The British Association of Dramatherapists

Annual Conference
9th - 11th January 2026

Shadows to Strength:

Transforming Group Dynamics in Dramatherapy



Welcome from the BADth Directors

We are delighted to welcome you to our annual conference, where we will explore the transformative power of Dramatherapy.

Our theme, “Shadows to Strength,” is an urgent invitation to look deeply at the forces we engage with daily: the unconscious patterns, systemic tensions, and relational dynamics that shape every space we work in.

We are called to navigate these "shadows" and transform them into potent sources of insight, strength, and collective healing. As Sue Jennings reminds us, *“The group becomes a microcosm of society, where roles can be explored, challenged, and transformed through dramatic action.”* Our unique tools enable us to bring light and action to what remains hidden, rehearsing new ways of being.

This critical reflection extends beyond the clinical room to the wider systems in which we operate: our teams, organisations, and the structure of BADth itself. How do we uphold ethical and creative practice and actively contribute to necessary systemic change?

This conference offers a vital platform for all practitioners, students, and allies to engage in this work. Join us to gain fresh perspectives, explore innovative approaches, and connect with a community dedicated to the therapeutic power of drama. Your presence and voice are essential. Prepare to be inspired, challenged, and transformed as we journey together from Shadows to Strength.

Friday 9th January

10:00 - 11:00	Delegates Welcome
11:00 - 12:00	Opening Ceremony
12:00 - 13:00	Lunch
13:00 - 14:30	Keynote: *Does my shadow look big in this?*
14:30 - 15:00	Break
15:00 - 16:00	From Discussion to Strength: Pop-Up Sessions
18:00 - 22:00	Dinner & Evening Social

Saturday 10th January

From 08:00	Delegates Welcome
10:00 - 11:30	Breakout Sessions
11:30 - 12:00	Break
12:00 - 13:30	Breakout Sessions
13:30 - 14:30	Lunch
14:30 - 16:00	Breakout Sessions
16:00 - 16:30	Break
16:30 - 18:00	Breakout Sessions
From 18:00	Evening in Glasgow

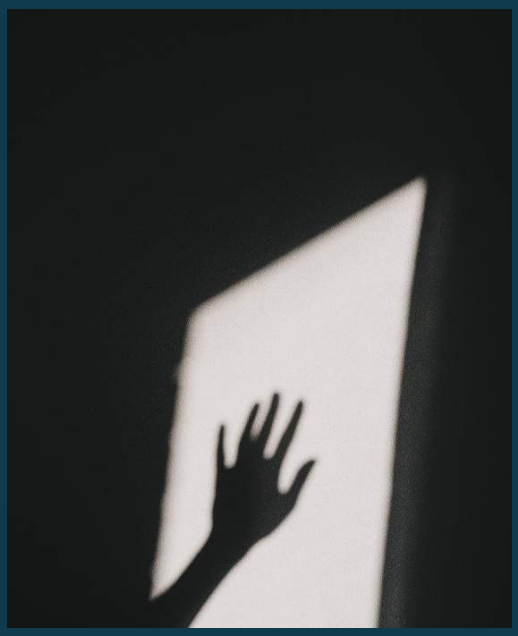
Sunday 11th January

09:00 - 10:00	Delegates Welcome
10:00 - 11:00	Session: *In Defence of the small and vulnerable*
11:00 - 11:30	Q&A with the Panel
11:30 - 12:30	Break
12:30 - 14:30	Closing Ceremony

Friday 9th January, 13:00 - 14:30

Keynote

Does my shadow look big in this?



Lizzie Palmer has been delivering the Adult Dramatherapy Service at Dundee Rep & Scottish Dance Theatre for the last seven years. When it launched in 1994, this was the first service of it's kind in the UK, and continues to thrive now in its 31st year.

It is government-funded, free to access, and is often celebrated as a 'beacon' of the dramatherapy community in Scotland; in this key note, Lizzie explores how shadow shows up in between the flashes of guiding light. She draws on the history of Dramatherapy at Dundee Rep and stories of practice from colleagues across Scotland, examining the relationship between shadow and therapist, client and institution, and how spending time in the darkness can be a catalyst for change.

Lizzie Palmer manages and delivers Dundee Rep & Scottish Dance Theatre's Adult Dramatherapy Service, funded by Dundee Health & Social Care Partnership. She is also a visiting lecturer on the QMU Dramatherapy MSc, course coordinator for the QMU Introduction to Dramatherapy Short Course, and a Creative Clinical Supervisor.



