

Reflecting Ourselves

A journal writing supervision group for members of the St Luke's Hospice
Bereavement Service

report by Kate Thompson

Aims

To introduce members of the bereavement service to journal writing techniques to use as self-supervision (primary aim) or with clients (subsidiary aim). To explore them in the group and to apply them to current practice.

Attendance

The project consisted of six sessions which took place fortnightly on Monday afternoons 4-6pm. St Luke's Hospice provided us with a room (which varied from week to week depending on other demands on the space), in which we could sit around a table and sometimes have space for moving around to find more privacy. The need for this diminished as the weeks went on and the group began to cohere and trust between members was established (this was noticeable by the fourth session). We were also provided with refreshments each week. Most members of the group attended all sessions but personal circumstances meant that some people missed one or two. Their absence was acknowledged, especially in the case of one group member who had to miss the last two sessions because of bereavement. The group took time in the final session to write a group letter to him.

Everyone said that they had found the group valuable and would like to continue in some form but at the current time the way forward has not been decided.

Content

Each session began with a check-in period followed by a warm-up write focusing on some personal theme using springboards such as:

How do I replenish myself?

The purpose of these was to allow people to focus on themselves which was often a struggle.

Each week we looked at a particular journal technique and applied it either to personal or professional spheres.

- Week 1) Captured Moment (personal)
- Week 2) Captured Moment (professional/clinical)
- Week 3) Dialogues (personal)
- Week 4) Unsent letters (professional/clinical)
- Week 5) Unsent letters (part 2) & lists (roles)
- Week 6) Perspectives (Personal or professional)

Evaluation

There were 2 methods of gaining data for the evaluation of the project:

1) The ProQOL R-IV (Professional quality of life scale) measures compassion satisfaction and fatigue. Group members completed a questionnaire at the first session and again at the last in order to measure any change.

Initial analysis suggests that there are positive changes over the time the group has been running.

2) Subjective data was gathered by means of a 3 question card in the first session and a feedback form in the final session.

The card I use in the initial session is one that I give out at the beginning of my talks, seminars or workshops. One of my reasons for doing this is to see if general awareness of the field is growing or changing over time. It consists of 3 sentence stems.

Journal Writing is.....

Something I find very valuable but also find difficult in motivating myself to do

A form of diary writing

Reflective of my thoughts

An opportunity for me to be free to write anything

A useful way to express thoughts and gain clarity

When I ask my client to write journals they.....

Often feel apprehensive

One wrote regularly and asked me to read her journal at the beginning of each session

Find it hard to start but enjoy the experience

I don't

Usually find the process therapeutic and valuable

Today I want to.....

Resume keeping a journal

Learn more about journal writing

Understand more about the purpose and process of writing

Find out more about Lapidus

The feedback form elicited information about the sessions in terms of both professional practice and personal development.

What have you gained from the sessions in terms of the following?

a) Professional practice

I have briefly incorporated 'writing' into my helping work but I believe the technique is firmly in my repertoire

Ideas to use with clients. I have found myself suggesting some writing ideas to people I work with & feeling more confident in doing so

Awareness of a new technique

Practical application

Awareness of self and others

Reflection & different forms of expression

I will be able to use some of the writing techniques with bereaved clients

I can use reflective writing to support my clinical work and for supervision

I have learnt not only through my own experience but hearing about the experience of others

Peer support and review

A quiet space for reflection

Useful tools for reflection & monitoring self-development & work with clients

b) Personal development

Writing about self in 3rd person gave a sense of perspective

Removal of writer's block (for 6 years)

Recovery of the joys of writing

Meaningful insights into my own behaviour

I have gained from doing the writing in the group

I will be able to use some of these techniques on myself

Self-expression

It has moved my thinking about certain things

More potential than actual – I believe this can help when I find time to commit

What did you most enjoy?

The actual writing process felt very natural and fulfilling

Working/sharing/being with this group (several responses)

Rediscovering writing, especially when I'm not in crisis

Journal writing

Dialogue with myself

Revelations from the exercises and sharing theses with others

Unsent letter

What did you least enjoy?

Nothing

The long journey

Boring biscuits

Perspectives exercise (x2)

Some of the issues that topics covered were uncomfortable but I never felt it was counter-productive

Is there anything you would have liked more of?

More group discussion (several)

Time outside the sessions to do more

Sharing the 'replenishment' exercise

Unsent letters, found them very powerful

Is there anything you would have liked less of?

Late starts

Would you attend further sessions of this kind?

Yes (everyone)

Any other comments?

I really believe in this as a therapeutic tool and a means of self-development
Felt dynamics of group, including leader, ensured a supportive environment which
has been a pleasure to attend and be part of.

I have enjoyed Kate's facilitation - gentle fun-loving & clear

Conclusion

The group found the introduction to journal writing techniques very useful in terms of personal development and professional practice. In the area of personal development, one member reported using captured moments as both cathartic and reflective processes in her life, another found that writing dialogues helped her to move on in significant ways and a third completed a bereavement stage.

The professional practice aspect had two outcomes – one was the way in which people began to introduce writing with their clients and the other was how they used the techniques to reflect on and think about their work (self-supervision).

A major aspect of the project was the way in which people were able to share with and support each other. Although not everyone read every time, everyone read at some time. Gradually the depth of sharing and response became very powerful. People gave each other permission to become more themselves and this led to greater confidence in reading their poems and personal writing.