

# COLOUR MY VOICE

ART THERAPY FOR  
HOMELESS KIDS

*(Case Studies)*

## *Colour My Voice: Art Therapy for Homeless Kids (Case Studies)*

### **Authors**

Dovi Seldowitz

Kirsten Winthers

### **Acknowledgements**

This healthcare initiative was funded in part by the Wolper Jewish Hospital Health Foundation.

### **Produced by**

Caretakers Cottage Inc.

96 Bondi Road

Bondi Junction NSW 2022

[www.caretakers.org.au](http://www.caretakers.org.au)

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## Introduction

Each year in Australia, thousands of children and young people become homeless. Some will only live for a short stay in youth refuges or domestic violence shelters before moving back home, others will only find stable accommodation after several bouts of homelessness. Youth homelessness is caused by abuse, domestic violence, and family relationship breakdowns. Other factors, such as mental illness and substance abuse (by either parent or young person), often play a role.

Art therapy has been used for kids and young people living in homeless shelters. In this context, art therapy seeks to alleviate the stress associated with living in emergency shelters.<sup>1</sup> Researchers have found that structured activities or programs, including art therapy, may enable homeless youth to develop a sense of accomplishment by creating something beautiful, and art therapy can provide a safe outlet for creative expression. Art therapy also allows the homeless child or young person to explore the meaning of their experiences. As one writer put it:

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, Cathy A. Malchiodi, *Breaking the Silence: Art Therapy with Children from Violent Homes*, Psychology Press, 1997; Doris Arrington and Peter Yorgin, "Art therapy as a cross-cultural means to assess psychosocial health in homeless and orphaned children in Kiev," *Art Therapy* 18, no. 2 (2001): 80-88; Jean Davis, "Building from the scraps: Art therapy within a homeless community," *Art Therapy* 14, no. 3 (1997): 210-213; Jerri Shepard and Deborah Booth, "Heart to heart art," *Reclaiming Children and Youth* 18, no. 1 (2009): 13-15.

*“It is one thing to imagine what it must be like for children whose families experience domestic violence; it is another thing to see the graphic images which gives us an inside look at how children make sense of their experiences.”<sup>2</sup>*

For homeless youth, art therapy enables them to reclaim their own sense self and start to realize their agency and restore their faith in their own abilities in an often confusing and difficult world.

In 2016, the Caretakers Cottage Youth Refuge in Bondi piloted an art therapy program, “Colour My Voice,” assisting homeless youth who stayed at the refuge, providing individual and group sessions for the children and young people to express their feelings, emotions and every day challenges, and to give them practical strategies into their own healing processes, whilst empowering them to make life enhancing choices moving forward.

The art therapy project was initiated by a youth worker at the refuge, Kirsten Winthers. Kirsten completed her Advance Diploma in Transpersonal Art Therapy at the College of Complimentary Medicine.

The case notes below were written by Kirsten following each session as part of each young person’s case plan. Prior to publication, the notes were edited to remove identifying details.

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<sup>2</sup> *Breaking the Silence: Art Therapy with Children from Violent Homes*, p. viii.

Much like the artwork by these homeless teens, the case notes speak a thousand words, and staff at the refuge have witnessed the benefits, progress, development and relief of the teenagers who participated in this program.

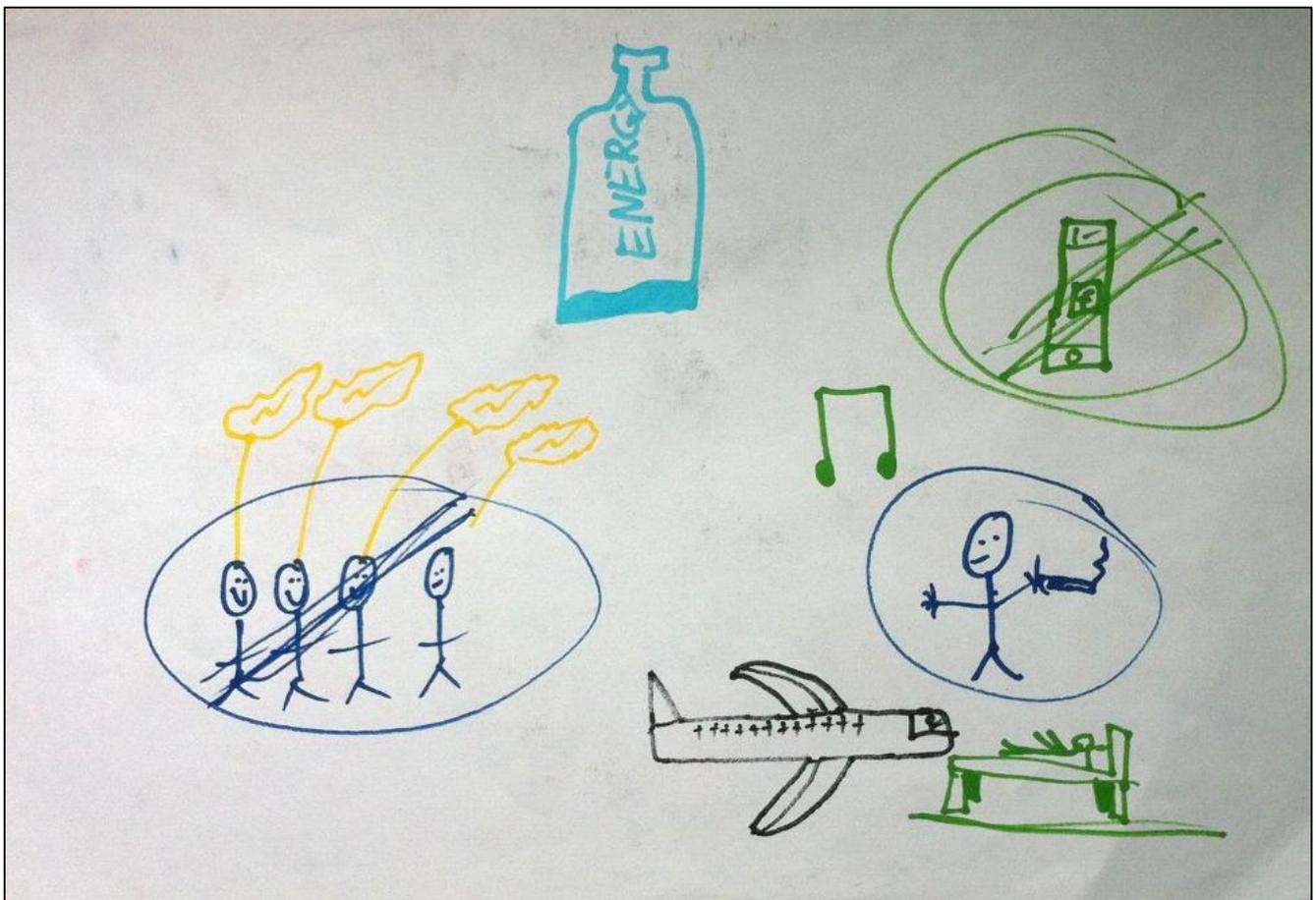
The benefits of art therapy are varied. As the case notes presented below indicate, each child can walk away from the experience with an entirely unique outcome. This is not surprising, as our caseworkers know all too well, each and every child staying at the refuge has a unique story of how they became homeless. But while each of young person's struggle is unique, there emerges a common theme of hope and longing for the 'normal life' which was denied to them. The case study notes outline the sessions with six different homeless teens, each benefiting from the session in his or her own way, each finding the therapy session a safe place to share their feelings and experiences.

## Enjoying the Moment

*Summary: H.G. (male, 16 years old) opens up to expressing his feelings through drawing pictures, and enjoys his time with the others in the therapy sessions.*

### Session 1

It was H.G.'s first time doing art therapy and he was still feeling sick. For the first process, the writer asked H.G. and resident A— how they were feeling today in general and wrote their answers on the white board. H.G. said he was feeling, 'drained, isolated, horrible, retrieving, angry, betrayed, lack of money, annoyed.'



For second process, H.G. was to pick a card based on what he was feeling. H.G. chose a card with the view of a person on an airplane, looking out the window. H.G. shared with the group that he felt like he wanted to 'just get away from everything' and 'leave it all behind.' The writer asked him if it would be for a holiday or leaving forever, to which he replied he did not mind as long as he could get away from it all.

H.G. then completed a creative expression based on the card and shared with the group what it was about. He had drawn a story using pictures in three different coloured markers and described his drawing as follows: a group of people all talking the same ideas and are 'followers,' drinking and energy drink that is low on energy, turning off his phone so no one contacts him, having a cigarette and listening to music, getting on a plane and going far away, then sleeping.

For the last process, H.G. choose a card of a girl lying under a tree that represented 'calm, relaxing and alone time,' all what he wanted to give himself this year.

Overall, Resident H had a really good session and participated in all of the processes. He was able to easily verbalize his feelings and portray them visually and make useful meaning and self-expression from them.

## Session 2

H.G. had a really good session and is very receptive to art therapy. He enjoys the creative outlet and an alternative of expressing himself. H.G. was easily able to verbalize his feelings during this session and for the first process he did a creative expression of himself skating in the skate park next to the beach. He explained to the group that it was him skating and enjoying his time with friends during summer and used lots of color of blues, yellow and red.

His artwork conveys the positive social aspect of living in Bondi and what he loves doing the most which is skating.



