



# **Space for Stories**

## **Self Evaluation Report**

**Scottish Storytelling Centre**  
**January 2008**



**“We never had so much need of storytelling and its healing powers.”**

George Mackay Brown, poet, storyteller and patron founder of the  
Scottish Storytelling Centre

**“...participation in culture adds enjoyment to life, increases  
self belief, equips people with important life skills, and improves  
well being and health.”**

Creating Our Future, Minding Our Past, Scottish Government, 2001



## Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Space for Stories working group</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Aims &amp; Outcomes</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Timeline</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Project 1: Artlink Central</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Project 2: Orchard Clinic</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Project 3: Soutra Day Unit</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	
– Appendix A: Space for Stories guidelines	<b>42</b>
– Appendix B: Story Round, Soutra Day Unit	<b>44</b>



## Introduction

---

Building on the success of the *Life Stories* group, established in 2003 to provide outreach sessions to older people living in community, residential and hospital settings, the Scottish Storytelling Centre devised *Space for Stories*, a pilot initiative aimed at exploring and celebrating narrative as a vehicle of personal and community development. It was understood by staff, storytellers and participants that this was not a therapeutic intervention.

Involving three very different client groups within the Lothian and Forth Valley areas, *Space for Stories* consisted of storytelling and storymaking workshops and performances for people with mental health problems and learning difficulties living in both secure and community settings. The sessions, which ran between July and December 2007, were facilitated by a core group of five professional storytellers and involved a range of narrative approaches, including:

- telling, developing and re-telling oral stories;
- Life Story-ing and reminiscence;
- storylines in film and drama with group discussion/commentary;
- creative writing;
- devising and expressing narratives through group work;
- role play and games.

## Space for Stories working group

---

To inform and support the development of the project, the Scottish Storytelling Centre established a working group, bringing together seven professional storytellers with experience of working in a variety of mental health and well being settings.

This group had **four key purposes**:

- to bring professional arts practitioners together in a space where good practice and experiences could be shared and creative partnerships formed;
- to provide advice and guidance to the project co-ordinator;
- to provide peer support and guidance to facilitating storytellers during the project;
- to help establish a research/evidence base for development of future mental health and well-being projects.

Storyteller facilitators worked in pairs, and each pair of storytellers was allocated a member of the working group for additional peer support and advice. These groups were encouraged to meet at least three times during the project and to feed their observations back to the working group on completion of the project.

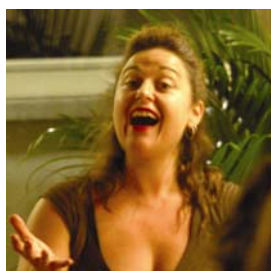
One of the key achievements of the *Space for Stories* working group was the establishment of a set of practical guidelines for facilitation of storytelling and storymaking activities in mental health and well being settings (Appendix A).

The ethos and development of Space for Stories was also informed by the Scottish Storytelling Centre's *Enabling Stories* group, which spent a year exploring storytelling with a therapeutic purpose in a variety of contexts and developed guidelines for storytellers in relation to good practice in this area.



**Millie Gray, project leader and storyteller**

Millie is the Scottish Storytelling Centre's Champion for Older People and in 2004, alongside Donald Smith and Colin Mackay, she formed the Life Stories group, specialising in storytelling with older people and their carers, including the frail elderly and those with dementia. Over the years she has worked alongside people with a broad range of life experiences and personal issues and in a variety of contexts ranging from women's groups and colleges to residential homes, hospitals and sheltered housing. More recently Millie has been involved in the West Lothian *Choose Life* initiative and the *Life Stories* project in West Edinburgh.



**Marion Kenny, storyteller**

Marion Kenny has spent the last 27 years as a professional performer and teacher of creative arts and has worked extensively throughout the UK in special needs settings. Since living in Scotland, Marion has performed and led workshops in special need schools, homes and respite centres, including five years at Rachel House Hospice in Fife, as a Clown Doctor at Edinburgh Sick Kids Hospital, and as a workshop leader for Artlink in a music, storytelling and dance residency. Marion is on the Scottish Storytelling Centre steering committee for storytelling in therapeutic settings, and also a member of the *Dirty Rascals* group which explores storytelling with a therapeutic intent.



#### Jack Martin, storyteller

While working as an associate member of the Occupational Therapy Department at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital, and later at Cambridge Street Day Hospital in West Lothian, Jack was instrumental in introducing drama, play-reading and storytelling to day care patients. His subsequent experience of delivering therapeutic and supportive training programmes to individuals with mental health issues enables him to interact with ease with people from all walks of life, and he is always willing to share his knowledge and skills with others. Jack is a member of the *Life Stories* group.



#### Mary Kenny, storyteller

Having been an artist and sculptor for the last 25 years, Mary's most recent work in the context of mental health and well being was for the Drake Project, providing opportunities for adults with disabilities to explore, compose and perform their own music. She has also led projects at Victoria Park Day Care Centre, with one multimedia project resulting in a DVD showcase at Eastgate Theatre and Arts Centre, and an earlier site-specific project leading to the creation of a permanent mural at the Centre.



#### Marie Louise Cochrane, storyteller

Marie Louise has a broad range of experience in social work, counselling and church settings including three years with Simpson House Drugs Project and one year working with people with learning disabilities. She recently joined the *Life Stories* group, specialising in storytelling and reminiscence with older people and their carers. She likes to use her skills and stories to enable other people, especially older people, to go on and share their own stories.



#### Ruth Kirkpatrick, advisor

Ruth Kirkpatrick qualified in Social Work 21 years ago and has worked with all groups in this time, from the elderly to babies. In 1988 she completed an approved Social Work training course in Mental Health followed by a Certificate in Gestalt Counselling in 1991. For the past 4 years she has worked for Children 1st as a National Storytelling Development Worker, promoting storytelling as an effective tool for engagement, inspiration and change in the lives of adults and children.



#### Ewan McVicar, advisor

Between living in the USA and becoming a writer, Ewan became a social worker and worked for 20 years in a variety of social work contexts. His experience in the area of mental health led to a position as senior social worker in psychiatric hospitals in Glasgow and Greenock, and he later became Assistant Director of the Glasgow Association for Mental Health and initiated and led the first community centre for ex-psychiatric patients in Scotland. Ewan has also combined his love of storytelling and writing to facilitate workshops for Survivors Poetry, a writing and performance group of people recovering from mental illness.

## Aims & Outcomes

The overall aim of *Space for Stories* was to explore and celebrate narrative as a vehicle of personal and community development.

The main outcomes of the project were:

- giving people opportunities for participation in storytelling and storymaking activities;
- helping participants to improve their communication skills;
- helping participants to increase their confidence and self esteem;
- helping enhance participants' sense of self worth;
- improving Centre staff and storyteller understanding of how to deliver storytelling projects in mental health and care settings;
- to develop a research/evidence base for development of future mental health and well-being projects.

The project also draws largely on the four key **Artfull** aims:

- increasing participation;
- building partnerships;
- developing quality artistic practice;
- developing a research/evidence base.

## Timeline

---

- Apr 07** – *Space for Stories* working group formed  
– partnership formed with Sarah Chester, Director of Artlink Central, Stirling
- May 07** – partnership formed with Linda Irvine, Strategic Programme Manager (Mental Health and Wellbeing), NHS Lothian (leading to Orchard Clinic project)
- Jun 07** – partnership formed with Jamie Morris, Staff Nurse, Soutra Day Unit, Herdmanflat Hospital, Haddington  
– *Space for Stories* guidelines for working in mental health and well being contexts drawn up in consultation with working group
- Jul 07** – start of 10-week project with Artlink Central drama group, Cowane Centre, Stirling
- Aug 07** – project evaluation outline drawn up in consultation with Evaluation Support Scotland  
– partnership formed with Linda Walker, Senior Occupational Therapist, Orchard Clinic, Royal Edinburgh Hospital
- Sept 07** – start of nine-week project at the Orchard Clinic, Royal Edinburgh Hospital  
– '*Space for Stories: The Life and Work of Tim Stead*' public event at the Scottish Storytelling Centre  
– work-in-progress performance of *Under Milk Wood* by the Artlink Central drama group, Cowane Centre, Stirling
- Oct 07** – start of nine-week project at Soutra Day Unit, Herdmanflat Hospital, Haddington
- Dec 07** – performance of *Under Milk Wood* by the Artlink Central drama group, Cowane Centre, Stirling  
– Artlink Central drama group visit to Scottish Storytelling Centre, Edinburgh
- Feb 08** – performance of *Under Milk Wood* by the Artlink Central drama group, Scottish Storytelling Centre, Edinburgh
- Apr 08** – 'Stories for Health and Well Being: Personal and Community Development' network development event, Scottish Storytelling Centre, Edinburgh

## Project 1

---

### Artlink Central, Cowane Centre, Stirling

July – September 2007

#### Background

The first *Space for Stories* project was a partnership between the Scottish Storytelling Centre and Artlink Central in Stirling, and aimed to provide people with learning disabilities with opportunities to explore the art of storytelling and develop their own storytelling skills through drama, role play and creative writing.

Artlink Central is the key organisation in arts and disability in the Forth Valley region and is recognised as such by both statutory and voluntary sectors. Their primary purpose is to develop inclusive arts activity across Central Scotland by giving vulnerable groups access to high quality arts projects. Artlink Central recognise and promote the power of the arts to heal, raise self esteem and increase confidence, and their projects embed the arts in core and life skills and support lifelong learning.

Co-facilitated by storyteller Jack Martin and Artlink Central drama artist Elaine Kordys, this series of half-day workshops involved 11 adults from the local Stirling community who have learning disabilities, most of whom live in sheltered housing and are largely excluded from mainstream social or arts activities. Over a period of 10 weeks, Jack and Elaine worked with participants to devise, write and perform an adaptation of *Under Milk Wood* by Dylan Thomas (a DVD copy is enclosed).

