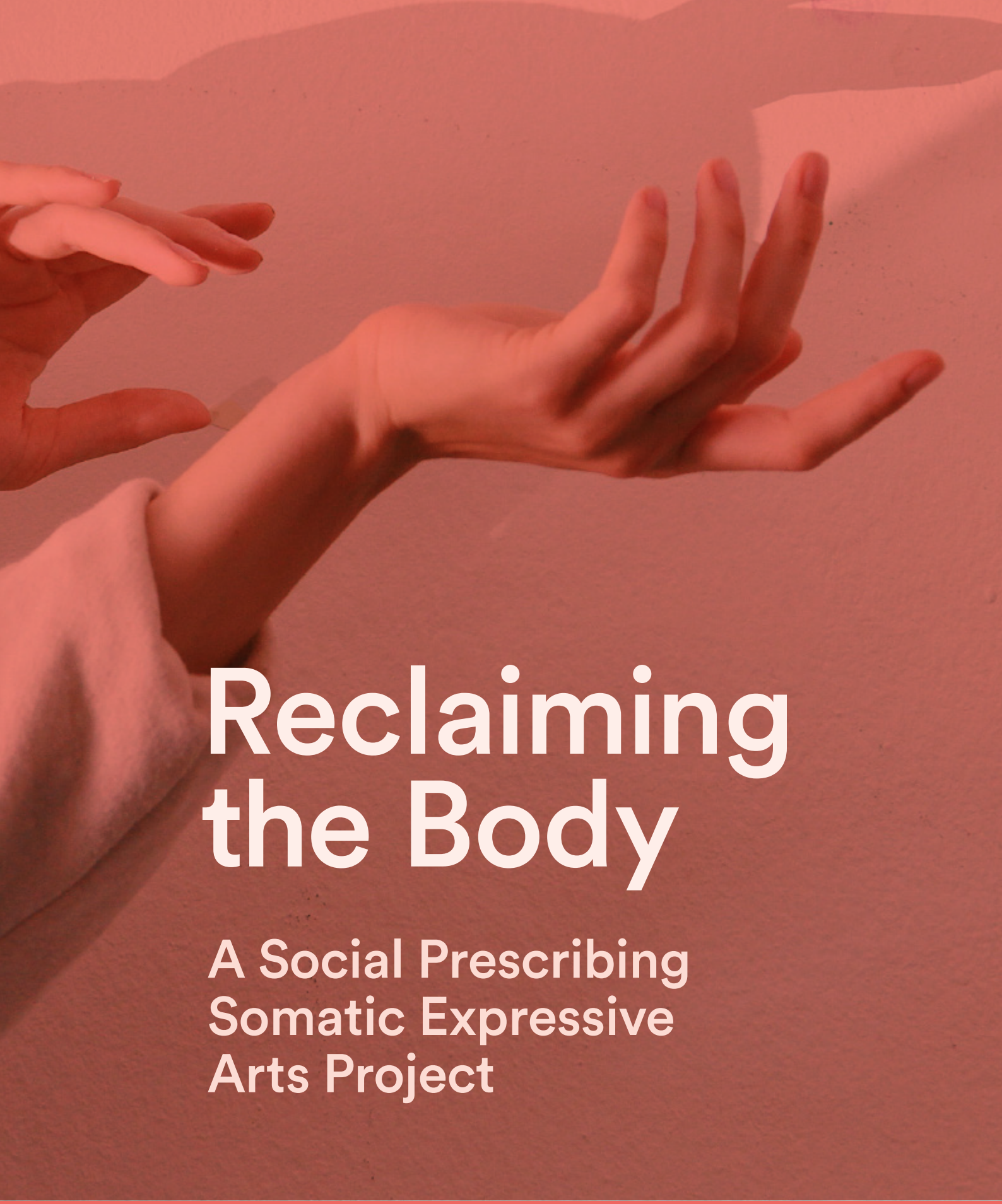
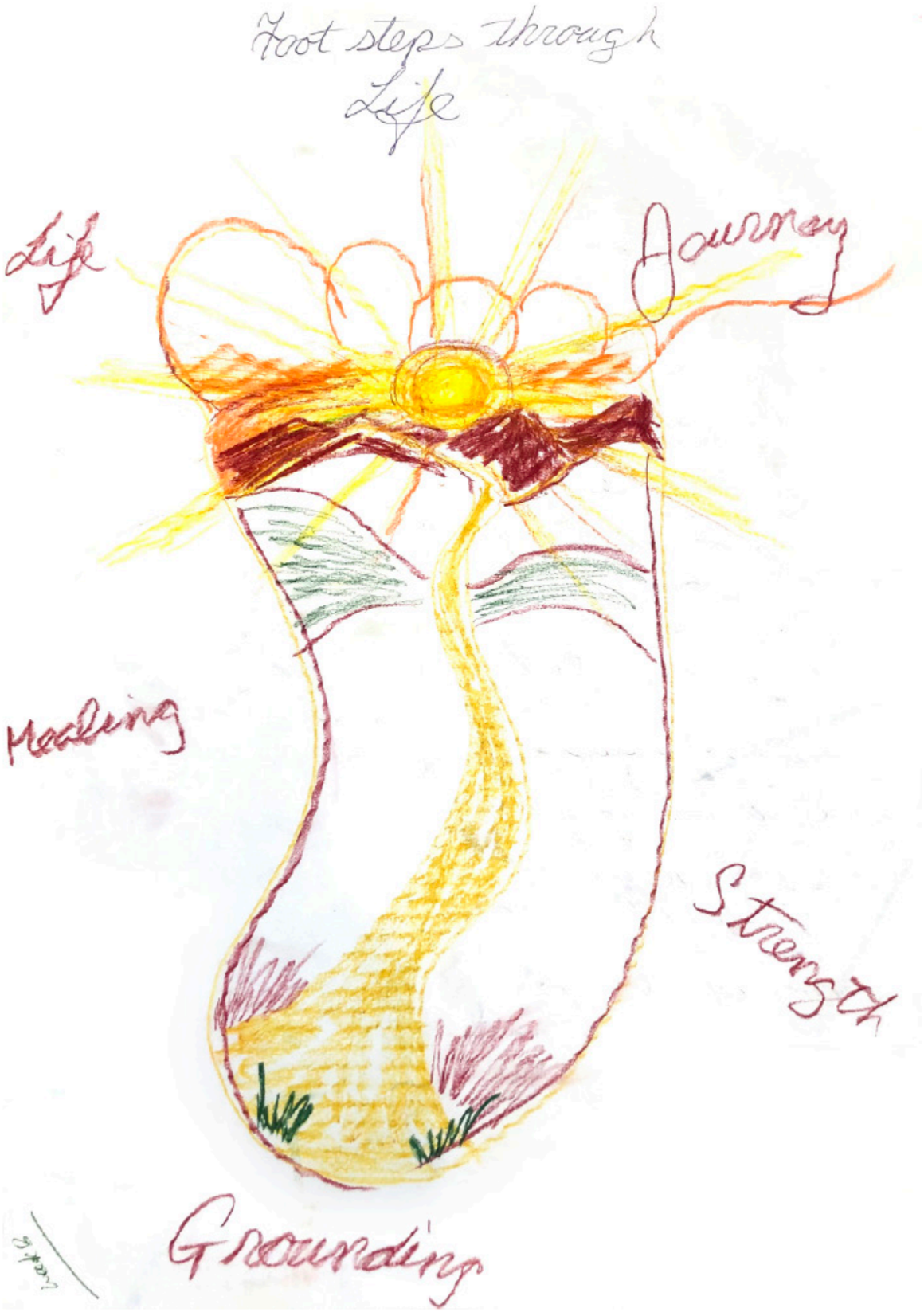


Reclaiming the Body

A Social Prescribing Somatic Expressive Arts Project

Evelyn Aston Rhodes



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Executive Summary

This article discusses the key learnings and challenges in offering The Tamalpa Life/Art Process® and Somatic Movement project alongside social prescribing.

