

Words from the Well, A Comprehensive DBT Ten Week Residential AOD Program for Women with Substance Use Issues and Their Children



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ABSTRACT

This presentation will provide an overview of the Jarrah House programs focusing on the six week Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) ‘Skills’ program. This includes both ‘*psychoeducation*’ and ‘*integrated skills groups*’ which are equally balanced, along with one poetry group on a weekly basis. Significant improvements have been reported by consumers. By actively practicing skills learnt in psychoeducation in experiential ‘*integrated skills groups*’ clients self-report overall positive outcomes. This will be highlighted with consumer feedback. A lack of ‘*integrated skills groups*’ has revealed an inability for consumers to draw the skills learnt in psychoeducation’s into their internal world. Poetry has also proven to be a key component for allowing the residents of Jarrah House to communicate the often inexpressible. This captures both the struggle and the transformation. The conscious and unconscious can merge with a free flowing uninhibited expression, facilitating freedom from the restraints of trauma, substance misuse and discrimination.

INTRODUCTION

The women that reside at jarrah house have not only experienced severe personal trauma, but have also been subject to institutional sexism, structural gender inequality, stigma and discrimination. it is within the above set of circumstances, which are often unseen, that sets the discourse for the continuing disadvantage and gross inequality that oppresses substance misusing women.

METHODS

Participants for this study are the consumers who participated and have been participating in the six weeks skills group. Some residents were provided with group evaluation questionnaires after ‘*integrated skills groups*’ and ‘*psychoeducation and integrated skills groups*’. Some consumers filled up a form highlighting four DBT skills (mindfulness, emotion regulation, distress tolerance & interpersonal effectiveness) practiced for two consecutive days. They also identified the goals set by them and things they are thankful for. Some consumers who had an opportunity to participate both in ‘psychoeducation group’ only and ‘psychoeducation and integrated skills group’ later when it started were interviewed face to face to get their feedback comparing these two groups. These comments and feedbacks are analyzed and presented as needed.

RESULTS

As the number of the respondents participated in each group is less than 10, most of the data is presented in a descriptive tabular format. Of the clients participated / interviewed:

- 100% female
- 2% were Aboriginal
- mean age 36.75

Table 1: Evaluation questionnaire on psychoeducation and integrated skills group

What did you enjoy most about the group?	• The topics • The discussion and the quotes • Way the topic was presented • Group discussion • Discussion and relating mindfulness to client's life • The open nature of the group and facilitator's presenting skill
What did you learn during today's group that you anticipate applying in your daily life?	• To be mindful more • Applying mindfulness, learning to identify the middle path • Mindfulness • Mindfulness and coping better • Practising mindfulness skills • To be kind to own self and being mindful
Was there anything you did not understand during today's group? Please provide specific examples.	All the clients answered 'no'
What is the most valuable thing you learned today (knowledge or skills)?	• To be mindful and in wise mind more • To practise mindfulness techniques as practising skills is more helpful than theory • Being present in the moment • Both the practical and the group discussion • Learning to be an observer of inner thoughts • The feeling of being at peace comes when one finds peace within oneself.