During the project Jack also worked with Millie Gray who co-facilitated two sessions when Elaine had other commitments, and was available to Jack for advice, support and debriefing between sessions.

Whilst making the clear distinction between mental health problems and learning disabilities, it's important to recognise that the risk of mental ill health is often greater among people with learning disabilities than among the wider population:

“Research suggests that people with profound and multiple learning disabilities may be more susceptible to mental health conditions than the rest of the population. It is important that careful attention is given to these needs and that the right treatment and support is found to meet them.” Mencap

The *Space for Stories* group therefore felt it important not to restrict the project to mental health service users but to take an inclusive and accessible approach to community mental health and well being.

#### Creative Approach

A series of creative steps led to the final production:

- Stories were told to inspire, entertain and engage the participants, and they were encouraged to share their everyday experiences, and observations for group discussion;
- Participants contributed newspaper clippings to a group scrapbook, which was used alongside props and personal items to stimulate imagination and encourage the sharing of personal stories, tall tales and anecdotes;



An example of a page from the group's scrapbook. These articles were used by Jack Martin to stimulate discussion and imagination within the group.

- Masks were employed as an introduction to improvisational games and character development;
- Participants were introduced to the basic narrative structure of *Under Milk Wood* and worked in pairs (with other group members or carers) or individually to identify which characters from the piece they would like to play, and how they would present these characters visually, orally or through movement. Four group members wrote and learnt their own monologues or musical parts for the play;

Robert - policeman

THE POLICEMAN good AT PUTTING  
 BAD MEN AWAY  
 TAKE THEM AWAY TO THE POLICE STATION  
 AND WRITE A REPORT TO HIS BOSS -  
 AND THE POLICE OFFICER HOW WEARS  
 SHIRT AND TIE

Robert had a clear idea of his role as Policeman, and what his costume would be.

- Participants introduced their own props, costumes and musical instruments to complement their characters. With support from Jack and Elaine, each participant developed their role within the play and together the group brought the piece to life through music, movement and oral narrative.

### Key achievements

- A group of people with a diverse range of learning disabilities, some with profound and multiple difficulties, worked together to devise, develop and perform their interpretation of *Under Milk Wood* by Dylan Thomas.
- The group attended the 'Backstage Blunders' event at the Scottish Storytelling Centre in Edinburgh featuring Jack Martin. For many of the group this was the first time they had travelled by train or been to Edinburgh, and the experience was much enjoyed by participants and carers alike.
- The production was performed three times: twice to carers, friends and Artlink Central contacts at the Cowane Centre in Stirling (the first being a 'work-in-progress' performance), with audience numbers exceeding 30 and 70 respectively; and the third time at the Scottish Storytelling Centre to an audience of 70 carers, friends, health and well being contacts and members of the general public.
- Although the drama group is well established, and some members have been attending for up to 5 years, this is the first time that the group had performed a full piece of work to a live audience:

"We've done many a production but we've always done it on a DVD, feeling that people would be more comfortable like that. But this collaboration has shown us that our group are well able to hold their own on the stage and perform to a very high standard, and this for us is extremely rewarding." *Sarah Chester, Director, Artlink Central*

- The Scottish Storytelling Centre and Artlink Central established a strong professional partnership, based on quality artistic practice and shared aims.

### Evaluation approach

Evidence to support the *Space for Stories* and Artfull aims was gathered in a variety of ways during the project:

- A weekly record of participant attendance;
- A weekly record of creative approaches used and storyteller and group responses;
- Staff/facilitator de-brief at the end of each session;
- Filmed interviews with participants, using a screening of the *Under Milk Wood* DVD to refresh memories and lead into feedback;
- Interviews with Sarah Chester, Jack Martin and Elaine Kordys;
- Feedback forms for carers. There was a low return rate on these, perhaps due to the frequent turnover of group members' care staff.

### Findings

#### Opportunities for participation

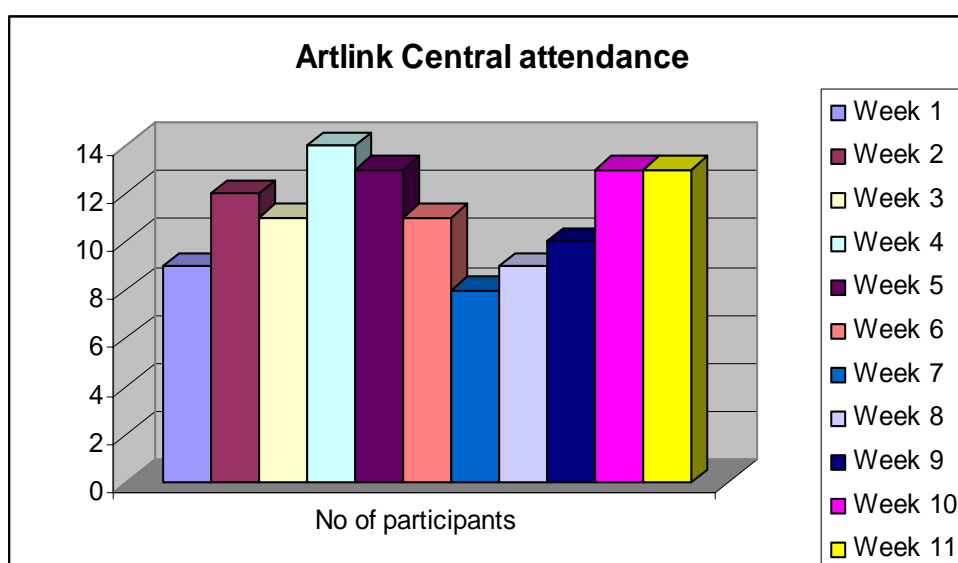
The Artlink Central project provided people with a wide range of learning disabilities with accessible and opportunities for participation in storytelling and storymaking activities. At any one time over the course of the 10-week project, a maximum of 14 people participated in the drama group, with the lowest number of attendees being eight.

A core group of six people attended all 11 sessions, and some participants demonstrated more commitment to this project than they had to previous group activities, suggesting an improved level of client access and engagement:

"Steven wasn't a regular attender before this. His attendance has been more consistent this time." *Sarah Chester*

"This is the best one so far because it's the one that I've taken the most part in...I actually got to play the music for it." *Kirsty, participant*

As the graph below illustrates, there was a drop in attendance around the middle of the project but numbers increased again towards the end. Reasons for non-attendance ranged from participants forgetting the session was on, to illness, lack of carer commitment to the project, and other participant commitments such as doctor or key worker appointments.



During the first few weeks of the project, several participants arrived late to sessions and some were inclined to become restless and keen to leave early. By the end of the project participants were arriving on time and engaging in group activity for much of the session, with some eager to stay longer. This increased level of participation may also reflect an increase in carers' commitment to the project, as many members are dependant on carers to arrive at sessions on time.

### Improved communication skills

Several members of the drama group, including Tony (Captain Cat), Paul (the Milkman), Karen and Robert (the Cocklers) are able to communicate verbally but found the memorising and delivery of a written script very challenging. These participants used storytelling, role play, improvisation and visual aids such as props and masks to identify and develop their roles within *Under Milk Wood*. This led to improved oral communication skills, captured within the projections used to complement the live performance. These participants also developed their improvisation and movement skills on-stage and, having initially struggled with this, engaged fully with their roles and performed confidently.



Tony and Paul developed their communication skills through improvisation, movement and facial expression in their portrayals of Captain Cat and Ochy Milkman respectively.

In line with the diverse nature of the group, participants had different learning styles and methods of communication, and listening played an equally important role as speaking in developing a strong group dynamic. Two members of the group have particularly complex needs and are not able to express themselves verbally, but participated by providing musical sound effects to the production.

Although engaging these participants was perhaps the most challenging aspect of the project for Jack and Elaine, there was a noticeable change in their tendency to interrupt or talk over each other, demonstrating an improvement in listening and teambuilding skills:

*"Towards the end they were much more considerate to each other. Kirsty came out of her shell...her ability to control her emotions improved." Jack Martin, storyteller*

### **Case Study: Robert**

Robert is one of the more able members of the group but, like the other participants, had not performed on stage before. Having chosen his role as the Policeman he created his own costume and, also for the first time, wrote his own script for the part. Until the penultimate week of the project, Robert was still very reliant on the script for support on stage. Robert worked with Jack to develop his character and by the end of the project was able to deliver his lines confidently without the script:

*"The clearer he became about his character, the less he used the script." Elaine Kordys, drama artist*

During the development of Under Milk Wood, Robert collaborated with Jill (the Cleaner), who at times displays quite challenging behaviour, and together they established a supportive partnership. When Jill was unable to attend the last performance, Robert was unfazed and happily improvised his part, even involving the audience in the story.

*"Individuals have grown with their parts." Sarah Chester*



Robert (Police Constable Attila Rees) and Gill (Mrs Ogmores-Pritchard), and Robert and Karen (Mr and Mrs Floyd) worked in pairs to develop their roles. Teamwork helped less confident participants to develop their communication skills in a safe and supportive environment.

"It's something to be really proud of. I didn't know what to expect. It was a great afternoon, with people of different abilities supporting each other."

*Fiona McLean, Quality Action Group, Stirling*

### **Increased confidence and self esteem**

"...through being part of a project like this, I feel people have raised self esteem and confidence, and I feel that they have a huge enjoyment, they have social skills, they make new friends and they work with stimulating and exciting professional artists."

