

Building a future...An exploration of the contribution of educational provision to clients' well-being at Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers

Part 1 gardening and storytelling

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Introduction

Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers (SDCAS) works towards the relief of the poverty and distress of asylum seekers and refugees, and the promotion of health, well-being, and education. The organisation provides a wide range of holistic services from three sites in which to overcome social and economic disadvantage, improve lifestyle chances, and provide opportunities to build resilience throughout the asylum process.

We believe that our holistic programme plays a vital role in reducing isolation for those asylum seekers and refugees experiencing high levels of marginalisation. Our programme aims to prevent further destitution and provides various pathways for asylum seekers to engage, combat loneliness and stress, boost mood, skills, and confidence at a time when it is most needed. Clients are able to enjoy a meal, share stories, celebrate, improve language skills, work on our allotments, be creative and take part in our art sessions, join a mindfulness and relaxation session or just connect with others over a cup of tea. This all forms part of the programme each week at our centres - helping uplift spirits and aid integration.

This research is part 1 of a research project exploring the contribution of the educational provision within SDCAS to the well-being of clients. The report is focused on the gardening and story-telling sessions. The research explores the contributions that gardening and storytelling make to the well-being of clients along with some constructive feedback to help us improve how we deliver in future. Research helps us to ensure that we are providing educational provision that meets the very particular needs of our clients.

This research project was started in 2018 and concluded before the start of the Covid19 crisis. At the time of publication there is, due to Coronavirus regulations, no educational provision taking place in any centres. However we hope to resume as soon as practicable and safe.

Thanks to everyone who contributed to this study.

Pauline Nando

Director SDCAS

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Introduction

This research project builds on previous research (Cogo, Inman, McCormack, Rogers 2018) which focussed on how clients at Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers (SDCAS) understood and evaluated their wellbeing. We used the understanding of wellbeing outlined in our previous research project, an understanding which was developed from work done by Dodge et al (2012) and Michaelson et al (2012) for The New Economics Foundation (NEF). Dodge used a dynamic representation of well-being where she depicts well-being as a see saw where one end has the psychological, physical and social resources balanced against the psychological, physical and social challenges at the other end. The NEF definition of well-being enabled us to have a deeper understanding of well-being as comprising feelings, functioning, personal resources and external conditions.

“Well-being can be understood as how people feel and how they function, both on a personal and a social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole. To break this down, how people feel refers to emotions such as happiness or anxiety. How people function refers to things such as their sense of competence or their sense of being connected to those around them. How people evaluate their life as a whole is captured in their satisfaction with their lives, or how they rate their lives in comparison with the best possible life.” (Michaelson et al 2012 p.6).

One of the areas we had touched on in ‘Beneath the Surface’ was the role of educational activities in developing the wellbeing of clients. In discussion with the SDCAS Director it was decided that it would be useful to do some more in depth research on ways in which the educational provision offered in the centre contributed to the well-being of clients and how this contribution might be enhanced. This first report focuses on how two areas of education provision - gardening and storytelling contribute to the well-being of clients. Our intention in the second part of the research is to focus on other educational activities offered by the centre.

A number of studies have focused on the mental health benefits of storytelling. Recent research demonstrates (Camplejohn 2019) how storytelling can be used to create a positive atmosphere and community feeling, and in some cases even psychological healing, when used in English language classes. Camplejohn (2019) demonstrates that refugees taking part in storytelling in refugee camps in Austria, Greece and Jordan, benefitted in terms of learning English and other academic skills, and also showed psychological benefits by bringing participants together and allowing them to share their experiences. Camplejohn’s (2019) study also reflects on the importance of the formation of a group dynamic as a key first step in creating a storytelling group. The teacher’s personal knowledge of the students and a mutual sense of trust that is developed over time are important to create the appropriate context for storytelling to be effective.

Telling stories was also used with African refugees to promote psychological well-being (Goodkind et al 2014) and to bring communities together, as in the Storytelling Project (Bell 2010). In this project, Bell used storytelling as a cross-cultural method to access and share different cultural experiences, clarify misunderstandings about different cultural backgrounds and develop social support for refugees.

While the previous research on storytelling focuses on communities of refugees, the studies around gardening tend to be more general. Well-being has been the focus of a number of studies which investigated the benefits of allotment gardening (Genter et al 2015), which is the basis for the type of gardening that takes place at the centre Genter et al (2015) systematic review of literature, which looked at the impact of group and therapeutic allotment gardening in particular, concluded that allotment gardening does indeed have a positive impact on health and wellbeing. Soga et al (2017) undertook research in Tokyo using a questionnaire in which 332 people self-reported their health outcomes associated with allotment gardening compared to those who were not gardeners. When socio-demographic and lifestyle differences were taken into account the research revealed that 'allotment gardeners, compared to non-gardeners, reported better perceived general health, subjective health complaints, mental health and social cohesion' (Soga et al 2017 p.1). The researchers concluded that involvement in urban allotment gardening could have great potential to prevent and alleviate healthcare issues.

Dunnett and Qasim (2000) carried out research in Sheffield looking at the perceived benefits to well-being provided by the urban gardens of British cities. In their research urban gardens consisted of private gardens and allotments which took up 15.6% of the urban green space in Sheffield. Their research showed that 'the value of gardens to the people who use them goes far beyond pure utilitarian uses. The garden also has considerable emotional, psychological, healing and even spiritual values for many people' (Dunnett and Qasim 2000 p.45). A great deal of the benefit appeared to come from the contact with nature and with the cultivation and care of plants. The activities which people undertook varied, it was not just the physical activity which participants perceived as beneficial, just being in the garden and relaxing was also seen as having a positive effect on well-being.

Aims of the research

- To explore in what ways the education classes provided at SDCAS contribute to the well-being of clients
- To identify educational good practice in relation to contributing to the well-being of clients
- To make some recommendations as to how educational provision can further enhance the contribution made to the well-being of clients

Overview

The research attempted to explore in what ways the education classes provided at SDCAS contribute to the well-being of clients. Initially we made a distinction between provision focussed on skill development and provision with a therapeutic focus and thought that we would choose activities that fell into one or the other. However, it soon became clear that any such distinction was not useful in that all educational provision in a centre for asylum seekers and refugees would inevitably have a therapeutic element. Alongside this realisation practicalities such as client availability and times of educational sessions began to dictate our choice of activities to research and we ended up focussing on gardening and storytelling for the first part of the research.