H.G. completed the second process, 'conversation without words' with youth worker B— and was giggling a lot and had a really fun time creating an artwork with him. Their artwork was only done in pencil and depicts a story using lots of symbols which contain a variety of all of life's different aspects, both positive and negative.

H.G. said he found the process fun but exhausting because it takes a lot of energy to guess what someone is drawing and why.

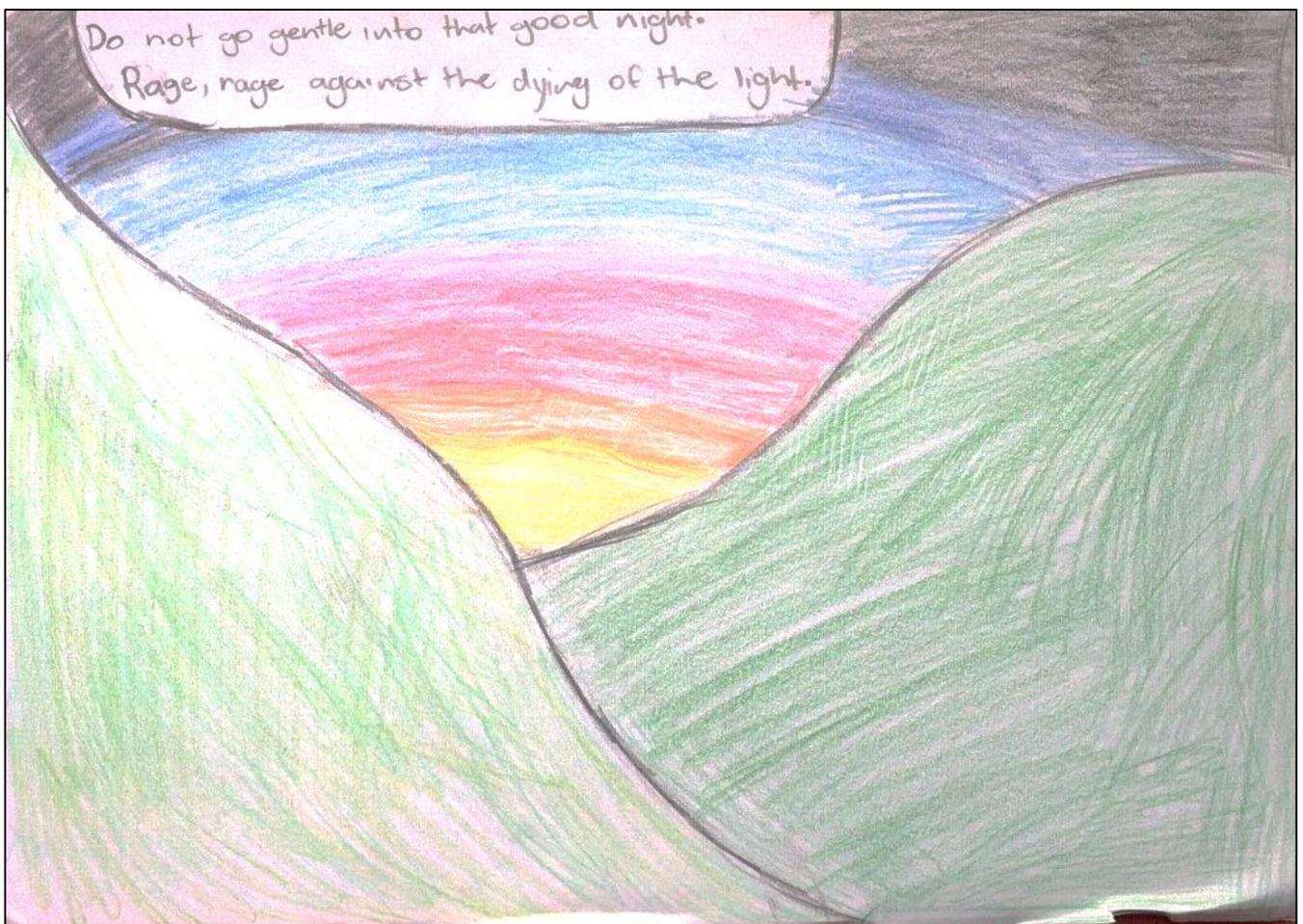
Overall, H.G. interacted really well with the group and easily participated in all the processes.

## Expressing Her Own Feelings

*Summary: A.C. (female, 15 years old) slowly learns to express her own feelings, first through a character in a novel, and later, as her own.*

### Session 1

A.C. completed her first one-on-one art therapy session today. A.C. took to doing creative expression straight away and went straight into doing a drawing that she already had in mind. Whilst A.C. was doing her first drawing, the writer asked open ended questions and A.C. spoke about what she was drawing and why.



The first drawing she completed during free expression was a sunset across large bright green fields with a quote at the top that stated 'Do not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light.' The drawing itself was very colorful including the sunset (she used black, blue, pink, red, orange and yellow).

A.C. explained to the writer that the drawing was based on a quote from a book she is reading at the moment which is a series for teenagers. A.C. expressed that she really liked reading these books and told the writer all about the concept of society described in the novel is all about control, no free expression or individualism. Everyone looks the same, dresses the same and have to take different coloured pills at different stages of their lives and the people are completely controlled. A.C. also said that she identifies strongly with the main female character of the novel 'Zoe' and that this girl was controlled by her parents, arranged to marry a boy she did not love, etc.

This lead into the second free drawing creative expression which was of this character 'Zoe' from the novel. The writer noticed and told A.C. that she had seen her draw the same female character before and asked her who she was, which she stated her name is 'Zoe'. The writer discussed with her whilst she was in process what 'Zoe' meant to her and she described her as an external feature that was not actually her but could not manage to verbalize her feelings and

creative expression in the 'I' it was only about describing this character that she identified with so strongly.

As A.C. was clearly not able to own her own feelings and discuss the recent trauma she is going through, the writer encouraged her to verbalize through 'Zoe' and express herself in this way which was the safest option for her at this point in time. A.C. completed a drawing of Zoe, a girl dressed in black top, blue skirt, long black hair with her face pointed down, holding a rose. There were blue tears coming down the face and there was no nose or mouth. A.C. stated that Zoe was something that she has been drawing for a while.



For the last process, A.C. chose a picture card based on how she was feeling. She chose the picture of the full moon over a dark barren landscape, large rock and barren tree. A.C. said she chose it because it represented how she was feeling, barren and depressed. A.C. then did a creative expression based on the card she chose and did another drawing of Zoe, however she re-drew the picture card, adding Zoe into the scene with her sitting on the rock facing towards the full moon wearing a purple shirt, and blue pants holding the flower, still looking down. The tree was not barren like in the picture card, A.C. had drawn different colored flowers of red and one blue. When the writer pointed this out to A.C. she did not comment and seemed happy with her creative expression.

During the whole session, A.C. only spoke about Zoe and the novel and did not speak about her 'own' feelings except for when she explained why she chose the picture card. A.C. did quite well and definitely seemed to have benefited from our session, as she was in a much better mood than when the session started.

## Session 2

A.C. was very happy to be doing another art therapy session with the writer and during the 'checking' in process she very readily discussed the current issues that she felt that were relevant for her at the moment. The writer

explained to her the importance of doing the checking in and writing down all of the different issues she is dealing with to gain perspective, etc. and she agreed.

- “Boyfriend” – A.C. said her new boyfriend came from a very dysfunctional home and his stepfather was verbally and physically abusive towards him (rather, he used to be, as the boyfriend is no longer in the family home). Today he called her and told her that his stepfather had ‘run over’ his younger brother, a toddler, and was rushed to hospital. The writer discussed this with her and acknowledged that it was a very traumatic event.
- “School” – A.C. was very frustrated with school and does not enjoy it there. A.C. struggles to get along with the other girls. It is an extremely stressful environment and she has not been doing well.
- “Punching the Wall” – A.C. had punched a wall in anger the previous night and sprained her hand. She said she was so angry because of no sleep, anxiety, periods.
- “Feeling Caged” – because has no freedom at the refuge to do ‘normal’ things teenage girls do at her age. They do not take her and the other residents out on outings or anything and do not interact with them and she does not like living there, feels isolated, etc.

A.C. then did a creative expression and did a drawing of a female from the chest up, wearing a purple hoodie with dark hair giving the rude finger. When the writer asked her if it was her she said 'yes' which was a major difference between the previous session when she would only draw a character 'Zoe'. This time she drew herself, giving the rude finger. The writer told her that she had every right to feel angry and that anger is a healthy, normal reaction to what she is going through at the moment. Resident Really enjoyed creating this drawing and this discussion around it that she said she wanted put it up in her room. The writer told her that it was a great idea.

The last process the writer asked A.C. to choose 3 cards of what she would give herself right now if she could. A.C. choose the following picture cards: a baby's hand holding an adults finger, a key in a door, flowers on a wedding cake. A.C. said she choose these three cards at they represented what she wanted the most: family, freedom, wedding/pretty. We discussed these three different cards and what they meant to her. The writer asked her to choose one card that she was most drawn to, and to complete a creative expression.

