

A photograph of children sitting on a grassy field. In the top left, a child in a yellow shirt and patterned shorts sits with pink patterned leggings. In the top center, a child in light-colored pants is kneeling. In the top right, a child in pink and black sneakers is partially visible. In the bottom left, a child in red shorts and red sneakers is sitting, with several colorful containers nearby. In the bottom right, a child in black pants is sitting. The text "NEW TOWN CULTURE" is overlaid in the center in a white, stylized font.

NEW TOWN CULTURE



This pamphlet introduces New Town Culture, a creative project in social care services in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.

The Project supports creativity in the work of people like social workers, child practitioners, youth offending service workers and foster carers working with children and young adults every day.

The pamphlet comes with a gift – a stencil you can use to design your own emojis. We hope this will inspire you to ask: why is it that children are so much better at playing and being creative than adults? Do adults forget how as they get older? Does this affect how we do our jobs as adults?

SOCIAL CARE AND CREATIVITY

New Town Culture is led by the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, bringing art and culture into social care services for children and adults. It includes creative clubs, resources and tools, and knowledge exchange with people using social care services, staff, and cultural practitioners.

New Town Culture explores how artistic and cultural experiences can reframe the work of social care and support adults and children in need of social care services.

Creative work in social care can support systems and processes to be more engaging and accessible, to uncover knowledge about people's needs, build new relationships, build confidence, support change, shift fixed narratives for service users and provide a space for exploring cultural identity.

This approach fits perfectly with the Relational and Strengths based Practice Framework Models for Children's and Adults Services.

Russ Bellenie, Principal Social Worker,
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

This pamphlet introduces five areas we have identified linking creative and social work practice.



RADICAL HOSPITALITY: PLEASED TO MEET YOU

Artists running creative workshops and social care staff can be good at engaging reluctant and even hostile participants. In New Town Culture we explore how they build relationships and what benefits this can bring to young people. We also think about 'hospitality', which is not a word often associated with social care practice.

We first came across the term 'Radical Hospitality' in the artist Albert Potrony's plan for Transform Yourself, a five-day workshop run for young women at risk of exploitation. At the start of the workshop Albert gave participants beanbags, duvets, cushions, rugs and gold foil fringe curtains and asked them to transform an area of the workshop room into a place to relax and take care of themselves. This space was maintained during the whole week as a space for rest and conversation.

Rachel Parry Hughes, Lecturer in Social Work,
Goldsmiths University of London

I thought that it could be a radical thing to do for these young women at risk of or being abused to experience hospitality in a safe environment, to take care of themselves for the sake of it, without an ulterior motive or benefit to anybody else. By doing so, hopefully, the act of self-care could help them to value themselves for who they are, in their own terms, and not by what someone else wants them to be. To take control of their own care.

Albert Potrony, Artist



In the project Perfect Party, a three-day workshop for foster families, the artist Rebecca Davies also gave participants the possibility to control and alter the relationships between themselves as hosts and the participants as guests. The form of collaboration – the preparation and enjoyment of a 'perfect party' – was chosen by the participants at the outset. Activities included the planning and preparation of table mats, table decorations and the food for the party, including a centrepiece of bread dough spelling out 'Perfect Party'. Through these activities, the participants became 'hosts' alongside the artist.

Rachel Parry Hughes, Lecturer in Social Work,
Goldsmiths University of London

POSITIVE RISK: TAKING IN SOCIAL WORK DISRUPTING FOR GOOD

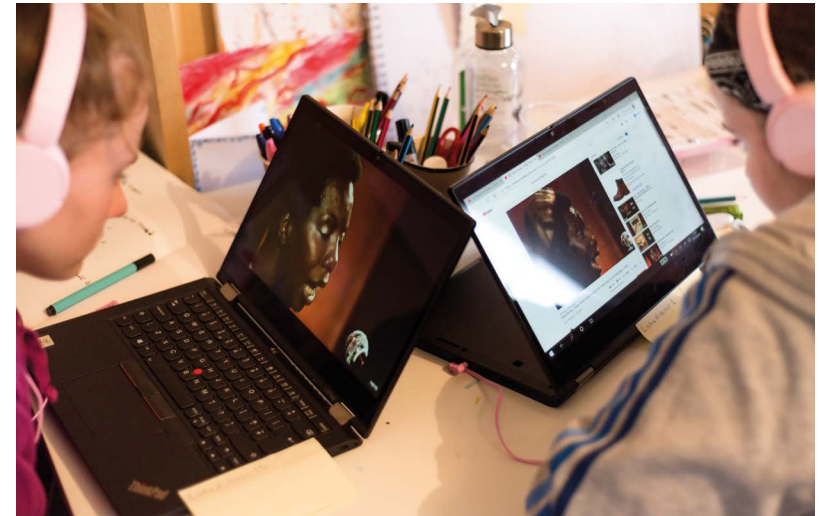
Sometimes, we deliberately take risks and disrupt norms in our day to day lives. Why do we do this? Does this help to develop new and better ways of being? Can this approach work in social care with young people?

In New Town Culture we have come to think about this as 'hopeful disruption'. These are acts carried out by social care or cultural practitioners, which challenge conventional ways of talking and acting. Such disruption can be orchestrated or spontaneous, but it always emerges from an attitude of hope, and it can generate further hope. The New Town Culture programme could be viewed as an example of orchestrated 'hopeful disruption'. To set out to make art and culture part of the core business of local authority social care services is to challenge the current way of doing things.

Rachel Parry Hughes, Lecturer in Social Work,
Goldsmiths University of London

Unaccompanied asylum seekers signed up to take part in the project Make Your Own English. They worked with artist Albert Potrony. Bringing over 17 languages to the group they contributed significant expertise to 5 days of workshops where they built sculptures, shared languages and then invented their own.

