

Oasis

by Leeds Jewish Welfare Board
& Artlink West Yorkshire



Written and compiled by Becky Cherriman
for Leeds Jewish Welfare Board and
Artlink West Yorkshire 2014.

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Foreword

The Oasis Project is the result of planning between Artlink West Yorkshire, Leeds Jewish Welfare Board and the artists Becky Cherriman and Bryony Pritchard over many months. We were aware of the growing numbers of unpaid carers within our communities, how these voices are sometimes not heard, with levels of care often taken for granted by society as a whole.

As project managers and practitioners within Artlink we know the power of creativity to develop confidence, create networks of support and also space to give people the time to focus on themselves in a positive and nurturing manner. The practical workshops, visit to the theatre and work which took place away from the sessions is all captured in this book through the photographs, writing and quotes. It is a small insight into how this group of diverse individuals came together to share their lives and draw out their creative selves whilst having a good old laugh along the way!

***Hayley Mason, Project Manager,
Artlink West Yorkshire,
July 2014***

The idea to provide a group for unpaid carers has long been something we have wanted to do. Leeds Jewish Welfare Board's partnership with Artlink West Yorkshire has made that idea a reality and the group has been a massive success. As part of the group and providing support where required has been a pleasure and the chance to work with two amazing tutors as Becky and Bryony is something I will always treasure. They have inspired and motivated the group and the work produced as evidenced in this book is fantastic. The book provides a lasting legacy of an amazing group of individuals and what happens when we tap into our creative souls.

*Paul Tolkin, Community Support Worker,
Leeds Jewish Welfare Board,
July 2014*



We were to make connections,



find our differences,



tell the stories of our scars



**and, most importantly,
create.**



We planned some quick icebreakers for the first session but we didn't anticipate how in touch the participants would be with their own capacity for fun. Matching eye colour with Dulux strips, compliments abounded, 'What amazing eyes!'



Oasis

A wooden village on the beach. A fire burns at the centre throwing out hues of browns, yellows and orange. Shadows dance across the wooden structure creating a continually moving tableaux.

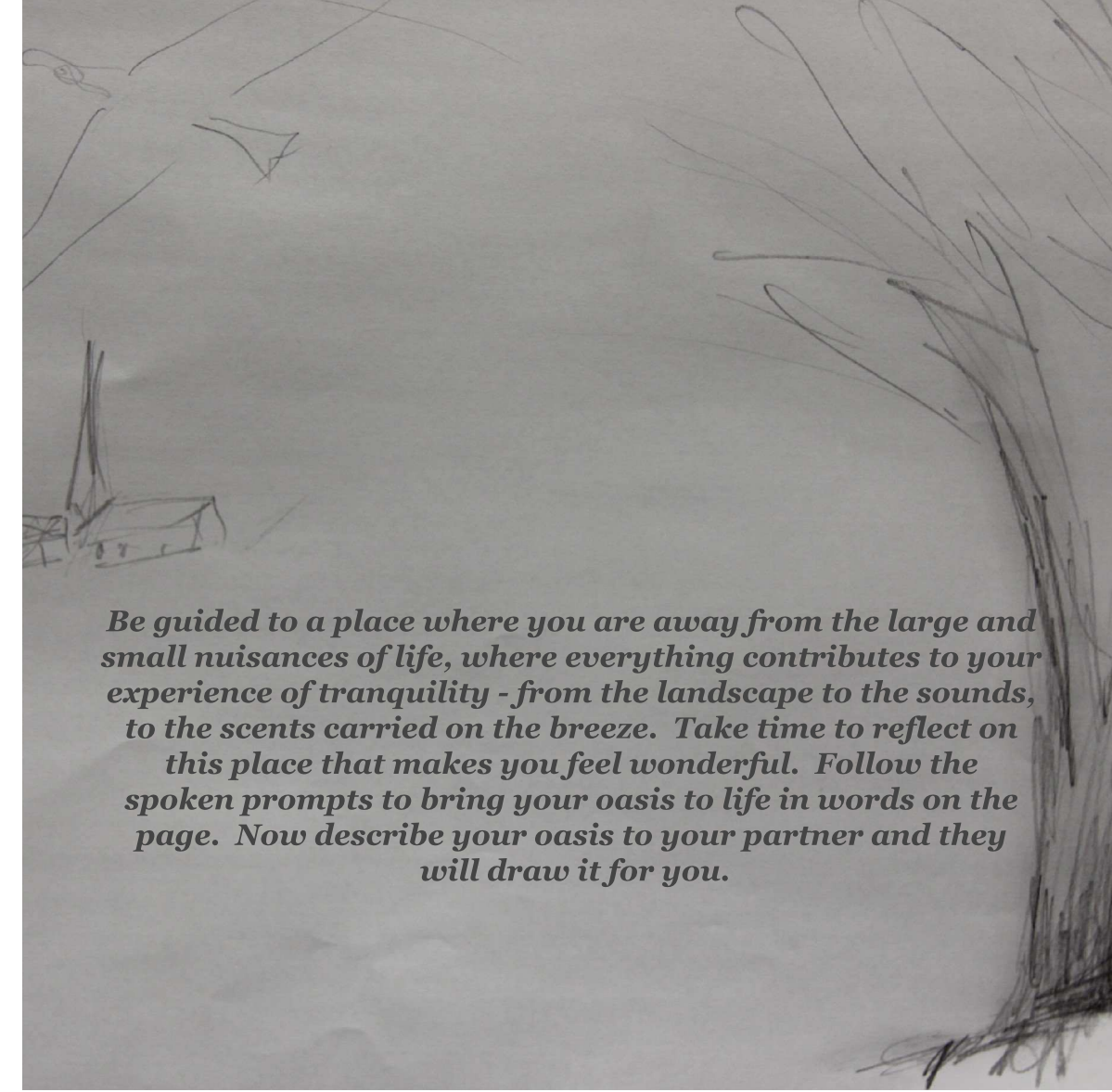
It is dark yet comforting and within its centre sits an old leather chair, a place to observe all.

