

'SINGING OUR OWN SONG'
REPORT OF A 19-SESSION COURSE run for KARM on
'Giving Voice' principles, as devised by Jill Rakusen, February/July 2002

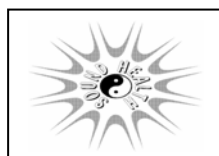
SUMMARY

1. 13 participants who identified as having/had mental health problems attended a free 19-session course (2-hour sessions)
2. All indicated positive gains, enjoyment, enthusiasm and surprise at what they discovered. For many participants, these gains were astonishing and profound.
3. Of those who returned anonymous questionnaires (9), all reported accessing at least four different types of specific positive experience/ feeling, and for many, experiencing such feelings was unusual.
4. Those who reported occasional difficult feelings saw the experiences in a constructive way.
5. Some reported positive effects on physical health problems, thus reinforcing claims from participants in previous courses using this approach (refs).
6. All respondents to the questionnaires had decided they wanted to learn how to use song as a resource in their lives, thus indicating a high degree of willingness to learn and take responsibility.
7. Of these, all reported that a) they had been able to use this self-help tool in their lives, b) they had achieved positive results, and c) gave examples of how they did it.
8. All reported wanting to build on what was offered during the course, and indicated how they intended to do this.
9. All indicated they would value some follow-up, and many indicated what might prevent them accessing this (largely child-care problems and money)
10. All had constructive suggestions as to the information others might find useful if they were considering attending another course

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **The potential of this self-help tool in relation to a range of mental health problems has been demonstrated and should be developed further**
2. **Together with previous reports of people claiming benefit using this self-help tool¹, this project indicates its value for people with a wide range of problems, and this should be investigated further**
3. **Its potential for promoting self-responsibility and in reducing dependence on clinical services – whether at a primary, secondary or tertiary level - should be investigated as a matter of priority**

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All participants were experiencing or have experienced mental health problems, including

schizophrenia, severe depression, severe life-threatening physical illness and other challenging physical disabilities, learning difficulties and traumatic bereavement.

Comments about the course in general

“I feel so lucky I found the group. It’s been brilliant. It’s been absolutely right for me ... The benefit has been unbelievable. I’ve been given a goldmine! It’s been a lifeline. It still is [after end of course]”

“I feel I have got my life back” (independently reported by 2 people)

“I’ve been surprised by my capacity to learn and grow from my experiences both within the group and in everyday life”

“I’ve learnt skills here that I’ve never learnt anywhere else that I can use in my life”

“A wonderful way in which to express yourself and aid in the healing of yourself and others”

“An amazing experience, a gift”

“It’s been so exciting and enjoyable!”

“Astounding”

“I surprised myself”

“I have gained in lots and lots of ways. It’s so difficult to put into words.”

“I feel more myself. It’s benefited my mental health an awful lot”

“I’m standing taller (I keep hitting my head on the kitchen cupboards!)”

“I can cope with my hearing loss”

“I never thought I could feel like this after two hours!”

“I’ve smiled a lot – it’s great!”

“Feeling part of a group”

“Inspired”

“Have found it easier to be open to my emotions within the sessions as the course has progressed ...”

“It’s a positive, uplifting and strengthening group”

‘negative feelings’

Participants saw ‘negative’ feelings in a constructive way. For example, one person reported feeling a whole range of positive feelings “at different times and with different songs”, but also experienced “intense grief”. “At first this was all surprising ... but these experiences quickly became important and welcome”

other effects on health

One person decided to give up smoking : “I’ve tried before and it hasn’t worked – I’ve always started again. I feel the group has been really helpful and I feel really confident that I won’t start again! ... I really feel that using song helped me to succeed. Singing during cravings meant I actually enjoyed having them and beating them!” **Over 6 weeks after the course was finished, she was still happily free from smoking**

Another, who has severe, long-standing Fibromyalgia and osteoarthritis, reported an extraordinary development whereby one particular song “ has connected with the pain and it’s eased”. She went on: “This is the first time I’ve had an experience like this. Gardening, I’ve been surprised how less bad my back’s been. And I’m standing taller because I’m less hunched up with pain, and it’s since my experience with this song! it means I keep hitting my head on the kitchen cupboards – the first time ever (I’ve had them 15 years!)”

Learning and self-sufficiency

All respondents proved they could use this tool in their lives, with beneficial results – some of them astounding. Yet recognition was given to the fact that there was more to learn:

“Would like group to continue to increase my capacity to love and allow time for myself”

“I’d like the group to continue because learning to use song as a resource is an ongoing process.”

One person’s journey

“This experience has altered my perception of music/song. I now often choose to listen to music, not just listening to it but can hear it, see it and feel it deep within. The most astounding discovery is its healing capacity. It has opened my heart and mind to allow song to seep osmotically in and work its magical qualities.

11 June “The song feels like huge crashing waves all around. Initially I need to hold on and struggle to avoid drowning. Slowly the waves become supportive and I realise I can swim”

14 June “The last half hour has just been a most unbelievable experience. I’m looking after my 14 month old grandson. He’s having a bad day, teething, crotchety and to cap it all he trapped his fingers in the cupboard door. We snuggled down into the chair and rocked. [A song that she’d been having great difficulty with emotionally] surfaced from deep within. I couldn’t believe it, but began to sing quietly to him. He settled to sleep in the warmth and comfort while I sang and cried. Does each tear help to empty that great well of sorrow? My initial reaction is to question and try to

analyse what happened – but instead I have just accepted the experience and feel the calm relief ripple through my whole being”.

c. 20 June “I feel very solid after the last group ... my feet still feel to be connected, and drawing strength from the earth, while anxiety drops from my shoulders and my mind feels clear ... “

“After completion of the course “The group has been my Golden Apple. See the beauty of it then experience the healing properties as I continue to nibble. Gradually I am learning to savour the delights of this fruit and feel its magical qualities working.

“Thank you Jill for being so supportive and encouraging. Your skills have opened up an amazing new vista for me; then you have given me the courage to move tentatively forward and become aware of my suppressed emotions. I feel to be progressing at a very basic level – but this is developing solid foundations to build on ...”

*see for example:-

- 1994 Waters J. A dynamic account of a workshop held at Westminster House, Warrington on 25 March 1994: Internal paper for North West NSPCC
- 1996 Coniam S and Gibson L. ‘Giving Voice’ with Jill Rakusen. *Journal of Contemporary Health*. 34-35. Summer 1996
- 2000 Rakusen J. Report on *Survivors Give Voice!* - a course for survivors of abuse. *Sound HEALTH Consultancy* (submitted to Calderdale and Kirklees Health Authority and Kirklees Metropolitan Council).
- 2001 Rakusen J. ‘Giving Voice’: a Self-help tool for healing and transformation. *Positive Health*. (61 February 2001)
- 2001 Rakusen J. ‘Giving Voice’: a Tool for Individuals and Communities. *Action - Journal of Community Health*. (January 2001)
- 2002 Rakusen J, James Alan, Curbishley Ruth, ‘Report on an Innovative Pilot Residency in a Cumbrian Primary School, involving *Giving Voice*, held in the midst of the Foot and Mouth Crisis (*Sound Health Consultancy*, March 2002)