

**“Thinking about what makes you you”: An exploration of the experience of  
care leavers in engaging with collective narrative practice through the Tree of  
Life**

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## **Abstract**

Over 10,000 young people in the UK transition from being in care to being a care leaver each year (Department for Education, 2021). Despite the prevalence of mental health difficulties among this group, available emotional support is argued to be inadequate (Ofsted, 2022). The Tree of Life is an arts-based collective narrative practice intervention rooted in narrative therapy; utilising the metaphor of a tree as a platform from which to reflect upon, develop and share personal narratives (Ncube, 2006). This has been found to be positively experienced by a range of groups. To date, no research has explored the Tree of Life with care leavers. This research aims to explore how the Tree of Life is experienced by this group.

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with six care leavers who had engaged in the Tree of Life and the data was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Findings revealed five Group Experiential Themes which summarised the participants' experiences: Uncertainty and discomfort, individual barriers and facilitators, developing identity, connecting with others and hope and motivation for the future.

This research provides insight into how the Tree of Life is experienced by care leavers, thus providing valuable information as to how the emotional wellbeing of this group can be supported, by not just Educational Psychologists, but a range of stakeholders with a responsibility to this group. Findings may also be of interest to those involved in the designing and implementation of therapeutic interventions in a range of settings.

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“In a forest of a hundred thousand trees, no two leaves are alike. And no two journeys along the same path are alike”.

Paul Coelho

“He who plants a tree, plants a hope”.

Lucy Larcom

The most important thank you goes to the six remarkable individuals who gave their time to share their experiences. We have a lot to learn from you.

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## **Introduction**

### **Chapter Overview**

This chapter will illustrate the national context in relation to care leavers and present a rationale for exploring the use of the Tree of Life with this group. This will include reflections on my own personal interest in this research and the interconnectedness between myself and the participants. The history of Tree of Life approach and its routes in narrative therapy will be explored, before bringing these ideas together to present a rationale for the exploration of the Tree of Life with care leavers.

Consideration of the implications for the role of the Educational Psychologist (EP) will also be discussed.

### **Researcher Reflexivity**

It feels important that this chapter opens with my own personal motivations and journey towards this research. Personal reflexivity is the process of considering one's own values, life experiences and beliefs and how they may impact upon your research (Willig, 2013). I was adopted as a three-year-old and have grown up reading a full, clear and engaging life story book. As an adult, I now recognise the profound and positive impact that this had on my sense of identity. Interacting with care experienced individuals, both personally and professionally it became clear that my experience is not the norm, particularly for young people who are not adopted, and this will be discussed later in this chapter. On my first day of the educational psychology doctorate, I engaged in the Tree of Life (Ncube, 2006) alongside my cohort. I found the opportunity to reflect on my own background, skills, hopes for the future, and tell my own story extremely powerful. I considered some of the parallels

between the Tree of Life and life story work, becoming curious about how this approach could be used more widely.

### **Key Statistics and Terminology**

At any given time there are around 80,000 children and young people looked after by Local Authorities in the UK (Department for Education [DfE], 2022). The Children's Act (1989) defines a child who has been in the care of their Local Authority (LA) for more than 24 hours as a Child Looked After (CLA) or Looked After Child (LAC).

These terms are often used interchangeably alongside the term child in care. For this research, the term Children Looked After (CLA) will be used alongside Care Experienced Individual (CEI) in order to encompass a range of individuals and experiences, including young people who are care leavers, which is the focus of this research.

In 2021-2022 there were 45,000 care leavers aged between 18 and 21 in the UK with over 10,000 young people transitioning from being in care to being a care leaver each year, usually once they turn 18 (DfE, 2022). The legal definition of a care leaver is a young person who was previously looked after for at least 13 weeks after their 14<sup>th</sup> birthday, including some time after their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday (DfE, 2022). However, The Care Leavers Association use the term to describe any adult who has spent time in care (The Care Leavers Association, 2014).

## **National Context**

There are several reasons why a young person may come into care. The most common reason is due to abuse and neglect where children's services have intervened when the child is deemed at risk of harm (DfE 2022; National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children [NSPCC], 2022). A child's parents may have agreed to them becoming a CLA, for example if they are too unwell to care for their child or if their child has a disability and needs respite care (NSPCC, 2022). A CLA might also be an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child. This group of young people currently make up 6% of the CLA population (DfE, 2022).

CLA may continue to experience changes throughout their childhood with 7 in 10 CLA experiencing a placement, school or social worker change in a year and 1 in 10 having three or more placements in a year (DfE, 2022). CEI have therefore often experienced significant trauma, adversity and instability (Ward, 2011). This impacts upon their physical and mental health, education and employment and outcomes in a range of areas are consistently poor for this group (Brady & Gilligan, 2019; Clarke et al., 2019). For example, CLA frequently experience poorer educational outcomes (Berridge et al., 2020; O'Higgins et al., 2015) and are over-represented within the criminal justice system (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). Currently, 38% of care leavers aged 19-21 are Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET), compared to 11% of all young people aged 19 to 21 (DfE, 2022). CEI are also significantly more likely to be impacted by mental health difficulties when compared with the general population, with statistics showing that 50% of care experienced children and young people may have a diagnosable mental health condition compared to 12-17% of

children and young people in the general population (Ford et al., 2011; Wijedasa et al., 2022).

In addition to the impact of prior and ongoing adversity and instability there are some other explanations for poor outcomes for this group. Mannay et al. (2017) highlight how educational policies and practices can often exclude CEI from discourses of success with them being allowed and sometimes even encouraged not succeed due to their complex life experiences. Outside education there is a contrast in how the state cares for young people in comparison to those that live with their parents.

Young people who grow up in a care are expected to live independently much earlier than their peers, with many moving to independent or semi-independent living once they are 18 (DfE, 2022). In contrast, data shows that the average age for young people to leave their parents' home is nearly 25 (Office for National Statistics, 2022). Care leavers may not be able to depend on additional support from former carers in the same way that other young people can turn to their parents (Become, 2022). Stein (2005) highlights that "in contrast to the extended transitions made by most young people, the journey to adulthood for many young care leavers is shorter, steeper and often more hazardous" (p.1).

### ***Current Provision for Care Leavers***

In an attempt to combat the consistently poor outcomes for this group of young people, The Children Leaving Care Act (2000) sets out the provision for children and young people who have been, or are still being looked after by the LA. The Act states that "it is the duty of the local authority looking after a child to advise, assist

and befriend him with a view to promoting his welfare when they have ceased to look after him” (The Children Leaving Care Act, 2000. Ch 35, s.19A).

In accordance with the act, all children should have a Personal Advisor (PA) from the age of 16. The PA should work with the young person’s social worker until they turn 18, at which point responsibility for support switches to the PA. The role of the PA is to provide financial and practical help and all young people should have a pathway plan, determining what advice, assistance and support they should be provided. This should be kept under regular review and set out clear milestones such as education, training and career plans and where they will live.

The amount and type of support however varies between LAs. A recent survey conducted by Ofsted (2022) looking at care leavers views on preparing to leave care, found that a quarter of respondents did not meet their PA until they were already 18. Some respondents did not have any support from a PA until they had already experienced difficulties such as debt or homelessness. Almost a quarter of respondents (23%) reported that they did not feel at all involved in plans and decisions that were made when they left care and a third felt only ‘a little involved’ (Ofsted, 2022).

### ***Emotional Support for Care Leavers***

Despite the prevalence of mental health difficulties among CEI in England, The Children Leaving Care Act (2000) makes no mention of emotional or mental health support. It appears that where support is provided to this group of young people it is predominantly focused on practical support such as finances, education and housing

with little attention given to emotional wellbeing. This has been voiced repeatedly by care leavers themselves (Baker, 2017; Ofsted, 2022; Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017). Their views are clearly highlighted in the quotes shown in figure 1. These were collated in Ofsted's (2022) review and an earlier review of care leaver's views on their transition to adulthood undertaken by Coram Voice and The University of Bristol (Baker, 2017).

## Figure 1

### Quotes from Care Leavers Regarding Support



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Although these quotes are from up to 11 years ago, Ofsted's more recent review (Ofsted, 2022) suggests little has changed since Baker's (2017) review. Ofsted (2022) concluded that care leavers often felt alone and isolated, having no one to talk to about how they were feeling. A third did not know where to go for help and

support, with no plans made to support their emotional wellbeing upon leaving care. They recommended that pathway plans should pay more attention to social, emotional and mental health needs.

### **Life Story Work**

In most family settings, photos, stories and objects support individuals to build narratives of identity and belonging. However, these items and resources are often missing for CEI (Hoyle et al., 2020). The ability to construct a narrative of your early life is seen as essential to the construction of the self (Cook-Cottone & Beck, 2007) and research has indicated that narratives held by CEI themselves and those around them can often be negative, causing CEI to ascribe long-term negative identity conclusions to themselves (Become, 2017; Yuen, 2007).

One way to support the development of personal narratives is through Life Story Work (LSW). LSW was developed as a social work technique to be used with children separated from their biological families through adoption or foster care but has also been used with other populations such as older adults (Doran et al., 2019). LSW is usually done by social workers or delegated to support workers, sometimes with the support of foster carers or adoptive parents and usually involves the creation of a life story book (Willis & Holland, 2009). The aim of LSW is to enable children to make sense of previous, sometimes traumatic experiences, construct a coherent narrative of their early life and create a sense of identity coherence (Baynes, 2008; Ryan & Walker, 2007). However, LSW is not a statutory requirement for all CEI, only those who are adopted (Adoption and Children Act, 2002) and the quality and structure of input varies considerably (Baynes, 2008; Hammond et al., 2020).

There are several issues with traditional models of LSW such as the creation of life story books and these methods may not be appropriate as CEI get older (Baynes, 2008; Hammond et al., 2020). Hoyle et al. (2020) found that children's voices are often missing from life story books, and it can be argued that they put social workers in positions of power through their role in giving information to young people (Baynes, 2008). Baynes (2008) highlights that LSW is often something that is "done" in childhood and is not revisited, and that this could be due to the view of LSW as an 'optional extra' with social workers having limited time due to their role increasingly shifting to work such as child protection conferences.

It is important that work of this nature continues as CEI get older and there is a need for low intensity LSW approaches that can be implemented throughout and beyond a young person's care journey (Hammond et al., 2021). Erikson proposed that identity formation is a major task of late adolescence and young adulthood, with important implications for healthy psychological development, highlighting the particular importance of LSW at this time (Erikson, 1950). Stein (2005) underscores how supporting care leavers develop a positive sense of identity may promote their resilience, enable them to feel a greater sense of control over and ability to plan their lives and enable them to reframe difficult experiences.

### **Narrative Therapy**

Narrative therapy, or narrative psychology is a therapeutic approach which is centred on individuals being experts in their own lives, drawing upon their individual skills, values and beliefs (Morgan, 2000). At the heart of narrative therapy is the concept



that experiences in life are mediated through stories individuals tell and are told about themselves; and humans seek to make meaning from their experience, through linking life events to form a particular story or narrative (White, 1995).

McAdams' Life Story Model of Identity demonstrates how narrative therapy could be one way of conceptualising LSW (McAdams, 2001). He proposes that individuals find meaning and purpose in their lives through constructing evolving internalised narratives of the self, with identity itself taking the form of a story. This narrative identity or life story integrates the past and imagined future and goes beyond facts, with individuals selecting aspects of their experience to construct past and future stories that make sense to them and provide them with meaning (McAdams, 2001; 2011).

Narrative psychology suggests that individuals can have several stories about their lives that occur simultaneously, with life stories co-authored by the individual and the context in which their life is embedded (McAdams, 2001). However, dominant stories and discourses can be negative, particularly among groups who have experienced trauma, such as CEI. These dominant negative narratives are termed *thin descriptions* within narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990; Morgan, 2000).

Thin descriptions leave little room for complexity and for individuals to share their own meanings. They are often created by others, often those in positions of power such as teachers and social workers. Individuals can adopt these thin descriptions for themselves, privileging events that fit with a certain plot (Morgan, 2000). For example, a CEI who has had several placement breakdowns may form the dominant

narrative that they are unlovable. The influence of these problem laden stories can grow, hiding an individual's skills and competence and this can be seen in discourses surrounding CEI. In a report 'Perceptions of Care', the charity Become found that CEI feel unfair judgements and assumptions are made about them and that they are "expected to fail" (Become, 2017, p.1). CEI may internalise and these negative identity conclusions to themselves as well as having them ascribed by others (Yuen, 2007).

Narrative therapy is interested in finding and offering ways for individuals to re-author their stories for themselves rather than re-telling "single-storied accounts that dwell on the problem-saturated territories of their identity" (Ncube, 2006 p.5). Instead creating stories by which they would like to live their life; replacing thin descriptions with rich, multi-storied descriptions of their lives and externalising problems (White & Denborough, 1998; White 2007).

## **Collective Narrative Practice and the Tree of Life**

One opportunity for individuals to re-author their life stories and develop a more positive narrative is through collective narrative practice. Collective narrative practice builds upon the foundations of narrative therapy and seeks to support groups who have experienced social suffering in contexts where therapy may not be appropriate or culturally resonant (Denborough, 2012). The group setting aims to promote connection with others, bringing people together around shared struggles, hopes and dreams. It is useful where resources are limited, as the approach can be put into place by individuals in the community (Denborough, 2008; 2012).

