



## **WEALTH OF ART**

**OVERCOMING THE EFFECTS OF ABUSE DURING CHILDHOOD THROUGH  
THE USE OF ART**

*With particular focus on:*

*gang violence and child sexual abuse (CSA)*

*Author: Georgina Peta Thompson  
Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellow 2012*

## **Appendix:**

Introduction:	p3
The prevalence of abuse in the UK:	p4
The prevalence of abuse in Brazil:	p7
Schedule of research:	p8
Associação de Apoio à Criança em Risco (ACER):	p9
Workshop Kaleidoscope:	p10
An insight into the ethos of ACER:	p12
Workshop Dreams:	p14
Workshop Collage:	p16
Insight into ACER's approach:	p18
Salvador:	p20
Interview: Sylvia Rodrigues* art therapist	p21
Mandala art:	p23
Viva a Vida:	p24
Workshop: Trust:	p25
Rio de Janeiro:	p26
União de Mulheres Pró-melhoramentos da Roup Suja:	p27
Workshop: finger printing:	p28
UMPMRS: The whole family approach using art:	p29
AfroReggae: A profile:	p30
Conclusion:	p31
Special thanks:	p32
Further information:	p33
Winston Churchill Memorial Trust:	p34
References:	p36

## Introduction

From my experience of working with children, young people and women affected by domestic and sexual violence, I have seen the effects that these prolific forms of abuse can have on the survivors, and their futures, first hand. Behavioural problems, negative body-image and low self-esteem are just a small proportion of the outcomes that these experiences can imprint on those affected, and, left unaddressed, the effects of abuse can last a life-time, impacting wellbeing and the ability to develop emotionally. Abuse not only affects the individual, its destructive impact can affect a whole family, and, if left untreated its consequences can have a negative impact on whole communities.

Despite its prevalence in the UK, there seems to be significant inadequacy in the use of art as a therapeutic approach to overcome child abuse. When considering the long-term physical, psychological, behavioural, and societal issues that it can cause, this lack must be addressed. In Brazil, a country where the pervasiveness of abuse, particularly gang violence and child sexual abuse, is similar to, and in many areas more than, that of the UK, there is a marked difference in the use, informal and formal, of art in treating trauma and giving hope to survivors of violence. Brazil treats art widely as a therapy within its own right.

*How can the use of art, in all its forms, empower individuals to overcome the effects of abuse during childhood?*

With a grant from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, in 2012, I travelled to Brazil with the aim of gaining knowledge and understanding of how the use of art can help individuals unravel and address some of the complexities involved in experiencing abuse during childhood and begin the healing process. I spent time in Eldorado, Greater São Paulo, Salvador and Rio de Janeiro to enable me to report back to the UK on how art, used as a therapeutic tool, can help those who have experienced abuse to overcome the effects, build in confidence and develop emotionally in order to benefit from educational, social and employment opportunities.

Unfortunately, for many residents of Brazil's most notorious settlements, favelas, whose wars with violence and drugs has been repeatedly glamourised in world-wide box office hits such as City of God, the effects of violence and abuse are ingrained in everyday life. However, these areas, arguably amongst the most deprived on earth, are so rich with techniques to help the generation of today, and tomorrow, to overcome the by-products of this extreme deprivation – vulnerability, violence and abuse. Through observational research, documented in this report, I aim to share the knowledge and expertise of Brazil's professionals working with children and young people affected by abuse in practical ways of how to use art in individual and group settings to help transform the lives of children affected by this cruelty and give them an equal chance to the futures they deserve.

## **The prevalence of abuse in the UK**

Figures show that there are approximately 50,500 children at risk of abuse in the UK right now; this statistic is calculated by the number of children on a child protection plan, but what about the children whose suffering is hidden from the authorities? Although these figures form the reality for a significant number of children, research suggests that cases of abuse are under-recorded and under-reported, and therefore the number of children, young people and adults who have experienced abuse during childhood is likely to be much higher.

### **Sexual abuse**

Child sexual abuse is defined as any sexual act with a child performed by an adult or another child. Often, perpetrators of sexual abuse against children are known to them; parents, family members and people in a position of power being the most common offenders. Cases of child sexual abuse committed by a stranger are minimal in comparison to those known and trusted by the child or family. With research indicating that a person who is sexually abusive towards their partner is likely to display the same behaviour towards children in their care, it is unsurprising to know that unless this pattern is broken by addressing it sexual abuse can repeat itself, causing intergenerational cycles of sexual violence.

- One in four (24.1%) individuals experienced sexual abuse (including contact and non-contact) by an adult or by a peer during childhood.
- One in six children aged 11-17 (16.5%) have experienced sexual abuse.
- One in 10 children aged 11-17 (9.4%) have experienced sexual abuse in the past year.<sup>i</sup>

### **Physical violence**

An adult that deliberately harms a child, physically hurting them, is a perpetrator of physical violence against children. In the UK it is not against the law for parents to use physical punishment with their own children 'as long as it is reasonable'. But, measurement of 'reasonable' can be a grey area. Physical abuse causes harm including broken bones, burns and in some cases death. In addition to the physical effects, the mental scars resulting from physical violence can too last a lifetime; with the potential to cause aggressive tendencies and, as with sexual abuse, serious mental health problems.

- One in nine young adults (11.5%) had experienced severe physical violence during childhood at the hands of an adult.
- One in 14 children aged 11-17 (6.9%) have experienced severe physical violence at the hands of an adult.

