some power today and I got it from Xango.”

“The ongoing music helped me get into the rhythm.”

“I felt true pride. There was a trance like quality.”

“I feel I have more fluidity and spontaneity ”.

The one participant who had come to the first Open Session said:

“There was not so much difference between the two gods this time”.

Rosaria’s felt confirmed that it would be very fruitful “to explore the combinations of gods and goddesses to really see the differences in energy levels and students’ experiences”.

3. Singing

The opening round revealed that 3 of the group had good experience in singing, one felt she had no confidence in her voice. There was a lot of interest in the tradition.

Polina use a different Niggun, which the group picked up with astonishing ease and speed. The group managed harmonies up to 5-chords and particularly enjoyed the sliding and sighing of this tune. It felt very appropriate to allow this deeper emotional level after the abundance of male energy presented in Exu and Xango. Participants found the “Krekhtsn” very intriguing. One comment was that it needed getting used to, but then felt very opening. Another person reported that she had carried over the energy from the dance into the singing; it felt as if it was in her body.

All liked the exercise where we sang while facing away from the circle and then repeated the phrase while facing inwards. The effect was so obvious and profound.

The bonding of the group was felt in the harmonising, but also in the very open and relaxed feedback in the circle.

4. Participants' feedback in general and examples from questionnaires

a) General feedback finishing circle

This group also confirmed that starting with the dancing was best (but see below).

There were some comments with regard to the effect of the work with regard to self healing and self awareness:

"I felt I could pick up on things that are needed"

"I felt disappointed about my own stiffness"

b) Feedback in questionnaires (see App.2)

What did they liked most:

"very good teachers – kind, informative and approachable"

"good pacing"

"the combination of dance and singing in one session"

"the combination of singing and dancing"

"the Samba"

"the first dance and the horse dance"

"listening about the history of it and the singing"

What they would improve (only one comment):

"timing. I'd like to know how long the dancing will take (in order to pace myself) – IE what time will the singing start"

4. What was learned

Rosaria realised she had used more time than planned on the dancing, "reducing the possibilities for exploration in the singing". We can blame Exu, the Trickster for this, I am quite sure.

Polina suggested that we allow more time for written feedback forms.

Not all participants had realised that the questionnaire was a double sided sheet, so we missed out on some feedback. We need to mention this next time.

We want to look into possibilities to evaluate differences in response to male, female goddesses

We came to the conclusion that it would be better if participants filled in there feedback sheet before the final circle, to be encouraged to take enough time and also not to be influenced by other peoples comments.

In the same vein was the decision that workshop leaders and researcher should refrain from comments, until all participants had spoken (although it is tempting for researcher and workshop leaders to "break the ice")

C. FIRST SESSION ST. JOHN (2.3.07)

It proved difficult to find enough people over sixty who wanted to come to the workshop, partly due to restriction in advertising opportunities. Alternatively, the opportunity was offered to St.John's Community Centre in Hove, which runs several groups for the elderly.

The arrangement had its difficulties, but the workshop leaders managed to run a taster on March 2ⁿ.

1. The set-up

On arrival at the centre we found that our group had gone on an outing. But we managed to muster 7 participants, amongst them 2 men (plus one late joiner), partly users of the service, partly staff. The researcher was present as participating observer, but really, under the circumstances observation was the priority.

Most of the users were quite elderly, some infirm. They were all seated in chairs, most with armrests (restricting movement). They had not expected us and were slightly apprehensive of what was coming at them. All in all a rather challenging set-up.

1. Dancing

It did at first not look like this could be anywhere near a dance. But we were to be surprised.

After a very brief introduction and a gentle warm-up Rosaria chose Oxum to work with. She is gentle and non-intrusive, and she cares for her beauty and well-being. The participants responded to this orixa astonishingly quickly and with almost instant positive results.

The women in particular liked the movements, which had to do with combing, bathing, poring water and stroking arms, shoulders and chest. But the men joined in gladly. The session had to be short so as not to tire the participants out (20 minutes), but even in this short time liveliness seemed to come into our group. There was a feeling of self-appreciation with a memory of a younger, beautiful body to be loved. More eye contact was made, heads were lifted up, backs straightened and shoulders released. Smiles appeared in faces and even the one woman who did not seem to be aware of anything when we started out, picked up on a move or two.

2. Singing

We moved into the singing without much of a break. By then the participants were positively eager. Polina chose a Niggun with a slide and a sigh, which invited a deep response. She worked with breath adding the sound and a movement with the hand. There was a lot of holding at the beginning, but more smoothness soon evolved. After 15 minutes of singing the group had achieved coherence and the singing went well. Movement had been carried over into the singing from the dancing, giving a special note. More smiles and shinier eyes could be observed. A little breeze of energy seemed to have carried a bit more will to live back into the hearts of these people.

3. The feedback

Obviously it was out of the question to ask for feedback sheets to be filled in.

Oral feedback was invited and very positive. They suddenly spoke a lot, declared they wanted more of this and were very disappointed when they heard that we had to shift the workshop to a different day – a day when they would not be coming to the centre due to lack of transport or help.

4. What was learned

This session definitely confirmed the power of the work. When there is little energy and mobility left, people can only resort to inner movement to enhance their quality of life.

Work needs to be gentle and respectful and much awareness is needed. And there are other challenges: The environment has to be taken as it is, and so have the social and institutional limitations. Flexibility will be needed, because of other agencies involved in the set-up who are bound to their own agendas.

It was very encouraging to see such good results. But evaluation of the work will be more difficult. It will be interesting to experiment with different orixas to explore the potential within this context.

5. Action

A series of dates (all on Wednesdays) have been arranged with the administrator at St. John for an ongoing workshop with as much continuity as possible for participants. This will give us the continuity to assess changes in participants over time.

D. Ongoing work - outlook

Sessions have been set up at the Brighton Women's Centre and Open Sessions are being continued.

Two further sessions at St. John's have been very successful, with participants showing a growing interest, making request for further sessions and enquiring about open sessions they could recommend to their relatives.

We are moving into a consolidation period with respect to set-up, routine and basic assessment. We will now revise discussion on observation and evaluation issues.

APPENDIX 2 Second Project Report (June 2007)

CONTENT

A. FOCUS GROUPS

B. DEVELOPMENT OF THE WORK

1.1. Open sessions

1.2. Sessions at St John's Community Centre

1.2.1. The set-up

1.2.2. Collecting of evidence

1.2.3. Response of the group

1.2.3.1. Researcher's observations

1.2.3.2. Self-reflection by workshop leaders and adaptation of the work

1.2.3.3. Communication between group members and beyond

1.3. Sessions for the Oasis Project

1.3.1. The set-up

1.3.2. Collecting of evidence

1.3.3. Response of the group

1.3.3.1. Researcher's observations

1.3.3.2. Workshop leaders reflections

1.3.4. Outlook for Oasis

C. CONCLUSION

A. Focus groups

Due to a number of factors to be discussed in more detail in the final report, the project moved to focus groups different from those that had been anticipated in the proposal⁵⁷.

After the initial trial period the work focused mainly on three client groups.

The sessions at the Brighton Women's Centre had to be abandoned. Open sessions were continued. The sessions with older people at St Johns Community Centre were continued. A new series of sessions for the clients of the Oasis Centre (working with for substance users and their partners) was newly established.

B. Development of the work

1.1. Open sessions

Open sessions were carried on and received good feedback. In spite of this and some fairly intense advertising they did not attract enough people to form larger groups. The project leaders were thus unable to use group dynamic and group's coherence as a constructive element of the work as much as they would have wished. It also proved difficult to establish enough continuity to assess the benefit the work may have had for individuals over time.

The conclusion is that the sessions were perceived as open drop-in classes by the clientele with no commitment attached - a phenomenon quite common in the field (arts, body work, movement and self-development/healing) and the location (Brighton). This said, it should be emphasised that participants regularly expressed the wish to deepen their experience and those who had attended several sessions started to get more involved.

The team found the open sessions very valuable, because they allowed for a rather more experimental and thus challenging mode of working, which would not have been appropriate for the two other groups where a much more acutely therapeutic approach was needed. For the same reason the open sessions allowed for explicit encouragement of direct and open feedback with reference to self-exploration and observation of the workshop leaders' role in the process. Participants were curious and actively interested in the cultural background, some doing their own research. They had enough space and energy in their life and experience in the field to appreciate the benefits of the work for self-development.

The set-up described in the first report was upheld, and ongoing assessment relied on participants' oral and written feedback and the self-reflection of the project leaders.

1.2. Sessions at St John's Community Centre

These sessions started in March and the first two have already been analysed in some detail in the first Progress Report.

1.2.1. The set-up

These sessions were arranged through the St John's Community Centre at Palmeira Square for a group of older people who regularly attend the centre on a Wednesday afternoon. It took a little while to establish a routine with the centre and the participants, but there was enough continuity to facilitate observation on key factors.