The Tree of Life is a tool informed by narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990). The Tree of Life can be used with individuals but was originally designed as a collective narrative practice. It was developed by Nczaelo Ncube (2006) whilst she was working in camps with children orphaned by HIV and AIDS. She found that stories of loss dominated conversations and problem saturated stories were told. The Tree of Life aims to empower participants to become experts in their own lives with a focus on creating opportunities for people to tell and witness one another's preferred identity stories, moving away from problem saturated descriptions towards more positive narratives based upon strength and resilience (Ncube, 2006). Ncube (2006) found it to be a safe and creative way for children to tell their stories in an approach which celebrates strength and individuality, rather than in a way that is focused on problems. It does not rely on spoken word, instead allowing participants to produce rich descriptions and stories about their lives through drawing.

## ***Tree of Life Methodology***

The Tree of Life invites participants to draw a tree which maps out their life with each part of the tree representing an aspect of their life, as shown in table 1. The participants are encouraged to share their tree with others who act as *outsider witnesses*. This then provides individuals with a ‘safe space to stand’ and talk about some of the challenges they face in their lives (Ncube, 2006).

**Table 1**

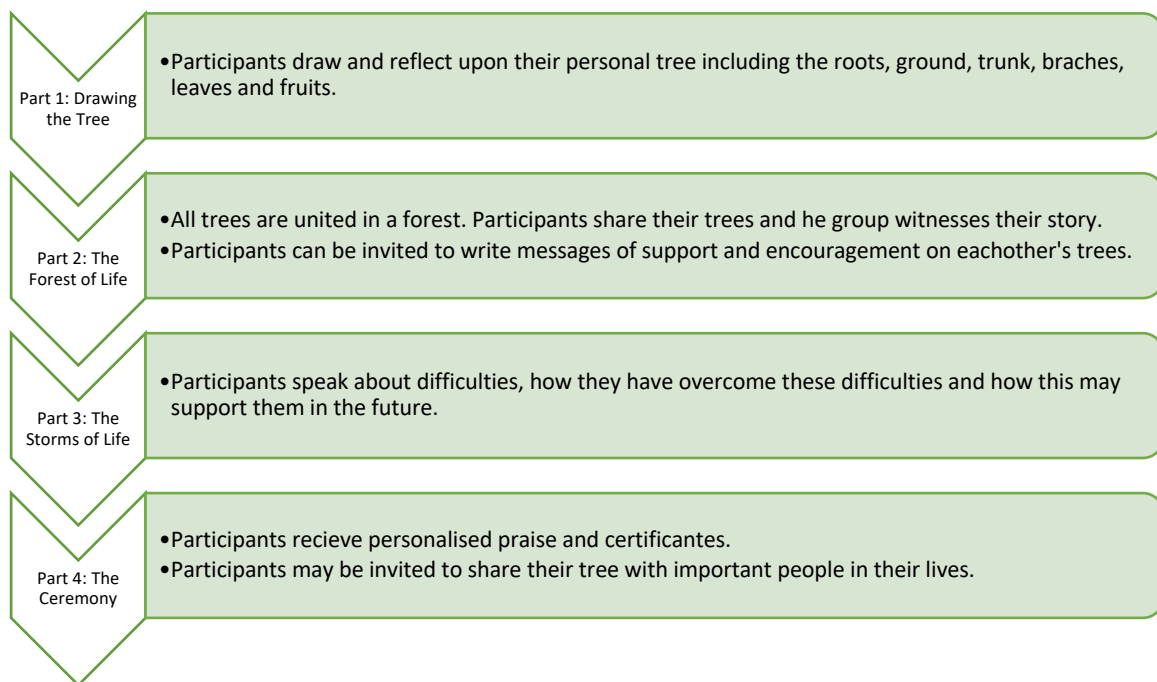
### *Elements of the Tree of Life*

<b>Part of the Tree</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
<b>Roots</b>	Facts relating to where you are from, ethnicity, important places, family relationships.
<b>Ground</b>	Where you live and what you do now, current hobbies, people you enjoy spending time with.
<b>Trunk</b>	Strengths and abilities, what you are good at.
<b>Branches</b>	Personal goals and hopes and dreams for the future.
<b>Leaves</b>	Important people to you, they may be alive or may have died.
<b>Fruits</b>	Gifts you have been given. These may not be material gifts, they can be acts of kindness or specific successes.

The methodology proposed by Ncube (2006) comprises the elements shown in figure 2. It is designed to be used flexibly and to be adapted for use with different population groups. It can be delivered in different formats such as one day sessions or up to 16 shorter sessions (Ncube-Mlilo, 2022).

## Figure 2

*Suggested Structure of Sessions (Ncube, 2006; Ncube-Mlilo, 2022)*



### ***Use of the Tree of Life***

Ncube (2006) highlights that the intervention engages individuals as it is enjoyable, does not rely on verbal communication, encourages creativity and facilitates personal storytelling. Since its initial development for use with children, the Tree of Life has been used with a broad range of populations and communities. It is relevant in addressing a range of issues such as loss, bereavement, illness and supporting refugees. It has been used in hospitals and community contexts to address a range of psychosocial challenges (Ncube-Mlilo, 2022). The Tree of Life has also been used as LSW on a 1:1 basis with CEI (Shotton, 2010) but does not appear to have been used in a group setting. A full review and exploration of gaps in the current research on the Tree of Life follows in Chapter 2.

## **Relevance to the Role of the Educational Psychologist**

The role of the EP has been widely debated for many years and is influenced by changing legislative contexts (Ashton & Roberts, 2007). However, it is widely agreed that the role has five core functions: Consultation, assessment, research, training and intervention, which operate at three levels: individual, group and organisational (Scottish Executive, 2002; British Psychological Society [BPS], 2017). The aim of intervention is to promote positive outcomes for children and young people in a range of areas and this includes the use of therapeutic intervention to support emotional wellbeing (Atkinson et al., 2011; Hoyos and Manger, 2021). EPs may deliver interventions themselves or support and train others to do so. Although EPs report positive views of working in this way, in a review of the EP profession, Farrell et al. (2006) found that EPs state that only 2% of their time is used in working this way. This may be in part due to the constraints placed on the EP role by pressures of statutory work such as assessments for Education Health and Care Plans (Hoyos & Manger, 2021). Despite this, EPs working therapeutically is an area of growth, with EPs ideally positioned to support the mental health needs of children and young people in school and community settings (Hill, 2013).

EPs are well placed to support CEI. EPs predominantly work in schools, with Norwich et al. (2010) identifying that 80% of EPs report working with CEI through their school allocation and a further 18% work with CEI through specialist roles. EPs increasingly operate across a diverse range of settings, working collaboratively with a variety of professionals and services such as the Virtual School, with many services rebranding themselves to include the word 'community' within their titles (Hill, 2013). In the early 2000's Education and social care agencies were

restructured into wider children's services meaning that EPs are perfectly situated to work with other departments under this umbrella (Fallon et al., 2010). Furthermore, the corporate parenting model in the UK means that the LA has responsibility on all professionals to work together to safeguard and meet the needs of CLA. This responsibility falls with a range of professionals including EPs (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). Additionally, the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (Department for Health [DfH] & DfE, 2015) extended the scope of EP work to children and young people aged 0-25, increasing opportunity to work with care leavers.

### **Summary and Research Aims**

There is a clear need for EPs and other professionals to enact change in order to promote positive outcomes for CEI. The Tree of Life is an innovative therapeutic approach which aims to build connections with others and give young people the opportunity to tell their story using an arts-based method, providing an alternative to traditional models of LSW. It can be implemented flexibly in a range of situations and has the potential to be used as an accessible intervention to support the emotional wellbeing of a range of vulnerable groups.

The Tree of Life is used by EPs in different settings, for example German (2010) used the approach with a whole primary school class in London and some EPs are beginning to look at how it can be used as LSW with individual children (Shotton, 2020). However, no research has looked at the use of collective narrative practice through the Tree of Life with care leavers.

This research aims to explore the utility of the Tree of Life as an intervention for care leavers through investigating how it is experienced by this group of young people.

## Literature Review

### Chapter Overview

This chapter provides an overview of the available literature on the Tree of Life. Details of the literature search are provided, including the search strategy and inclusion and exclusion criteria. The literature is presented according to themes and a critical appraisal of the available literature is provided. The literature review aimed to answer the following question: What is the available research on the Tree of Life?

### Search Strategy

#### *Databases*

A number of databases were chosen in order to capture research from a range of fields. These were PsycINFO, PsycArticles, Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection, ERIC, Education Source, SocINDEX and CINAHL. These databases were searched simultaneously through EBSCOhost. It is recognised that electronic searches are not exhaustive (Greenhalgh & Peacock, 2005) and therefore a more dynamic process of identifying literature was also utilised. This included *reference-mining*, the process of searching the reference lists of included articles from the databases (Hempel, 2020). A search of Google Scholar was also undertaken to capture anything missed in the above databases.

#### *Search Terms*

A systematic literature search was conducted on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2022. A flowchart of the literature search can be found in appendix 1. A single search term (“Tree of Life”) was used. Search terms were intentionally kept as broad as possible. This was to maximise the number of potentially relevant articles as initial scoping reviews of the



literature indicated limited published research on the Tree of Life. Initial scoping reviews also trialled the use of different search terms such as “collective narrative practice” however this did not capture any further relevant research above what was returned when using the more focused search term, “Tree of Life”.

### ***Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria***

The search returned 894 results. A number of limiters were then applied. These were articles written in English, from peer reviewed journals and published between 2006 and 2022. The rationale for the application of these is given in table 2. This resulted in 249 articles once duplicates were removed. Titles and abstracts were screened and articles with irrelevant subject matter were discarded. Further inclusion and exclusion criteria (table 2) were applied to the full texts of the remaining 36 articles. This resulted in 9 papers for inclusion. A list of excluded articles and rationale for their exclusion can be found in appendix 2. One further article (Casadagli et al., 2017), was found through the process of reference-mining. This resulted in the inclusion of 10 papers for final review.

**Table 2***Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

<b>Inclusion Criteria</b>	<b>Exclusion Criteria</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
<b>1. Language</b> Articles written in English	Articles not written in English	Studies could be critiqued and summarised by the researcher
<b>2. Publication</b> Articles written in peer reviewed journals	Articles not written in peer reviewed journals including dissertations and books	To ensure the quality of articles
<b>3. Date</b> From 2006-2022	Articles written before 2006	Ncube's original article on the Tree of Life was published in 2006 and the literature review was conducted by the end of 2022
<b>4. Study Focus and Approach</b> Articles exploring the narrative therapy-based Tree of Life approach as set out by Ncube (2006) in a group setting	Articles not exploring the narrative therapy-based Tree of Life approach or describing an approach which differs from Ncube's (2006) approach. The use of the Tree of Life as an individual or couple's intervention	To ensure the focus of the research was on the Tree of Life as collective narrative practice
<b>5. Type of Study</b> Studies that collected either quantitative or qualitative data	Articles that do not collect quantitative or qualitative data (e.g., review papers, reflective or descriptive articles, theoretical articles)	The literature review sought to describe current research on the Tree of Life

Research participants were not limited to any particular groups, in order to include a wide range of perspectives. Care leavers are at an age at which information from

both adult and child populations is likely to be useful. Research from around the world was included since the original Tree of Life methodology was developed in South Africa and is designed to be an adaptable and culturally sensitive approach that can be applied across cultures (Ncube, 2006).

### **Review of the Quality of the Literature**

Included papers were critically appraised for their strengths, limitations, and implications for professional practice. A table summarising aims, participants, methodology and results can be found in table 3. The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2011) was used as a framework to critically appraise qualitative articles. One mixed methods study (German, 2013) was critiqued using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool [MMAT] (Hong et al., 2018). The other mixed methods study was critiqued using the CASP, as the quantitative aspect of this study was not reported (Randle-Phillips et al., 2016). Completed CASP and MMAT checklists can be found in appendices 3 and 4 and key strengths and limitations are highlighted within table 3.