## **Experiencing domestic abuse**

When a child is living in a domestically abusive household it is often impossible to prevent them from witnessing violence. Children who witness their mothers being physically, emotionally or sexually abused can often experience significant behavioural and emotional problems including stuttering, anxiety and sleep disruption.

- One in four young adults (23.7%) were exposed to domestic violence between adults in their homes during childhood.
- Just under one in five children aged 11-17 (17.5%) have experienced domestic violence between adults in their homes.

## **Disclosure**

Social stigma, humility and a lack of awareness are all factors which prevent individuals affected by abuse from disclosing their experiences. Without releasing, unravelling and facing some of the physical and emotional outcomes of abuse, it is impossible for the healing process to begin.

- More than one in five children aged 11-17 (22.9%) who were physically hurt by a parent or guardian did not tell anyone else about it.
- More than one in three children aged 11-17 (34%) who experienced contact sexual abuse by an adult did not tell anyone else about it.
- Four out of five children aged 11-17 (82.7%) who experienced contact sexual abuse from a peer did not tell anyone else about it.

## **Impact of abuse**

The long-term effects that abuse, including physical violence and child sexual abuse, has on its survivors can range from the inability to form positive relationships to lack of self-regard to increased risk of substance misuse to, in worst cases, suicide.

The variations of therapy that are provided through local governments and non-governmental organisations to support children and young people who have been affected by both physical and sexual abuse fit into two categories: talking therapies which include cognitive behavioural therapy, counselling and psychotherapy; and creative therapies, which include play therapy, art therapy and drama therapy. Cognitive behavioural therapy is the most prominent among therapies available and offered by professionals in the UK.

## **Gang violence**

Research suggests that gang violence across the UK's largest cities has increased, some even suggesting that the UK riots in 2011 accurately portrayed just how serious a problem gang and youth violence had become.<sup>ii</sup> Often, the negative aspects of gang culture include extreme violence, which can be forced as part of an initiation test into a gang. In London, one in five of those arrested in connection with the riots were known gang members. Home Office statistics also show that gang members carry out half of all shootings in London. It is thought that children and young people, sometimes as young as nine years old, join gangs as a result of family breakdown, to provide them with a sense of belonging and to offer protection; some children are reportedly 'born' into gangs when older siblings or even parents being members.

## **The prevalence of abuse in Brazil**

As previously mentioned, statistics available in the UK with reference to the frequency of abuse are often underreported, this is even more so in Brazil where accurate statistics on the prevalence of physical violence and child sexual abuse are difficult to collect because of problems of underreporting and the lack of one definition of what constitutes such abuse. However, through the knowledge I gained from the child protection professionals I was working with in Brazil, it was thought that over one in four children were abused; with this figure reaching much higher numbers in areas of extreme deprivation, including the favelas, where substance-misuse and exploitation of children, including sexual, were far more common.

Pervasive violence perpetrated by criminal gangs and abusive police plague many Brazilian cities. Violence especially impacts deprived communities. In urban areas across Brazil, such as Rio de Janeiro, for example, drug gangs, which routinely engage in violent crime and extortion, control hundreds of favelas. In November 2010, drug gangs unleashed a wave of attacks in the streets of Rio, setting vehicles alight and staging mass robberies, leading to huge deployment of police and armed forces to the Complexo do Alemão community.

Police abuse, including extrajudicial execution, is also a chronic problem. According to official data, police were responsible for 372 killings<sup>iii</sup> in the state of Rio de Janeiro and 252 killings in the state of São Paulo in the first six months of 2011. Police often claim these are 'resistance' killings that are a result of dangerous confrontations with criminals. While some police killings result from a legitimate use of force by police officers, many others do not, a fact documented by Human Rights Watch and other groups and recognized by Brazilian criminal justice officials.

The outcome of the occurrence of violence has not just resulted in it being ingrained into everyday life, it has also give rise to a substantial amount of non-governmental organisations, local and international, working in the areas where acts of violence, particularly against children and young people, are most frequent, Brazil's favelas. These organisations have perfected the art of helping the residents of these communities to overcome the effects of violence; and it is their staff who generously shared their time, knowledge and energy to enable me to write this report.



### Schedule of research

Organisation	Location	Workshop
ACER	Eldorado, Diadema, Greater São Paulo	Kaleidoscope
ACER	Eldorado, Greater São Paulo	Dreams
ACER	Eldorado, Greater São Paulo	Collage
Individual, Claudia*	Salvador, Bahia	Mandala
Viva a Vida	Salvador, Bahia	Trust
Roupa Suja	Rocinha, Rio de Janeiro	Identity
Roupa Suja	Rocinha, Rio de Janeiro	Weaving bowls

This report looks at the impact of art therapy on children and young people affected by abuse, including an explanation of the facilitation of each workshop; case studies of children and interviews.



