



Birmingham Centre for Arts Therapies

Supporting Birmingham Virtual
School for Children in Care

ART
DANCE
DRAMA
MUSIC
PLAY

What is BCAT?

The Birmingham Centre for Arts Therapies (BCAT) is a registered charity that was set up in 1993 to provide an accessible arts therapies service throughout the Midlands.

Arts therapists work with both children and adults who have a wide range of needs, such as those arising from emotional, behavioural or mental health, and effects of stress and trauma.

BCAT uses the arts as a catalyst to support people and communities - helping them to grow and develop, and use the arts as a way to express and engage.

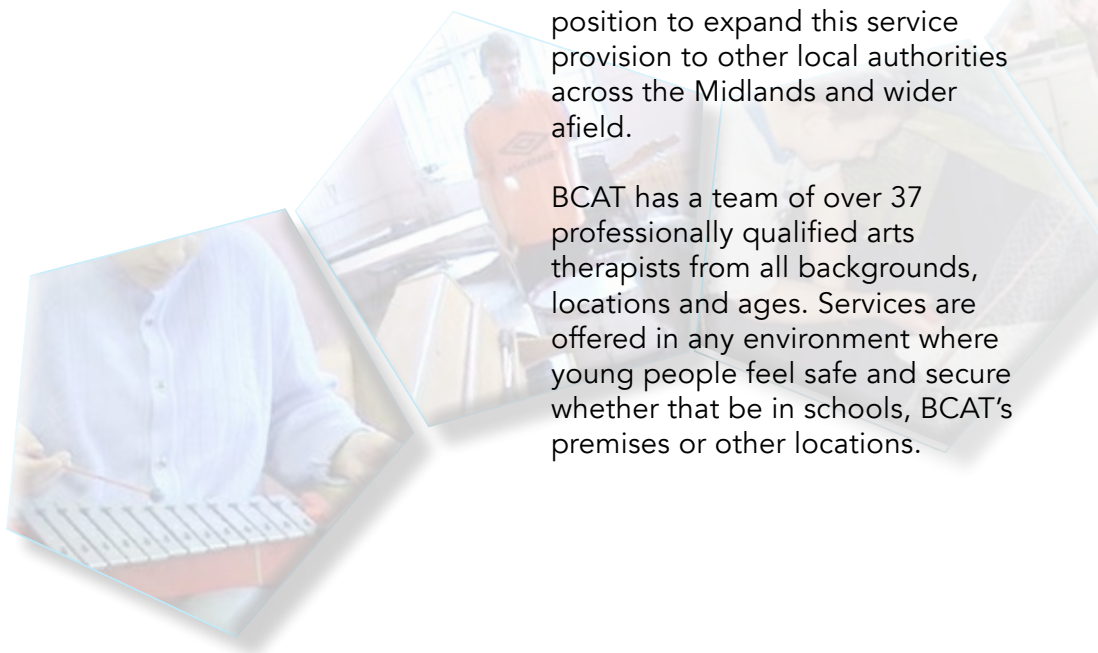
Birmingham Virtual School

BCAT has been supporting Birmingham City Council's Virtual School for Children in Care since 2015.

We have successfully delivered arts therapies to over 90 children across the city, from pre-school to leaving ages. The 12 week therapy interventions - sometimes longer if required - allow children registered with the Virtual School to develop confidence, self-esteem and ways to cope with underlying issues that affect their general well-being.

As we continue to support Birmingham City Council, we believe that we are now in a position to expand this service provision to other local authorities across the Midlands and wider afield.

BCAT has a team of over 37 professionally qualified arts therapists from all backgrounds, locations and ages. Services are offered in any environment where young people feel safe and secure whether that be in schools, BCAT's premises or other locations.



ART therapy

is capable of breaking down boundaries of language and communication. It can be helpful for speech or sensory impairments, as well those with mental and learning difficulties.

DANCE therapy

uses movement or dance, to explore the therapy space together, exploring personal and interpersonal issues that may affect the individual or group.

DRAMA therapy

uses creative, dramatic structures that examine, and explore personal and interpersonal issues. Interventions involve a wide range of creative approaches including mime, mask and puppetry.