**Table 3**

*Overview of the Literature*

<b>Authors, Title and Aims</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Participants and Structure</b>	<b>Type of Study and Outcome Measures</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Strengths and Limitations</b>
<p><b><u>Casadagli, Christie, Girling, Ali and Fredman (2017)</u></b></p> <p>Evaluating the Tree of Life project: An innovative way of engaging children and young people with type 1 diabetes</p>	<p>UK – London</p> <p>(Paediatric diabetes service)</p>	<p>One-day session</p> <p>At the time of the paper 93 young people had attended 17 workshops.</p>	<p><b>Qualitative:</b></p> <p>Data from feedback group interviews at end of the day transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis</p> <p>Further telephone interviews conducted 2-4 weeks after the project (focused on the impact on diabetes management)</p>	<p><b>Group interview themes:</b> From isolation to inclusion: a feeling of togetherness, an open space to share experiences, learning from each other about living with diabetes</p> <p>Building a positive view of the self: focussing on my qualities, separating myself from diabetes, empowerment</p> <p><b>Telephone interview themes:</b> Responding to negative attitudes about diabetes</p> <p>Improving diabetes management</p>	<p><b>Strengths:</b> Structure of the workshops clearly explained</p> <p><b>Limitations:</b> No information on how many participants took part in interviews (both immediately following the project and telephone interviews). Group interview is a potential source of bias. Very limited information on aspects of the study – ethics, data analysis, recruitment etc</p> <p>Aim of the project is to reduce negative emotional impact of type 1 diabetes on children and young people. However, aims of the study itself is unclear</p>

<b>Authors, Title and Aims</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Participants and Structure</b>	<b>Type of Study and Outcome Measures</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Strengths and Limitations</b>
<p><b><u>German (2013)</u></b></p> <p>Developing our cultural strengths: Using the 'Tree of Life' strength-based narrative therapy intervention in schools to enhance self-esteem, cultural understanding and to challenge racism</p> <p><b>Research Questions:</b></p> <p>Is the Tree of Life successful in improving pupil scores of self-concept?</p> <p>What were the pupils' overall ratings for the Tree of Life intervention?</p> <p>What are the pupil's understanding of culture and ethnicity?</p>	<p>UK – London</p> <p>(Primary School)</p>	<p>29 children aged 9 and 10 years old</p> <p>8 x 90-minute sessions</p> <p>(Added additional strengths-based exercises related to cultural understanding)</p>	<p><b>Mixed Methods:</b></p> <p>Pre and post evaluation semi-structured interview's (content analysis)</p> <p>Self-Report Measures (e.g., rating of interaction)</p> <p>Beck Youth Inventory Self Concept (Beck et al., 1990)</p>	<p><b>Quantitative analysis:</b></p> <p>significant improvements in pupil's self-concept post intervention</p> <p>Mean score for how much participants liked the interview was 9 (10 being highest)</p> <p>Significant increases in post-intervention ratings of cultural knowledge and importance</p> <p><b>Qualitative data:</b> Pupils reported on a number of positive aspects such as learning about their own and others' cultures, working together and reducing racist name calling</p> <p>Interview responses demonstrated an Increase in cultural knowledge post intervention</p>	<p><b>Strengths:</b></p> <p>Structure of the project itself clearly described. Clear details of analysis</p> <p><b>Limitations:</b></p> <p>Does not appear to be any consideration of ethical issues. Unclear if the facilitator of the sessions conducted the interviews. No consideration of the impact of this</p>

<b>Authors, Title and Aims</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Participants and Structure</b>	<b>Type of Study and Outcome Measures</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Strengths and Limitations</b>
<p><b><u>Haslehurst, Moss, Rust, Oliver, Hughes, McGrath, Reed, Ferguson, Murray (2021)</u></b></p> <p>A narrative-informed evaluation of tree of life for parents of children with physical health conditions</p> <p>Piloting a parent's tree of life group, running parallel to a children's group</p> <p><b>Research Question:</b> How did parents experience the group?</p>	<p>UK – Manchester</p>	<p>Seven parents of children with physical health conditions</p> <p>One day session</p>	<p><b>Qualitative:</b></p> <p>Post-intervention narrative informed group interview analysed using thematic analysis</p>	<p><b>Themes:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A safe place to stand</li> <li>2. A different view</li> <li>3. Connecting with confidence</li> <li>4. Giving the gift of independence</li> <li>5. Togetherness in the storms</li> </ol>	<p><b>Strengths:</b> Extensive consideration of ethics and power differences. Clear justification for group interview. Narrative informed aspect of data collection is in keeping with the theoretical basis of the Tree of Life itself. Detailed information on how analysis was conducted. Consideration of relational ethics</p> <p><b>Limitations:</b> Questions based on the concept map were designed to scaffold parents towards preferred identity stories. This perhaps guided them away from sharing more negative experiences</p>

<b>Authors, Title and Aims</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Participants and Structure</b>	<b>Type of Study and Outcome Measures</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Strengths and Limitations</b>
<p><b><u>Ibrahim and Allen (2018)</u></b></p> <p>The Highs and Lows Through Recovery: An Integrative Group Combining Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Narrative Therapy, and the Tree of Life</p> <p>Pilot group to explore feedback</p>	UK – London	<p>Six participants with a diagnosis of bipolar disorder</p> <p>8 weekly 1.5 hour sessions (Tree of Life was part of 6 of these)</p>	<p><b>Qualitative:</b></p> <p>Focus group analysed using thematic analysis</p>	<p><b>Themes:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Social support and hope</li> <li>2. The Tree of Life</li> <li>3. Understanding and coping for all</li> <li>4. Group processes</li> </ol>	<p><b>Strengths:</b> Session content clearly explained</p> <p><b>Limitations:</b> No information on ethical issues. Study combined different approaches so not just Tree of Life. Participants did not attend all parts of the group.</p>
<p><b><u>Ibrahim and Tchanturia (2018)</u></b></p> <p>Patients' experience of a narrative group therapy approach informed by the Tree of Life Model for Individuals with Anorexia Nervosa (AN)</p> <p>Pilot group to explore feedback</p>	UK - London	<p>5 Females aged 18-30 with a diagnosis of AN</p> <p>8 x 1-hour sessions (6 participants who attended at least 6 sessions invited to take part in research)</p> <p>Adapted to add in additional aspects relevant to group</p>	<p><b>Qualitative:</b></p> <p>Focus group analysed using thematic analysis</p>	<p><b>Themes:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. An image to remember, share and change</li> <li>2. Constructing an alternative perspective</li> <li>3. Hope</li> <li>4. Creating a sense of community</li> </ol>	<p><b>Strengths:</b></p> <p>Content of each session explained. Clear illustration of how themes derived from data. Participants involved in coming up with themes</p> <p><b>Limitations:</b></p> <p>Limited information regarding ethical issues. No consideration of the role of facilitator as</p>

Authors, Title and Aims	Location	Participants and Structure	Type of Study and Outcome Measures	Findings	Strengths and Limitations
<p><b><u>Randle-Phillips, Farquhar and Thomas (2016)</u></b></p> <p>Adapting and evaluating a Tree of Life group for women with learning disabilities (LD)</p> <p><b>Research Question:</b> Is Tree of Life a helpful narrative approach to adapt for people with LD?</p>	UK – Bristol	<p>e.g., externalising the eating disorder</p> <p>4 Adults with Learning Disabilities</p> <p>5 x two-hour sessions</p> <p>(Adapted communication style using pictures, additional templates and support)</p>	<p><b>Mixed Methods</b></p> <p><b>Quantitative:</b> Pre and post intervention use of: 1. CORE-LD <i>measure of psychological distress</i> 2. Adapted Rosenberg Self-esteem inventory 3. Tree of Life <i>Questionnaire (designed for this study looking at perceived social support)</i></p> <p><b>Qualitative:</b> Semi-structured interviews analysed using thematic analysis</p>	<p>Quantitative Analysis not presented due to no significant change in scores.</p> <p><b>Qualitative Themes:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Positive emotional response</li> <li>2. Social interaction (meeting others/peer support)</li> </ol>	<p>researcher and impact of bias</p> <p><b>Strengths:</b> Data collected by someone who did not facilitate the sessions to avoid bias. Clear consideration of ethical issues for this group</p> <p><b>Limitations:</b> No quantitative analysis Inconsistent attendance: Only four participants and one of these only attended 2 sessions and another attended 4 (out of 5)</p>



<b>Authors, Title and Aims</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Participants and Structure</b>	<b>Type of Study and Outcome Measures</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Strengths and Limitations</b>
<p><b><u>Rowley, Rajbans and Markland (2020)</u></b></p> <p>Supporting parents through a narrative therapeutic group approach: a participatory research project</p> <p><b>Research question:</b> What do parents think of the Tree of Life?</p>	UK - London	<p>6 parents of Children with SEND from ethnic minority groups (another parent as co-researcher)</p> <p>Sessions over four consecutive weeks</p>	<p><b>Qualitative:</b></p> <p>Participatory research</p> <p>Focus group analysed using thematic analysis</p>	<p><b>Themes:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sharing</li> <li>2. Self-Awareness</li> <li>3. Change</li> </ol>	<p><b>Strengths:</b> Ethics considered in detail. Themes checked with participants</p> <p><b>Limitations:</b> Data from focus group was collected via a graphic illustration which meant that the richness of data was reduced and may have been influenced by researcher bias. Less rigorous analysis as process was adapted for co-researcher</p>
<p><b><u>Schweitzer, Vromans, Ranke and Griffin (2014)</u></b></p> <p>Narratives of healing: A case study of a young Liberian refugee settled in Australia</p>	Australia	<p>One adolescent, (14-years old) from a Liberian background settled in Australia</p> <p>(Experience noted in the context of a Tree</p>	<p><b>Qualitative:</b></p> <p>Case Study</p> <p>Data from observations and researcher's reflections of each session</p>	<p>Observations, comments and authors reflections presented in detail.</p> <p>Therapeutic factors identified as important to the success of the programme:</p>	<p><b>Strengths:</b> Uses observational data and facilitator reflections (from multiple facilitators). Highly detailed account for one participant</p>

<b>Authors, Title and Aims</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Participants and Structure</b>	<b>Type of Study and Outcome Measures</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Strengths and Limitations</b>
<p>Aims to explore the therapeutic processes underpinning the changes observed in the participant</p> <p>Investigating the participant's experience of the programme.</p>		<p>of Life group with 7 other adolescents aged 12-17 from a special school for newly arrived refugees and immigrants)</p> <p>7 x 80-minute sessions</p>		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Exploration of alternative stories of self</li> <li>2. The fostering of group cohesion</li> <li>3. The provision of corrective emotional experiences</li> <li>4. The experience of outsider witnesses</li> <li>5. The installation of hope</li> </ol>	<p><b>Limitations:</b> Has ethical approval but does not consider ethics within the paper. Potential for bias with observational data, cannot draw conclusions. Only one participant considered</p>
<p><b><u>Wellman, Lepori and Szlachcic (2016)</u></b></p> <p>Exploring the utility of a pilot tree of life group in an inpatient setting</p>	UK	<p>8 participants</p> <p>(From group of 9 attending Tree of Life group, 7 male, 2 female)</p> <p>7 x weekly sessions (length of session not specified)</p> <p>Adapted to include 'damaged roots' metaphor</p>	<p><b>Qualitative:</b></p> <p>Data from focus group and questionnaires analysed using inductive thematic analysis</p> <p>Most Important Event Questionnaire [MEIQ] (Bloch et al., 1979) at end of each session.</p>	<p><b>Themes:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sense of community</li> <li>2. Rediscovering Identity</li> <li>3. Usefulness of the Tree of Life metaphor</li> </ol>	<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <p>Clear description of all aspects of the study. Ethics - participants given option to do interview as a questionnaire and explicit information on informed consent etc.</p> <p><b>Limitations</b></p> <p>Focus group ended up being a joint interview due to participants not wanting to take part in this part because of concerns about the use of the recording. MIEQ</p>

Authors, Title and Aims	Location	Participants and Structure	Type of Study and Outcome Measures	Findings	Strengths and Limitations
<p><b><u>Vitale, Khawaja and Ryde (2019)</u></b></p> <p>Exploring the effectiveness of the Tree of Life in promoting the therapeutic growth of refugee women living with HIV</p> <p>Aims: To understand (i) the experiences of women from refugee background as they participated in the Tree of Life and (ii) the benefits of the Tree of Life when used with these women.</p>	UK	<p>5 African Women from refugee backgrounds living with HIV</p> <p>7 x 2 hourly sessions</p> <p>Following manualised version of Tree of Life (Vromans, Ranke &amp; Schweitzer, 2014)</p>	<p><b>Qualitative:</b> Multiple case study design</p> <p>Data from in-depth individual interviews, end of session individual feedback form, visual material produced in the sessions and researchers notes</p>	<p>Detailed findings presented for each participant.</p> <p>Findings suggest that the Tree of Life supported the specific needs of the individual women.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Women motivated to learn new ways to manage issues and overcome isolation.</li> <li>- Recognition of qualities and strengths.</li> <li>- Instillation of hope and optimism</li> <li>- Clear goals for the future.</li> </ul>	<p>data not suited to research question. Average sessions attended by participants was 3.78 out of 7.</p> <p><b>Strengths</b> A range of sources of data with clear findings presented for each participant. Explicit consideration of ethical considerations</p> <p><b>Limitations</b> Small sample size, paper recommends looking at the therapeutic factors that lead to change.</p>

## Summary of Excluded Literature

Details of excluded literature and the reason for exclusion can be found in appendix 2. Although these articles did not meet the criteria for inclusion in the final review, they demonstrate the use of the Tree of Life in a number of other contexts such as: In a forensic mental health setting (Gardner-Elahi & Zamiri, 2015), with AIDS orphaned adolescents (Hirschson et al., 2018), in family therapy (Butera-Prinzi et al., 2014; Méndez & Cole, 2014), couples therapy (Chimpén-López et al., 2021), as a parenting intervention for Afghan refugees living in London (Hughes, 2014), and with unaccompanied refugee minors in Greece (Jacobs, 2018). The authors' reflections in the latter two papers highlight similar themes and findings to those that will be discussed in this literature review; with the Tree of Life offering a new perspective, improving social support and reinforcing identify and strengths (Hughes; 2014; Jacobs, 2018).