A.C. drew 'family' and did a drawing of a mother holding and nursing her baby in her arms, with warm, loving expressions on her face. A.C. said that this was the most important thing to her out of everything was family and that she hopes to have a family one day and misses being part of a family now. Overall

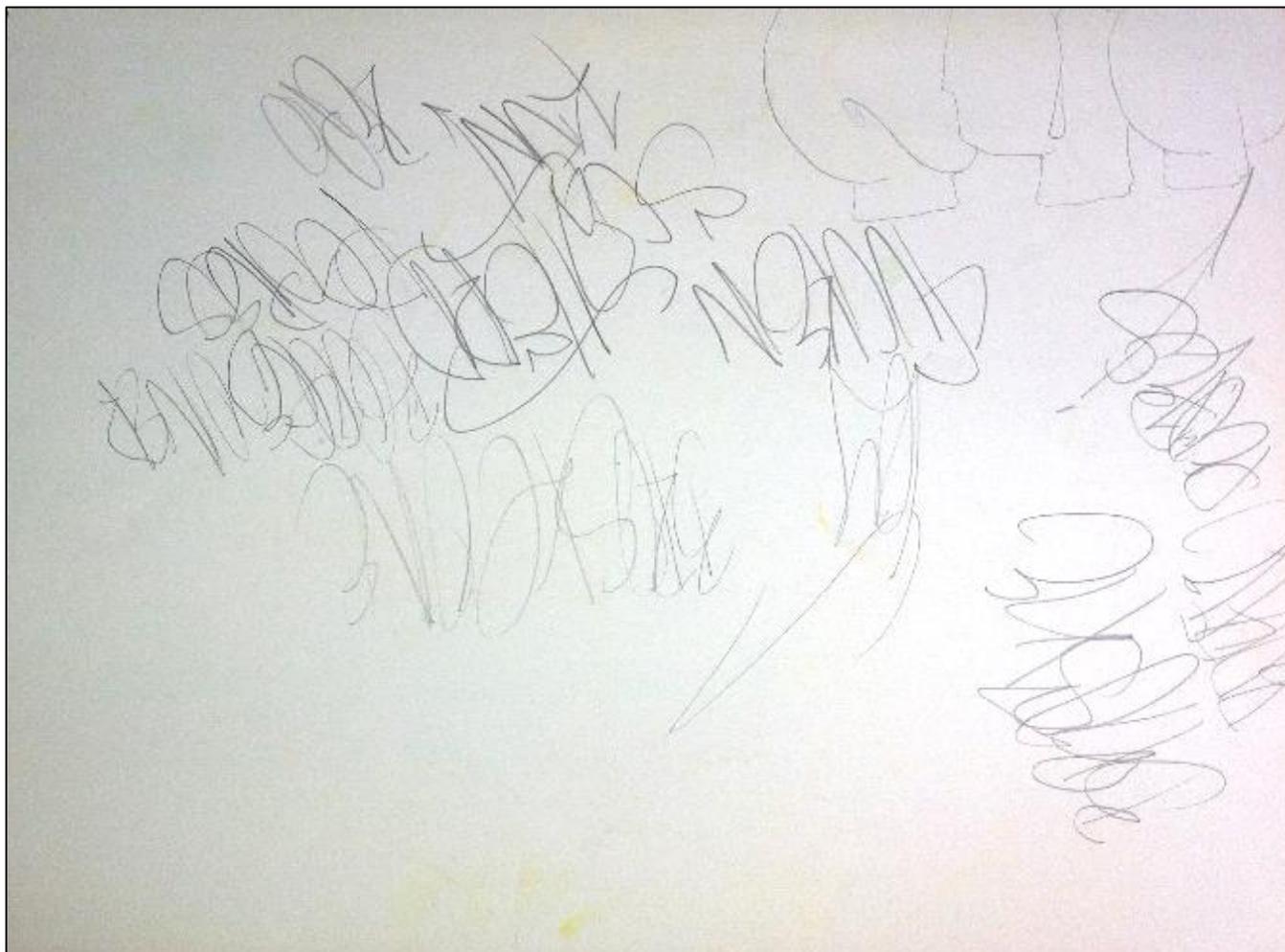
A.C. made major progress in this session and actually referred to herself and her 'own' feelings and actually drew images of herself and referred to them as herself.

## Art Without the “Buzz”

*Summary: T.D. (male, 16 years old) discovers he can be artistic without the influence of drugs.*

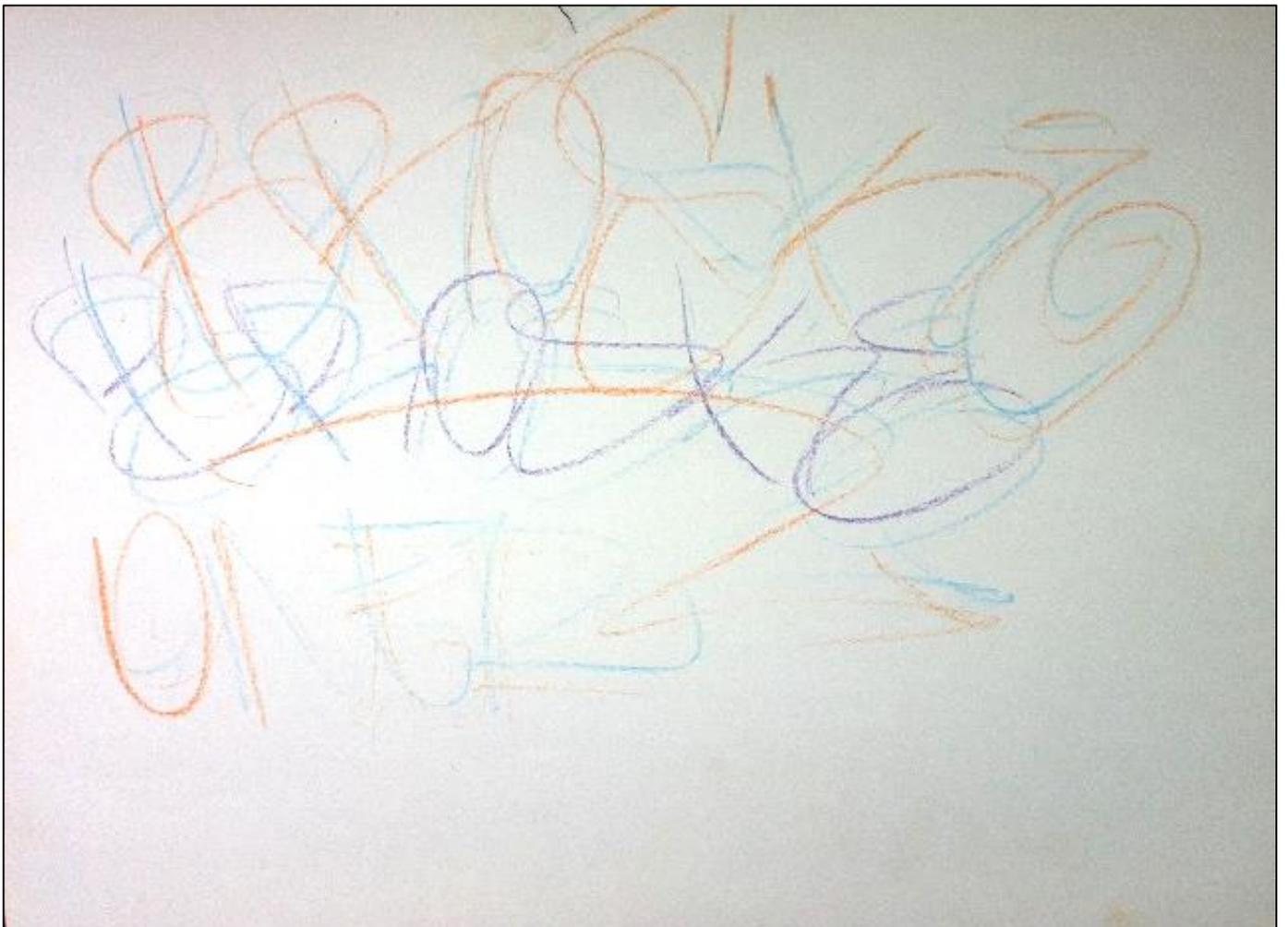
### Session 1

Initially, T.D. was very reluctant to join the group, the writer told him he could sit in the session drawing whatever he felt like. He ended up talking and participating in the first process, and he drew his tags which he was very proud of. He repeated to the writer over and over again that he has never drawn before without having a ‘buzz’ or being under the influence. T.D. said that he would



draw for hours under the influence of drugs or alcohol and found it very difficult to draw sober. The writer assured him that he was more than capable [of drawing sober], it just might feel uncomfortable at first, but he could get used to it.

T.D. spoke a lot about his dysfunctional relationship with his mother, mixing drugs and alcohol (and being sick because of this), as well as his negative experiences with the police and Juvenile Justice. Overall, great participation in Art Therapy session, enthusiastic and gave the writer some ideas for future Art Therapy sessions (painting boomerangs, etc.). Afterwards, T.D. told the writer



he wants to do some more drawings but will get 'smashed' to do this. The writer told him again that he doesn't need to and he can participate without being under the influence. T.D. left after an hour and did not participate in the second process.