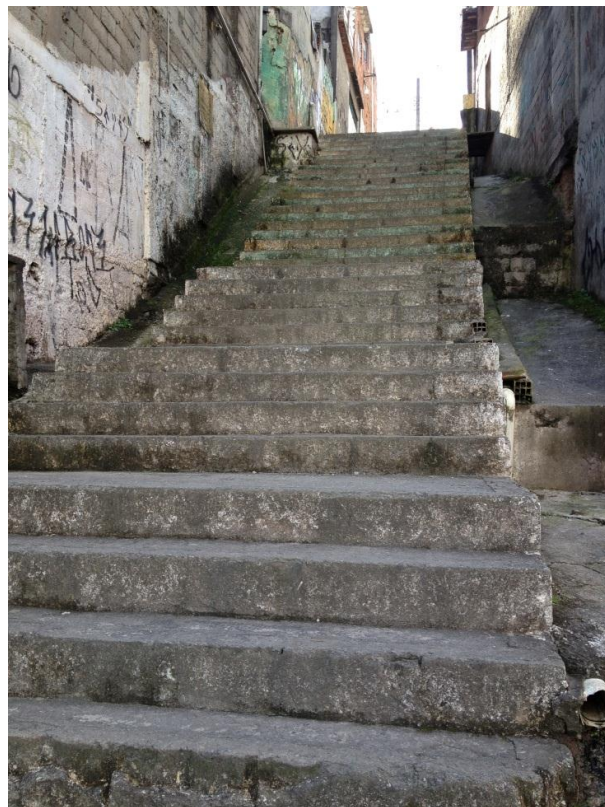


### **Associação de Apoio à Criança em Risco (ACER)**

Associação de Apoio à Criança em Risco (ACER), or the association of support for children at risk in English, started as an organisation working to help children living on the streets of São Paulo, it now supports over 3000 children, adolescents, and their families, to give them the help they need to try and eliminate the chances of them even getting to that stage.

ACER is situated in the heart of the Eldorado favela, on the outskirts of São Paulo, an area with high levels of poverty, violence, drug and alcohol abuse, unemployment, child abuse and exploitation, and illiteracy. Through education, individual support and creative therapy the project aims to 'affirm the dignity of children and young people, transforming social perceptions and attitudes'.

The strong team, made up of mostly local residents with the leadership from Jonathan Hannay, invest in the futures of every child, young person and family they come into contact with at ACER, not only that, they believe them too. The organisation has created a strong status in the area, it is well respected and protected whilst it strives to achieve the most effective positive outcomes for children possible through a range of activities, most of which are open to everyone, leaving stigma at the door. All sessions seemingly compass towards the same purpose, freedom of expression.



## **WORKSHOP: KALEIDESCOPE**

### **Formula**

This workshop is facilitated with a group, the number of children and young people in the group can vary widely. Each member of the group starts off with a range of felt-tips or colouring pencils and a piece of paper of their choice. The kaleidoscope is passed around the group; each person looks through it and transfers what they see onto the paper. The kaleidoscope can be passed around as many times as necessary. Once every child or young person has completed their design the drawings are stuck onto a large wall next to each other to form one collective picture or collage.

### **Result**

During the workshop, every child was fascinated with what they saw at the end of the kaleidoscope. There was a clear level of interest and concentration that each person held throughout the task, which allowed them to focus solely on the objective of completion. For the two hours that the workshop took, the group members were able to make choices that were completely theirs, no one else could tell them what they saw and no one else could make the decision of what to draw for them. The responsibility that they experienced during the session had a profound impact on their confidence and it was visible to see that they felt empowered as a result. During the presentation stage of the workshop, each child and young person proudly came to the front of the room and stuck their drawing on the wall for all to see. Imagination was set free and, with every design widely different from the next, it could be clearly seen.

It is obvious to say that every child's view of their life and experience is unique. This is even truer for children affected by abuse; their reactions to it differ hugely and, although there are broad techniques used to help children who have experienced violence or abuse, a one size fits all approach can be ineffective when addressing these issues, doing so can layer the problem. Understanding that each experience and each reaction is different, allows the layers to be stripped back, setting the core free, and letting it grow.

### **Case study**

Seven year old boy, Claudio\*, is a shy character. Like many children in the area, Claudio's choice has been taken away from him many times. His choice to be a child, and often his choice of happiness and choice of staying safe, have been so alien to him throughout his life that when he was presented with the task of drawing what he saw, he was stuck and he couldn't choose. Claudio's frustration, combined with an extreme lack of confidence and low self-esteem, showed; and he took some persuasion to finally believe in his capabilities; but through tough persistence he achieved the purpose of the session. Breathing a sigh of relief, Claudio started to draw and on finishing he joined the rest of the group and proudly displayed his work of art, his choice.



## **AN INSIGHT INTO THE ETHOS OF ACER**

A significant learning I was able to quickly realise from ACER was its ability to create something substantial out of what appeared to be quite small. Every ounce of space, every corner, every room, even every street in the neighbourhood is used. Nothing goes to waste. Having taken part in numerous games' workshops during my time there, it is true to say that utilising what is available to its maximum ability is a symbolic segment of the ethos.

One notable game, amongst many, consisted of one hundred plastic balls inside a plastic bag. The balls are thrown all over the room with the objective of each member of the group of children and young people to collect up as many as possible in 30 seconds and put them into the bag. The rules? Completion. The professor, who was looked upon with admiration from the group, explained that the importance of this task does not lie in how it's done, it's all about completing it. During the explanation, everyone blinked in understanding. Something they've learnt before – completion is the key; means to completion is just unnecessary detail.

Smiles beamed across the room as children hurriedly focus on collecting as many plastic balls as possible. Again, the level of concentration the task requires means that a child can only focus on achievement, offering the opportunity to heal any mental scars that may be present.