One article describes how the Tree of Life has been adapted into an intervention called Beads of Life; a narrative intervention for children with cancer at a London hospital (Portnoy et al., 2016). It involves individuals choosing beads that represent aspects of their life such as important people, skills, abilities and values, covering similar aspects to the parts of the tree in the Tree of Life (Ncube, 2006). Individuals thread their beads onto twine whilst sharing their story with the group before being given the opportunity to share their experiences with their families and other important people, thickening their preferred narrative and externalising their feelings about the cancer. Portnoy et al. (2016) note that intensive psychological approaches are not always appropriate, practical, or wanted whilst undergoing cancer treatment. Since introducing the Beads of Life onto the oncology ward they have found

individual referrals to the psychologist have halved. One suggested contributing factor to this reduction in referrals is that by enabling staff to witness children's preferred identity stories, staff are able to see children's distress in the context of the other stories in their life and respond to them with "reasonable hope" (p.12).

### **Research Overview and Critique**

All included articles document 'real world research', with the majority taking the form of small-scale service evaluations of the Tree of Life with different population groups in a wide range of contexts. The majority of studies were qualitative, utilising the thematic analysis of interview or focus group data in order to explore whether it is a helpful approach with a specific population group. Qualitative research is suited to the exploratory nature of these studies with many underpinned by relativist and constructionist philosophies. Two studies were mixed methods, with quantitative elements in order to measure more specific outcomes using measures such as the Beck Youth Inventory [Beck et al., 1990] (German, 2013). However, the other mixed methods study did not report the quantitative findings due to a lack of statistical significance (Randle-Phillips et al., 2016). One study included a telephone follow up (2-weeks after the session). None of the studies included any longer term follow up.

All but one of the studies took place within the UK, although participants came from a diverse range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Population groups included children with Type 1 diabetes (Casadagli et al., 2017), a case study of an adolescent refugee (Schweitzer et al., 2014), an entire primary school class (German, 2013), parents of children with chronic health conditions and special educational needs and disabilities [SEND] (Haslehurst et al., 2021; Rowley et al., 2020) and adults with

learning disabilities (Randle-Phillips et al., 2016). A range of physical and mental health contexts were also explored, such as a mental health inpatient setting (Wellman et al., 2016), individuals with anorexia nervosa (Ibrahim & Tchanturia, 2018), bipolar disorder (Ibrahim & Allen, 2018) and HIV (Vitale et al., 2019).

None of the articles report any negative outcomes. In the majority of studies, the group facilitator and the researcher were the same person, which may have implications for the findings. The power dynamics between the facilitator-researcher and the participants may have impacted what participants felt able to share, reducing the possibility for more negative experiences to be voiced. Interpretations made by the researcher may also be influenced by researcher bias and presumptions made through facilitating the sessions. This was acknowledged to varying degrees within the research articles. Some applied strategies to reduce the impact of the power dynamic, both within the Tree of Life sessions themselves and when collecting data. In one study, parents were given an imaginary stack of 'red cards' which they were encouraged to use if they did not wish to respond and a visual scale was used to support sharing of more negative experiences (Haslehurst et al., 2021). Nevertheless, it remained that no adverse experiences were voiced.

All the studies had relatively small sample sizes, with authors stating this as a limitation. Research is further limited in that in several studies, participant attendance at the sessions was inconsistent (Ibrahim & Allen, 2018; Randle-Phillips et al., 2016; Wellman et al., 2016). These participants may have had difficulty following the metaphorical structure of the sessions, thus impacting their overall experience. A participant from one study specifically highlighted the importance of attending all the

sessions, saying “I think one of the biggest drawbacks of the group is that people didn’t attend every session, and I’d missed two sessions myself, and I really felt that, when I came back, I had missed out quite a lot” (Ibrahim & Allen, 2018, p.8). One study mitigated this by only inviting participants who had attended a certain number of sessions to partake in the research (Ibrahim & Tchanturia, 2018). Furthermore, not all attendees consented to attending research interviews, meaning that in some studies the participants providing detailed qualitative feedback was limited (Ibrahim & Tchanturia, 2018; Wellman et al., 2016). It is also possible that these participants had less positive experiences to share.

All authors highlight that findings cannot be utilised beyond the specific population and advocate the need for further research on the Tree of Life. Nonetheless, collectively these studies contribute to a body of evidence demonstrating the utility and adaptability of the Tree of Life with a range of population groups, many of whom have experienced hardship or trauma in their lives.

## **Key Themes from the Literature**

This review will critically consider the articles according to the following common themes:

- Improved access to psychological support
- The value of arts-based activities and metaphors
- Experience and outcome themes:
  - A positive experience
  - Connection with others
  - An alternative perspective, increased self-esteem and recognition of strengths
  - Hope and change

All but one of the studies (German, 2013) captured their findings through key themes derived from qualitative analysis, which related to participants' experience or outcomes as a result of engaging in the Tree of Life. This provided a starting point to identify common threads across the literature through mapping themes onto a spider-diagram demonstrated later in this chapter (figure 3). Sometimes there were connections between articles that did not come directly from explicitly labelled themes. These were identified through reading and re-reading the articles, making notes of points that arose and considering links.



## ***Improved Access to Psychological Support: An Adaptable and Culturally Appropriate Intervention***

Within the included literature, the Tree of Life was delivered by psychologists or therapists. For the most part this was clinical psychologists, likely due to many of the studies taking place in clinical mental health contexts (e.g., Wellman et al., 2016; Ibrahim & Tchanturia, 2018). For the two studies based within a school context, the facilitators (and researchers) were educational psychologists (German, 2013; Rowley et al., 2021).

The literature demonstrates how the Tree of Life can be used to provide therapeutic support to individuals and groups for whom traditional ways of accessing psychological support may not have felt possible, safe or culturally appropriate. This can be seen in the rationales provided by authors for the use of the Tree of Life with their given participant group. For example, in Rowley et al's. (2021) study the Tree of Life was planned due to concerns around the wellbeing of parents from minority ethnic groups with children with SEND. Concerns were expressed that resources in the community were lacking and unsuitable for a culturally diverse group (Rowley et al., 2021). When studied in a primary school setting, the use of Tree of Life was prompted following a request from a school for intervention to enhance the self-esteem of a group of Somali pupils (German, 2013). When combined with other tools such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), The Tree of Life was the only tool used that was valued by all participants, reflecting the utility of the approach with individuals from a range of backgrounds (Ibrahim & Allen 2018).

When used with parents of children with chronic health conditions (Haslehurst et al., 2021) the theme 'a safe place to stand' was identified, with some parents noting that

accessing psychology had not always felt safe. They came along for the benefit of their children (who were attending their own group) but found that they ended up benefitting themselves. One parent said, “I did it for [child] but it’s actually good to be able to talk while [child]’s not here” (p.7). Casadagli et al., (2017) also noted that the Tree of Life is a way to help young people who are struggling with the challenges of diabetes but do not qualify to receive more intensive psychological therapy.

This improvement in access to psychological support could be attributed to the adaptable and culturally appropriate nature of the Tree of Life which is designed to be used in local community settings (Ncube, 2006). Critics of western psychology argue that psychological therapies and interventions often operate in a cultural vacuum with limited utility due to potential cultural and language barriers (Vitale et al., 2009). The Tree of Life is considered a culturally appropriate tool, with the narrative underpinnings seeing an individual’s roots, heritage and spirituality as sources of strength (Morgan, 2000; Schweitzer et al., 2014; Vitale et al.,2009).

### ***Adaptations to the Tree of Life***

All studies broadly followed Ncube’s (2006) original four-part structure incorporating drawing the Tree of Life (part one), the Forest of Life (part two), Storms of Life (part three) and certificates and celebrations (part four). The structure and delivery were often adapted according to the context and population group, as is recommended with collective narrative practices (Denborough, 2008). For example, the majority of studies with adult participants did not include the certificates and celebrations aspect, instead often using final sessions to reflect on learnings (Ibrahim & Tchanturia, 2018).

The duration of the sessions varied from one day workshops (Casadagli et al., 2017; Haslehurst et al., 2021) to up to eight, weekly sessions (German, 2013). A variety of adaptations were made. German (2013) for example, incorporated additional activities to facilitate cultural understanding and learning such as the sharing of genograms. Other studies also made a number of practical considerations such as adapting communication style and facilitators offering additional support for specific groups (Randle-Phillips et al., 2016; Rowley et al., 2020). Within mental health contexts the Tree of Life was combined with CBT (Ibrahim & Allen, 2018) and other aspects were added for challenges faced collectively by specific groups. For example, the addition of a specific session on externalising eating disorders (Ibrahim & Tchanturia, 2018) and the inclusion of the metaphor of damaged roots (Wellman et al., 2016). Some studies also built upon Ncube's (2006) original metaphorical structure of the tree, incorporating flowers to represent gifts they have given to other people (Casadagli et al., 2017; Randle-Phillips et al., 2016).

When used with young people with Type 1 Diabetes (Casadagli et al., 2017), the group was co-facilitated by peer trainers who had previously undertaken the Tree of Life themselves. Although not meeting the inclusion criteria for the current literature review (see appendix 2 for list of excluded studies), a description of the use of peer trainers for this group can be found in a subsequent journal article (Casadagli et al., 2021). The range of adaptations highlights the flexible nature of the approach and the potential for the Tree of Life to be implemented successfully and adapted for a broad range of groups and populations with positive outcomes.

### ***The Value of Arts-based Activities and Metaphors***

A key theme from the included literature was the creative aspect of the activity and the utility of the metaphors employed. In three studies, participants explicitly highlighted the value of the creative nature of the Tree of Life (German, 2013; Ibrahim & Tchanturia, 2018; Vitale et al., 2019). When used with refugee women with HIV, participants reported the value of reflecting on traumatic events through different expressive modalities rather than through overt discussion. One participant commented, “it’s a nice feeling... to draw and talk” (Vitale et al., 2019 p.14). Similarly, Ibrahim and Tchanturia’s (2018) study produced the theme ‘an image to remember, share and change’, with three participants highlighting the value of the creative aspect of the group. They expressed that the metaphors used and the visual and creative elements would help them to remember what they had identified and learned. One participant reflected on the therapeutic power of art, saying, “I find words really difficult to describe my feelings, but pictures are so much better” (p. 8). When used with a primary school class, German (2013) found that many of the pupils reported enjoying creating their tree, with one pupil saying, “I liked creating the tree and that you could do it in your own way” (p.12).

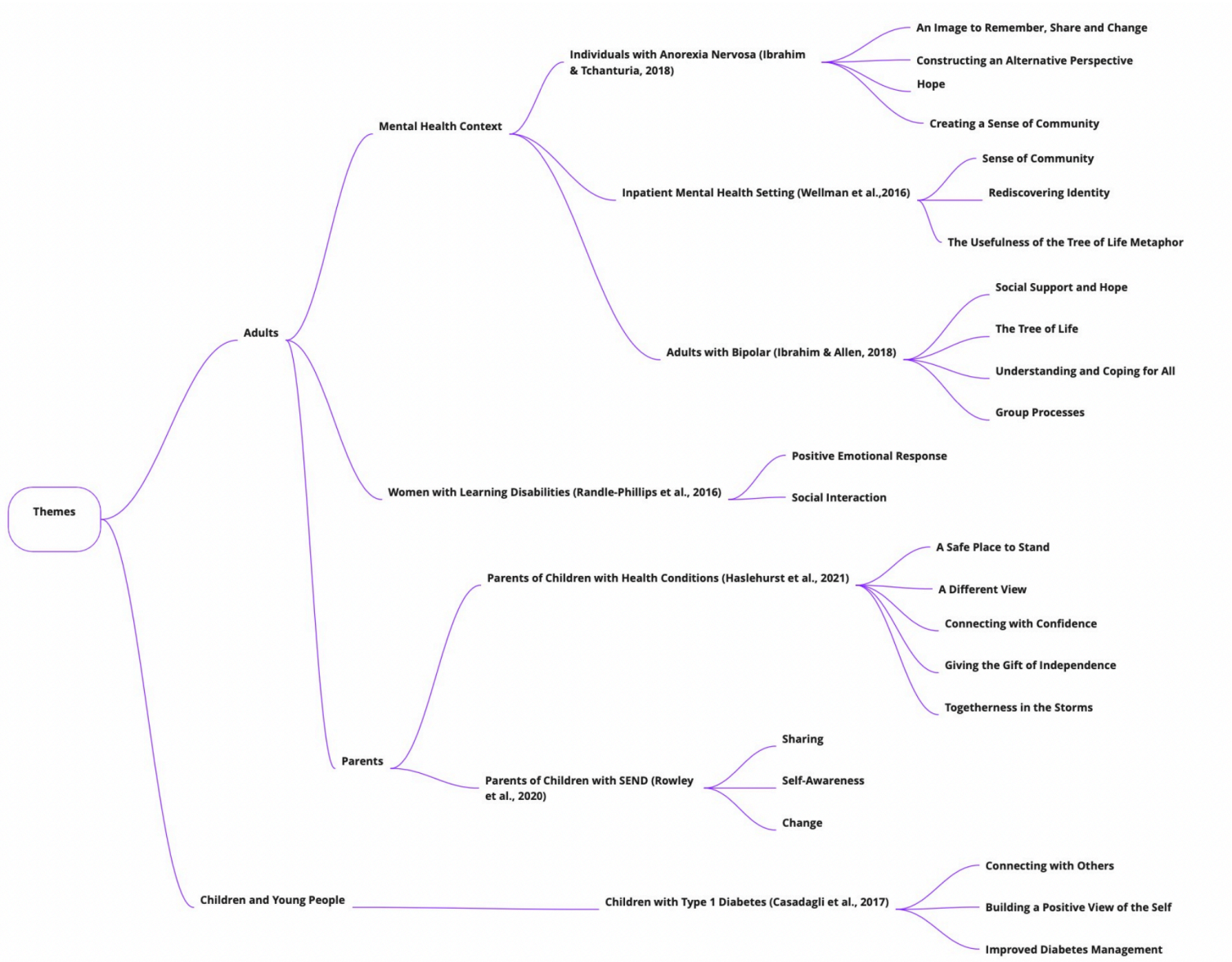
When used in an inpatient setting, Wellman et al. (2016) highlighted the usefulness of the tree metaphor. Participants agreed this enabled them to plan their recovery and facilitators appreciated the way in which it helped participants share their feelings without becoming overwhelmed. When combined with CBT as part of an 8-week programme (Ibrahim & Allen, 2018) most of the participants mentioned the Tree of Life as being one of the crucial parts of the intervention. They discussed how the tool enriched stories of their lives and emphasised the value of completing this as

a group. It is suggested that the visual elements of the Tree of Life allow the group to provide unique representations, with illustrations acting as symbols for internal experiences which can be shared and celebrated (Schweitzer et al., 2014). Randle-Phillips et al. (2016) observed the utility of metaphors for individuals who have experienced trauma, suggesting that the focus on roots and important individuals allows themes of loss and change to be drawn out.