Friday 9th January, 15:00 - 16:00

From Discussion to Strength: Pop-Up Sessions

Open Discussion

We are pleased to introduce this dynamic, participant-led session dedicated to spontaneous connection and collaborative learning, directly supporting the conference theme of Shadows to Strength: Transforming Group Dynamics in Dramatherapy.

This session is a dedicated space for delegates to gather and explore the themes, issues, and creative ideas that feel most relevant to them right now. This is an "un-conference" style format where no formal presentations or pre-planned facilitation are expected. Instead, delegates are invited to pitch a conversation topic or clinical challenge that they would like to discuss with others.

To get involved, simply propose your topic! If a topic resonates, interested delegates will join the person who pitched the idea, forming an immediate, focused group discussion. The Value of this session is immense, offering a brilliant opportunity to move beyond the scheduled program and engage in truly peer-led learning. You can gain diverse perspectives on shared professional interests and network with colleagues in a meaningful way.

Come ready to share your current thinking, challenge your ideas, and co-create the conversation!



Saturday 10th January, 10:00 - 11:30

Breathing Space

Interactive Session

Whilst accompanying a loved one through the shadowlands of anxiety it was a shepherd who possessed the care connection needed to accompany parent and child out of the shadows and beyond the security of familiarity, certainty and control.



The care connection of shepherd to sheep, her knowledge, skill, strength and kindness, along with the calming countryside, furthered the journey out of the shadows into the light of landscape and restoration of liberty.

In The Book of Psalms in The Bible the role of the shepherd is key to the shadows of the valley of death. The shadowlands can be seen as a place to traverse in a wider context where they coexist with peaceful pasture, provision and protection.

Breathing Spaces make use of the intersection between faith and dramatherapy. Using scripture* as text and text as a resource they are quiet spaces for rest, relaxation, reflection and re-sourcing, taking the words off the page for mindful and embodied consideration.
In this session there will be time and space to find peaceful pasture and explore the elements of the Psalm that co-exist with the shadows as well as draw from the facilitator's experience of witnessing the role of the shepherd first hand.

*Judeo-Christian

Please note this session involves periods of lying down and will require participants to provide a yoga mat



Rebekah Porter is a Nottingham based Dramatherapist with additional training in Parent and Child Therapy and Sherborne Developmental Movement. She has taken Dramatherapy into health and education settings, private practice and training institutions and published her work with Adults with ASD in Dramatherapy.

Rebekah has a special interest in the intersection between faith and practice and is currently developing the use of scripture as text and resource for embodied contemplation.

Saturday 10th January, 10:00 - 11:30

Bring Everything to the Party

Experiential Workshop

Using the carefully laddered structure of a Developmental Transformations (DvT) group play, this session will explore how 'shadows' in group dynamics can be included, embodied, and perhaps transformed.

DvT is a highly physical, dynamic, and improvisational approach. It draws on techniques from Dance Movement (Marion Chace), Theatre (Meisner, Grotowski, and Viola Spolin), and the psychological theories of Piaget and Winnicott. Philosophical influences include Derrida's deconstruction and Foucault's work on power and privilege.

This session will function as a mini, condensed group demonstration, allowing delegates to observe the workings of this powerful improvisational model first-hand.



Eleanor Zeal is a Roehampton trained Dramatherapist, practicing for 25 years, primarily in schools.

Searching for an improvisational model of Dramatherapy, found DvT (David Read Johnson's Developmental Transformations) and has been a DvT practitioner and trainer since 2008.
Also works as a DT supervisor.



Saturday 10th January, 10:00 - 11:00

Presentation &Workshop

Inside/Outside: Exploration of a Dramatherapist's internal conflict when working with offenders in a high security prison.



What are the challenges and barriers faced when attempting to facilitate group dramatherapy in a high security prison, and how can the therapist tolerate their own internal conflict as it arises in the moment and in reflection/supervision?

Through a combination of oral presentation and creative expression, this workshop invites participants to acknowledge and sit with tension, uncertainty and discomfort as it follows the Dramatherapists physical and emotional journey as they navigate the setting, the characters, the stories and the questions that come with it.