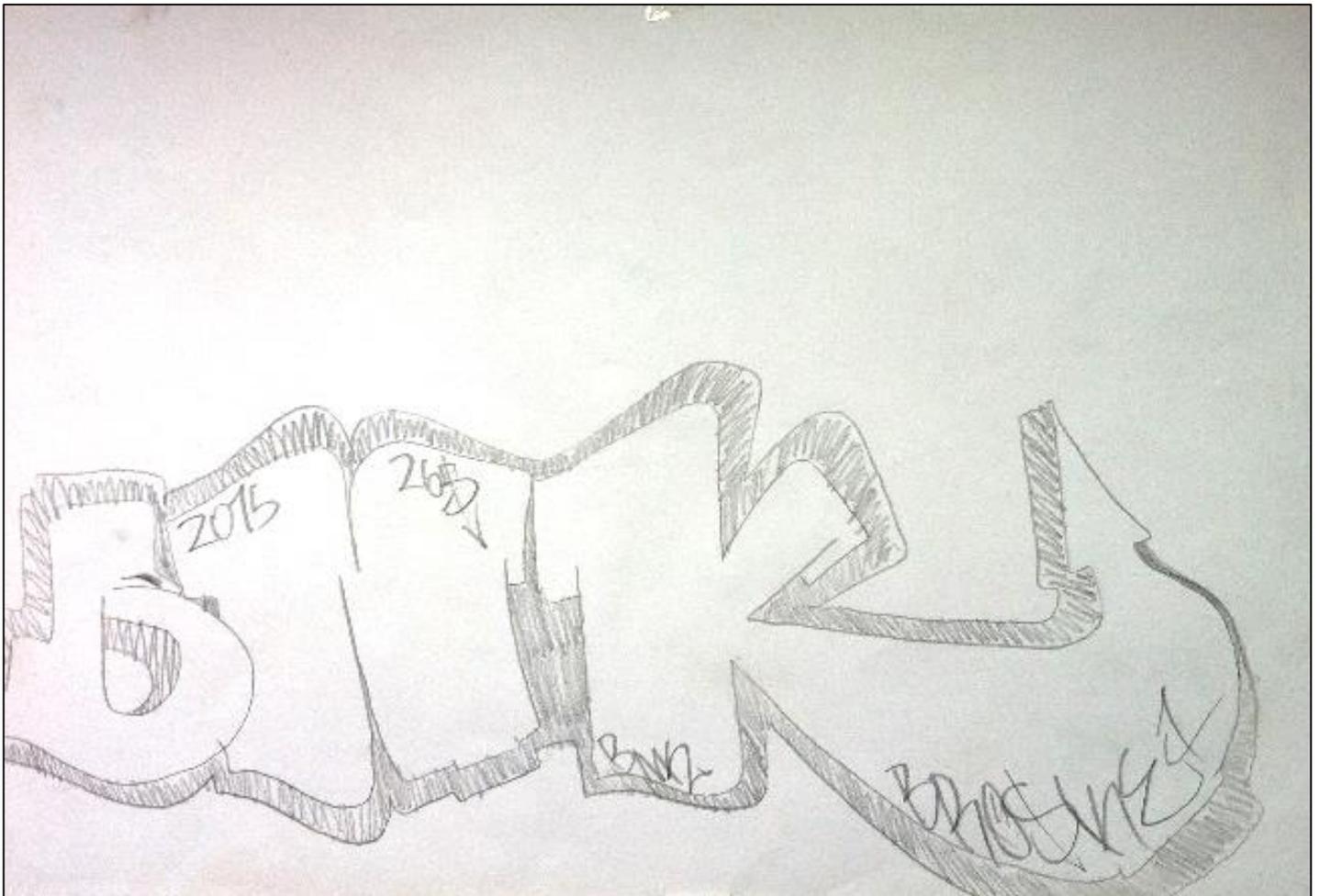
## Session 2

T.D. had a really good session with the group. The writer said that T.D. could sit and draw and participate when he would like to. This approach of allowing him the space to take initiative on his terms works really well as T.D. was one of the main contributors to group discussions on the processes. Spoke



a lot about smoking 'bongs' and told everyone an incident that occurred with his girlfriend A— and his mother.... T.D. was laughing while telling the story....

T.D. did not complete the processes in terms of sharing with the group what his drawings where about, however, he did approach the writer individually and showed that he had drawn something completely different to his usual 'tags', this was very interesting as it had lots of colors. The writer gave T.D. positive reinforcement during these sessions about his artistic abilities and also discussed the issue that he thinks he needs a 'buzz' to be able to draw or dance. T.D. did not bring up the topic as often as he did in the first session. This



week he used more colors and different kinds of drawings (words written in top of words).

### Session 3

T.D. came late to the group art therapy session, but walked straight into the counselling room when he arrived at Caretakers around 9:00 pm. T.D. enjoyed the free drawing part of the session and spoke freely and in a relaxed manner with the writer and Resident J. T.D. said that his girlfriend A— was moving to another refuge tomorrow because she cannot go back home to her mother.



T.D. continued drawing his tags, still using a lot of black and red and seemed much more naturally inclined to start drawing now which is a significant progress compared to when he first started the sessions. He does not mention once this time about needing to have a 'buzz' or be under the influence to draw or express himself creatively.

#### Session 4

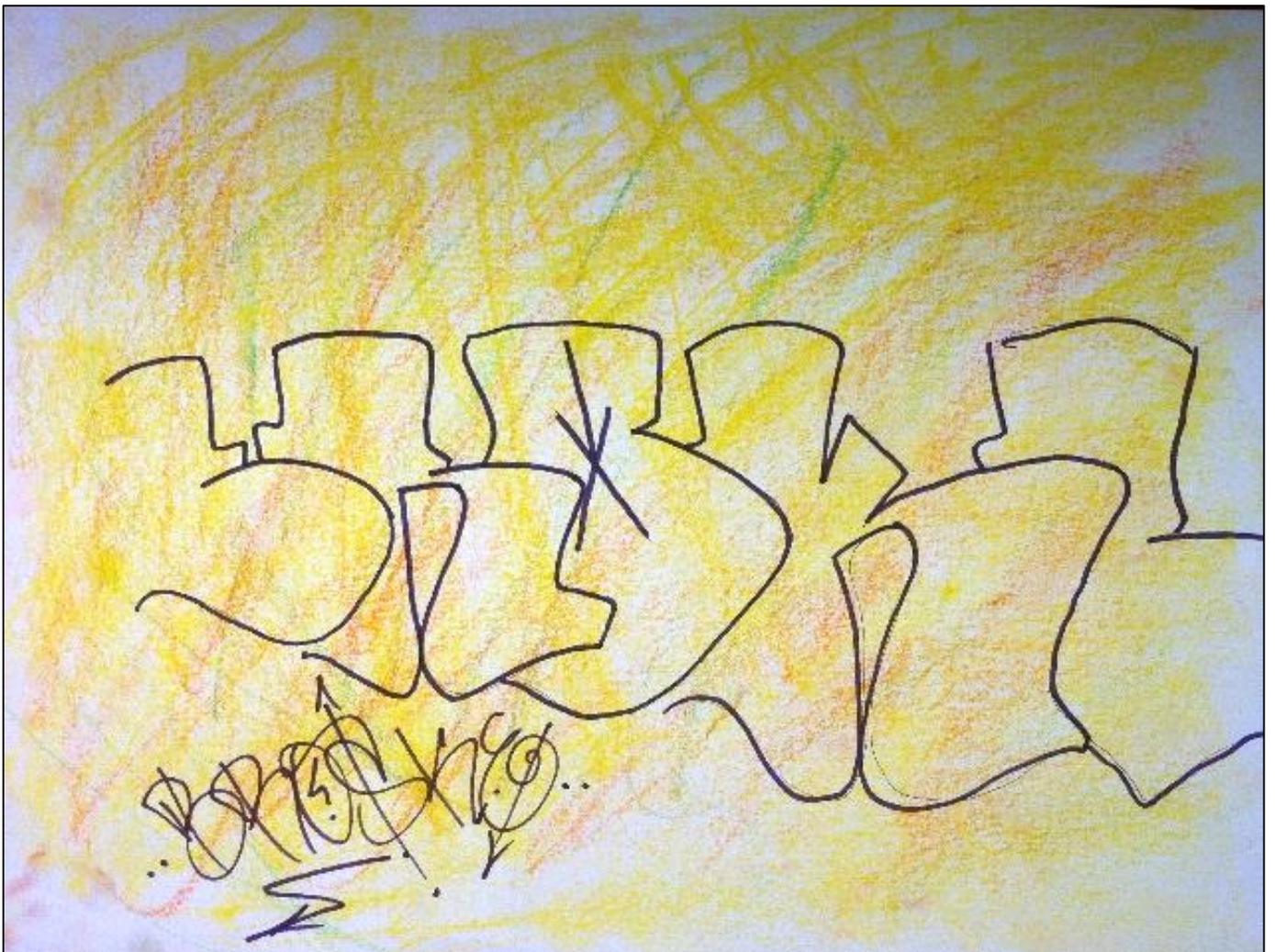
T.D. was very tired, fragile and sensitive and asked to do some free drawing after the first picture card exercise. He chose a picture card of a barbed fence and said that it reminded him of cutting holes in fences to get into train tracks to tag trains. He did not participate in the group activity of painting the wooden art box but did some drawing on his own. Was very quiet and needed sleep but still had a good session.

#### Session 5

The writer spoke to T.D. before the session and informed him that because he has a lot going on at the moment he can choose what processes he participates in to allow him to draw and relax and have down time. T.D. agreed and appreciated this. T.D. did not participate in any of the processes except the free drawing at the end. During the whole session he did his own drawings while interacting with the group and making meaningful contributions to group discussions.

T.D.'s artworks initially were lots of tagging in black and white and by the end of the session he started using color.