The group was made up of the elderly clients of the centre as well as some of its volunteers. Numbers varied between five and eight, not counting staff (usually one or two). Most user-participants are very elderly and some fairly frail. At the outset not everybody was able or willing to join in actively. For the workshop leaders this was a steep learning curve, because they obviously did not have access to any health or social information about the participants and there was very little time for communication with staff. The basic principle, formulated by Rosaria in her first reflections, was to start out with something "very gentle and non intrusive".

⁵⁷ See Proposal for Funding, p4.

1.2.2. Collecting of evidence

The researcher observed three of the first five sessions. A fourth session was scheduled to take place further down the line to enable verification of earlier impressions. No notes were taken during the first two sessions, because it did not feel appropriate. The workshop leaders gave written feedback after sessions and findings were discussed. The team realised that it needed to move towards a more structured form of keeping track of development. Participants were asked for some basic feedback, but questionnaires or feedback sheets were not an option at this early stage. When it became clear that the group would have a sufficient number of participants and continuous support from the centre, the team reviewed the procedures. At the fourth session participants were asked their names, how often they had been coming and how they liked it. These notes allowed the team to follow up comments and feedback from individual participants and keep track of changing responses. The researcher suggested that the staff-participants and the centre should be asked to provide some feedback on how they thought things were going for the people in their care.⁵⁸

As the interest in the traditions and the increasing readiness to express feelings and opinions and the willingness to listen to their own inner self and share the result grew, it started to look more feasible to encourage organised feedback, maybe by using a short questionnaire with simple value scales. Because when something that has become sufficiently familiar and accessible it can be experienced as empowerment to be asked to evaluate its benefits rather than appear as a tedious task to difficult to even attempt.

1.2.3. Response of the group

1.2.3.1. Researcher's observations

The participants were quite willing to give this project a chance, but remained cautious throughout the first and into the second session. From then onwards the work started to effect change. Some of this change can be interpreted as a result of general stimulation, but other signs and symptoms were much more project-specific.

a) Candomblé dancing

When the sessions started there could have been no suggestion that people stand up to dance. Still they were dancing, because of a development of internal movement created by following the story and expressing it through movement of shoulders, arms, hands, head, face and sometimes feet. In my observation this internal movement allowed those elderly people to open up to the challenge.

1. Willingness and readiness to move increased⁵⁹, as could be expected from any exercise, but since this initial involvement progressed very quickly to expressive movement, it can be considered to be an effect inherent to the Candomblé itself.
2. The sessions always started with warm-up exercises, some of them using breath, some self-massage. The latter were simple, but very effective in bringing the participants 'in touch with themselves'.⁶⁰
3. As soon as a basic routine was established the story took over, with the observable effect of self-consciousness falling away rather quickly allowing the participants to move onto a deeper level of body-mind experience: movements not only became smoother, more expansive and more confident, but also evoked memories.
4. Communication – verbal and non-verbal – between participants and project leaders increased, faces relaxed, smiles became more prevalent and laughs more frequent.

b) Singing of Niggunim

Breath was an issue with almost all participants – even the volunteers. The sitting position did not help, but the expressive movement before the singing did, and breath exercises with focus on out-breath brought good results. Aware of the issue the workshop leaders started the second with singing rather than the dancing.

As the Niggunim have no words, there was no strain on memory and no issues with translation and semantics. Niggunim can express a life in one musical phrase going from loss to triumph, from sadness to joy, from ecstasy to quiet contemplation. The same tune can be adapted in many ways to the energy of a group and enriched by adding harmonies or running rounds. They can also be used to take the group to a place where its member can explore a certain feeling and the energy connected with this feeling in the safety of the group. The flow of the

⁵⁸ Feedback sheet for staff., developed by Rosaria.

⁵⁹ Lack of willingness to move is often found in older people and counts as a sign of depression

⁶⁰ Recent research suggests that empathy is not just a concept of the mind, but connected to a feedback loop connecting perceived body sensation (pleasant touch/self) with mental concept (compassion, empathy/others).

Niggunim carries the singer from painful to joyful feelings and helps him or her not to get stuck. In the process of working with a number of Niggunim in consecutive sessions this dynamic became quite observable:

1. Participants' willingness to use their voice increased and facilitated a deeper connection with their emotions, particularly those emotions usually feared by old people, namely sadness and grief. However, they seemed to be able to also connect with their younger, more active, more involved and more rebellious self. Some began to tell the group about their life, particularly things that had been long forgotten.

2. Helping the members of the group to connect with their deeper feelings and reviving their memory of the past brought some of them very much 'centre stage', which was not so easy to handle within the context of a less-than-60-minutes workshop. However, the work seemed to have an interesting effect on the group as a whole: it fostered empathy and with it came more than polite patience with those members of the group who, having got carried away a bit, took rather more time and space than others. Unsurprisingly, this led gave them the feeling of being heard and calmed them down.

3. I perceived that it was the singing that drew those members into the group who were more remote and had initially participated very little in the movement activities. Some healing traditions work with what is called a 'sound bath' and as the harmonies started to evolve in the group's singing a similar effect seemed to take place for the less active participants. Rosaria had chosen Orixas with dance movements that were very gently, e.g. working with water images and bathing of the body. The two aspects of the work were thus blended and made to support one another.

4. Old and particularly frail people need to be gentle with their energy. Eastern traditions know about the importance of the breath and the mind as the subtle sources and moving agents of energy. Polina actively worked with the breath by giving specific exercises with focus on the out-breath - a technique particularly used for old and asthmatic people, which can be expected to improve breathing capacity in a very natural way with singing. As the focus was drawn to the singing and the movement of emotional energy, the participants started to breathe more deeply and with less self-conscious effort. Voices became stronger and pitch more stable over a very short period of time.

Earlier on in the workshop leaders had coincidentally started a session with the singing rather than the dance and found that the dynamic had changed considerably. Participants commented that the session had been "very soothing, very different and very interesting". When observing this group for the last time it occurred to me that the participants had come to a point of transition: energy levels and involvement had risen significantly and it seemed to be their idea of being old and frail that was holding them back more than anything else. We discussed this observation in the team and the workshop leaders agreed. It was felt that singing first should be tried again and the outcome observed closely.

1.2.3.2. Self-reflection by workshop leaders and adaptation of the work

The workshop leaders' observations led to an ongoing adaptation of the work to meet circumstances they had not anticipated when first undertaking the project. The physical and emotional needs of the participants were considerable and had to be taken into account, but as the group went from the very easy and gentle to the more complex and intense it became clear to workshop leaders and participants that the possibilities were much greater than expected. Ongoing feedback and discussion including the participants, the researcher and the staff helped to tailor the work very much to the needs of older people and will be very useful when carried into the community and shared with other service providers.

The further development of this part of the project will be discussed in more detail in the final report. So far it is already clear that the work with this group was very satisfying and rewarding, because there was amongst the participants such growing enthusiasm and joy and so much visible and audible improvement of their physical and emotional state.

1.2.3.3. Communication between group members and beyond

By May participants started to positively look forward to the sessions not as entertainment, but as experience. They advertised the sessions to their friends, talk about them in the centre and at home. Staff commented that all of them seemed to have become nicer people, easier to be with.

Some participants remained overtly uninvolved, but it could be observed that they were following the process internally. One male participant suddenly joined in, smiling and moving with the group, another, who had felt the need to comment on Polina's teaching, just joined in with the group turning her attention inwardly. Other members calmed down or livened up, in either way creating more space for interaction.

It would have been interesting to interview family members, maybe in the context of a little concert. It would be nice to explore such possibilities in future sessions.

1.3. Sessions for the Oasis Project

When the work at the Brighton Women's Centre did not take off the workshop leaders moved into working with the Oasis Project, which is run in Brighton and provides support for substance users the partners of substance users.

1.3.1. The set-up

Originally four sessions were scheduled, spread out over a period of five weeks, but due to unforeseen circumstances Synergy was able to offer seven sessions held over seven weeks.⁶¹

This proved to be fortuitous. Four sessions would have been rather short under any circumstances. But as the group remained fairly unstable, with participants being volatile, very demanding and difficult to engage, it necessary to provide more routine and time before the group started to settle.

The venue was slightly small, but sheltered with a little courtyard providing a space where participants could smoke.

The group consisted of female participants (and staff) only.

1.3.2. Collecting of evidence

The researcher actively participated in two of these sessions (3rd and 5th). Trust was the most significant issue for this group. Observation from the sidelines would not have been appropriate. No notes were taken during sessions. The team felt that feedback sheets would meet with scepticism if not rejection.