## **CASE STUDY: THE TALE OF THE CAT UNDER THE CAR**

Leaving ACER behind, a group of ten children aged between 7-11 years old climb stairs, hills and slopes. Arriving at a quiet street, which soon becomes the playground, the game at this moment is hide and seek. The professor, an expert in helping children affected by abuse and well-respected by the children and families of Eldorado, turns his back and everyone flees. On his turning, nothing lies in his sight, only dust. One child is pretending he's a cat. Neatly folded, he places himself underneath a car. He is motionless and silent. The only noise is his heart beating, but even that he manages to quieten. For now he's invisible, to the professor, to the neighbourhood, to me. No one can catch him; he knows it and believes it. He waits until the professor passes by. He holds his breath. The view is restricted by the body of the car, so he shuts his eyes and listens to the footsteps. The crackling of glass, the slight kick of a pebble, whatever he needs to listen to, he takes it in to further build his knowledge of where the professor is situated. He pounces out from underneath the car, running to the finishing line. His height doesn't affect his chances, nothing does. He's won.

Despite their circumstances that the children and young people in Eldorado are faced with, they are not afraid to express themselves. Bravely, and maturely, allowing themselves to get caught up in their imagination, their thoughts, without losing focus of the task in hand. Nothing will stop them from achieving. There is no doubt that the workers and the ethos of ACER combined have helped them obtain this mind-set. Successfully setting themselves as role models, they are there to guide.

Jack of all trades, masters of none, they are not. Multi-skilled and multi-talented with a clear-cut understanding of what these children and young people need, they are.





## WORKSHOP: DREAMS



*The Dreams of Eldorado*

### Formula

During the dreams workshop, each child and young person in the group chooses a piece of card. As previously mentioned, this importance of choice must not be underestimated. Children and young people affected by deprivation, abuse and violence often have their choice, or their right to it, snatched. A six year old boy who witnessed a violent sexual attack on his mother has no choice. An eight year old girl who is sexually exploited by a family member and his friends, has no choice. In effective workshops, there is always choice. Choice affirms the individuality of a person, whose choice may have been removed. The card has two sides; one side is a space to fill with each individual's dreams of today, and the other, their dreams of the future. Once the drawings are complete, each person takes it in turn to share their dreams with the group.

### Result

Despite the cards that the children and young people of Eldorado have been dealt with, it was true to say that they set their sights high; and the dreams workshop was proof of this. Although children and young people affected by violence and blighted by extreme poverty are more likely to automatically shut away their dreams than those who have not, with the right care and support a glimmer of hope and the thought of a future is all it takes for them to realise that they have the potential to achieve.





## WORKSHOP: COLLAGE

### Formula

The collage workshop is a very simple and effective way for children and young people to work as a team, or individually, to create something unique to them. Each person chooses one part of the neighbourhood in which they live that they want to create using paper and felt tips. They design it from their view, their opinion and their choice. At the end of the session, everyone's designs are displayed and come together to create a mini neighbourhood, in this case Eldorado, constructed through its children's eyes. Enabling a child to draw and create objects and sights that they see on a daily basis which hold negative impacts in a safe environment empowers a child to overcome those experiences and start the healing process.



### Case study

Crying, unable to concentrate, he sat, shoulders tensed, his head heavy facing the floor. His forehead was crumpled. Projecting his despair, he breathed erratically. He took a breath in, held it and looked up. Ironing out his forehead he leaned forward as the instructions of the workshop were explained. His eyes and ears sponged the information as he calmly reached for the coloured pens. Something had clicked; he was lost again, though this time not in his sadness. He was lost in his imagination.

The boy was one of 34 children and young people who attended the collage workshop, all of whom were determined to stamp their mark, their opinion, on the paper, in order to create the truth. An in-depth interpretation of the drawings is not necessary, the designs speak far louder for themselves than a textbook analysis. Hearts, houses, stairs, families underneath letters reading 'united'. Palm trees, butterflies, birds. Suns and clouds passing over countless dogs were just a few of the images rapidly taking their place. Energy was running high, the temperature in the room increased as people hurried to create their perception. A boy took the scissors. In what seemed like seconds he had established his role as the shape-creator. He began to cut. Cats, rats, cars and people were flying into the eagerly awaiting hands as he took requests for what designs were needed. He was a key cog in a chain of many, developing an authentic display. Each person had a role to play and they constituted it for themselves. It was their choice. As the workshop came to an end the designs were displayed to reveal a collection of colourful shapes, all uniquely decorated. But there was something missing, the guns, the drugs, the raw violence that we here all too much about in the media? A silent decision was made, no words were needed and the children and young people had collectively decided to sieve out the sand to reveal the gold, the Eldorado of hope through its people's eyes. It was not a deception of life there; it showed the foundations of the community, of what the people in the community had created. It was the real, stripped back Eldorado that has been created thanks to the ethos of ACER.

The positive impact that the workshop had made on the group was clear. Naturally, there were varying degrees. The children and young people slowly dispersed, leaving just two at the end. They were desperately creating more of their thoughts to add to the collage. One of them was the boy who wouldn't stop crying at the beginning. That something that clicked had obviously stayed in place. The hard part isn't helping someone to experience well-being; its maintenance is the real test.

## **INSIGHT INTO ACER'S APPROACH**

A critical mistake, arguably often made, is to turn someone in need away for the sake of bureaucracy; a form to be filled. I wouldn't return after being turned away, would you? But for me, it is unlikely that the effect of this rejection would have a dramatic impact of my life and future. But for the boy who is being encouraged to join a gang, murder gang rivals or sell crack to his friends, undeniably the effects of slamming a door in his face, instructing him to sign up and come back once the form has been processed, could last a lifetime. In Brazil's favelas, adolescent males are most at risk of gang violence. In London, it is a similar demographic which is most at risk, but the way the issue is dealt with is vastly different and more often than not there is a sign-up process. It's time for the UK to leave the door open and put an end to risking someone's future, and potentially, life, for the sake of a signature.