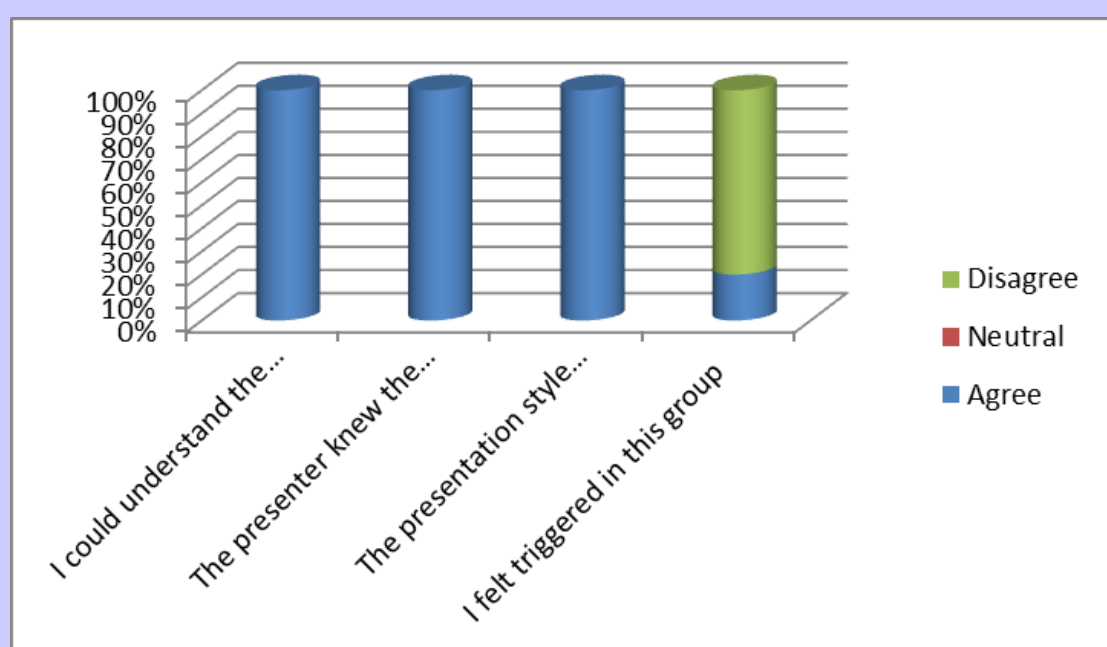


Table 2: Evaluation questionnaire on integrated skills group

What did you enjoy most about the group?	• Being able to cry • Letting feelings out & being able to heard • Listening to other clients' experience • Sharing experiences • The discussion of mindfulness & it's relation to her own life in terms of practising • Knowledge and it's practicality • Open nature of the group • Open nature
What did you learn during today's group that you anticipate applying in your daily life?	• Not to bottle up emotions • To let things go & to have a voice • 'There is hope' • Learning about herself more • Mindfulness practice (being the observer of her thoughts & commentary in her head) • To be present in the moment • Live life for the moment • To be mindful
Was there anything you did not understand during today's group? Please provide specific examples.	All the clients answered 'no'
What is the most valuable thing you learned today (knowledge or skills)?	• Skills • Skills • 'I am not alone' • To take care of oneself • Both knowledge & skills • Both • Live the day as it may be the last & parents make mistakes as well • Both parents and children need compassion & empathy

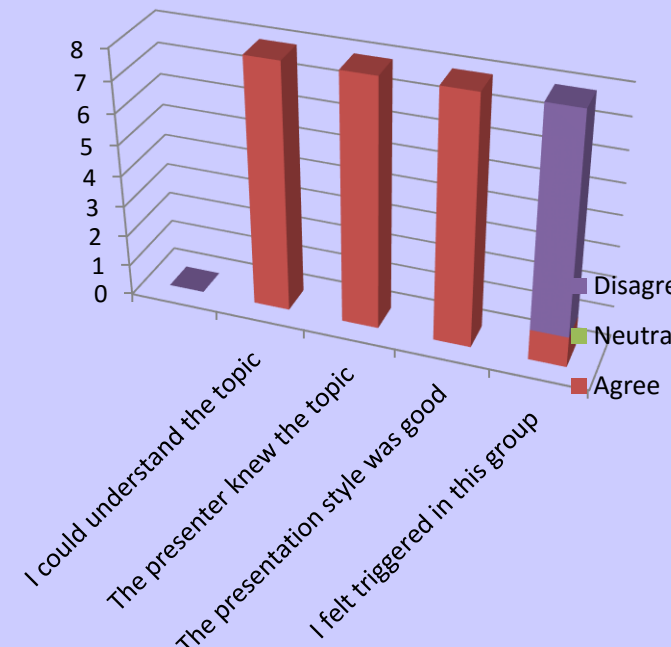


Table 3: Skills practised by the residents currently in integrated skills group

RESPONDENTS	MINDFULNESS	EMOTION REGULATION	DISTRESS TOLERANCE	INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS
Respondent 1	❖ Being in the moment			❖ Attending to relationships
Respondent 2	❖ Knitting x 2 ❖ Eating	❖ Self-soothing	❖ Talking ❖ Opposite action	❖ Using 'I feel something'
Respondent 3	❖ Played with her children x 2 ❖ Meditate Read	❖ Pause x 2 ❖ Breathe	❖ Pros & cons ❖ Bathing ❖ Walking on the grass	❖ Listen to a conversation ❖ Staying with a conversation
Respondent 4	❖ Knitting ❖ Bathing ❖ Walking	❖ Learning how to express her emotions	❖ Learning how to deal with situations where she is powerless	❖ Being the house-keeper, showing her assertiveness to enable the girls to do their chores.



Table 4: Clients' interview on the comparison between Psychoeducation only group and combined Psychoeducation & Integrated skills group