The workshop leaders felt an increased need to reflect on these sessions and share feelings and observations within the team, because the energy was volatile and the work challenging. A discussion within the team brought forth the idea to ask the participants to take a little time in between sessions to write an idea, feeling or association on a piece of paper and keep it in a safe place without looking at it again. They could then go through these notes at the end of the series and bring some feedback to the class if they wished. The listened to this idea and made a few comments, but it was not quite clear if they would pick up on it. They were gently reminded of this possibility in later sessions.

1.3.3. Response of the group

1.3.3.1. Researcher's observations

Some of the participants knew each other and they all seemed to know the staff. Nevertheless, there was a general feeling of cautious reserve and inhibition on the one hand and a tendency of taking over and taking control on the other. A readiness to opt out at any moment could be felt with any newcomer and remained a possibility most of the participants wished to reserve for themselves. This also expressed itself in the tendency to arrive late for the session.

However, changes did occur. One participant who had been particularly antagonistic at the outset made it her venture to actively work on establishing a little community. Others could not resist the desire to bond although it was obvious that they were struggling with a habitual resistance.

With respect to showing feelings, accepting structure and allowing for corrective emotional experience, the work was very demanding for this group and a variety of avoidance strategies were employed. There was a great

⁶¹ Synergy was able to provide these extra sessions because work with The Brighton Women Refuge Centre had to be abandoned at this stage due to low numbers and a breakdown in communication between the centre and their client group. However, the centre expressed an interest to restart sessions with Synergy should further funding be available, because they had found the project both interesting and beneficial for the client group.

reluctance to reflect on their own state of mind and feelings although a lot of superficial commenting was going on

However, smiles were seen more often; the workshop leaders were respected and trusted as much as could be expected under the circumstances and the willingness to engage increased noticeably over time.

Participants seemed more comfortable with the dancing, although there was a lot of self-consciousness. Most of them seemed physically relatively fit but showed little endurance. Almost all smoked and the dancing left them breathless. They preferred free style dancing above the form set by character of the Orixá and the Candomblé story. The space was not brilliant for dancing, because the room is narrow and long, which did not allow for much creative interaction, something the group would really have needed and benefited from.

The singing seemed a greater challenge emotionally although it also had a greater effect with respect to group bonding, because we could sit in a circle and tune into the group energy with regard to pitch, volume and speed. Again, there was reluctance to follow the given structure and to open up to an experience that had a potential to be overwhelming. The general feeling underneath a somewhat fragmented and disruptive energy was that of fear. Activity levels were high, but the energy displayed felt unsupported. Participants had difficulties to settle down.

All these responses are not uncommon for people who are struggling with a background or environment of drug abuse. Help is often rejected or not seen or acknowledged for what it is. Self-help is a very difficult issue and so is self-reflection. Building trust and self-esteem are major issues and it cannot be expected that things can be turned around in a few sessions of group work. Rather the focus should lie on subtle responses to this type of work so that it can be geared to the specific needs of this group.

It was obvious that those participants who had been coming to the sessions more regularly felt more comfortable with the work and showed more appreciation of the benefits it was given them.

1.3.3.2 Workshop leaders reflections

The Workshop leaders, unsurprisingly, found this group to be hard work. They were aware that they needed to develop a suitable approach, but struggled with the complexity of the needs of the participants. It was difficult to build a group and it was difficult to get a commitment or even enough openness or perseverance for an exploration.

What they did achieve fairly quickly was a level of trust, which enabled participants to be there, even if they did not join in. With respect to this client group it can be considered a success to see them coming back to meet again and try again.

Attempts were made to accommodate the participants by giving them a choice in music (bring their own) and dance (samba generally).

There was a lot of intellectual interest in the cultural, religious and social aspects of Afro-Brazilian dance and Yiddish singing and music and it was felt that this interest could be a door to more engagement.

1.3.4. Outlook for Oasis

Responses of this complex group need to be monitored more closely and over a longer time.

Focus needs to lie on establishing a stable group, so that the group energy can be harnessed to support the individual members.

Also more time is needed to give individuals and their story more attention before they can be asked to integrate into the group and engage with somebody else's story (Orixá).

It was recognised that this client group has more and more complex needs than any of the others we have been working with and that advice should be sought from other agencies if the work is to be continued.

C. Conclusion

Further development will be discussed in the final report.

APPENDIX 3 Open Sessions Questionnaires

Hello everybody

First of all, thank you very much for coming to our workshop.
We are always looking into improving our workshops and we would like to know a bit more about your preferences and your expectations to be covered in them.

Could you please spare few minutes to answer the following questions? Many many thanks.

Best

Rosaria and Polina xxx

Workshop/s attended

SESSION

What were your expectations?

Did you have your expectations covered?

In terms of your emotional and physical well being, is there anything you would like more of?

Yes

No

Would you care to specify?

DELIVERY

How was the pace in the teaching and techniques taught?

Were you satisfied with the level of preparation and delivery of the teacher/s?

What did you like most?

What didn't you like?

What would you like to improve?

What would you like to have more of?

What would you like to have less of?

If you would like to talk to us about any issues, health related or otherwise, please do not hesitate to come to us at any point.

Thank you very much.
Take care and see you soon.

AXE!

APPENDIX 4 St John's Centre Questionnaire (Staff)

Your name:

Names of the client group:

1. How did you find the project for the purposes of your work?
2. Did you find any general changes in the client group?
3. Did you find any particular changes after the sessions on the:

2/03/07

14/03/07

21/03/07

30/03/07

18/04/07

25/04/07

2/05/07

9/05/07

16/05/07

23/05/07

4. Were there physical changes?
5. Were there emotional and relational changes?
6. Were there individual or group changes?
7. Would you say that the sessions were a success? Please explain why.
8. Would you be interested in Synergy running workshops for the volunteers/workers of your organisation?

APPENDIX 5 Oasis memos: Rosaria's proposal with Polina's recommendations

I would propose that we can prompt the group to comment on the effects of the session. As it is the second of four sessions, it would be good to suggest that as a type of homework, they reflect on:

- *What they thought the session was going to be like*
- *Their opinions of the session once it finished*
- *Their favourite and less favourite bits*
- *How they felt at the beginning and at the end of the session*

I think these we discuss openly in the group anyway. These points don't necessarily require deep personal sharing. So I would leave "less personal" things for open feedback in the group and then for the "homework" ask to do something different, like the other points:

- *Whether they felt that the following days were different to their normal routine*
- *General impressions about their state of mind and heart*
- *If there was something they would like to think about after the session when they are on their own and/or continue working at our next times.*

We could ask them to keep this reflection in a safe place and not share it with anybody, as it was a precious treasure.

We can prompt them to do the same in the following session (3/4) and if they wish to do so, to report to everybody or the facilitators at the end of the 4 day course, comparing the before and after of their feelings and general state of being.

It would be good to ask them whether we can record their feedback on that last session. (*either video or audio – choice is theirs*)

APPENDIX 6 Polina's final feedback for St John's Centre

The course was 10 sessions altogether. The number of participants varied from 7 to 17.

Adjustments that we made for particular group:

We had to adjust our teaching to this particular group and make it more suitable for their age. Rosaria taught her movements sitting down. I started with really simple tunes.

Culturally, Eastern-European part of the workshop was more familiar to the group than the Afro-Brazilian. This group was more into singing as they were more familiar with the concept and more used to singing in general.

How did this effect the course?

Some of the members had Jewish origins, most knew about Jewish culture, synagogues and Jewish weddings. People liked to share their memories. One old lady even brought her wedding pictures to show to the group. For this very reason I had to be quite careful with the choice of niggunim as I didn't want to touch too personal and sensitive memories, so by the end of the course we knew a lot of "happy" niggunim, not just "sad" ones.

The fact of cultural memories and connections also led us to philosophical subjects. We discussed what makes a tune sad and where the sadness hides, whether it's our own perception and subjectivity that we project onto music. We also spoke about sad memories, letting them go, living in the present moment, being old but happy, being limited by body but free in mind.

Singing niggunim was so in tune with where the group wanted to go, and we really used them to change the mood from boredom to joy, from sleepiness to energy, from sadness to acceptance.

Most members expressed that the sessions were very therapeutic.

Difficulties:

We came across a difficulty with balancing our theoretical context of the sessions with the group's desires. Because there was so much personal about the Jewish part, we sometimes had to carefully lead conversation away from somebody's personal thoughts and memories when it endangered our timing.

For the Jewish part, there was more discussion on the tradition.

For the Afro-Brazilian part, there was more information and one-way teaching, which was received with great appreciation.

The progress with this group was really obvious. By the end of the course, we did some standing up exercises and dancing (I am sure Rosaria will write more about this). From my part of the workshop, we developed from 3-4-note tunes in the space of a musical fifth to 16-bar niggunim with a range of 1,5 octaves.

