Anger discussion group: a new approach

to engaging rough sleepers in working together towards solutions

John Conolly, Paul Ashton 2014

ANGER! IS THE SOUND THAT FEAR!

MAKES

Holding on to anger is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.
-Buddha

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KEEP CALM

IT'S ONLY

THE ANGER GROUP

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Introduction

In **2012** The Westminster Rough Sleepers Unit Asked for an **ANGER MANAGEMENT** Group for Homeless people Including Rough Sleepers**.**

Paul and I have been evolving a model of counsellor-ex-service user **pre-counselling** initiatives since **2011**.

We decided to establish an **ANGER DISCUSSION Group at CStM:**

- We thought this more **appropriate** to:
  - Meet the **Special needs of** homeless people
  - **match the stage of readiness for change homeless** people likely to be at

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CHANGE IS DIFFICULT

IF you are always trying to be NORMAL you will NEVER know just how truly amazing you are

‘fewer than **20%** of a problem population are prepared for action at any given time. And yet, **more than 90%** of behavior change programs are designed with this 20% in mind’ (2)

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Stages of Change

Prochaska et al (2) believe that change consists of six different stages:

- **1. Pre-contemplation** – change is not wanted/believed possible – loss of hope
- **2. Contemplation -** problem acknowledged and thoughts re changing –fear of failure – thinking vs action
- **3. Preparation –** 'Go public' with intentions, high awareness of what needed, firm detailed plan

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Stages of Change 2.

- **4. Action** – change actions and surroundings – continued need for support
- **5. Maintenance** – consolidate gains and struggle to prevent lapses and relapse – long on going process
- **6.Termination** – former addiction/problem no longer presents any temptation – controversy re this e.g. **AA** believes Alcoholism is for life.

We thought Rough Sleepers more likely to be at **stage 1 and 2 of Pre-contemplation**, and **Contemplation;** best addressed by a co-facilitated **Anger Discussion Group.**

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Homeless People Special Needs

In addition Homeless people have:

- **Survival needs**
- **Tri-morbidity** of issues:
  - Physical
  - Mental
  - Addiction

- Histories of **Abuse** **at the hands of those entrusted with authority**
  - estimated **60-70%** hostel residents have **Personality Disorder** (3)

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Homeless People Special Needs 2.

Issues with:

- **Low TRUST** - History of poor, 'toxic help', many have reported previous failed Anger Management Groups
- **loss of Hope**
- **Self-isolating** behaviour; engaging with and maintaining **relationships,**
- **Continuity & regular attendance**
- **group situations (**low **social skills).**
  - **taking turns** in a conversation
  - Managing **anxiety/aggression levels** vs **withdrawal**
  - Hypersensitivity re **Power dynamics** with Facilitator(s)

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Anger Group Structure

Drop-In

- Referrals and Self-referrals
- No expectation of regular attendance
- Individually based comfort/smoking ‘breaks’

Structure

- **Pre-group social time** (15mins)
  - All welcomed, snacks, icebreaking conversation
  - Relate to clients as people first and foremost
  - Develop a connection before potential exposure of vulnerability

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Anger Group 2.

Structure continued

- Adaptation of **AA Rules** (To contain anxiety)
- **Verbal Signing In** (encourage all to participate)
  - All invited (but not obliged) to introduce themselves
  - Describe the reasons for interest in the Anger Group
- **Open Discussion** (re Anger issues, and Members led)
- **Verbal Signing out**
  - All invited (but not obliged) to summarize any personal **highlights** gained from the session.
    - help consolidate any learning

Anger Group Co-Facilitation

Ex-service User

Counsellor

- **Ex-service User**
  - Exposure of members to **credible Role model** and **Narrative** of **Recovery**; embodiment of **HOPE**.
  - Dilution of **Authority/Power** dynamic issues
- **Counsellor**
  - Ensure **safety** of the group (No prejudicial, personal attacks)
  - **Validate** each member and their contributions (usually from invalidating backgrounds)
  - Build **Group Cohesion** (Reflections, Open questions, Affirmations, Summaries).
  - Keep Group on **task** (redirect discussions to understand and change anger reactions)

    - Support, Ventilate, Broaden perspectives, be a Resource, Problem solve

Group Therapeutic Factors (4).