Lizzie Palmer manages and delivers Dundee Rep & Scottish Dance Theatre's Adult Dramatherapy Service, funded by Dundee Health & Social Care Partnership. She is also a visiting lecturer on the QMU Dramatherapy MSc, course coordinator for the QMU Introduction to Dramatherapy Short Course, and a Creative Clinical Supervisor.



Saturday 10th January, 11:00 - 11:30

Presentation

Honouring the BADth Charity's legacy through their final research grant: Exploring Dramatherapy with Migrant and Refugee Populations

This session explores the findings of the final BADth research grant (2024), focused on dramatherapy with migrant and refugee populations. The project combined a systematic literature review with a collaborative inquiry involving practitioners.

Eleanor will first present the systematic review findings (published in Dramatherapy), examining the current landscape of practice, therapeutic aims, methods, and outcomes. Guidance on conducting systematic reviews will also be offered.

The second part will share insights from a co-authored publication (with Aisling Murray and Mariana Steffen) created through practitioner workshops. This collective inquiry harnesses field knowledge to address literature gaps and deepen our understanding of this client group's needs and strengths.

This timely session reflects on dramatherapy's response to increasing global displacement and serves as a tribute to the BADth charity's legacy in fostering research on vital humanitarian issues.



Eleanor Keiller is a qualified dramatherapist and researcher. She is currently undertaking doctoral research in dramatherapy at Queen Mary University of London and convenes the BADth research committee. She has lectured at the University of Derby and has published widely on children and young people's mental health and dramatherapeutic practice.

Saturday 10th January, 12:00 - 13:30

Security from Shadow: Supporting ethically non monogamous clients in dramatherapy

Interactive Workshop



As therapists, we aim to hold space for diverse identities and experiences—yet when it comes to relationship structures, many of us are still navigating unfamiliar terrain. This experiential and engaging workshop invites participants to explore ethical non-monogamy (ENM) in a supportive, open-hearted environment.

Together, we will begin by unpacking key terminology and concepts around ENM, offering a grounding in the language and lived realities of clients in consensually non-monogamous relationships. We will then turn the focus inward, gently exploring our own assumptions, biases, and questions about love, intimacy, and connection. Finally, we'll consider what working with this client group might look like in dramatherapeutic practice—drawing on creativity, embodiment, and play.

Whether you're completely new to ENM or already working with clients in these relationship models, this workshop offers a safe space to come as you are, celebrated diversity, and build confidence in your therapeutic approach. Expect discussion, reflection, and joyful exploration.

Lisa Christie is a Glasgow-based dramatherapist and supervisor. They specialize in supporting LGBTQIA+ and neurodivergent individuals towards self-acceptance. They also convene the BADth Scotland Nation Subcommittee and are passionate about GSRD education for therapists.



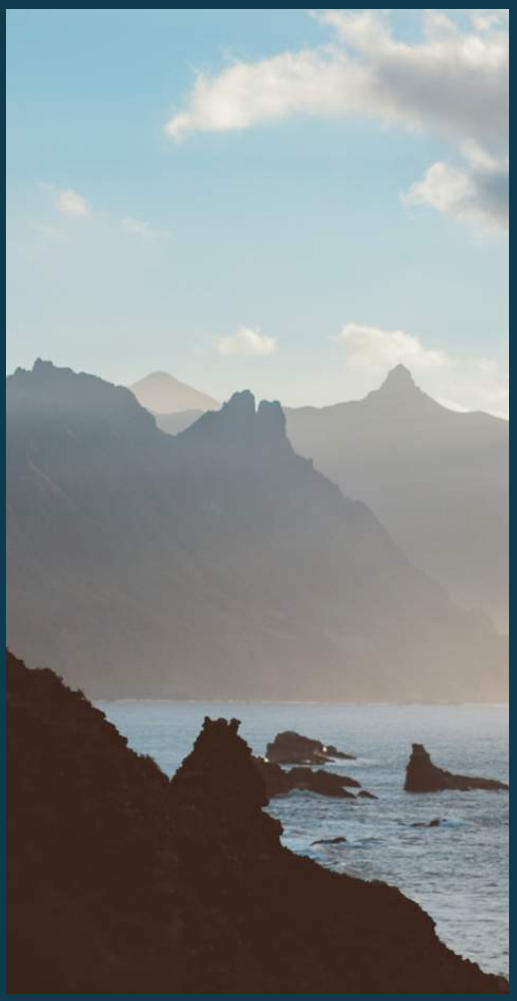
Abigail Nelson is an Edinburgh-based dramatherapist in private practice (online/in-person) specializing in neurodivergence, trauma, and identity with adults. She also runs dramatherapeutic and nature-based workshops, lectures at Queen Margaret University, and is passionate about aerial silks.



