

Hidden Presence – a [ffotogallery](#) project

Learning resource – Barnardos Seraf Service

The Participants

In partnership with the Barnardos Cymru Seraf Service, which works with young people who are at risk of or who have experienced sexual exploitation, the project worked with three young women aged 14-17 for 3 consecutive days.

Theme: Identity and Exploitation

This workshop focuses on self-expression and identity through photography, culminating in a series of portraits that can be printed in a self-publish style book, or exhibited.

Aims

- Through exploration of Nathaniel Wells story young people learn about identity, exploitation, trafficking and to reflect on their own circumstances
- Learn new practical creative skills and boost self esteem and confidence
- Help vulnerable young people focus on aspirations and looking to the future
- Give access to opportunities for self- expression, understanding of own experiences and self
- Improve visual literacy and practical skills through photography

Planning

Contact with the group was made via the Barnardos Seraf Service. This service works specifically with children and young people who are at risk of or have been abused through sexual exploitation in Wales. The Service has experienced Art Therapy staff that support young people through art and a formal therapy programme, but working with a professional artist photographer and team was not only new for the young people but also for the Barnardos Seraf Service.

Due to the nature of the group, visits were required prior to the workshops starting, to introduce the project and start the engagement process. The young people did not have access to mobile phones or the internet, so after the initial visit they were sent postcards of images by artists such as Hamershoi, Peggy Buth, Aida Silvestri, Nilbar Gures and Sam Ivin. This was a starting point for the participants to get thinking about ideas they might want to explore, the language they might want to use and to keep the project fresh in their minds.

The workshops also responded to the nature of the group as temporary, and while some participants would come to all the sessions some might only come to one or two. Each session was designed so it could work as a stand alone or part of a longer programme.

Outcomes

- **Digital Photography**

The young people were introduced to contemporary photographers working in portraiture through books. Examples include Rineke Dijkstra, Francesca Woodman, Beth Yarnelle Edwards.

Working one to one, young people were shown how to use a DSLR and invited to photograph their personal possessions.

Prompt questions:

- What objects have personal significance to you?
- What is your favorite item of clothing and why?
- How does changing your appearance through clothing & accessories, hair and make-up make you feel?
- How do people express personality through personal appearance?

See [How to: Digital Photography](#)

- **Assisted Self Portraits**

Trip to the Gower beach to create self portraits using an [analogue](#) camera, a [medium format](#) Hasselblad. The site was chosen because of its relative proximity and because the young people had little access to walk about in the area adjacent to their accommodation. It was an ideal location because it was relatively private, loosening the vulnerable young people's inhibitions of being photographed and also allowing them to reflect on their own experiences in a safe and peaceful environment.

The young people were shown how to create multiple exposures. They then chose to create double exposures where their body language reflected how they felt when they first came to the care home after traumatic events, to now after the experience of living in a safe place and undergoing therapy.

Other sites included in the rural area near to the accommodation, where the young people chose to wear clothes they had photographed earlier in the day.

Prompt questions

- How can you use body language to express emotion?
- How can you express freedom/joy with just your arms?
- How can you show shyness/fear with just your head?
- How do you want to be seen in this photograph? Strong/small/powerful/anxious
- How can you show identity without photographing a face?

- **Photobooks**

After receiving the postcards and looking at various photobooks, the young people were keen to produce a physical object for them to keep. This worked well as the young people were able to take pride in the photos that we can't show online or for the exhibition – being very vulnerable young people their identity must be hidden.

The analogue films had been processed and scanned overnight so they were able to look at all their photos on the laptop. Much care was taken in the editing process to decide which photographs should go in and which not, how they should be arranged on the page and in which sequence to tell the narrative they wanted to tell. Photographs were then printed off and the young people bound them by hand with a needle and thread using the [Japanese book-binding](#) technique. See [How to: Photobooks](#)

- **Exhibition**

Prints of the work were reproduced in a large public exhibition organised by Barnardos. Being part of a much larger multi-media project boosted the participants self-esteem.

Impact on Learning

“The young people who attended the sessions were disengaged with education and had had limited opportunities to work in the arts or use photography. This project provided a tremendous opportunity for the young people to express themselves through the images they created.” Lisa Ambrose, Therapeutic Arts Development Co-Ordinator, Barnardos Seraf Service

The young people involved in the project have all experienced modern day slavery and sexual exploitation and were able to reflect on their own circumstances and similarities between their stories and Nathaniel's.

Prior to project the participants' experiences and expectations of photography was mainly based on "modeling" and appearance, and wasn't necessarily positive. After working with a professional artist photographer, that view expanded in terms of careers, education and what art and photography is. The performance elements of the project enabled the participants to improve communication and explore story. The images produced were of a very high standard and this increased self esteem.