### ***Outcomes and Experience of The Tree of Life***

Most studies looked at whether the Tree of Life was beneficial with a group of individuals in a particular context or with a particular shared experience. Some studies examined measurable outcomes such as changes in perceived social support, psychological distress (Randle-Phillips et al., 2016) and self-concept (German, 2013). Although the quantitative results from the Randle-Phillips et al. (2016) study were not reported due to there being no change in questionnaire scores, there was found to be a significant improvement in scores of self-concept following the Tree of Life amongst the primary school children in German's (2013) study. All but one of the studies (German, 2013) used qualitative data to generate key themes. There was considerable overlap in these themes, as demonstrated in figure 3.

**Figure 3. Key Themes from Literature Utilising Thematic Analysis**



### ***A Positive Experience***

All of the studies indicated that the Tree of Life sessions were a positive experience for those who took part. For many studies this was implied by the positive themes that emerged, such as connecting with others and constructing an alternative perspective. For others, there was explicit mention of enjoying and valuing the experience. The primary school children that took part in the intervention as a class all rated the project highly, giving it a mean score of 9 out of 10 and all 29 pupils responded that they thought it would be good for the whole school to undertake (German, 2013). One of the two main themes from the project involving women with learning disabilities was 'a positive emotional response'; with quotes from the participants such as "happy feeling", "exciting" and "enjoyed it" (Randle-Phillips et al., 2016, p.44).

### ***Connection with Others***

Connection with others as a positive outcome of the Tree of Life was mentioned by all the studies. Several articles discuss the value of connecting with others who share similar challenges in life, reporting this to be comforting and reassuring, leading to a feeling of togetherness, building group cohesiveness and belonging, allowing the formation of new friendships and reducing feelings of isolation (Casadagli et al., 2017; Ibrahim & Allen, 2018; Randle-Phillips et al., 2016; Rowley et al., 2020; Vitale et al., 2019). Schweitzer et al. (2014) reported that participants became more comfortable with each other as the sessions progressed. The connection with others through shared experiences was thought to provide safe ground with which to share within the group, enabling participants to learn from each other's experience and expertise (Casadagli et al., 2017 Haslehurst et al., 2021;

Ibrahim & Tchanturia; 2018). Participants in the Haslehurst et al. (2021) study reported feeling validated by hearing other parent's share similar experiences of the 'storms' of parenting a child with health conditions.

Within the included studies, it was implied that group members often knew each other. For example, due to being patients in the same service (Ibrahim & Tchanturia 2018; Wellman et al., 2016), or being in the same class at school (German, 2013). Other groups were made up of strangers. The literature indicates positive outcomes in both scenarios; with one participant from the Haslehurst et al., (2021) paper highlighting how the group being strangers prior to the Tree of Life made it feel safer to share experiences.

Alternatively, the participants in Ibrahim and Tchanturia's (2018) paper reported feeling more connected and supportive of each other, as opposed to previous feelings of competitiveness. Within an inpatient setting (Wellman et al., 2016), it was suggested that the Tree of Life groups aided the development of a sense of community amongst patients and staff. This was particularly attributed to the process of sharing appreciation and compliments for others within the group. A child in German's (2013) study reported that the Tree of Life "brought everyone together to actually work with each other" (p. 86) and the women in Vitale et al's (2019) study formed friendships, seeing each other outside the group, with one participant referring to them as her "new sisters" (p.18). The formation of social support networks mean that the participants act as agents of change for each other, rather than solely recipients of services (Rowley et al., 2020).



Some studies also commented on the role Tree of Life in reducing power imbalances between facilitators and participants. An initial aim of using the Tree of Life with a group of women with anorexia nervosa was to reduce the power imbalance between the clinical team and patients (Ibrahim & Tchanturia, 2018). This was also commented upon in other studies. This could be attributed to the fact that in some of the studies the facilitators also engaged in the process of drawing and sharing their own trees, as done in Ncube's (2006) original approach (Schweitzer et al., 2014). This was seen to aid the development of successful therapeutic relationships and reduce anxiety, as well as a way of modelling the process to participants (Ibrahim & Allen 2018; Schweitzer et al., 2014). One facilitator commented on how it would be nice to see more ward staff engage in the sessions and how this could positively influence relationships, allowing staff to see that patient's "have a lot more to them, a much richer story to them than just medication and diagnosis" (Wellman et al., 2016 p.6).

### ***An Alternative Perspective, Increased Self-Esteem and Recognition of Strengths***

Several studies resulted in themes relating to the idea of an alternative perspective, with the Tree of Life supporting individuals to think about things in a different way. These included the themes such as 'a different view' (Haslehurst et al., 2021), 'constructing alternative perspectives' (Ibrahim & Tchanturia, 2018), 'self-awareness' (Rowley et al., 2020), and 'rediscovering identity' (Wellman et al., 2016). Wellman et al. (2016) suggest that the process of creating the trees enabled personal reflection, allowing participants to connect with their values, experiences and strengths, and consider forgotten aspects of their lives which could then be drawn together through

the metaphor of the tree. Similarly, Haslehurst et al. (2021) highlighted that the Tree of Life offered parents 'a different view' from which they could identify their strengths, aspirations, dreams and challenges. Schweitzer et al., (2014) noted that participants were seen to become better able to explore their individual preferred self-outcomes and possibilities throughout the sessions; thickening their preferred narratives (White & Morgan, 2006). Schweitzer et al. (2014) gave the example of a young person beginning to explore the narrative of herself as good friend, singer and dancer. They noted that the experience of having a group to act as 'outsider witnesses' acted to strengthen this narrative further, allowing them to see themselves as a caring person who can impact positively on the lives of others.

In health contexts, the Tree of Life supported participants to develop a view of themselves as separate from their illnesses, known within narrative therapy as externalising (White & Epston, 1990). For example, participants in Ibrahim & Tchanturia's (2018) study discussed how refreshing it had been to focus on something other than the eating disorder and how the group sessions offered an alternative perspective to their difficulties. The theme 'building a positive view of the self' (Casadagli et al., 2017) encompassed young people being able to separate the view of themselves from their diabetes. One participant reflected on how the session "helped me learning who I was without diabetes" (p.13).

Linked closely to themes of alternative perspectives, several studies identified themes and findings relating to increased self-esteem and recognition of strengths. These included 'building a positive view of the self' (Casadagli et al., 2017), 'connecting with confidence' (Haslehurst et al., 2021) and 'reflection on strengths'

(Wellman et al., 2016). Vitale et al's., (2019) study discussed the value of participants identifying their strengths and references participants reporting a surge in self-esteem following the sessions.

German (2013) found that self-concept scores, as measured by the Beck's Youth Inventory self-concept scale (Beck et al., 1990), were significantly increased post-intervention, highlighting the positive effect that the Tree of Life can have on self-concept. However, Randle-Phillips et al. (2016) also looked at measures of self-esteem and found that this actually decreased following the Tree of Life. However, no statistical analysis was used so the findings are questionable. Randle-Phillips et al. (2016) note that self-concept and self-esteem are linked. Self-concept is more closely related to identity, whereas self-esteem is related to confidence in oneself. It could be argued therefore that self-concept may have been a more appropriate measure as it aligns better with the goals of narrative therapy and the Tree of Life.

### ***Hope and Change***

Several studies cited themes around hope. It was suggested that a sense of hope was instilled in participants through engagement in the Tree of Life with participants reporting feeling more hopeful about the future (Ibrahim & Allen, 2018; Ibrahim & Tchanturia, 2018; Schweitzer et al., 2014; Wellman et al., 2016). This increased sense of hope can be attributed to the Tree of Life encouraging participants to move away from problem-saturated stories, acknowledge their strengths and have the space and opportunity to consider and plan for their futures, renewing their sense of hope (Wellman et al., 2016). For some participants, thinking about the future had previously felt challenging and it was positive to think about how things could change

(Ibrahim & Tchanturia, 2018). Having participants act as witnesses to each other as they explored these parts of their trees was seen to be therapeutic. Instilling hope and optimism in the group by giving them the sense that they could consider and expect similar positive outcomes in their own lives and allowed them the opportunity to think about their future in a positive light (Schweitzer et al., 2014; Vitale et al., 2019).

The Tree of Life leading to change was an outcome from three studies.

In follow-up interviews, children were found to be managing their diabetes better following the workshop (Casadagli et al., 2017) and parents spoke of becoming motivated to support their children to be more independent (Haslehurst et al., 2021).

Change was also a main theme in the Rowley et al. (2020) study. Through the process of re-authoring their stories and identifying personal strengths and values, participants were able to change their relationships with challenges they faced, leading to change in particular aspects of their lives (Denborough, 2014).

Participants identified feeling stronger, more accepting of their children's needs, reacting to their children differently and able to take more time for themselves. It was also felt that the impact and process of change was ongoing with ideas that "continue to grow as you continue to develop" (p.12).

## **Conclusion**

The literature highlights the Tree of Life as a flexible, adaptable, strengths-based and culturally appropriate approach which can be carried out in a range of community and clinical contexts. It is well received by both adults and children from a range of backgrounds. The Tree of Life can be successfully combined with other approaches

such as CBT, school curriculum content and psychoeducative components, meeting a need for more flexible and systemically orientated provision (Rowley et al., 2021).

The Tree of Life is particularly useful for individuals who have experienced considerable loss and change. The majority of the literature focusses on participant outcomes and experiences. Despite the differing backgrounds and contexts of the participants, many of the themes drawn from the studies were similar. The Tree of Life is found to be effective in supporting participants to connect with others and reflect on their own life. The arts-based approach and use of metaphors offers individuals a safe way to reconnect with their skills, histories and abilities before offering opportunities to be shared with a group (Ncube,2006). Tree of Life participants are offered an alternative perspective, allowing recognition of strengths and increasing self-esteem. It instils hope, allowing participants to make positive changes in their lives. The group setting offers emotional support and an audience to allow self-narratives to be thickened (Denborough, 2008). In some instances the group leads to a support network that extends the lifespan of the project itself (Vitale et al., 2019).

Research on the Tree of Life is limited to mainly small-scale studies, with none offering long term follow up. It is also notable that the findings are overwhelmingly positive with limited exploration of the possibility of less positive experiences or outcomes for participants. In the majority of studies, the researcher and facilitator are the same person and the extent to which the impact of this is discussed varies across articles. It may be that both the potential power dynamics of this relationship

and the focus on positivity and strengths within the Tree of Life approach itself, left participants feeling unable to share the possibility of a more nuanced experience.

As of yet, no research has examined the use of the Tree of Life with Care Experienced Individuals. Care leavers represent another group of individuals that may have experienced significant change and trauma in their lives and for whom traditional psychological therapy may not feel accessible safe or appropriate (Denborough, 2012). The aim of the current research project is to explore the experience of care leavers in engaging in collective narrative practice through the Tree of Life, addressing the research question:

***What is the experience of care leavers in engaging in collective narrative practice through The Tree of Life?***

## **Methodology**

### **Chapter Overview**

This chapter outlines the aims and purpose of the research and the underpinning ontology and epistemology. Methods of data collection and analysis will be described and justified in addition to discussions around reflexivity. The chapter will end with an exploration of the quality of the research and associated ethical considerations.

### **Research Aims and Purpose**

The aim of the research was exploratory, due to the absence of any current research considering the use Tree of Life with care leavers. Exploratory research attempts to collect information which describes how things are, as opposed to attempting to explain or evaluate something (Denscombe, 2010). The research aimed to answer the following question:

***What is the experience of care leavers in engaging in collective narrative practice through the Tree of Life?***

Whilst the research is primarily exploratory in purpose it could also be seen as action research. Reason and Bradbury (2008) summarise that the purpose of action research is to produce practical and useful knowledge that can then be used to contribute to improved wellbeing for people and communities. Thus, a wider aim of the research is that it will increase available intervention for care experienced children and young people.

