

STARS

Support, training and
recovery systems

NEWSLETTER
AUTUMN 2024

STARS

TVI
TRAINING & VOCATIONAL
INITIATIVES IN
PERSONALITY DISORDER

STARS are all Experts-by-experience in Personality Disorders, having completed an intensive therapy for Personality Disorder/complex needs. We collaborate with TVI (Training & Vocational Initiatives) Professionals and Complex Needs Staff to develop and present training to groups of professionals across the country. STARS also work alongside clients, encouraging engagement in services and the benefit of group work.

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Consisting of 11 sessions, the mentalisation-based therapy group is often the first introduction to group therapy for many. Darnella has written a wonderful reflection on her experience of co-facilitating the MBT group in Oxford.

Community of Communities (C of C) Annual Forum..... pages 3-5

On Tuesday 25th June 2024, STARS participated in the 2023-2024 CofC Annual Forum at the Royal College of Psychiatrists in London. The Community of Communities (C of C) is a quality improvement and accreditation programme for Therapeutic Communities (TCs) in the UK and overseas. This year the theme was 'Journeys through communities: what you leave behind and what you take with you'. STARS chose to highlight their individual journeys collectively with a creative presentation entitled, 'Creative Expression of our Therapeutic Community Timeline', using song, poetry and visual art to represent individual journeys. Thank you, Laura, for this excellent write up of the day.

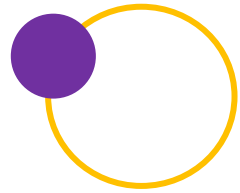
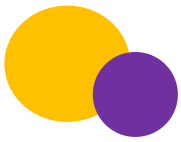
Life beyond therapy..... page 6

In the spirit of reflection, we are sharing this version of the emotions wheel as a reminder that life beyond therapy means continuing to use the tools we learnt during therapy. See also some upcoming trainings and recent feedback.

Editor's note

Last month I had the opportunity to shadow a Personality Disorder training session at Restore, the mental health charity. As part of that training, we hold a Q&A session with STARS members: an opportunity for professionals to ask questions of us and learn more about our lived experiences of, and treatment for, personality difficulties and complex needs. One question that stood out asked how we might account for the positive changes often witnessed in people who have completed their therapeutic journeys with CNS, compared with beforehand when they had felt so anxious, fearful, or reluctant. This made me reflect on the barriers some encounter when attempting to access the Complex Needs Service and how we can understand and reduce those barriers. One of the ways we do this is by utilizing STARS, who are invited to speak to referees to reduce feelings of anxiety and isolation and promote hope. **To enquire about this for your service, you'll find the contact details for our administrator Debbie on page 6.**

~ Rosie Claremont, STARS member



Facilitating Transformation: My Journey with MBT in Oxford

Since August, the Mentalisation Based Therapy (MBT) group in Oxford has been in full swing, offering participants a unique opportunity to delve into the depths of their emotions and thoughts. As someone who has journeyed through MBT myself, facilitating this group feels like a full-circle moment, where I can now guide others in discovering the transformative power of understanding their minds.

The MBT Group Experience:

The Oxford MBT group is often the first introduction to group therapy for many participants. It is a safe space to explore 'thinking about thinking'; and equips individuals with tools to manage strong emotions effectively. The psychoeducational component of MBT provides a framework for understanding oneself and others, fostering a sense of connection and empathy.

Key Concepts Explored in the Group:

Central to our sessions are concepts like the 'emotional thermometer', which helps participants gauge and regulate their emotional states. We also explore the importance of switching perspective and checking things out; encouraging members to view situations from different angles and verify their assumptions. In our discussions, we tackle behaviours such as acting out, and strategies like 'parking it', alongside the modes of 'concrete' and 'pretend'. These tools enable participants to navigate their emotions and interactions more effectively, all while maintaining a spirit of curiosity – a crucial element for personal growth.