The waves lap against the shore, a rhythmic ebb and flow creating a tranquility that entices you in. Nothing can enter that isn't invited, a true place of solace and peace, and within that peace is an oasis of calm.

The sounds have a meditative effect, everything slows and all daily stresses disappear slowly, dissipating into the ground, lost to a darker place that no longer belongs here.

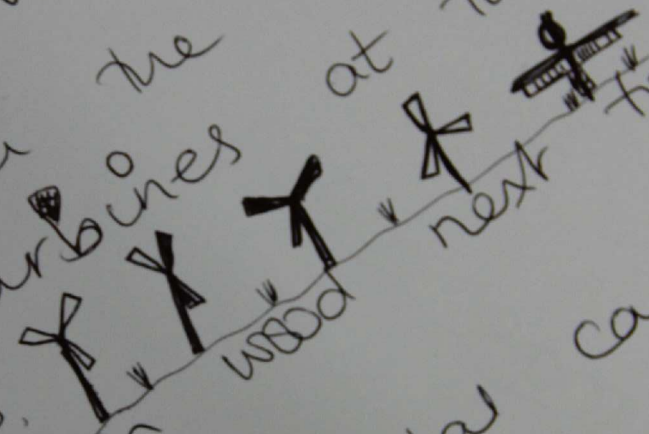
Scents of the surrounding foliage bring an earthiness, a dampness, a smell of loam that disappears into the salty tang of the ocean, forever lost in the sea breeze.

Paul

A pencil sketch of a landscape. On the left, there is a simple drawing of a building with a chimney. On the right, there is a large, detailed drawing of a tree with many branches. The background is filled with light, sketchy lines suggesting a sky or a misty atmosphere.

Be guided to a place where you are away from the large and small nuisances of life, where everything contributes to your experience of tranquility - from the landscape to the sounds, to the scents carried on the breeze. Take time to reflect on this place that makes you feel wonderful. Follow the spoken prompts to bring your oasis to life in words on the page. Now describe your oasis to your partner and they will draw it for you.

green
light fluffy
blue sky.
curves in the
road horizon
trees on the
wind turbines at the far side
trees, brown wood next to the
of rusty metal cattle
grid. cold bars as you
of carries on the wind
distant noise birds
noise travel
noise





'I like that here there is me, us and nobody else.'

'The writing is bringing back some wonderful memories of places I've been to. An indulgence.'

'This is my escape.'



"I'm Harrie
named after my grandfather.
It was my fault I was a
girl."

How many times have I told
that story? It's true.
It's funny. It makes people laugh!
It's always been that way
and that's good.

Escape to my Oasis - how good is that?
Is it Florida? That was my first thought
A child - happy happy times.
I thought of a mountain in the distance
that was Comemara. Only been once to
I was so happy and relaxed there in spite
the chaos and trying to please everyone

I'm Harrie -
not a wife, mother, daughter or sister of anyone

I'm Harrie
Anonymous - no past no future
Now.

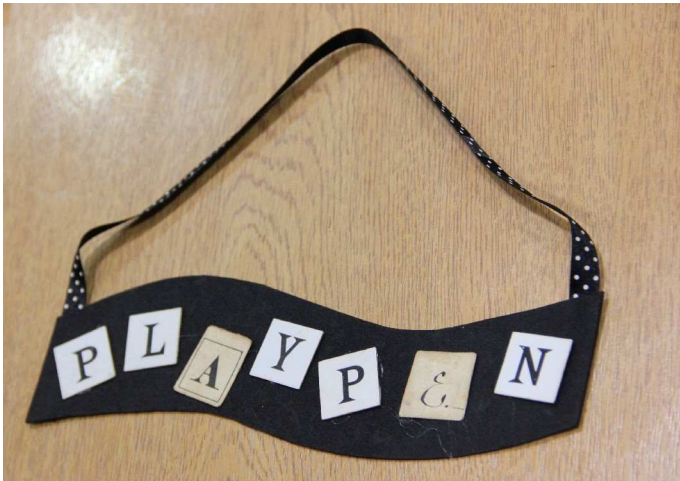
I'm Harrie
me.



We made words to hang on our doors or put on our walls to make oases within our own homes.



'Such fun to play instead of lead games for a change.'



'It is a happy place to be.'