The question was kept intentionally broad to explore the experience of participants engaging in the Tree of Life in their own words. A qualitative approach was selected as the research does not seek test hypotheses or seek universal truths, focussing instead on lived experience. This aligns with the underlying philosophical assumptions of the research.

### **Philosophical Assumptions**

It is important for a researcher to understand the philosophical assumptions underlying their research. This will influence how research questions are formulated and shape the methods used to collect and analyse data (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Ontological beliefs affect how science or knowledge is approached and epistemological beliefs affect how one finds out about it.

### ***Ontology***

The term ontology refers to the nature of knowledge and beliefs about reality and truth (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It is the “study of being” (Crotty, 1998, p.10) and concerns the question “whether or not there is a social reality that exists independently from human conceptions and interpretations” and whether there is a single, shared social reality or whether there are multiple realities that are context specific (Ormston et al., 2014 p.4). Willig (2008) highlights that ontological beliefs can be seen as a continuum of realism to relativism. A realist perspective postulates that there is a single, measurable truth and reality exists independently to individuals. In contrast, a relativist perspective takes the position that there are multiple ways of interpreting the world, all of which are true. These *truths* are shaped by context and will evolve and change (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Willig, 2013).



This research takes a relativist stance with the belief that individuals will have different interpretations and attach different meanings to their experiences (Willig, 2013). The research does not claim to produce any quantifiable truths about the experience of care leavers in engaging in the Tree of Life. Instead, it aims to understand how it is experienced from a subjective perspective (Willig, 2013).

### ***Epistemology***

Epistemology is concerned with the theory of knowledge and “how, and what, can we know?” (Willig, 2013, p.2). It can be seen as a way of making sense of the world and beliefs about what knowledge is possible and can be attempted (Crotty, 1998). Epistemological positions held by researchers will determine how they go about uncovering knowledge.

A positivist epistemology implies that the goal of research is to produce objective knowledge and believes that truth and knowledge are testable (McCarten & Robson, 2016). A positivist approach was historically relied upon within mainstream psychology, with quantitative methods used to test theories, controlling confounding variables and producing objective and tangible knowledge which is not influenced by the researcher (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Willig, 2013).

In a rejection of positivist traditions, positions such as constructionism and constructivism appeared, which propose that there are alternative ways of finding out about the world to direct measurement and observation, such as our interpretations of our experiences and the environment around us (Ormston et al.,2014). These

positions will lead to inductive research processes with theory generated from data, rather than the use of data to test pre-determined hypotheses (Willig, 2013).

Social constructionism can be seen as a broad approach that assumes meaning is created through interaction with the world and is mediated historically, linguistically and culturally, with the creation of shared meanings that evolve through shared interactions and experiences (Burr, 2003; Crotty, 1998). It focuses on the importance of language and social interactions, arguing that the same phenomenon can be described in different ways, leading to different ways of understanding it (Willig, 2013).

Constructivism holds a subtly different view and is the epistemological position adopted by the current research. Constructivism also takes the view that knowledge does not exist independently of individuals but is developed through experience, acknowledging that realities change over time and are influenced by social contexts (Crotty, 1998; Willig, 2013). Constructivism places greater importance on how social interactions lead to learning, with individuals creating their own meaning based upon cognition and how they individually construct knowledge through engagement with the world (Crotty, 1998; O'Reilly & Lester, 2017). For the purpose of the current research, it is thought that participants who engage in the Tree of Life workshops will experience this in unique ways, dependent on their individual experiences and contexts. The research does not aim to discover a single, generalisable finding, instead exploring insights into individual experiences from participants' unique perspectives.

## **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was selected as the methodology for this research. A qualitative approach was chosen as a quantitative study is unlikely to uncover the rich, detailed accounts needed to explore the personal experience of the participants.

IPA was developed by Jonathan Smith and Colleagues over 20 years ago. It was initially designed for use in the field of health psychology and is now an established qualitative psychology technique (Smith et al., 2022). IPA aims to provide an in-depth understanding of individual experiences, enabling researchers to examine how individuals view, experience and make sense of significant life experience. This is in line with the relativist ontological position, constructivist epistemological position and the research aims; with IPA considered most suited to providing the type of data required to answer the research question “what is the experience of care leavers in engaging in collective narrative practice through the Tree of Life?”

IPA is concerned with obtaining and describing individuals’ personal experiences of a particular phenomenon, with the aim of gaining rich, contextualised information. IPA recognises that experiences will be unique to individuals and does not seek to make broad generalisations. IPA values the influence of the researcher, acknowledging that any findings are an interpretation of the participant’s account (Smith et al., 2022).

Smith et al. (2022) highlight that IPA is underpinned by three main philosophical concepts: phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography.

## ***Phenomenology***

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach to the study of human experience (Smith & Nizza, 2022). Husserl (1859-1938) was the first to write about this approach and described the need to “go back to the things themselves” (Smith et al., 2022, p.8). He argued that studying subjective experience should come before any scientific account of the world. When conducting a phenomenological inquiry, it is important not to be influenced by any existing views or beliefs of the world, *bracketing* this off and instead focussing on examining the lived experience of participants (Smith & Nizza, 2022). The phenomenological concept of bracketing is discussed further in the reflexivity section of this chapter.

## ***Hermeneutics***

Hermeneutics is a theory of interpretation. Heidegger was a student of Husserl and argued the importance of phenomenology being an interpretative task. He explained how the meaning of experience is not always clear from language and requires the researcher to dig deeper and uncover the meaning behind something. The idea of a *hermeneutic circle* is one of the most important ideas from hermeneutic theory and relates to the “dynamic relationship between the part and the whole” (Smith et al., 2022, p.22). To be able to understand any given part, you must look at the whole and to understand the whole, you must look at the parts. For example, the meaning of a sentence may only be clear in the context of the *whole* interview but to understand a participant’s account of their experience through their interview we must look at the *parts*, through the meanings of individual words and sentences. Despite the stages of IPA being described in a linear way, the idea of the

hermeneutic circle highlights how the process of IPA is iterative, with the researcher moving back and forth through the stages, rather than purely one by one.

IPA can be described as *double hermeneutic* in that both the researcher and the participant are interpretative (Smith & Nizza, 2022). IPA involves the researcher attempting to make sense of the participants who are in turn attempting to make sense of their own experiences. The researcher therefore brings their own pre-conceptions, assumptions and experiences to both their interactions with participants and to the analysis of the data (Smith et al., 2022). It is therefore vital that the researcher aims to remain reflexive and sensitive to participant's accounts throughout the process. It could be argued IPA is *triple hermeneutic* with an additional layer of hermeneutics present in the way in which the reader will also have their own view and interpretation of the findings.

### ***Idiography***

Idiography can be defined as *a focus on the particular*. This contrasts with a nomothetic approach which seeks to uncover generalisable findings (Smith & Nizza, 2022). IPA seeks to understand “particular experiences of particular people in particular circumstances” (Smith & Nizza, 2022, p. 8). The focus is on one case study at a time, before making comparisons. Although generalisations may be made, this is done more cautiously than nomothetic approaches and making generalisations to the wider population is not the focus of the approach (Smith et al., 2022).

## **Methodological Considerations**

There are often a range of methodological options that could be adopted for any given research project (Willig, 2013). What is key, is that the method selected fits the purpose, theoretical assumptions and research question(s), resulting in a coherent design (Braun & Clark, 2021; Willig, 2013). A number of qualitative approaches were considered before deciding upon IPA. These were reflexive thematic analysis, discourse analysis and narrative analysis. The following section will briefly highlight each approach and explain the rationale for why they were not adopted.

### ***Narrative Analysis***

The Tree of Life is rooted in narrative psychology, making it important to consider narrative research as an approach. Narrative research explores the stories participants tell about their experiences, attending to how they are sequenced and organised (Willig, 2013). Although this is the basis of the Tree of Life activity itself, with individuals reflecting on and telling the stories of their own lives; the current research is instead concerned with how engaging in this narrative approach was experienced by individuals. The constructivist epistemology underlying this study acknowledges that individuals are likely to have experienced engaging in the Tree of Life in different ways and this may not have been in the form of a linear story with a clear beginning, middle and end. Furthermore, narrative approaches to research rely on *how* participants tell the story of their experience, rather than looking at the meaning they make of it (Clandin & Connelly, 2004). It was therefore considered not to be the most appropriate method for the current research.

### ***Reflexive Thematic Analysis***

Reflexive thematic analysis is an approach to analyse data to answer questions regarding perceptions, views and experiences of participants, seeking to discover patterns across cases through identifying themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Although this is also a key aspect of IPA research, the focus of identifying themes in reflective thematic analysis is across cases, looking for shared themes. This is different to the idiographic aspect of IPA in which there is a detailed analysis of each individual case, prior to identifying themes across cases. This was felt to be important since it was thought that participants were each likely to have differing experiences of engaging in the Tree of Life. IPA was considered more appropriate to examine both distinct personal experience and any shared themes that may arise.

### ***Discourse Analysis***

Discourse analysis is concerned with the role of language in the construction of social reality, focussing not on *what* is said, but *how* it is said (Robson, 2011; Willig, 2013). Both discourse analysis and IPA seek to make sense of and explore the meaning behind participants words. However, whilst it is acknowledged that discourse will influence the understanding of how the Tree of Life is experienced, it was considered important to use an approach that placed higher value on exploring individual experience and the meaning that individuals may attribute to their experience.

## **Research Design**

### ***Tree of Life Workshop***

Although not part of the research itself the Tree of Life workshop took place in August 2022 and the structure of the day can be seen in appendix 5. The researcher (a trainee educational psychologist) and an educational psychologist from the Local Authority's (LA) Virtual School delivered the workshop. Young people were invited from the participation group for care leavers in the LA in which the researcher was on placement. Eight individuals attended. The participation group is a group of care leavers aged 18 and above that come together to create a stronger voice to influence positive changes in the services they receive. Following the workshop, attendees were invited to participate in the research. This was on a voluntary basis with no obligation to take part. Further information on informed consent can be found in the ethical considerations section of this chapter.

### ***Participants and Recruitment***

Due to the in-depth nature of the study a small sample size was required. Smith et al. (2022) recommend a sample size of between six and ten for a doctoral research study. Following the Tree of Life workshop, all eight attendees agreed to participate in the research and completed consent forms. It was explained that they would be contacted to arrange the interview via their chosen contact method. The recruitment process resulted in six participants being interviewed. Details of the participants can be found in table 4. Limited personal information was collected to protect participant's anonymity.



Smith et al. (2022) state that IPA requires a purposive and “reasonably homogenous” sample (p.45). This is to enable the exploration of a particular phenomenon, allowing for the identification of differences and similarities in experience. In the current study, there is no claim that participants are all the same. However, being a care leaver in a single LA provided a point of unity, allowing for the exploration of the phenomenon – their recent experience of engaging with the Tree of Life.

Inclusion criteria were as follows:

- Participants had engaged in the Tree of Life workshop
- Participants were care leavers (aged 18+ with experience of being a CLA)
- Participants can communicate verbally in English

**Table 4**

*Overview of Participants*

<b>Participant number</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>
1	Maya
2	Inaya
3	Jack
4	Zain
5	Yasmin
6	Jade

### ***Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews***

The option of a focus group as a method of data collection was considered within the research process since all participants had already been in a group setting together. However, due to the difficulty in extracting idiographic accounts from the group experience created within a focus group setting (Love et al., 2020), data was collected using semi-structured, one-to-one interviews. This was in line with the exploratory purpose of the research and to elicit rich, in-depth accounts of participant's experiences.

Participants were invited to undertake interviews either in person or online over Microsoft Teams, 2-4 weeks after the Tree of Life workshop. It was considered that this length of time would enable participants time to reflect upon their experience. All participants chose to interview in person and these took place 3-4 weeks after the workshop at the LA town hall. This was a location familiar to them due to their existing roles within the participation group and this being the location of the Tree of Life workshop.

Maya was the first to interview and a time was arranged to meet at the town hall. Inaya, who interviewed second, requested meeting prior to a participation group event to save on travel time and costs. The four remaining participants (who had given consent to interview but had not yet responded to arrange a time) also offered to interview that evening after seeing Inaya interview at this time. Although this was not the initial plan, it enabled six out of eight workshop attendees to engage in the interviews. Some of the drawbacks of this are considered within the strengths and limitations section of the discussion chapter. The other two workshop attendees,

although giving consent to interview, did not respond when contacted to arrange a time.

Interviews used open questions to explore their experience of taking part in the workshop. Since phenomenological research requires the researcher to enter the world of the participant it was vital that interview questions were open-ended and non-directive. Semi-structured interviews enabled flexibility and allowed the participant to lead the discussion and explore areas that were important to them without being fixed to a particular order (Smith et al., 2022). Prompts were used to encourage participants to expand on what they had said rather than to check whether they agreed with certain statements or ideas (Willig, 2013). The guide used by the interviewer acted as a checklist of possible topics and was used flexibly to give participants a sense of agency over the interview, explore particular topics in varying levels of depth, modify initial questions in light of participant responses and allow for the exploration of any unplanned topics that may arise (Smith et al., 2022). The interview guide and suggestions for additional probes can be seen in appendix 10.