Saturday 10th January, 12:00 - 13:30

Interactive workshop

Exploring shadows through the Myth of Sedna the Sea Goddess



Drawing inspiration from the Inuit myth of Sedna the Sea Goddess and the importance of addressing the "shadow" (Clarissa Pinkola Estés), Gill Robertson and Lauren Bianchi present a participatory workshop on suppressed truths.

This session encourages you to look beyond the surface and uncover what lies on the seafloor sediment. Using Dramatherapy techniques, storytelling, embodied expression, and ritual—informed by the Sesame Approach and Jungian Psychology—participants will gain a deeper acquaintance with their shadow selves and explore how to integrate these vital energies. Join with openness and willingness to examine, within the safe container of the story.

Lauren Bianchi is a Glasgow-based Dramatherapist and Storyteller. Her practice focuses on working with disenfranchised groups, including her recent work with birth parents who have lost children to adoption.



Gill Robertson is a Dramatherapist (QMU 2024 graduate), theatre maker, and Artistic Director of Catherine Wheels Theatre Company. She works with children and adults in Edinburgh's schools and community settings.



Saturday 10th January, 12:00 - 12:30

Presentation

The Shadows of Disclosure: How queer-identifying dramatherapists navigate self-disclosure in the therapeutic encounter



This performative presentation addresses how queer sexuality and therapist self-disclosure implicitly shape dramatherapy sessions, often existing as a powerful, unspoken "shadow" largely ignored in professional discourse.

Grounded in heuristic inquiry and enriched by a focus group of queer-identifying dramatherapists, we delve into the nuanced, ethical complexities of queer identity disclosure.

Our findings reveal that self-disclosure is a fluid, relational negotiation influenced by implicit fears and power dynamics.

By courageously engaging with these shadow elements, we aim to empower dramatherapists to navigate sensitive disclosures with clarity and creativity, transforming what is hidden into a source of insight, authenticity, and collective strength.

Petros Petrou, Lewis Pickles, and Amelia Woodhouse are newly qualified dramatherapists whose practices are united by a focus on queer identity, innovative research, and marginalized voices. Their expertise spans NHS, education, and community settings, exploring areas such as myth and memory (Petros), death and loss (Lewis, also an Associate Lecturer at Goldsmiths), and somatic awareness and movement (Amelia, who works with Roundabout).







Saturday 10th January, 12:30 - 13:00

Presentation

Naming, navigating and overcoming the light and shadow of school-based dramatherapy: A qualitative research presentation



Around 40% of UK dramatherapists work in school settings, which are dynamic environments presenting both unique opportunities and significant systemic challenges. Despite this high presence, little research has explored how these settings impact our practice.

This session presents the findings of a new qualitative study that addressed this gap through semi-structured interviews with 12 school-based dramatherapists. The research identified key facilitators (light) and barriers (shadow) to practice, focusing on issues like accessibility, space, interdisciplinary collaboration, and the structures that support or restrict therapeutic work. Employment themes, such as short-term and sessional contracts, will also be explored.

Framed by the "Shadows to Strength" theme, the session invites you to consider how dramatherapists can transform these systemic tensions into opportunities for connection and change. Attendees will hear the findings before sharing their own experiences.

Eleanor Keiller is a qualified dramatherapist and researcher. She is currently undertaking doctoral research in dramatherapy at Queen Mary University of London and convenes the BADth research committee. She has lectured at the University of Derby and has published widely on children and young people's mental health and dramatherapeutic practice.



Saturday 10th January, 12:30 - 13:30

Panel

Navigating the Threshold: Student Voices on Group Dynamics and Professional Identity

This dynamic panel session offers a unique opportunity for Dramatherapy students to take centre stage and explore the practical application of the conference theme, 'Shadows to Strength,' within their training and emerging professional practice.

Facing the complexities of group dynamics is integral to becoming an effective Dramatherapist. This session will provide an honest, peer-to-peer discussion where students can share their experiences of transforming challenging or 'shadow' group moments in training - both as participants and as facilitators - into moments of professional growth and strength.