The result was most rewarding. We became friends with the centre. I brought my Jewish choir to perform for the centre, and some of the members of the Synergy group joined our singing from the audience, as they knew some of the tunes!

Both the workers of the centre and the clients would very much like to continue the course. A couple of members of the group even offered financial contribution to future sessions. We are planning on applying for funding to carry on from October 2007.

The concept of expressing and developing oneself through dance and music has worked perfectly well. The educational side of the project has worked too. The group feeling was strong and increased throughout the course. The communication between the teachers and the participants has been much greater and deeper than we expected.

APPENDIX 7 Polina's final feedback for the Oasis Project

We had 7 sessions with the centre altogether.

Here is some history of the course from my point of view:

We had a committed group of the centre's clients who would either come every time or attend most of the sessions by the 2-3 session. Occasionally we had 1 or 2 new members in the group who either stayed or left... So I would say, the core group was 5 clients plus 1-2 Oasis workers.

It took us about 4 sessions to completely gain the participants' trust and build some common language. During the same time the participants were getting closer to each other, so by the end of the course it felt like some friendships were made, a lot of personal sharing has been made etc... It became a welcoming group.

Real relaxation into the material started gradually and slowly, but I would say only after 4-5 sessions. Obviously, this client group requires much more preparation work before we even touch the surface of our principal of personal development.

In my opinion, real digging into the personal development only started on the last session! So it was a shame to interrupt the course. Still, our achievements were already quite obvious.

What was achieved?

- The group formed into a **small community** where the women shared experience about what they were going through with us and with each other and get support. *On the very last day Rosaria and I met one of the participants on the street just before the session. She was with her family and her baby. She was very happy to show her baby to us. Then at the session another member showed us a picture of her baby. I couldn't stop myself from showing a picture of my son... so this was a very touching moment of sharing.*
- The workshop place became a *safe place* for them where we could discuss things like anger, love, behaviour, nature and people, fear, support, family.
- The women learned something new about completely **unfamiliar cultures**. There were lots of questions and discussion about religion, traditions, and different backgrounds.
- There were participants who **started to sing** although never used to do it before. *One of the participants mentioned that she had been singing one of the niggunim to her baby.*
- The group started to express themselves through movement a lot and really enjoyed it.
- The group developed a special attitude to singing. I would call it **appreciation**. Not everybody joined the singing, but all members found the singing part relaxing, calming down, warm.

Notes on what angles we took to make it work better.

The more familiar the material was, the better it worked with the group. Dancing on its own was more familiar to them, but even within the dancing part they preferred a popular tune and familiar samba movements. This was expected, and Rosaria played around it, nicely balancing between popular culture and the Afro-Brasilian tradition.

Niggunim were obviously completely unknown to them. So I reduced the theoretical part of it and tried to pay as much attention to just singing, breathing, being together in a circle of friends as possible. Still, the concept of expressing one's feelings through singing on its own was very unusual to the most of them. So we used lots of variation in this part: sometimes just singing at them while they were relaxing with their eyes closed, another times singing and shouting as a whole group, from time to time singing to each member of the group separately.

I noticed that singing touched something very deep in the participants. One lady cried several times saying that there was a profound sadness in it. Another one refused to sing as we started singing a tune that she had been

singing to her baby. Obviously, that was a very painful subject to her. I really wish we could continue this work, as there would be a lot to develop. Some of the group got quite nervous when we sang and then successfully overcame their first reaction. Some even mentioned that they had fear of singing. But everybody joined in one way or another. They opened up and relaxed into the tunes.

We come across some disciplinary problems. As the workers of the centre admitted, these people weren't coming there only by their own will. They had to attend a certain number of sessions in the centre having been sent there by social workers. The fact that they choose our course was very pleasing. But still, they were difficult to control: a lot of chatting, always wanting to stop for a cigarette or coffee, not really wanting to work. So we had to insist on doing things sometimes. Everything came into place in the end, and we even had a couple of volunteers in the group to help us with discipline. Also, it worked better in smaller groups (less status games, less nerves, more space in the room, more attention)...

In general, this group was more comfortable with dancing as it was far less challenging for them. But we weren't only looking for comfort. It felt to me that the deeper work had just begun.

Some feedback from the participants after the last session:

"I felt more comfortable with the dancing, but I found the singing useful and relaxing too."

"R'n'B (*pop singer/group whose song Rosaria used several times*) was the best, I liked popular stuff."

"I found the dancing very energetic. The singing was different. Relaxing."

"Friday was a good day for it, it was special as it was the end of the week. It's like we let stress out and go."

"Yes, I sang the Bay-bay tune to my baby. He liked it and did this (*showing a funny bouncy movement*) to it!"

Feedback from other sessions

(Three sessions have been delivered: 4 and 18 May, 1 June; 3 more planned: 15 and 29 June, 6 July)

We've done 3 sessions for that centre. Average number of participants – 6-7, 3-4 permanent. 2 of them work at the centre.

The first 2 sessions were more about gaining trust and devising better fitted methods of teaching for this specific client group.

What I do differently to other groups:

1. Simplified description of background of the culture of niggunim.
2. More emphasis on emotional and communal sides of singing.
3. Repetition of the same tune through several sessions as the group possibly found Niggunim completely unfamiliar and now is just getting used to it and starting to enjoy familiarity.
4. More freedom to react and even not to participate during the singing.
5. More singing to each member of the group to make it more personal.
6. More sharing of my own personal views and background as I found it encouraged trust, relaxed participants and even simply satisfied their curiosity.

Feedback from the group:

1. Slow Niggunim sounded sad to some of the participants, remind them of lullabies, calm them down. At the second session participants requested a slow nign when given choice of energetic or calming down...
2. Some of the members of the group expressed that in loud moments of singing they had impulses to really shout out their emotions. I think we'll develop this.
3. Participants expressed that they liked singing to each other, which we can develop too.
4. There were a lot of questions about Jewish culture, religion, tradition, modern life and music. Educative aspect of the workshop seems to be very present with this group.

5. Singing encouraged discussions about

- a) personal reactions (2 participants couldn't stop laughing although didn't mean to show disrespect. I think this was their unconscious reaction to having to be open and honest with themselves and attentive to their feelings – this probably doesn't happen very often);
- b) religious views (lots of questions about Judaism, making comparison to Christianity and sharing knowledge and experience of religious events in the past.)
- b) equality of men and women;
- c) environmental questions (talking about what we personally can do to help the climate change ect...)

In general I feel these sessions are a challenge for the participants. This kind of activity is unusual to most of them, so a couple of them left during sessions. But those who stayed took it quite seriously and worked hard. There is a lot more about group support, knowing other members of the group, sometimes hiding behind them (!) or asking for confirmation of one's words... but also most of them started to really enjoy and relax and contribute much more than in the beginning into group work.

I am convinced that a much longer course with a group like this would be very effective. But I'm sure we'll gain good results from the 6 sessions as well.

APPENDIX 8 Polina's general feedback on the pilot study

The concept of putting together two cultural traditions and two ways of expression (dance and song) has worked perfectly well. The educational side worked well too and even encouraged lots of healthy discussion. We were flexible enough to fit into different circumstances and learned from experience. I think the concept of the workshop should stay the same as it has potential to suit almost any possible client group.

Each single workshop was different. Even when we taught exactly the same material, people's expectations and reactions were so different and affected the way sessions resolved. It was all good, all positive!

The only thing that hasn't worked as well as I personally expected to was the promotion side of the open sessions. We didn't get as many people as we expected, even though we arranged some publicity. Instead of 9-10 participants we had 2-7 for the open sessions, which was disappointing on one hand. On the other hand, there was nothing like the intimacy and depth that we reached in groups of 4-5 people.

It was also a frustrating to not succeed with the 2 communities that we approached: the Brighton Women's Centre and the Refuge Centre. Although they showed interest in the beginning, there was no help with bringing participants into the course, so it fell apart. But thanks to this we extended our courses with Oasis and St' John's centres, which was very valuable!

Having finished the course, we see a strong artistic potential of it. On many occasions we created something really beautiful that deserved to be seen: 3-part harmony when singing niggunim, perfectly in tune, well structured, very musical; beautiful dance improvisation too. There was a desire expressed by some of the participants to go on stage. So we are thinking of an interactive show, which would involve participants from different groups as well as audience.

APPENDIX 9 Rosaria's final reflections

In retrospective I think the project was successful and it offered different things to the different groups involved. I found the open sessions useful as participants opened more than I expected sharing what they felt throughout the session. However, it is quite difficult to get very deep considering that there is not a continuing attendance of the same group so issues around trust and familiarity with the group are not cultivated, despite the fact that participants always felt at ease with each other.

It may be that the open sessions are used as a call for trying different things and not expect too much depth from them, which was what we originally thought.