The ten week project in autumn 2023 was intended for those affected by chronic pain and illness, poor mental health and for anyone who wanted to support their health and wellbeing. The project was supported by community arts organisation, Intobodmin who secured funding from Active Cornwall, and was located in the town of Bodmin. Participants were signposted through social prescribers in mid Cornwall covering the areas of Bodmin, Wadebridge and Camelford. The number of participants in each session ranged from seven to twelve, from ages 30-75 and a mixed group. The intention was to develop body mind awareness, creativity and connection with personal story through The Tamalpa Life/Art Process®, an intermodal arts approach and Somatic Movement Therapy.

This article discusses the impact of The Tamalpa Life/Art Process®, and how it can be beneficial in addressing health and wellbeing inequalities such as social isolation, mental and physical health and quality of life. Furthermore, it seeks to illuminate the challenging, deeply moving and transformational impact that the Creative Arts can have in working with chronic pain and illness.

Prologue

The Emerging Theme

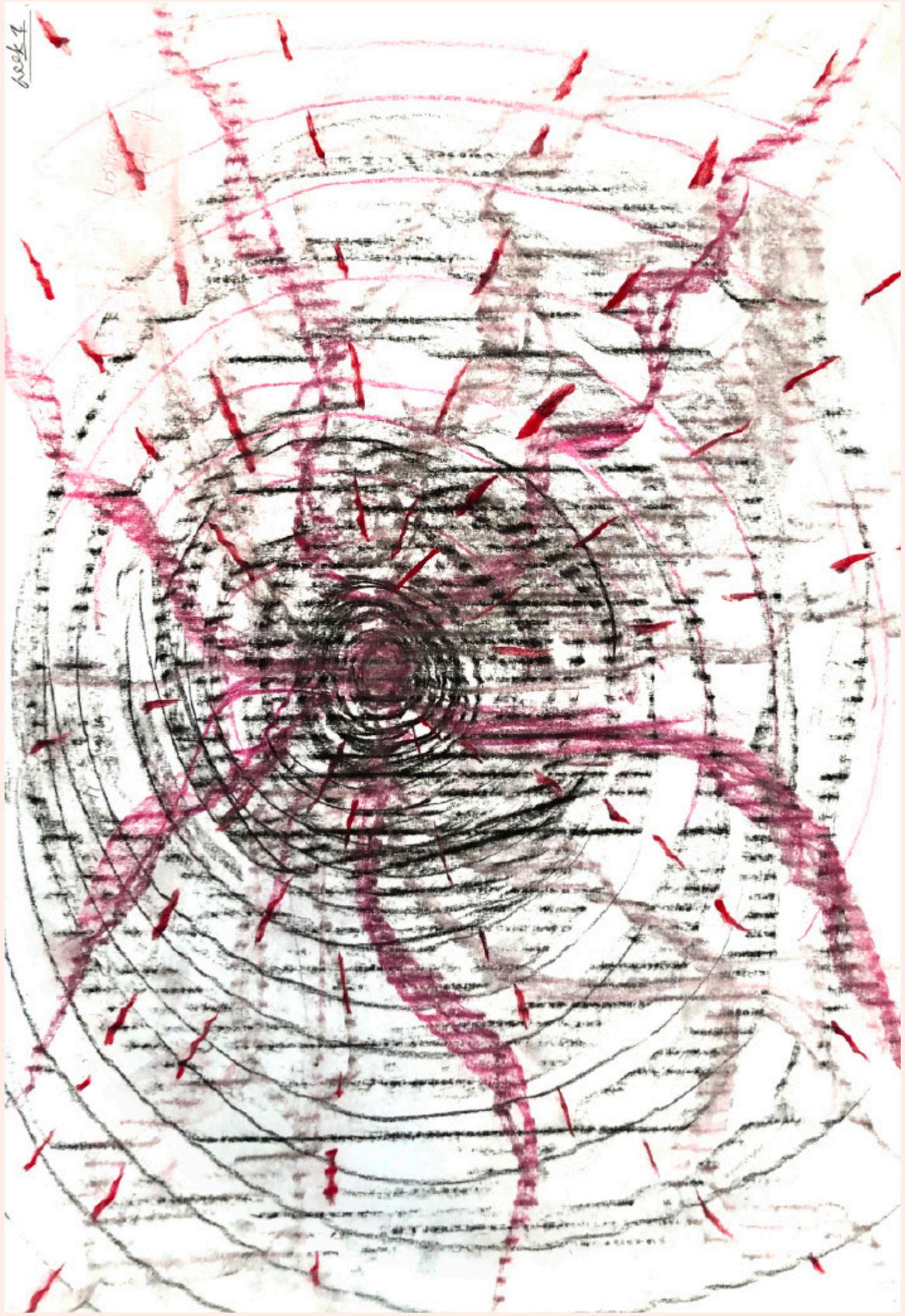
When I began training in The Tamalpa Life / Art Process® in 2010 in California, I had transitioned from a potential career in academia. With a change in life circumstances and a move from the UK to Hong Kong, my instinct told me that there was something else I needed to explore in my life. A feeling that something needed to change. I was reconnected with my passion for dance and movement.

> “The more I moved, the more I felt, the more I remembered, and I was curious to understand how movement fostered a connection between the physical, emotional and imaginal experiences in my life.”

I discovered The Tamalpa LIfe / Art Process®, alongside the practice of Authentic Movement and sought out a movement therapist to mentor me as I started studying both practices.

> “I consider The Tamalpa Life / Art Process® as a compass; a creative way to navigate the world. To address questions in my life through the wisdom of the moving body; connecting with different parts of the self, and discovering new ways to experience myself, my personal story and the potential for change in my life.”

Introduction



The Tamalpa Life / Art Process®

The Tamalpa Life / Art Process® is an intermodal arts approach that uses the tools of movement, art, writing and performance 'to facilitate an in-depth exploration of personal myth, pathos, and potential' (Halprin 2003: 102). Created by the pioneering work of avant garde dancer, Anna Halprin, and her daughter Daria Halprin, a leading Expressive Arts and Gestalt Therapist, Tamalpa Institute was co-founded in 1978 and the first training centre for movement based expressive arts therapy. The Tamalpa Life / Art Process® offered a new approach to working with the body therapeutically through combining the fields of somatic psychology, non-violent communication, dance and the creative arts.

The intention of movement-based expressive arts therapy is to assist people in developing awareness, creativity, and embodied expression (Ibid: 102). 'Movement and art are vehicles of passage that can help people slowly and sensitively re enter their bodies and reconnect with their feelings. [...] movement allows us to tolerate an intense meeting of our story and our suffering' (Ibid: 29). In working somatically, that is, with the felt sense of the body - with what a person senses, feels and imagines, we can start to uncover new pathways of movement and emotional response, and the possibility for change and personal growth.