Attendees will gain vital insights into:

- Translating Theory into Practice: How theoretical understanding of group dynamics (e.g., resistance, cohesion, conflict) manifests in real-world training and placement settings.
- The Power of Peer Support: Strategies for using the training group as a crucible for personal and professional transformation.
- Embracing the Shadow: Learning to work with difficult group emotions, power imbalances, and emergent anxieties to foster deeper therapeutic connections.
- Developing Professional Identity: The impact of group work on defining one's unique voice and role as a future Dramatherapist.

Join us to hear from your peers as they reflect on their journey from students grappling with foundational concepts to emerging practitioners ready to step into their strength.



Saturday 10th January, 13:00 - 13:30

Presentation

Playback theatre for staff wellbeing

As a response to her Trust's staff survey results around burn out Clare proposed a continuous quality improvement (CQI) pilot offering two playback theatre sessions to staff in an NHS mental health and learning disability Trust. The rationale for the pilot was that the Trust had successfully embraced Swartz Rounds as a forum for staff to share their experiences together, without judgement, with the aim of reducing stress and improving compassionate care. Clare believed that Playback Theatre could offer an opportunity for interested staff to take this further, by witnessing their experiences played back to them, offering validation and emotional connection as time is given to hear and respond to their stories, and to see how it is received by others.

The CQI team and arts therapies team supported the project. London Playback Theatre Company were commissioned to provide the sessions and worked closely with Clare to present the proposal to the innovation panel, and to think about how best to offer the sessions. Clare will present the project with outcomes and learning.





Clare Hubbard is Arts Therapies Professional Lead for the Adult Mental Health Services in Hertfordshire Partnership University NHS Trust (HPFT), and a member of BADth's NHS sub-committee.

She has worked in the NHS as a Dramatherapist with adults experiencing mental health challenges since 2000. Clare is a BADth registered clinical supervisor, a qualified Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT) Practitioner, and an HCPC partner.

Saturday 10th January, 14:30 - 16:00

Dramatherapy Research / Publication Café

Research

This relaxed, café-style session is offered by the BADth Research Committee for members who are curious about sharing their work, presenting research, or publishing in the *Dramatherapy* Journal.

· Do you collect outcome data in your practice and wonder how to present it?
· Do you have client feedback you'd like to organise and share with the profession?
· Do you hold an interesting case you're considering writing up for publication?
· Do you have questions about client consent or ethical considerations when sharing therapeutic stories?
· Do you want support developing an idea or area of interest you'd like to turn into a small research project?
· Or, do you already have research experience and feel you would value from a reflective space to pause, reconnect with your work and support others who are beginning their research journey?

In this session, members of the BADth Research Committee will be on hand to talk through your ideas, answer questions, demystify the publishing process, and help you identify manageable next steps toward research or publication.

Whether you're taking your very first step or picking up an idea you've held for a while, you're warmly welcome to attend this relaxed session for guidance and support.

Marissa Green is a qualified Drama and Movement Therapist (2017), Mental Health Adviser at Anglia Ruskin University, Researcher, and Supervisor.



Eleanor Keiller is a qualified dramatherapist, researcher, and convenor of the BADth research committee. She is currently completing her doctorate at Queen Mary University of London.



Saturday 10th January, 14:45 - 15:45

Presentation & Performance

How does your shadow impact the group process?

Holly Stoppit presents a part-performance, part-lecture, part-social experiment using her interdisciplinary skills in Fooling, Internal Family Systems (IFS), public speaking, and research.

The session explores how our inner shadow parts—the voices and drivers in our heads—profoundly impact our facilitation style and the group process. Holly will share her personal story of how discovering and befriending the shadow parts that drove her to burnout, using meditation, IFS, and Fooling, transformed her practice.

You'll be guided through how shifting this relationship moves facilitation from being restrictive to spacious, trusting, and empowering. The session invites you to discover the impact this transformation is having on group process and reflect on your own facilitation style.

(Participation is consensual.)