With regard to the sessions at OASIS, it has been a very interesting learning process. Participants went from playing around to really share their feelings, to withdraw, and finally to use the sessions to share their situation, ask for advice to other attendants and support each other. It seemed that the dancing and the singing were an excuse to come together. They all mentioned that it was a good way to wind down. It made me feel that we needed to be gentle with this group and very much leave them to take the development of the sessions. It would be very interesting to see how it would work after working with them for a year or so, see how the relationships within the group develop, how they come up from their shell and how they deal with difficulties that life throws at them. There is a very interesting way they have to deal with pressure, which is very much playing at being "naughty" and "have a laugh", which for the purpose of the session can be disruptive. However, I felt that that was what it was needed at that time and some times they were more focused than others. They asked whether we were going to come back as they will be interested. I think that we need to be careful for them not to confuse this session with another therapy session and treat it like that, but more as a space where they can relax, experience new feelings and deal with things in a different way.

The sessions at St. John's were very popular. Participants really enjoyed them and it was noticeable the progress made in terms of mobility and relationship within the group. Centre workers mentioned that they were nicer, more relaxed and somehow happier since the sessions started. They gave us a bunch of flowers and a card thanking us for the work. Some of them offered some economic help to continue with the sessions.

I consider this group to be exquisite in terms of how they embraced the different components of the project and made it theirs. They did not really went deeper into their feelings openly but there were some incidents that showed that they were giving some thought to the process they were going through. Example of this was the fact that one of the participants (the one that had been repeatedly disruptive) who brought a picture from her wedding, which was triggered by one of the sessions' tune and conversation that followed. This participant also offered to pay for the sessions to help with the funding.

Participants were aware of the physical benefits of participating in the sessions and they wanted to continue. There were also comments about the emotional benefits.

Quotes from them are included below.

Quotes from St. John's participants

"enjoyed the music, enjoyed the singing very much"

"movement was not strenuous; it was very nice"

Betty (invented name)

"it made me feel loser on my neck"

"it has really helped me"

"I like what you do. I need you. I am happy to even support economically with some cash if that helps"

"it was wonderful; it was very good"

(Rose B)

"every session was an adventure because it was so new"

"it is a combination of keep fit and singing.... A bit of performing arts; it was very artistic"

"the best thing that we have done here"

"the best idea will be to do something during term time"

"I did not get that the sessions were necessarily linked. It got more difficult thought, specially the singing"

"it has an educational value learning from other cultures... yiddish chanting , all that brazilian stuff... nice balance between the different things you offer"

"I would seriously think about donating some money towards the running of the sessions"

"you both seem very qualified in what you do... if members propose something to pay it may help for funding"

“it is an unique art form with different skills involving chanting, movement, dancing. Synergy sounds like energy”

“It has been very popular; it is something different”

“I find the arts most stimulating”

“what can happen here is that trips out are organised for the same day, so there needs to be some coordination with the centre”

“it has been very successful”

“it pushed people beyond of what they could and that was good. Sometimes activities are far too easy”.

(Mr. T.)

APPENDIX 10 Rosaria's reflections on open sessions

9/12/06

I used the symbology of Oya (strength) and Oba (anger, helplessness) to explore first of all the strength within all of us after being subject to rejection. The second symbology called towards anger and unfairness, linked with helplessness and envy.

The energy went up very quickly using Oya and it calmed down with Oba, although it did not lose intensity.

Based on that experience, I will be interested in mixing up Oya with other gods and goddesses that are more pacific and less problematic than Oba to see what reaction is observed in the class and development of the session.

17/02/07

Symbols used were Elegua/Exu and Xango, in that order. The group was more restricted during Exu and explored the cheekiness of the god in a very contained fashion. Xango, on the contrary, opened up not only the regal character of the god but also feelings of pride and self-assurance as confirmed by the comments from the students. It felt very free but very powerful. One of the students pointed out that she felt more in tune with Xango because of her particular story and moment. I relate to that experience and I felt that Xango was more associated with my feelings and experiences in the day.

With regard to the session, I used more time than planned, reducing the possibilities for exploration in the singing. I need to pay more attention to the time limits and follow them.

I also thought that the combination of the two gods gave a good balance in feelings and experiences. In future sessions I would like to explore the combination of gods and goddesses to really see the differences in energy levels and students' experiences.

In general, I really liked the potential of exploring individual feelings during the representation of the gods and goddesses, going into a more group work structure during the "neutralizers", culminating with a very strong community feeling with the singing.

3/03/07

I decided for the day to work on Ogun (blacksmith) and Oxum (goddess of beauty). The day started in a very Oxum way, cleaning the house and preparing myself for the session, pampering myself and putting some make up on. There was definitely some conditioning knowing I was going to work with her.

There were only 2 participants. However it did not feel intimidating for them or for us at any time. It really had the feeling of a more internal exercise with people interacting less with each other and reflecting more on their own individual issues.

Ogun was very strong and one of the participants pointed out that she should do those moves every day before going to work to be able to cope with the day in a purposeful manner. I really enjoyed the "biting move", which had a very determinant flavour rather than angry, as well as the chopping.

Oxum was surprising. One of the participants said that it was more challenging as she is used to do lots of chopping anyway, so Ogun came more natural for her. Oxum was more difficult for her to get into for that feeling of looking after herself in a feminine way. The other participant pointed out that she felt completely inadequate in the selection of clothes she was wearing (black) as Oxum is yellow and vibrant. This was supported by Polina who pointed out that she wanted to be wearing a skirt, more feminine like to represent Oxum. It was also pointed out that it was important for the participants to have the permission to do their own moves within the framework presented. This allowed them to get into the feeling rather than worrying about the steps, although one of the participants pointed out that she would like to be able to do the steps competently.

For me Oxum was quite interesting. I really enjoyed the movements and I got into them with extraordinary ease. After 6 minutes into the music, I thought that it was dragging a bit (the tune was for 9) and I was ready to stop it when something in me tried to contain me and persuade me to wait for just 3 minutes relaxing into the moves. For some reason, when performing the "jewels washing" move, I found myself making a "cuddling a baby" move, which is an interesting twist considering that Oxum is also the goddess of fertility.

With the singing, I felt very in tune with Oxum as well. One of the characteristics of this goddess is that when she is happy she cries and when she is sad she laughs. At certain points of the niggun, there was so much energy going on that my facial muscles did not know what to do with themselves and I found myself in between laughs and tears. None of them materialised though.

The energy was flowing and the group gelled well. It was very lovely when one of the participants asked for a group hug when we finished.

A very fulfilling day.

14/04/07

The session commenced with the explanation of the purpose of the project and introduction of the participants. 4 people attended: 3 women and 1 man.

The god and goddess used for the movement session were Iansa and Xango. Time was allowed for the participants to develop their own style within the framework presented in the introduction.

Participants mentioned that they like the contrast of Iansa as female and male with softness and strength in one. One of the participants mentioned that she felt very much identified with the goddess. They felt very energised and calm.

With the representation of Xango, some participants mentioned that some of the steps were more challenging; however, once they went over the first barrier of following the steps and got into their own move, they felt more confident and comfortable with it all. They also like the difference in tempo set up by the music which influenced the speed of the move. This difference in tempo allowed the participants to feel their body and the move in a different way, being more reflective.

The session finished with a ciranda, which is a dance which involves holding hands. This is the first time that this type of dance was used and just felt right due to the level of openness and partnership experienced in the group. They commented that they particularly liked to finish the session in this way.

I felt that it took me a bit longer to get into the first goddess, feeling more concern with the framework and the safety for the participants. Whereas often I get lost in my own moves, this time I followed the original routine more closely. Anecdotally, one of the participants commented on this and thought that it would be good if I could get more into my own moves so that, in that way, I would give the permission to the participants to experiment a bit more; interesting aspect to keep in mind.

However, on the other side, there was another participant that felt that she needed more structure to be able to feel confident in the class and she felt this security was provided as it was. All participants shared the view that they needed more time to get immersed in the moves and they will be interested in one-weekend workshop to do so.

I felt that the movement session facilitated putting the energy out there. It felt very vibrant but somehow disconnected; very much like a tornado, although with Xango and the holding hands dance, the group connected more with each other and started to draw the energy inwards. The singing facilitated a complete focus on the person and calm the group down, being at the same time, energising.

One of the participants (male) mentioned that with the movement he put all his energy out and with the singing he started to draw that energy in, while at the same time he felt part of the group.

The feedback was very positive and there was a greater feeling of group work. We stayed longer than usual talking at the end of the session.

One of the participants emailed us few days later saying that she was unable to do anything else for the rest of the day. She had lots of plans and she just managed to relax, feeling energised but not been able to be out there in the world. It was the first time she did something like this (she is in her sixties). She felt energised and relaxed and she said that staring at the wall is not something she does! I ensured her that it was a positive development to recover energies and look after oneself.