Project Summary

The intention of this project was to offer a safe and supportive space for participants to reconnect and deepen their awareness of the body and explore their personal stories physically, emotionally and imaginatively; to provide a space for individuals to honour their personal journeys, and discover resources that support pain management and quality of life. The project is aimed at those affected by or living with chronic pain and illness, poor mental health and for anyone who would like to support their health and wellbeing.

Working with Illness

In the previous eight years facilitating Somatic Movement Therapy sessions, I have worked with many people affected by long-term pain and illness with conditions such as ME, Fibromyalgia, Pots Syndrome, COPD and Chronic Fatigue. Clients have either self referred through my website or have been referred through social prescribers or signposted by health and wellbeing officers and mental health organisations.

Within my working role I have witnessed that often there is a huge sense of loss that is present in the experience of illness and chronic pain. A loss of confidence in the body, of self agency, of a life before illness. Due to the constant management of adapting one's life to fit around health and self care needs, the psychological impact of such conditions can be equally debilitating. Anxiety, depression, overwhelm, loneliness, and the experience of anger, shame, grief, despair, embarrassment can all be symptoms of such pathology.

The sense of a person's vitality can be concealed or greatly diminished. 'Perhaps the most important aspect of what movement and creative expression can do, is reconnect people with what they love, and what has mattered to them in their lives'. An art's practice that listens and engages through senses and body brings us vividly into the present moment infusing new content into our lives thereby nourishing us emotionally, strengthening self-esteem and lifting our spirits (Tufnell 2017: 4/5).

Social Prescribing

Social prescribing has been practised in the UK since the 1990's as a means for enabling health professionals to refer people to non clinical services. Recognising that social, environmental, and economic factors determine a person's health and wellbeing, social prescribing seeks to address people's health and wellbeing from a holistic approach[1].

The rollout of social prescribing gained momentum in 2019 with the implementation of the 'NHS long-term-plan' that incorporated social prescribing into the comprehensive model of personalised care to support people to take greater control of their health and care needs (Ibid).

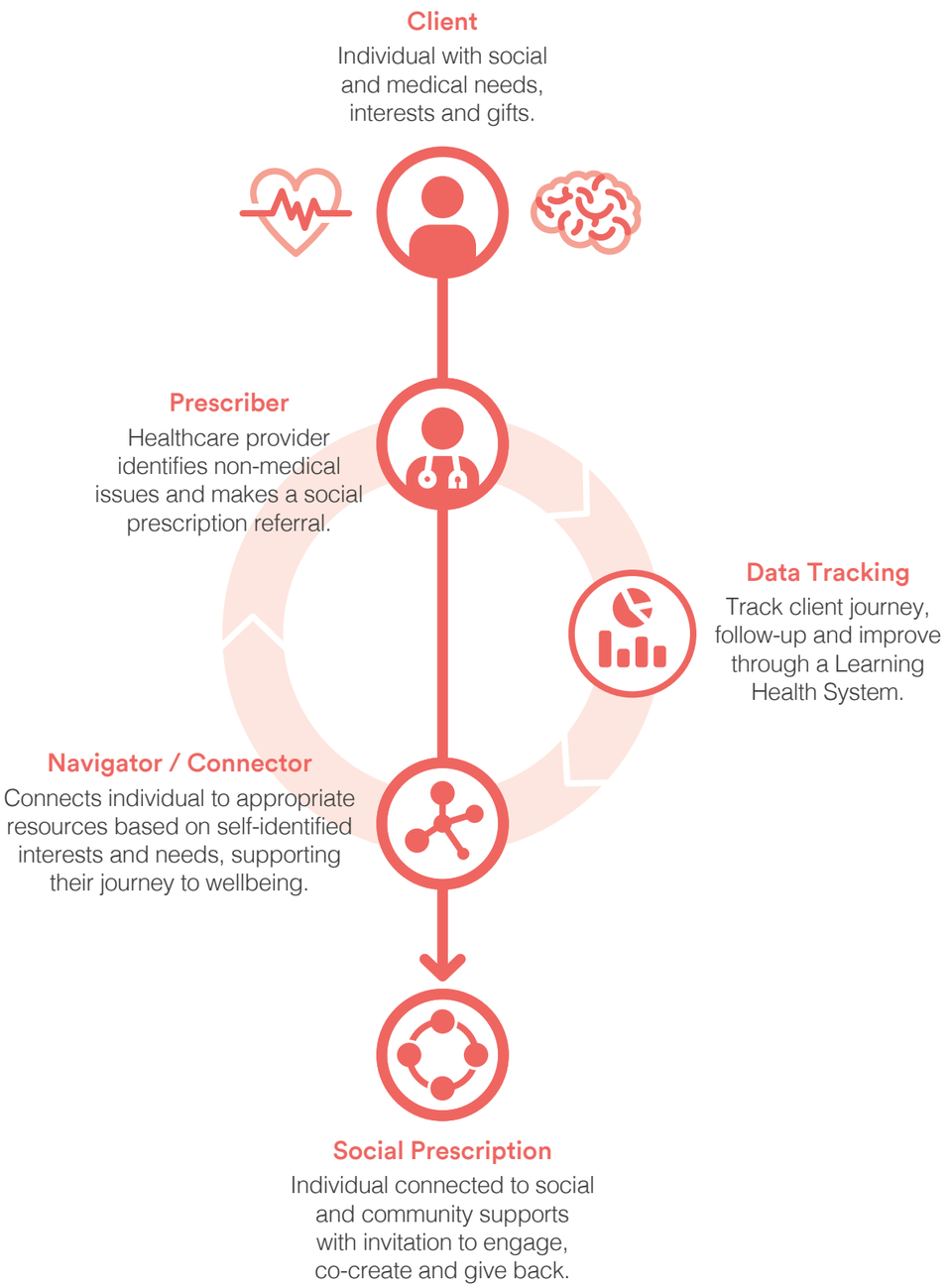
According to the 2017 Creative Health: Arts for Health and Wellbeing report, at least one third of GP appointments are for social-psychological reasons (Povey et al., 2017). As an approach that connects people to activities, groups and services in the community, social prescribing meet's practical, social and emotional needs. It is particularly supportive for those that have long-term conditions, who need support with low level mental health issues, who are socially isolated, and have complex social needs that impact their quality of life[2]. Social prescribing provisions and referral pathways are different in each county in the UK and there is not a cohesive model of practice.

It is important to consider the link between social prescribers and other health professionals in the efficacy of the referral pathway. For instance, what measures are in place in discerning whether an individual is suitable and resourced or stable enough in attending body based services, and how may Somatic practitioners support social prescribers in the referral pathway?

Social isolation and the feeling of coping alone is often experienced with those affected by chronic pain. The invisible nature of some illnesses and conditions, means that people 'are often unable to access specialist services [thus] their pain remains unmanaged or ignored within mainstream healthcare' (Breivik et al., 2006 cited in Meehan and Carter 2021: 2), further fuelling social isolation and the potential detriment of mental and physical health. The World Health Organisation defines health as 'a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity' (Fancourt and Finn.,2019 cited in Fancourt et al 2023: 7). Therefore, sense of purpose, meaningfulness and self management are intrinsic to health and wellbeing.