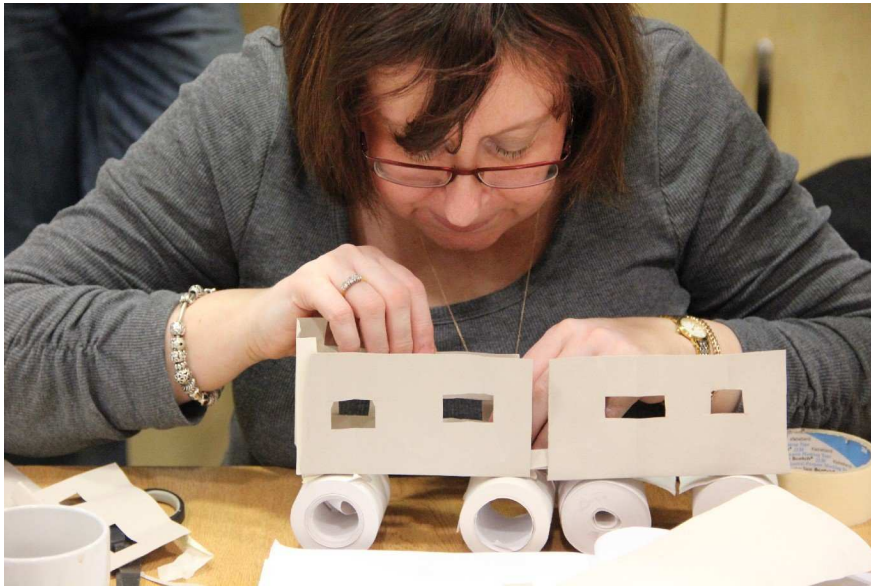
Q. What do you do with a blank sheet of paper?



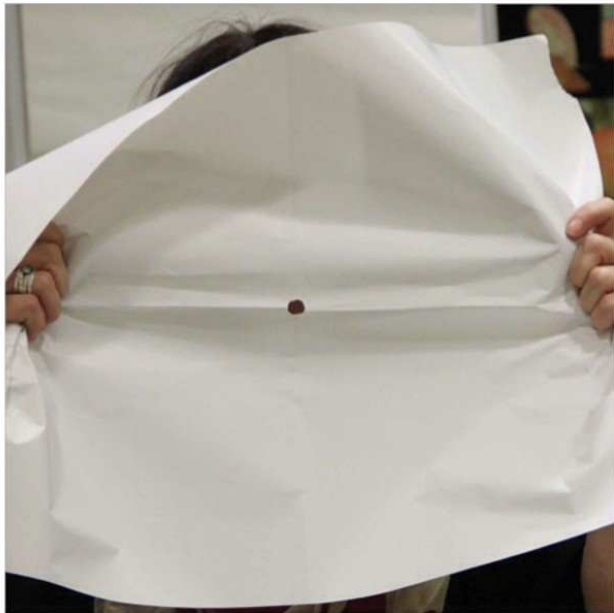
A. Play it like a musical instrument, using scores to help you, of course...



'I love how the sharings are interspersed with so many giggles,' Bryony.



'Creating a sculpture was great fun and brought everyone together,' Paul.



You could always write on it.





‘English is not my first language but that is the language I want to write in.’

We talked about the scars we gained whilst seeking out treasured lemonade, about how our creases tell stories of sleepless nights, sunbathing, babies, our whole lives. Someone mentioned the maps of older people's skin. It was amazing what we had forgotten until asked to find the tales our bodies told. A woman's scars should not be hidden, we agreed, but reclaimed.



Harrie made this figure in response to her movement homework. When she turned her, the woman danced!



Pink and wiggly, my toes scrunch into the blanket.
Proud in new shoes they prance, much admired.
Slapping the pavement in white plastic sandals,
they join other colours in Whitsuntide pride.
Cold, clammy and happy, they slush welly ventures.
Cool sneakers permit freedom to play on into new life.
Foolhardy fashion dictates pain, restriction and totter
till years bring wisdom to feet, who know better
the path they now follow.

Laine



Can't
dance,

don't
ask me

My hair has done lots -

It grows.

It gets cut.

It gets coloured. It turns white.

It curls. It curls. It curls.

It gets washed, dried, pulled, yanked,
brushed, combed, messed up.

It curls -

My hair has seen it all -

It's attached to my head.

It's seen first.

It blocks the view of those behind me.

My hair has been short.

It's been long.

It's been an afro.

It's been straight.

Never the same twice.

It's been up. It's been down.

No fear in the wind but
kinks in the wet.

There goes that hair -

My hair grows where it likes,
no control, just free.

Waiting to be (arrested)
but escapes.

Harrie



Birdsong

Her ears hear the birds sing for the first time, when she is seven.
Scrunched in the corner of her bright, sunlit bedroom, huddled next
to Dad. The sash window is wide open.

“What is that noise?” she asks him. Unrecognisable racket - a
screaming creature clambering and scrambling hastily through her
ear holes, it crashes into her grommet-scarred eardrums.

Sound meets in the middle of her brain – a white shatter, piercing and
bursting. It fills every crevice, nook and cavity with the solid mass of
pure pain.

Tiny hands cup her pink throbbing earlobes – a losing attempt to
muffle, mask and hide from this new world.