1. **Instillation of Hope**
2. **Universality** (not alone)
3. **Information Sharing**
4. **Altruism** (mbrs help each other)
5. **Develop and Practice Social Skills**
6. **Imitative Behaviour**

7. **Catharsis** (Ventilation of Emotions).
8. **Corrective Emotional Experience**
9. **Existential Factors** (assuming responsibility)
10. **Group Cohesiveness** (Sense of Belonging)
11. **Interpersonal Learning** (Recognize social Impact)

Therapeutic Factors and Anger Group

More Salient Factors

- A Neutral Space (Trust)
- Identification
- Hope
- Universality (not alone)
- Expression of Emotions incl Anger
- Group Cohesiveness
- Corrective Emotional Experience
- develop social skills
- Altruism (advise/help each other - Empowerment)
- Imitative behaviour

Present but less Salient

Interpersonal Learning

- Recognizing own social impact on others

Existential Factors

- Assuming responsibility
  - Attributing responsibility where it belongs

Frequency of Attendance

No Ps	**37**	**11**	**5**	**3**	**3**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
Max X attended	1	2	3	4	5	7	8	13	14	15	18	26	30	32
%	52	15	7	4	4	3	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1

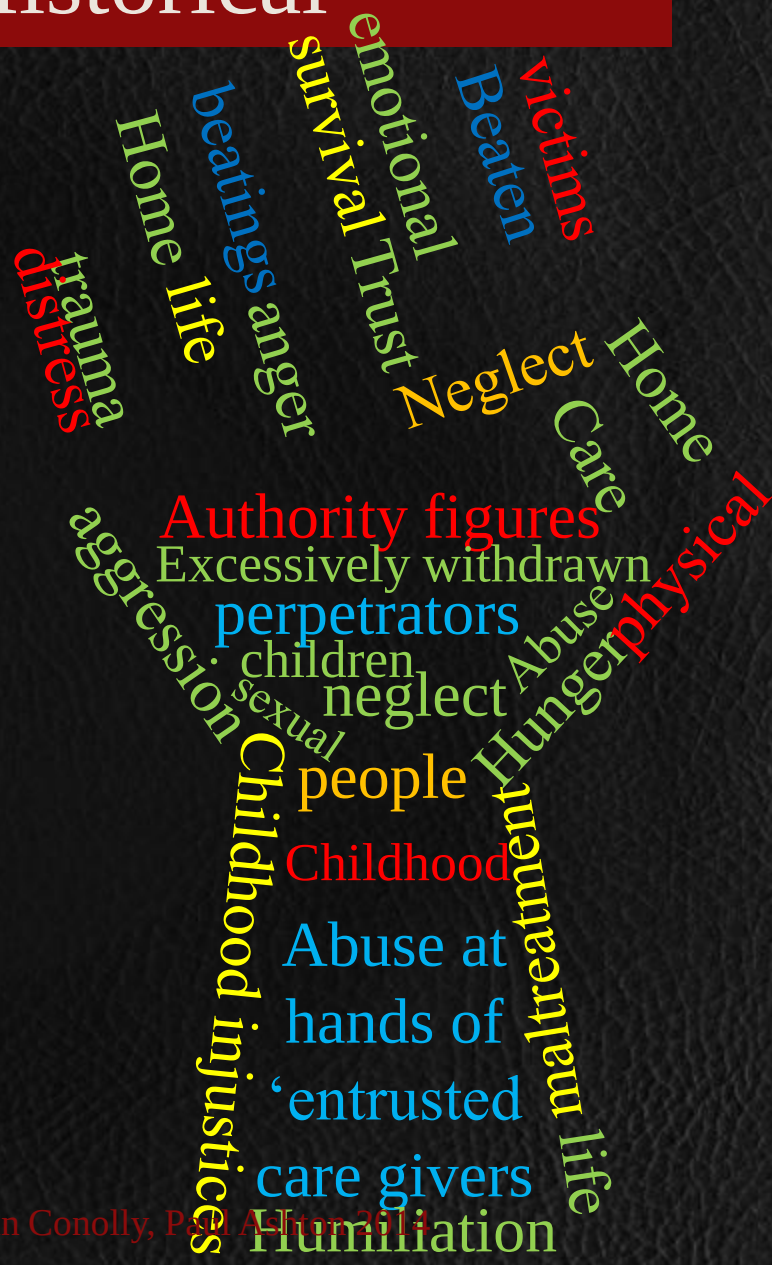
Group Themes - Historical

Abuse at hands of 'entrusted' people

- E.g. Care Home staff
- 'Impossible to trust 'Authority figures'
- 'Get them before they get you'

