

Modelling emotions: A potential new therapy for disturbed teenagers

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Researchers at The University of Nottingham are to investigate whether the therapeutic effects of clay modelling could help disturbed teenagers deal with their feelings of anger, anxiety and depression.

Academics are teaming up with professionals in the NHS, Nottingham Contemporary art gallery and local artists for the innovative project that will look at the potential benefits that clay could offer to [young people](#) struggling with [mental health problems](#).

Dr Gary Winship, of the University's School of Education, part of the project team, said: "With its qualities of cold resistance and suitability for moulding, we believe creative play through clay could be an exciting [alternative therapy](#) for young people suffering from a range of mental health vulnerabilities.

"Anecdotally, it may offer potential therapeutic effects through the cathartic venting of emotions through banging, squashing, bending or breaking the clay."

The £25,000, one-year project will focus on young people who are currently accessing local mental health services through the NHS and may be dealing with a range of psychosocial personality problems, [anger](#) issues, [anxiety and depression](#), which has often also led to their exclusion from school.

The researchers believe that the process of group sculpting could offer

the added benefit of improving the ability of the youngsters to talk to other young people their own age, reducing the sense of isolation that many experience.

The project will also look at how clay therapy could be developed by health professionals as a way of more successfully engaging with young people who suffer from autistic spectrum disorders and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

The project was one of two chosen to receive support as part of an innovative interdisciplinary, cross-faculty Arts, Humanities and Health Communication Sandpit held recently.

Bringing together around 30 people from across the University, the NHS and the voluntary sector, the event, directed by Dr Victoria Tischler from the School of Community Health Sciences, aimed to identify shared interests, formulate ideas and act as a springboard for research proposals for healthcare projects involving the elderly and adolescents.

A pot of £35,000 in pump priming grant funding, provided by the University's Faculty of Arts, School of Nursing, Midwifery and Physiotherapy, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Research Innovation Services and the Centre for Advanced Studies was available for proposals demonstrating the most potential.

The remaining £10,000 funding was awarded to a project which will examine the informal language used by teenagers in emails to health websites to improve the success of face-to-face consultations in healthcare settings.

Young people often find it difficult, embarrassing or uncomfortable to speak to healthcare professionals, which can sometimes lead to a failure to disclose and address serious healthcare concerns around sensitive

issues such as [mental health](#) or sexual health.

However, they are often far more open and explicit when communicating by email to health websites. A team including Dr Dick Churchill in the University's Division of Primary Care and involving academics from Medicine, English Studies, Clinical Sciences and Psychology, will draw on the language used in these emails to create innovative video and simulation resources to train health professionals and empower adolescents to communicate more effectively in healthcare settings.

The recent sandpit event aimed to support the development of the Health Humanities, a cross-disciplinary approach applying the theory, knowledge and practice of arts and humanities to healthcare.

The University of Nottingham has appointed the world's first Professor in Health Humanities, Paul Crawford in the School of Nursing, Midwifery and Physiotherapy, who alongside Dr Tischler and colleagues has recently formed the International Health Humanities Network to direct and develop research and teaching in this area.

A follow-up to the recent sandpit will be held during August to provide mentoring and guidance to the research projects developed through the event with a view to increasing success in applying for funding from external sources.

Provided by University of Nottingham

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