Methodology

We adopted a qualitative methodology with an emphasis on understanding and honouring the participants' own words as generative of meaning and knowledge. The experience of our previous research with clients (Inman and Rogers 2015, Cogo et al 2018) confirmed our belief that accessing this complex set of understandings and experiences will be best achieved through a qualitative approach. The methodology attempted to be participative in that the focus and methods were partly shaped by the participants' perceptions and understandings as the research progressed. The research comprised of the following stages:

Stage 1: Work with staff/volunteers in a staff development session where we discussed and agreed the areas of provision that might best yield useful data on the contribution of education to well-being. We also identified staff/volunteers happy to help coordinate interviews etc.

Stage 2: Gathering the data

- Observation of classes to enable us to understand the context for interviews and how the activities contributed to well-being. The observations took place before interviews were conducted.
- One to one interviews with clients, wherever possible, two members of the research team conducting each interview.
- One to one interviews with tutors leading the gardening and storytelling sessions

Stage 3: Analysis of data

Stage 4: Conclusions and recommendations

The participants

Eleven clients and three members of staff took part in the research into gardening and storytelling. They were selected from across all three of the SDCAS centres. Three female clients were interviewed for the gardening project and two for storytelling. Three male clients were interviewed for gardening, and three for storytelling. We interviewed two staff members for gardening and one for storytelling.

The interviews

We conducted interviews between July 2018 and April 2019. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Centre staff and/or volunteers approached clients initially and those that agreed to be interviewed were largely self-selecting. It was not always easy to find clients to interview as clients were understandably prioritising accessing help and advice and we had to work around this. The clients we interviewed were often those who had the confidence to talk with us and the ability to communicate in English but it was evident during interviews that they were speaking not just for themselves but on behalf of the other clients.

In the interviews with clients we asked about

- their backgrounds and what brought them to SDCAS
- why they have chosen to do gardening or storytelling and any experience of such activity in the past
- what they like/ dislike about gardening or storytelling, what they might get from it in terms of physical, psychological and social benefits
- skill development and building on the experience
- their evaluation of the learning and teaching and the quality of the tutor
- ideas for improvements and further development

(See interview schedule in Appendix 1)

In the interviews with staff we asked about

- their backgrounds and experience
- the aims of the provision
- how they plan and organise sessions
- what they think clients get from the sessions
- difficulties and challenges

(See interview schedule in Appendix 2)

The contexts for the research

Gardening

Gardening is offered at two of the Centres on different days – Peckham and Copleston. Sessions usually last 2-3 hours. At Peckham there is an outside space which is big enough to grow plants and vegetables and to construct raised beds and supports for larger vegetables, for example, squashes and pumpkins. At Copleston there is very little gardening space on site but SDCAS does have an allotment which is ten minutes' walk away and part of a number of allotments rented by local residents in Camberwell. Clients vary in their commitment to the gardening sessions, many are regular attenders whilst others have a more casual approach. There could be up to twenty clients across the two centres in any one week.

The staffing of the gardening provision is uneven. There is currently (January 2020) no funding for a permanent member of staff so the provision depends on a combination of paid staff on short term project based contracts and volunteers. During the course of the research there was a paid tutor but the funding ended shortly after the research. Some of the clients have taken over responsibility for the running of the garden.

There is an explicit philosophy underpinning the gardening. The tutor and project coordinator we interviewed were clear that the gardening aims to enable clients to do a number of things:

- Develop a range of gardening skills
- Share skills with others
- Share stories about gardening in the countries they have come from
- Feel a sense of peace and happiness and a time to forget their 'troubles'
- Use the gardening as a place of healing

From our observations, see examples in boxes 1 and 2, clients do a range of things in the gardening sessions:

- Plant and look after flowers, herbs and vegetables
- Harvest food grown and share with others
- Build structures for plants and vegetables e.g. pumpkins
- Tell stories of home, journeys etc.
- Talk with each other and share knowledge and experience
- Engage in tutor led discussions about gardening topics such as the use of plants for medicinal purposes
- Make things from the flowers. For example cards and plant containers



IMAGE 1: Copleston - raised beds created by clients

Gardening observations at Copleston Centre 19 June 2018

Copleston working in the small patch in front of the church. Mostly watering, weeding and planting. A clear focus on gardening skills throughout. Only 3 clients but all very engaged – G and Ch and B. G is an experienced gardener who can also build garden structures, he spoke very highly of the tutor and talked about the therapeutic qualities of gardening- it makes him calm when he is angry or depressed. Ch talked about making lavender oil and spoke about the connection between gardening, making oils and making good health. They talked about how the sessions were organised and run.

Gardening observations at Peckham Centre 4 July 2018

Activities observed: GD set to watering the herb and flower patch while the tutor and a volunteer (JD) devised a structure to support the squash plants which are spreading over the fruit bushes. The coordinator also appeared with 2 more clients. Two women who had planted flowers in that patch picked mint. They came to the garden to chat to each other and collect mint to use at home for tea.

Storytelling

Storytelling is offered once a week at the Copleston centre. It runs after lunch on a Tuesday for roughly one and a half hours. There are usually between 8-15 clients in the group. The group is run by an experienced psychiatrist who gives his services as a volunteer. The sessions are based on stories from literature and drama chosen by the tutor. The stories (see example handout IMAGE 2) are usually summarised versions of classics e.g. Shakespeare, Greek mythology which are printed for the clients. Clients then read the stories together helping each other with English or translating from other languages. As they go along they discuss the themes that are emerging from the story. Themes discussed include revenge, betrayal, modern slavery, forgiveness and generosity, treachery and love, honour killings and rape.

