



The Listening Stone: Dramatherapy with War-Affected Children — Breaking Cycles of Violence through Value and Belonging

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Children living in war-affected and displaced communities endure chronic adversity that can have lasting psychological and developmental consequences. Exposure to violence, loss, and instability frequently results in heightened levels of trauma, anxiety, and depression. In these contexts, conventional therapeutic models are often inaccessible, culturally misaligned, or inappropriate for children’s developmental needs. Arts-based therapies, encompassing drama, movement, music, and visual art offer non-verbal, culturally adaptable means of expression and healing.

The Listening Stone Programme (LSP) is an eight-week dramatherapy intervention developed by For The Love of a Child (FLOC) to address the psychosocial needs of war-affected children. Through storytelling, puppetry, movement, and art-making, children journey alongside ‘Little No-Name’, a metaphorical orphan girl seeking identity and belonging after loss. This programme has government recognition and has been implemented internationally with Syrian refugees, and internally displaced children in Iraq, Lebanon, and Asia.

This paper will explore the structure and delivery of the LSP and will expand on the challenges of its delivery in an Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp in Northern Iraq, with children aged 4–13 who had been displaced by ISIS occupation and conflict since 2014. The paper will then describe the recent and current qualitative research. We will present several individual case studies, which demonstrate the reduction of internalised cycles of fear and violence. They highlight patterns of the children’s increased sense of self-worth, belonging and social connection, and trust, and decreased emotional distress and peer conflict. The thematic analysis, of interviews and facilitator observations, will be presented, including discussion of themes of trust, empathy, safety, and restored value.



The work aligns with the WHO-led Arts and Health movement and demonstrates how dramatherapy can offer culturally responsive, evidence-based psychosocial support in humanitarian crises, restoring to children the fundamental truth that they are valuable, precious, and capable of love and change. This paper will finally suggest ways in which such intervention can benefit wider communities and intergenerational dynamics; and highlight the benefit of early intervention to give children a greater chance to become healthy adults.

Biography

Donna Jennings is the founder and director of For The Love of a Child (FLOC), and author of 'The Listening Stone' and programme. FLOC delivers arts psychotherapeutic based programmes to children affected by trauma, bereavement, and war. The programmes have been implemented internationally with Syrian refugees, internally displaced children in Iraq, Lebanon, in tribal communities in Asia and in schools across Scotland and with Ukrainian refugees. Donna's practice-led research explores the intersection of story, healing, and the child's rediscovery of self-worth after displacement or adverse childhood experiences.