The interviews were conducted by the researcher, who also facilitated the Tree of Life workshop. The interviewer was therefore already familiar to the interviewees. It is hoped that this enabled participants to feel at ease in the interview scenario, with the semi-structured approach further allowing it to feel like a “conversation with a purpose” (Smith et al., 2022, p. 54). There are also some potential limitations of knowing the participants, which are considered in the discussion chapter.

Throughout the interview the interviewer drew on skills as a trainee psychologist,

building rapport with participants and using empathetic listening skills to further help participants feel at ease.

Audio from the interviews were recorded and the transcribed verbatim (appendix 11) All data including recordings were stored on a password encrypted computer in line with Data Protection Act 2018.

### **Reflexivity**

IPA acknowledges that data collection and analysis is an interpretative process, accepting the role of the researcher. In IPA, along with all qualitative methods, researchers need to consider the impact of their own experiences and preconceptions on the research, acknowledging that the research setting is a two-way human encounter (Finlay, 2002; 2003). Although this influence of the researcher is accepted, Elliot et al. (1999) suggest that researchers should explore and disclose their own values, beliefs and assumptions so that the reader can make their own interpretations of the analysis and develop their own explanations. As will be discussed within this section, this process of reflexivity was ongoing throughout the entire research process, with the use of a research diary and regular supervision used to aid reflection.

### ***Insider Research***

It was particularly important to consider and acknowledge my own experiences and reactions throughout the research process since I had been drawn to this topic due to my own personal experience. There were different levels at which I could be considered an *insider researcher* (Adler & Adler, 1987); through my own personal

experience of being a care experienced individual, engaging in the Tree of Life and through my role as facilitator.

Hofman and Barker (2017) highlight several costs and benefits associated with insider research. This may have meant that I was drawn to investigating a topic which may have otherwise remained unexplored and gave me the benefit of experiential knowledge (Borkman, 1990). However, in line with the constructivist underpinnings to this research, my personal experience does not necessarily offer any greater insight and understanding and is likely to be different to the experience of the participants. I was mindful of the risk of over-identifying with participants and the potential impact of my own assumptions and experiences on the research. This was particularly important to consider given the double hermeneutic aspect of IPA, with the requirement to interpret the experience of others.

### ***Bracketing off***

Hoffman and Barker (2017) highlight the need to *bracket* assumptions, setting them to one side to limit the impact of prior experiences and beliefs on the research.

Through self-reflection, aided by conversations with my supervisor I was able to gain a greater understanding of my own preconceptions about the research, ensuring that the analysis was rooted in the participant's experience rather than my own reflections. The concept of bracketing came from Husserl's idea of *phenomenological reduction* which underscores holding an awareness of previous knowledge but consciously and reflexively putting preconceptions to one side, concentrating instead on the study of the experience at hand (Fischer, 2009).

### ***To Disclose or not to Disclose?***

An important decision was whether to disclose my motivations for the research and position as a care experienced individual to research participants. I considered both the risks and the opportunities of my decision. Hoffman and Barker (2017) highlight that self-disclosure can influence the participant's narrative, with the participant likely to present themselves differently to someone who shares part of their experience. This could be both negative and positive, in that although it may alter what the participants share, for example with them perhaps feeling pressure to also share a positive experience, it may be that disclosing my own experience enables participants to speak more freely. Hoffman and Barker (2017) take the position that self-disclosure is an individual decision for each researcher to make, but that there is a "need to reflexively interrogate the relational and ethical implications of whatever decision is made" (Hoffman & Barker, 2017, p.17). In the end, the decision was made in collaboration with the participation officer for the group, that I would disclose my experience to those attending the workshop (most of whom would later become research participants). It was felt that it would be important for participants of the workshop to understand the rationale for my interest in the area and for them to build trust with me, as someone external to the group coming in to facilitate the workshop. Therefore, individuals were aware of my position and previous experience prior to becoming research participants.

### ***Further Reflections on Social and Cultural Contexts***

It was important to consider other aspects of my own and the participants' identities, both shared or different and how these could contribute to power differences and the impact that this could have on the research. I used the social GRACES model

(Burnham, 2005; 2012) to consider both visible and invisible characteristics such as gender, religion, culture, class, education and ethnicity, aiming to pay attention to these in order to minimise the influence of any unconscious power dynamics. I was aware for example, that I was a white, educated, middle class female in her 20's and the participants were younger and some were from minority ethnic backgrounds. This may have had an impact on the information they felt able to share. I worked to build rapport and relationships with the participants in an attempt to minimise any potential power differences and enable them to feel at ease within the interview.

### ***Reflexive Diary***

A reflexive research diary and ongoing reflection during supervision throughout the process were used in order to consider how my own experiences and position could influence my interpretation of the experiences shared with me. The aim was that this would support me to limit the impact of my own assumptions and biases. An example from my research diary can be found in appendix 14. Initial themes were also checked with a research supervisor and through peer supervision to ensure my interpretations were not overly biased by my own experiences, thereby increasing the trustworthiness of my findings.

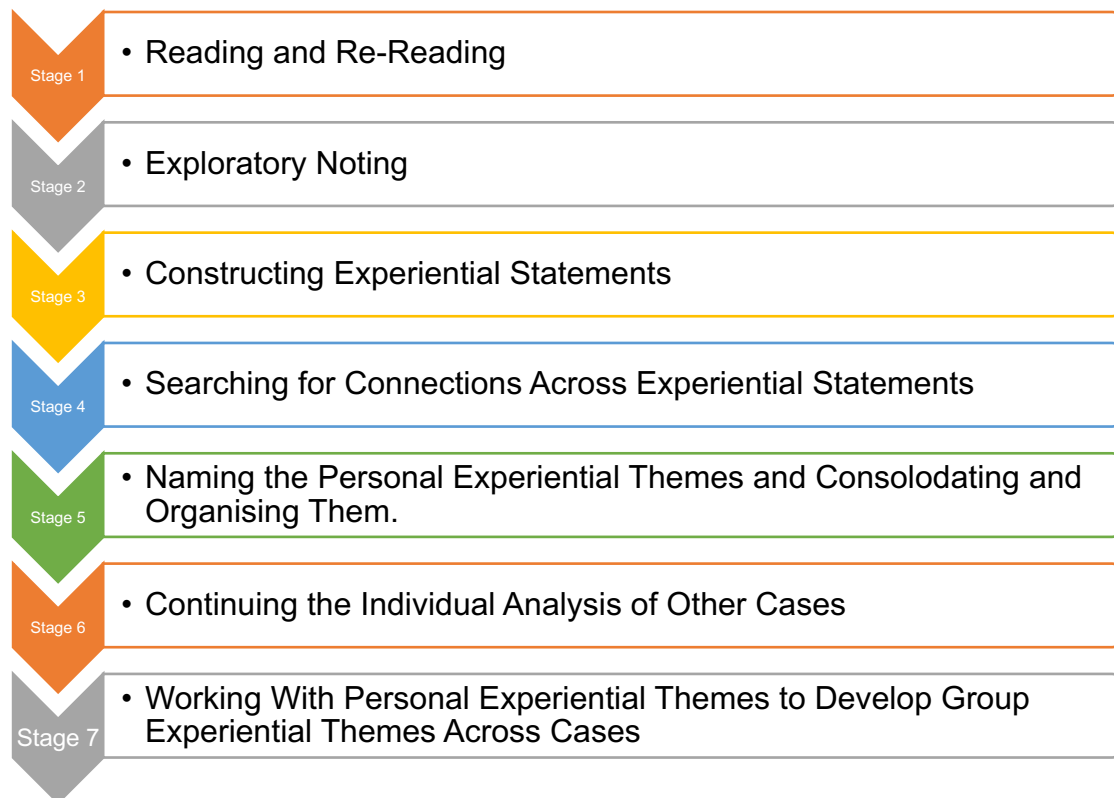
### **Data Analysis Procedure**

The data analysis followed the process recommend by Smith et al. (2022) this expands upon their earlier six stage process set out in the first edition of their book (Smith et al., 2009). The stages presented in figure 4 were followed. Smith et al. (2022) highlights that these can be used flexibly and are not “analogous to steps in a

recipe” (p.77) but provide a helpful structure, particularly for novice IPA researchers. The following section will discuss how each stage was employed in turn.

## Figure 4

### *Stages of IPA*



### ***Stage 1: Reading and Re-Reading***

The accuracy of the transcript (appendix 11) was checked against the recording and amendments were made where required. Smith et al. (2022) advise listening to the audio recording whilst reading the transcripts so that the voice of the participant can be imagined during later readings of the transcript, allowing for a more complete analysis. The transcribed data was inserted into a Microsoft Word document and columns were inserted either side of the transcript to create space for experiential statements on the left and exploratory notes on the right.



### ***Stage 2: Exploratory Noting***

At this stage, anything interesting or significant within the transcript is noted in order to begin to identify ways in which the participants talk and think about certain issues and aspects of experience. In some ways, stages 1 and 2 took place simultaneously as notes were made as the transcripts were read and re-read. Smith et al. (2022) helpfully highlight that there are “no rules about what is commented upon” (p.79). Some of the initial notes took the form of questions.

Smith et al. (2022) highlight that three types of exploratory commenting can be made, and these can lead to different levels of interpretation. These can be grouped into exploratory, linguistic and conceptual notes. Exploratory notes relate to what a participant has said, linguistic to the specific use of language and conceptual relates to analysis that may take a more interrogative form in which we are “explicitly asking questions of the data” (Smith et al., 2022 p. 83). Comments made were coded according to the three areas and can be seen within the annotated transcripts shown in appendix 11. There was considered to be some overlap between which comments fell within each category and this process was used flexibly to aid the researcher’s process of analysis, rather than as a strict coding system.

### ***Stage 3: Constructing Experiential Statements***

This step involved a shift to working primarily with the exploratory notes, rather than the transcript. Exploratory comments were analysed to identify experiential statements which are expressed as phrases. The task at this stage was to produce concise summaries of what was important in the initial notes, aiming to reduce the volume of data whilst simultaneously maintaining complexity. Smith et al. (2022)

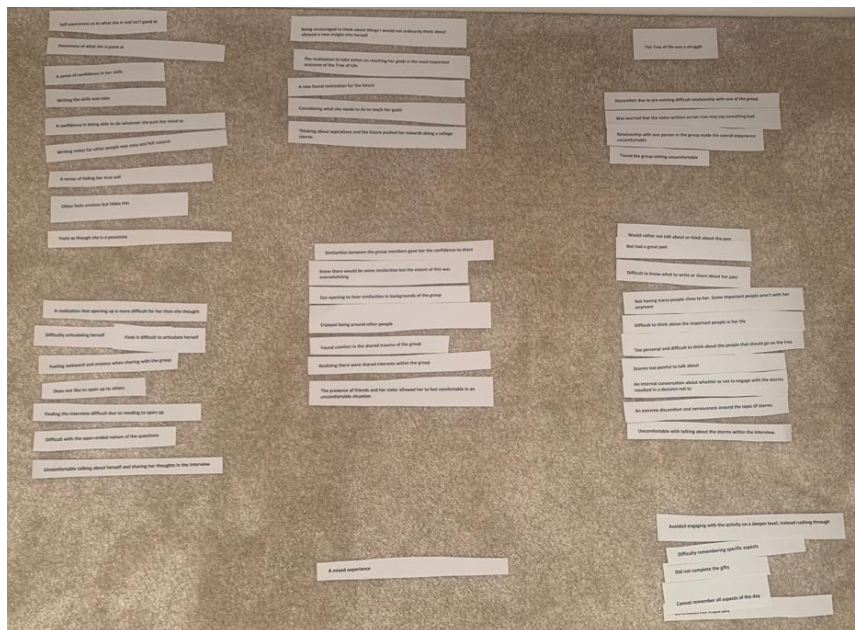
chose the term experiential as these statements “should relate directly the participants experiences, or to the experience of making sense of the things that happened to them” (p. 86). These statements reflect not only the participant’s words, but the researcher’s interpretation of these words, turning “loose and open” initial notes into more “stable and polished” statements that capture and demonstrate understanding (Smith et al., 2022, p. 87). At this stage it is important to pay close attention to the data and ensure that experiential statements stem from one’s exploratory notes.

#### ***Stage 4: Searching for Connections Across Experiential Statements***

At this step the experiential statements were grouped together to produce a structure that highlights the most important parts of the participant’s account. This was achieved through looking for connections between them. Experiential statements were printed on strips of paper and mixed up on a flat surface. Statements that related to each other in some way were clustered, as shown in figure 5. Any duplicated experiential statements were placed on top of each other. Some experiential statements were discarded, for example if they did not seem important to the final analysis. Clusters were transferred onto a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet alongside the original quotes from the transcript.

**Figure 5**

*Photograph highlighting the process of clustering experiential statements*



***Stage 5: Naming the Personal Experiential Themes and Consolidating and Organising Them***

Each cluster of experiential statements was given a title that best described their characteristics. These became the participant's Personal Experiential Themes (PETs). PETs were then divided into subthemes and tabulated, alongside the experiential statements and illustrative quotes that contributed to them in order to trace the analytic process. Tables of PETs can be found in appendix 11 and are also shown in in figures 8-13 in the results chapter.