[1] https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/long-reads/social-prescribing
[2] https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/social-prescribing/

Social Prescribing Pathway Components



Funding Support

Having clear alliances with social prescribers was key to ensuring that the project had as wide a reach as possible. Offering small tasters within community groups, such as wellbeing cafe's and pain management groups was fundamental in securing funding for the project, enabling people to experience what was being offered and the benefits of the work.

The funding for this project was secured by a community development officer working alongside Intobodmin, a community arts organisation. The project was one of many hosted by Intobodmin, who provided the space, and funded by Active Cornwall. Participants were signposted by social prescribers and community health and wellbeing organisations within the local area of Bodmin, Wadebridge and the surrounding towns.

The Process

The Tamalpa Life / Art Process® explores the relationship and interplay between the physical, emotional, mental and imaginal levels of experience and expression.

The Tamalpa tools used throughout this project were the **three levels of awareness** - what is being noticed and evoked on a physical, emotional, and mental level.

Body part metaphors

Awareness of anatomy, posture, and the themes and metaphors associated with each body part and the relationship of body parts to feelings and the imagination.

Psychokinetic imagery process

The exploration between body, emotion and image through art, writing and movement.

Communication model of active listening

I sense, I feel, I imagine and **non-violent communication** - empathic witnessing and active listening.

RSVP cycles

Self-reflective tool of designing and evaluating themes, intentions, resources and activities.

Somatic movement inquiries[3] were established from a trauma informed approach that emphasised safety, trust, choice, collaboration equality and empowerment. For instance; tracking sensory information in the body; exploring experiential anatomy - the function and range of movement; application of imagery, either abstract or anatomical as an entry point into feeling, and somatic grounding techniques to regulate the nervous system and provide a safe base for further explorations.

[3] Referring to the process of **Interoception** - the internal body; **Exteroception** - the external environment; and **Proprioception** - movements in space.

Discussion & Challenges

Primary Themes

The primary themes identified in the project were ethics and the challenges of social prescribing, the importance of safety and resource, reclaiming the body, and the importance of play and creativity. Throughout this article, key learnings and challenges that reflect these themes will be discussed.

The theme of the project (the Metascore) was connection, safety, support and resources.

The intentions were:

+ To offer a safe and supportive space for participants to deepen their awareness of their body's, emotions and connection to others.
+ To honour each participant's journey with illness and long term pain.
+ To create a space for self expression
+ To discover body based resources that support health and vitality.

Careful consideration was given to the design and order of each week's sessions (the fieldwork score) using the RSVP Tamalpa tool. A learning model used to design the theme, intentions, resources and activities within a session. This also supported the process of valuation; of refining and recycling activities based on evaluation of what worked, what needed changing or developing after each session. The tools of The Tamalpa Life / Art Process® were slowly scaffolded throughout each session. Repetition, developing and introducing new tools was key to build trust and agency for each participant to engage.

Each week a particular body part and its accompanying theme from the Tamalpa methodology was introduced and explored. In this process the anatomical structure and physiological function of a body part is explored, and the associated movements of this part. For instance, in an exploration of the legs, the actions of running, skipping, crawling, jumping may be explored. In the Tamalpa methodology, particular movements evoke certain attending emotions, images and associations [...] the body parts, their corresponding movements, and their thematic associations are used as keys to the parts or chapters of our self and our life story (Halprin 2003; 145).

Weeks 1-4

Centred around introducing the tools, building capacity to listen to the body, and finding places of resource.

Session 5

The mid-point in the project, was the meeting place; the identification of both a challenge in the body and life.

Sessions 6-9

Built upon gently meeting the edges of challenge, and cultivating new pathways and responses, physically, emotionally and imaginatively.

Final session

Weaved together this journey of connection, challenge and support.

The five-part process (identify, confront, release, change, growth) was a light structure in the framework[4] for the order of themes that slowly built upon each other. Scores 1-3 could represent the identification of a theme, scores 4 and 5 the enactment of a confrontation, score 6 - release, scores 7 and 8 - change and scores 9 and 10 as growth / resource.

[4] Week 1 - Settling and Landing; Week 2: Spine - Postures in Life and Finding Support; Week 3: Ribs and Breath - Open / Close; Week 4: Head, Jaw and Throat - Giving voice to; Week 5: Meeting Places - Challenge and Resource; Week 6: Hands and Arms - Holding on and Letting go; Week 7: Pelvis - play and Creativity; Week 8: Legs and Feet; Where have I been? Where am I going? - Moving forward; Week 9: Heartland - Expansion and Imagining through the Heart, Week 10: Body Mythology - Honouring the past and Moving forwards.

Ethics & Social Prescribing

For the promotion of the project I worked closely with the host organisation Intobodmin, a community based arts and wellbeing charity. Social prescribers and community development officers passed information onto local charities and wellbeing groups.

This project was designed for participants who were beginners to The Tamalpa Life / Art Process® and Somatic Movement and suitable for those living with low levels of depression, anxiety and stress who were able to explore their emotions from a place of relative stability. It is important to note that the project was not designed for people affected by high levels of trauma, who may be triggered or destabilised by the process of attending to the body as a different framework of explorations and safeguarding measures would have been in place.

Challenges of the Project

A number of participants were signposted to the programme from a local charity supporting women affected by domestic violence which raised questions of safeguarding. Due to time constraints in the lead up to the project, an assistant was not secured, and as a facilitator working alone, I did not have the resources to offer an inclusive space for people with very differing support needs. The implications of this were clear from session one, as it was apparent that some participants had been referred without knowing what to, and therefore what to expect. This materialised as talking excessively over other participants, over myself while I was teaching and in the quieter moments of self reflection. This was challenging as a facilitator; to hold a space for the whole group, introducing new tools, and present a space that is safe where people feel heard and seen while attending to those who needed more support and direction.

Recommendations & Key Points

Securing an assistant, either a practitioner, support staff, community nurse or charity representative would have been extremely supportive and in future projects will be in place. It is fundamental to have clear frameworks in place that enable monitoring and suitability of participants. Transparency with social prescribers to enable an understanding of projects and who may benefit. For facilitators, to have autonomy in monitoring the group and having prior knowledge of risk, accessibility and need. A health and wellbeing assessment form sent to all organisations, social prescribers would support clear expectations and ensure that safeguarding measures are in place and enable the facilitator to understand the specific and collective needs of the participants before the project commenced. For future projects this will be implemented.

The process of valuaction after session one was important in setting clear boundaries for the continuation of the project. The support of supervision was invaluable in this process, discerning the challenges, resources and revising session two's score. Identified was a need for clarity regarding confidentiality, time keeping, engagement and group safety. At the beginning of the session, more time was given to 'housekeeping' and the invitation for participants to enter the space earlier or stay after the session for conversation and connection.

Space was given for a discussion on what can make people feel safe within a group dynamic to strengthen the group container and enable trust and safety to grow. As a gentle rule, only those with the stone could speak. Confidentiality, keeping phones off, not talking over people and listening to others were all named. Creating these clear boundaries, and designing a safety pack as a group had a huge impact on the rest of the project supporting choice, permission and self agency. I witnessed the quieter participants engage, the silence parts were honoured, and as a facilitator I felt more grounded and resourced and able to be more present within myself.

