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**Sussex Partnership Trust
Nevill Hospital Project
February - March 2009**

Project Introduction

synergy, is a project initiated in 2006 that delivers movement and singing sessions by Rosaria Gracia in collaboration with composer and musician Polina Shepherd.

synergy aims to assist participants to learn about other cultures, feel better about themselves and reduce isolation as the movement and the singing are rooted on community traditions where the group work is essential for it to be able to develop. Through the teaching of the legends of the orixas from the Candomble and Santeria traditions, translated into movement, and the Jewish Niggunim (wordless songs), the workshops have proved to be a channel for people to help group dynamics, personal and collective self-esteem and to provide the basis for empowerment. **synergy** practitioners continuously research issues around arts and health and community empowerment to ensure that the workshops are safe, well informed and effective.

Benefits of the project (which fall into two categories)

For Participants

It provides:

- An increase of their physical mobility
- A reduction in anxiety, feelings of isolation and depression
- An improvement in general wellbeing
- Tools for empowerment, social skills
- A development in the ability to work as part of a team

For Staff Members

It assists with the:

- Development of their ability to respond better to their clients' needs,
- Establishment of better relations with their clients
- Training in delivering sessions using the arts as major vehicle, to reproduce the materials from the sessions contributing towards the sustainability of the project and its outcomes



Rosaria Gracia, Co-founder and Coordinator

Synergy

www.synergyarts.org.uk/ www.rosaria-gracia.com

telephone: 07779 002983 email: Rosaria.gracia@googlemail.com

The sessions develop around trust, confidentiality and humour, and are delivered in a non intrusive manner. Participants have reported that the sessions are more enriching than what they have experienced before and they feel they want to know more and work more with the different techniques offered.

Delivery

The project was delivered in 7 weekly sessions by Polina Shepherd and Rosaria Gracia. Sessions were programmed for 1 ½ hours at a time convenient for practitioners, client group and hospital staff.

Originally it was thought that the sessions could lead to a public performance with the permission of the participants. This did not take place. In some cases, the workshops have worked best when they were only treated as weekly sessions. The prospects of a performance can jeopardise the security of the space so it needs to be considered. In this particular project it was felt that the group was just starting to come together as an unit and the pressure of preparing a performance at the end could have damaged the development of the sessions.

Sessions' Observations

Session 1 _ 11/02/09

Three participants attended plus two occupational therapists. The participants belonged to different wards and had different needs.

The session consisted on warm up and 2 gentle movement routines, tea/coffee break and singing session. A total of 1 ½ was utilized.

First of all, there was a desire to participate from the clients! All the movements were done **sitting down**. This was obviously the right decision otherwise the participants would have got tired very soon. **Storytelling and explanations** about the cultures and traditions being introduced both in the dance and the singing parts went well and with full attention from the group.

Movement observations

The male participant was very enthusiastic about the music and the singing. His coordination requires work. Once he trespasses his original excitement he is more able to follow the instructions although he loses concentration quickly. He is nevertheless enthusiastic and seems to enjoy the session.

Female participant 1 suffers from depression. It was highly encouraging to see her smile during the session. She follows instructions well although she does not use much energy. She seems to prefer slower moves and less energetic activities.



Female participant 2 did not show any signal in her facial expressions. She arrived late but stayed for the length of the session. She followed the instructions perfectly.

Notes from next session

Extend the movement part of the session but build up more gently the energetic component.

Singing observations

Good voices, people were able to **remember a short tune** (2 sections with repeats) by ear and sing it back.

Tea break in the middle worked well and was adopted for the rest of the course.

Session 2_18/02/09

One participant attended plus one occupational therapist. He became our most regular attendant and never missed a session.

The session followed a similar structure to the previous one.

The male participant worked hard to repeat all the movements but did well. We've noticed that he was more capable of **mirroring** Rosaria's movement rather than following explanations and do it using the same side as her. He was much more physically active this time. It's difficult to say though whether it was because he felt better or because all our attention was on him...

It was decided to try a **different room** next time as the present one was too small and too intimate and also not very easy to leave if people felt like it. So to give participants more freedom, we decided it was better to move to the TV room next to the dining room, which was bigger, lighter and had a piano.

Movement observations

The male participant showed signals of better coordination. It was observed that he mirrors the movement so I need to sit down opposite to him at the next session.

He was a bit pressurized as he was the only participant but he still joined with all the exercises. He also felt quite confident to talk about his life.

The session introduced the exploration of body organs. This week was the heart - related to OGUN, and the story of the strawberry field was told. Exercises to open the heart followed.

The session included more facial expressions and the participant responded well to it. He was much better at following and his physical openness has considerably improved.



The OT reported that he has been more active in other activities during the week.

Notes for next week

Continue with the exploration of different parts of the body and storytelling, have a defined choreography and have more specific divisions of the warming up, development and cool down of the session.

