

## Research Summary, 2019-207 B.R.O.A.D.

Two researchers from the University of Central Lancashire conducted an observational study of a pilot dance and forum theatre programme called 'Building Resilience and Overcoming Adversity through Dance & Drama' (BROAD), designed for vulnerable groups in prisons, secure children's centres and secure hospitals. This was carried out at HMP Lancaster Farms, a Category C resettlement male prison, over 2½ days. (9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2019). For comparative purposes the programme was also observed in a Local Authority Secure Unit (Lincolnshire Secure Unit, Sleaford) and a care home for young people (a Care4Children facility in Calderdale). The workshop was also delivered at Forest Bank prison, but the researchers did not observe the delivery. Odd Arts, who have been delivering forum theatre-based work in prison and youth custody settings for many years, partnered with dance organisation Company Chameleon. The programme combines forum theatre and dance, and uses non violent communication, strengths-based and trauma-informed approaches, all within a restorative practice framework. The programme aims to:

- Improve communication and self-esteem, thus reducing risk of violence and harmful behaviours
- Improve mental health and overcome the barriers caused by adversity
- Increase resilience and wellbeing

### Research aims and approach

The main research aim was to identify opportunities for improvement in programme delivery and explain how the programme aids communication, self-esteem and enhances wellbeing in offenders and young adults in care and custody. The focus of the research is on the programme facilitators as they deliver the workshop to participants. The researchers observed the workshops and interviewed the staff running the workshop sessions. The research questions were:

- How is the programme delivery established and sustained through challenging moments?
- What are the conditions in which insight, emotional engagement and reflective capacity are achieved, and where are they limited?
- Which behaviours and activities best facilitate engagement with the programme by the participants?

To fulfil this aim the researchers:

- observed, noted and tracked the process of the programme as it unfolded in detail,
- provided feedback to facilitators,
- identified outcomes of the programme.

The researchers used a peer-reviewed observational and participant observational methodology previously used in secure settings (Froggett, Kelly-Corless & Manley, 2019), to document what occurred in the workshops and how it occurred. This involved collecting detailed observational data with manual process recording in notebooks during sessions,

and immediately after the sessions. Notes were compared, analysed and then presented to the facilitators as feedback. The subsequent

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analysis generated explanatory hypotheses designed to qualitatively evaluate and account for the effectiveness or otherwise of the dance- forum theatre model.

The focus of the observations were:

- the content of the workshops,
- the effectiveness of the workshops at engaging and supporting the participant group,
- the skills and methods of the facilitators.

As evidence of the above the researchers considered:

- The observed ability of the facilitators to work as a team in the workshop to produce communicative, self-reflective and accomplished sessions and a final performance before an audience.
- Skills developed in the workshops that might usefully support interpersonal communication, performative confidence and hence employment prospects (as exhibited in the workshop and in the final performance).

Before workshop delivery, the researchers introduced themselves and the research verbally to the participants, and asked them to carefully read the research information and data privacy notice we provided, and sign a consent form, retained by the staff member on duty. We explained the research information and answered questions. The researchers then took part in the physical warm-up exercises with the rest of the group to make participants comfortable with their presence.

### About the BROAD workshop

Odd Arts and Company Chameleon provided four facilitators to work with small groups of up to 8 participants. Participants are engaged in creative and physical active tasks in groups which facilitate self and group reflection on violence and self-harm related experiences, which participants voluntarily share in workshop discussions. The workshop involves a series of movement and drama-based exercises punctuated by discussions about relationships, feelings and emotional self-management in challenging situations. The exercises and discussions encourage teamwork, self and group awareness, and communication, and are adapted to the abilities of the group. After warm-up exercises which heighten attentiveness, reaction times and teamwork, the participants are introduced to some basic dance moves and invited to express different emotions through them. For example, one group performed frustration at not being listened to, which then turned into a short piece of choreography depicting how two people began to talk to one another more effectively. Another group individually depicted the different negative outcomes of excessive alcohol and drug use: drug withdrawal, being penniless, drunkenness and aggression. After displaying these using only their bodies they then changed to different poses and positions

depicting different hobbies as alternative ways to spend their money and time happily. At all times the facilitators gave positive encouragement and made suggestions about how to improve dance moves and acting.

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## Key Findings

Reducing violence and self-harm was targeted in three ways:

1. Exercises and activities with gradually increasing levels of difficulty. These developed participants' self-confidence and willingness to do more challenging work.
2. In reflective discussions, where facilitators provided participants with alternative frameworks of thinking informed by trauma-informed and non-violent communication approaches.
3. Enjoyable and supportive physical and expressive activities focussed on the expression of thoughts and feelings about violence and self-harm related issues.