The Space

Throughout the project the primary intention was to cultivate group safety and trust. Setting clear intentions and expectations from the beginning enables a solid foundation of trust to be built upon. The relational quality of presence is at the heart of the therapeutic process, and without this, safety, ease and permission for exploration, becomes difficult. The first element in building trust within the group was to create a safe, contained, warm space. In these initial moments of crossing the threshold, we register the environment and people, and assess whether there is safety, danger or threat (Levine 2012). Daria Halprin also speaks of this process of 'crossing the threshold of the studio, as crossing into an altered space where we can be with all of the material in our lives in an embodied way' (Halprin 2017).

Creating a space that was warm, light, clean and free of clutter was an important part of the process each week. A challenging task for the space provided by Intobodmin for the project; a previous stationary shop that was long, narrow, dark, cool, and with old carpet and copious amounts of furniture. Extra soft lighting was brought in, furniture re-arranged to allow for maximum space, and many blankets and cushions were placed to the side of the chair circle to form a contained nest where participants could go if they needed to pause, lie down and rest. For future projects, choosing a space that was more evenly proportioned, had wooden floors rather than carpet for ease of movement, more windows and natural light and was free of excess furniture would support a calm and warmer environment to work in.

Safety & Resource

In Peter Levine's work with trauma and the Nervous system, creating safety and resources within the body are integral to the healing journey. Slowing down, grounding, creating space, resource, orienting (slowly moving the eyes to move around the space and noticing places or objects of pleasure, to support coming back into the external space[5]). Movement ritual (softly palming the hands over the body to invite sensory feedback, movement and warmth), was also used in every session to expand places of support and vitality in the body. In working with people who have experienced illness or are living with chronic pain or trauma, there is often a withdrawal from the body and a feeling that it is not a safe place. Meeting the body, feeling sensation, moving, noticing emotions, thoughts and stories can be daunting and evoke fear. As one participant A named, 'I've lived my whole life in my head, to suddenly feel all of these sensations can feel overwhelming'.

The challenge in working without an assistant became apparent in some parts of the course. For instance when a participant experiences dissociation - the body becomes a little flaccid, eyes fixated and distant. 50/50 awareness is needed to be held between the group and the participants who need extra support. Soft invitations in these moments of 'check out', offered to the group as a whole, supported a person back into the room, without singling them out. Participant G, later reflected that by following the invitation to wiggle her fingers and toes, and trace her eyes around the room, the regulatory technique of Orienting, helped her 'come back' and notice her 'choice not to engage'. In the last two sessions an assistant was present to support those who needed extra attention while I as facilitator held the space for the group. For example, when a participant became overwhelmed by an emotion, the assistant supported them to find regulatory and grounding movements - slowing down, inviting touch and feeling the feet on the ground.

For one participant, C, palming (exploring different contact to the body through hands)[6], was a trigger that made her feel unsafe, especially as it was a mixed gender group. C experienced a freeze response - her body became locked in space, a little collapsed and she reported feeling her heart rate increase and clamminess in her hands. Grounding techniques were employed to bring C back into the space, and invitations to firmly press her feet into the ground, to release the hands and invite small squeezes through the fingers, directing attention to the peripheral of the body to orient and invite space to enable C to become more aware of the external environment.

Applying the Tamalpa method of Body Part Mapping that considers how certain parts of the body and particular movements evoke certain attending emotions, images and associations (Halprin 2003), after the group we discussed and identified where on the body was a place of resource and trigger for C. We explored different ways to contact the body (for example, soft light touch, pressing in, tapping), and the option of making contact with an object instead, for example a soft ball or stone. There is a choice to find remain with the hands on the place of support or find movements away from the body. In the following session, I witnessed C adapt the exploration to tend to her needs. She made contact through touch for a minute before moving her hands away from her body, slowly rotating the wrists before resting her hands instead on her abdomen and landing both feet flat on the ground. In offering choices, we can support self agency and permission to step away from explorations. Similarly, if a body part or movement is challenging or triggering, we can find a resource or containing quality while working with the same body part in drawing or writing.

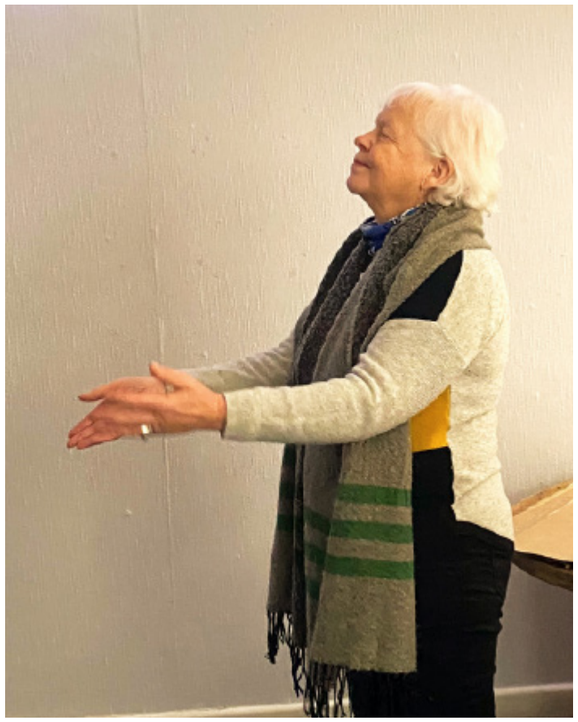
[5] A somatic technique from Peter Levine's body of work Somatic Experiencing®, as the eyes get stuck in experiencing trauma, consciously moving the eyes alongside the neck and head supports a person's physiology coming back to safety.
[6] As developed by Anna Halprin.

Frameworks of Practice

In working with beginner's, it is important to work slowly, micro-dosing techniques so that there is not too much information too soon and people can get used to sensing and moving intuitively. Each session began with an opening circle; simple grounding techniques to connect with weight and places of support in the body, pulsing and the Tamalpa tool of movement ritual, body part mapping - sensing and moving each body part, and lastly, orienting. Passing the stone, a verbal check in, often one thing that is noticed from the physical, emotional or imaginal level always preceded the warm up to encourage speaking from the present 'felt sense'.

These openings served as an anchor in each session; a place to settle and resource the nervous system before deepening into explorations. They were also opportunities for people to feel seen, heard, valued and held without judgement. A place for each person to hear their voice, and for the facilitator to have an awareness of what participants are arriving with or connecting to in their body's.

It is good ethics and scope of practice as a Somatic practitioner to have trauma informed training. To recognise when a participant is triggered by an activity and offer skills that support a person to feel safe and grounded in their body.



Honouring the Journey & Reclaiming the Body

Working with illness and chronic pain can be challenging, illuminating, deeply moving and often, transformational.

This process therefore, needs to be held with compassion, sensitivity, steadiness and respect. In the opening session of the course, time and space was given for each person to name what drew them to the course and what health challenge they were navigating. The therapeutic process of being witnessed; seen and heard without judgement is integral to the healing journey. The witnessing presence of a facilitator offers a space for participants to reveal parts of their story that may have been quiet.