Singing observations

The male participant remembered us from the first session and also remembered the tune we'd learned. He sung with **pleasure, occasionally smiling and making good non-verbal contact** with the rest of us. Because he had a lot of attention from us and was the only one in the room, he had a chance to **share his memories** and thoughts and told us about singing in pubs and how much he used to enjoy it. We learnt another tune this time, a whole song with 2 sections.

Session 3_25/02/09

Big group including two of our previous participants. Movement was met with curiosity and interest. Most participants followed Rosaria all the way through the session taking short rest and doing to the best of their abilities. It was important to have an **element of entertainment** in the sessions, participants showed a lot of curiosity in the material being taught and personally in the tutors too.

Good rhythmical and emotional response to music that was played during the dance part. As we were getting through the session and more familiar to the members of the group, people started to make comments about what we were doing, some of them quite intellectual. Rosaria's story about an Afro-Brazilian goddess was met with perfect attention and interest and also gave participants some time to rest. Good reaction to the story.

We mentioned every time that participants **were free to leave** and come back or not any time they wanted. So whoever stayed did it **voluntarily**. A couple of people would usually leave half the way through the session, some came back, and some didn't. Most people stayed through sessions.

Movements observations

Six participants attended and three OTs were also present. The session took place in a larger room.

The session followed similar structure to previous sessions. The main topic was inspired by the movement of "small intestine" making numerous "eight" shapes as well as circular movements.



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Synergy

www.synergyarts.org.uk/ www.rosaria-gracia.com

telephone: 07779 002983 email: Rosaria.gracia@gmail.com

The movement evolved from the feet going up to the rest of the body and concluded going down.

Participants followed well but energy seemed low.

Notes for next week

Need to focus more on the Afro-Brazilian component of the sessions as it seems that the music and the stories lift the spirits and participants join better. The facilitator reflected that she seemed to be more distracted guided by individual needs rather than trying to engage the whole group. This needs to be watched over the next session.

Singing observations

In the singing part we sung again the 2 songs we'd done in the first 2 sessions with smaller groups. Most new participants **were able to repeat the tunes** phrase by phrase. Learning went well although the material was very different to any kind of music these people hear in everyday life. At the end of the session one new patient joined and the whole group ended with 'performing' our 2 songs to her. Really enjoyable session with good energy.

Session 4_040309

Less people this time but the two original participants were there. In the beginning, there was **low energy and tired faces** in the group (it was a very gray day too!) but it **completely changed** after the session: we finished with **lots of positive energy and satisfied faces**.

Very good comments were made by participants that showed us that we were **gaining their trust**.

We **discussed together our future plans** for next sessions. This helped participants to **feel included** and to bring the group together.

Familiarity of the material was important too. I would say, about 50 per cent new should be balanced with 50 per cent old material in a session.

Rosaria developed a '**dance routine**', which really worked. People were repeating Rosaria's directions aloud: **verbal memory helped visuals**; this was obviously very helpful to some of the group.

Movement observations

There were four participants and one OT in addition to the facilitators. Two new people joined in.

The session focused on work with the upper body and participants reacted well to it. There was some mention that it was hard but they seemed to enjoy the music and they followed the instructions at all times.

They reacted well at the repetition of the routine.



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Notes for next week

There needs to be more exercises for the lower part of the body and continue with the repetition of the routine as well as with the Afro-Brazilian element. Some standing work should be encouraged and the use of the paraglide should be added at the end of the session.

Singing observations

Same principle of familiarity in the singing part was used and nothing new was introduced this time. The new element was that an electric piano was used to accompany the songs, and everyone reacted really well to this. One of the participants commented that the sound was richer and songs more expressive.

Session 5_ 110309

Very large group: 9/10 participants (including the two original participants), 2 OTs, 1 trainee. One woman spent the whole session complaining about the noise and with her eye closed but she still stayed until the very end! **Everybody else participated most of the time**, occasionally taking short rests.

Everybody followed the movement as much as they physically could. Movements were immediately adjusted to people's abilities. Some of the participants invented (or just happened to be doing) something else, and this was taken on board and incorporated into the rest: **sharing ideas!**

For some of the patients, Synergy has become their social activity, regular entertainment, familiar and exiting and something to look forward to. They also had their preferences: some were leaning towards singing and some were more responsive to movement.

This time the male participant (the only one) was successfully differentiating between doing a movement with both or separate feet at a time. He has learnt that this is something to watch for and now was **gaining results!**

There was **better level of concentration** this time and also some jokes, laughter, more **non-verbal communication through movement and voice.**

Movement observations

There were nine participants in total with three OT present.

The movement session evolved as usual from a gently warm up, working specially on the lower part of the body and including some exercises for the upper part. All participants joined in at their own tempo and even responded well to a faster sequence of movements.

One participant that was not sure about the movement part (as she was more interested in the singing) joined in at intervals and did not come back for the singing after the break.



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Participants seemed to be more relaxed in their own bodies, more responsive to instructions and more smiley.

Notes for next week

Deepen on the Afro-Brazilian side of storytelling, more upbeat music and use of the parachute.