He tends to get frustrated with himself which he verbalizes out loud that if it doesn't look the way he wants he will make comments about himself that are negative such as 'idiot' or 'spastic'. T.D. also asked the writer about what the writer thought about his drawing. Overall T.D. enjoyed being able to relax and have freedom to be himself amongst the mentors present (staff) and his peers.

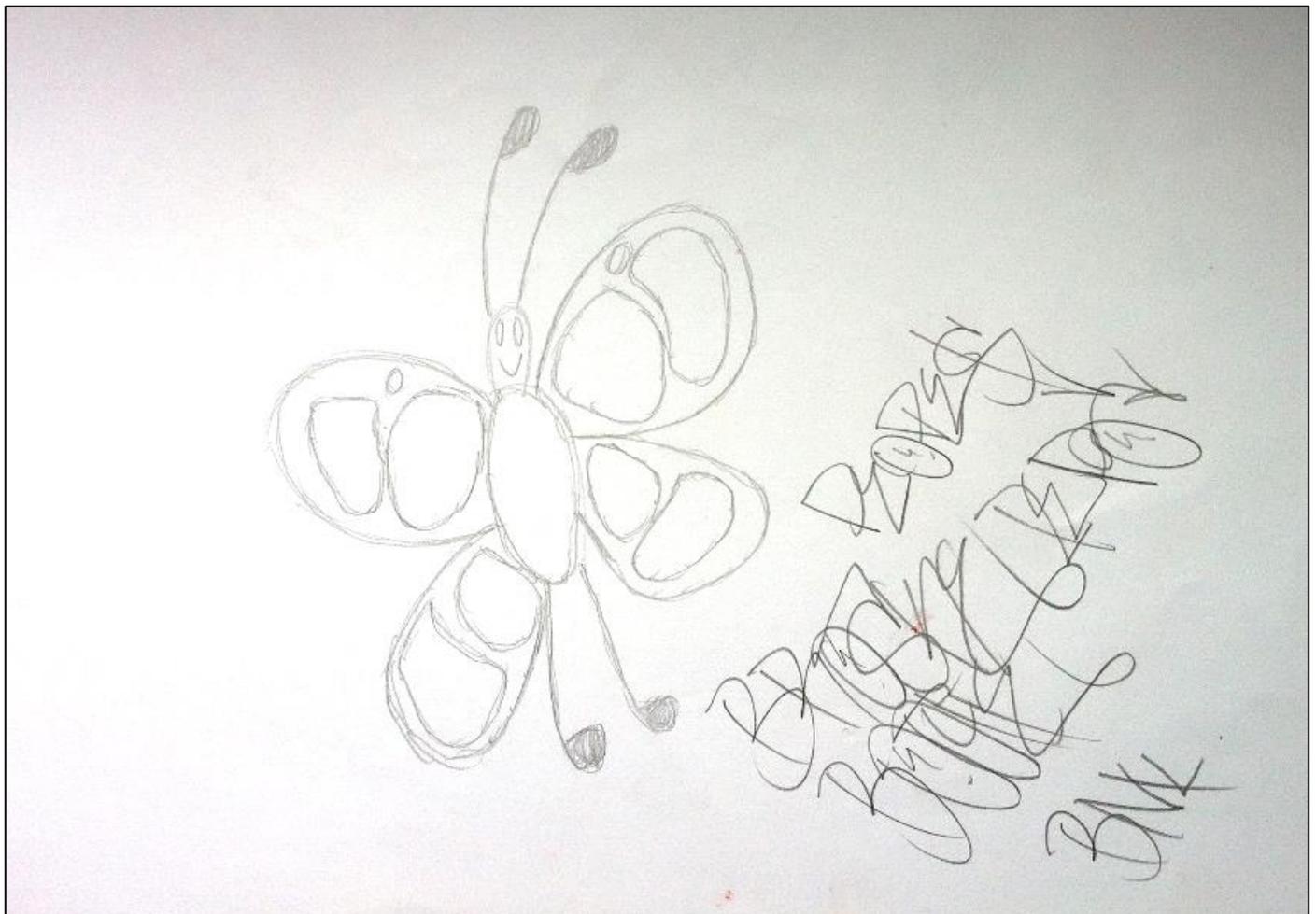


## Session 6

T.D. only came in after the first process was already completed and participated in the second process of which animal he would want to be and why.

T.D. said he wanted to be a 'vicious' animal like a crocodile and when the writer asked him if he was sure, he said that he wanted to be a butterfly and 'change from a worm into a butterfly.'

T.D. then did a creative expression of a butterfly in pencil only with a smile on its face....



## Session 7

T.D. did not join the first process and did some drawing while joining in with group discussion. T.D. spoke about the conversation he had with the manager that if he comes home under the influence he will be 'out'.

T.D. became very loud and distracted when resident A— arrived half way through the session and socialized with him a lot.

T.D. participated in the second process of free drawing and did a very colorful and soft 'tag' that seemed delicate and very expressive. T.D. had a good session and enjoyed it.

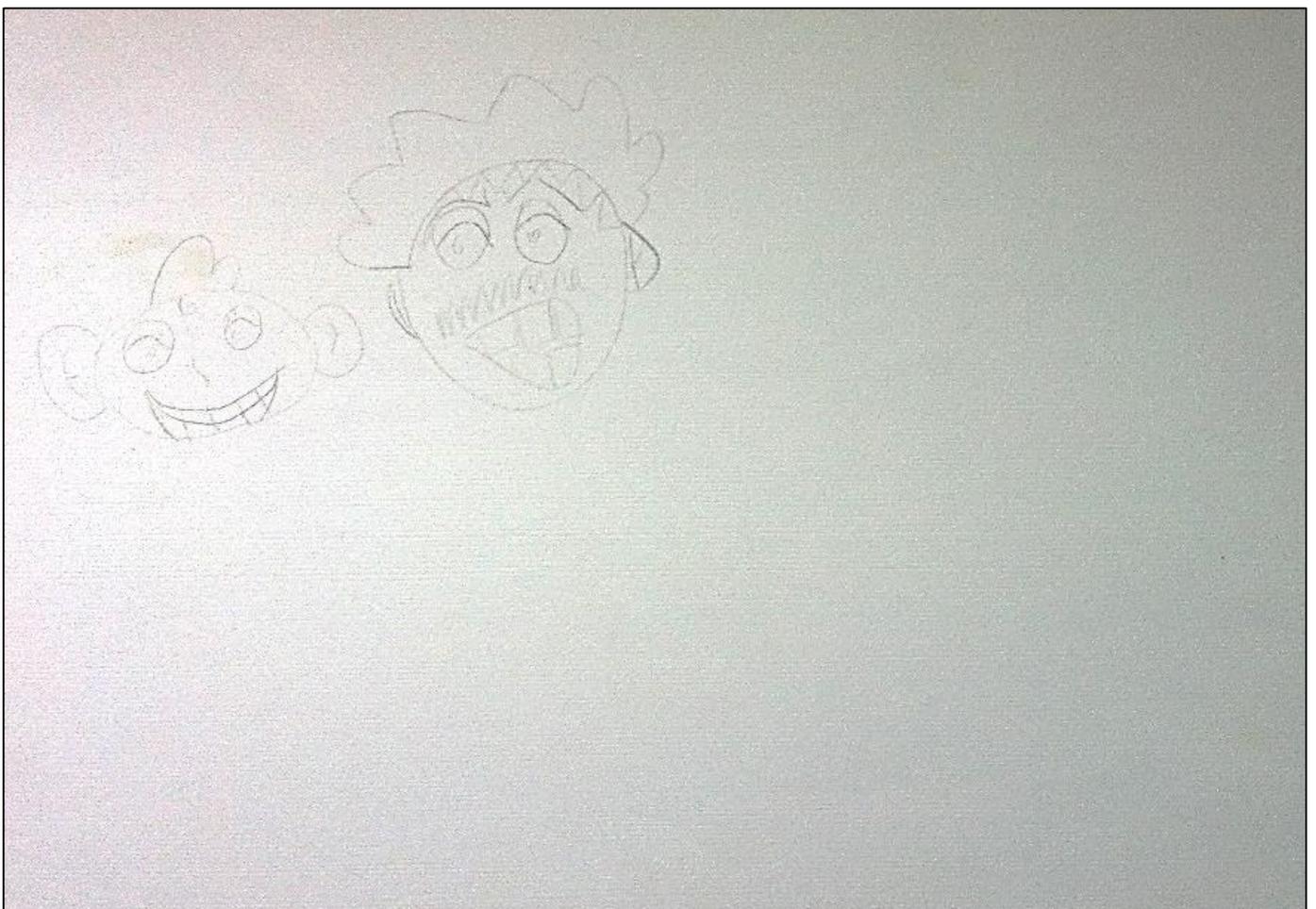
## Session 8

T.D. participated in every single process for the first time in almost two months of joining the group art therapy every week. Whilst we started the first process, T.D. stated that it was the first time he was doing the processes and started behaving very shy and awkward, and tried desperately to look 'masculine' to others in the room. For the first process, he chose a card that represented who he used to be with barbed wire on it for the times he has been in a Juvenile Justice Centre.

For the second process, he chose a card that was a male swimming under water and said that it represents who he is today, because he likes swimming. For the last card, he chose a picture of a baby's hand holding an adult's finger

which represents who he wants to become in the future: to have a family, children and be a 'father', which he said he 'cannot wait'.