As Daria Halprin states, 'the manner of witnessing that allows for [...] transformation is based first and foremost on empathy [...] Empathetic witnessing refrains from interpreting, criticising or analysing' (Halprin 2012: 11).

Using non violent communication - 'I see', 'I imagine', witnessing can support the mover 'to gain the mental flexibility to move beyond attachments to particular circumstances or beliefs' (ibid). For some, the simple act of naming the challenge was deeply resourceful and emotive - to hear their voice in a circle and hear others with similar experiences.

Experiencing pain, feeling disconnected from the body, recovering from illness, healing from trauma, and the need for self care were shared responses met with empathy and relatability by the group. As one participant remarked, 'hearing others speak gives me the strength and courage to voice what I have been through in my recovery journey' (participant J).

Permission to Move, Express & Reflect

The themes of session one was settling and Landing; of gently and slowly meeting the body and imagination, connecting with sensation and body part mapping. The intention; to create safety and trust, to develop whole body awareness, and introduce the methods of The Tamalpa Life / Art Process®. In working with beginners especially when body confidence has been stripped by illness and pathology, working slowly and offering choices, and leading by example is vital. I have witnessed in my work that connecting with the body and following sensation can elicit fear, shame and alienation. It can sometimes be too much, too soon, too fast, overwhelming a person's capacity to cope. Micro dosing was therefore key in supporting participants to notice tiny places of sensation, and then move away[7].

As Miranda Tufnell states, 'for people living with chronic pain, movements can be feared and posture fixed to avoid further aggravation. Slowing down, connecting gently to the rhythms of breath and [...using] slow movements can be a powerful tool in restoring a sense of ease and capacity to self-manage' (Tufnell 2017: 20).

Simple experiential anatomy, imagery and sensory awareness explorations were opening invitations in each score to locate body parts and begin to notice their movements. When working with the relationship between the actual and metaphoric body, 'the emotional and mental responses and the "events" of life associated with these imprints are stored within the different parts of the body' (Halprin 2003: 146). The use of imagery, both anatomical and also abstract, was also another tool used as a different way into experiencing the body and the felt sense. If sensing is challenging, noticing details from imagery can become a bridge into the felt sense and a tool for further explorations.

[7] Refers to the Somatic Experiencing® tool of Pendulation; shifting awareness between small places of expansion or ease in the body and small places of contraction or challenge. This incremental way of working, supports more resilience in the nervous system and widen's the capacity to be in the window of tolerance.

The Moving Body

Giving permission for people to move freely, knowing that there is no right or wrong or judgement can take time. Repetition of simple movement explorations engaging key movement principles of force, time and space; for instance, finding movements in the joints, exploring large and small movements, body shape, rhythm, movements through space, enabled participants to start to develop movement repertoire and expression throughout the course. Returning to simplicity was therefore key.

In witnessing the difficulty most participants had in moving the body, inhibited by self consciousness and sometimes shame, each week the sessions began by finding movements together as a collective. Simple invitations were given; how would it be to allow the arms to grow into the space as if reaching for something beautiful and bringing it back to the body.

These explorations engaged the imagination, a key resource when working with chronic pain when movement may be inhibited. Key approaches were adapted and simplified from the Tamalpa method of the five-part process. For instance, exploring the stages of repeating a movement, developing (making the movement larger or smaller, changing pace, locomotion) and change (finding new movements).

This group exploration was important in forging group cohesion each week. It also served as a bridge to fold in the three levels of awareness. In each session we would explore how a movement may feel emotionally, what thoughts or images may arise in particular movements with participants naming how they felt - 'I feel joy as my head lifts to the sky' (participant K). As participants became akin to moving their body's, they were able to name out loud what they experienced.

Self Reflective Arts Practice

The use of the term mark making, rather than drawing, was intentional to offer a space for process rather than product, and to confront the myth of 'I can't'. For many, this was a challenging process bringing up feelings of self confidence, fear, feelings of 'getting it wrong', or 'I can't draw'. Invitations were therefore given to either make marks with the less dominant hand or close the eyes, remembering or feeling the moment in the body to lead the process. The invitation to anchor the mark making into a body part for example, identifying a place in the body that doesn't feel pain and drawing from there, supported some in finding more accessibility within this process. As did the technique of inviting a key that was resourcing, for example a favourite colour, adding a different type of mark, making part of the image fuller.

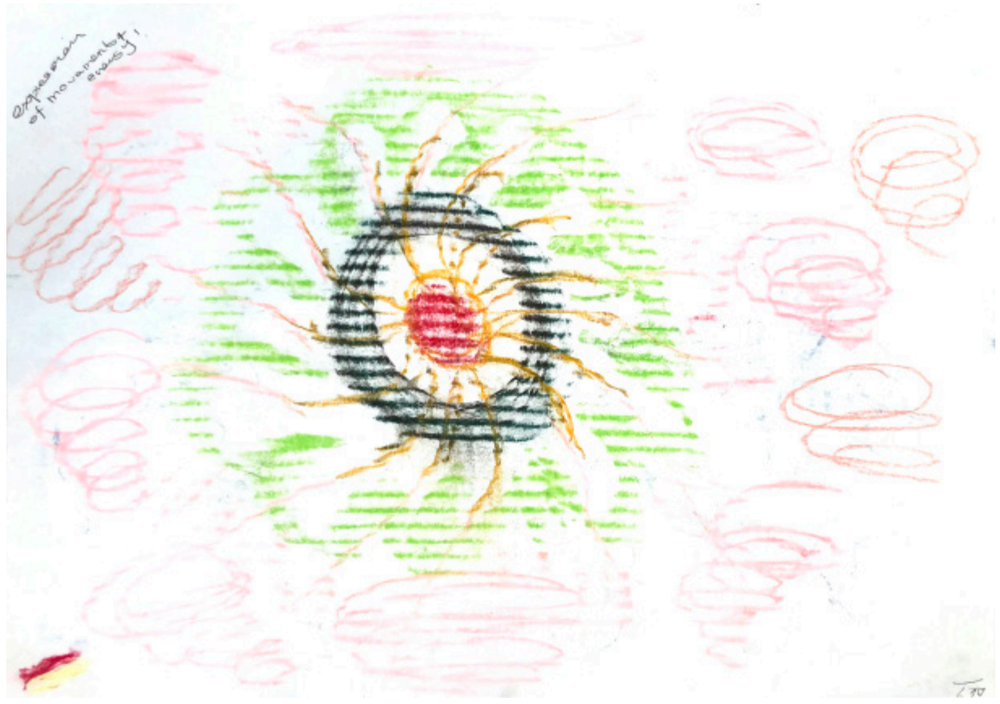
Mark making was vital in anchoring the experience and also decenturing from personal story to offer a new perception. When images were brought together and witnessed in silence before dialogue ('I sense, I feel, I imagine'), moments of insight would emerge as commonality was felt.

This supported group cohesion and empathy; pivotal qualities in working with those who are socially isolated. In the Tamalpa method, the psychokinetic imagery process is a tool used as an 'active and expressive engagement with sensations, images, and narratives [this process] lets us bypass our preconceptions and allows resources from the unconscious to surface' (Halprin 2003: 130/1).