Photo by Ciaro Sealey

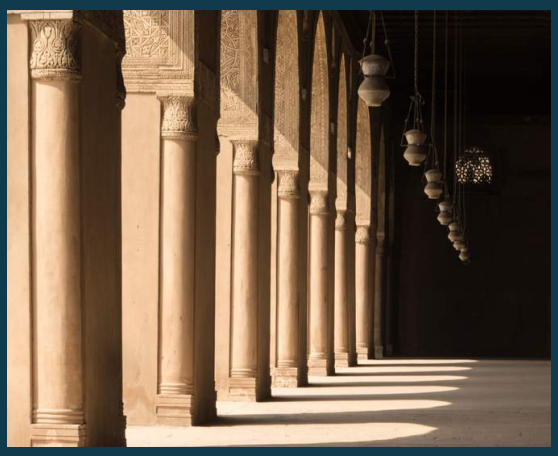
Holly Stoppit is a dramatherapist, IFS Therapist (Level 2), and supervisor who has designed group workshops since 2007.

Holly explores the meeting point of Fooling (solo improvisation where you embody the voices in your head) and IFS, through workshops, performances and blogs.

Saturday 10th January, 14:30 - 16:00

Interactive workshop

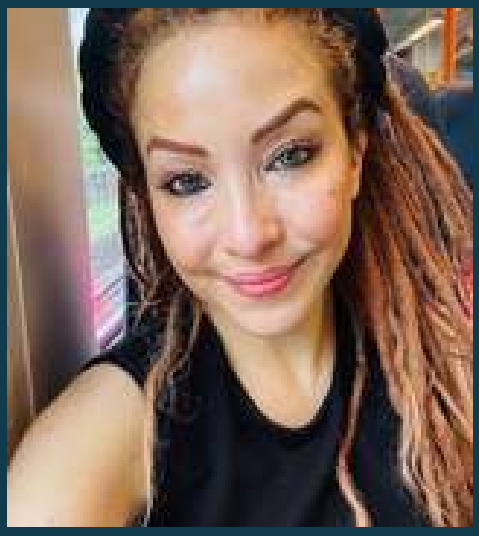
Playing with power: Dramatherapy, psychodrama, social theatre and power dynamics in healthcare a playful, embodied approach



Drawing on their experience as a Dramatherapist and nursing curriculum co-designer at the University of Winchester, Dr Marata Paglioni shares innovative methods for teaching communication and therapeutic approaches (aligned with NMC Annexe A).

This session focuses on the interpersonal and power dynamics often found in MDTs and organisations. Through a highly experiential and embodied approach, participants will be invited into playful activities borrowed from Dramatherapy, social theatre, and improv. Techniques will include Johnstone's power status exercises, Psychodrama for difficult conversations, and Boal's Forum Theatre to explore participants' own stories.

The aim is to notice and name unconscious patterns, explore alternative actions, and ultimately reclaim agency within complex professional settings.



Dr Marta Paglioni is a Dramatherapist in private practice also Senior Lecturer for the University of Winchester, where she teaches Communication Skills and Therapeutic Approaches to student nurses - with a particular focus on humanising healthcare. Marta also leads Schwartz Rounds for all health and social care professions' students..

Saturday 10th January, 14:30 - 16:00

Interactive workshop

Organisational shadows: A staff wellbeing perspective



Working within complex Health and Social Care settings can be highly challenging, with teamwork often inadvertently bearing the burden of unspoken systemic issues and high pressure.

As members of a staff psychological wellbeing service in a North London hospital, we combine our CBT and Dramatherapy expertise to support colleagues dealing with burnout, problematic team dynamics, and work-related trauma. This workshop offers a glimpse into this shadow work and the power of allyship we've built between two colleagues.

You'll be invited to explore your own work experiences and the organisational "shadows" present in your teams. We will then offer a creative and conceptual space to envision the form of allyship that can leave you feeling empowered and part of an organisation with a soul (Hope & Chigudu, 2015).

Kyriaki Markogiannaki is Dramatherapist and Clinical Supervisor. She currently works as a Principal Psychotherapist within a Therapeutic Community (TC) and within an NHS Staff Psychological Wellbeing service.



Andrea Chebat is a low-intensity CBT practitioner with a background in Neuropsychology. She is currently a Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner for an NHS Staff Service in North London and serves as a Supervising Volunteer for The Listening Place, a suicide prevention charity.



Saturday 10th January, 16:30 - 18:00

Workshop

Soul Activism in Troubled Times: Transforming Shadow Dynamics Through the Sesame Approach



In this workshop, we will step gently into the hidden currents that move beneath the surface of group life: parts often overlooked, dismissed, or considered lesser.

Through movement, drama, and imaginal work, we will meet these shadowed threads with curiosity and care, listening to the wisdom they carry.