T.D. choose the last card to base his creative expression on and drew a pencil drawing of two small faces on the top left corner, an adult male face and a baby's face. When the writer asked him to express what he had drawn he had difficulty verbalizing. T.D. said that he was the adult male in the picture, the 'father', and that was his 'baby'.



## Mapping Her Emotions

*Summary: B.L. (female, 17 years old) learns to make sense of her feelings and experiences through an empowering 'mapping' technique.*

### Session 1

B.L. completed her first art therapy session this evening and really enjoyed herself and seemed to feel better, more at ease and expressed herself easily both verbally and creatively. B.L. chose for her first card of her past self, the picture of the shoes hanging from power lines. B.L. said that when she was six years old 'as a street kid' she would see this everywhere and knew that it meant that 'a drug dealer lived on that street'. B.L. said that when she was six years old she knew that her parents were doing drugs even though they did not do it in front of her, she was aware of what was going on.

B.L. spoke about how her parents were 'junkies' and that because she was very 'smart' and aware of her surroundings that instead of treating her like a child when she was still a child they treated her 'like an adult' and that this resulted in a switching of roles, as she became the 'parent' and they were the 'child.'

For the second card representing her present self, B.L. chose a roller-coaster and said that she feels excited and nervous about all of the positive opportunities that are now coming up for her, including starting school again

soon and that she feels capable to 'ride' the ups and downs of life a lot better than she used to be, where she did not feel able at all and was very 'depressed.' B.L. said she felt like she had a bit of anxious energy because she was nervous about starting school and possibly being bullied.

The writer told her that she needs keep doing her best, be honest with the teachers if anything happens and that is all she needs to do. B.L. responded to this and said that school was 'really important' to her and she is aiming to finish Year 12, go to university and work in community services. She wants to create a facility for adults who have been institutionalized because she witnessed this with her father who had been in and out of jail since she was five.

B.L. said she witnessed how his needs were not met and the actual real reason and problem of why he was re-offending was not addressed or supported in anyway and just kept going back to jail. The writer told her that she would be very capable of doing anything that she wanted to and if she feels passionate and driven about making a difference in this area of society that she would be more than capable.

For the third card representing her future self, B.L. chose a picture of a dark alleyway that had the view of a bright colorful city with tall buildings on the horizon. B.L. said that she felt that all three of her cards were represented in this one as her past was dark and challenging and her present was much more

positive and bright and her future was the big colorful city which was wealth, success and achievements. The writer gave her positive reinforcement for verbalizing and identifying an incredible depth of self-awareness and personal strength.

The writer then asked B.L. to complete a creative expression based on one of the cards and she chose the future self. B.L. spent some time drawing and really enjoyed the creative expression aspect of the session and drew a very colourful picture based on all three cards (which she realized she had done unconsciously mid-process) which had the word 'success' in capital letters which a city landscape in the background, roller-coaster and bright fireworks. She had also drawn the sneakers on the power lines in lead pencil, very small on the top left corner.

After the session, B.L. said that it was a very big deal for her to be able to sit down and draw because she has not been able to do so in the past two years. B.L. expressed that she felt better emotionally and physically, less anxious and more at ease with herself. The writer encouraged all of the above. For B.L.'s first art therapy session she is evidently highly capable of connecting with her emotions and feelings and can express this at a highly complex level both verbally and creatively which she seemed to benefit from immensely.

## Session 2

B.L. had a great session. Before the start of the session, the writer was aware how intense B.L.'s week had been and wanted to get B.L. to vent all of her frustrations, identify both the positive and negative aspects she possesses and what control she actually has in her life. The aim of this session was to give her relief, perspective and empowerment to discover what is within her power.

At the start of the session when the writer asked her to get out everything that she had experienced this week and have a 'verbal vomit' to get it all of her chest. B.L. came up with the following words/emotions to describe how her week had been: 'Angry, Shit, Flop, Annoyed, Frustrated, Physically Lashing Out, Removing Myself, Using Drugs, Thinking Before Acting, Proud, Out of Control, School, Stressed.' We discussed the words on the board at length in order for her to fully express and verbalize and reflect on the events of the week, the decisions she made and the consequences and her general emotional, mental and physical well-being at the moment.

The writer pointed out there was a few positives and it was not all negative including 'Learning to Walk Away and Removing Myself' which B.L. said that she is still learning how to do but could give examples from this week of when she thought before she said or acted on something which she was proud of herself for. She used the example of when she was at school and emotionally

'lost it' and had to 'remove myself' and 'I sat at Redfern station and instead of going out using straight away I thought about it and went back to Caretakers.'

After discussing all of the points on the board the writer turned it around to the other side which was blank and asked B.L. and resident A— who did they think would be capable of experiencing all of the issues raised on the back and still be here today? Resident A— said 'Iron Man' and B.L. could not think of anyone. The writer made it clear that most humans would not have been able to survive everything she has been through so she must have some important qualities, characteristics and values that have kept her here today and we explored all of them.

The writer wrote her name in the middle of the white board and asked her to give words that convey all of her strengths and qualities that have enabled her to still be here. B.L. stated the following 'Staunch, Always Stand Up for Myself, Respect (for children, pregnant women and elders), Morals and Principles, Strength of the Mind, Body, Survival Skills, Street Wise, Staunch, Energy, Walking Away, Telling the Truth, Speaking My Mind, Protection of Animals and The Way I Was Raised.' The writer discussed with B.L. and resident A— whilst writing these qualities that B.L. nominated on the board, discussing what each of them meant to her and her understanding of how she has been able to utilize these different qualities.

After B.L. had discussed all of the qualities she could think off and had given examples, the writer pointed out to her that this side of the board is much more full than the other side. This gave her a visual example of all of her positive, strengths and qualities that are all in her control as she identified feeling like she has not control over life was a massive stress factor for her.

Once this locus of control was established back within herself the writer asked youth worker B— what he liked about B.L. and he stated 'Personality and Smile' (this was added to the board) then the writer asked resident A— what he liked about B.L. and he stated, 'Wisdom' and the writer added to the board that what she liked about B.L. which was 'Courage and being a Pocket Rocket.' As a group we all discussed what was added to the board and B.L. seemed interested in learning that others perception of herself can vary in what she thinks of herself.

The writer then asked B.L. what was the top five qualities on the board that she valued the most about herself. B.L. listed: 'Speaking My Mind, Staunch, Moral Principles, Respect, Humor.' The writer asked B.L. what was the number one quality, and she stated 'Speaking My Mind.' After this process was completed the group discussed what we had discovered about ourselves and anything else brought up in order to close the session. B.L. mentioned the

following issues that she feels is affecting her in a negative manner and causing the core of her frustration and current stress in her life:

- Feeling abandoned and alienated from her family.
- Giving everything to her family only to be 'used' in return for 'drugs or money.'
- Not able to see her brother whom she desperately wants to connect with because of difficulty with Child Protection Services.... B.L. said that she felt really sad and that she had 'raised him' and desperately wanted to reconnect.
- Worried and stressed about her father who will get out of jail later this year.... [concerned about] housing and lack of support to assist him in not re-offending. B.L. expressed anger at him for breaking his bail conditions and going back into jail.

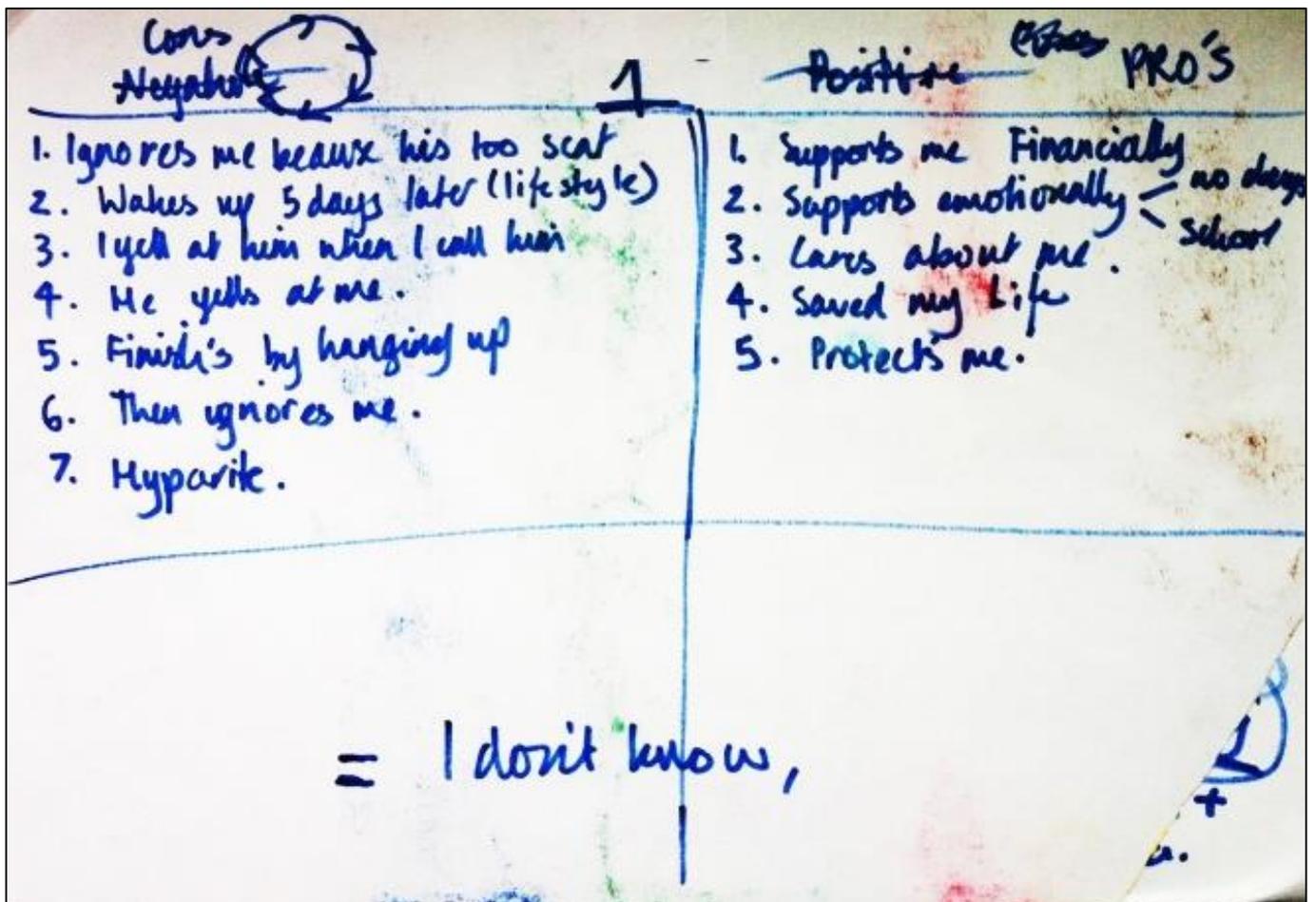
The writer informed B.L. that staff can assist her to the best of our ability with the above and that she needs to talk to her caseworker about contacting Child Protection Services on her-behalf to possibly visit her brother...