*Sarah Chester*

During the project, participants increased in confidence and self esteem both individually and collectively, and a strong sense of group ownership developed. Each person was nurtured by the group to develop creatively "at their own speed and in a manner that suited them" (Elaine Kordys) and were valued as being integral to the production as a whole. Participants were given control over the interpretation and dramatisation of the piece and this person-centred approach seemed to have an empowering effect on the group:

"It feels really strong, I feel really happy with it. Each little section, everyone's devised themselves. I think that's why everyone feels so comfortable with it...it was very much theirs. Everyone has a lot of ownership over the piece, which I think is why it works...They developed their own style and took responsibility for it...this was both fun and empowering." *Elaine Kordys*

The availability of appropriate rehearsal and performance space was essential within this project, and the use of a theatre in Stirling and Edinburgh validated the production as a piece of professional, quality artistic work.



“There was a good feeling of achievement at the end of it, with the whole thing coming together.”  
Gregor played undertaker, Evans the Death, and wrote and delivered his own script for the play.

### **Enhanced sense of self worth**

Some members who were lacking in self belief at the beginning of the project recognise how much they have achieved and have expressed a real desire to develop the artistic process further:

“I didn’t think I’d be able to do this a few weeks ago, ‘cause I had my hands full and everything, but I’m really pleased I could do it today...I hope we can do more in the future just as good.” *Kirsty, participant*

Through improved group communication, a strong sense of mutual tolerance, understanding and respect developed within the group. Participants were asked to contribute a story, poem or some music to the group towards the end of the project. Where earlier there had been some critical remarks and intolerance, people were more comfortable sharing something significant to them, and each person appeared to feel valid and their contribution validated:

“Tolerance between participants developed over the weeks. At one point early on, Gregor was not really making allowances and that seemed to diminish as the weeks went on. He learnt to make space for other people.” *Jack Martin*

This suggests that participants’ faith in the value of their own contribution to the group improved, and as they started to feel more at ease with themselves they were more able to accommodate other peoples’ needs. Participants came to see themselves as part of a creative group, and valued the role that the drama group played, but most significantly recognised their own achievements:

“It made me feel that there was a point to it, I was doing something. And I really have been welcomed by the team. Nobody’s just closeted me away. Together is what it’s about...being together and enjoying it...I’m really grateful that people have been really nice and we’ve done so well with it. When I did any writing at home, they were quite happy to listen to it, so we were all together, that’s what keeps it going.”  
*Gregor, participant*

Local support of the project has been a vital part of its success, helping to combat stigma and raise awareness the needs, skills and abilities of people with learning disabilities.

Community presence at the Stirling performances also provided valuable opportunities for participants to meet people outside of their immediate circle of family, friends and carers and this seemed to contribute significantly to a sense of well being and self worth:

"We've worked hard for it. Every week we look forward to it...It's good and we get a lot of folk coming to see it...You meet a lot of folk."

*How would you feel if there wasn't a drama group? (interviewer)*

*"Down." Karen and Robert, participants*

Local recognition of the group's achievements was further facilitated by a glowing report in the Stirling Observer on Artlink Central's work, including a specific mention of *Under Milk Wood*. This illustrates to the value and importance of investing in quality arts activities across the community, in helping to create tolerant and supportive communities:

"A whole-community response is required to maximise the mental health potential of all community members. This will involve...creating supportive environments...developing and consolidating local community partnerships. Being able to provide the basic building blocks of a good quality life in local communities is an essential part of improving mental health and well being. This involves the provision of...cultural activities..."

*National Programme for Improving Health and Well Being, Action Plan 2003 – 2006*

### **Learning Outcomes**

- Some challenges were met in attending to the individual needs of such a diverse group, particularly trying to engage participants with more complex needs. This illustrated the need for further consultation and development in this area.
- One participant in particular displayed quite challenging behaviour. This highlighted the importance of carer involvement, storyteller awareness of individual participant needs, and clear ground rules regarding personal space of participants and storytellers.

### **Future steps**

- Sarah Chester has factored storytelling sessions into Artlink Central's 5-year business plan, and the Centre will work with her over the coming year to identify how best to develop this partnership.
- Artlink Central and the Storytelling Centre will put measures in place to provide further opportunities for participants to develop their interest in drama and storytelling, including regular communication on Centre events and activities and visits to more events at the Scottish Storytelling Centre.

## Project 2

---

### The Orchard Clinic, Royal Edinburgh Hospital, Edinburgh

September – November 2007

#### Background

The second *Space for Stories* project was based at the Orchard Clinic in Edinburgh and was aimed at providing adult offenders experiencing a range of severe psychiatric problems (including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, severe forms of depression and severe obsessive-compulsive disorder) with opportunities to engage in storytelling, reminiscence and group discussion. Co-facilitated by storytellers Millie Gray and Marion Kenny, the project consisted of a nine-week series of storytelling and music performances and involved 15 patients across three wards.

The Orchard Clinic is a medium secure forensic psychiatry unit in the grounds of the Royal Edinburgh Hospital. Patients are admitted from prisons, courts, local services, the community and the State Hospital. The Clinic has fifty beds across three ward areas: Redwood (25 beds) is an admission/assessment ward, Cedar (14 beds) and Hawthorn (11 beds) are rehabilitation wards. The Clinic has a strong commitment to multidisciplinary working, incorporating occupational therapy, psychiatry, psychology, nursing, pharmacy and social work. Patients can take part in a variety of group sessions at the Clinic, ranging from literacy and numeracy (CLAN) to art therapy, music therapy, relaxation, drug and alcohol awareness, anxiety management, communication skills and preparing for discharge groups.

This strand of *Space for Stories* evolved out of initial discussions with Linda Irvine, Strategic Programme Manager (Mental Health and Wellbeing) for NHS Lothian who felt the patients at the Orchard Clinic, particularly those working towards rehabilitation into a less secure or community setting, may benefit from being involved in the project.

The needs of offenders detained in psychiatry units are expected more complex than those of people detained within the mainstream prison service, but the power of arts for the mental health and well being, and the importance of equality and personal development for people living in secure settings are widely recognised:

“Research to date has shown the significant benefits of using the arts with offenders, and the establishments within which they are held. The benefits can be personally therapeutic – whereby individuals are given the space and tools to explore their own issues – or can serve an educational need or may simply add to a social or recreational situation.”

*'Breaking Rocks', Arts Professional, May 2004*

“Lets us not forget who is in prison, members of the community passing through.” *'Mental Health in Prisons', John Podmore, Head of Community Prisons and Transitional Facilities, Home Office*

#### Creative Approach

- It was decided from the outset that sessions would take the form of an informal storytelling and music performance – something that, due to the secure nature of their environment, many patients at the Orchard Clinic would not ordinarily have access to.

By creating a safe, accessible space where stories could be listened to and shared, patients were offered a “window into other worlds where their imaginations and creativity were stimulated and developed” (Millie Gray).

“Storytelling was different...as it was focused more on patients attending a performance, a lot of the emphasis was on entertainment rather than the patients being actively involved contributors to the process (as they usually are in our sessions).” *Linda Walker, Senior Occupational Therapist*

These were the only recreational sessions in the Clinic to be facilitated by visiting professional artists, as opposed to an Occupational, Art or Music Therapist. As it is necessary in such a setting for patients’ behaviour and levels of interaction to be regularly and closely monitored, Marion and Millie aimed to create a ‘failure proof’, accepting space which focused deliberately on enjoyment and escapism, where participants could relax and have fun.

- A balance of music and storytelling was used during the sessions. One artform complemented the other, allowing patients to engage in the session through visual and aural means. Some patients found the musical interludes distracting, but for many it provided a new and exciting means of stimulation:

“Marion’s music was an essential part of the sessions. It brought calm and a feeling of well being to all – staff, clients and storytellers. It was an interval which allowed you to reflect and ponder on the last story and what it meant to you.” *Millie Gray, Space for Stories project leader and storyteller*

“I loved the harp and had not heard stories like that before. Thank Marion and Millie for me.” *B, patient*

- A colourful poster was displayed in the Clinic each week to advertise the next session and its theme to patients, and weekly topics ranged from ‘Tales of the Sea’ to ‘Animal Tales’ and ‘Tales of Fire and Light’. Sessions featured a variety of stories from true life tales to traditional folktales, myths and legends. The use of humorous stories became an integral part of this approach and Millie and Marion “took the positive decision to entertain and have a degree of fun in every session.” *Millie Gray*

“When people engage in humor and laughter, they tend to feel more cheerful and energetic, and less depressed, anxious, irritable and tense. In the short term, at least, humor seems to boost positive moods and counteract negative emotions.” *The Psychology of Humor, Rod A. Martin*

- End of session tea times served an important role in providing informal opportunities for group communication, and helped to foster a sense of equality and community between the patients, storytellers and staff. As the project developed, many patients used this time to share their responses to stories, as well as offering their own personal anecdotes:

“Very enjoyable, very interactive, and felt like a community spirit – the entire group enjoying rich and beautiful stories. A shared experience.” *Mary Jo, Occupational Therapy student*

## Key achievements

- The art of storytelling was introduced to 13 patients, all of whom have severe mental health problems and live in a secure in-patient setting. The majority of the patients had no previous experience of storytelling.
- The Scottish Storytelling Centre established a new partnership with the Orchard Clinic, and is in consultation with Clinic staff ways on developing this through future sessions.
- For patients who attended, the storytelling sessions took precedence over several other activities that took place on a Monday morning, as well as other personal commitments:

"One of the patients who attended last week went out of his way to change arrangements for this morning so he could come to the session today." *Linda Walker*

- Millie and Marion gained the trust and confidence of several patients who, by the end of the project, were communicating openly with them and each other:

"...by the end of the nine week project they (the patients) were confiding their innermost hopes to us...It was rewarding for me to have a good response to my stories from people who are so restricted. Marion and I managed to bring a sense of dignity and worth to the clients who began to value us as friends – friends with no 'power' over them and they relaxed and started to transform." *Millie Gray*

- Six of the 13 participants attended an end-of-project feedback session and openly gave their views, positive and negative, on the sessions.