Children, young people and families affected by drugs, violence, crime, sexual exploitation and abuse can be hard to reach, and there are perfect hiding places behind a multiplex of iron, wood and bricks across the hills surrounding ACER. The opportunity for people to disappear into the alleyways doesn't affect the work of the seven social workers at ACER, nothing does. They each have 33 families who all have complex issues that put their children at risk of harm. During one afternoon we visited three families. The first family was a mother who often tries to hide away, not today though; she greets us with a smile and laughs, suggesting we should take her and her children away from here. The visit today is not taking place in order to tick a box; the social worker cares too much for that to be the motive. He's human, normal; he speaks to her like he speaks to his friends or family. Why should he treat her differently?

We arrived at the next family's house, there were two children there, familiar faces I'd met at the project, but something was different. Inside the project's walls vulnerability is disguised, maybe it's left at the door due to the comfort and safety that ACER provides. But at the children's family house that day, where drugs and violence feature more often than not, it was on display. The mother invited us in, but we were not there to sit opposite each other to talk about their issues; their problems were clear, and they too were on display. We were there to play games with the children and we went into the street to draw ten clearly marked boxes on the tarmac, its hopscotch. Immediately the children got involved, there was no time to waste. The mother watched, laughing; then, naturally without force, the moment to talk arrived. The trust between the social worker and the family was so visible you could almost touch it. There wasn't a notebook or form in sight, there wasn't a reason to write anything down, doing so would have broken the fluidness of the meeting.

The social workers at ACER are facilitating the work that they sign up to do – empower people to make a positive change. They haven't spent years being trained to follow rules, there's no need for that in Eldorado. The requirement there is people, human interaction which offers support to others in order to improve their lives. It's not complex, far from it, its basic, it's human nature, and it works.



“Eldorado, one of the poorest favelas (slums) of Greater São Paulo...plagued by...violence” is the Economist’s perception of Eldorado. This acuity joins a whole host of other negativities. But what the reports fail to mention is Eldorado’s sense of community. The news doesn’t disclose details of the self-sufficiency of the people who have been forced to create their own world because they have been cut out from the map and carefully unpicked from the ‘real’ one. There is no discussion in the papers of the multitude of talented entrepreneurs that fill the streets, the favela scientists who make their own washing liquid, the market sellers who have created boxes which allow buyers to carry their eggs home with a handle and the bartenders who brew their own drinks. All of these aspects of Eldorado have been swept out of sight from the outside world, but they’re there, mingling with the violence and drugs, they’re there.

A lack of political will has forced Eldorado’s residents to design their own city, with its own rules, for its own people. It’s unique and somehow it works. However, the lessons learnt from ACER are not those of segregation, forcing people to create their own infrastructure in order to survive; its listening to the children and understanding their needs; using art, in all its forms to help them overcome extreme violence and abuse.



## Salvador

With a history of over 500 years, Salvador, North East Brazil, is an impressive combination of ancient and modern, where shining apartment blocks tower over crumbling colonial establishments. The comparison between extreme wealth and raw poverty is as clear as it is in São Paulo, with the poor outweighing the rich significantly. As with many cities across Brazil, the drug of choice is crack cocaine, and reminders of its destruction are visible on every street, under every bridge and above every beach. Brazil looms large in a trend toward increasing illegal drug use in emerging nations from South Africa to Argentina whose recent economic growth has made them even more lucrative drug-trafficking markets. Brazil is one of the world's biggest cocaine markets, with an estimated one million users, but is likely these statistics are grossly underestimated due to lack of resource to establish accurate data. Naturally, this level of addiction feeds violence. Military police crawl the streets but it appears that their presence only diffuses a small percentage of the brutal violent attacks in a city suffocating in extreme social, educational and political problems.





## **INTERVIEW: SYLVIA RODRIGUES\*, ART THERAPIST**

Sylvia Rodrigues\*, an art therapist from São Paulo, has been working in Salvador for the past three years. On a daily basis she works in some of the most violent areas on earth to help children, young people and women unravel the complex and choking effects of sexual abuse during childhood, enabling them to heal. Gaining an understanding of art forms that facilitate the healing process for individuals who have experience sexual violence was the driving force behind my research and Sylvia's knowledge and experience played a key part in facilitating that objective. Sylvia taught me a fascinating technique: Mandala art, a unique and powerful way that uses imagery in circular forms, which are interpreted by the subconscious mind. The circular motion of it lends itself to an individual's natural fascination with circles, offering them a sense of completeness.

One of her clients, who suffered years of sexual abuse from her father, refused to talk. Her mother was more than aware of the abuse, but trapped by poverty, she refused to leave him and her suffering still continues. Unlike most others in this girl's life, Sylvia never gave up on her and after six months of silence during their regular meetings and countless Mandala designs, the artistic creations flowed and she started to talk. The clear impact of art in this case to help someone release deeply set distress cannot be denied. This example of her work does not feature in isolation. Another young woman she supports was being violently and sexually abused by her partner, a routine she had endured for most of her life by an array of perpetrators. Within two months of intensive work using the Mandala technique, the transformation took place. The woman left her partner, escaping torture and for the first time in her existence she started taking part in life. In addition to adolescents and adults, young children make up a significant proportion of her clients. Children that are sexually abused often either leave their homes in search of a life free from exploitation or they are forced to leave by their parents due to the stigmatisation, particularly for boys, that comes with this type of violence; and it is for this reason that boys make up most of the clients who have experienced sexual abuse that Sylvia works with at the centre for children living on the streets.