Together, we will search for a glimpse of what we are being called to transform, not only within ourselves, but into the broader collective of the changing world we now must live in.

As we move beyond the failing standards of our times, we open to a sense of integrity and of shared community as expressions of soul activism.



Mary Smail is a Dramatherapist (Sesame) and Integrative Transpersonal Psychotherapist hailing originally from Glasgow.

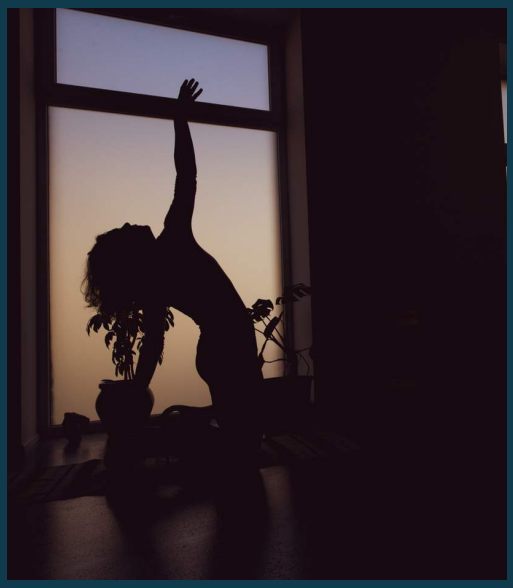
She is the founder of the Psyche and Soma Sesame training, which has been running in Wales, England, and Austria since 2008.

Mary presently teaches and supervises at Re-Vision Counselling and Psychotherapy in north London while also working in private practice at SoulWorks UK.
www.marysmailsoulworks.co.uk

Saturday 10th January, 16:30 - 18:00

Presentation

A life world led approach to embodied power dynamics



As Dramatherapists, we are uniquely positioned to explore institutional hierarchies and promote systemic change due to our deeply embodied approach to power dynamics within groups. Our awareness of Embodiment—a dimension of the "Lifeworld" (Husserl, 1970)—allows us to make sense of subtle interaction signals and consciously become embodied catalysts for change.

The first part of the presentation will revisit Husserl's Lifeworld dimensions (with a focus on Embodiment) to reflect on humanizing groups and institutional dynamics, thereby reclaiming our phenomenological roots.

In the second part, we will use a classic improv technique (Johnstone, 1981) on power "status" to interactively explore how toxic power dynamics are unconsciously acted out, and how they can be consciously challenged and re-shaped through the intentional use of the body in space and interaction.

Dr Marta Paglioni is a Dramatherapist in private practice also Senior Lecturer for the University of Winchester, where she teaches Communication Skills and Therapeutic Approaches to student nurses - with a particular focus on humanising healthcare. Marta also leads Schwartz Rounds for all health and social care professions' students..



Saturday 10th January, 17:00 - 18:00

Presentation & Performance

Schwartz Rounds: In at the deep end



Schwartz Rounds are structured group spaces where professionals reflect on the emotional and social aspects of their work through authentic storytelling and witnessing. The goal is not problem-solving, but fostering resonance, belonging, and shared humanity ("shadow to strength").

We invite you to join two unique Rounds following the core format: a panel of three storytellers shares personal experiences, followed by facilitated reflection on thoughts and emotions from participants.

The In-Person Round: In at the Deep End focuses specifically on raw, immersive experiences that left us feeling overwhelmed or exposed—such as stepping into new roles or facing ethical dilemmas. This is a compassionate space to reflect on emotional labour and the resilience found there.

Interested in sharing a story for this session? Please contact danai.karvouni@drasis-dramatherapy.com

Kyriaki Markogiannaki is Dramatherapist and Clinical Supervisor. She currently works as a Principal Psychotherapist within a Therapeutic Community (TC) and within an NHS Staff Psychological Wellbeing service.



Danai Karvouni: HCPC Dramatherapist/Supervisor and Head Arts Therapist in West London Forensic Services. Her expertise includes EMDR/NARM, with published work on their integration with Dramatherapy.



Saturday 10th January, 16:30 - 18:00

Interactive workshop

Ensemble alchemy: Using long-form improv to transform group shadows

This workshop addresses invisible group shadows—power imbalances and unspoken tensions—that create disconnection in teams and organizations. We meet the need for embodied, playful approaches to transforming these dynamics into catalysts for insight and healing.