## Evaluation approach

Due to the severe nature of most patients' illness and their varying levels of medication, it often wasn't appropriate or possible to gather direct feedback from patients during the sessions and any evaluation approach needed to be very 'soft touch'. Much evidence for this project is therefore based on storyteller and staff observations.

- Weekly record of participant attendance
- Weekly record of themes focused on, stories told, and patient, staff and storyteller responses
- Staff/storyteller de-brief at the end of each session
- 'Storytelling Revisited': end of project informal feedback sessions with staff and patients (including patients who stopped attending)
- Recorded interviews with Millie Gray and Marion Kenny
- Notebooks were given to patients for gathering ideas and notes from the sessions. It became evident however that this approach was not appropriate to the group as the books were not used. This is symptomatic of the severity of patients' mental health problems but likely to be linked also to the low literacy levels of some patients.

In the planning stages of *Space for Stories*, the Scottish Storytelling Centre secured partnership funding from Linda Irvine, Strategic Programme Manager (Mental Health and Wellbeing), NHS Lothian for an outside evaluation of the two NHS projects at the Orchard Clinic and Soutra Day Unit.

Despite careful planning and consultation however, the evaluators unfortunately did not conduct the patient feedback session at the Orchard Clinic in a way that the Storytelling Centre and Orchard Clinic staff found acceptable.

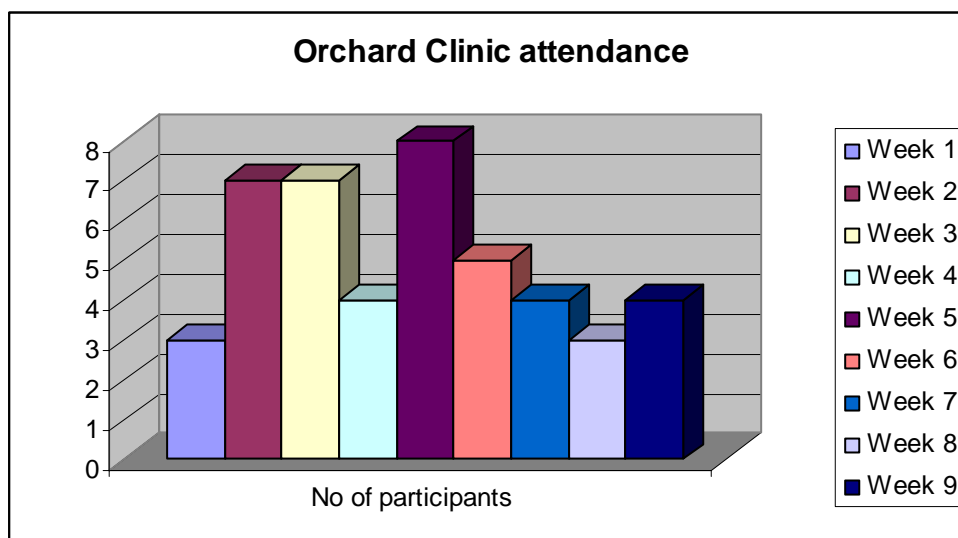
In light of this, the Centre terminated their relationship with this organisation and was supported by NHS staff in taking this decision. Linda then offered to cover the cost of two consultation sessions with Jacqueline McDowell of Evaluation Support Scotland, who provided invaluable advice on gathering further evidence and collating it for this report.

This change in circumstances then posed some challenges regarding collection of data, particularly from patients/clients participating in the sessions, and findings from the Orchard Clinic in particular were somewhat incomplete. It did however allow Scottish Storytelling Centre staff to gain more insight into the outcomes, processes and findings of the two projects and to strengthen project partnerships on all levels through the direct gathering of feedback from storytellers, staff and participants.

## Findings

### Participation in storytelling activities

"Fun session for all, staff and patients alike. I enjoyed the audience participation very much, felt like a part of the storytelling. Many thanks." *Mary Jo Casell*



Over nine weeks, 15 patients from three wards, all experiencing severe mental health problems, participated in the storytelling sessions. Four patients attended five or more sessions, with one patient attending eight out of the nine sessions. Reasons cited for non-attendance included family visits, participation in concurrent groups and difficulties with concentration during sessions.

"D came to nearly all the sessions. He listened intently, laughed easily, participated with interactive tales, and was keen to ask about the origin of stories. He loved the traveller tales and...shared many stories due to this connection. He always shared stories during teatime and they were often triggered by tales told within the session." *Marion Kenny*

## Case Study # 1

"On the first day R sat looking very nervous and was even shaking. Millie told a tale set in Leith and R's face lit up. When she had finished the story, he started to tell us all that he had lived in Leith, and shared a personal and very moving story about a close friend who had died in Leith of a drugs overdose. When it came to teatime, R made tea for us, chatting about the stories told and personal stories.

As the weeks went by, R came to all the sessions apart from the last two when, for the first time, he was allowed out with a carer. He had asked on many occasions whether we would be coming back to tell more stories at the end of the project. R grew in confidence and communication skills and really seemed like an entirely different man by the end of the project." *Marion Kenny*

"I really enjoyed the stories. 10 out of 10." R, patient

## Improved communication skills

"As we grew in confidence we were able to tailor make the sessions to fit the needs and expectations of the clients, and as they grew in confidence with us they interacted with us when our stories triggered their memories." *Millie Gray*

Many patients were quiet, subdued and visibly nervous at the beginning of the project. Those who attended regularly began to respond orally to stories and songs and contribute to group discussions.

"When we saw N on the last day he said that he really hoped we would be coming back. The staff said that he was a very solitary, quiet man and that it was good to see him taking part in a group session and chatting so much." *Marion Kenny*

In a setting where access to sources of stimulation such as television, radio, magazines and books is restricted, both due to literacy problems amongst patients and Clinic regulations, participation in the storytelling sessions stimulated patients' imagination and provided something positive to reflect on and talk about with staff, other patients and family during the week:

"I noticed that patients who were here last week encouraged others to attend today." *Linda Walker*

For some patients development of concentration and listening skills was more apparent than an increase in oral communication skills. Many patients' ability to engage with the stories told and music played increased as the project developed:

"Some of the patients showed an improvement in their concentration and level of relaxation within the storytelling sessions as they progressed." *Linda Walker*

This improvement was also demonstrated by patients' ability recall "powerful stories" (*D, patient*) from previous weeks, with several patients who attended the end-of-project feedback session recalling stories that they had enjoyed hearing during the first session over two months beforehand:

"To remember the stories showed that she (Marion) made an impression on you."  
*B, patient*

It emerged though that one of the patients who showed real progress during the project in terms of her communication skills and self esteem found some stories difficult to understand and engage with:

"It's hard to take things in when you're ill." *B, patient*

### **Increased confidence and self esteem**

"Millie's stories were good...warming." *A, patient*

Many patients seemed to show a visible improvement in confidence and self esteem over the weeks, demonstrated by an increase in eye contact and increasingly relaxed body language. By the end of the project, some patients were taking part in interactive drama-based activities, actively participating in the story with animal sounds and character voices.

#### **Case Study # 2**

For one patient who attended the Space for Stories sessions, this was the first group she had attended at the Clinic. B joined in the sixth week of the project and during this session was visibly nervous and withdrawn; unable to maintain eye contact or to communicate with other members of the group or with Millie and Marion. Having previously been unable to stay in a group setting for more than 10-15 minutes, she stayed at her first storytelling session for approximately 45 minutes.

B returned the following week, and this time was able to stay for an hour, informing staff that she intended to stay longer each week. This time her body language had noticeably changed and she demonstrated increased confidence and self esteem through her ability to engage with Marion and Millie, responding to the stories told and music played through smiles and maintained eye contact:

"B stayed for an hour. She made lots of eye contact – very important as she didn't used to attend groups and chose to come back for a second time." *Marion Kenny, storyteller*

Although B then missed the eighth session, she returned for the final session, her third. She was again able to stay for over an hour and, rather than leaving during a story, she waited until the end of the story to inform staff that she wanted to leave.

B attended the 'Storytelling Revisited' end of project feedback session at the Clinic and, out of the six patients present, was the most vocal and assertive in offering her views on the project, which she confidently expressed to a relative stranger. She was comfortable voicing more negative opinions on the project as well as offering some positive feedback, suggesting a real sense self worth and faith in her own needs and judgement, as well as a marked improvement in confidence and self esteem.

Feedback from staff also suggested that the use of storytelling fostered an environment where patients could stretch their resilience and coping skills:

“I was aware that the stories hit some personal notes for some of the patients and they coped well with it. I think they appreciate the honesty of the stories/storytellers.”

*Janet McSherry, Occupational Therapy Assistant*

### **Learning Outcomes**

- Although music and storytelling complemented each other well within this project for some patients louder music was difficult to engage with and created a barrier to concentration.
- Many patients have problems with concentration, and found longer and more complex stories difficult to engage with and understand.
- Some female patients expressed concerns about maintaining physical space between themselves and the storytellers. This highlights the need for clear ground rules, availability of a suitable performance space, and creation of a safe and secure environment.
- Some patients found particular themes or stories disturbing. In future projects it would be beneficial for staff to highlight any topics that are of particular relevance (positive and negative) to participants.
- Storyteller confidentiality was particularly important in this setting, and should be considered as a ground rule for future similar projects.
- For some patients the performance nature of the session presented a barrier to participation. The willingness of patients to actively participate in later sessions indicates that there is real scope for developing more interactive, drama-based activities with the group.

