

**Client:**

Blue Cabin www.wearebluecabin.com

Sector:

Social Care: Children's Services

Context:

Blue Cabin are a Community Interest Company. They believe, based upon evidence and research, that outcomes for Care Experienced Children and Young People (CECYP) can be transformed when they have regular and ongoing opportunities to develop positive relationships with the people in their lives. The opportunities that we develop are always facilitated by Artists – they see the role of creativity as being both a fundamental human right for all children and young people AND the mechanism that can bring people together to experience something which is fun, joyful, exciting and challenging and based upon a sense of equality and imagination.

For the past two years Blue Cabin have worked in partnership with Child Trauma Intervention Services (originator of the Therapeutic LSW model) and South Tyneside Council and five Associate Artists to develop a Creative Life Story Work approach; a three tier model of All About Me, More About Me and Therapeutic Life Story Work. This model builds upon an approach called *Therapeutic Life Story Work* which has been an intervention for children, young people and adults for the last 30 years developed by Richard Rose at Child Trauma Intervention Services. The Creative Life Story Work approach enhances the first tier of this model called 'All About Me' by offering CECYP the opportunity to take part in a Creative Experience.

What is Life Story Work?

Life Story Work is a collection of relationships and behaviors that can provide children separated from their birth families the opportunity to know about their past in a way that is meaningful to them in the present. All local authorities are obliged to undertake Life Story Work with children and young people in their care but can find this process very challenging.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellent (NICE) state that CECYP should have 'ongoing opportunities to explore and make sense of their identity and their relationships' as this is associated with 'high self-esteem and emotional wellbeing'. It is recognised by NICE and OFSTED that CECYP who are not able to live with their birth parents may have difficulty developing a clear sense of who they are. NICE cites **Life Story Work** as an approach that can

support CECYP to do this and states that it should be an 'ongoing process facilitated with sensitivity'

The Creative Life Story Work Model

All About Me - is the initial 'entry point' into CLSW for CECYP. It provides them with the opportunity to explore their past, explore what is happening right now and express their hopes and dreams for the future in a safe creative space. CECYP can either take part in *Creative Experiences* in a group setting facilitated by an Artist and a Pastoral Support Worker or engage in 'direct work' with a trusted adult, such as a foster carer. Themes such as 'who am I?', how do I feel?, where do I live and why do I live there?, what do I want for my future?, are explored.

More About Me – is an in-depth process, undertaken by a trained worker alongside the CECYP and their key adult (such as a foster carer) and lasts 8-10 weeks. The process aims to support the child or young person to explore and understand questions about their past and present, in a safe therapeutic environment. More About Me is facilitated by a trained Therapeutic Life Story Worker (TLSW).

Therapeutic Life Story Work - is a more in-depth process, facilitated by a trained TLSW, alongside the CECYP and their key adult (such as a foster carer) and lasts 12 months. The process aims to support a child who is 'stuck' in processing an often difficult and complex past, which has featured trauma for them.

Support for Associate Artists

Blue Cabin have provided a range of ways for the Associate Artists to reflect. These have included posting weekly reflections online on [Basecamp](#), regularly conversations with Blue Cabin team members, access to a therapist, and group reflections sessions like this one.

Participants:

Associate Artists working on the Creative Life Story Work programme and the Blue Cabin Team

Length of Intervention:

The Creative Life Story work began in 2018 and has lasted 2 years. The artist cohort have met regularly throughout the life of the programme – online and face to face. This was the final reflection session for the artist cohort and the Blue Cabin Team and had been planned as a day long session. Covid19 demanded that the session was held online and so the steep Virtual Facilitation Learning Curve began

Rational Aim:

- To have space and time together to reflect on two years of All About Me
- To gather learning for future iterations of All About Me
- To gather reflections about individual learning

- To reflect on our virtual session

Experiential Aim:

- Open, transparent, learning, playful

Main methods used:

Wall of Wonder: “What have been the key significant events in the Story of All About Me?”

Focused Conversation: Artists were asked to bring an object which best represented their experience of All About Me and to complete a questionnaire about the experience of what was to be a face to face session going online.

Online platforms used:

Zoom, Basecamp, Google Docs to capture Focused Conversation, Mural to Capture Wall of Wonder

To what extent did the event succeed in meeting the intended aims? (short term)

Surprisingly, the online meeting format was a huge success. Blue Cabin are indebted to the generosity of other facilitators : Kim Howe www.cocreativeomaha.com/ Eva Jo Meyers at www.spark-decks.com for Virtual Bootcamp and Orla Cronin <https://www.ica-uk.org.uk/going-virtual/> and the role of the producer.

We managed to structure the session, a create a playful space, make all feel comfortable with the technology and have rich, nuanced conversations. All quotes below are from the artists

- *I felt really safe in the space. The pre-intro to Zoom was thorough and the method of ensuring we were all familiar with the functions in the new digital space was great.*
- *The break out rooms were clever. Well managed tech Blue Cabin!!*
- *This method of working will certainly inspire other aspects of my work. Blue Cabin have set the bar on this one!*
- *Loved the Wall of Wonder and being able to visualise the amount of work that we have all done and recognise the good bits and tough bits. Loved using the objects to share special moments and memories.*
- *I really like zoom meetings – this was by far the best one I have done over the past few weeks and I was in awe of the different ways in which it could be used so that we could see and edit the documents etc! Soooooo clever! Blew my wee mind, it did!*
- *Eeeee, what a hoot we all had! It was a great combination of light-hearted loveliness and serious work!*

- *Interesting to think back through the chain of connections involved in the project meeting Jenny led to meeting Dawn & to meeting others etc. We've now a shared history. Lovely to be part of something innovative as a collective. And to hear others' views about that same journey.*

In the medium term (e.g. 3-9 months) what is the overall impact of the event?

Insights gained from Wall of Wonder Exercise have already informed a funding application to work with another Local Authority to develop Creative Life Story Work further.

Blue Cabin have learned that it is possible to work in a truly collaborative manner with a group of artists and Local Authority managers to design and deliver Creative Experiences within the All About Me tier of the Creative Life Story Work model. Blue Cabin provided the safe space for conversation, improvisation and sharing of learning

- *When we met at Sage, there was a real sense of first beginning and connections. The philosophies, the post-its, bringing things with us. It felt really unknowing, and we were really going with our feelings*
- *There has been a two way reciprocity not just in sessions – it has been mirrored at organisational level between Blue Cabin and Artists/ Blue Cabin and South Tyneside/ South Tyneside and Artists. Back and forth, back and forth. Honest dialogue from start - we don't know what will happen, but we want you to be with us as collaborators*

Blue Cabin are now better able to articulate the Creative Life Story Work model and have a clearer understanding about what support needs to be in place for Associate Artist and for Local Authority staff in order for it to be embedded within a Local Authority Structure at a macro and micro level.

There is a vital need for regular reflection spaces for Associate Artists to support each other and share key learning.

- *It felt great – we were really supported. It was a beautifully supported project*
- *Learned so much from conversations / reflections with other artists. We are all different and yet we have become a team*
- *Reflecting on sessions on basecamp – using things other people had done. It felt like you weren't alone, you were part of a team*
- *The phonecall from J – like a warm hug from your Grandma*

Artists are using expertise and knowledge gained since the beginning of this process, and applying in other work they are delivering.

- *It becomes a sub-conscious thing – it's a part of how you work. I've been able to take that way of working into other things*
- *I've started to make connections with my own work*

The Blue Cabin team now have confidence to design and deliver online sessions and can add Virtual Facilitation to their collective skill set.