**TAFFI Art Therapy Group (Therapy, Art, Friendship and Flourishing in Illness)**

**Preliminary qualitative results of a randomised controlled trial**

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**Background:**
- Children and young people with chronic physical disorders have twice the risk of psychological maladjustment compared with healthy children (Huang, Elgen, Gillberg, & Lundervold, 2009).
- Many children with longer health conditions struggle with self-esteem, social role definition and frequently report feeling different from their peers (Lambert & Korch, 2015).
- An art therapy group protocol called TAFFI (Therapy, Art, Friendship & Flourishing in Illness) that integrates aspects of narrative therapy, positive psychology and mindfulness-based approaches was designed to address the psycho-social needs of patients across multi-diagnostic paediatric presentations. A heterogeneous group composition offers underrepresented patient populations the opportunity to participate in a group experience (Lambert, 2011).

**No study of an art therapy group intervention applied to multi-diagnostic presentations exists.**

**Primary Aims:**
- To assess the effectiveness of an art therapy group intervention on health-related quality of life: social functioning, coping, illness perception, well-being and psychosocial behavior in young people with chronic conditions
- To qualitatively examine the acceptability of the intervention to participants and parenetguardians

**Methods:**
A randomised controlled trial with mixed methods approach to data collection

**Recruitment:**
- Participants aged 9 – 12-year-old diagnosed with a chronic health condition across two hospital sites
- n = 60
- 3 x 8-week long intervention (up to n=10)
- 3 x Waitlist Control Group (up to n=10)
- Block randomisation (two strands: diabetes & other conditions)

**Analysis:**
- Quantitative:
  - Psychometric battery administered at baseline, post intervention and at 6-month post-intervention
- Qualitative:
  - Thematic analysis of focus groups with participants and with families post-intervention.
  - Audio Image Recordings (AIRs) and Reflect Interviews (RIs) will be used to identify participant valued mechanisms of change in the art therapy process.

**Preliminary Findings:**

- **Increased Self-Esteem**
  - "Em, I’m more confident and I’m much better with making friends."

- **Reduced Feelings of Loneliness and Difference**
  - "Yeah because now I know people my age and stuff and now I don’t feel lonely or like, alone, yeah."

- **Improved Mood**
  - "now I come home from this and I’m kind of happier."

- **Belief in Ability to Cope with Health Condition**
  - "I want to say thank you very much to [facilitators] for showing me that I can cope with my condition in very many ways!"

- **Meeting Others Who Share Similar Feelings and Experiences**
  - "Yeah, like, it was good to make friends with other people who have chronic illnesses. It just made me feel better."

- **What Helped?**
  - "Just so, like, you can learn about other people, not just, like, just thinking about yourself. And then think about other people and their illnesses and what they’re going through."

**Analysis:**
- This is the first study that examines the efficacy of an art therapy group protocol designed to address the psycho-social needs of paediatric patients with chronic health conditions across multi-diagnostic presentations.

**Discussion:**
- Using qualitative methods to capture the stories of young people’s journeys with chronic health conditions is strongly in line with agendas for patient-centred care and can prove to be a powerful tool to connect service providers and commissioners to service users (Flannery, Glew, Brewster, & Christie, 2017). Mixed methods research furthermore provides stable option for advancing the art therapy research agenda while preserving the essential meaning of the field (Gerber, 2016). New methods such as the AIR and RI offer a novel contribution to art therapy research from within its practice.

**What Changed?**

- **Pleasure and Play (Joy and Kinesthetic Release)**
  - “it was fun, and it was just fun to take a creative thing in your mind and just make it.”

- **Symbolic Expression of Feelings and Experience through the Artwork**
  - “Well, it’s kinda again, it’s getting everything off my shoulders and just putting it on a page or making it in clay, so I can like see it in person.”

- **Interpersonal Learning**
  - “It helped me to make new friends and to be around children who have similar experiences.”

- **Belonging and Sense of Community**
  - "I was like, I’m not weird here, you know, like I belong here."