### **Future Steps**

- Linda Irvine, Strategic Programme Manager (Mental Health and Wellbeing), informed us that she had received very positive feedback from staff at the Orchard Clinic and would be happy to contribute NHS funding towards further sessions. Having reviewed the successes and challenges of the *Space for Stories* project with Clinic staff and the storytellers involved, the Scottish Storytelling Centre will draft an outline for development of the project in 2008/9, focusing on a combination of performance-based and interactive sessions.
- Linda Walker, Senior Occupational Therapist at the Orchard Clinic is planning to provide patients with the opportunity to attend a public event at the Scottish Storytelling Centre during the coming months.

### **Public event**

In the lead up to the *Space for Stories* sessions at the Orchard Clinic, a public event was held at the Scottish Storytelling Centre to tie in with an exhibition of Tim Stead's sculpture and furniture. Designed to give a wider public, including service users and staff, the chance to get involved in *Space for Stories*, this storytelling and music event was attended by 37 adults (a combination of service users, carers, NHS staff and general public), and led to the development of several new links with NHS, local authority and voluntary sector contacts including Andrew Gardiner, Health Improvement Co-ordinator for Midlothian Council and Ivan Barry, Advocate for Circles Network.

The event was funded and publicised by NHS Lothian, helping to further cement its partnership with the Scottish Storytelling Centre, and increase awareness of the role of storytelling in mental health and well being.

"The benefits of the role of the arts and creativity in promoting positive mental health and well-being is well known and we are delighted to be part of this event." *Linda Irvine, Strategic Programme Manager (Mental Health and Wellbeing), NHS Lothian*  
[www.nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk/news/mediaroom/news\\_release/07\\_09\\_24\\_space\\_for\\_stories.asp](http://www.nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk/news/mediaroom/news_release/07_09_24_space_for_stories.asp)

## Project 3

---

### Soutra Day Unit, Herdmanflat Hospital, Haddington

October – December 2007

#### Background

The third *Space for Stories* project was based at Soutra Day Unit in Haddington and involved a small group of adults from the local area experiencing acute (short term) moderate to severe and crisis levels of mental health problems who attend the Unit on a drop-in basis.

Using a range of narrative approaches from storytelling and reminiscence to story rounds and group discussion, storytellers Marie Louise Cochrane and Mary Kenny facilitated a nine-week series of participatory workshops. These were aimed at providing people who live in the community with opportunities to learn more about storytelling as an artform, explore different ways of telling stories and ways of expressing themselves creatively through storytelling.

The majority of the services provided at Soutra Day Unit focus on education and psychotherapy, helping clients to find and develop techniques and strategies for recovery, trying to instil a sense of hope, purpose and structure to their everyday lives. Clients come to the Unit through referral from a psychiatrist via their GP. Part of this assessment looks at suitability for group work, based on the understanding that most people get better most quickly by participating in group sessions. Sessions on offer at the Clinic range from coping skills and anxiety management to assertiveness, mindfulness and body awareness and exercise groups.

As the Unit's staff nurses and occupational therapist are currently solely responsible for the provision of educational and social activities to clients, this project seemed a particularly good use of *Space for Stories* resources. Whilst providing service users with opportunities for involvement in quality arts activity, the workshops also helped to relieve pressure on Unit resources and gave staff the chance to get involved in sessions alongside clients and storytellers.

The *Space for Stories* sessions at Soutra Day Unit developed through initial discussions with Staff Nurse Jamie Morris and Senior Staff Nurse Ginny Murchison who had no prior experience of storytelling or the benefits of storytelling for mental health and well being.

"We were very curious about storytelling. I knew nothing about it and had never been to a session before. I was expecting a less interactive event than what was actually experienced." *Ginny Murchison, Senior Staff Nurse*

#### Creative Approach

"The creativity of the storytellers was amazing, really enjoyable. It was lovely to be on the receiving end, getting caught up in listening to the story, and having my contributions valued as well as the clients'. I was initially there as an observer but then became a participant." *Ginny Murchison*

This project consisted of a combination of performance and skill development approaches. Each session developed organically, was tailored to the participants' responses, interests and abilities and gave everyone the "opportunity to have their voice heard" (*Mary Kenny*).

- Life stories, anecdotes, fairy tales and traditional stories were told to introduce the art of storytelling and invite personal responses, leading to group discussion;

"Storytelling offers people an escape from reality. There are no rules in imagination and each person is allowed to come up with his/her own ideas." *Ginny Murchison*

- Participants' suggestions of types of stories they would like to hear, and themes they would like to explore led to group discussion and the sharing of reminiscences and personal anecdotes:

"The sessions were about everybody's ideas and experiences, and sharing stories about oneself and one's past wasn't detrimental and felt ok." *Ginny Murchison*

- Games were used to gather participants' ideas on the personal significance of stories, and encourage individual response for discussion;
- Story circle exercises, with each person adding to the previous person's contribution, were used to improve listening and sharing skills, exercise voice, increase confidence and facilitate a sense of inclusion;

"...the group responded brilliantly, imaginatively and with rounded humour to the story circle, and this created a bright energy. This proved a profoundly beautiful and practical vehicle for many positive purposes" *Mary Kenny, storyteller*

- Re-telling of stories in pairs, focusing on story structure (characters, location, repetitions, rhymes, sense of journey) to stimulate imagination, improve memory skills, and improve confidence;
- Creative writing was introduced as a medium for storytelling, using pictograms to aid memory;
- Revision and retelling of story endings, and creation of new stories for sharing with the group;
- As with the sessions at the Orchard Clinic, group tea breaks were invaluable in adding a social dimension to the group, promoting a sense of community and shared experience and creating a space for informal discussion and anecdotal storytelling:

"Social aspect is really important too. Mary and Marie Louise are both really friendly, chatty and encouraging – having a break halfway through helped this." *S, client*

## Key Achievements

- One participant attended all but one of the sessions, missing the last one due to a job interview. He got the job and credited this achievement to his participation in the project.
- Regular attenders showed a marked improvement in communication skills, confidence, and self esteem.
- The art of storytelling was introduced to 8 clients, all of whom have moderate to severe mental health problems. Many of the patients had no previous experience of storytelling, and two showed a real interest in developing their skills further.
- The Scottish Storytelling Centre and Soutra Day Unit established a strong professional partnership, one which Unit staff are keen to develop through further sessions:

"It would be good to explore the possibility of funding, and I am definitely interested in having more storytelling sessions." *Ginny Murchison*

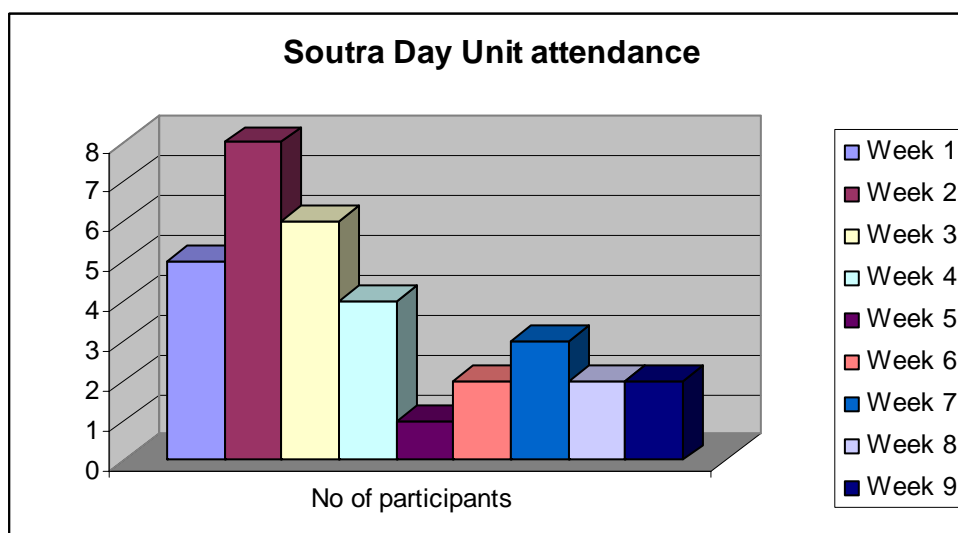
## Evaluation approach

- Weekly record of participant attendance
- Weekly record of stories told, creative approaches used, and staff and storyteller comments
- Staff/storyteller de-brief at the end of each session
- Written feedback from participants at the end of the project
- Feedback forms sent to clients who stopped attending (three out of six returned)
- Interviews with Ginny Murchison, Marie Louise Cochrane and Mary Kenny
- Recording of story round activity as evidence of creative process and outcomes
- Notebooks given to clients for gathering ideas, notes and stories from, and outside, the sessions
- Words-in-the-hat exercise where each participant, including staff, putting a word in the hat at the beginning and end of the session, leading to group discussion. There were plans to carry this out in the second and ninth week but as numbers dropped it was only done once in the second week.

## Findings

### Participation in storytelling and storymaking activities

Over nine weeks, nine people with moderate to severe mental health problems participated in the *Space for Stories* sessions at Soutra Day Unit. Two people attended more than half of the sessions, with one participant attending all but one.



Based on staff and client feedback, reasons for the drop in attendance ranged from work commitments, new jobs, to sessions being too long, client problems with commitment to weekly sessions and poor health (physical and mental):

"I just went downhill in mood and could not cope with coming into a group." *S, client*

Staff also suggested that sessions were pitched too intellectually for some clients with more severe mental health problems and that people nearest to the end of their recovery derived most benefit from the sessions:

"I enjoyed everything the storytellers did but it was at a fairly intellectual level. The sessions would work brilliantly with people with mild problems. The drop in attendance is to do with the nature of the illness. Some clients stopped coming because it was 'too weird', too new a concept, too challenging." *Ginny Murchison*

Staff participation in the sessions was an equally important element of the project, both in terms of strengthening staff/storyteller relationships and giving staff an opportunity to step out of their roles as lead facilitators of group sessions:

"It was nice to be a participant rather than a leader...to see people's skills developing. The sessions offered a learning opportunity for staff." *Ginny Murchison*

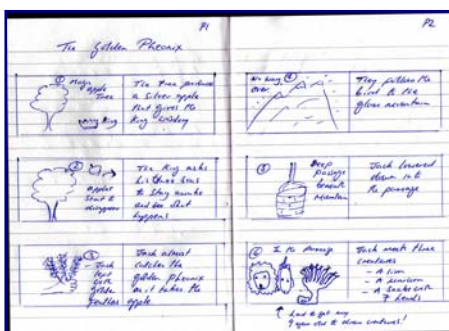
### Improved communication skills

For clients who attended regularly, there was a real improvement in concentration, aural, verbal and written communication skills. Participants who were initially visually withdrawn and reticent increased their ability to communicate independently, and as a member of a group.

