



<p>Project: 'Reflections of trauma, challenges, and healing: An oral history' Respondent: Rachel Toner Year of Birth: 1971 Age: xx Connection to project: Respondent. Date of Interview: The 7th of April 2022 Interviewer: Dr Sue Morrison Recording Agreement: Yes Information & Consent: Yes Photographic Images: No (Number of: 0) Length of Interview: 46.43 Location of Interview: Hillhead Community Centre. Recording Equipment: Zoom H4n (internal mics)</p>		 	
Time (from: mins/secs)	Description	Transcribed Extract (from- to: mins/secs)	
00.45	Respondent was born in Glasgow and lived in the Drumchapel area of the city. She moved to the Isle of Lewis when she was aged 5 and went to school there. The family moved from Lewis back to Glasgow when she was aged nine. She now lives in Yorkhill in the West End of Glasgow.		
	Interviewer asks the respondent what her understanding is of the term trauma.		
	“The term trauma from my perspective...I’m not a text book person. But, I do think I’ve got a kind of empathy around the idea of trauma and traumatic experiences for individuals. And I’m aware that it can manifest in lots of different ways. And I probably would base that knowledge on personal experience and building a knowledge around it. I think it can manifest in lots of different ways. Internally, non-verbally, physically and it can also, perhaps, present itself far later on; the fact of the actual beginnings of that journey of experiencing a traumatic experience and then this manifestation developing into trauma; I think there’s something that happens in between perhaps.”	1.29-2.43	
2.44	Interviewer asks the respondent what might be the cause of a traumatic experience or if she could give some examples of traumatic experience.		
	“I think, you know like, traumatic experiences are experiences that people have throughout their lifetime and it can be a whole host of things. So, it could be separation. It could be bereavement. It could be a car accident and recovery. It could be, you know, mental health issues within a family. And, you know, it could be a whole heap of things. It depends on the individual and how, perhaps, they are treated throughout that journey of having experienced something that...quite a negative experience in your life, maybe, and, you know, and it’s how that’s kind of managed or how you’re supported through that. But, yeah, something that hurts you I would say physically and mentally and emotionally is a traumatic thing.”	2.54-4.02	

4.05	Interviewer asks the respondent about her own traumatic experience whilst emphasising that there is no pressure to do so.	
	<p>“I’ve experienced numerous traumatic experiences in my life; there’s quite a few. And I think that’s part of life and the human condition and some of them are more extreme than others. Yeah, I think, perhaps separation within the family, and at a very early age, maybe had a bit of an impact on my development as I grew older and as a teenager. And, that I think didn’t define who I am but it helped me probably cope better as an adult. I don’t really know. I mean, I think I’ve experienced lots of things that have made me feel unhappy and sad. And, but, I’ve learned a lot from them perhaps. And that’s probably why I do what I do professionally. Cause I’ve got empathy and stuff. So, yeah.”</p>	4.11-5.22
5.25	Interviewer asks the respondent about her work as a community artist.	
	<p>“Well, I am a community artist. I graduated from Cumbria Institute of the Arts in 2005 with a fine art degree. And it became very clear throughout my degree that it was about process of making that I was more drawn to than the actual outcome of making. And I learned a huge amount and I explored concepts and so on. But, I also realised that I wanted to work with people. I had come from working in the service industry as a youngster. And I loved that working with people. And, you know, just, I like people. And combining those two things together, art and people, it was kind of inevitable that I was going to be either an educator or something else. And I wanted to do it on my own terms as well. So, yeah, I got my first experience of working in prisons the year that I graduated. And that was through Theatre Nemo who were...are a charity that focus on well-being in mental health. So they...That was a big insight. And, of course, working in prisons...I had never done that before and it became very, very clear to me that the people that we worked with had experienced a huge amount of trauma in their lives. And that was the beginning of that journey of me helping through art to maybe address those things. But also, it’s used as a tool to enhance life...Sort of life skills. So that we don’t...build resilience. So we can build resilience and, sort, of move away from, sort of, negative behaviour. So, but, the point I’m making there is that I think working in that setting really was an eye opener. But it was like a magical moment for me because I knew that the partnership between people, health and art genuinely worked and I knew I had a huge amount to offer that. So, that was that.”</p>	5.33-8.19
8.27	Interviewer asks the respondent about the practicalities of delivering art workshops in a prison.	
	<p>“That’s a very strange thing to go through. Because you have the added thing of working... Although you’re working with probably the health team you’re in a custodial setting. So the health...Everybody’s very supportive of you. And, you know, it was quite unusual that whole thing. There was a, kind of, period of it was, you know, like, strongly funded to work in these settings to try and, sort of, stop the revolving door. Because a lot of it is...the guys that I worked with, It was petty crime really. And it was to do with mental</p>	8.35-11.35