Psychoeducation	Psychoeducation and Integrated skills
INTERVIEW 1	
It was only about reading text giving the program a text-book like learning. There was no way the clients could actually practise the skills. Even though there were discussions around with examples, the lesson was not even suitable to their practical life situation.	Whereas, with integrated skills group it's definitely has made a big change for the residents. It made them more grounded and helped them to tap into their emotions & taught them to utilise what they have learnt in the psychoeducation in their day to day activities. The house became warmer & participants got closer than before when it was only psychoeducation. She also identifies that with integrated skills the emotions are getting validated. With the commencement of the integrated skills, the poetry group got better in terms of exploring their emotions in depth & expressing more lucidly.
INTERVIEW 2	
With psychoeducation only, she felt removed from life, segregated, hard to integrate what she learnt in her life.	There was opportunity to look at the emotions and she was able to integrate the learning / knowledge in her own life. She was more able to connect with others. It was a supportive environment & there was validation of her thoughts & feelings. She received feedback both from the facilitator and the peers which helped to create a processing frame.
INTERVIEW 3	
First time she came in was 10 years back and was 10 years younger than she is now and was not mature enough. But at that time she came in straight from detox and was put on level 2. She did not do any stabilise at that time. There was no factual information and it was boring. The program was not personalised with lack of comments. There was no healing, change, growing and learning. The client was distracted and observed less connection between stabilise & skills group.	With second admission, though it was slow but it was more authentic and with integrated skills it became better which actually holds the whole Jarrah House program. It made the group super powerful. She also mentioned that she would like to see more phototherapy & programs that engage with psychotherapy dynamic. With both psychoeducation and integrated skills, the house shows more connection and warmth.
INTERVIEW 4	
With psychoeducation, only one on one attention was applied but there was no group attention.	The program is much better, more in depth. Made her think the way she should be thinking. She was able to touch with emotion specially the core emotions, able to draw the feelings, make sense of full things and identify her personality well. There was a deeper relationship among the clients, closer to lecturers and facilitators. With integrated skills, it gave them a forum to speak; each person was given equal time & ability to bring forth their issues. It also helped to bring up stuffs that are beneficial and thus made the program successful.
INTERVIEW 5	
They could not expose their feelings. It was more information and very less time to learn them. All the clients missed the group learning as they wanted to talk and share their stories & feelings.	She personally felt better as this program was more authentic in regards to identify 'being herself'. Her thoughts were heard, validated in a safer place. The house environment was congenial having deeper relationships among them. With integrated skills, she was able to use poetry in deeper level having to detect causes why addiction happened to her.

CONCLUSIONS

The above mentioned research illustrates significant improvements in client outcomes since the introduction of the ‘Integrated Skills Group’. ‘Integrated Skills’ is the process of internalising the capacity to practice the four core elements of DBT - Mindfulness, Interpersonal Effectiveness, Distress Tolerance and Emotional Regulation (Linehan, 2015). It is clear from current research that increasing the capacity to identify *feelings, thought patterns and behaviours* in the therapeutic milieu leads to greater self-awareness and capacity for health seeking behaviours (Swenson, Sanderson, Dulit & Linehan, 2001). This increased awareness encourages a reflective practice. This more inclusive approach, focusing heavily on the here and now, facilitates real internal and attainable change. This increases moments and experiences of contentedness, therefore reducing desires to remedy uncomfortable thoughts and feelings with substance use.

The previously heavily focused ‘psychoeducation’ element of DBT fell short in not allowing the voice of struggle to be heard. This inspired a shift in approach which validates the voice and universally challenges its obstructions. DBT is always informed by a strengths based approach and unconditional positive regard (Maidment & Egan, 2004). DBT is an integrative multifaceted model that continues to inspire change and acceptance in those willing and coerced to become more empowered through self-determination (Kezelman & Stavropoulos, 2012).

Poetry has also played an imperative role, particularly apparent for women who struggle to find their connection to self. ‘Words from the Well’ is a humanistic endeavour, which allows the inner voice to be heard in the safety of a facilitated group setting (Meares, 2016). Poetry can foster the emergence of self which seeks to express the world that exists within the deep recesses of the mind (Meares, 2016). The women at Jarrah House develop skills in reflective practice that facilitate externalising past narratives thus paving the way for a greater connection to the present unclouded by the trauma of the past.

WORDS FROM THE WELL

Haiku Poetry	Jarrah House Rehab My recovery (8 weeks clean)
LOVE Cuddle me so hard My heart is skipping a beat Hot sweat from your touch	How on earth do I relate What chaos did I create How did my life hit rock bottom? My kids my partner, the ones I'd forgotten My abusing drugs took over my life He no longer wants me to be his wife I had destroyed everything around me This wasn't who I was brought up to be! I couldn't quite grasp the meaning of life Could I redeem myself & see the light All I did was make wrong choices
RECOVERY Sight sound taste touch smell I fight my evil demons Live life day by day	Why do I listen to all these voices? Puff after puff, the higher I became The ice was numbing all of my shame As I stayed awake for countless days The more I would keep my manipulative ways How could I be the role model I was It's like I was a Cockroach instead of a Dove Ice destroyed my spirit without me knowing The beauty inside me was no longer showing As more emptiness filled me up inside My drug use became even harder to hide I am now able to regulate my impulsive behaviour Through meditation, DBT or even yoga So when I feel triggered to use drugs or pills I will practise all of my new learnt skills - Jarrah house has given me a new life - So I can be a better mother & a perfect wife!
Word association poetry DISCRIMINATION: The Mirror The eyes that cut right through me Refuse to meet with a steady gaze And if perchance they should meet They revert behind a haze The disapproving naughty stance The smirk of cold derision Cover over dreams now lost, no chance Eyes devoid of worthy vision A life held capture by addiction Are now eyes filled with cold rejection It pains me so to look at them For they....they are my own reflection	

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