During her career, Sylvia worked as an art therapist at a women's prison on the outskirts of Salvador where 99% of her patients had experienced sexual abuse at some point during their lives. Similar to life on the outside, crack cocaine is used by the majority of detainees and the need for support is desperate. Using the Mandala approach, Sylvia's work with women affected by substance misuse in this setting was so powerful it started to affect the drug trade and she experienced the same threat that many of her clients had received: death.

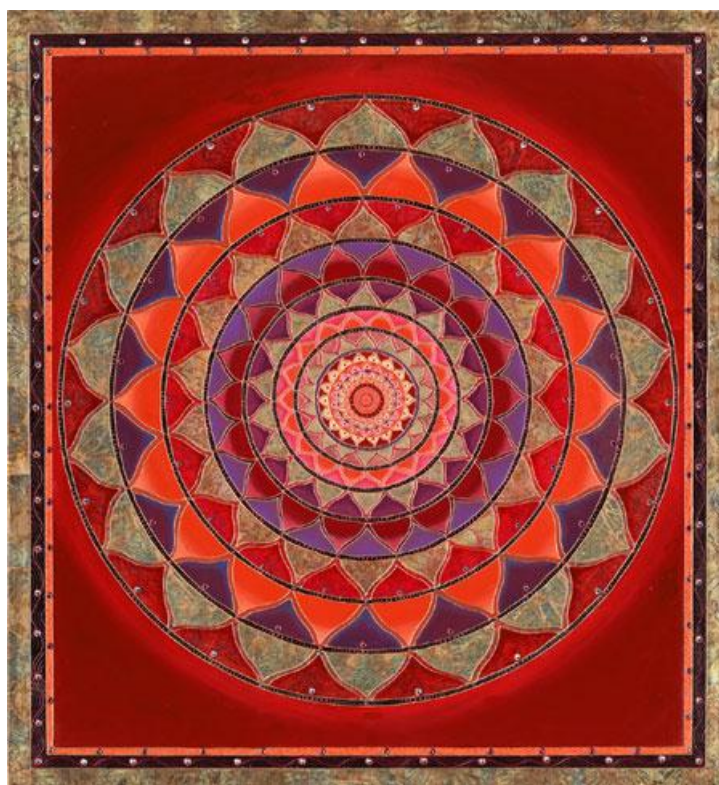
The process of overcoming the effects of childhood sexual abuse can be successfully achieved through expanding consciousness through the Mandala technique, which uses the brain holistically in order to access thoughts and feelings, which have been oppressed for a significant period of time, in a safe environment.

Originally from São Paulo, she has witnessed both the North East and South of Brazil. Despite many years supporting sexually abused children and women, it is more than clear that its prevalence and reality still affects her. She shakes her head and looks down in despair. She explains her theories of the underlying cause of the abuse...poverty, ignorance and 'entitlement'.



## MANDALA ART

*Example image*



## Viva a Vida

Viva a Vida, or live life in English, aims to empower street children and young people across Salvador, Brazil, supporting them to gain confidence and to develop so that they can achieve their goals. This is done through two main projects: a drug intervention and support service for substance-abusing street children and a school project for young people at risk of issues including violence, exploitation, drugs and abuse.

"I'm going to tell you a little about my history. I was born with my mother and then she left me in a place when I was small. Some people took me in to raise. They raised me until I was 12 years old, when I met my mother and father. They threatened my grandfather with aggression. They took me and it was then that I began to suffer. My father hit my sister, mistreated and scratched her face. He knifed me. It was when my father killed my grandmother that I turned to drugs. I smoked marihuana, went to all the shelters, wandered through the streets. It was then that I became an addict and I couldn't stop smoking any more and I began to use crack. It was then that I got to know Viva a Vida, I already wanted to be in treatment."

(15 year old Claudio)

## WORKSHOP: TRUST

The importance of an exercise that gains the trust, required to form an effective relationship between a therapist or support worker and an individual affected by violence, should not be underestimated. The girl who is abused by her father, while her mother sits in silence; the boy who is forced to kill by his friends have both been forced to increase their criteria for someone aiming to gain their trust.

In order to start the formation of trust, sitting in a group we each write secrets on an individual piece of paper. The secrets are folded into the paper by the person that wrote them. Everyone stands in a circle with the secret in their left hand. One by one the paper is passed behind everyone's backs into the hands of the person to the left. Before long, the group members have lost track of their secrets. They know they are behind someone's back, scrunched up in their hand, but how do they know that person won't open their secrets and share them with the group? No one opens the secrets up and the pieces of paper are returned to the middle of the group and destroyed. One by one the group members talk about how it made them feel to know that a secret, that perhaps hadn't even been admitted properly to themselves, could be revealed at any moment.





## Rio de Janeiro

With reports suggesting that those born in a favela are six times more likely to have their lives ended as children than someone born into a wealthy family living outside of a favela, it is clear that a 'postcode lottery' is as present, if not more, in Brazil as it is in the UK. Extreme deprivation, limited access to health services, education and the bare necessities that enable people to have an equal chance in order to live a long, healthy and prosperous life are some of the issues that these communities face on a daily basis. Violence plays its part, of course. "A stray bullet has no address" is an all too common a phrase heard amongst this city's favelas, which are home to over 20% of Rio's residents.

Rocinha, Rio de Janeiro, home to an estimated 300,000 residents, is thought to be one of the largest and most notorious favela in Latin America. Countless news stories, blogs and documentaries paint a picture of the reality of this informal settlement, which, up until 2011, had been in the hands of drug gangs for over three decades, fermenting violence.