	<p>health and self-worth and all those kind of things. So, and addiction was a big issue. And so, you know, there's stealing and all that sort of stuff. So, we were trying to change that route that people were feeling safer being inside than outside. And as an ex..., you know, as an opportunity we wanted to either get people to revisit these, sort of, inherent life skills that maybe they had or maybe they were never developed; but, we really wanted to, kind of, highlight the fact that people are good really if they're treated well and respected and have self-respect. And all those things. So, the practicalities of doing the workshops themselves was interesting because the first time I went in... I remember going in with a huge box full of art. I didn't really know what we were going to do. I just knew we were going to do something. I had a structure to my workshop. And I was like a little puppy at that point, you know, but the guys at the desk, basically, bring you to the reception and you have to put this box through these detectors. And then they check everything. And of course I had pencil sharpeners and I had-'Don't know if you can take that in that's not shar...You'll have to count that in, you'll have to count it out.' You'll have to have eyes on the back of your head sort of thing. So, the practicalities were tricky. But, we worked with what we had and what we had was pretty good. And we needed the people. That's what we needed and they came and lots of wonderful things happened."</p>	
11.36	<p>Interviewer asks the respondent about the expected outcomes from this work.</p>	
	<p>"Yeah, the sort of outcomes. That's always a bit of an issue. I have a bit of a problem with that because I think putting vulnerable people into that setting and saying-right, we're doing this to get an outcome. We can't do it that way. We have to be really careful. Because, really, the community that you're creating at that time; your main focus and reason for trying to help them feel better about themselves. You can't put pressure on that. So, that could be a bit problematic working with, sort of, aims and objectives for outcomes. We do have aims and objectives and we...but they are more about the individuals rather than ticking boxes. It's really important. Because you can frighten people, you know. Because , it's such a brave thing to do to walk into a workshop for the first time. In whatever setting you're in or whatever community you're in. Cause you perhaps don't know people. You're perhaps quite vulnerable. You perhaps need extra support. You know there's so many, kind of, complex things around it all. I think it's, yeah, it's quite..."</p>	11.40-13.13
13.14	<p>Interviewer asks the respondent if she had any mental health training for her work.</p>	
	<p>"I've had safe guarding training. And I worked in Carstairs for a year in their recreation facility. And I was employed as an artist to work there. But I was allowed to work there for six months without having to process any of the index history. And, unfortunately I was a bit overwhelmed by that. But the training was...You know, it wasn't mental health training. It was more control and restraint training, things like that, and that's because of that setting. I</p>	13.17-14.37

	think I've had little bits of training through different organisations. And child protection things like that. But no formal training on mental health, no. It's more I've worked my way through, sort of, looking after people and just...it's, kind of, an instinctual thing. I'm a carer I suppose. So..."	
14.40	Interviewer asks the respondent what support she received working in prisons.	
	"I had a huge amount of support from, you know like, peers that I worked with who were very experienced, I would say. Certainly within the team there's historically a psychiatric nurse who is now an artist. So that was incredibly...So, I probably did get training but it wasn't formal training. It was communicating with peers that were like-minded and that care about people, I suppose. So, we had a, kind of, common ground and a common objective if you like."	14.49-15.33
15.33	Interviewer asked the respondent what she did after working in prisons.	
	"Well, I'm a community artist. So, I did that for about seven years. And it was funding based so I would have, kind of, gaps in between. And do a number of other jobs to, kind of, keep my head above the water. But, I stopped working for prisons. I made an actual conscious decision to do that after about seven years. Because, I felt a little bit burnt out. I think it should be transient. I think there should be fresh people going in. I think it's my responsibility to address that and not just keep doing it just for the sake of doing it. And I was quite tired by that point. So, I, kind of, started working in the, sort of, wider community; which I've been doing ever since. So, yeah..."	15.38-16.42
16.44	Interviewer asks the respondent for examples of her community work.	
	"I'm currently working for GRACE which is a peer driven support organisation that support people who have experienced life trauma. So that, let's face it, could be anything in our lives. So, it's indiscriminate and it's non-judgemental. So, that's one of the things that I've been doing. But I also have worked for Women's Aid. I've worked for lots of things. I'm just trying to think of...There's so many different projects. "	16.50-17.28
18.00	Interviewer asks the respondent how people find out about GRACE.	
	"I think a bit of both actually. We quite often have people who have heard through word of mouth and pop in and never leave, which is great. But, yeah, I think it's mainly referrals. So, it's used as, a kind of, complementary...Not therapy but a complementary thing alongside other therapies perhaps. And it's about people engaging as a community which then, in turn, hopefully helps people participate in a positive way within the wider community. And I suppose giving people an opportunity to develop their own personal skills that they maybe don't even realise that they have. So, we have a very wide range of people. We have carers that sometimes bring people as well. So there's a, kind of, referral system that's used. But, there's also word of mouth. And it's an unusual community I would say. There's no other project like GRACE. It's really unusual. Because, I think what	18.13-21.08

