

Conclusion

FROM THE EXPERTS

DORIAN DAMMOND

On two (2) separate occasions, I had the privilege to be an observer and active participant with the outside the box, action oriented, sensory therapy that was utilized with participants at the East Village Access PROS Program. During my observation and participation, I was able to see and hear the impact that taste, touch, and smell have as sensory reminders, and how they can elicit recall memory in a new and unique way, to allow therapeutic process to occur.

What I enjoyed most was the ACTION ORIENTED approach. Meaning, we're not going to just TALK, and understanding that healing occurs, not just through talk but also by DOING SOMETHING. Working at EVA PROS for six (6) years, and being an action oriented counselor, I can appreciate the combination of talk and action to impact change. What Rodrigo and Rinat did at EVA was masterfully blend the two, for amazing qualitative outcomes.

Tears, small smiles, wide eyes, not being able to stop talking about the experience are just a few of the qualitative changes that occurred. People that have difficulties finding and expressing emotions, were doing so. This kind of change can't be measured quantitatively but, the qualitative impact of doors being opened and the emotional journey of processing that occurred can

also never be taken away. As a provider of wellness services and one who believes in the power of “non-traditional” forms of therapy (i also teach yoga to the participants at the clinic) I truly believe what Rodrigo and Rinat did, was healing to the mind, body and soul.

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ABIGAIL KLEIN

Since early 2014, I’ve been developing a group, Embodiment & Recovery, for my mental health day program. After years of cognitive-based talk therapy, I started realizing that over-intellectualizing the emotional experience was becoming detrimental to teaching my clients how to handle their anxiety and other emotional experiences. I started realizing, people didn’t need to fully understand their experiences, they needed to learn how to first accept and manage them so they can continue to do what is important. So instead of talking, we moved, we breathed... Incorporating yoga into the group was people learned to live with their mental health condition, rather than constantly fighting it.

When Rodrigo approached me to interview my work with and my understanding of anxiety as a yoga teacher and clinician, I thought it would be a one-off interview, sharing my experiences, hoping it would give him insight. Ultimately, we decided to see if Rodrigo and Rinat could

work with my group, to support their initial idea of creating a token to help people “embody” their anxiety. It took about six weeks to get them through the HR process: paperwork, fingerprinting, orientation, etc. It felt like many hoops, but in March, they were able to come. At first they joined, the group, participated in our conversation and exercises, getting a sense experientially of what I had said I was doing, so they could see how to add their own project.

For three weeks following, Rodrigo and Rinat held workshops focusing on three major senses: taste, touch, and smell. In the first workshop, we saw that the tastes that left an impact were related to positive memories: limes reminded one of a corona on a warm day, strawberry jelly beans tasted like candy from childhood. In the second, touch opened everyone up: marbles reminded people of playing games as children, cotton balls playing dress up, feathers being free like a pet bird. Smell was about self-soothing, using pleasant scents. I was amazed at their ability to connect with my clients so naturally, guiding them through exploring these different senses. Ultimately, when Rodrigo and Rinat messaged me about their idea of making illustrations based on one participant’s story, I was surprised to see the change in direction.

Instead of creating a humorous token of the anxiety monster we struggle with, they had captured positive memories into personalized art. When Rinat and I presented the first drawing, a cotton ball that elicited memories of a client playing dress up, it was one of the best experiences I have had. Rinat had no idea of the client’s back-

ground: a woman in her mid-40s had survived a chaotic childhood of sexual abuse (by the hands of her grandfather, her brothers), as well as emotional and physical abuse from her mother and sisters. She had no idea how volatile this woman had been, and how through the last four years we have worked intensively to help her find compassion for herself, as well as the suffering of others. How we worked on minimizing self-harming behaviors and helped her develop positive social relationships, as well as a current volunteer position in the community. They didn't know that the memory of touch turned into an illustration was the only time touch was a positive thing during her childhood. How their project helped make touch safe again for her. I was overwhelmed when we presented the drawing. A few weeks later, Rodrigo and Rinat came back with more illustrations; presenting drawing after drawing, watching their reactions was emotional, inspiring, and beautiful.

Today, I presented a drawing for a woman with OCD and hoarding issues, who has been struggling the last month more than in recent months. She cried when she saw the birds drawn exactly as she described them. How the feather she touched reminded her of feathers of her pet birds, how they reminded her of being free. Having weight pulled off her shoulders. She went into group with me right after, a Spirituality group, where she was elated. She shared her portrait with the group, talked about how much joy she had felt; she could not stop beaming from ear to ear. She inspired a conversation how just showing up and being involved in the world, listening, talking, touching, feeling, can lead to the unknown.

How we never knew this is what would happen from the sense workshops, how I never knew my conversation with Rodrigo would lead to this work. How I never knew me going to a yoga class would bring us all to this moment in time. It Makes Sense, reinforced how important it is to be fully active in the world, using all our senses, and with faith, good things will come. Thank you both for your beautiful contributions to the world, especially to those who need the support, love, and unique gifts the most!

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