### Session 3

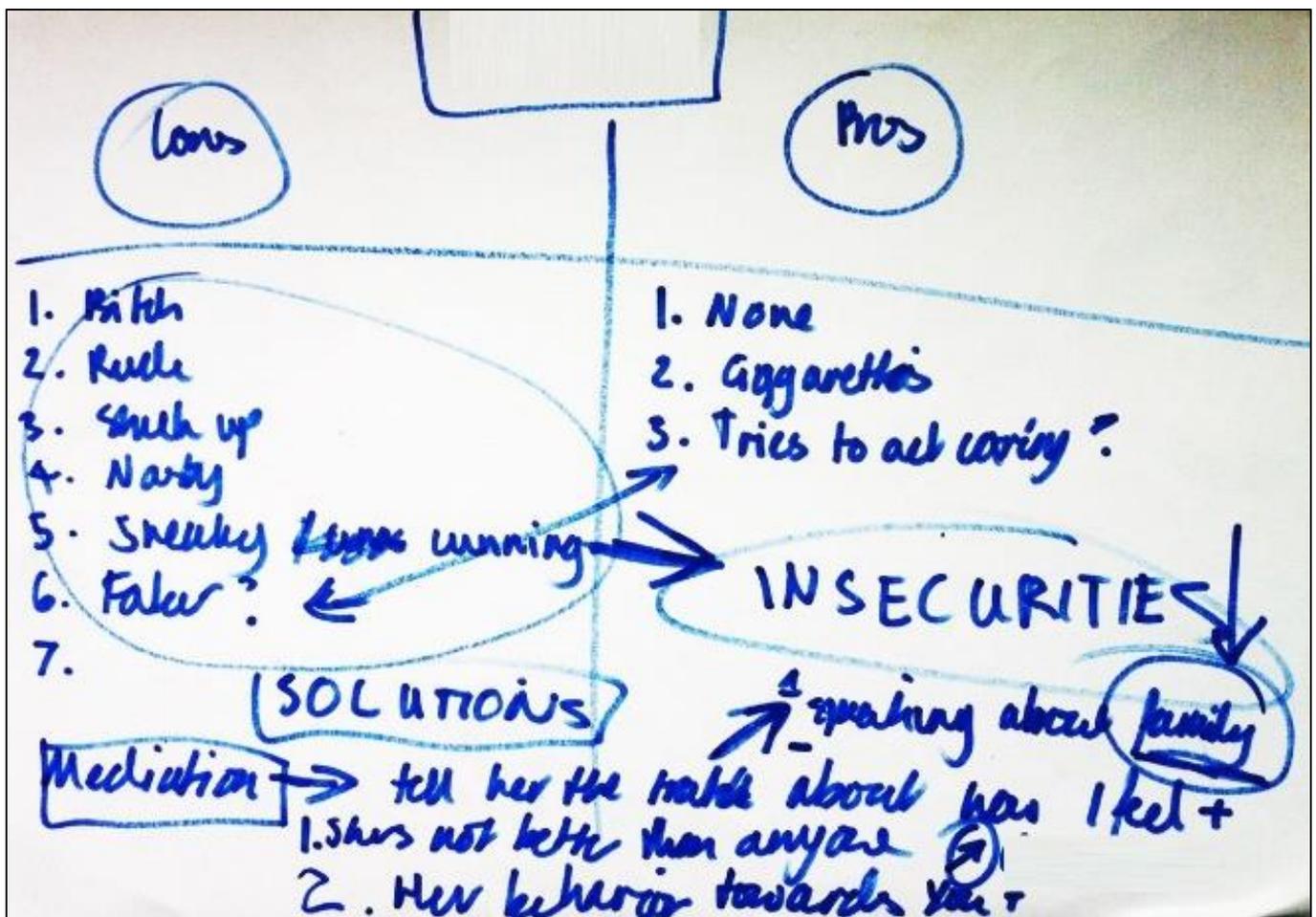
B.L. had another great one-on-one session with the writer. B.L. particularly likes mapping rather than doing any drawing/art works and the writer focused on this request.

The writer used the top half of the white board to write all of the main emotions she had experienced this week and then below that wrote three main issues that she wanted to discuss. One was her boyfriend, two was [resident A—], and three was [resident E—]. Under each of these three titles, the writer listed all the presenting issues within each conflict to vent it all out and in order for B.L. to visually see it all in front of her.

Each one was discussed at length and the writer linked the above emotions to a direct consequence of what she was dealing with, written below. The writer took a piece of paper and wrote the title of the first issue and divided the page into half of 'pros' and 'cons.'



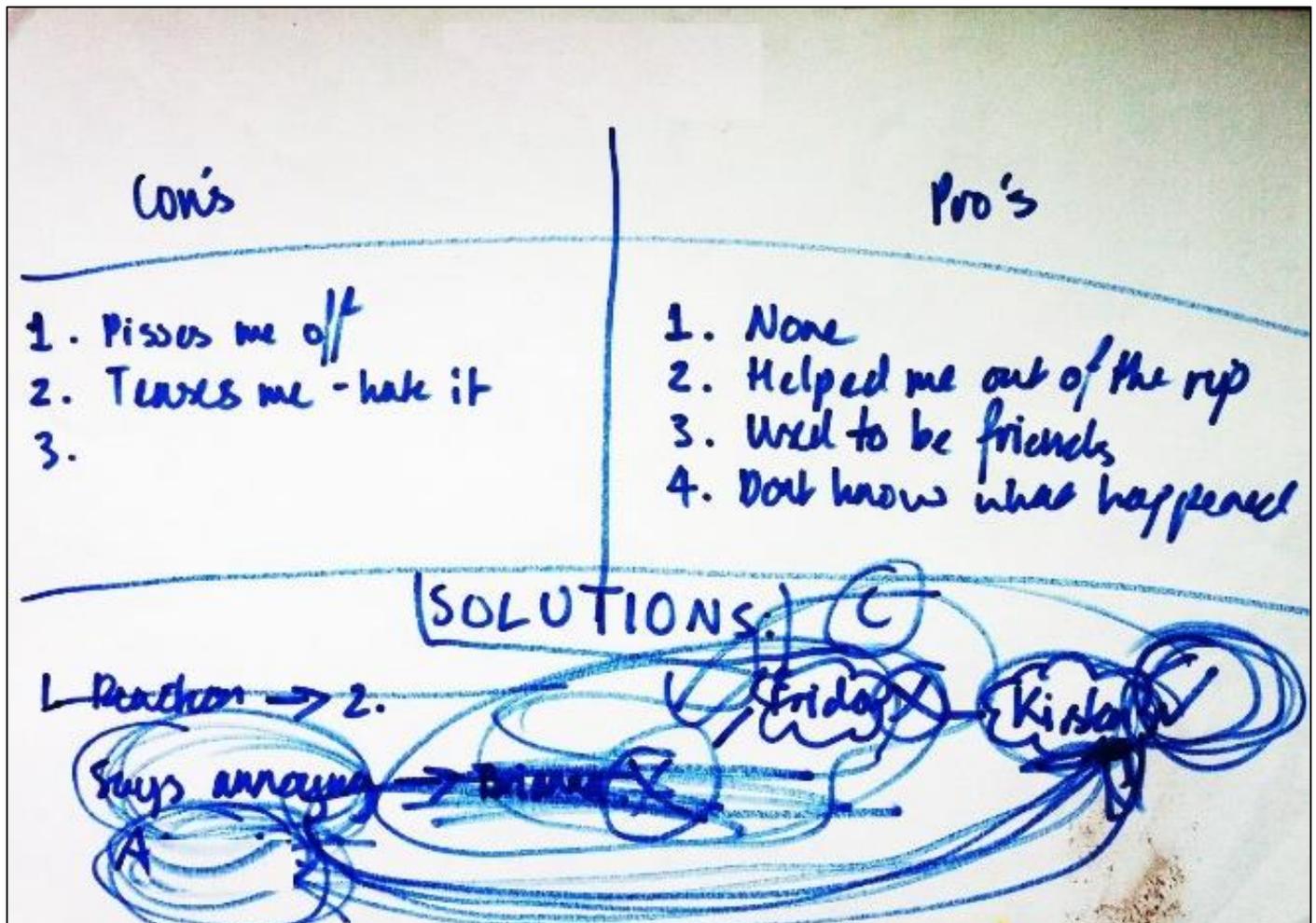
- “Boyfriend” – B.L. identified the ‘cons’ as: ‘he ignores me because he is too scattered, wakes up 5 days later because of his lifestyle, I yell at him when I call him, hangs up on me, then ignores me, hypocrite. The ‘pros’ included: ‘supports me financially, supports me emotionally (no drugs, school), cares about me, saved my life, protects me...’
- Resident A. – B.L.’s list of ‘cons’ included: ‘pisses me off, teases me - hate it.’ The ‘pros’ were: ‘none, helped me out of the rip, used to be friends, don't know what happened.’ After this was discussed I drew a map on the piece of paper to offer her a helpful solution of not ‘taking the bait in the first place’ and then this energy from resident A— is deflected back onto



staff or other residents and completely misses her. B.L. seemed quite surprised by this and understood exactly what I was explaining to her.