Once again, a positive experience!.

9/06/07

There were only two people that took part in the session. One male and one female in addition to the facilitators.

The session commenced with the movement and was followed by the singing.

The first god chosen for the movement was Obatala (wise and old man, god of peace but fierce at times) and the movements were very low and demanding.

The neutraliser used was Maracatu as the position is very upright and was thought to compensate the encroached position of the performance for the god.

The second goddess was Iemanjá (goddess of the ocean, mother and daughter, grumble and gentle, old and young) with movements that illustrated the peacefulness and the whirlpool of the sea.

Participants mentioned that they felt maybe too calm (female participant). There was a clear differentiation between the first and the second and the difference in movement was quite illustrative between the encroachment and the expansion of the combination of the two gods. Recommendations about posture change and general health issues were made by the facilitator.

The singing session touched upon two niggunim. One was slower than the other and the rhythm was quite different. Participants sang to each other, closed eyes, got energised by the change and finished very relaxed. It was a very emotional session where a “trance” like status was achieved by the participants.

It was observed by the facilitators that the female participant was very uptight. It was difficult for her to relax and let it go, although she participated at all stages of the workshop and showed her appreciation.

APPENDIX 11 Rosaria's reflections on St John's sessions

2/03/07

From the logistic point of view, it was not ideal the fact that the time for delivering the workshop was mistaken in the general diary. However, it worked well as there were six people left from the social outing. I decided to work with Oshum (Oxum) after a light warm up using Loreena Mckennitt. The reason for choosing this orixa responded basically to the fact that she is very gentle and non intrusive. I thought that it would be good to start the series of workshops with some notion of self-love and self-respect. It surprised me how gentle the participants were with themselves, specially using the movement of "bathing". Participants were making signs of poring water over themselves even when I did not prompt them to do so. The beauty and the gentleness of the movements moved me. It also surprised me the fact that when the singing part of the session took place, the participants were keen in linking the singing with some sort of movement. That characteristic has not been given in any other of the workshops.

14/03/07

The session started again with some bureaucratic problems as they did not expect us because it was not in the calendar. It ended up that when we arranged the sessions with Debbie, the calendar for the month was out and the person in charge of it could not make the changes. The rest of the dates are however confirmed and will be included in the next calendar.

As the group was doing stretching when we arrived we decided to start with the singing. I could feel that it was having a soothing effect on them. Some of the participants (10 = 3 men, 7 women of which 2 were helpers) did not sing at the beginning but joined in as the session progressed. A couple of participants felt very emotional and said out loud that they were going to cry. The feeling was one of love and support and everybody present engaged in the activity.

In the comments that succeeded the singing, participants mentioned that it was very soothing, very different and very interesting. I could see that some of them engaged with the tradition behind it quite strongly (one of them goes to the Sinagogue in Middle Street) and it was easier to relate to it than with the dance.

I decided to work with Oya, specially working on the aspect of having lots of energy that needs to be canalised and once is properly formed, can reach anywhere, anytime. After telling Oya story of breaking the gates of the cemetery, the participants got into the moves. There was one particular participant that was very enthusiastic, so much so that she was really making laugh the rest of the participants. This was fine at the beginning but it was becoming a bit of a distraction to the objective of the exercise. I tried to encourage her to make more outrageous moves building on what she was doing and she seemed to calm down and deepen in her own experience. By that time, the rest of the participants found their own way to explore the moves. After we finished they expressed that the moves were a good exercise and that they were going to use them (both as imagery of the feeling behind it and as an exercise) while watching TV or at home.

They showed a good interest in continuing the sessions and coming every Wednesday. Some of them enquired about the open sessions to let their families know about them. They all were very supportive of the project, felt energised and soothed at the same time.

18/04/07

There were 6 participants of which one was a man. Four participants were recurrent (the man is included in this category). A helper was also part of the group and a lady joined in very late in the session, when we were almost finalising with the singing.

After the gentle warm up, starting from massaging the face, eyes, neck, etc, the god chosen for the day was Oxosi, the hunter. The movement was very much free style, with fingers in a cross emulating an arrow and shooting once the "hunter" was ready. I was pleasantly surprised by the freedom of the participants in really focussing on the task and "shooting" when they were ready. It was clearly appreciable that they were more relaxed with the structure of the workshop and they were putting plenty of effort and energy. Movements achieved were more complex and wider and the breathing at the end of the exercise was better than in previous sessions where the participants showed some sign of tiredness.

They reported after the session that although the exercise was gentle they could still feel that they were using the articulations and they felt energised by it.

We then moved into the singing. During the movement session I put extra emphasis on the need to inspire and expire freeing the lungs from all air. The singing session picked up on that and we worked on breathing with more emphasis than usual. The male participant was complaining of a chest infection and he was encouraged to participate in the session in his own rhythm.

The singing session was equally encouraging. The sound that was emitted by the group was much more powerful than in previous sessions and the sequence was faster and more complicated. Some participants mentioned that the session helped with the breathing and the man with chest infection said that he felt much better after the session.

25/04/07

I must say I do not remember the exact number of participants but I seem to believe that there were six, one of which was a man, plus two members of the staff, researcher and facilitators.

The movement session commenced with a gentle warm up followed by Ossayn, the wizard, healer. Movements were rhythmical and energetic and the group followed them at their convenience. There was a cheerful mood although focussed attention by all.

It was interesting to observe the performance of one of the participants, who has been reported as being quite disruptive. She started the session being quite comical and her disruptive manners were quickly converted to a more focussed approach. It was also observed that she encouraged the person next to her, whose physical abilities were quite constraint, to join in.

One of the members of the staff reported that it is quite unusual for her to, firstly join an activity without complaining and secondly, invite her friends to join in. Members of staff were encouraged to keep track of any visible changes in the performance of the attendants, being physical dexterity, emotional or of any other sort.

The singing session was very well embraced. The voices were stronger than in previous sessions and attendants were very enthusiastic.

Positive feedback again and attendants showed their interest in attending future sessions.

02/05/07

There were ten participants, of which 3 were men, and four staff (two facilitators, the researcher and a helper).

The session commenced with everybody introducing themselves, which was very useful to put at least some faces to names.

The goddess chosen for the day was Iemanja, evoking movements related to the sea. Beatrice attempted to be a bit distractive and she was discouraged by Dorothy? Who was sat next to her, who prompted her to be part of the group. The group very easily joined into the movement of the sea, introducing their own moves and playing around.

The energy levels were felt to be higher than normal. I personally felt that it was good to encourage them to prompt them to come up with their own moves, technique that I may use in the future. The group seems to be working very well together and as Tony mentioned, the sessions seems to run smoother and it is easier to follow.

The singing session touched upon a more complicated niggun. The participants did not have any problem joining in and they even "interrupted" Polina eager as they were to repeat the sequences.

The feedback was again positive; they felt energised by the dance and relaxed overall.

I asked the staff members to start keeping record of any changes that participants may experience throughout the week or if they felt that anything has changed since the sessions started. They quickly responded that they seem to be generally nicer people to be around and they said that will keep track of any changes they may observe.

15/05/07

This session commenced with the representation of Xango, the god of thunder, a royal figure with benevolence but also weak. I seem to remember that there were eight participants, one of which was a man. The attendance was not that good due to the fact that another activity was scheduled for the same day at the same time. The male

participant mentioned that this was far from being ideal because it did not give the people the chance to participate even if they wanted to.

In terms of the movement session, participants followed very well the moves which were quite strenuous in the upper part of the body. It was the first time that the routine was repeated three times, where the participants had a bit of free style input. All in all they pointed out that one could feel the movement in the upper body and that it felt like they had done a workout.

With regard to the singing session, participants once again were very enthusiastic and joined in immediately. The piece was more complicated than previously both in terms of the melody and the breathing space between notes. Even so, everybody joined in and expressed at the end how fluid the session was, how relaxed they felt and how encompassing was.

16/05/07

There were 9 attendants, 2 of which were male. In addition there were 3 members of the staff.

The session commenced this time with the singing of a niggun. The niggun was considerably faster than those performed previously and the group followed without problems. Different tempos were used and the group engaged in it.

The decision to alter the order of the singing and the movement responded to the fact that the attendants were too reminiscent of Jewish memories at the end of every session. It was decided to alter the order to see the effects in the group.

The singing finished on a high note.

The movement part took advantage of this and introduced Oxum, which was the first goddess that this group worked with. As an additional change, the facilitator encouraged the participants to stand up and perform the moves, showing that the difference between sitting and standing was minimal in terms of the representation of the moves. Only 4 participants remained seated. The rest were dancing standing up. The energy levels rose and there was a general feeling of well being. Other members that were not originally part of the group joined in presenting a total of 17 people taking part in the activity.

