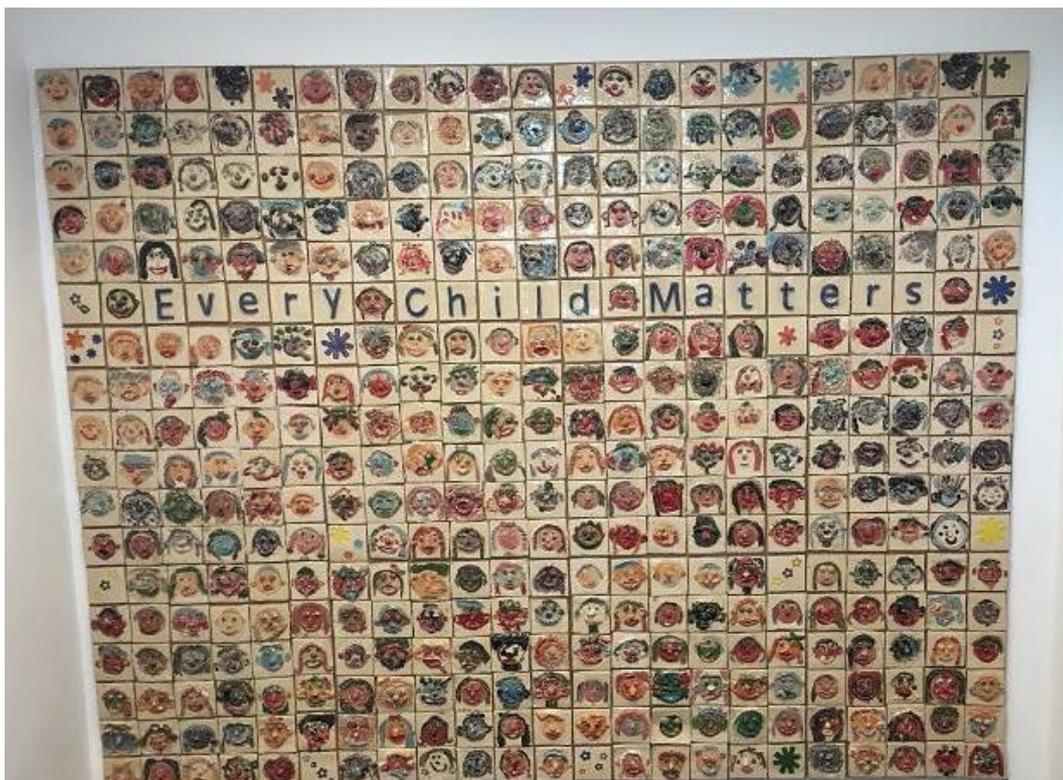


# ATOL: Art Therapy OnLine

## Why a picture can speak for a troubled child

Nadine Wojakovski

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A new programme is offering art therapy for children in Jewish schools.

“For a child whose life is being torn apart,” says art therapist Tim Anders, “a picture can provide more information than words alone.”

A children's art therapist for many years at Chai Cancer Care, he has just launched a charity to bring his programme into schools. It was first piloted it at Sinai Primary in Kenton and now ten Jewish primary schools have signed up to the scheme.

One day a week an in-house therapist is available on site offering art, play, animal-assist or music therapy, depending on the school's ethos and requirements. Typically, the school's special needs co-ordinator identifies those most in need of emotional support and will advise the parents of their recommendation.

For children who lack the vocabulary or developmental ability to put their thoughts and feelings into words, arts therapy is a powerful aid. The range of emotional issues requiring therapy is broad; they cover children who have witnessed domestic violence, emotional abuse, bereavement or divorce, or who have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or autistic spectrum disorder, or who live with parents with mental health issues.

"We are giving children a vehicle to communicate complex, difficult feelings and, together with their therapist, tools to make sense of their world," he says.

For the Sinai pilot scheme, Mr Anders was mentored by the eminent consultant child and adolescent psychotherapist and art therapist Tessa Dalley, who focused on the symbolism of the image.

"What a child makes is extremely loaded and symbolic and our job was to explore that," Mr Anders says. "You don't put words into the children's mouths. You try to draw out from them what it means."

He attributes its success to the fact that sessions took place in a "therapeutic space", a tailor-made room within the school premises. "When a child comes in here, there's no pressure for them do anything," he explains.

“They may want to just talk or be prompted by the material around them, be it musical instruments, punching the pillows, throwing sand up, or painting.

“The beauty of this therapy is that children can express themselves naturally and safely in the presence of an adult who is highly trained in understanding this specific type of communication. Their fears, desires and anxieties are given form and our job is to help them process it.”



Normally, a child needing help would typically have a consultation after school in a formal setting and at a time when he or she is likely to be exhausted. By contrast, seeing a therapist in school is far less intimidating and takes place somewhere where the child feels safe. The therapist also has the benefit of liaising with teachers and observing the child interacting with other children and in other settings within the school.

In order to measure the effectiveness of the 50-minute weekly sessions, his charity, Art Therapies for Children, has partnered with Dr Emma Godfrey, a senior lecturer in health psychology at King's College. She has created a

system called Psyclops that provides metrics, based on intervention at the beginning, middle and end of the process.

All therapists receive regular supervision and adhere to the code of practice and standards of proficiency of their professional body and statutory regulator. The charity receives a proportion of funding from the school and the rest from the community. It currently has a budget for three children per school.

The initial response has been excellent, he says. "Every school that has heard of the programme wants to get on board recognising arts therapies as an effective, accessible and affordable intervention." With sufficient funding he hopes the programme can eventually reach every child who needs it.

Although you can't change a child's past, he believes you can help them make sense of why they are feeling as they are.

"Just helping them see why they are angry, sad or hate the world provides a therapeutic benefit in itself," he says. "If we don't look after the emotional well-being of our children, what kind of future will they have?"

### **CASE HISTORY: A MOTHER'S EXPERIENCE OF ART THERAPY**

"My daughter has been working one on one with Tim Anders for a couple of years and there has been a remarkable, positive change to her personality and wellbeing in general.

My marriage broke up and my kids lost contact with their father along with all the other male family members close to them for various other reasons. This breakdown had a devastating affect on my youngest daughter, who became angry and scarily aggressive. She was not one for talking either, so her tantrums became more and more violent with her ending up lying on the floor in the foetal position, kicking and screaming.

Through carefully planned art therapy sessions with Tim, she has been able to express herself through creativity, which is something she loves to do. Tim

has taught her how to be emotional without anger. She now cries when she's sad rather than getting angry and talks to me or asks for a cuddle when an unhappy thought crosses her mind. She also has faith and trust back in a man where all the others in her life 'left her'.

She is moving to secondary school soon but Tim has worked hard to give her the skills and mental strength to accomplish this without him there.

She's now ready for the next stage of her life and is back to the happy little girl she once was. Our home life is also happier now than it ever was.

Tim succeeded where others failed and his skills are one in a million. I highly recommend Tim and the art therapy process for all kids out there who don't like to talk – but desperately need an emotional release. It's so very important to give them the time to escape but feel safe when they're doing so.”

**Tim Anders** is an Art Therapist and Founder Member of 'Arts Therapies for Children' <https://www.artstherapies.org.uk/founder-member.html>