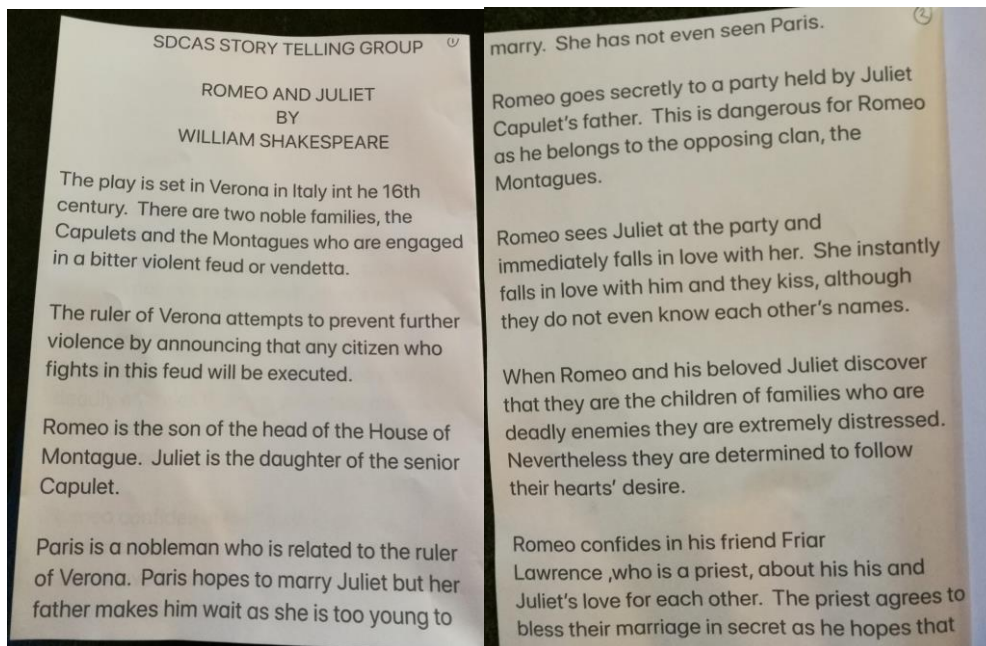


IMAGE 2: Handout for Romeo and Juliet

From our observations and the interview with the tutor the sessions aim to enable clients to do a number of things:

- Improve their spoken and written English
- Develop their listening skills
- Understand something of some of the 'classic' mostly Western literature such as Shakespeare as requested by clients
- Share understandings and skills with each other
- Relate the stories to their own cultures and experiences and discuss current issues and problems in a safe environment
- Read aloud in a second language
- Translate into home languages
- Develop empathy with people from very different cultures

Like gardening there is an explicit philosophy underpinning the storytelling. The tutor is clear that it is not group therapy but rather provides a safe space where clients can talk about important and sometimes distressing issues through the distancing of the story. The tutor endeavours to ensure that everyone understands the story, sometimes using other clients to help this process. Whilst the learning of English is important it is not the prime aim of sessions and the tutor rarely intervenes whilst a client is reading unless they are visibly struggling.

Observation of storytelling session -The Taming of the Shrew 23 October 2018

At the beginning of the session the tutor explained the two meanings of the word 'shrew'. He also explained why many plays were set in Italy, as it was very fashionable. Padua had the oldest medical school in Europe. He also explained the pronunciation of the names. He used photographs of scenes from the play and clothes that rich people dressed in at that time.

Activities observed: client M started reading the first paragraph. The tutor recapped and explained the meaning of the sentences. He also translated into French for a woman who joined the group at this point. Client A continues to read and again. The tutor explains what the paragraphs mean. A volunteer then reads. Also the French-speaking woman wants to read and copes very well. The tutor then poses the question about the moral of the story. The French-speaking woman explains in French to the tutor who then translates into English.

Observation of storytelling session - Othello 27th November 2018

9 clients, some regular members of the group. Focus on Othello. Translating by clients into Arabic and Farsi with one client translating into Arabic as he spoke. The author explains how stories can have universal themes. Clients take different parts and really get into the play lots of laughter and engagement. Fascinating that the handkerchief becomes central to the group- clients seem relaxed and feeling good about themselves, confident in their contributions. A discussion recalling the plays they have done and discussing the gender of the heroes and villains. Discussion of similar stories in different cultures- discussed the stoning to death of a woman accused of adultery in Iran.

The Findings

Why do clients choose gardening and storytelling?

Gardening

The choice to do gardening was not always deliberate, at times the reason to take part seemed almost accidental:

Over the summer...like for instance on a Wednesday, it's so hot in the building that people just naturally come out the back, and when they are out the back they see us...like there were sometimes this summer we were like out the back doing stuff...there were twenty people out doing stuff...like digging, putting soil in pots, like picking raspberries. Tutor Gardening

Once the clients had made their first visit to a gardening session they kept coming back. It is clear from the extracts below that clients we interviewed were motivated to continue to come to the gardening sessions for a number of reasons. Client C, appears to feel a definite sense of achievement and that she is valued because of her contribution to the gardening activities.

That's some of the ideas I gave to them. "C showed me how to do that", that makes me happy. Client C

And G likewise shares a sense of achievement but this time through winning the Camberwell allotment competition. But G also gains more, he enjoys the sense of being busy, being occupied, he meets people and he has an opportunity to discuss and share his ideas:

My life have been good and meeting other people, exchanging ideas, doing something. And I have learnt a lot and latterly because of the way we are doing we managed to come number one (with their allotment) in Camberwell'
Client G

Storytelling

Many clients seem to have taken an initial positive step in choosing to engage with the storytelling sessions as a way of improving their English. But they also come to listen to the stories:

I usually come here to listen to some stories and I'm here to join the English class and to practise my English
Client H

Clients at the storytelling sessions had other reasons for their continuing attendance. Clients enjoyed reading aloud and finding out what the storytelling sessions revealed about each other's countries and cultures:

When I come here I come to the storytelling classes and that one I enjoy because I can read a bit you see... I like to read stories and that you get to know things about other countries
Client D

Sharing experiences through the telling of universal stories can have further beneficial effects for the clients and can motivate their continued attendance at the storytelling sessions. The tutor of the storytelling sessions has noticed the ways in which the sessions can encourage mutual support and sometimes trigger clients to tell their own stories:

And then we had young woman... she and her brother had to make a choice between staying with her elderly parents or running away... She was very upset about it so everybody listened to her very sympathetically. They were all from very different backgrounds... So that was a good example of the story discussion provoking ... which then evoked support and was a very positive experience
Tutor storytelling

One client talked about how she enjoys being with the diverse group of people she meets and works alongside. She values what she has learnt and shared with this group of people:

It's really good I think that when people come, the multi-cultural aspect, to talk, to learn things, to share experiences. I think it helps a lot, especially it helped me a lot. When I come I learn everyday new things, new words plus my son is very happy here too.... instead of being at home all the time, it's very boring

for me staying at home. I can't do that. I have to come out. It's better to be here to be with people, learn from them, I really like that. Client H

The aims of the tutors

Gardening

The tutor describes the gardening project as aiming to create a situation where people can naturally “gravitate to the energy and vitality of nature”. The project leader also sees gardening as a context for telling stories as it gives participants the opportunity to link the activity to their lives before they came to the UK. The tutor aims to provide the inspiration to make something as part of a healing process:

Gardening is an inspiration and then for someone to get better, for me as I see it, you need to make something with your hands, you need to do something. You get inspired and then you make stuff. And that's a nice process of somehow getting better. I always find when I make stuff either knitting or cooking with your hands. You do need to make something. That is part of healing I think. Tutor interview

The tutor aims to use the client's prior experience and the aim is not to produce a perfect garden, but rather a garden that demonstrates people's involvement and what they can do:

So it's people maybe showing what they did back home and stuff like that. Letting people lead how they might have done it. Tutor interview

The gardening coordinator ¹ aims to rebuild confidence, retain and build on skills clients already have and to reduce social isolation. For some clients this might lead to opportunities to use these skills in other situations e.g. volunteering:

Opportunities to do something else ... volunteering...so do you know what I mean it's like linking people up. Gardening coordinator

Storytelling

The tutor for storytelling spoke at length about the aims of the sessions. He explained that the storytelling sessions arose from a suggestion that he provide group therapy, which he was clear would be inappropriate as it requires a particular structure, regular attendance of the same participants and other clinical aspects. However, he acknowledged that there is a clear therapeutic element to the

¹ The gardening coordinator doesn't teach the sessions but has overall responsibility for the gardening projects

storytelling sessions. The organisation of the storytelling sessions aims to allow for variations in levels of English and the fluidity of attendance, i.e. participants 'coming and going' as advice and advocacy appointments take place at the same time.

The tutor chooses stories to be read and discussed during the sessions that might, provoke participants to share their memories, ideas and experiences and to support each other in doing this. The tutor exercises careful censorship in the choice of the stories and the issues likely to be raised. There is no expectation that clients will relive their experiences, rather that their stories, as the tutor says, might "embolden people to talk about things that had happened to them".

The contribution of gardening and storytelling to the well-being of clients

Gardening

I love the nature. When I was introduced to gardening, I can say its like something I love now Client G

Throughout the interviews and our observations there was a strong sense that gardening contributes to a holistic sense of well-being for many clients. The interconnected threads of mental, physical and social well-being provide a sense of 'feeling better and happier':

Because when we do gardening we are getting healthy food so I'll come and gardening it's good because for your body, for your mind, for your physic, I'd say for everything, for happiness yeah I'd say it's good for mind, for health, it's good for physical and good for meeting new people because a lot of people come and come. Client G

The interviews provided evidence that the gardening sessions contributed to the well-being of clients in a range of often interrelated ways. One of the most pressing challenges for clients is their mental health. Almost all the clients we interviewed talked about how the gardening sessions provided a space to forget about their troubles, to relax and get relief from anxiety and to lift their depression:

the garden is the most important thing supporting people. And the garden is something which is supporting us a lot because like me I have got depression and others like Joe, Maria's. When we go to gardening all our minds close down. That's why we attend every day in the garden. And we are happy because of the centre because they help us a lot and others. Client G

The gardening coordinator talked about a client for whom the sessions were an important way of temporarily forgetting the troubles of his brother who was in prison:

He might have been just at home thinking about his brother (who is in prison), you know what I mean, and this just like being busy, you could tell that he really wanted to busy himself because it would mean that, when he would go to visit his brother his mind is clearer. Gardening coordinator

Many clients described how the physical exertion of the gardening sessions helped them to feel better and more able to relax and sleep:

Physically it's helped me a lot because I feel like when I do a lot of gardening in the evenings sometimes I'm tired and I feel like I have done something. So even when I go to relax, I relax without thinking a lot and I get to sleep. Before I didn't get sleep. Now when I work physically in the garden I get a little bit tired. When I go home I sleep nice yeah. Client G

The gardening also provides an important social context in which clients can socialise, make friends, demonstrate skills, work together and learn from each other – a lot of informal teaching goes on between clients as they work:

We talk, even we create our own things because we try to upgrade ourselves with what we are doing. Like now you can see there, it was bushy it was sloping, everything was coming down. We have put some stuff down and when you look there it's like a meditation area. Client G

Yeah actually on a Wednesday, and it will be people just doing what they want...and yeah...it just feeds in, like some people, because the gardening is like on a Wednesday some people might be just sat there having a picnic while their friends are just sat there like doing something, like planting some tomatoes, picking tomatoes or whatever, but they are just doing something but it's not like completely over the (difficult to hear)...it's kind of a nice way to participate..... Yeah they can just do what they want, if they have an idea they can just say it...and we'll be like Ok, we can do that. Gardening coordinator

Interviews with the gardening tutor and the coordinator reinforced the contributions to well-being described by clients. The tutor described how the sessions are often a way of keeping track of the journey a client is on and the issues that he/she are dealing with – talk often goes on during the informal setting of working together:

like X who has got like loads of issues with his housing...but obviously likes a bit of time off from that, just doing something helps him, gives him like the resources...Ok...cos I've noticed, when you are not doing the garden with him he can be a bit like he's not really around, you don't know really what is going on, what's going on a home and we can't help him with it, but the more he does the garden the more you can keep track of what's going on, what's going on with his home...and we are able to keep on top of it.....and because we are like able to talk to each other, informally rather than like formally...sit...it

means that he can tell me something and I can go away and do something, ...rather than like he and me being sat, him like being sat there waiting for the solicitor to come ...rather than me just talking and him just hanging on for news it makes it like a better format for helping someone.
Gardening coordinator