"Despite initial awkwardness, the group quickly became quite animated and involved, participants engaging freely in discussion on subject of stories, likes and reservations, dislikes, associations. Plenty of attentive listening. Participants reflected on their own levels of concentration being good in the session – very positive and upbeat and equal." *Mary Kenny*

"C seems quite different from the first time we saw her. She is much more animated and very engaged and contributing well. She seems like a fairly reserved person but no longer seems flat and tuned out as she seemed at first." *Marie Louise, storyteller*

For regular attenders the group provided an enabling framework and they developed their storytelling and storymaking skills to the extent where they were learning stories at home to share with the group:



"Encourages you to collect stories – I really enjoy using the book to scribble down tales and work through half-remembered stories." *S, client*

Below is an excerpt from a story round (Appendix B) which formed part of the penultimate *Space for Stories* session. This exercise involved two clients, one storyteller and one member of staff. Anonymity of participants has been retained to illustrate that storytellers, clients and staff were participating in the sessions on a level footing, with each person's contribution being equally valued and essential to the process of creating a magical and inspiring story.

### Arctic Bird

#### S

It was a beautiful, cold day in the Arctic. The land was pure white and the sky was deep blue. Nothing moved except for a polar bear and its cub as they crossed the ice, ambling away...there was just a huge expanse of flatness. When the mother polar bear turned round she saw that the other bear, her cub, saw something else, which was...

#### G

...which was a red rag, a silken rag, which was the most glorious shock, to see such vibrant colours against the dazzling dazzling whiteness of the Arctic snow and ice. And of course the cub had never ever seen anything quite so vibrant before, and as the mother turned round to see what had caught the attention of the cub, her gaze followed and she too was mesmerised by what it saw, shaking in the arctic wind and snow, and closer and closer they were drawn to this wonderful shining, shimmering scarlet rag.

And as they approached it, they heard a very strange noise coming from the rag as it shook. It was simply the noise of the wind, whistling through the silken strands. It made a noise again, which was a bit unerring for the cub. And as they approached the rag, they saw that it was what looked like part of a parachute – of course they didn't know that, they were animals, a human would have recognised the rag for exactly what it was. As they got closer to the rag, a strange thing happened.

#### M

The rag dislodged itself from the piece of ice that it had been attached to and, almost as if it had been pulled by an unseen hand, the rag whipped itself up and scattered across the floor towards the polar bears. At first the polar bears both jumped backwards on all fours in surprise, and then jumped again as it came towards them, a little like a snake or a lizard. It was very strange because the wind was blowing in the opposite direction, the cool arctic wind that blows all the time.

Staff and participant feedback indicated that memory games were very challenging for some participants but provided a means of developing their cognitive skills and facilitating more effective communication:

*"It could be challenging – making our brains think and remember – which can be difficult for those of us suffering from anxiety and depression."* C, client

## Increased confidence and self-esteem

"I liked all the stories – they were all different and took you to where they were. You could imagine it. Liked the way they were told. Liked happy stories and funny. Felt better after a session." *S, client*

Several participants showed an increase in confidence and self esteem during the project. One participant, M, identified strongly with a particular traditional story – the long journey, the tasks, the search and eventual finding of something – and although this evoked a sense of loss for her, the story itself seemed to provide a means of making sense of her painful experiences.

"Traditional stories are...seen as repositories of wisdom, offering an exposition of life's problems and a method of approaching and resolving them; a source of identification; an opportunity for catharsis; and a model of understanding and insight, yielding a knowledge of motives, causes and some kind of justification for otherwise unjustifiable and unmanageable turns of fate and fortune." '*Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*', *Glenn A. Roberts*

The same participant's engagement with the stories, and ability to recall them, was such that that she would retell them at home. This not only demonstrates a high level of participation in the sessions, but suggests that her participation increased her confidence and self esteem sufficiently for her to share this positive experience with someone else, improving the quality of her relationships on an everyday level:

"It made a difference to my head! Used to go home and tell my husband about them." *M, client*

"He [M's husband] had said to her that he'd never seen her looking as young and animated as when she was telling the stories. In terms of effect, and in terms of a gift of something, she could see and understand and appreciate that she had gained something." *Mary Kenny*

The sessions gave clients the opportunity to practice projecting their own thoughts and ideas, and activities such as the story round gave clients a great sense of achievement. Feedback from indicated that clients projected themselves in a much more positive way than they thought was possible. This points to the enabling and empowering quality of the sessions and demonstrates how valuable staff participation was in terms of them having the opportunity to gain a new insight into clients' everyday presentation of themselves:

"I was amazed at how relaxed the clients were within the group and how confidently they projected themselves given the difficult social situation, and this can be quite contrary to the impression they give in care plan review meetings. Clients are often negatively off-loading on staff, so we don't see how they are in general. In a session that's not led by Soutra staff, they forget they have to speak about mental illness." *Ginny Murchison*

## Storytelling at Soutra – A Personal Account

I first heard about the story telling sessions at Soutra from my Key Worker. The fact that he and the other staff were so enthusiastic about it helped to persuade me to give it a go. Before this my only real encounter with storytelling had been with someone dressed as Sir Topham Hat!

Although there are other 'talking' groups at Soutra which help to build self confidence, the topics are often, and quite rightly, about mental health issues. I had become pretty fluent about talking about my illness; depression seems to have a way of edging out other things until it becomes the only thing you feel qualified to talk about. I hoped that storytelling might be a way of breaking through this.

Looking back over the sessions this is what did happen – and more. Hearing stories and anecdotes from Mary and Marie Louise was a real tonic. We also talked about how stories were structured, how they were passed down through generations of storytellers and how some themes were common in many different countries. Outside the sessions I really enjoyed the informal 'halftime' chats over coffee when Mary and Marie Louise would talk about the other projects they were involved with and their experiences as storytellers.

Although some of the stories we heard appealed more than others, there was always pleasure in hearing a tale well told. I particularly enjoyed humorous stories and the themed session at Halloween. I thought the songs were great too! The storytelling circle (when each person in turn would add a bit to a story) was a good way of building confidence for eventually telling a story yourself. There was also a session where we created a short story by repeating what other people had said before adding a sentence of our own. Although I made a mistake or two it helped me recover some confidence in my ability to remember things – I've a pretty good memory normally but my illness seemed to have affected this as well.

After a few weeks I began to feel more confident in general and got to the point where I was able to tell a story or two of my own. Again, Mary and Marie Louise were very encouraging and I felt I'd made a real breakthrough.

I had been unable to work for a number of months and had lost my job as a result. Towards the end of the sessions I managed to get an interview for a new position. The interview involved making a presentation to a panel and I would not have been able to do this had I not been able to draw on the experience and confidence I gained by taking part in this project. The downside of having the interview was that I missed the final session and ruined my attendance record. On the plus side – I got the job.

This project made a real difference to my recovery – I hope other people will be given the chance to benefit in a similar way.

*S, client*

Client and staff recognition of storytelling as a unique human skill, and the humanising effect of the telling and sharing of stories within a small group promoted a sense of equality, a key element in promoting confidence and combating feelings of inferiority or stigma. The relaxed, informal nature of the sessions and the fact that the storytellers were not trained members of staff seemed to create an atmosphere where a sense of achievement was a happy by-product rather than the explicit aim:

“Storytelling is quite a normal activity that people recognise...there was an immediate affinity as normal people together, where equality was immediate...The atmosphere was relaxed and there wasn’t a pressure to conform, or for patients to be progressing towards recovery, as is often expected of them.” *Ginny Murchison*

“I liked the sharing aspects...It felt non-threatening and welcoming.” *C, client*

The power of one storytelling session to improve participants’ overall sense of well being was demonstrated by the results of the words-in-the-hat exercise carried out in the second week of the project:

<b>Before</b>	<b>After</b>
Intrigued (x 3)	Relaxed
Apprehensive	Spirited
Non-being	Looking forward
On Edge	Intrigued
	Interested
	Content

### **Enhanced sense of self worth**

Regular attenders demonstrated a clearly enhanced sense of self worth over the course of the project, illustrated by their increased willingness to share stories with the group (some of which they had created themselves), to share the stories they learnt during the sessions with friends and family, and their desire to continue developing their skills after the end of the project.

“I felt valued and my contribution(s) valued...It gave me some ‘quality me time’ which I have very much enjoyed.” *C, client*

### **Learning Outcomes**

- The strong focus within this project on interactive skill development meant that clients with more severe mental health problems were not able to fully participate. Future projects in similar settings should consider an interactive but less academic approach, combining performance storytelling with slower paced storymaking activities.
- Clients unable to commit to weekly group sessions may find it difficult to participate in a full storytelling session. In future, taster sessions could be programmed to engage clients in a gentler and more informal way.

### Future steps

- Ginny Murchison, Senior Staff Nurse is keen to run more sessions at the Unit. Having reviewed the successes and challenges of the *Space for Stories* project with her and the storytellers involved, the Scottish Storytelling Centre will draft an outline for development of the project in 2008/9, focusing on a combination of performance-based and interactive sessions.
- Participants were provided with literature about current Centre events and training opportunities, and the Unit will be kept informed about future events for clients who wish to participate.