Childhood injustices and lifelong anger

- Severe beatings by paternal figures
- Experiences of severe Hunger, Shame, Humiliation



Group Themes – Alienation

Not being cared for by 'helpers' but managed only

- 'Just doing their job'
- 'We'r just a number'
- They'r patronising and Blaming

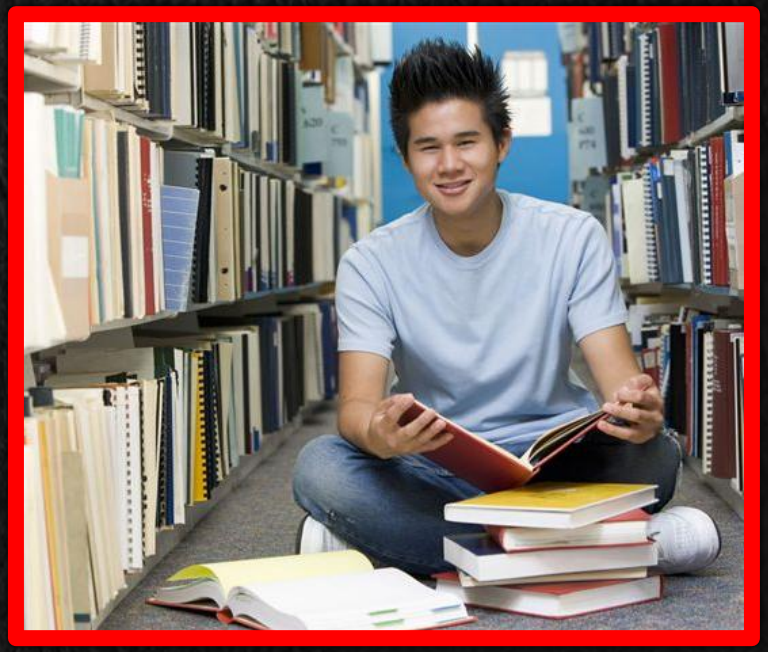
No Families to fall back on Irremediable exclusion/marginalisation

- Impossibility to leave penal history behind
- Nothing left to lose

Group Themes – Daily provocations

Being beaten/urinated on sleeping on street
Constantly moved on by Police
4 hour wait at Housing to be told do not qualify
Challenging neighbours – spitting, noisy, threatening
Anger Group Cancellation

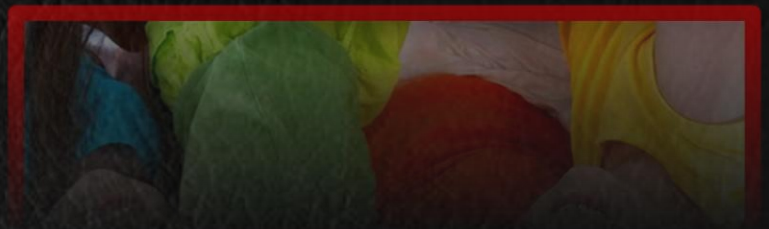
Group Themes - Learning



Useful coping strategies shared

- ‘Walk away’
- Humour/Sarcasm
- Distractions – listen to music
- Prayer
- Self-expressive activities: Drawing, Painting
- Talking to ‘calming friends’
- Having something to lose

Expressed Value of Group 1.



‘Like the family I never had’
‘I need this group’
‘It helps me to know that I can come here and let it all out’
My court order says I have to go to an Anger Management Group, but I also come here
‘I pay travel to come here’

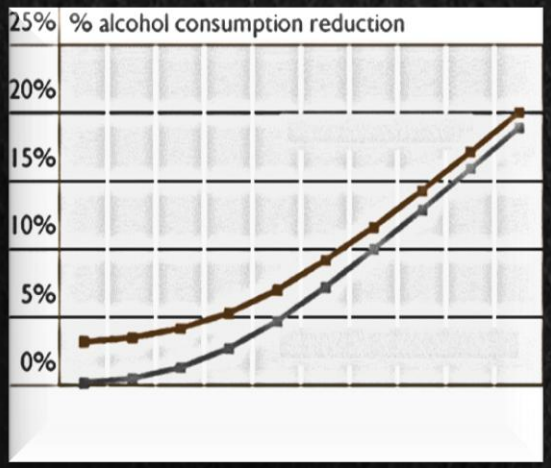
Group Continuity.