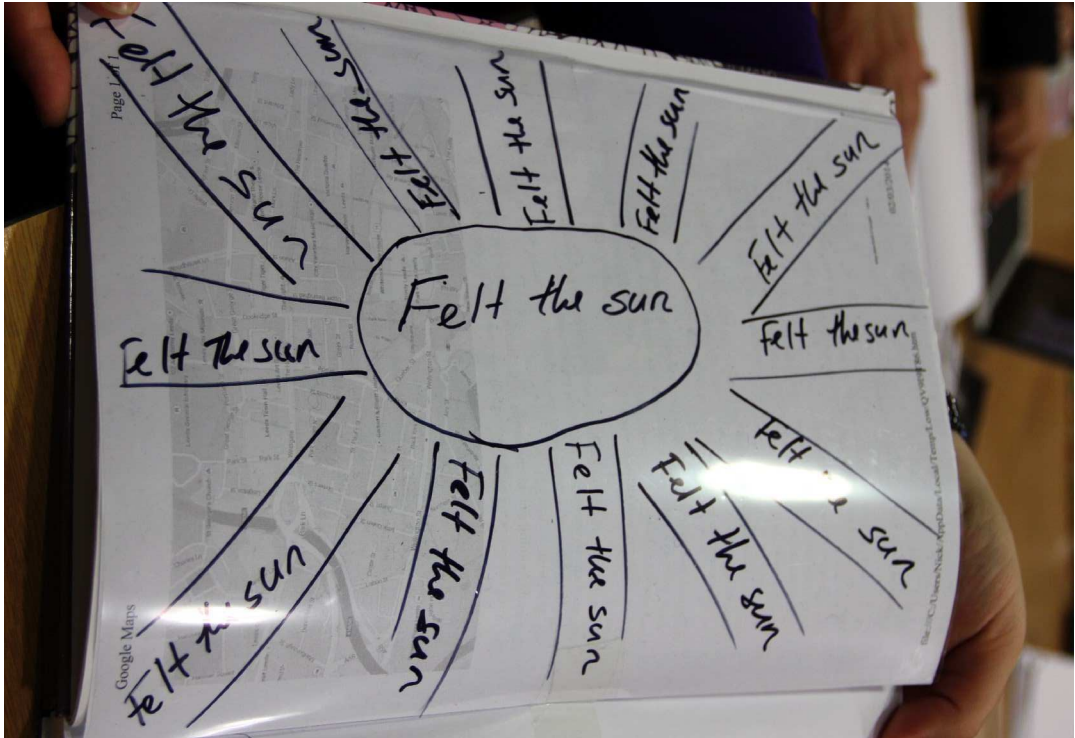
Unbeknown to her then, they would hear everything from birdsong in
a Leicester garden, to the gangling wishing bells in a Bangalore
rickshaw.

“It’s the birds singing,” he answers with tears dripping off his chin.

Bryony



...meeting
...message some
...Dr Felice add
...also possible you
...will discover your
...is cracked with you, which is unus
...he had with you, which is the best th
...conditional, was the best th
...ad happened to him.
...may well want you back but
...is always the risk that you may
...ant him back, having realised
...if you want a partner who
...unconditional in their love for



We took favourite phrases from our writings and projected them onto one another's bodies.



We soon found the natural models and the innate directors - 'Can you move out of my shot?' 'What about the back?'





...a
...silky
...warm
...soft
...elastic
...wall.

**Bodies
leaned. They were
bandaged,
cocooned,
shrouded in our
thoughts.**





Summer of 1949,
their hands fused in harmony.
60 years STRONG, together.

MOVE forward - another day, ANOTHER story,
I lift and move and build and re-build,
lead links I copiously seal. Working like a dog unto it I owe
the small diamond front imbibes the day's rationed rays.
...Nothing unusual there.
I FEEL STRENGTH. I FEEL POWER. I FEEL HOPE.

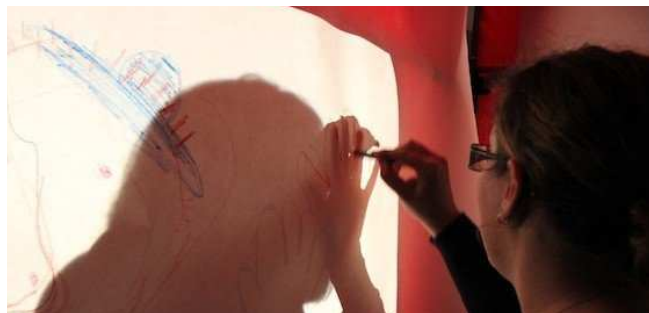
Through soil, water and air I sift,
bound and tunnelled, direction set,
steadfast in unison. Like their 1949.

Nicola



Drawings of lines following inside and outside a body shape, marked the edges of a body, the start and end of the frame. As we drew and painted, we noticed connections, cross-overs, links, layers of the lines, light from one side.

It became a patchwork of texture and pattern and drips.



'I witnessed laughter, stillness, flow, complimenting each other's ideas, careful consideration, thoughtful and reflective encouragement,' Bryony.



'Everyone was really focussed on what they were doing.'

We found ourselves knotted up in coloured scarves





and helping one another to squeeze our bodies through frames.

We read and discussed poetry. One week participants were given a print out of Grace Nichols's poem Hurricane Hits England and asked to develop group performances of the poem.