	<p>GRACE tries to offer is this, sort of, peer cyclical thing. Where you come in to GRACE as a person first and foremost and then you become...you learn to trust the environment you are in. And then you become a member. Then you become perhaps a volunteer. But throughout those journeys you do self-development and you can gain lots of different certificates and things like that, that...self-development sort of stuff...And then you can potentially become a facilitator which has actually happened within GRACE. And that model is what communities really need. People supporting people. And GRACE helps people know that they can support people. I think that's the crux of it."</p>	
21.10	<p>Interviewer asks the respondent about the activities that are delivered in GRACE.</p>	
	<p>"Well, there's digital support, which is vital in this day and age. There is ukulele lessons. There's crafting, 'Pins and Needles'; they do sewing and knitting. There's the visual art workshops. There's mindful crafting, too. So, there's also 'Safe Sharing', which allows people to, sort of, do a lot more in-depth work about their, perhaps their, kind of, their personal experiences. So they can prepare to move forward. So that's quite a healing, holistic thing...There's so many different things. 'Wellbeing Walks' as well, so, of course, that really enhances mood. And also, you're doing it with your peers; it's very peer driven. It's about encouraging people to support each other. That's the main pivotal part of GRACE, you know, making sure that people fully understand that it's their community and they have a voice, and they need to know that their voice is as valid as the next, and whatever you bring. But there are, kind of, guidelines that we follow, so that we keep everybody safe and feeling safe. And, yeah, it's a very accepting, non-judgemental environment to be in. It's great. It's really great."</p>	21.17-23.04
23.05	<p>Interviewer asks the respondent how important GRACE is for the recovery of people who have suffered traumatic events.</p>	
	<p>"Oh, it's massively important. There's nothing else like it in the community from what I can gather. I think...you know like having...There's obviously likes of the medical sides of supporting people who have suffered trauma or traumatic experiences. But, how that's defined within that realm can be problematic I think. I think it's having a service like GRACE can, sort of, fill that gap perhaps. So, that people who maybe feel dismissed within the medical world or, you know, the, sort of, the analysis of it all; they have this place where they know they can go and be supported and be kind of...They can realise that, yeah, kind of, my experience is validly a traumatic experience and I've experienced trauma. You don't necessarily get that in other settings. So, the definition I find quite difficult to, kind of, pinpoint because there's all this talk around mental health and well-being. And then there's obviously the , sort of, psychiatric side of things. You know, is there certain mental health conditions induced through trauma? Things like that... So, I think having a service like GRACE in all communities is really vital</p>	23.19-25.55.

	because although we can't fix things. What we can help is help people realise that they can heal alongside other interventions or other therapies. We're a, kind of, add on to that because there can be a gap between having mental health problems, going through trauma, having been through trauma... But having something to perhaps prevent that ever happening again. Or, if it does than you can have somewhere you can go."	
26.04	Interviewer asks the respondent how long people feel the need to keep going along to the activities within GRACE as an add on to other services.	
	"I think the fact that...I think, it's supposed to be transient, ok, however, I think when people come they actually stay for a very, very long time. And it's an on-going thing. And it becomes an integral part of their life to keep strong and survive. And there's not enough of that in community, I don't think. You know, there are things, like, you can do, sort of, if you're rich you can do night classes and meet friends. If you're you know...There's lots of things you can do. Go to the library. That's quite a, sort of, insular thing to do. But socially I think maybe that's that, sort of, socialisation and that discussion to be had around trauma and mental health, well-being...That's...It never ends. So, people maybe stay for a very long time. You can't just...I mean, Ideally, you know, you would like it that, you know, you knew you had twelve weeks and somebody would be all better by then. But, it doesn't work like that. So, we kind of need to have our doors open and just allow people to access it when they need it. And keep it like that. It needs to be funded so that it can exist. Because, if it doesn't then there's this big vacuum where people will disappear. And people will disappear and it's a life line for some. You know so, yeah..."	26.33-28.36
28.37	Interviewer asks the respondent if she has seen any noticeable differences in people as they progress through GRACE.	
	"Oh, absolutely (there is a noticeable difference in people as they go through time at GRACE). I mean the journey through GRACE and the activities...I think we're in a very funny place just now. Because a lot of the hard work we had done through GRACE prior to Covid-I'm going to say that word...A lot of that work's been undone. Because we had to remodel and, sort of, rejig how we did things. And lots of other services closed their doors when really they shouldn't have, I suppose. But, you know, we all did our best. But GRACE couldn't close their doors. So, of course, we had to reinvent ourselves. And I think some of that work we had done with some of the people we had worked with prior they're kind of...They're back here now again two years down the line and feel that they need work on that. Because, a lot of it's been lost as a result. So, we've got a lot of work to do."	28.45-29.53
29.58	Interviewer asks the respondent what she did through Covid to deliver the art classes.	
	"I'm just going to make a distinction that art therapy and community are from my perspective... Just to underpin it; I am not an art therapist. I use art as a therapeutic process. Art therapy is perhaps something that not even	30.22-37.33