In switching between movement, imagery and writing, participants are supported to discover new resources in their images that may represent a desired quality in their lives. For instance, they may be drawn to a quality of softness, space, vitality, momentum in the image, or a particular symbol that speaks to a pertinent theme or story in their lives. Through engaging in a conversation with our art, with the symbols and resources, and noticing what we may sense in our bodies as we meet an image (sensation, gesture, movement), we strengthen the interplay between body, emotion, and imagination and the connection between art and life, enabling a fuller discovery of the self.

As Daria Halprin states:

> 'It is our real life experiences that feed our art, and our art that informs the real issues in our lives[8].'



[8] https://www.tamalpa.org/about-us/our-process

Stepping Out of Dormancy Into New Life

Reframing our Stories

L came to the course in remission from cancer, and with the intention to 'understand things in her life and and let go'. L had suffered from peripheral neuropathy in her hands as part of her cancer treatment and found the process of palming initiated feelings of grief in meeting the places in herself that had felt 'disconnected and cool'. She would move her hands quickly, as if restless, lightly dusting the surface of her skin, passing over places on her body, or move her hands away to 'avoid the places of pain'. These were places she simply could not make direct contact with. Each week, L began to experience this contact differently, little by little. She began to meet these places for a little longer each time.

Moving with sensitivity she slowed her movements, bringing her hands directly to the places of pain, where she stayed in stillness, often pressing with more tone in her hands, one on top of the other, until some tears would come. Her hands would then move freely away from her body, reaching into the space making scooping and gathering movements before drawing back into this same place on the body. L's process is an illustration of body part mapping and the 5 part process; identifying and confronting a challenge, releasing held impulses and emotions, memories, and changing / growth, finding new movements and emotional / imaginal connection of the self. As the project develops, L's hands and arms became places of resource for her - places where she felt ok, referring to them as 'finding freedom and release' (week 6).

The Tamalpa tool of mapping the body part metaphors supports a discovery of the themes and stories that show up in our movement explorations. In week 8's session on the legs and feet, the theme of moving forward is explored. The invitation to remember entering into the space in session one from the three level's. That which was sensed, felt and evoked. Awareness was then brought to exploring the movement repertoire of the legs and feet. Jumping, walking, skipping, standing, through the use of force / time / space - pace, balance, momentum, transitions. Life/ art prompts were given to support the connection between the kinaesthetic experience of moving and the metaphors or images that may arise, and the places of support we may find in our movements.

For instance; 'as you move forward, imagine something that you would like to move forward with in your life'. I witnessed L moving through the space, pausing and taking time to slowly step forward and I am touched by the sensitivity and time she takes to explore this simple movement that becomes an expression of L's 'Footsteps through LIfe' (Image title). The quality of slowing down and taking time was a metaphor for L's journey through illness and recovery.

L responds through writing to the question, **'Where do your legs and feet want to take you?':**

'To a happy time,
Less stress,
More freedom, getting through my block fears,
Fighting onwards
One step at a time, fairy steps.'

When asked to reflect on what would support this? L responds:

'Learning to relax,
Face unrealistic fears,
Getting back into life,
One step at a time.'

The self reflexive practice between mediums in The Tamalpa Life / Art Process® incites a reframing of our experience, a decentering so we may have a different way of perceiving our stories.

GP Gavin Francis, states:

'For some conditions the best way towards recovery is to find a new story that makes sense of our experience. [...] Accepting that different stories are even possible and can be rewritten is a powerful step in the right direction.'
(Francis 2022: 84).

As L moves through the course, she reflects how her images became more colourful, choosing a wider palette rather than just grey and black as she starts to find places of vitality in her body. She has learnt to 'move forward, to heal again through using different tools'.

In working with illness, Francis 'redefines the goals of treatment not necessarily as 'rehabilitation' but as 'possibilisation'; the opportunity of each person to fulfil their potential, to be the best possible visions of themselves [...] Though we can't overcome illness, we can find ways to improve our circumstances and live with it in a sort of negotiated peace' (Ibid: 111), supporting our quality of life. As one participant states, 'these classes have gone a long way in improving my mental and physical health.

I am again moved when L gives a stone with the word 'Hope' painted on it to another participant; a reflection of her journey with illness and hope of new possibilities for the future. As L reflects at the end of the programme, 'I really benefited from the experience. These sessions helped me so much in moving on with my life'.

The Importance of Play & Creativity

Week seven's session in working with the Pelvis marked a turning point within the project as many participants discovered more physical ease, sturdiness, fluidity and expressions of 'movement and energy' (participant S). Play was an essential component for this. Continually building the tools of group improvisation and movement repertoire, alongside the three levels of awareness, supported participants to widen their capacity to sense, feel and express. With safety strengthening within the group, there was permission to play. Exploring the physical and emotional impact of a contained pelvis ('rigidity, muscular constriction, immobility, mental squeezing'), and conversely, an easeful or fluid pelvis ('freedom, space, flow, belonging'), supported participants to find the places in the body that felt easeful, alive.

As one participants writes:

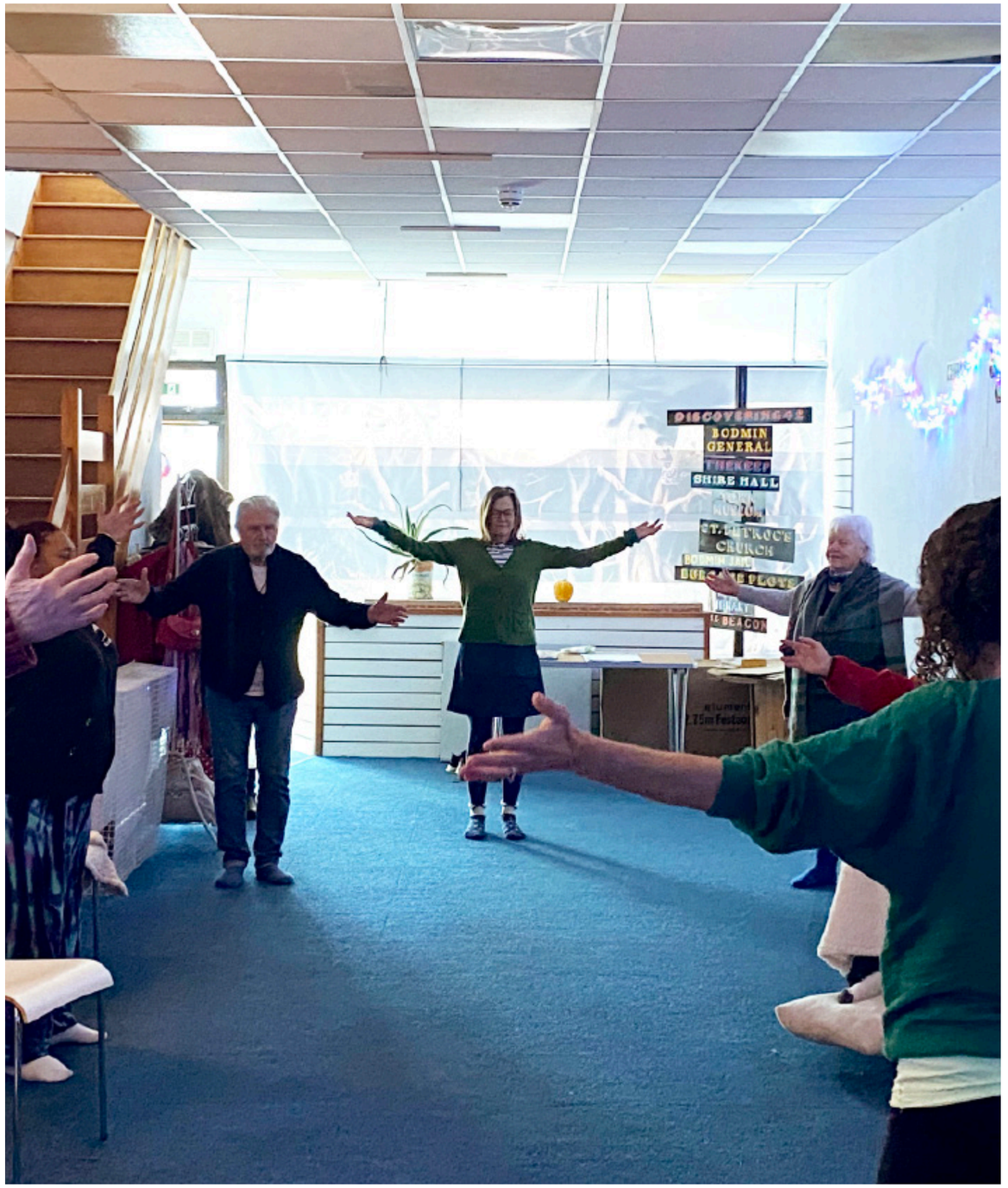
'I noticed opening up,
I felt warmth - movement,
Freedom to move and enjoy space around me,
I felt belonging to the space,
Remember me pelvis and centre me!'