In November 2011 the hopes of the next generation were raised as police helicopters flew over the hilled favela advising residents that Rocinha was being pacified. Heavily armed police took over. The objective was to bring peace. However, reports of rape and stories of stray police bullets piercing the thin walls of the concrete maze and catching innocent people in their sleep soon replaced the 'heroic' articulation of the supposed pacification. In an area where police shoot three times more people than in the United States, following this said pacification Rio state secretary ironically claimed 'What we have achieved is the liberation of these people from the rule of the gun.'

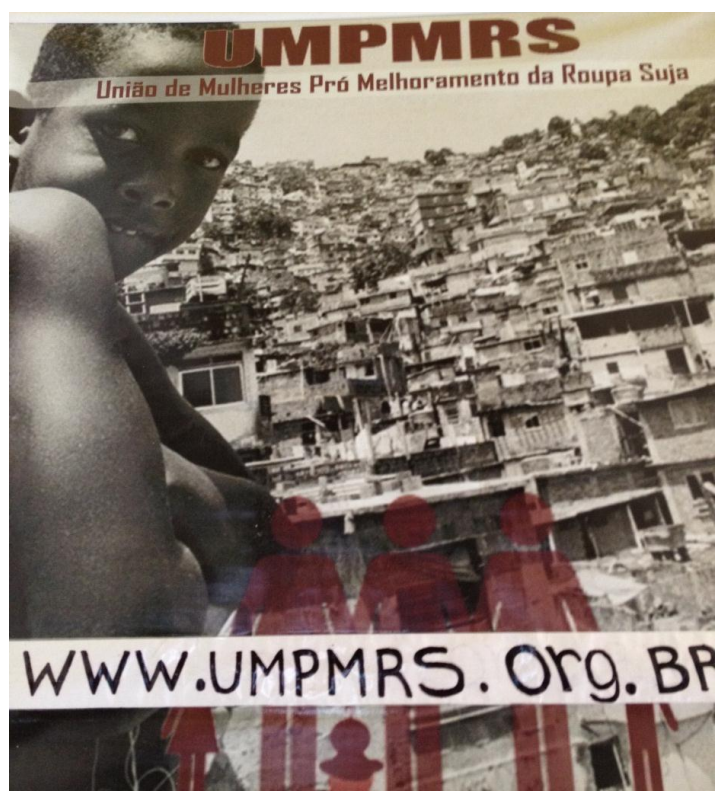


## União de Mulheres Pró-melhoramentos da Roupa Suja

The União de Mulheres Pró-melhoramentos da Roupa Suja, or the union of women for the betterment of the Roupa Suja, is situated at the top of the hill in reportedly the most dangerous and least visited district in Rocinha where drug abuse, sexual exploitation and alcoholism are commonplace. The need for a safe and clean environment is absolutely critical for the 140 children attending the centre.

Addicted to crack cocaine, affected by mental health problems or other social issues often render the parents of the children who attend the centre throughout the day unable to provide the basic requirements a child needs. Those parents who are fit for work take the very few jobs available and are left with a difficult choice: lock their children in the house with a candle for light or leave them outside in the street until they return from work, leaving them exposed and at risk to gangs, sexual exploitation and violence.

Children in three specific age groups, aged 0-18 months, 18 months-three years and three-six years, come here from 8am to 4pm. They receive two meals a day, a shower, a mattress to rest on and a tooth brush. These are the basics, what the staff here do is so much more than simply ticking off the bare requirements a child needs. They teach them life lessons through art, music and education. They are tough with them but allow them to be children at the same time. All the children have been hugely affected by the violence they've been exposed to and the lack of concentration is a sign of the effects.



## WORKSHOP: FINGER PRINTING

### Formula

With a group of up to six children, three paint pots are placed onto the middle of the table or floor. Each child makes the patterns of their choice.



### Case study

Samuel, a young boy was one of the members of the finger printing workshop. Physically abused throughout his life and so affected by the drug fuelled existence his family leads, his cognitive development has been significantly affected and his mental development doesn't match his age. His eyes are everywhere, but nowhere at the same time. He can barely speak; he's four years old. His emotions are all over the place and predominately aggressive. It took him a while to start painting shapes with his fingers on the paper, but he got there, for five minutes he focused, perhaps the longest he's ever concentrated in his life.



## **UMPMRS: THE WHOLE FAMILY APPROACH USING ART**

In cases where physical and sexual violence, drugs and the negative aspects of gang culture are present in everyday life, the project recognises the importance of working with the whole family. Women's groups are run to offer support and advice on ways in which violence can be removed from the home. Art plays a key role in this process. The women in the group come to UPMRS because they want to make a change. Without force or threat, the first hurdle has been cleared and the signs that the women want to make a change are present. The mothers sit in a circle facing each other with a pile of pages from newspapers, magazines and leaflets in front of them, each woman takes a small pile. They fold every page over and over, starting in one corner and working their way across, creating a thin line which is curved to form a circle. Similar to the effects of the Mandala technique as the circles flow, the words shortly follow. The circular shapes are stuck one top of each other to create a bowl shape, then glue is applied across them all to fix them.

