

Blue Ocean Piece by Piece Project at Lliswerry High School

In early 2024 Poet Taylor Edmonds and illustrator Amy Moody worked alongside Toby and Emily from Newport Mind to deliver a 9 week creative project exploring mental health for year 8 pupils.

You can read Taylor and Amy's observations below, or click on the Piece by Piece page of our website [here](#) to read more about the broader project.

I started 2024 with the joy of co-delivering a Piece by Piece creative programme alongside illustrator Amy Moody, as well as Toby and Emily from Newport Mind. Working with a small group of year 8 students at Liswerry High School in Newport, we devised 9 weeks of sessions exploring mental health and creativity. Over the course of the project, I was thrilled to see students' creative confidence and their ability to talk about their mental health improve.

Over the weeks, we covered a wide range of topics. From anxiety, to self-talk, to anger, to relationships and boundaries. Discussing our experiences and feelings around each of these topics, we followed with creative activities that gave us a tactile and visual element to solidify what we were learning. Over the project, I saw the huge difference in the confidence of participants in regards to experimenting with their creativity and their ability to talk about their mental health. From creating new ways to talk about emotions through poetry, to crafting affirmation stars, the group's creativity left me feeling inspired.

As a facilitator, it is always exciting to have the opportunity to work in-depth with a group over a long period of time. This allows the time and space to build a deep and meaningful connection with participants. Especially when exploring such a sensitive topic as mental health, this is so valued and has a huge impact on the work that is produced. Bouncing from activities led by each of us facilitators, each session had flow and enabled us to keep up a good pace, playing on each of our strengths as collaborators. I welcomed the opportunity to work alongside Newport Mind, and to be able to draw on their wealth of experience in mental health. I also felt privileged to work with Amy, whose illustration experience gave me the confidence to try out more visual activities in the sessions.

During my time in school, there was little to no opportunities such as this. I wish we had the opportunity to engage with facilitators and be provided a creative outlet and safe space to talk about our mental health. I have no doubt it would have had a profound impact on myself and my peers.

At the end of our project, we reflected on each of our sessions and realised just how much we had covered and achieved during our time together. We combined our creative work to create a group poem, which we named Blue Ocean. The poem speaks to the student's ways of describing mental health and emotions; a topic that can sometimes feel so difficult to put into words. I think they captured it perfectly.

Taylor Edmonds, Poet

Blue Ocean

Anger's texture is salty and wet.
Anxiety is blue like the ocean,
like being on top of a foggy mountain
where you can't see the bottom.
Anger is feeling your body
get warmer and warmer,
wanting to scream till you can't breathe.
Anger looks like thunder and waves crashing.
Anxiety is a book, you never know the ending.
Anger looks spiky and sharp.
Anxiety is a blue colour like sadness.
Trust is soft like a pillow.
Sadness is all purple clothes and a hat.
Anxiety is oceans because of what's inside it.

At the start of 2024 I was given the honour to co-deliver a creative Piece by Piece project at Lliswerry High School to help explore mental health with the year 8 students in the group. I worked alongside a poet, Taylor, as well as Newport Minds family support workers Toby and Emily. We worked as a group over 9 weeks providing 1 hour sessions while using our individual strengths to provide an engaging and safe environment where the students felt comfortable to open up.

During these sessions we explored many different topics while having to adapt on what the students would benefit from the most. We focused on anger and self confidence while still informing the group on the various other emotions that can be overwhelming at that age, such as, anxiety, relationships and boundaries. While Toby and Emily both informed the group about the ins and outs of these thoughts and emotions, myself and Taylor were left to create an activity to keep the group engaged while also allowing the students to explore different ways of expressing their emotions through creative work. I believe the students came out for each sessions with more understanding of their emotions and as time went on found it easier to voice their thoughts and feelings with more knowledge and confidence. The growth of the group left me feeling accomplished in the fact that we achieved the goal that the Piece by Piece project set out in to do, by helping the students understand their emotions and know how to get their feelings out in a healthy way.

Doing these type of sessions always demands a gentle and caring touch. It can be a lot to expect young people with high emotions to be easily willing to share their thoughts and feelings with you when you're a stranger. This is why the time given

to us is so important. Since we had a while to get to know each other, the time was a valuable asset to this project since the group soon warmed up to us and shown us a great growth in their confidence and the subjects they were willing to share. I am also thankful that the project picked out facilitators that each have their own strengths and weaknesses. I came out of this project with more knowledge that I had prior to it while also feeling as though I gained more confidence just as the students have. For this fact, I am thankful to have the team to fall back on for the skills I lacked while also learning from their strengths.

Although the group was more keen on group discussion, we still gathered a lot of creative work despite their lack of desire for it. They gave their all in each task and soon found it easier to put their feelings into words. We were all pleasantly surprised when our last session came and we displayed all our work for everyone to see. For a group that found it hard to even voice their feelings at the start, I believe they all contributed in the activities and produced a lot of fulfilling and creative work. During our last session we all decided to write a group poem which summed up the group in a beautiful display of emotions.

I believe each students came out of this project with a better understanding of their emotions while also learning how to deal with those negative thoughts. I also believe that the group was very proud of their group poem 'Blue Ocean'.

Amy Moody, Illustrator