## Additional findings

The following findings refer similarly to all three *Space for Stories* projects:

- Through effective **partnership working** – consultation, information sharing, regular review and evaluation – the Scottish Storytelling Centre has established new links with two NHS Lothian units (one medium secure clinic and one outpatient day unit), and with Artlink Central.

“I see this first collaboration with the Scottish Storytelling Centre as a fantastic opportunity for Artlink Central. It’s the first time we’ve linked our drama group with a professional national company and this, for an organisation like ours is extremely important – it takes us up onto a different plane and has made the group much more confident.” *Sarah Chester*

- *Space for Stories* also illustrates that **quality artistic practice** is essential in providing people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities with equal access to quality arts activities, in combating stigma and in forming strong and effective partnerships between professional artists and partner organisations working in the field of mental health and well being:

“I think people with disabilities of all kinds deserve the best, and the better quality artists you can find, the better the project. Talented people require the best, and on this project I believe they’ve got the best.” *Sarah Chester*

- Staff involvement in *Space for Stories* sessions was invaluable to the projects’ success and has enhanced staff awareness of the role of storytelling for mental health and well being and promoted a **sustainable** and long-term approach to the development of storytelling and other forms of narrative within these settings:

“I’ll be more aware of stories in future – it certainly sparked my interest in storytelling and the place it has in mental health.” *Ginny Murchsion*

“The staff involvement was welcome and productive...Having the staff involvement will mean in future that storytelling as an artform and non-therapeutic tool will be understood for its depth and scope.” *Mary Kenny*

- The three projects, each unique in setting and participant needs and abilities, have also increased storyteller and Scottish Storytelling Centre staff understanding of delivery of storytelling projects in mental health and care settings:

“The project was a learning experience for us as storytellers as well as the staff and for each of us knowledge and understanding of the power of story when working with people with mental health problems was greatly enhanced.” *Millie Gray*

## Future steps

- Based on this self-evaluation, a *Space for Stories* report/publication will be produced for dissemination to project partners (NHS Lothian, Artlink Central), and for presentation to future potential NHS partners.

- 'Stories for Health and Well Being: Community and Personal Development' on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2008. This event at the Scottish Storytelling Centre will provide an opportunity for the wider storytelling network to hear about the *Space for Stories* projects, explore the role of storytelling in this area and identify specific areas for further development.
- A series of 2008/9 health board and local authority workshops and network events, disseminating the findings of *Space for Stories*.

## Conclusion

As a pilot project, *Space for Stories* illustrates the valuable role storytelling and other forms of narrative can play as a vehicle of personal and community development in community, outpatient and secure mental health and well being settings.

The three projects at Artlink Central, the Orchard Clinic and Soutra Day Unit provide a good framework for development of the Scottish Storytelling Centre's work in the area of mental health and well being, and evidence gathered from these projects has led to the development of a research base for improved co-ordination and facilitation of future projects.

Tailored to the specific needs and abilities of a group, storytelling and storymaking provides a fun, inclusive, accessible means of improving communication and interpersonal skills, developing confidence, self esteem and resilience and enhancing self worth – all contributing to improved quality of life and integration into the wider community.

Although staff and storytellers involved in *Space for Stories* made the clear distinction between therapeutic and artistic practice, it was recognised by all involved that any activity which promotes people's confidence, self esteem and general well being has therapeutic potential:

*"The fact that sessions weren't therapeutic in their intent was irrelevant – anything that people do that they get sense of achievement from is going to be therapeutic." Ginny Murchison, Senior Staff Nurse, Soutra Day Unit*

This project has also illustrated that improvements in mental health and well being are difficult to quantify; mental health means something different to each person, and a person-centred approach, based on consultation, transparent teamwork and effective partnership working, must be taken for any intervention to be effective and sustainable.

## Recommendations

- The roles of all staff, facilitators and advisors involved should be clearly defined from the start of a project, and communicated to all members of the team.
- A storyteller induction (led by staff) before the beginning of any project would help to establish a clear set of guidelines for each project (see *Space for Stories Guidelines* as an example). Although it is essential that storytellers are not informed of clients'/patients' specific histories or backgrounds, they must be made aware of any specific needs within the group and challenges that may arise.
- Artist/storyteller workshops would allow for creative approaches/ideas to be shared and relationships built in preparation for collaborative working.
- Taster sessions for clients/patients and staff would help to better tailor sessions the setting and the needs of the participants.
- Opportunities for regular, transparent staff/storyteller communication, and reviewing of outcomes and good practice, should be factored into the initial project programme and used to inform effective project development.
- A clear evaluation plan should be put into place from the start of the project, and each team members' responsibility/role in this area established.

- Staff should be involved in defining aims and outcomes and indicators as far as possible, including establishing observational baselines for clients/patients where appropriate.
- Clients/patients should be involved as much as possible in identifying effective indicators for evaluation, and creative approaches to evaluation should be incorporated into the artistic process where possible.
- An appropriate performance/workshop space should be identified and made available for all sessions as far as possible
- A clear exit strategy and options for sustainability should also be considered in close consultation with staff at the beginning of any project.
- Inclusive approaches to drama and storytelling should be explored further for future projects, particularly in regard to people with more complex needs.
- Opportunities should be explored for NHS staff to help facilitate a group in collaboration with a storyteller, and could be a good means of making future projects more sustainable.
- Regular network events (similar to Artfull PLNs) are essential for sharing of good practice, ideas and creative approaches amongst artists, medical/care staff and project co-ordinators working in the context of mental health and well being, and for creating a platform for sustainable development in this area.

## References

- *Action Plan 2003 – 2006*, National Programme for Improving Health and Well Being, , Scottish Government
- 'Advances in Psychiatric Treatment', vol. 6, pp. 432–441, Glenn A. Roberts, Royal College of Psychiatrists (2000)
- *Arts Professional*, May 2004 *Creating Our Future, Minding Our Past*, Scottish Government, 2001
- Mencap: [www.mencap.org.uk/html/campaigns/PMLD/Meet\\_the\\_People\\_definition.pdf](http://www.mencap.org.uk/html/campaigns/PMLD/Meet_the_People_definition.pdf)
- 'Mental Health in Prisons', John Podmore, Head of Community Prisons and Transitional Facilities, Home Office at The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, November 2006
- *The Psychology of Humor*, Rod A. Martin, Academic Press, 2007

## Appendices

### **Appendix A: Space for Stories Guidelines Storytelling for Mental Health & Well Being**

#### **Planning & Preparation**

- The number of participants must be agreed between the lead member of staff and storyteller(s) before the project sessions start. A maximum of 10 participants is advised, although individual participants are free to leave the group at any time.
- A safe, comfortable space should be allocated for the sessions, and the storyteller notified of any changes in space availability in advance of their visit.

#### **Staff Roles & Responsibilities**

- At least one designated staff member should take leadership of the project and liaise with the facilitator and relevant colleagues to decide on the structure and format of the project and which service users would benefit most from participating. Participating service users should be made aware who the lead staff member is, and of any changes to this arrangement.
- The lead staff member, or a designated colleague, should be present at the beginning and end of each session and contribute to the planning and de-briefing process as agreed with the storyteller(s). Storytellers should be made aware of any changes to the lead staff member
- Staff and/or carer participation in the weekly sessions should be agreed with the storyteller(s) beforehand
- The lead staff member is encouraged to provide the facilitator with any useful/necessary background notes on the individual needs of the service users involved, and set clear ground rules regarding sharing of storyteller personal information, importance of personal space etc.
- Staff and storytellers should discuss service user confidentiality before the sessions start, and service users made aware of any storyteller obligation (or lack of) to pass on potentially sensitive information to the lead staff member.

#### **Storyteller Roles & Responsibilities**

- Facilitating storytellers will provide one half-day (up to 2.5 hours) session per week unless otherwise agreed
- A suitable session start-time should be agreed between the staff and storyteller(s) involved, and any changes to this arrangement should be made a week in advance of the session(s) in question
- Each Space for Stories session is facilitated by two storytellers unless otherwise agreed, and each storyteller is required to provide peer support to their partner in the form of shared preparation, de-briefing and evaluation.
- The storyteller(s) should discuss the need for an exit/transitional strategy with the lead staff member and, where necessary, incorporate this into the closing weeks of the project
- The storyteller(s) will establish a set of group 'ground rules' with the participants at the beginning of the project, as consulted on and agreed by the storyteller(s), lead staff member and (where appropriate) the participants themselves. These will establish the storytellers' and the participants' roles and expectations for the project.

- The storyteller(s) (and lead staff member) involved must draw a distinction between the benefits of storytelling for general well being/development/creativity and the use of narrative for specific therapeutic purposes. *Space for Stories* is *not* a therapeutic initiative.

### **Health & Safety**

- In case of emergency, the lead staff member, or a designated colleague, should be immediately contactable at all times during the sessions.
- All Space for Stories facilitators are accredited professional storytellers, have Enhanced Disclosure and are covered by the Scottish Storytelling Centre's public liability insurance.

**Scottish Storytelling Centre July 2007**

## Appendix B: Story Round – Soutra Day Unit, 14<sup>th</sup> December 2007

### Arctic Bird

#### S

It was a beautiful, cold day in the Arctic. The land was pure white and the sky was deep blue. Nothing moved except for a polar bear and its cub as they crossed the ice, ambling away...there was just a huge expanse of flatness. When the mother polar bear turned round she saw that the other bear, her cub, saw something else, which was...