One woman who endured years of sexual violence at the hands of her family, fled to the streets when she became pregnant, where she would spend the next ten years raising her child. The emotional and physical trauma of life had taken its toll, and after years of fighting she pleaded for help. She ended up in Rocinha with Marcia, who set up the project when she was 11 years old, and her team at UPMRS. Taking part in this group allows her stories, her life, to make sense, to start un-shedding layer upon layer of deep set wounds, inside and out. She focuses so much on the creation of circles, she didn't even look like she knew she was talking, but it was clear the wounds were healing. Her face became alive, maybe alive for the first time.





## **AFROREGGAE: A PROFILE OF AN ORGANISATION USING CREATIVE THERAPY TO HEAL THE WOUNDS OF VIOLENCE**

AfroReggae is an organisation born in the early 90s out of extreme armed violence against the urban poor, where the targets were primarily children and young people. In July 1993, eight 'street children' were murdered by a "social cleansing" death squad as they slept on the steps of the Candelária church in Rio. The squad was made up of off-duty policeman. Weeks later, a report of another similar death squad entering the Vigário Geral favela during the night to massacre 21 innocent residents hit the news. The favela became a melting pot of unstoppable war-like violence. AfroReggae re-located to Vigário Geral to drag its people from the depths of destruction in order to install and re-build the hopes and dreams of a shattered community.

AfroReggae promotes social justice using art and education to bridge differences and create the foundations with which to build sustainability and exercise citizenship. The work the organisation carries out across Rio de Janeiro is a true inspiration to young people, providing opportunity where others see no solution. As young people emerge through the art workshops, they are trained to become leaders within their own communities and encouraged to become artists. AfroReggae is not just an organisation, it's a movement. It's an unstoppable power that changes regular thinking practice. It is a movement that is and will continue to transform communities. The art they use comes in many forms: music, as a means of expression; drawing, as a means of unravelling complex emotions; and martial arts including capoeira, to teach control and relieve aggression.

Between the years of 1987 and 2001, 3937 minors were recorded to have been murdered in Rio alone. It is a number that gives reason to many of the young people in Rio's favelas, particularly young boys, believing that their lives will be ended in their early 20s; to be murdered by police, rival gangs, or perhaps even their own. This is what is expected, and, with shocking stats like these, who can blame them.

Fortunately, for many communities in Rio and across Brazil, the AfroReggae movement is growing. In fact, it has become so powerful that countries across the world are utilising its approach – giving young people the opportunity to act as mentors to their communities by using creative therapies. It is organisations like these that brought me to Brazil. A country packed with inspirational leaders who are pioneers in patching up years of violence and decay in order to build a solid foundation for the next generation to make their mark.

## **Conclusion**

Through my work and interest, I recognised a need for an increase in well-established art therapy techniques to help individuals who have been abused during childhood. I identified that gang violence and child sexual abuse are still areas that require particular attention in the UK. With a rise in gang culture across inner cities, the need to support those affected by some of the negative aspects of a gang is at its highest. In addition, despite its frequency, child sexual abuse remains an overlooked issue. This stigma and taboo must be broken down so that children, young people and families can get the right support that they need. Brazil is incredibly forward-thinking in its approach of creative ways that help children overcome the long-lasting and damaging effects of these prolific forms of abuse.

Abused children have had choice removed from their lives. When a child or young person is given a choice of creating something unique to them, it can return control to their lives, allowing them to make the most of educational, employment and social opportunities.

During my time in Brazil, I learnt specific art therapy techniques from experts working with children at organisations in Eldorado, Salvador and Rio de Janeiro. The use of collage, freedom of expression and Mandala art, which uses the creation of circles, are all highly valuable tools to help children and young people unravel the complex emotions that are often experienced as a result of abuse. The effectiveness and power of art must not be underestimated.

## Special thanks

I would like to give special thanks to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, for believing in and funding this research, and to the fantastic project leaders, art therapists and non-governmental organisations that welcomed me into their projects and lives.

The knowledge and expertise that I was able to capture in this report is a result of the fantastic people that I was able to work with during my time in Brazil. I would like to especially thank all the staff, children, young people and families the following organisations, whom I owe this report to:

ACER Brasil [www.acerbrasil.org.br](http://www.acerbrasil.org.br)

Viva a Vida [www.vivaavida.org](http://www.vivaavida.org)

Action for Brazil's Children [www.abctrust.org.uk](http://www.abctrust.org.uk)

União de Mulheres Pró-melhoramentos da Roupa Suja [www.umpmrs.org.br](http://www.umpmrs.org.br)

Sylvia Rodrigues\*

### **Further information**

To read more about art therapy in Brazil please visit: <http://www.georginapetathompson.tumblr.com>

To find out more about the findings in this report or to contact the author please email: [georginapeta@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:georginapeta@hotmail.co.uk)

### **Winston Churchill Memorial Trust**

The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust offer Travelling Fellowships to British citizens to travel overseas, to bring back knowledge and best practice for the benefit of others in their UK professions and communities.

To find out more about the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust please visit: [www.wcmt.org.uk](http://www.wcmt.org.uk).

***"With opportunity comes responsibility"***

Winston Churchill

---

<sup>i</sup> NSPCC June 2012

[http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/statistics/prevalence\\_and\\_incidence\\_of\\_child\\_abuse\\_and\\_neglect\\_wda48740.html](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/statistics/prevalence_and_incidence_of_child_abuse_and_neglect_wda48740.html)

<sup>ii</sup> Home office November 2011 <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/crime/ending-gang-violence/gang-violence-summary?view=Binary>

<sup>iii</sup> Human Rights Watch [http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/related\\_material/brazil\\_2012.pdf](http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/related_material/brazil_2012.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.vivaavida.org/what-we-do/testimonials/>