Drawing on the disciplined, collaborative framework of long-form improvisational comedy (e.g., UCB tradition), participants will use core improv principles like “Yes, and...” and ensemble thinking to co-create scenes. These scenes act as a mirror for exploring group roles (leader, outsider, etc.) and experimenting with shifting relational dynamics symbolically. Facilitated reflection connects the play directly to participants' lived experiences in teams and systems. No improv experience is required.



Sarah Bradley is a Dramatherapist and Improviser who blends serious play and story to foster connection. She works in an ASN high school in Glasgow and co-facilitates the BADth Theatre Arts in Health subcommittee.





Katie Edkins is a Dramatherapist and improviser. She works as a Senior Psychological Therapist at Great Ormond Street Hospital and regularly performs improv and stand-up comedy in London with her team, The Non-Recyclables.

Sunday 11th January, 10:00 - 11:00

Closing Talk

In defence of the 'small and vulnerable': A rejection of NHS England's recent description of Dramatherapy

On being confronted by NHS England's recent description of the profession of dramatherapy as being 'small and vulnerable', I was mobilised into the 'dramatic action' described by Sue Jennings and others within this conference programme. As one of the strengths of our embodied way of being and working, an active form of rejection is at times needed to dismantle this systemic silencing.

In planning for the worst scenario of the dissolution of training programmes, NHS England has adopted belittling, inappropriate and somewhat threatening language; this 'othering' of professions that are smaller and thus less powerful in number speaks to institutional oppression, potentially relegating dramatherapy to the literal and psychodynamic shadows.

The position of 'small and vulnerable' places us in relational danger, at odds with the anti-oppressive approach we are attempting to adopt in our programmes. Given the reality of therapy and vulnerability being deeply connected, how might we consider our vulnerability as a source of meaningful activism? We will consider vulnerability as a function of human connection, how we might as a group resist the projection of fragility.

Stephanie Turner is the Programme Leader of the MSc Dramatherapy at Queen Margaret University (Scotland). She has practiced dramatherapy and supervision within many diverse settings, including adult mental health and NHS forensic services. She feels excited to be alongside the first students and graduates of Scotland's Dramatherapy programme throughout this conference.



Further Reading

Medium	Author	Title	Year
Song	Dire Straits	Brothers in Arms	1985
Song	Decemberists	The Soildering Life	2003
Song	The Animals	We Gotta get Out of this Place	1965
Paper	Keiller, E; Hutchinson, T; Ougrin, D; Carr, CE; Y.F Lau, J	The Experience of School-Based Dramatherapists: Understanding the Barriers and Facilitators of UK School-Based Dramatherapy to inform better Implementation	2024
Book	Schwartz, R	No Bad Parts: Healing Trauma & restoring Wholeness with the Internal Family Systems Model	2023
Book	Schwartz, R	You are the One You've Been Waiting for: a New Approach to Intimate Relationships with the Internal Family System Model	2023
Book	Herbine-Blank, T; M. Kerpelman, D	Intimacy from the Inside Out	2025
Book	McConnell, S	Somatic Internal Family Systems Therapy: Awareness, Breath, Resonance, Movement and Touch in Practice	2020
Book	Burris, C	Creating Healing Circles: using the Internal Family Systems Model in Facilitating Groups	2022
Book	Krueger, R. A.	Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research	1988
Book	Hines, W.	How to Be the Greatest Improviser on Earth	2016
Book	Close, D., Halpern, C., & Johnson, K.	Truth in Comedy: The Manual of Improvisation.	1994
Book	Napier, M.	Improvise: Scene from the Inside Out.	2004
Book	Johnston, K.	Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre.	1981
Book	Jennings, S.	Introduction to Dramatherapy: Theatre and Healing	1998
Book	Landy, R.	Persona and Performance: The Meaning of Role in Drama, Therapy, and Everyday Life.	1993
Book	Emunah, R.	Acting for Real: Drama Therapy Process, Technique and Performance.	1994
Book	Boal, A.	Theatre of the Oppressed.	1993
Book	C., Pollock, C., Aikman, L., & Willoughby, E.	Power Struggles in MDT Meetings: Using Different Orders of Interaction to Understand the Interplay of Hierarchy, Knowledge and Accountability.	2019
Book	Yalom, I.	The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy. (5th ed.)	2005
Book	Brown, B.	Daring Greatly	2012
Book	Nachmanovitch, S.	Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art.	1990