In experiencing an unfamiliar movement, it will often provide us with new emotional resources (Halprin, A 2000).

The experience of joy is often overshadowed by debilitating symptoms and pain levels. Play can allow us to encounter ourselves and our stories in a new way and can strengthen group cohesion.

In this session I witnessed play evoking laughter, experimentation, and group connection and collaboration. As one participant noted, 'moving and laughing together with the group has helped to release parts of me that are so uptight all the time and make me feel part of something' (participant S).

Furthermore, I have witnessed many times previously, and within this group as joy is experienced and expanded, we can widen the capacity for ease to grow through our systems, experiencing more flow and fluidity in our movements and a quality other than pain. As one participant reflects, 'I remember freedom when I move my pelvis' (participant C). Even in this simple act of remembering a movement or a key quality, we can consciously invite and expand that quality into our lives.



Reflections & Steps Forward

Challenges

+ The **intention** of the project and **clarity** in the demographic are key for future projects. Consideration would be given to deliver more ‘taster’ sessions to social prescribers and community health and wellbeing officers to support a better understanding of what people are being signposted to, what may be involved and who may benefit.
+ The **Referral pathway** is a key factor to supporting social prescribers and key referrer’s to understand who the project is designed for and whether a person is resourced enough to attend a body based service. A **Health and wellbeing questionnaire** and collaboration with specialist health workers to support individual mental and physical health needs is pivotal in safeguarding for both facilitator and group.
+ Securing an **assistant**, either a practitioner, support staff, community nurse or charity representative is extremely beneficial in safely holding the space.
+ The **physical space** is key in delivering future projects; a space that is warm, light and free of clutter. As most of the participants commented, the space was too cold and dark.

Key Learnings

In returning to the theme and intention of this project, **Reclaiming the Body**, The following key learning’s were identified.

The elements of the project’s methodology that would be repeated:

+ **Repetition:** in future projects working with beginners, the design of the overall project score would be repeated. For instance, incrementally scaffolding the explorations of body parts and slowly building and developing The Tamalpa Life / Art Tools week on week.
+ **Clear structure of explorations:** housekeeping, settling and landing in the body, collective and individual movement explorations, mark making and writing, group harvesting.
+ **Integration and self care:** giving space for participants to check in at the beginning and end of each session and to name one supportive resource discovered or act of self care they will enact.

And the elements of the project that would be changed:

+ A longer **lead in time** in promoting the project would be beneficial in having a wider reach.
+ Finding a **Space** that was more welcoming and having a photographer at the beginning, middle and end of the project to capture a broader picture.
+ Order of **Body Part Score’s**: shifting week’s nine Legs and Feet score with week ten’s Heart score to support transitioning and growth.

The Tamalpa Life / Art Tools that worked well for this project were **Body Part Mapping**, **Three levels of awareness** and the **Psychokinetic Imagery Process**. This would be developed in future projects, alongside the 5 Part Process to support a deepening and integration of the personal material.

Health & Wellbeing Outcomes

Health and wellbeing outcomes were evaluated under the following categories:

+ Social connection.
+ Self care resources for pain management.
+ Emotional health and connection to personal story.
+ Physical confidence and capability, relaxation.
+ Discovery of health and vitality.

In all categories the outcome was 100% positive from eight completed surveys, with seven participants strongly agreeing or agreeing on the positive impact of the course. For instance, participants spoke of **‘using the methods to calm me throughout the day’, ‘identifying parts of my body that feel strong’, ‘learning to relax and seeing myself as important’, ‘having more confidence and self esteem’, ‘allowing me to recognise my need for mental clarity and emotional connection, and that I am allowed to have it!’**. Participant feedback emphasised the key benefits to health and wellbeing and most commented on hoping that the similar projects can run throughout other areas of Cornwall.

Impact

Working with chronic pain and illness can be both challenging and deeply rewarding. Rather than cure pain, The Tamalpa Life / Art Process® and Somatic Movement Therapy supports people to manage their pain better and gives a sense of hope.These tools are ways in which people living in pain could develop both their awareness and modulation of sensation, emotion and environments associated with pain' (Meehan and Carter 2021).

I have witnessed participants discover qualities of self compassion, kindness, strength, creativity, joy, ease, and places of health.

Participant L states:

> ' I am going to start loving that rejected part of my body".

Participant D speaks of:

> ' Finding more strength to do things, feeling more comfort and self compassion.'

And Participant S adds:

> ' Moving differently, thinking differently, experiencing something other than the pain.'

In connecting and conversing with the pertinent themes in our lives, physically, emotionally and imaginatively, we can start to widen our capacity to meet new challenges in our lives. In the words of Daria Halprin, 'the body, movement, and art all call us into an active and creative relationship with ourselves, with one another, and with the world. The integration of the body, movement, art and healing is rightly part of our ethical criteria for a sustainable life' (Halprin 2023: 230/1).

Steps Forward

My professional intention with Tamalpa is to keep building and growing my one-to-one practice, and offer a course for women who are affected by infertility. I am continually developing my learning and skill set and with a keen interest in working with trauma and the Nervous System, I will commence training in Somatic Experiencing in 2025. I imagine that this work will greatly enhance and develop the direction of my Tamalpa work.

For now, I maintain a soft and steady focus in staying close to the work that has so greatly impacted my life. My skin remains porous to receive space, clarity and intention.

I acknowledge and thank with immense gratitude those teachers who have paved the way before me; to Anna and Daria Halprin for developing and delivering this profound work, to Lian Wilson for her generosity, expertise and wisdom in supporting me through this project, and to all of my Somatic teachers over the last fifteen years who have taught me that sensitivity, time and spaciousness are skills to be greatly treasured and shared in the world.

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Page 12: L, D (2023) Spring in my step - moving on one year on

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