The gardening tutor works with an explicit commitment to team work and the equal sharing of knowledge and experience:

someone comes along and wants to join in, it's like 'Yeah come and join us...what are you doing' ...and it's like we all work as a team in what we're doing because the person feels like, because it feels like a horizontal thing...and we'll be encouraging them as much as possible to take part in the decision making of what we are doing and because they have maybe experience or expertise in something, they might have an idea. We're just facilitators really of what people want to do. So that's basically like the best way for retaining skills or for increasing confidence and for decreasing isolation..... It's not specifically like we're doing gardening this is how you plant this...it's like we're there this is what we have what would you like to do with it? I don't know...I think that's the best way to do it...empowering.
Gardening Coordinator

Well, the main thing is we can do gardening as like a team thing, do you know what I mean, when someone comes along, when there is like three of us doing it and eventually you get something out of it.
Gardening Coordinator

The tutor described how the gardening often enables some clients to reflect on their past lives and the gardening skills they learned:

I think a lot of the clients I have worked with it's a feeling of being back home. They tell me stories of when "I was a child" or you know "my mum did this, we grew that. We ate this like this or this looks different to how it is back home but we eat the leaves like this", so it's just a sense of, I don't know. Maybe the people who are attracted to the gardening group are kind of growers or farmer back home but they have a sense of home I think when they work with me. So maybe it's that.

I think like with memory they just remember the good bits about growing and home. It could be that home was a horrible place but maybe they remember home and growing and pulling up that potato or carrot as a nice memory. So I think it evokes a lot of feeling. Gardening Tutor

For others it is an activity that helps them to temporarily escape from their past:

It depends on the clients. I had another guy who would never talk about himself, never talked about home and for him I think it was a bit of escapism because then I learned that he had many, he never really told me about his past so I don't really know it. But I don't want to go into asking him. And only recently has he told little bits. So it depends. Some people use the garden to escape because they want to forget, it could be all of those things. Gardening Tutor

Storytelling

No...it is actually...its all of this. For example, it informs people about English literature, about Shakespeare, the history in this country, in Europe. It's informative, it's a therapy, its socialising, it's all of this...English also. Client CA

The Interviews with clients and the tutor together with our observations provide evidence that the story telling sessions make a number of contributions to the overall well-being of the clients who attend.

The sessions provide a context in which clients are encouraged and enabled to develop their spoken and written English skills. This is achieved in a number of ways: by clients taking it in turns to read the story, clients with more English translating for others in the group, and clients offering their comments and understanding of the stories in English:

It's storytelling actually, every week he takes one story or play from Shakespeare and people read. He makes copies, many copies and people read it in English and I translate for Arabic people who don't understand and everyone involved has the time to tell something, to read something so I told you it's more than storytelling. Client CA

Like maybe communicate with other people, because another day we are at home or we just speak our language, or maybe some people all the time at home and no speaking. Here we want to speak, it is necessary...That's why people meet here. Because if there are a lot of people, we can speak and communicate, we are happy, we want to learn English. We all communicate, there are many things. Client M

The sessions enable the clients to share information from a range of cultures and to tackle sensitive issues through the 'safe' distance of the story. The tutor describes this process:

People listen to stories and think 'what is the relevance of the story? What would I do in that situation? What would I do in the future if this happens, maybe this is what my parents went through, or...

And one of the best examples is the story about a thief and a miser, I think it is one of Aesop's fables, so we read the story and I said to the group "which is

better to be a thief or a miser?" So what do you think they said? They were unanimous in this

Interviewer: A thief

Tutor: yes, they said it was better to be a thief. I think that might be because they were nearly all Muslim. Because charity is so important as well. So then to get the conversation going I said imagine a miser is saving up money they said that would never happen because his children would support him.

Storytelling Tutor

Storytelling provides a context for clients to share experiences and often to find universal themes emerging from the very different contexts:

it's just discussing things, sharing information, sharing stories, their countries, about everything, about their cultures and so about their opinion actually...at the end of the story he...we...ask them about the moral of the story and everyone gives a different point of view.

(other clients) they find out they have something to say about their countries, the stories in their countries, the life there and so its...yes...not only storytelling...not only English language, so it's more than that...Client CA

Researcher: There's something isn't there about the same stories being in different cultures...

CA: In different cultures yes

Researcher: Sort of universal themes...yeah...

CA: Yes even if it wasn't the same stories, maybe similar or something...and we sometimes find ourselves thinking about the traditions in those countries, the religion, many, many things even the policy in those countries. Client CA

Reading the stories can help clients to gain confidence and self-respect:

Because everyone, he or she, feels they have something to say and they get a chance to say it, so they feel that they are valuable, they are someone, they are something, they say something and people say 'wow', we didn't know that. So their self-confidence, it improves their self-confidence, their personality. Client CA

Being part of the story telling group can give clients a sense of belonging, being wanted:

I've seen some people who are sitting there in the hall, like eating, speaking to nobody and they feel like isolated but in the afternoon group they feel likehere they feel because it's like a group of people they trust...it's not random people who are approaching them...it's a group, M, me, they know

that we are a group, storytelling and we invite them...and they...yeah that's it.
Client CA

The sessions can also demonstrate how people from a range of different cultures, many of whom have been through traumatic experiences, can connect with and support each other. The sessions can reaffirm a common humanity:

What I like in the group is how patient and tolerant they are with each other because if we go very slowly usually while another language some can't read at all in their own languages, some people read them very slowly so it requires a lot of patience on the part of the participants and they're never impatient with each other, they are always gentle, even though they come from different continents, its extraordinary their tolerance. I don't know if you have sensed that. Storytelling Tutor