#### G

...which was a red rag, a silken rag, which was the most glorious shock, to see such vibrant colours against the dazzling dazzling whiteness of the Arctic snow and ice. And of course the cub had never ever seen anything quite so vibrant before, and as the mother turned round to see what had caught the attention of the cub, her gaze followed and she too was mesmerised by what it saw, shaking in the arctic wind and snow, and closer and closer they were drawn to this wonderful shining, shimmering scarlet rag.

And as they approached it, they heard a very strange noise coming from the rag as it shook. It was simply the noise of the wind, whistling through the silken strands. It made a noise again, which was a bit unerring for the cub. And as they approached the rag, they saw that it was what looked like part of a parachute – of course they didn't know that, they were animals, a human would have recognised the rag for exactly what it was. As they got closer to the rag, a strange thing happened.

#### M

The rag dislodged itself from the piece of ice that it had been attached to and, almost as if it had been pulled by an unseen hand, the rag whipped itself up and scattered across the floor towards the polar bears. At first the polar bears both jumped backwards on all fours in surprise, and then jumped again as it came towards them, a little like a snake or a lizard. It was very strange because the wind was blowing in the opposite direction, the cool arctic wind that blows all the time.

And as the red rag moved towards them of its own volition, the cub, who was too young to know any better, pounced forwards and put his two soft white paws right on top of the rag and stopped it in its tracks. But the rag writhed beneath his fists, and so he jumped up again and looked it. And then it writhed again slowly. He jumped on it again and this time put his nose down and he sniffed it. It smelt unlike anything he had ever smelt before. If he could have said, he would have said that it smelt of lemons and peaches and angels and it smelt of vanilla pods, and it smelt of different climates than the one he was used to.

And as he sniffed it, he took one paw off, then the other paw off, and he saw it move very very gently between him and his mother, and then...

#### C

His mother moved forward and with her paw, very delicately and gently, she hooked the rag towards her, and as she did that, she could see that just underneath there was a feather poking from underneath the rag. She drew the rag closer and closer, and every time she moved the rag closer, something else was visible underneath.

First of all it looked like a red feather, then the next bit was yellow, and purple and blue, and as she drew the rag further towards her, more and more beautiful colours of feather were visible, until finally the whole thing, that was sitting, balanced on the ice, was visible to her.

They didn't know what it was, but to us...we would know that it was a beautiful, tropical, feathered parrot. But how did it come to be here, trapped underneath this beautiful red rag? When the rag was finally taken from the parrot's head, it sat up on the ice and looked at the polar bear and her cub, and with its beady eye looking at them, its beak finally opened and it said...

## **S**

It squawked, and it was a squawk of surprise, "Eek", and then, "Where am I?" because although to the polar bears this was a very strange sight, to the parrot it was even stranger. Only a few months before, he'd been sitting in a tree in a tropical jungle surrounded by the smells and sounds and colours that he knew and loved, and here he was, transported by some kind of magic into this polar wilderness where all he could see was white, and the only animals he could see were these bears which, to him, and as we all know...were quite ferocious.

He didn't want to fly away because he'd only just landed, and it was cold and he was shivering, and the only option he had really was to try to make friends with these two big furry animals and see if they could lead him back to where he came from. Parrots can talk, as you know, so he tried to talk to the bears, and said:

"I need to find my way home." There was silence. He wasn't sure the bears could understand, so he tried again, "I need to find my way home."

And to his surprise, the baby bear said:

## **G**

"Mum, it speaks." The parrot, very cleverly because, as we all know, parrots are wonderful mimics, had managed, within just a few moments of being released from the cage of the red silken rag, and looking around, taking in his surroundings, he had managed to find out how these bears communicated. And with this wonderful piece of mimicry was able to pick up the cues of how they were managing to communicate with each other.

With this wonderful gift of communication that was there between the three of them, the parrot, as he realised he really needed to befriend these animals, first of all needed to find a way out of this crate that he was stuck in, which had been sitting underneath the silk rag. He managed to communicate to the cub that he would need to open up the crate, and that didn't take any time at all because we all know that wee cubs like to play with and explore anything that's new – they're curious.

So with the cusp of his little white paw, he broke the lid of the crate and out popped the parrot. It was getting cold and dark by this time and everybody was quite exhausted by the discoveries that they'd made. The mother bear called her cub to snuggle down beside her and without any ado, the parrot just popped himself in between the two of them, absolutely delighted to have a little bit of warmth, and be safe until the cold light of morning. In the morning...

## M

In the morning, when the light drew itself up into the sky and the horizon of the flat arctic wastes became the brightest colours that the morning has ever seen in that area, the parrot stretched its wings and fluttered and by far its colours were greater than all those that were anywhere around it; more intense, deeper, and more numerous as well.

The polar bear and the polar bear cub looked at their friend that had just turned up the day before, and they realised that this was a very precious gift that had been sent to them because an entirely new element had arrived in their life, something that they'd never ever experienced before.

And so the two bears were in awe of the bird, and the bird was also in awe of these two warm, soft, cuddly, life-giving bears. And the bird knew really, that on any other occasion he would possibly have been lunch, but between them was a bond that was undisputable. But the parrot knew that it couldn't stay there because there was no food and he knew that the food the polar bears would eat was not the food that he would be able to eat. Being snuggled up with the bears was one thing, but when the bears were not there it was too cold for him. And the bears knew this too; they could see that the parrot was not kitted out for the arctic wastes, certainly the arctic winters.

What they did know was that there was some strange two-footed creature that lived not so far away in a strange, alien lump in the land. The bears had seen these two-footed people go and come, and they had machines and things that were not like them at all. And so the mother bear, who was really very wise as most mothers are, as you know, decided that they should go there and see if there was something that could be done for the parrot, because they knew the parrot needed to survive.

So they set off on a long journey, towards the strange place where the two-footed people lived. And maybe, along the way, they thought they might discover something about how this strange and wonderful bird had arrived in that place.

## C

The mother bear padded across the ice with the little cub padding behind her, and the parrot sitting on top of the mother bear's shoulder...watching everywhere round about it, and seeing nothing that it could land on, so that it knew that the only way to get out of this problem was to go the way they were going.

He sensed that the mother bear was a kind bear and was trying to help him, as he bobbed along, as she padded along the ice for what seemed like miles and miles and miles. Until finally, they saw in the distance not just the horizon and the blue sky and white all around, but what seemed like a bump on the horizon. And he knew then that the mother bear was trying to help, and that she was taking him somewhere that could help him, and he relaxed and enjoyed the ride as he bumped along and got closer and closer to this bump in the ice, which got bigger and bigger and bigger, until finally they were only a few yards away from seemed like an upturned bowl, sitting in the middle of the ice, with some strange...probably vehicles round about.

He had seen vehicles before because he had said he had been in an airport when they put him in the crate, and he'd been on an aeroplane, and he knew these vehicles could move and take people, so he was aware of these vehicles that were sitting around the upturned bowl. And then the mother bear sat down, deciding whether to go any closer or not,

because she knew it could be quite dangerous for her to go closer. And she sat, and she wondered what to do next...

## **S**

As you know, polar bears are such a white colour, and the snow ice they walk on is such a white colour... especially when you have the strong arctic sun, and you can't distinguish one white from another white. And so it was for the scientists were looking out of their igloo-shaped research station. And to them, looking out that morning, it looked as if the parrot was just floating in the air – not flying as you'd expect, and obviously not perching because it had nothing to perch on, but just floating.

The door of the research station opened very quickly and two scientists appeared, and they started to – driven by curiosity – move towards it, until they saw that there were two polar bears there as well. Now, anyone who's ever been near a polar bear was frightened of polar bears because, although they looked cuddly, they were very big and very powerful.

Their first reaction was to turn tail, and to run back, and put it down to a vision and not to worry about the floating parrot - maybe there's mirages in the whiteness of the arctic as there are in the desert. But there was something about these two polar bears that made them realise that they weren't there to do harm, they weren't there to rummage around for food, they weren't there for anything which was trouble, and so they stopped and turned round and they walked, looking into the eyes of the polar bear. Someone had told them that if you look into the eyes of an animal it won't harm you, whether that's true or not, I don't know because the mother bear didn't move and its cub didn't move, and the parrot didn't move, and the two very bewildered scientists approached that bear and gently one of them took the parrot from where it was perched on the polar bear, and very quietly turned and went back into the research station.

It was one of the strangest objects anyone had ever found when they're miles and miles from anywhere in the middle of the polar ice cap. The door closed behind them, and the first scientist looked at the second scientist...

## **G**

"We have to help this poor creature. There is hardly any life in this poor creature; how on earth it survived in these sub-zero temperatures for any length of time is beyond me." They were amazed that the polar bears had managed to bring this beautiful bird to their door, they were amazed at the colour, they were just totally taken over by the glory of life in its entirety. But they were also so despondent because this beautiful bird was so delicate and its life just seemed to be slowly ebbing from it because it had been out in the cold for such a long time.

However, we all know that scientists are very clever and practical people, and they were lucky enough to have a vet with them who had gone out there to study some of the seals, and the habits of the seals of the arctic, and they quickly called the vet over.

He came and cast his eye over the bird and gave the correct instructions as to how to gently bring its temperature back up to a normal level. And they looked at the bird, and they looked outside, and they were quite bewildered to see that the polar bears were still

out there, you'd expect them to have left because normally polar bears are not happy to be around any kind of human contact.

And they began to understand that there was some kind of connection between the polar bears and the bird, who'd only really met maybe 6, 7 hours ago. And the polar bears understood that there was something badly wrong with this beautiful gift they had found...and they were obviously very worried to let it go. But as the moments went on, they looked after the bird and the bird grew stronger and stronger, and after an hour they looked out the window again, and the polar bears had gone.

© Scottish Storytelling Centre, 2007

Caroline Budge  
National Storytelling Coordinator  
Scottish Storytelling Centre  
43-45 High Street  
Edinburgh  
EH1 1SR  
[www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk](http://www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk)