‘I couldn’t get into it [the poem] at first but I really like it now, having worked with it. I feel I understand it more.’



'Inspired by the poem and the movement activities, the participants threw themselves into the task. As each group performance began... "It took a hurricane, to bring her closer to the landscape" ... we nestled in and watched the variety of performance responses unfold. This was a safe space for sharing, laughing, encouraging. It was beautiful to see.'

Bryony



I am me becoming

I am becoming me

I am the cloud sweeping across the sky

I am the sky

I am the bud on every tree

I am the tree

I am the eagle soaring over the mountain

I am the mountain

I am the thunder that strikes after lightning

I am lightning

I am the storm out at sea

I am the sea

I am the waves crashing on the shore

I am the shore

I am the sand that blows across the desert

I am the desert.

Today, I will arise and walk the land

I am the land, the earth, the sea

I am old and growing older

I am becoming me.

Neli

**Written in response to the Grace Nichols poem, Hurricane Hits
England.**



Starting out
similar to



awakened when time permits
awaken.

Sketching

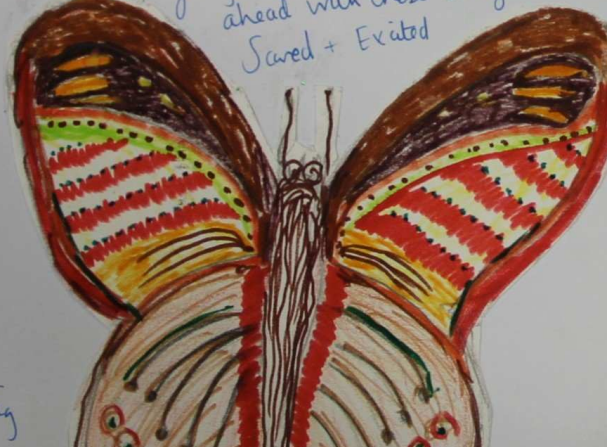
Pushing = MOVING

No longer content in this imprisoned place
until I break free - slowly and cautiously, into new ground, - new
Wings... it's the unknown really. I'm not certain what's beyond this
Sleeping bag and its stretchy comfort. It's initially quite scary
because I need to expel lots of energy in order to forego this transformation
But, focused I am. And once the decision is made, there's
no going back. I HAVE to go
ahead with these changes.
Scared + Excited

Which butterfly

time?
when?
Will I be?

I will change colors, depending



welcomed feeling
I'd gather so used to
movements all seem too much
for change and it doesn't get much
flowy opportunities



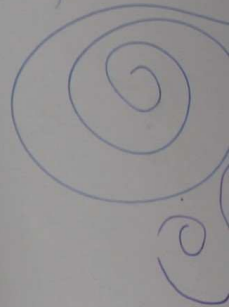
I'm

FREE

In flight, I travel far + wide -
no restriction or responsibility. Just the
freedom to pursue my own self direction.
which is weightless and focused.

With GRACE I fly through the Spring
air, showing my colors to all around. They
will be graced with my beauty. I will give
their eyes a feast. I'm LIGHT and
unbordered - which allows for me

and not scared
fearless of things
in my new unfurling



Through
when the g
+ rust
I trust

I am an egg me,
always have been.
Humpty Dumpty was an egg,
didn't like it when he fell.
Me? I feel just fine – don't miss that shell at all.
I was stuck there for a while,
hemmed in, repressed, that sort of thing,
old mother hen clucking away,
'Outta my way egghead,
can't you see I'm busy',
would poach your brain with small talk,
I'd wander around my shell for a walk,
go to bed and dream of faraway places,
city lights, cabaret and vast open spaces.

Then -
*one night as I was busy sleeping,
the door did suddenly start creaking,
a crack appeared and then a light.
I grabbed me hat and stood real quiet,
I waited for impending flight,
me nerves all tangled up in fright
and when the gap was wide enough
I took me chance and toughened up!*

*I ran as fast as I could go,
I ran so far no-one would know
and when I got to Godknowswhere
I ran again to a place called Dare.
I passed through Go-Between and Seeificare
I stayed in Turnback and Bliss and Scare,
Love was lovely but sometimes sad,
Disappointment was a real drag.
Strange was difficult, Go-On was quick,
I was always landing in Thick-of-It.
I hitched to Lust and Button-Up
And then I knew there was summit up.
And still I travelled on my way
Until I found myself Inhere
I like Inhere, I'd like to stay,
It's the kind of place I like to play.*

But isn't it a funny thing -
as I settle in my shell and sing,
I dream of life and kith and kin
and think I might become a hen.

Neli



'I remembered what the other poems were like and made some of it rhyme and some of it not rhyme properly – you see I have been listening.'



I've been thinking about the writing a lot. I was away for a few days and I felt I had to write there and then. It is cathartic.'



We experimented with our voices, with different ways of conducting and choreographing each others' words using touch and body movements to indicate changes in the voice speed, volume and pauses. Here Vita plays director while Becky performs Vita's poem back to her.



In pairs, we questioned objects and discovered their stories.

'I took part in many of the sessions and was inspired by the energy, kindness and humour of the group,' Hayley.

A Salad in your Head

Finding a way back to the beginning,
the seed of an idea
the scenic route forwards, backwards.