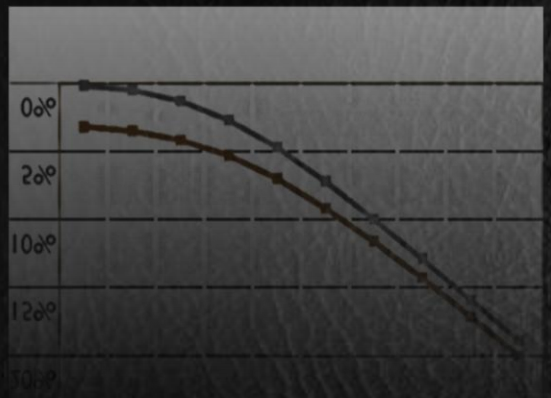
Unfortunately the Group had to be **cancelled** a few times .
Members expressed much **upset** and anger but also: Requested an **'Understudy' to the counsellor Co-facilitator** so as to ensure Continuity for the Group.

Observable Changes

Reduced Alcohol consumption
More constructive engagement
with:

- Homeless Day Centres/Hostels
- Key workers
- Housing





Re-settlement

1 member after 14 years rough sleeping moved into own flat

Mr. A

- 14 years on street, banned from services for VIOLENCE
- 1st attended DRUNK then SOBER
- MACHO narrative replaced by one of ABUSE and impact on Behaviour
- RE-SETTLED

Mr B

- On/Off streets since 14 (**now 44**)
- **GANG VIOLENCE**
- Multi-ADDICTIONS
- Drunk then SOBER
- More sustained engagement with staff
- Narrative of violence to one of **NEED**
- Engagement with re-settlement

I would rather go through life SOBER, believing I am an Alcoholic.
Than go through life DRUNK, trying to convince myself that I am not

Mr C

Residential Children's Homes

- Left Army, on streets several decades.
- Prison for Violence.
- Brought up in **CARE.**
- Never anything to lose.
- Now feels has something to lose.
- Group family he **never had.**

Moving On

A 'Move On' Group requested by members:

- Closed membership
- Weekly attendance commitment
- In addition to (Drop In) Anger Group

Type?

- Anger Management
- Therapy
- Schema Therapy
- Mentalisation
- Encounter Group
- **Motivational Interviewing?**

Anger Management ?

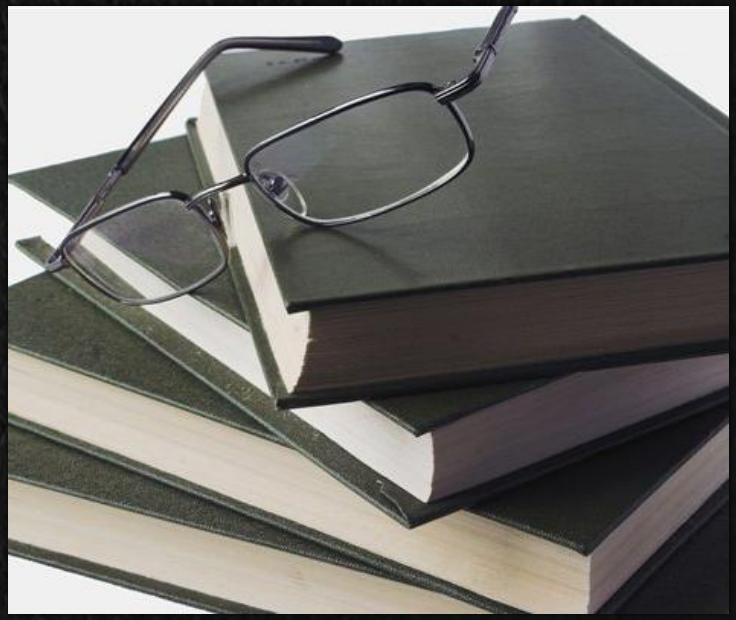
Encounter Group?

Therapy ?

Schema Therapy ?

Mentalisation ?

References 2.



3. Maguire et al, 2009 cited in **Department of Health**; 2010, ‘ Healthcare for Single Homeless People’, Office of the Chief Analyst, Department of Health, London.

4. Yalom, I.D. and Leszcz, M. ‘ The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy’, 5th Edtn, 2005, Basic Books, New York, Cambridge MA.