One of the things that emerged from the interview with the tutor was unexpected – he talked about the fact that it may be an advantage that he is an older man as many of the clients have had to leave older relatives behind and he can sometimes temporarily 'stand in' for them:

My main advantage is my old age. All the refugees lack close contact with older people because of the circumstances of their escapes, and so closeness with an older man is a positive thing for them. Storytelling Tutor

The holistic sense in which storytelling contributes to well-being is summed up by the tutor in a follow up email interview:

The storytelling helps to relieve the extreme boredom and inactivity which are inflicted on the asylum seekers because they are deprived of the opportunity to work. Their lives are marked by profound uncertainty regarding their fate and so the regularity of their storytelling gives them a weekly anchor. The universality of the stories and fables helps to make them feel integrated into both the host community and into the wider realm of humankind which is so important for people who find themselves as strangers in a strange land. The stories often resonate with narratives which they first heard as children and it's a pleasant surprise for them to find how these memories resonate with the childhood experiences of people from a different continent. When they are asked to provide a meaning or moral to the stories, they have the opportunity to contribute their own individual interpretations and this can lead to lively discussion and fresh insights. Storytelling allows them to validate their own identity while at the same time promoting the idea that they have so much in common with people from unfamiliar cultures and religious backgrounds. In practice they show remarkable sympathy and tolerance for each other despite the wide disparities in knowledge of English and even levels of literacy. The

participants also find that they have a sense of humour and a sense of wonder in common and they also share strategies of resilience. Storytelling Tutor

What do the clients like about the sessions and what are the challenges?

Gardening

Clients, staff and tutors find much to enjoy and value in the gardening sessions. Many enjoy the practical side of growing food and physical activities:

And I'm glad I say because it provide us with food. When we work we benefit from food. Client G

Planting the tomatoes, aubergines, cucumber now it is more organised. I like to do some like a positive thing, helping the garden for the people so they can use it. Client AH

For others it strikes a deeper, almost a more spiritual chord, connected with their religious beliefs, their love for their family and for nature. Clients' responses indicate feelings of inner peace and help with combatting depression:

I'm a lover of natural things. I like life. I like to handle live things. That's gardening make me have sense (sic). Like you are that pumpkin. I put it there. The first lesson I go to see them grow and it gives me inner joy... yes, knowing it's a way of life makes me think of the glory of God...when you farm you get and eat. It's a way of life. When I'm in the garden I'm always happy. The way I love my children is the way I garden. It's like caring for my children. Client C

First you get more knowledge about the nature; second is good for me because it finished my depression ...everybody's happy when we are coming there and we share some stories because people will say how they are low, what they have been doing. When we are doing gardening everybody mood change and we get happy, we get to talk about what is going on and, yes, it help us a lot. Client G

There was very little criticism of the gardening sessions. One client in the gardening sessions wished there were more places for people to sit and relax:

Because no place to sitting...when I say for you that's why I say you need café...and you bringing your coffee and are sitting in the garden if it's sunny and they've got a place...now you are standing...only standing...no place to sit. Client Q

The gardening tutor also faced some challenges in the organisation of the sessions, mainly due to the large number of people who attended on some occasions:

I've been really lucky. I've had really good volunteers in the garden and without the volunteers it would have been very hard. So you need another body just to, it makes it a bit easier. With thirty, maybe not thirty, maybe twenty people in the garden from Barry House [local hostel for asylum seekers]. So you need to have, some people start wandering about and picking stuff up. You just have to remind people. So it's helpful to have two people. Gardening Tutor

Funding is a constant issue for the centre and this is particularly important for the gardening sessions as they are run by a paid tutor, unlike some sessions which are purely led by volunteers. Funding of the gardening sessions has been sporadic at times, and has meant that the tenure of the tutor is insecure. This is difficult for both the tutors and the clients:

They're really sad actually, they got really angry some of them really sad. I've been telling them slowly and just reminding them what's coming but they have been a bit "but why are you going?"...I think I'm going to still very much be part of this community, I don't want to really just leave it. I'm still in touch with a lot of the clients that I've worked with and I think I'll keep in touch. Because they're my friends now, I don't want to abandon them. So yeah, I've made really good connections with people. Gardening Tutor

The loss of the gardening tutor in 2018/9 led to reflecting on the value and importance of the sessions to the clients:

The only other thing is like maybe if it could be like a bigger thing in people's brains... to think maybe we should talk to them about gardening...there's two people specifically who did a lot of stuff and depressingly they kind of just stopped coming along...and they never really re-joined ...and...from my understanding one of them, their case at the Home Office has not progressed, even since then. And the other one has had a lot of mental health issues, since they left, kind of like bad examples, not bad examples but things haven't gone so well for them. But we haven't really been able to measure, because there has been so much turnover, we can't measure it very well if someone does move on. Member of Staff SDCAS

Storytelling

In the storytelling sessions, the being around people, the sharing of experiences through the talking and the exploration of the different stories are aspects that are enjoyed by a number of the clients we interviewed:

At the end of the session? I feel happy. There's a lot of people. I say him, I talk to them. I like that. Client AM

I enjoy being with people, listening to people talking. I really enjoy that ... the advantage of that in a positive way ... being in the class...instead of being at

home all the time, it's very boring for me staying at home. I can't do that. I have to come out. It's better to be here to be with people, learn from them, I really like that. Client H

The clients enjoy having the opportunity to share their own knowledge and expertise:

I like to read and like helping people so... some people there doesn't speak English quite well so that's the reason I like to help with pronunciation of the word, if I know it, and like to help and say it in the story... yes because people speak of Afghanistan or other country in the story so if I am there I can interpret so everybody understand what is going on and so they leave here confident I am sure. Client D

In terms of the storytelling, some challenges for the clients arose from the different levels of knowledge and understanding of English displayed by themselves and fellow clients:

And sometimes, for students, sometimes for me some words are really hard. But I just Google them to find out. I just find things. I'm a very hard worker, I am trying to find things, I try to know. But for other students it might be a little bit hard. Even they are shy, they don't ask like the meaning of the words, some sentence. Like some students they make it really clear. You understood me? But sometimes when [the tutor] is trying to explain but people, I don't think they'll be able to get it for the first time. They need some more translation, the meaning of the words. Client M