artists use. They are maybe more academics and they analyse through art. So, I'm not that breed if you like. I am a, sort of, holistic practitioner and I use art as a, kind of, vehicle for that. Oh yes, so, throughout Covid...Well, when Covid first, kind of, hit we had a, kind of, we knew that it was coming and it was in the post. And, you know, but, you know, it was that, kind of, we will struggle on until we're told otherwise. And then, of course, when that 24th of March came and we were told to do as we were told and stay at home and all that kind of stuff. That was a really scary time for everybody. It was so alien to us. That's our liberty that's our...And my first gut instinct was-Aw, what? I need to batten down the hatches. I mean, I panicked, I think, definitely panicked, you know, and just ran around trying to, kind of, get the bunker ready. But GRACE, obviously, was running really smoothly at that point. It was, you know, doing its work really, really well. It was providing so many things for people on lots of multiple levels. But, when we were told that we had to close the community...Well, we weren't told. We were told the community centre was closing. And that is the council were told to do that. So, that was that. And the thought of how to, kind of, support our members and volunteers was...We were just like-How we going to do this? This was like-I've got no idea. This was such a kind of-We're not prepared for this at all. So, it was amazing because Robert the CEO, he's just got this incredible tenacity to life in general. But, he had discovered this thing called Zoom. And he basically worked that out and then knew by then that GRACE would continue as a result of that platform. And I was pretty horrified at the prospect at the time. Because, I was like-How am I going to teach my group? Because, a lot of my method around delivery is around nurturing and being close to somebody so that they know that they trust me to make a mark. And their mark is just as valid as the next mark. And, so, I'm not a traditionalist. I like to deconstruct and, you know, break things up and get people to build them up again but on their own terms. And I just thought-How am I going to do this via this weird thing where there's all these little windows with faces, you know. Because you have to be close to somebody to, kind of, help confidence and...cause it can be a bit of a scary prospect, you know. So, I ended up having a good month of just trying to work out how to deliver. And it did change. I did realise that I had to be flexible and, you know, like pliable with what we had. And, I ended up starting to make little demos and I would meet up with the art group twice a week on Zoom. And I would show a demo of me making something or painting something. So, it was very much...That was a very interesting experience actually because it became my view of the world. Whereas, I'm always getting them to bring out their view of the world. So, I felt a little bit exposed I must admit. And it was really interesting because it led into lots and lots of things. But that initial learning all these sort of digital aspects. I started making little demos delivering them. People responded really well. Then we developed it or I developed it into, sort of, tailored workshops where we worked simultaneously. So I eventually had three cameras on the go at the one time. And it was...It was an extraordinary experience for me professionally. I just was, actually, very proud of how far I had come with it. And people just kept coming. And particularly at the beginning people were coming in their