The light trickles into your
heart, character and personality.

Finding a way back to the beginning,
the natural and the perfect

the hopeful and meandering
forwards, backwards.

Edited by Bryony and Sandra



The big bang did not happen without direction and design.

② The seed of an idea; give it compost, water and sun.

④ Forwards, backwards, side to side.

It fills the edges, widens, opens, spills out.

Finds balance & takes form.

The natural & the perfect

To the sun rising in the morning and setting in the evening. So it is bright red or a trickle of light awakening or dimming.

That trickle of light is absorbed into your

heart, character and personality. Each morning when you wake up, you can smile, thank God, and listen to the dawn chorus.

The score of a ~~the~~ bird song, unrelenting, hopeful & meandering. ① Finding away back to the beginning. ③ The scenic route.

Sitting in rows, we planted our ideas on the page.

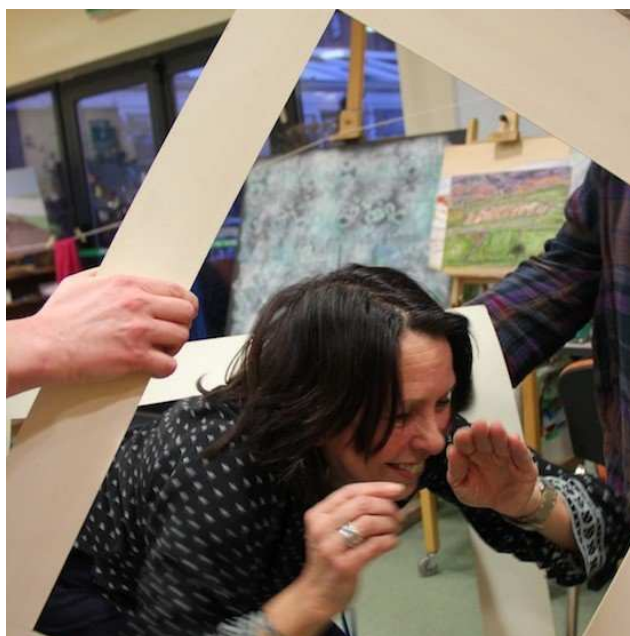
Weeks later, we came back and pruned and fed until our poems blossomed magnificently.

Co-operation
was the start of the great journey for me.
I was 19, in love, willing to give
whatever was needed
to allow union to grow.
No tariff seemed too high,
a climactic exchange,
the force of thunder and lightning
causing a flood,
a tsunami of emotion of my heart
couldn't take anymore...

The accommodation I needed
was within, a generosity
of spirit to balance old scars
and allow calm acceptance
of who I am now.

Edited by Vita and Harrie

'Together, we owned our scars.'

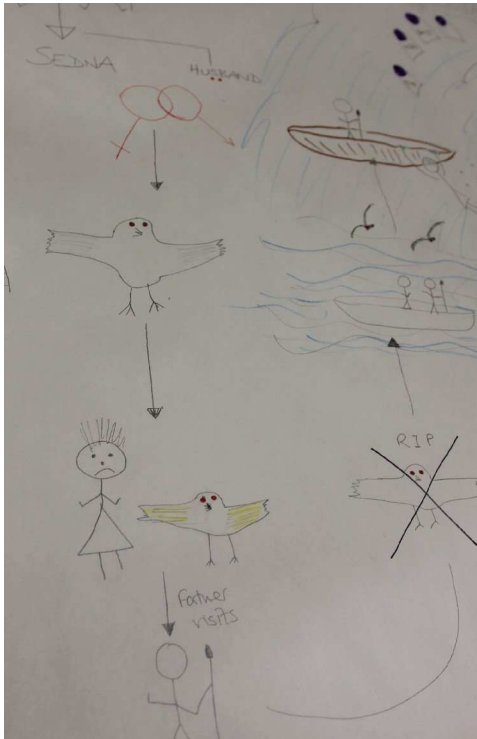


Mother of Sea Creatures

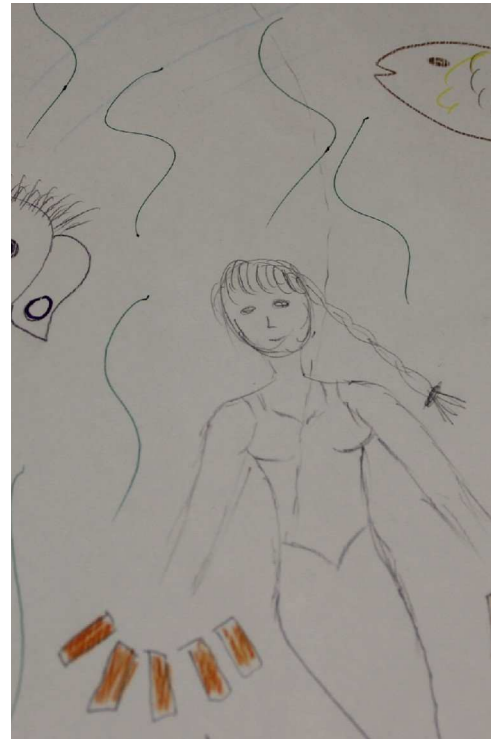
I have the power
and I can rule,
my fingers are gone
and the sea creatures are born.
Come down, my creatures,
Come down to me.
The world above the sea
no longer exists.
My hair is my strength,
it keeps me calm
when brushed and made into a plait.