In the morning, Albert shows the young people images of the Second World War giant concrete sound mirrors used in the work



of the artists Amalia Pica and Tacita Dean. He provides them with cardboard, tin cans, string, scissors and glue guns and encourages them to make their own communication devices. They engage in this activity with their usual focus and openness. After lunch we take the DIY communication devices into the street outside the social services building. The young people are relaxed and up for having fun. The sound mirror becomes a hat, which is offered to others to be tried on. Albert asks the young people to give him words in their own languages to shout into the improvised loudspeaker. One young man causes great merriment among his co-nationals by supplying Albert with words which are almost certainly rude. Albert gamely shouts them out. There are a few amused glances from passers-by. I am not sure if they understand the words or are simply taken by the fun the young people are having.

Rachel Parry Hughes, Lecturer in Social Work,
Goldsmiths University of London

WORKING WITH TRANSITIONS: MAKING MOMENTS MATTER

Picture this: an artist invites each person in a group of children to make a model of an animal and to teach everyone the name of the animal in their mother tongue. Each child performs this word to camera and the film is watched together by the group. This is a ceremony that celebrates their many languages, and indirectly their journeys and cultural heritage. How can ceremony and celebration become a positive tool in social care practice? Birthday parties, awards ceremonies and other life milestones are of course important but smaller interventions can be used in our daily interactions with young people. Sharing words to describe our feelings when we meet, drawing a picture together, preparing a snack together, watching birds in a tree. What can be the impact of these celebrations and ceremonies in our relationships?



Social workers often make use of ceremony and ritual in their work but their use of ceremony may celebrate or reinforce different things. There are, in fact, many ceremonies within local authority social care practice; indeed, the work of practitioners is largely organised around them. These ceremonies – local authority processes – include review meetings, case conferences and transition planning meetings. They have their own form of spatial ordering (often, round a table in a local authority office), their own symbolic objects (written documents of pre-determined format) and they unfold in particular sequences, time and time again.

Rachel Parry Hughes, Lecturer in Social Work,
Goldsmiths University of London

We weren't as process-driven [in the past]. We were able to spend more time. It was unheard of if it was a child's birthday not to give them a card and take them out for lunch. We need to get back into that place where children feel that if they're special to anyone then their social worker is among those people.

Social Worker,
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

The New Town Culture programme points to the vital importance of ceremonies which celebrate a young person's identity and culture and of social workers being part of these ceremonies. There may be ways – perhaps new ceremonies – which can achieve the same social work ends whilst also celebrating the individual whose interest they have been designed to serve.

Rachel Parry Hughes, Lecturer in Social Work,
Goldsmiths University of London

NOT KNOWING: HOW KNOWING A LITTLE CAN BE HELPFUL

We don't know their [young people taking part in a creative project] case history – are they aware of that? Does our not knowing change our approach in how we communicate and interact with them?

Paul Crook, Artist

Does 'not knowing' the histories of the young people change the way creative practitioners behave during interactions with them? What is the power of 'not knowing'?

'Not knowing' is a process which may allow young people to be seen in a different way and this opens the possibility for new relationships. Narratives follow young people in social care and can be difficult to escape. Is 'not knowing' a privilege of artists working in creative sessions with young people? Or is it potentially useful in social care practice? Can opportunities for such encounters be created within social work, which is in its present state, a predominantly transactional and information-led?

During the course of the Make Your Own English club with artist Albert Potrony, Celestine, a quietly spoken young woman of sixteen, was introduced to the group by her social worker as a new arrival in the area who spoke very limited English. The social worker explained that Celestine spoke only an African language that the team had been unable to find an interpreter

in London to translate. During the course of the week, there were a number of activities designed to celebrate the many languages spoken by the participating young people. At the end of the week, they wrote their evaluation of the week on mini-whiteboards, which they held up in the Council Chamber, reading out the words so that the different sounds resonated around the chamber. Through these activities, it emerged that Celestine actually had a good knowledge of two other African languages, as well as her own language.

Celestine's social worker was quite delighted at this unexpected development. She explained to us that it can be very difficult to find out key information about the young people because they are reluctant to talk about themselves. Sometimes, young people have been explicitly instructed by traffickers not to share information and sometimes they have a mistrust of officials, built up during their journey to the UK. Amina felt that it was due to the nature of the space which the artist had created in the Make Your English group that Celestine felt it was alright to share information about herself.

Rachel Parry Hughes, Lecturer in Social Work,
Goldsmiths University of London

When I came to the group, I saw different children. A more natural environment. They weren't sitting in an office, trying to explain why they've been arrested... I do think it humanises children.

Social Worker,
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER

We can get very blinkered in social work – monotone social work. We need to recognise we are working with different children with different cultures and needs. I was sceptical at first about the idea of art and social work – how will I have time? but now I feel I understand how to adapt my social work so it is more fun and engaging to children. It's shown me there are creative ways of doing things and the theory has felt really embedded in the practice for example looking at a system approach.

Paige Prescott, Supervising Social Worker,
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

- We bring together social care and cultural practitioners to share knowledge and expertise. Together they share ideas for supporting their work. We do this through regular group reflective sessions called Intervention.
- We have created a new course called Creative Social Work to support social care practitioners. Again, this builds on knowledge from social care and cultural practitioners, and experts by experience.
- Artists seem to have permission to 'not know' and deploy 'hopeful disruption'. We hope through knowledge exchange we can support social care professionals to test out new creative approaches in their work as they build new relationships of trust and support.

To find out how you can be involved please get in touch
newtownculture@lbdb.gov.uk