	<p>droves, you know, it was just really busy. And it meant that I could access lots of people in that little box in front of you. Whereas, if you're in a room the numbers can be limited. I don't like limiting the numbers but I have to because of the constraints of what we're in. But, this allowed for lots of people to, kind of, come and go. And everybody got something from it. It was just very different. And it became very clear that it was a...you know, an opportunity for people to, sort of, socialise and talk. And we do talk a lot about art. But we also, at that point, were talking about our own journeys and how we were struggling or how we had found good things. Or, you know, cheering each other up. And, so, yeah, it was great actually. I learnt a huge amount. And I think everybody else did as well because we had to get everybody up to speed and have access to digital technology. That was actually the pivotal thing. Was having the technology to facilitate that. And some people didn't even have an email address. So we had a lot of work to do before we could actually come together again as the GRACE community if you like, so it was massive."</p>	
37.38	<p>Interviewer asks the respondent how people felt when the restrictions were eased around Covid and they started coming back to GRACE in person.</p>	
	<p>"Well, I'm going back to this idea that quite a lot of work that we did prior to COVID. A lot of that work had been undone for people. And we're in this very funny transitional phase at the moment because we're not totally through that whole thing. There's a legacy but there's also this period where we're coming out of lockdown and I think some...I think it's actually been harder for people to come out of than go in. A lot of people...particularly, well, I think, some of the more...I hate labelling but the more vulnerable maybe welcomed being isolated for a while. Which then, in turn...two years of that can have awful, devastating impact on their well-being without them even realising it. And that socialisation thing... So, the transition...People became very, very, kind of...You know, we got to...Now, I can't remember what period it was but it was 20...late, sort of, mid to late '21; people were really champing at the bit now to get back into the community. And as soon as the community centres were told they could open their doors they...The doors were open and they came, you know. And, but, the dynamic had change quite considerably within GRACE, I think. And it is...We're having to start all over again. And that's tragic, but it's a good thing too. You've got to look at the, sort of, positives of that. And, because now a lot of the members that we have still coming that were coming before; they have all this wealth of experience prior. So, we're revisiting things. So, the work's not going to be quite as intense maybe and then the participation is different. So, we, just as facilitators, have to take all of that into consideration to empower people again. And we have to do it quite gently. And it is a slow process. It's not a quick dash it's a jog. In the, sort of, two year period of, sort of, being locked out of your community centre and, sort of, delivering workshops through GRACE via that platform; I think I could see that people were struggling. I think I saw people finding it very difficult. I found it quite difficult because I got fatigued. And I think people did get fatigued. And if you have mental health problems or if you have, you know, trauma; I think being in that</p>	37.50-43.17

	<p>situation where it's like a hyper reality...It's almost like beyond reality sometimes where you're, kind of, in this, kind of, weird situation where you're talking remotely all the time. I think that has a really negative impact. Because we are the human...We are humans and we need to connect with other humans but we need to...You can't do that in the right way just through platform...You know, like, digital ways. It's great and there's a place for it in terms of crisis perhaps. But, you know, and we were fighting fires all the time throughout that period, of trying to, kind of, encourage people, to kind of, keep coming. And there was a lot of work put into that because it was alienating going online. And, you know, you were out of your comfort zone. But then people got used to the fact that they were in their dressing gown and, you know, they were having their cups of tea and they were in their living room. But there's a...And I always said at the very beginning-I am worried about this and the legacy of this because this could isolate people even more throughout this period. And then we're facilitating that. And I worried about that a lot. But no, people got fatigued and they wanted back out there; the majority. But, the dynamic has changed. I think that people are tired and it's because we're not through this other side yet. So, yeah, I think that's where we're at."</p>	
43.18	<p>Interviewer asks the respondent what GRACE as an organisation needs now to do its work.</p>	
	<p>"It certainly needs supported financially. It needs more space. Because we're growing all the time. The membership grew beyond belief throughout Covid. Because people were in crisis and they needed to access something like GRACE. And we were the only ones that were operating really. So, the membership had grown hugely. We obviously got funding at that point to kind of hand out digital plat...you know, devices so people weren't isolated. So, that would be either phones, I Pads, laptops. We got materials, art materials so that people didn't have to worry about the expense. Because, of course, there was all of that to consider as well. People were really worried about money and how they were going to survive. And, you know, a lot of benefits got cut and things like that as well. So, it, you know, I think there's a backlash now of that. Where people are having to...You know, it's just trying to, kind of, get people to realise that they can access...If we can help them access what they need. We're not here to just hand it all on a plate to them. We're here to enable them and give them knowledge. And knowledge is power. And, if they have that information. Then, isn't the community as a whole a better place if people have that. And they're less likely to spiral."</p>	43.25-45.25
45.32	<p>Interviewer asks the respondent what her hopes are for the future of GRACE</p>	
	<p>"My hopes for the future. I would love us to have our own building our own GRACE community centre. I would love to, you know, see an art devoted room and a tech studio, a recording studio, a yoga studio all under one roof. A holistic service that bridges that gap between crisis and wellbeing. I think that would be my absolute dream for the future and hey it might happen."</p>	45.35-46.31

Interviewer thanks the respondent for sharing her memories with the project.



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