Vita





We saw Skeleton Wumman at one of West Yorkshire Playhouse's A Play, A Pie and A Pint nights.



These are our interpretations of the Sedna myth that inspired the play.

I am Sedna

I have no reason,
I know no rhyme,
they want me to marry,
why should I?

My father fixes it,
it does not work.
My husband, who is he,
a man or a bird?

The wind fires up,
I end up on the sea bed.
What is this place I find myself in,
all black, dark and green?

What will become of me?
I am Sedna,
I will rule the sea.
Make this my world,
 my Peace
 my Escape.

Debra



MY
SPACE



Through movement, we focussed on our bodily axis, weight, space around our bodies, travelling, support. We explored solo and in pairs, developed notions about what it is to be in an ensemble or 'shoal' but to have your own identity, keep your own approach.

'If you had mentioned eye contact at the beginning, my alarm bells would have gone off but this eased us into it.'

'The leading people by the finger activity was the most powerful for me.'

'Normally that would have tapped into all my insecurities, but that was O.K. It was fun.'



Weather Change

The sun is out, shining bright,
dazzling my brown eyes.
Pleasant, nice and warm is the air blowing through my face and hair.

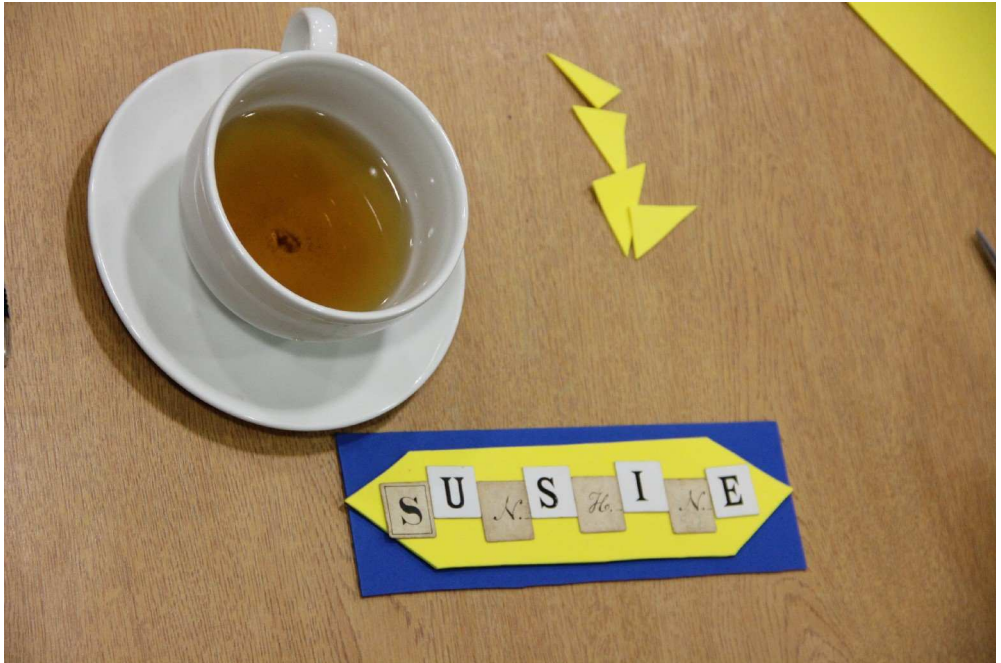
Looking high up in the sky that's no longer blue and bright.
It all looks dull, grey, dark
above me, to the left and right.

I'm surrounded by thunder,
the rain is here and I feel fear.
The ground is wet
but my feet aren't yet.
Quickly run under cover.

The rain is gone and the sun has returned, shining over me
And I can hear, in my ear,
the birds that cheer
in such a delightful way.

It's sudden peace and quiet.

Vita



Vita's prompt was to respond to five types of weather she encountered during the week.

Colour

Vivacious outgoing pink.
Pink in the air and everywhere,
pink on their shoes and in the sparkle in her hair,
pink is the wedding dress
and on their wedding invites,
pink is in the air.

Never seen her in blue,
see her often in black, it must be said,
her long black shiny boots,
her long curly coconutty hair,
her colour is pink, it's everywhere.

Probably have a pink wedding cake on the day,
everything will be pink, she won't be swayed.
A touch of white on the tables,
pink ribbons on the doors,
a grand night will be had by one and all
to celebrate those adored.

Debra

Write about a person in terms of their colours.



The Colours of Their Lives

Her garden blooms with vibrant colours.

The converse pumps she wore at school
were pink, often worn with baby-blue tights,
made her feel WAPPY.

See her sometimes in black, it must be said,
her long black shiny boots.
Her colour is pink, it's everywhere!

Red when angry, pale blue when calm,
each is reflected outwards,
washing over themselves and everything around them.

He is the orange of Mediterranean rooves,
my shelter, sunset romance,
a man to be unpeeled.

The colours of their lives.