The Impact of a Star Member:

A pivotal aspect of our group has been the presence of a star member who has previously completed the MBT process. Their journey serves as a beacon of hope, demonstrating that a more fulfilling life is attainable. Their insights and experiences inspire fellow participants, proving that transformation is possible and within reach.

Personal Reflection:

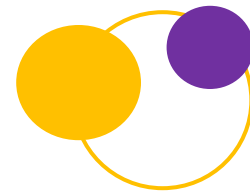
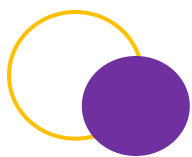
Facilitating the MBT group brings back vivid memories of my experience years ago. I recall the significance of learning to recognize and understand my emotions for the first time. These foundational skills set the stage for deeper self-exploration, much like laying solid foundations for a sturdy home. It's gratifying to witness others embark on this path, equipped with tools to decipher their feelings and begin connecting the dots of their emotional landscape.

To conclude: The journey with MBT is one of hope and courage. It encourages participants to embrace vulnerability and curiosity, paving the way for meaningful change. For those contemplating or engaged in MBT, I extend a message of encouragement: this process can lead to profound personal growth and emotional resilience.

Being part of the MBT group in Oxford has been a rewarding experience. Witnessing the transformation of group members and sharing in their journey has reaffirmed my belief in the power of this therapeutic approach. As we continue this journey together, I am reminded of the importance of community and support in the healing process, and I am grateful to be a part of it.



~ Darnella Daley, STARS member



Community of Communities (C of C)

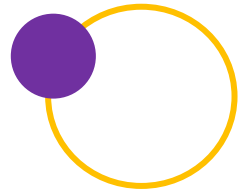
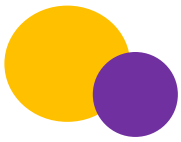
Filled with anxiety at the first community of communities I had attended as a member of STARS, I had no idea how our piece would play out at the Royal College of Psychiatrists. I had already been sweating so much as it was a boiling hot day travelling to London via train, being surrounded by so many people in this heat on top of my anxiety, actually felt like hell for me. I thought to myself how on earth do so many people manage this as a daily part of their routine?

Luckily, I met a few other STARS on the way who had a better experience and understanding of the London tube life, this was reassuring. We got to the Royal College of Psychiatrists, there was a shared excitement and anxiety about the day. Still sweating with butterflies and apprehension lingering within.

Gill (Attwood, Service Lead for Complex Needs Service and TVI), who lead the day, got us all mixing and blending with each other in an ice breaker - which was nerve wracking, but a wonderful idea for all of us to meet each other. There were so many different kinds of people from different therapeutic communities, and having shared common interests such as music, animals, travel etc. provided a lot of grounding and connection. Psychiatry and humanity, part and parcel.

When it came to the STARS' creative session, we were all feeling some anxiety build with some technical issues at the beginning - not a good start. Eventually, the equipment technician at the event sorted it out for us, phew! We could get back on track with our timings.





We all took it in turns to discuss what we left behind in therapy and what we took with us by using various art-forms to depict this. We incorporated a mixture of art work, poetry, music, monologues amongst others to share our individual therapeutic journeys with the audience at the C of C's. Mine was leaving behind chaos, destruction and paranoia as shown in my TC artwork: a twister and terrifying black trees with red eyes, a true representation of what I was feeling and seeing.

What I was taking with me was shared in the form of a poem I wrote back in therapy, and this encapsulated the feelings of being validated, being seen and accepting that I am a human, as valid and deserving as the next person:

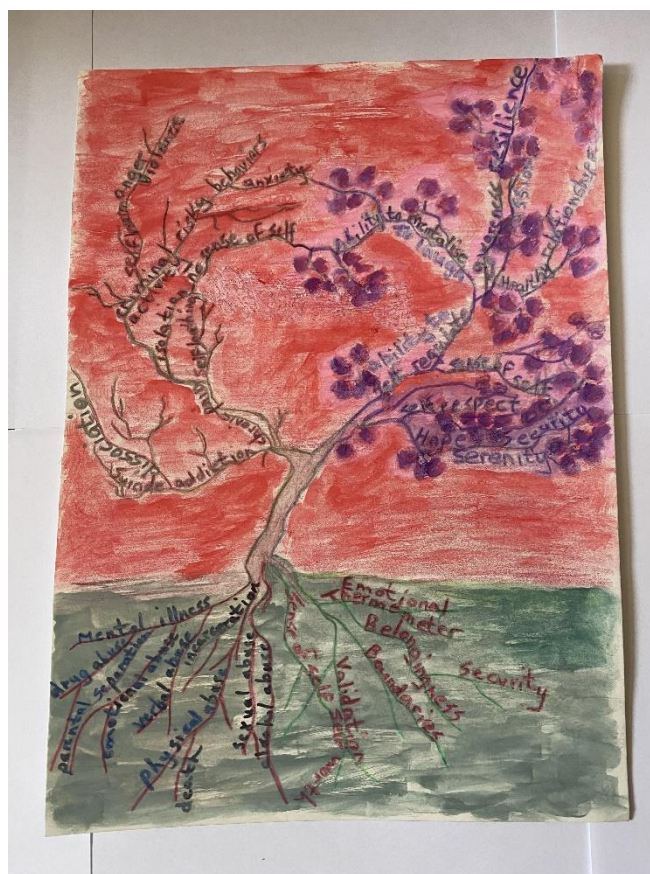
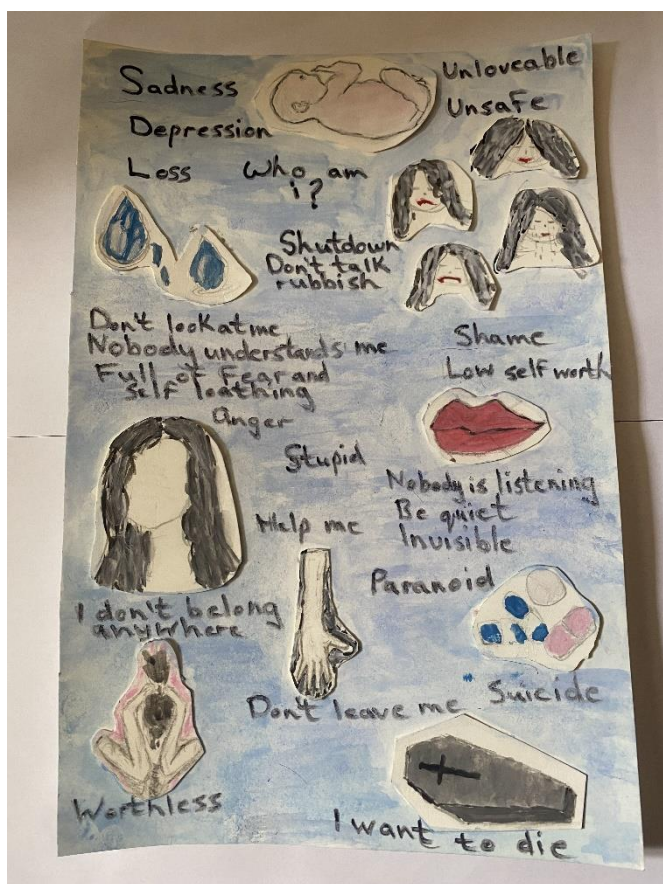
*'You are not insignificant or too much, once upon a time you were out of touch,
You are more human than you have ever been,
It just took a while for you to be seen.'*

After my amazing STARS colleagues and I had come towards the end of our reflection with the audience, a song written and made by my colleague played, the screens displayed other STARS' art work. The audience were in deep reflection, giving them the opportunity to think about what they would leave behind and take with them in their journeys. There were eyes filled with hope and warmth, followed by cheers and applause. I felt that we did such a good job as a team.

My anxiety from the start of the day up until that point, had drained from my body. Instead, I was filled with pride, warmth and gratitude for sharing this experience with wonderful, unique people, and for inspiring hope for others. That is what being a STAR is all about. Hope.