The participants were meaningfully engaged in working on their own difficult and challenging experiences which, left unexplored, may contribute to violence and other harmful behaviours. These included trust in relationships, addiction, and anxiety. Performances depicted anger and other violence-related emotions and their effective management to a positive resolution, for example supportive friendships. In another example participants performed anxiety using dance and acting, followed by tension and then relaxation.

Insight and reflective capacity were achieved in group discussions which followed physical and creative activities. Dance combined with theatre supported the discussion of emotional self management in situations with a risk of violence. The dramatic and dance elements of the programme were seamlessly combined to provide participants with a rewarding format to address and work on these issues. In discussions participants were introduced to simple frameworks to understand their own behaviour in challenging situations. This was done in a natural, conversational style. Participants used these frameworks in their discussions and used dance and acting to portray the challenging experiences of violence and harmful behaviours, their negative consequences, and alternative, non violent outcomes. Programme activities allowed for the safe expression of previous adverse experiences and developed in participants the ability to seek alternative modes of self-expression and action when under pressure.

Programme delivery was sustained through challenging moments. On the first afternoon of the workshop the attention of the group faltered when two new participants joined the group. The facilitators provided one-to-one support to new participants whilst encouraging existing participants to regain their focus after their lunch break. On the final day of the workshop a

participant was moved to another prison and was replaced by a new participant with no knowledge of the small group's planned performance. This created some anxiety within the group about how they could still achieve a good final performance without them. The new participant was supported one-to-one by a facilitator and other members of the group so that they could play their part in the final performance. At HMP Lancaster Farms the final group performance was attended by the Deputy Governor and a prison officer.

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### Implications for HMPPS decision makers

By focusing on dance combined with forum theatre as a model, the process of the programme, and the indicative outcomes for the participant group as a whole, this research can inform the effective and cost-effective use of HMPPS resources for reducing violence and other harmful behaviours in prisons, young offenders institutions and community rehabilitation settings. The pilot is small scale and establishes that a larger longitudinal study on outcomes for participants, assessed qualitatively and quantitatively, would be worthwhile.

The research indicates that in deciding which programmes to invest in to improve offender and youth custody outcomes, the BROAD programme should not only be considered as a creative arts offer, but a value-added alternative to purely talk-based therapeutic programmes, and also sport, because it includes physical activity, acting and the discussion of issues related to violence and self

harm. Participants gain exercise and have to work together, as in team sports; but they also think about and work on how they deal with challenging situations which can lead to violence and self-harm.

In our application we referred to two of the HM Inspectorate of Prisons 'Healthy Prison Tests': Safety ('Managing behaviour'), and Purposeful activity ('Education, skills and work activities' and 'Time out of cell'). We refer to these here in clarifying the implications of this research for HMPPS decision makers.

### Safety: Managing Behaviour

HMPPS Identified priority: work to reduce the incidences of self-harm and the rate of self-inflicted deaths and violence in prisons.

The BROAD programme progressively increased participants' confidence, self-esteem and communication skills. In so doing it directly addresses individual and group modes of thinking and feeling which influence self-harm and violence. The programme's creative approach to working on participants' experiences of violence and situations leading to violence, and positive encouragement and reinforcement of participants' work on this issue, supports the Youth Custody Service's Behaviour Management Strategy, "to reduce violence and improve

safety outcomes for children, young people and staff’.

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## Purposeful Activity (Expectations 71, 72.3 and 72.4 of the Healthy Prisons

### Test) Expectation 71:

The BROAD programme is a creative activity which promotes learning, well-being, supports rehabilitation and improves physical health. It involves participants reflecting upon their lives and social responsibilities. As an artistic and cultural experience the BROAD programme could enhance the prison environment, making it more conducive to rehabilitation, because it creates a safe environment where personal change can occur.

### Expectation 72.3:

The BROAD programme content and process involves prisoners in exploring personal, social and ethical issues in a containing and supportive group with experienced facilitators. This promotes positive personal development and behaviour. Participants took pride in the challenging work of the BROAD programme, becoming more self-confident. Participants’ success in completing the workshop demonstrates to them that they can be successful learners on their future courses.

### Expectation 72.4:

The BROAD programme provides an accessible entry point to creative-based activity with an adjustable level of challenge to produce a sense of achievement. Facilitators recognised the achievements of the participants by awarding them with ASDAN Expressive Arts Award certificates at the end of the workshop.

## Conclusion

Based on this case study, the Odd Arts/Company Chameleon programme is an intervention that can trigger and motivate participants to make positive changes in their perception and behaviour. The Odd Arts and Company Chameleon facilitators are able to create a safe, holding and enriching environment in which creativity and changes can occur. A longitudinal evaluation of outcomes for participants in a programme of longer duration and in contrasting sites would support a more robust conclusion (we recommend two iterations in each site).

Odd Arts/Company Chameleon intend to offer prisons, youth care and custody settings longer duration programmes with qualifications, which can have a greater and sustained impact on violence and other harmful behaviours.

### Contact information

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