Harrie, Debra, Paul, Bryony, Becky



Here I Stand

It stands alone, majestic in the corner,
upright, statuesque, silent yet alive.
We throw things at it, eager to shake off the outside
and embrace the warmth within.
Too much and it will topple over,
a balancing act we know we've got wrong
only when it's too late.
A jumble of colour, texture and size
held together by a spine of metal,
tall and straight, curved and decorative.
holding the lives of those who pass by,
come and go,
stop and start.

Hayley

***Find an object within the building and free write about it,
taking care not to mention what the object is.***



Leaves

So many up on the wall, all important to someone,
somewhere where they can think
that reminds them of loved ones.

Forget D Day landings,
forget the poppies,
although still important to all of us,
these are about people closer to us!

A fortune to add
but totally unique,
each holds its own emotion,
a leaf on a tree.

They glisten in the light,
they do not move,
remember the past,
the memories, their stories, our futures.

Debra



The End

All good things come to an end but this end is too sad to contemplate.

Since being in the circumstances which gave me access to Oasis, life has been challenging. The best to come out of this situation has come from the Oasis sessions where my life at home didn't matter and I am

ME (how selfish is that)!

The fun has been just that **FUN** laughs, considered activities and most of all relaxing. Apprehensive in the beginning of the unknown but confident (as before). I will miss the project and more importantly, the

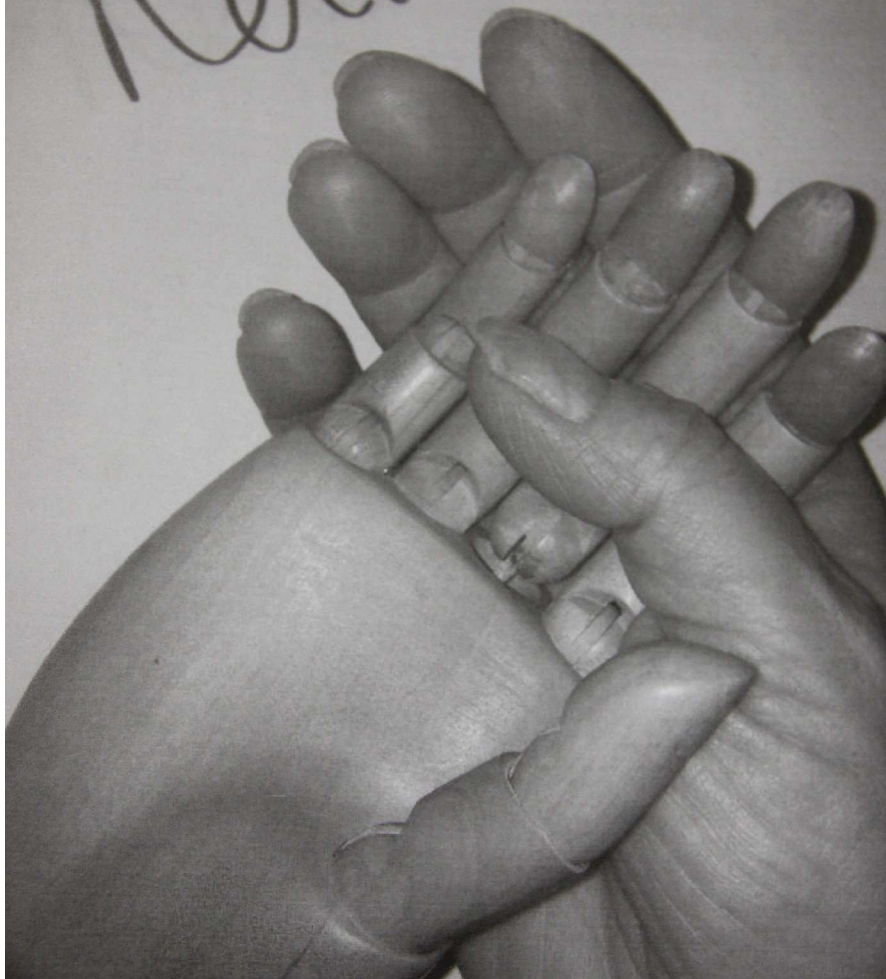
PEOPLE.

Thank you for giving me current

MEMORIES

worth saving.

held.



'For me the programme running during the darker evenings gave me something to look forward to and broke the work/home routine nicely.'

'I will find ease with my body and voice and take away some oasis to find it wherever I am.'

'Becky and Bryony have delighted us with a varied programme and they have offered generous, kind encouragement when needed.'

'It's been good to giggle. And I'm so thankful for that opportunity.'

'I've liked the writing the most, which I've been surprised at. As a single parent, it's been hard to allow myself that time, but when I go home after this session, I look after my kids better. I am a better mum because of this.'

'I've made lots of new friends.'

'I will be sad not to spend my Tuesday evenings with these people, each of whom exudes such vibrancy and integrity.'



Thanks to

the project participants:

**Andrew Tunick, Nicola Lonsdale, Laine Frances,
Sandra Jones, Harrie Lerman, Neli Shine, Vita Crawford
and Debra Sorkin**

**Becky Cherriman (Writer, Performer, Facilitator)
Bryony Pritchard (Interdisciplinary Artist)
Paul Tolkin (Leeds Jewish Welfare Board)
Hayley Mason (Artlink West Yorkshire)
Sylvie Fourcin (Artlink West Yorkshire)**

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