~ Laura Boyland, STARS member





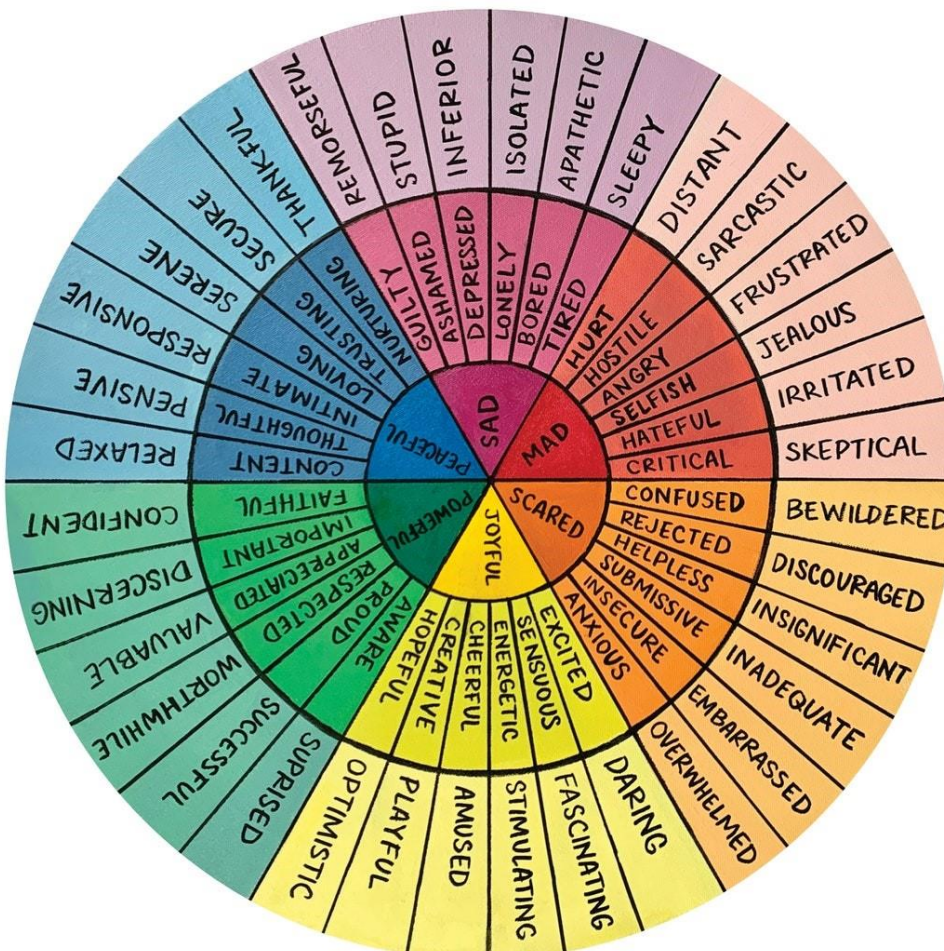
What participants have enjoyed about our trainings:

"It was great having STARS around, showing a different perspective of working and the results"

"I enjoyed the conversational nature of the training and found it particularly helpful to learn from the STARS. I really appreciated their honesty and openness in sharing their experiences of how they have been treated by various services and their time in a therapeutic community."

"I think having the STARS experiences was very powerful and help with understanding the experiences of people with personality disorders."

"Personal experiences from STARS and being able to ask questions"



Upcoming Training

Personality Disorder

When: Tues 3rd Dec

Where: Sandford Village Hall,
Sandford-on-Thames, OX4 4YN

Times: 10am – 3.30pm

Cost: £60 per person

Managing Difficult Interactions for admin

When: Tues 17th Dec

Where: Sandford Village Hall,
Sandford-on-Thames, OX4 4YN

Cost: £60 per person

**For more information or
to book onto a course
please contact
Debbie Stirzaker on
01865 901979**