MUSIC therapy

helps people who have difficulty in understanding their environments and, or whose verbal communication is an inadequate form of self-expression.

PLAY therapy

helps children understand muddled feelings or upsetting events that they may have not had the chance to sort out. Play helps communicate at a child's level and pace.

Impact

All BCAT's therapy sessions are regularly evaluated and monitored.

A recent report of the first year of work undertaken with 61 children from Birmingham's Virtual School showed that this form of intervention resulted in an average achievement of aims set at a level of 4.2, which is above the level of "Noticeable Improvement". Referrers and therapists were in agreement with this value, while clients rated the sessions on an even higher level.

The important fact is that the clients experience within the therapy context, a safe, stable space, in which their individual thoughts and feelings may be expressed and with which they may begin to come to terms through the relationship built up within the triangle of therapist, art form and client.

Of vital importance in this matter is liaison between the therapists, professional staff such as teachers, social workers and psychologists and the client's carers, so that information may be freely exchanged between all involved in the client's care, to optimize and consolidate achievements made during the therapy programmes.

Key comments made by clients:

"I can talk about my feelings in sessions – I like this very much!"

"Sessions are helpful because they calm me down"

"These sessions have been really useful to me because they have helped me to improve my communication and confidence skills"

Key comments made by Teachers/Referrers:

"Sessions provide an essential outlet / opportunity for the clients to express their emotions when upset or angry and provide a forum within which alternative models of behavior can be explored"

"We have seen improvements in clients' relationships with family and peers outside of the sessions and improved relationships with staff members within school hours".

Case study

F. is a 6yr. old girl who has experienced considerable abuse in her life. She is also confused as to why she has been moved to foster care and blames herself for this. Her play therapist states that after 9 sessions, their therapeutic relationship is well established and the child appears to trust her as a reliable adult in her life. F. has begun to tell the therapist a little about her current and previous circumstances, through the play activities shared together.

The aim for her therapy is to continue to explore her previous experiences more deeply, to gain more understanding about what happened and for her to know that none of it was her fault. As they go through this process together, the therapist wants F. to learn self-regulation and to be able to express her hurts in ways that she is understood - and heard.

Of course, F. cannot do this alone and the therapist suggests that there is some work to be done with the foster carers as well - in particular how to respond when there are disagreements between F. and her sibling. F. appears to be expressing her thoughts and feelings in ways that the adults may not fully understand and they are using 'rewards and sanctions' to control the child, which is not really helpful with children who have experienced trauma in their lives.

Which arts therapy?

It is not always easy to determine which of the 5 arts therapies – art, dance movement, drama, music or play – should be recommended for a particular client.

It is often the case that the client will express a preference – or be known to have an interest in one particular medium. It is probable that this would therefore be the best form of arts therapy to offer in the first instance. The choice may also be dependent on the facilities available at each location regarding space available or noise levels able to be tolerated.

All BCAT therapists are able to assess whether or not the therapy recommended appears to be the best for the client concerned. If it seems that a different form of therapy might be preferable – or if the client expresses a desire to change the modality – this can always be accommodated.

Choice of which therapy to recommend may also depend on the sheer logistics of where the sessions are to be held and whether this is time effective for the therapist concerned. But in all situations, the client's needs and preferences would come first.

Waiting Times

The fact that clients referred to BCAT do not have a long period of waiting before sessions start – usually less than 3 weeks – means that interventions can be matched to needs as soon as is possible.

This is especially valuable for clients who have urgent and acute needs.

Next steps

If you are interested in BCAT providing arts therapies services for your local authority Looked After Children then please call us or email:

Dr Angela Fenwick
t: 0121 440 8273
e: talktobcat@gmail.com

Full research and many other case studies involving work such as that with older children who are refugees; who may have been subject to forced marriages; have attempted or contemplated suicide; et al, are available on application to the BCAT office.

Our offices are located near the city centre
2 minutes walk from Joseph Chamberlain College
1 minute from Highgate Fire Station
On the 50 bus route - Moseley Road stop
Limited parking available



find us on Facebook and Twitter
#mailbcat



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