- Resident E. — The 'cons' included: 'Bitch, Rude, Stuck Up, Nasty, Cunning, Faker.' The 'pros' were: 'none, cigarettes, tries to be caring?' After discussing these lists, we spoke about some solutions which included 'mediation' and also discussed why someone might behave in the way in which she did.

Overall, B.L. was very communicative and stayed focused for a reasonably intensive mapping session.



## Session 4

One-on-one session: [B.L. completed another intense mapping session, focusing on the following issues: pot use, the move to a new refuge, Child Protection Services, the boyfriend, the relationship with extended family members....].

## Wanting to Visit Mum

*Summary: A.A. (male, 13 years old) expresses his longing to see his mother living overseas.*

### Session 1

A.A. came in after completing his chore and missed the first 15-20 minutes. A.A. participated in the free drawing part of the session and discussed with his peers about 'girls, dating girls, having to go to the gym to look good and that wealthy people don't have to worry about going to the gym because they get everything that they want and do not have to worry about looking good.'



A.A. spoke positively about school except for complaining about the long distance travel.

A.A. got along well with other residents and enjoyed completing the free drawing. When asked what he was drawing he said that they were words and different figures. All were drawn in lead pencil with no colors. A.A. did not elaborate any further. Overall, A.A. had a good session with the group.

## Session 2

A.A. had a good session with the group and participated in all the process with enthusiasm and his normal humorous self. A.A. chose a picture card of a girl lying down on the grass in the sun reading a book which he explained that 'she looks happy because she is wearing bright colors' and sitting out in the sun 'relaxing'.

A.A. completed a creative expression painting on the 'wooden art therapy box' and jumped straight into the process very naturally without having to be prompted. He then painted a large face and afro and explained that it was him as he wanted to grow an afro. A.A. enjoyed the session and socialized with the other residents well.

A.A. stayed for a while just painting the wooden box, listening to music and was singing the whole time he was in processes. Overall, a fantastic session

with him much more of at ease now when it comes to artistic therapeutic processes (in contrast to his first art therapy session).

### Session 3

A.A. seemed very hesitant at the beginning of the session and was very quiet and only spoke to make jokes with resident T—.

During the first process of choosing a card based on how he feels, A.A. chose the closest card to him and was not able to verbalize why he chose the card and seemed to be attempting to disengage from the session. However, when A.A. chose the second card based on what he felt he needed most in his life right now he chose a picture of a plane taking off.

A.A. said during the sharing that he wants to 'get on a plane and visit my mum' when the writer asked him more questions about this he said he did not know if it would be for a holiday or if he would come back at all. It seemed difficult for him to even just make the statement of wanting to get on a plane and see his mother and that was all he was willing to share.

At this point he did not choose the last card but started drawing before everyone else. He chose to do his creative expression based on the flight card and when sharing with the group he did not say much about it, but the artwork spoke for itself. It was a picture of the plane flying, him sitting on the ground below it with his legs crossed crying, and a few family member's faces floating

in the background behind a fence also crying. These people appeared to be both male and female....

Although A.A. did not verbally express what the drawing was about, he allowed the writer to hold it up and show it to the group.

The writer spoke to A.A. later in passing and gave him positive reinforcement in regards to his effort during art therapy and that he did really well.

#### Session 4

A.A. thoroughly enjoyed the session and had already started painting as the writer walked into the counselling room. The writer asked him to wait until we start the processes.

When asked to describe his day in three words, A.A. said that he was feeling 'happy, excited, confused.'

A.A. completed a creative expression based on the word he chose ('happy'). This was a painting on a large canvas which he mixed lots of different colors and really enjoyed the painting and created an image of two large hearts, a dollar bill to represent money, and a small round world with trees. A.A. explained to the group that it represented everything that made him happy.

In the second process, A.A. said that if he was an animal he would be a falcon so that he could, 'eat, sleep and fly whenever I want.' He then completed a creative expression, a smaller painting on paper of a falcon with gold background and it was also painted in gold and was flying.

A.A. had a good session and interacted well with others...

## On a Path to Independence

*Summary: I.S. (female, 17 years old) contemplates her present situation, as well as her desire to start a new life.*

### Session 1

I.S. had a really good session, considering it was her first time doing art therapy. She participated in all of the processes and verbalized her feelings and emotions well (whilst still slightly reserved). She started to relax during the session and opened up a lot more verbally and seemed to feel more free to express her feelings.

The first process she chose a lady bug on a large green leaf and said that it reminded her of being very gentle with them if she found them and setting them free when they would fly away. The second card she chose plane from the view of inside the flight looking out at the view. She said that she felt like she needed to travel and get away from family and enjoy her life.

The third card she chose was a picture of railway tracks that where parallel and crossing over. She said that she feels like she already knows what she is doing with her life in regards to school at the moment and feels really focused but she is unsure of what will happen after this.

I.S. completed a creative expression based on this card of a green field with a score board which had the numbers of what achievements she wanted to make in her life.

During free drawing she drew an incredible artwork that was done in black chalk all over the page except for a broken light bulb in the middle that was hanging from the ceiling. The writer gave her positive reinforcement to which she replied she was not sure what she was doing when she was drawing it but she did enjoy doing art at school.



Overall, I.S. had a fantastic session and bonded well with the group and freely expressed her emotions and feelings and really enjoyed the drawing part.

## Session 2

I.S. participated really well in the session. The first process, I.S. described her day in three words: 'numb, emotionless, sad'. Her creative expression was based on 'emotionless' which she chose out of the three and completed a painting of a black hole in the middle of the page surrounded by black and white.



When sharing with the group how it represented her chosen word she said that there was both black and white to represent the positive and negative aspects of life she was experiencing at the moment.

In the second process I.S. said that she wanted to be a tiger and did a painting of orange and black stripes.

I.S. shared really well, and articulated her feelings and was respectful to the rest of the group. I.S. informed the writer how she used to do art at school and really enjoyed painting.



### Session 3

I.S. had a really good session and participated in all of the processes. For the first process, based on picking a card that represented her past, I.S. chose a card with colorful oriental style umbrellas and shared with the group that it represented her culture and heritage from her father's side of the family.

I.S. completed a creative expression of a large fan with each different section with drawings, symbols and words that represented each part of the past self and articulated this very clearly. This initiated a group discussion around racism at High School and she felt like she struggled as she denied her cultural heritage



and now embraces it. Resident A— also expressed similar experiences of racism at school.

I.S. then choose a card that represented her now which was a baby's hand holding an adults finger and she shared with the group how she feels she is embarking upon new beginnings but still has ties to her past and family. Based on this card, I.S. completed a creative expression of water dripped on her forehead, which was very colorful and shared with the group that it represented renewal, re-birth and a new life for her.

## Appendix A: Art Therapy Exercises

*Art therapy at a youth refuge may consist one or several different session exercises and therapeutic processes.*

### Free Drawing

- All the young people can complete a 'free drawing,' sitting, relaxing, listening to music as a group and doing whatever creative expressions they feel like without having to share or complete any other processes.
- This is relaxing 'down time' after a process is completed to help ground and contain the group after discussing some difficult or intense issues.

### How Am I Feeling Today?

- Talk to young person about how they are feeling the first week back at school and discuss as a group (write the words they use up on the white board).
- Ask them to complete an artwork – based on one of the words on the white board – of how they are feeling today and/or a summary of the day so far (it can look like whatever they want to express creatively).
- Invite young person to share with the group about how their creative expression conveys how they are feeling today.

## Art Dialogue

- This exercise is done in pairs. Young people complete an artwork together without talking throughout the whole process. It is a conversation without words.
- The pair has to decide who is going to go first without talking.
- Each person takes a turn drawing a symbol until they have made a whole picture. At the end the person who did not go first writes a letter at the top of the paper, and taking turns until they have made a word, giving a title to their conversation without words.
- Pairs are invited to discuss with group about their experiences afterwards.

Caretakers Cottage Inc.  
96 Bondi Road, Bondi NSW 2026  
(02) 9389 0999  
[www.caretakers.org.au](http://www.caretakers.org.au)

