

## **Intervention Proposal - The Library of Meaning Mk2**

*How can we learn to explore the thoughts and feelings that we find most uncomfortable and practise self acceptance?*

### **What?**

My research project is focused on promoting self knowledge in order to combat the “Crisis of meaning” that is contributing to an epidemic of depression, anxiety and rising rates of suicide.

I propose that our ingrained aversion to uncomfortable feelings is what causes us to avoid the act of self reflection, this ignorance can lead to a spiralling decline in our mental health.

With a combination of the theory of narrative identity, therapeutic techniques, religious rituals and mindfulness practises I will be creating an immersive experience that can be used as a tool for self-reflection; The Library Of Meaning.

It is a travelling library, made of natural materials and inspired by the design of sacred spaces. Inside visitors can explore a collection of interactive narrative devices that ask them to reflect on the story of their lives. And through a mindful ritual participants are able to process the uncomfortable narratives they have been holding on to in order to find acceptance and a sense of peace within themselves.

### **How**

The guiding principles of the The Library have been identified by Donald Winnicott as vital to the processing of traumatic memories, these are:

- Empathy
- Mutual Joy States
- Offers of Adventure

These key values are the compass points with which I will be navigating the journey of the project.

The Library currently consists of two elements; The Archetype Books and The Story Booth.

The Archetype Books are on the shelves and visible to participants as they enter. Each book has a picture of the archetype on the front, these are 50 universal symbols that are found in stories all over the world across time and cultures such as The Mother, The Father, The Sword, The Ocean etc. Inside each book there are small cards that have a description of the archetype and what it represents.

Participants are welcomed into the space, given a brief introduction, then they are invited to browse the books and select an archetype that represents a memory, thought or feeling that they find uncomfortable. They choose their book and take out the archetype card. Participants then take their archetype card in to The Story Booth.

The Story Booth is a small enclosed space built around a simple shrine-like unit that is big enough for one person to sit at. On the shrine there are three frames in the shape of 'lancet' or 'church' windows, within each frame there is a pair of double doors.

After sitting down the Participants are lead in a brief meditation that induces them into a mindful state. They are then invited to open the doors in the centre and place their archetype card in the frame.

They are asked to open the doors on the left, behind the doors there is a stained glass window lit from the back by an led lamp which is softly glowing. Written on the window is the question "What Does It Mean?" The participants are asked to write down what their chosen archetype means for them, does it represent a story? A memory?

They are then asked to open the doors on the right, behind the doors there is another stained glass window, on it is written the question "How Does It Feel?"

They are then asked to write down how the archetype makes them feel, what are the emotions associated with the archetype? Can they feel a reaction somewhere in their body?

The ritual is then concluded with one last meditation, the participant is asked to leave their writing at the shrine anonymously, it will be added to the library for others to discover.

### **Why?**

The theory of narrative identity suggests that we form our sense of ourselves by arranging our lives in to a story with a past, present and future. By interacting with the archetypes in the library I am attempting to bring this tendency into awareness for my participants.

The act of identifying the stories that feel meaningful gives the participant a sense of control over the stories they live by, it also detaches the participant from the story, they are no longer victim to it. They are able to examine and explore it with a sense of objectivity, this is a valuable skill that is a key feature of cognitive behavioural therapy.

The ritual in the story booth is designed to deepen the participant's awareness of how their story affects them. The meditation exercises work to calm the participants sympathetic nervous system, reducing the levels of stress hormones in their body and bringing them into a state of calm. The act of writing down the meaning of their archetype is a way of clarifying thoughts that might have been otherwise avoided due to the discomfort associated with them. The light coming through the stained glass is used to invoke the reflective atmosphere of a church.

The overall aim of these combined elements is to create an atmosphere of empathy, where the participant can feel comfortable enough to reflect on the areas of their life that they have found the most difficult. The journey that they go on in the library is indicative of the 'Hero's Journey' as identified by Joseph Campbell, where the participant enters another world, undergoes a trial and comes away with the treasure of self-knowledge.

**When**

Saturday 26th March

**Where?**

Hastings seafront, as part of 'Men's Mental Health Day', organised by Mind Charity.

**Who?**

Participants will be members of the general public who are attending the event. In order to determine between people who are just browsing The Library and those who wish to participate I will ensure that those participating fill out feedback forms.

**Measuring and Recording Results**

After they have finished the experience participants will be asked to complete a short feedback form that gathers information about them and their thoughts and reflections about the The Library.

**Sample questions:**

Age?

Gender?

What experience have you had previously in managing your mental health?

How regularly do you experience significant difficulty with your mental health?

Is there anything that you feel you need to help manage your mental health?

Has your experience today with The Library of Meaning had any affect on your perspective? How?

What was useful about the experience?

What did you feel was missing? Is there anything that could be improved?

Any additional thoughts or reflections?

**Safeguarding**

I will be reassuring participants that anything they write while in the booth will be anonymous, this includes any personal information such as memories, feelings and reflections. In addition the feedback form they complete at the end may also be left anonymous.

I will make sure to let the participants know that they may stop the process at any point if they feel unsafe or panicked after bringing up uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. And I will have mental health support lines ready to offer them if they feel they need additional help.