At the end of the session, the facilitator introduced samba and showed very simple exercises to practice while seated. The participants followed the instructions.

Participants mentioned their appreciation to the sessions and one participant, with lacrimal eyes said that she will miss the sessions (this was the session before the last).

From the facilitator point of view, this was one of the most satisfying sessions where I could really see the change in terms of energy, endurance and physical improvement of the participants from the beginning of the sessions. The height to which they were raising their hands, the ability to combine the limbs movements and the energy used in the exercise were clear examples of the improvement in their physical performance. In addition, the group worked as a team and it was very satisfactory to see that.

23/05/07 and 30/05/07

Sessions counted with an average of 6 or 7 people plus a member of the staff. The previous decision of bringing the singing before the movement was adopted in these two sessions as well.

The goddess for the first session was Oya-Iansa and the one for the last session was Iemanjá. Both goddesses had been introduced in previous sessions.

In terms of the singing, the pieces continued to be more challenging and more demanding in terms of the energy necessary to perform them. This did not stop the participants who followed the instructions given by Polina.

With regard to the movement part, it was surprising to see one of the male participants, who although has been present in most sessions has not been able/willing to participate very actively. He was however always very welcoming. In the last session he strongly engaged in the movement although it was obvious that he had some physical limitations. He put as much effort as he could within his possibilities, always smiling and participating.

Another element to underline is the participant that has been mentioned as being quite disruptive. Progressively, but especially in the last two sessions, she has followed the instructions and participated with everybody at the same level without disrupting the session once. She also brought in some pictures from her wedding as some melody used in previous sessions had evoked memories. Talking about memories, another participant mentioned

that they are never going to disappear but one can look at them as memories and experience, reducing the sadness.

In an overall comment about the sessions, all participants mentioned that they would like to continue with the sessions and they got very much out of them. Some participants mentioned that the movement was sometimes very tiring. The practitioner ensured that although this may be true, the progress observed in the motor and physical abilities of the participants were quite noticeable. This was supported by everybody in the room. Everybody was very positive about the singing and recognised that although the project may have some religious underline, if it is good for you, it is good.

APPENDIX 12 Rosaria's reflections on Oasis sessions

27/04/07

The session was essentially different to anything we have been doing as part of this project. There were four attendants and two members of the staff. Attendants were either drug dependent or partners of drug dependent people.

We started the session outside talking about the project and the goddesses that we were going to work with. The atmosphere was somehow anxious and there was loads of nervous laugh. The circle broke when I mentioned that we were going to be working with Iemanja, goddess of the sea. One of the participants expressed that her father used to be a captain and things got smoother since that remark.

The movement session commenced with the presentation of a simple sequence and encouragement for the participants to follow and then do the movement on their own time and rhythm. The participants joined in straight away and started raising their interpretation very quickly, i.e. Iemanja movement that reminded one of the participants to cuddling a baby. The participants asked for repeating the sequences more often than planned for other sessions and I got the sense that they would benefit for a considerably longer session to fall into the trance and explore the movement. This may need to be addressed.

During the spoken feedback, participants mentioned that they thought that it was better than they expected and they expressed they would like to do more. One of the participants mentioned that she felt very aware of her stiffed body and that she wanted to do more movement. Other participant mentioned that the moves made her feel that she was outside in nature. Other mentioned that although the exercise was quite energetic she felt that it was ideal for her at the end of a very busy week, finding the session very relaxing. One of the members of the staff mentioned that she was feeling a bit apprehensive at the beginning, before commencing the session but she felt very relaxed and enjoyed it in the end.

The singing session was more challenging as some participants had already mentioned that they did not feel comfortable singing. Despite this, everybody joined in straight away and after finishing the session, said that they would have liked to repeat it more the learned niggun.

Three more sessions were scheduled with this group. Participants were very eagerly writing the dates in their diaries and talking about inviting other people from the project. Members of the staff also enquired whether more people could take part, to which the answer was yes. It was very visible the change in the mood, interaction and energy levels in the participants from the beginning of the session (very distractive, somehow rebellious, nervous) to the end (much more relaxed, present and together).

4/05/07

The second of a 4 project- session was attended by five people, four of which repeated from the previous session. Two of those attendants were members of the staff.

The goddess used for this session was Oxum, goddess of beauty and vanity. The reason for choosing this goddess responded to an issue that rose in the previous session. One of the participants apologised for being very giggly all session. She mentioned that she felt a bit anxious and nervous about the session and that that was her response. I pointed out that that characteristic was present in Oxum, who laughs when is nervous, unhappy or anxious, and cries when she is happy.

The session commenced with the telling of some stories related to Oxum, followed by her moves and her music. The rhythm was slower and softer than in the previous session. The new participant was very giggly and she was at times disruptive of the session. The rest of the participants tried to get into the moves nevertheless and explore the variations.

This part of the session was followed by the "neutraliser" dancing a samba reggae routine. The participants mentioned that it was very good to finish in an upbeat note and that it was good to get "the heart bumping". Some comments followed. Most of the participants mentioned that they felt very relaxed and content. The new participant mentioned that she was a bit self-conscious and that it was very difficult for her to dance not being under the effect of drugs. This remark opened a bit of a discussion about the achievements of this particular participant to be able to dance a little despite not being drugs involved and the courage that it takes to start something new and get into it.

Another participant mentioned that she felt that she could move more than in the previous session but she felt very stiffed. I ensured her that it was a good step to recognise the state of ones body. This recognition is the first step for improvement and the participant seemed satisfied and grateful by the remarks.

The session was followed by the singing part. The new participant said that she was not sure about joining in as she was not a singer. She was calmed by the facilitator and encouraged to listen the session and join in if she wanted. The group went into the exercises and the singing of the piece very quickly. It was a very meditative piece which arose some tears in one of the participants. She was very much supported by the other participants. When the singing session finished, the participants mentioned that it was like a lullaby. They mentioned that it was easier than in the previous session as they knew what to expect. The participant that had cried mentioned that she feels very moved everytime she listens Jewish music and that lots of feelings come to the surface. She looked very relaxed and at ease with herself after the session.

This session was challenging in the sense that there were people from the previous session and new participant who worked at very different levels. It was interesting to see that the person that was giggly in the first session was far more into the session this time and explained to the new person that she felt like her before but now she felt very comfortable with the workshop theme and structure.

Participants were encouraged to keep some sort of record about how they felt after the session and keep it in a safe place. Members of staff were also asked to report on any changes that they may experience in the participants to see the effects of the workshop work.

18/05/07

The third of a now 5 project- session was attended by 5 participants, 1 of which has attended all of them and another was in her second class. Two of those attendants were members of the staff and there were also 2 facilitators and the researcher.

The session evolved around Oya-Iansa. It was very satisfactory to see one of the participants joining in despite the fact that she mentioned that she would not be able to dance unless she was under the effects of alcohol.

The participants were quite distracted. Energy levels were very different, there were two participants that felt unwell and the talking levels were continuous. Participants followed the moves, including some voice exercise, starting working together.

At the end of the representation, they mentioned that there were very tired. They were focused at that time.

A neutraliser was used, (beyonce tune) and the facilitator encouraged the participants to bring some of their music for the next session to use in this part of the movement.

The singing part started. A new participant was very reluctant to stay; she joined in at the beginning and left. Another participant (the one for whom this was her second session) said that she needed to leave in 10 minutes but she stayed until the end.

Participants were slowly focussing on the tune and working together. There was some attempt to raise the energy but it went back to a more reflecting level. Appreciation was mentioned at the end of the session.

Remarks about how a tune or dance can evoke different feelings to different people were mentioned, and participants were encouraged by the facilitators to reflect on this and use it to their advantage, checking where they were with their feelings and experiences.

From my own perspective, this group would benefit with a longer session. It is relatively difficult to deal with all the feelings and expectations that the participants have in the time and number of sessions that have been allocated. However, some changes are already noticeable especially on the participant that has attended all the sessions. She was very chatty and distracted and she has become a real advocate for the project amongst her peers.

1/06/07

This session was quite challenging. From the outset the participants were quite chatty and a bit distracted. There were 2 new participants, 1 participant who had been to another session and someone who has been to all of them.

The session started with some singing outside as the weather was good. It was considered to be a good idea but in reflection I am not sure whether it ended up being more distracting than helping to focus. Variations need to be experimented with.

It did not help the fact that most of the participants were smoking at the same time.

With regard to the movement session, Xango was the god selected for the day. Participants followed on and off the steps and although talking, performed the steps. Some more updated music was used as a “neutraliser” and participants seemed to get into this.

It was difficult to judge whether the session did something for the participants. In previous sessions, it seemed that they were starting to get a new awareness. This session seemed to be like a reaction to that realisation although it is difficult to say as only 1 participant has been in all sessions. This participant mentioned however that she has started to carry around a yellow item given to her by her children. This was done in response to the symbology attributed to yellow (Oxun) and the identification of this participant with her.