Further challenges for clients attending the sessions arose from conflict with other priorities:

[the tutor] used to invite me, but I usually had something else, advice or something, so I didn't have time to join, but after that yeah, I enjoyed it...I think they have priorities...storytelling...because they don't feel peace in their minds, so if they have time...they will come...but their mind is busy with other things. Client CA

The tutor shared the clients' concerns regarding conflict with advice sessions. Also the conflict with the timing of other sessions was affecting attendance:

SDCAS have been marvellously supportive and encouraging. The only problem is that the storytelling event is now competing in terms of timetable with the art therapy which is a great pity since both activities complement each other and should not be competing. Storytelling tutor

As the tutor for storytelling is a volunteer, funding for these sessions was not such an issue as with gardening. However, relying on volunteers to lead sessions has its own

issues for clients and implications for the tutor who is leading the sessions and responsible for ensuring they happen on a regular basis:

At present I have to rely on my own medical students to deputise for me as inevitably I cannot be present every single Tuesday. Storytelling tutor

How do clients evaluate the quality of the teaching and learning and of the tutor?

Gardening

Clients were asked about the gardening tutor and what they were like as a tutor. The tutor's help in the garden was highlighted and clients were able to watch her and follow her example:

She help us, she show us. Client P

The tutor's experience as a gardener was acknowledged as well as other knowledge she was able to contribute:

She knows about different medications you can grow. Client AH

Another client acknowledged the experiences and knowledge that she herself was able to bring to the activity as well as what the tutor was able to offer:

She is gentle but steady, more likely a flower gardener. 'These flowers are so pretty. They look nice there' generally she do good. I like crops, what I plant I eat. Everyone has a specialisation. Client C

The tutor's empathy for clients was an important aspect of the gardening project alongside the knowledge and experience offered:

Because all this knowledge and these things I'm telling you, have come from her. And everybody, even if you go to our social media, everybody is sad to know that she is leaving....She was a part of us. We still like a family. And she knows how to engage everyone and I would say that she's like our mother in everything. She has taught us she have give us knowledge so she's one in a million. That's what I'll say. Client G

In terms of skills learned, some clients had little or no experience of gardening. However, as a result of the gardening project, clients felt much more confident about having acquired some skills:

No I didn't know much about gardening. But now I can say I'm good at gardening now they have teach me and now I can do everything in gardening.... I can make beds. I can plant all the things which the garden need I can do now. Client G

Storytelling

The tutor running the storytelling activity was described as warm, welcoming and very helpful. His teaching strategies were born out of his empathy for the clients as well as his professional understanding. In describing the tutor one client acknowledged his experience, intelligence and a source of knowledge that they could learn from. In the context of that client's situation the tutor was described as being "the best opportunity for us" (Client H). The client went on to say:

Yes, maybe we won't be able to get him in any other place, a person like him. Because it is not easy, everywhere we go, we talk and get their advice and go and sometimes we have to pay for it. He's really helpful for me. He is a very good role model, yeah I really like him. Client H

The breadth of the tutor's knowledge was also identified. One client explained how the tutor sees them as needing help, help in information about the culture of the UK as well as help in speaking English:

He views them as asylum seekers who need some help, so he is helping, that's what he sees, as asylum seekers who came to this country, they...some of them, they know nobody in this country and nothing about the culture, so he just gives them information and helps them with their English, with their knowledge, integrate into this country. Client CA

The tutor's ability to empathise with the clients was also valued and highlighted during interviews:

And he deals with people like he's one of them, all of them, all people they feel like they are equal and they can argue about something and say no this is such and such. Client CA

One client, who had only recently started attending the centre commented on strategies used during the storytelling activity and how these helped the clients to understand and learn:

He explains them very clearly one by one, step by step. Client AK

Clients commented on the tutor's teaching strategies of making everybody laugh; asking clients to translate for each other; and drawing on their prior experiences to try to help the group understand stories that were so different culturally than their own experiences.

The development of skills in English was one of the most important aspects of the story telling sessions and often the main reason for coming to the centre is to get help and advice:

It's the best thing, to learn English. Client AK

I have a lot of letters ... I can read but I don't know what can I do?. Client M

The level of fluency in English was highlighted by many of the clients and the discussion generated by each story telling session is seen by clients as a further opportunity to develop skills in communicating in English. The opportunity to speak within the group was valued:

another day we are at home or we just speak our language, or maybe some people all the time at home and no speaking. Client M

Other clients value the opportunity to reflect on their own lives and culture:

because when you read the story you go on wonder what will happen to you ...I would like to see more people come to the group. I enjoy. The first time I came and they say do you want to read, oh gosh I said, and I read and it was good and since I coming I always read some of the story so that encouraged me to come to help you know, to kind of build my self-confidence and that's why the storytelling is good. Client D

Clients and tutors ideas for further development

Gardening

Clients and staff expressed the need for more funding to keep gardening going and possibly introduce something that provides some income, like a cafe.

A client suggested creating a certificate that would show they have some gardening skills (possibly for employability purposes):

It's something good and if they can improve it and give us certificate, to give people a certificate because people have a passion. Client G

Another client talks about the possibility of creating an outdoor space for clients to gather and socialise:

You can just relax out there, possibly all year round if its sheltered, people will sit and enjoy the weather. There's nowhere we can do that, we need more seats so that people could have shelter, we could have hot chocolate. Client CB

Storytelling

The tutor discussed the usefulness of having interpreters for minority languages (e.g. Eritrean) or an actor to mime the stories for better understanding. He also suggested a revision of the timetable so that storytelling does not overlap with the art therapy sessions:

It would certainly be helpful to have reliable access to interpreters for minority languages like Eritrean. It is also very helpful for an actor to mime the stories and an artist to provide illustrations. Storytelling Tutor

One of the clients also talked about maybe having someone to translate for clients whose level of English makes it difficult for them to understand sometimes:

Sometimes, yeah. I think (tutor) he's very highly educated and he will see us on different levels. And sometime, for students, sometimes for me some words are really hard. But I just Google them to find out. I just find things. I'm a very hard worker, I am trying to find things, I try to know. But for other students it might be a little bit hard. Even they are shy, they don't ask like the meaning of the words, some sentence. Sometimes when (tutor) is trying to explain but people, I don't think they'll be able to get it for the first time. They need some more translation, the meaning of the words. Client H

Conclusions

1. The interviews provided evidence that gardening and storytelling contribute to the holistic well-being of clients. If we return to the definitions of well-being we have been utilising during the research then the interview data confirms that the activities help to build clients' psychological, physical and social resources and have a positive effect on how clients feel and how they function in the world. The activities do this in a number of ways:

- They enable clients to develop and further extend a range of demonstrable knowledge and skills to add to the resources clients have to help meet the challenges they face as asylum seekers. These include the knowledge and understanding involved in gardening and the development of understanding of, and speaking English, increasing fluency and opportunity to discuss cultural aspects of issues.
- They provide further opportunities for clients to use their prior knowledge and experience, to feel their knowledge and skills are valued and of worth to offer to others. The sessions act to help demonstrate to clients that they are not 'empty vessels'. In this sense they serve to empower clients and help them to locate their identities and feelings of self-worth.²
- They provide social benefits. Both gardening and storytelling are run as group activities in which clients chat to each other and work alongside each other. The tutors value and encourage clients to work with and learn from each other. For many clients isolation is a serious

² 'empty vessels' is a term used in education to describe students as being treated as passive recipients of knowledge and skills

issue and the sessions provide an important opportunity for them to build friendships.

- They can often provide precious opportunities for clients to temporarily at least forget their past and present troubles and sometimes joke and laugh with others. They help to build the psychological resources so central to the well-being of clients.
- They provide important opportunities for clients to feel accepted and valued members of a community in the context of an increasingly hostile external environment.
- They are planned and led by tutors who understand and are empathetic to the difficulties faced by clients in relation to their well-being and also have the knowledge and experience to devise a learning environment in which activities build the psychological, social and physical elements for the clients' well-being.

2. During the period of the research funding was available for gardening but became more uncertain as the research progressed. By the end of the research there was no obvious funding available for a tutor for gardening. The situation for gardening illustrates an ongoing issue faced by SDCAS and similar providers in that funding is often only provided for short term projects rather than ongoing activities. This means that the tutors have no job security and therefore are unable to plan for a long term view of the activity.

Recommendations

1. Whilst we recognise the difficulties in securing funding and understand the necessity to secure short term funding we would recommend that where feasible SDCAS concentrates funding proposals for activities within a longer term framework. This would ensure more stability for tutors and clients in activities where tutors are paid.

2. Storytelling is currently run by a very experienced volunteer. We would recommend that SDCAS works with the volunteer to provide some training/mentoring to ensure that some succession planning is done thus avoiding a situation where the activity is dependent on one individual.

3. There is a case for providing more explicit publicity about activities on offer including the content offered and times of sessions. We recommend that this is done for each centre. This could help to avoid potential clashes between activities and between activities and advice sessions.

4. The qualities of the tutors are central to the success of gardening and storytelling. We would recommend that SDCAS recruitment procedures ensure the quality of the tutor for activities in terms of relevant experience and demonstrable skills.

5. In order to ensure that the quality of activities is sustained we recommend regular reporting to the trustees concerning the activities and new developments. This should be done both in writing and by occasional verbal reports by tutors at trustee meetings.

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Appendices

Appendix I - Interview schedule for clients

Preamble:

I am a volunteer and researcher at the centre. This is >>>>>>>>> also a researcher and together we are carrying out a research project for the centre around the idea of well-being.”

What the project is about: “We are interested in how the educational aspect of the centre contribute to the well-being of clients. We are focusing on gardening/ storytelling.

The project might help the centre to improve the support it provides for well-being”

What: “we want to interview you and the interview will last about 30 minutes. You are free to leave at any time and also to stop the interview at any time”

Confidentiality: “All you say will be kept as confidential”

“Is that ok for us to interview you?”

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself?

When did you start coming to the centre

What brought you to the centre?

2. Why have chosen to do story telling/gardening

How long have they been doing it?

Do you do it regularly? How regularly?

What are you hoping to get from it?

3. Tell me what happens in the sessions

4. What do you like about it? What do you dislike?

What do you get out of it? What does it do for you?

5. What have you learnt from doing this? Do you get the opportunity to share your knowledge/experience? Do people learn from you? How does that make you feel?

6. How do you feel you can build on this? i.e. transferring skills, qualifications, jobs

7. Tell me about X - how does s/he lead the group, how does s/he involve people etc

8. Do you think more clients could benefit from this? Do you have ideas of how we can make that happen?

9. What else can the centre do to help develop/support story telling/gardening

Anything else you want to add?

Appendix II - Interview schedule for staff

Preamble:

I am a volunteer and researcher at the centre. This is >>>>>>>>> also a researcher and together we are carrying out a research project for the centre around the idea of well-being.”

What the project is about: “We are interested in how the educational aspect of the centre contribute to the well-being of clients. We are focusing on gardening.

The project might help the centre to improve the support it provides for well-being”

What: “we want to interview you and the interview will last about 30 minutes. You are free to leave at any time and also to stop the interview at any time”

Confidentiality: “All you say will be kept as confidential”

“Is that ok for us to interview you?”

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself?

2. How long have you been at the centre? How long have you been in this position?

3. What is your background/experience in storytelling/gardening?

4. What experience of teaching do you have? What’s your teaching background?

5. Tell us about the aims of the project.

6. What are you hoping to achieve?

7. How do you plan/organize the storytelling/gardening sessions?

What kind of activities? How does the number of people turning up affect them?

8. How does your project relate to this notion of well-being? (Physical aspect; social aspect; psychological aspect)what do clients get out of it? What kind of skills do clients develop? Are there any transferable skills? Can they use these in the future?

9. Obstacles/difficulties/challenges

10. What else can the centre do to help develop/support gardening?

Anything else you want to add?

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