Singing observations

A new tune was taught, a faster one with two sections again. It is more **difficult to hold attention after the group has worked hard on movement but changing tasks** helped. Although the sessions were planned to be 1,5 hours each, it was obvious that **an hour** with a break would be this groups' absolute maximum. We did quite a lot of **clapping** with the new song. It's interesting, that there was **no problem with the sense of rhythm** when singing an enthusiastic tune! Finished with the very first and the most familiar tune.

Session 6_180309

The biggest group ever. 12 people in the beginning, and then one left. It seems like the word has spread round slowly and only now people are really willing to try something new. Unfortunately, **this is as long as it takes to really build up some relationship with a group like this and it would be right to start stretching participants to more beneficial tasks and exercises.**

One of the original participants, the female, was on good form: faster movements and took part in absolutely everything.

The movements were **much faster** this time and everyone survived the tempo really well.

There was finally a **sense of community** amongst us. We talked about things during and after the session and got to know each other better.

Movement observations

Twelve participants took part in the session with one OT. The OT made reference at the beginning of the session that whoever wanted to leave the room during the session was free to do so. Only one participant left almost at the end of the session.

The movement session consisted on warming up from feet up and down using 30s /40s music to which participants reacted very well. This followed up exercises to work with the gallbladder (cutting shapes) and participants also followed the instructions well. The regular routine followed with Afro-Brazilian music and it provoked few giggles.

Some stretching was done before the coffee break. The parachute was used at the end of the singing session to accompany the pieces learned. It was felt that



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it was a good addition and all participants joined in (apart from one) in a playful manner.

Notes for next week

Wrap up what it has been learned over the last six weeks doing exercises for the heart, liver, small and large intestine and gallbladder within the context of the Afro-Brazilian storytelling.

Repeat the routine and use the parachute to finish with.

Singing observations

The singing part went well and nothing new was introduced. We went through all of our tunes this time, which everyone remembered well. With the OTs singing in parts, we sounded like a choir. Rosaria brought a bright silky parachute. Whilst I was playing the piano, we were sitting in a circle holding the parachute and moving it together with singing our melodies. This worked as a connecting tool for the group and also encouraged participants to more even more that they'd done in the beginning.

THIS PUT TOGETHER MOVEMENT AND SINGING bringing these people as close to a dance party as it probably could get!

Session 7_ 250309

It was a summary of everything learned in these sessions.

Movement observations

There were 6 participants and 1 OT. The class started in a somehow disruptive way with one of the residents wanted to watch TV. It was an unusual start but the participants got into the session and the new comer also joined in.

It was appreciable that all participants followed the moves and the instructions in their own speed. Some of them attempted to do it straight away while others copy the moves by looking first and executed them later.

For all those participants that attended a series of sessions, the ability to move, to speed up and to follow the instructions considerably improved.

General comments

- 1. It is important to develop a group feeling before starting to really work on things. A 10 or even 15 week course (maybe with a break on the middle) would be more appropriate.*
- 2. Participants' reaction was overall positive and enthusiastic.*
- 3. The fact that the material is not familiar to most people has a positive effect rather than scaring people away, which was an concern at the beginning of the project. They like hearing about other cultures and still find something familiar in them - a family memory, a piece of music (somebody mentioned the musical*



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«The Fiddler on the Roof' probably, because of the Jewish theme), singing in a pub when being young etc...

4. Freedom to leave and not to do anything are the best tools to keep people in and doing things!

5. Even people with very poor physical and mental abilities joined in and kept coming back.

6. The element of entertainment and social interaction is as important as the content of the sessions.

7. Participants' attention and abilities changed through the course. We can't say that it is to do purely with the dancing and singing work we've done with them but a lot of it depends on familiarity of the tutors and the content plus their responsible decision to come and stay and join.

Evaluation Meeting 10409

The OT team was highly congratulatory of the work and they are happy to support the project to deliver more sessions in other wards at the hospital, not only the ones we worked with but also looking at the expansion to the ward with dementia patients. This delivery is of course subject to funding.

In general, it was appreciated that the group gave a sense of community and reduced isolation. This vibe was echoed after the session when people socialised. Some of the comments from patient's comments were: the 'singing was beautiful,' 'I really liked it and I will go next week.'

Another comment was that the room filled with laughter at times, people felt connected to each other. They enjoyed being with others and responded well.

The power of the music brought people together and formed a feeling of trust. The dancing and singing increasingly became spontaneous for some people. All the activities were engaging. People responded more when the group grew and the sessions increased levels of communication between people. Coordination also improved for some people, as the sessions continued. The positive use of repetition made people feel comforted.

On a more personal note, the sessions also triggered memories for some people. The reach of those memories is difficult to measure or the effect that it has on the individual

On a constructive note, people who had reduced energy (some suffering from depression) seemed very tired by the end of the session. It may be an idea to reduce the length of the singing, for this client group. On the same note the singing was quite tiring because as one patient said, it was 'intense.'



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As a general comment, though, it was highlighted that the sessions are memorable. This is known due to patients still talking about it two weeks later.



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