More sessions were advertised for the group (as the other women group did not take off) so there are three more sessions to explore. All participants on the day took note of the dates and showed enthusiasm to attend the next ones.

15/06/07 and 29/06/07

These two sessions were also challenging. All participants had already experienced the sessions before. There were three clients and three members of the staff. For the last session, there was a new participant that did not take part in the session. After talking to her, she mentioned that she did not feel comfortable with the whole project (Oasis), it was not her place to be there and she was in obvious denial. She stayed observing the sessions and at some point she was crying but she did not participate.

The session started with some singing. Although there was some participation in the last session, there was some obvious rejection to the activity. Participants that started singing stopped after a while saying that the song had been sung before and they wanted something different. When this happened, they did not want to sing anymore. In the previous session, participants closed their eyes while the facilitators were singing. Some of them joined in but most of them stayed with the eyes closed.

With regard to the movement session, Oxossi was the god selected for the first session and Oxun for the second. Participants followed the steps although talking to each other. More concentration was experienced in the last workshop. The sequence of activities changed quite quickly. The facilitator moved from the orixa dance to modern dance and some lessons on samba. It was well followed although concentration was fragile.

In the first session, some participants mentioned very openly that they were generally frustrated, angry, tired because of how their week went. The facilitators talked about this and the need to be empowered and take things how they come on the proviso that if one changes their attitude towards difficulties, there is an obvious empowerment. Participants took this on and appreciated the comments.

In the last session, they mentioned that the activity has helped them to be a group, to feel more comfortable amongst themselves, to be more open, as some weight has been left from their shoulders. They took the questionnaire to be filled in and handed in the next session, which will be the last one in this part of the project.

APPENDIX 13 Polina's reflections on separate sessions

Brighton Women's Centre

2/03/07

1. All participants had some singing experience. So I taught a very complicated tune which was still easy for them to learn. They developed the nign musically by splitting into parts, improvising little subparts etc.
2. Because this style of singing and this kind of music were completely new to the group, singing was most free from associations and worked on a very abstract level. Most people were singing with their eyes closed and using the nign as a meditative tool – and this worked!

St. John's session

2/03/07

1. Because of certain abilities of the group, we paid a lot of **attention to detail** when teaching.
2. The group members felt very engaged although sometimes couldn't follow every movement or voice tasks. This makes me think that they mostly respond internally... More happening inside rather than outside.

Open sessions

17/02/07

The session proved again that the workshop were structured in the best possible way. The movement part in general requires a lot of physical and emotional energy. Therefore, in the first half group's energy goes up and reaches it's top by the very end of the dance part when we express ourselves in movement freely. So the calm and meditative singing part balances this back and brings participants via singing meditation to a calm and relaxed state, settling and shaping down all experienced emotions. As far as I remember, the group approved this structure during feedback.

I noticed a lot of free movement around the room while dancing and also a lot of swapping positions between participants.

The Niggunim part: we had quite a few very musical people in the group. So group improvisation worked musically really well. People made parts and harmonies (up to 5-note chords) for a newly learnt nign, allowing less experienced singers to stick with the main melody and to lead. Musical development of the nign was really impressive especially considering that we only sang for 40 minutes altogether.

A lot of attention was paid to the meaning and technique of the "krekhtsn". This is the most characteristic ornament in Jewish music that means something like "a sigh" and brings out greater emotion in music. Apart from emotional side this element also works on physiological level, as it requires a lot of breathing and muscle work when singing.

Feedback part this time was very open and thoughtful. I think Rose's questions really helped to concentrate on how the workshop affected each person, their emotion and creativity. I would suggest that we allow more time for writing feedback forms though so participants would write it down for us as well.

3/03/07

1. The group was very small – only 4 people including the 2 teachers. It changed the angle of the session to more individual work.
2. Feedback was very intimate and deep. We shared most profound spiritual thoughts about what kind of people we were, what we were discovering in ourselves, what we thought needed more work, what broke through our mental blocks and showed itself in movement...
3. VERY GOOD explanation from Rosaria about the gods. She mentioned most human aspects of their symbolism, which allowed participants to make connection with their own life and work on this.
4. Male and female gods created a lot of discussion about our own masculine and feminine parts and their balance...
5. Final group hug on a participant's initiative at the end was significant of opening up and changes inside us... I experienced a profound feeling of accepting the world and myself and people around me...

To be honest, we extended the session by 30-40 minutes as we couldn't stop sharing thoughts and feelings. The session went really well, as we are now really used to the structure and our material so we can play with it and improvise more as workshop leaders.

New elements:

1. In the end of movement part we Rosaria introduced a dance during which we held hands, and each participant had a chance to lead their own little group of people. We didn't have this group connection so early in the session before. It felt really natural. As the group shared later, they felt comfortable with each other as well.

2. In the end of the singing part the group held hands and closed their eyes naturally. Everybody apart from one participant, who then admitted that she liked clear structures and control over things in her life. Her feedback was very deep though. She then sent an e-mail to Rosaria and me saying: "I'm not sure whether this is a 'good' thing or a 'bad' thing but in fact I actually felt very 'peculiar' for the rest of the day, sort of detached from reality and unable to settle to anything - both tired and exhilarated at the same time. In the end I just gave into it and did nothing at all but sat around staring into space (actually very unusual for me!). Altogether an interesting and enjoyable experience - I've actually never done anything like that before."

After 4 days this participant also said: "The more I think about this session, the more I like the experience".

3. We experimented more with moving around this time. During the singing we stood in a circle. I asked participants to turn their backs to the rest and to sing for themselves although still hearing the group's singing and support from behind and see how it affected them. I also put people inside the circle to explore how it felt when the singing is directed to them.

One participant sobbed after the session, but this was not new. We discussed it afterwards, and the participant admitted that getting emotional was a normal reaction for her for opening up, and she really liked it.

To me the general feeling about this session was about depth of human connection and trusting each other. Also, I discovered for myself during the dancing that (I quote what I said at the session) "I don't want to fight in my life anymore", which I think is quite profound.

APPENDIX 14 Rosaria's reflections on separate sessions

Brighton Women's Centre

2/03/07

Also from the logistic point of view, I was a bit concerned by the dimensions of the space as it is not very big. For that reason, I decided to work with Elegua (Exu) as he does not need in principle lots of room.

Participants got into the movement quite quickly. I have to say that I did not have the chance to see how the participants were doing. I myself had a bit of difficulty in getting lost into the moves which I managed to do the third time I played the tune. I found that the energy level was rising though and the space was getting very hot as well as some sort of link growing between the participants.

I was once again surprised by how generous people were in their comments after the dancing session. It has been a constant in every session for people to express what was going on for them. From expressing that they were a bit "spaced out, but happy" to another participant that said that something had been worrying her that day and the session helped her to let it go.

The singing had also special significance for me. It was one of the most difficult niggunim we had sung and at the same time I managed to get into it more than in any other. I found the group very reassuring and comforting and I realised I was reaching a pitch that normally do not reach, without any effort.

I also found the combination between Elegua and the singing especially fruitful as the orixa managed to stir things around allowing the niggun to settle things down, providing more peace and tranquillity to the participants but also being energising.

APPENDIX 15 Letter from St John's Centre with staff feedback

June 2007

Afro-Brazilian dance and Jewish Niggunim in Synergy: personal development with voice and movement

Polina and Rosaria have run 10 Synergy sessions at the St John's centre for older people.

This has been a great, different and fresh experience for the members, something they might not necessarily be exposed to or open to. For the members it has been a freeing opportunity, working as one in a non-competitive, non-judgemental context. It has been a relaxed environment where people have felt free to open up and release suppressed emotions and feelings.

Members have worked individually and as a group, learning niggunims and movements allowing for a different type of expression. Over the sessions the members have become more confident, open to new ideas, something culturally different and their overall performance of the songs and movement has gone from strength to strength.

They have heard stories of the Gods as told by Rosaria and taken on their behaviours and movements in the sessions, beneficial as they have been exercising in a fun, new way. Polina has taught them of the tradition of niggunim and all have sung even those who were not so sure they could sing! Overall it has been an enriching experience and the members are looking forward to them returning to run more groups.

The sessions have evoked lots of memories, for example one member was reminded of her traditional Jewish wedding all those years ago and talked of this with the group.

Other comments from members include :

“The exercises are good, sometimes strenuous but you can go at your own pace.”

“The sessions cheered us up, we enjoyed it.”

“Rhythm means a lot – it reminds me of Indians rowing to the beat of the drum.”

The Synergy experience has been extremely beneficial and therapeutic, as a member of staff I recommend it for all community groups.

Claire Baker Centre Worker