Background

Many children living with chronic conditions struggle psychologically and report different feelings to their peers.

What we did

An eight-week long art therapy group was held at a local art centre near the children’s hospital called the TAFFI Art Therapy Group (Therapy, Art, Friendship and Flourishing in Illness). Art therapy helps children to express difficult feelings about their life experiences within a therapeutic relationship. The art therapy group combined art and creative self-expression with mindfulness exercises to help children explore their feelings and develop coping skills.

Who took part

Thirteen children (7 boys and 6 girls) living with chronic conditions such as diabetes, epilepsy, and cystic fibrosis participated in the first two TAFFI Art Therapy Groups. We hope that another 40 children will participate over the course of this PhD study.

How we collected our data

The children completed questionnaires before and after the group to see if the group helped them cope better or feel differently about having a chronic illness.

Focus groups were held after the art therapy group finished in which parents and friends were invited to talk about the group and what they found helpful or what they felt could be improved.

We also used Audio Image Recordings (AIRs) to capture what changes the children noticed in themselves and what caused these changes to occur. Each child completed a Reflect Interview (RI) in which they chose two artworks they made during the group to talk about with the art therapist and as their experience of the group. The recording of this interview played over a still image of the artworks to create the Audio Image Recording. Through this novel and creative research method each, children’s individual experience can be both seen and heard through an expression and in their own words.

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