***Stage 6: Continuing the Analysis of Other Individual Cases***

The next step involved repeating the above processes on the next participant's transcript, treating each case "as a complete universe of inquiry" in line with the idiographic nature of IPA (Smith et al., 2022, p.99). The process of bracketing, as

described earlier in this chapter was particularly important at this stage, to avoid the analysis of previous cases influencing the interpretation of the current case.

### **Stage 7: Working with Personal Experiential Themes to Develop Group Experiential Themes Across Cases**

The final stage was to identify patterns across the PETs generated in stage 5 to create Group Experiential Themes (GETs), allowing differences and similarities between cases to be highlighted. This was done using on-screen sticky notes. Each PET (bold and capitals) and any associated subthemes (lowercase) were typed onto a sticky note and a different colour was used for each participant. Sticky notes were grouped and re-grouped as shown in figure 6. The researcher regularly referred to the original tables of PETs and contributing experiential themes (appendix 11) to ensure that these were kept in mind when considering the overall meaning of each PET.

**Figure 6**  
*Screenshot to Demonstrate the Development of GETs*



## **Validity and Quality**

The usual measures of validity used for quantitative research are unachievable and inappropriate for qualitative research that does not follow the traditional goal of achieving scientific, objective knowledge (Willig, 2013; Yardley, 2017). A range of approaches for considering validity in qualitative research have been considered, both for IPA specifically (Smith et al., 2011; Nizza et al, 2021) and qualitative research more broadly (Elliot et al., 1999; Yardley, 2000).

Smith et al. (2022) highlight that different considerations will be suitable for different studies and any criteria for validity will need to be flexibly applied when using IPA since it is a creative process. The current research will be considered in relation to Yardley's (2000) criteria, before drawing upon the more recent guidance specific to IPA (Nizza et al., 2021)

### ***Yardley's Quality Criteria***

Yardley (2000) proposes that the validity of qualitative research should be grouped into the following categories:

- Sensitivity to context
- Commitment and rigour
- Transparency and coherence
- Impact and importance.

These will be discussed in relation to the current research.

### ***Sensitivity to Context***

Yardley (2017) highlights that qualitative studies can demonstrate sensitivity to context through "showing an awareness of the participants' perspectives and setting,

and the sociocultural and linguistic context of the research and how these may influence both what participants say and how this is interpreted by the researcher” (Yardley, 2017, p. 1). In the current research, sensitivity to context was demonstrated by immersive and disciplined attention throughout the research process, from planning through to write up.

Firstly, sensitivity to the context from which the participants were drawn was displayed. The researcher was also the facilitator of the Tree of Life workshop and therefore had an in depth understanding of the experience that participants had engaged in. An awareness of the existing literature on the topic is demonstrated within the literature review chapter and sensitivity to context was also demonstrated through the way in which the interviews were conducted, with participants made to feel at ease and the non-directive nature of the interview.

Furthermore, Yardley (2000) highlights that qualitative studies must show sensitivity to the data, carefully considering meanings generated by participants rather than imposing preconceived ideas and categories. Sensitivity to context continued to be exhibited during data analysis. Interpretations were made carefully and sensitively, and extracts have been included with the analysis section to maintain the voice of the participant.

### ***Commitment and Rigour***

Commitment and rigour can be demonstrated through in-depth engagement with every aspect of the research project. This includes developing expertise in the

research methods employed, collecting data thoroughly and completing a detailed analysis (Yardley, 2017).

I developed my interview skills to enable me to interview sensitively and rigorously. This was achieved through reading about IPA interview techniques, attending tutorials and using research supervision to develop competence whilst reflecting on every aspect of the research process. Prior to the start of the research I undertook additional training in the Tree of Life<sup>1</sup>, facilitated by Ncazelo Ncube, demonstrating my commitment to the project prior to the data collection phase.

In line with the four IPA specific quality guidelines developed by Nizza et al. (2021), I thoroughly immersed myself in the data, engaging in a close analytic reading of participants words in order to develop a vigorous experiential account and construct a compelling, unfolding narrative.

### ***Transparency and Coherence***

Transparency relates to the way in which the reader should be able to identify how interpretations originated from the data. In this research a clear audit trail of the analysis can be found in appendices 11-13. Unlike qualitative research this has not been provided to enable replication of the research, but to give a clear understanding of the processes and context within which the research is situated. This thesis aims to provide a coherent account of the research project, consistent with the theoretical

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<sup>1</sup> This training is run through Phola, a South African based non-government organisation (NGO), directed by Ncazelo Ncube-Mlilo. They are the main training provider for the Tree of Life.

underpinnings of IPA and the philosophical assumptions of relativism and constructivism underlying this research.

### ***Impact and Importance***

Yardley (2000) argues that however well a piece of research is conducted, the real test of validity lies in whether it tells the reader something that is useful. This could be through the generation of hypotheses or altering how we think about the world (Yardley, 2017). The discussion chapter demonstrates how this research contributed to a body of literature on the Tree of Life, providing a deeper insight into how care leavers experience engaging in this activity. Implications for the EP profession and how EPs and other professionals can support CEI is considered in the discussion chapter.

### ***Markers of High-Quality IPA***

In 2011, a set of criteria specific to IPA studies were developed which could be used to categorise IPA studies into 'unacceptable', 'acceptable' and 'good' (Smith et al., 2011). The criteria echo much of Yardley's (2000) standards but also encompass whether the study subscribes to the theoretical principles of IPA and provide three additional conditions for a *good* IPA study: Keeping focused and offering depth, presenting strong data and interpretations and engaging and enlightening the reader. Nizza et al. (2021) has since built upon this, highlighting four markers of high quality for IPA research:

1. Constructing a compelling, unfolding narrative
2. Developing a vigorous experiential account
3. Close analytic reading of participant's words
4. Attending to convergence and divergence



These markers were held in mind throughout the research process. Since they are designed to appraise a piece of IPA research and are most helpfully considered in light of the full write up of the research, these markers are considered further within the strengths and limitations section of the discussion chapter.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval was granted by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC) and was conducted in Line with the British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2021). Ethical approval was granted in April 2022 and can be found in appendix 7. Although no formal ethical approval was required from the LA, the head of the Care Leavers Service and the Principal EP were aware of and agreed to the research taking place. The following ethical considerations were made throughout the process.

### ***Informed Consent and Right to Withdraw***

The research and its aims were shared with the young people at the end of the Tree of Life workshop. They were informed that participation was on a voluntary basis and were given the opportunity to ask questions before participating. Those who expressed an interest were given information sheets and consent forms (appendix 8 & 9) and allowed the opportunity to decide whether they would prefer to meet in person or online. Young people were informed that they could withdraw from the research at any time. Any further follow up correspondence to participants also reminded them of their right to withdraw.

### ***Confidentiality and Anonymity***

Participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded and verbatim accounts from the interviews would be included in the write up. Participants were told that whatever they said in the interview would be confidential, their names would be pseudo-anonymised in publications and transcripts and analyses would be held on a password-protected computer. Any identifiable information such as the names of peers or family members would also be changed or omitted. They were informed that this confidentiality would be subject to legal limitations and local safeguarding procedures. Furthermore, due to the small sample size, it was explained that some experiences may be recognisable by those who were aware of the research project. Participants were informed that the research may be disseminated in the form of a presentation to professionals, written thesis, and journal article.

### ***Protection from Harm***

Care was taken throughout to minimise the risk of psychological distress. Informed consent and right to withdraw went some way to addressing this, however it was not possible to predict how participants would respond to the interview questions. There was a possibility that participants could become distressed during the interview itself.

Participants were made aware of the topics that might come up through the information sheet and were reminded of their right to withdraw at any time.

Participants had the opportunity to talk about personal experiences during the interviews and this may cause distress to participants or remind them of a difficult period of their lives. This is particularly pertinent to care leavers as it is likely that they have experienced adverse life events such as abuse, neglect or placement

changes. Interview questions were open-ended in order to allow participants to be in control of how much information they share. In some interviews participants showed through their body language or answers that they were uncomfortable discussing a particular topic, at these times the researcher moved away from the topic in question. On two occasions participants also appeared to become uncomfortable within the interview context. On these occasions interviews were brought to a close.

Throughout the process the researcher remained attuned to signs of distress or discomfort in the participants and moved away from certain topics and terminated interviews where required. The researcher also checked-in with participants after the interview to gauge their emotional wellbeing. The following support options were also offered where needed:

- Further space for reflection, separate from the research if they wished to speak further about any thoughts or feelings brought about following their participation in the research.
- The researcher supported the participant to identify trusted people whom they could contact for additional support, such as their personal advisor or counsellor.
- Participants could also be signposted to the LA Family Information Service page for care leavers which signposts young people to a range of organisations, both within and external to the LA.

## Findings

### Chapter Overview

This chapter will present detailed accounts from the research participants to gain insight into their experience of engaging in collective narrative practice through the Tree of Life, aiming to answer the following research question:

**What is the experience of care leavers in engaging in collective narrative practice through the Tree of Life?**

Some contextual information about each of the participants and their individual personal experiential themes (PETs) are shared, before an account of how these formed the group experiential themes (GETs) is presented. An overview of the group experiential themes is shown below in figure 7. These will be presented in more detail later in the chapter.

### Figure 7

*Overview of Group Experiential Themes*



Quotes from the participants are included in order to provide evidence for the researcher's interpretations and to maintain the phenomenological core of the research. Some typographic features are utilised and can be found below in table 5.

Page numbers follow each quote and relate to the page number for individual worked interview transcripts (appendix 11).

**Table 5**

*Typographic Features*

<b>Typographic features</b>	
...	A pause in speech
[ ]	Contextual information such as [nods], [laugh] or a [long pause]
[...]	Quotation has been cut
<b>bold text</b>	Words within the interview that were emphasised by the participant

**Contextual Information and Personal Experiential Themes**

This section will highlight some brief contextual information about each of the participants in order to facilitate the reader's role within the hermeneutic dialogue, aiding their own meaning-making of the data and understanding of the researcher's interpretation. In order to retain the idiographic nature of the methodology used, an overview of their Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) is also provided in these individual sections. However, PETs and associated quotes are not offered in detail in this section, instead presented in relation to broader Group Experiential Themes (GETs) later in this chapter.

Individual participant accounts are presented in the order in which they interviewed and pseudonyms have been used throughout to protect participant's anonymity. The contextual information presented for participants is limited to information participants

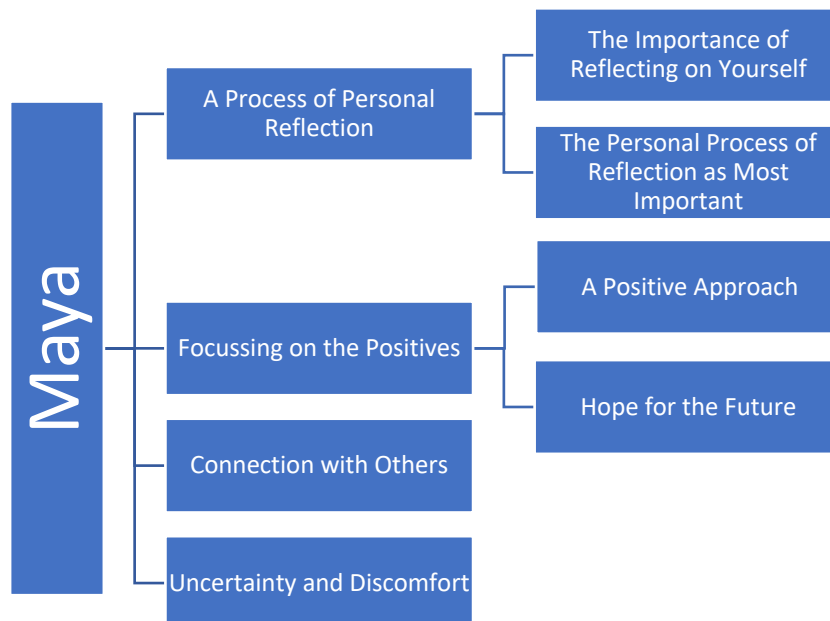
shared within their interviews and therefore consented to being included in the findings of this research. However, it is notable that acting both as group facilitator and interviewer, I learnt more about the individual participants. Although wary of stereotyping all care leavers within the bracket of leading challenging lives, it feels important to acknowledge that many of the participants were experiencing ongoing challenges in multiple aspects of their lives. Some of these challenges found to disproportionately face care leavers are discussed in the introduction chapter. The interviews took part at a transitional time for many; with participants embarking upon new college and university courses, looking for work and moving house. As a researcher, my additional knowledge of the participants is likely to have impacted upon my interpretation of the data.

**Participant 1: Maya**

Maya appeared to feel comfortable to speak openly within the interview. She did not know the rest of the group very well as she had not routinely attended the participation group events. Although there were some aspects that were more difficult for her such as reflecting on important people and sharing personal ‘storms’, overall, she spoke positively about the experience of engaging in the Tree of Life, highlighting the value and importance of regularly reflecting on herself. She seemed to appreciate the positive nature of the approach as well as the opportunity to connect with others and reflect on her hopes for the future.

**Figure 8**

*Maya’s PETs*

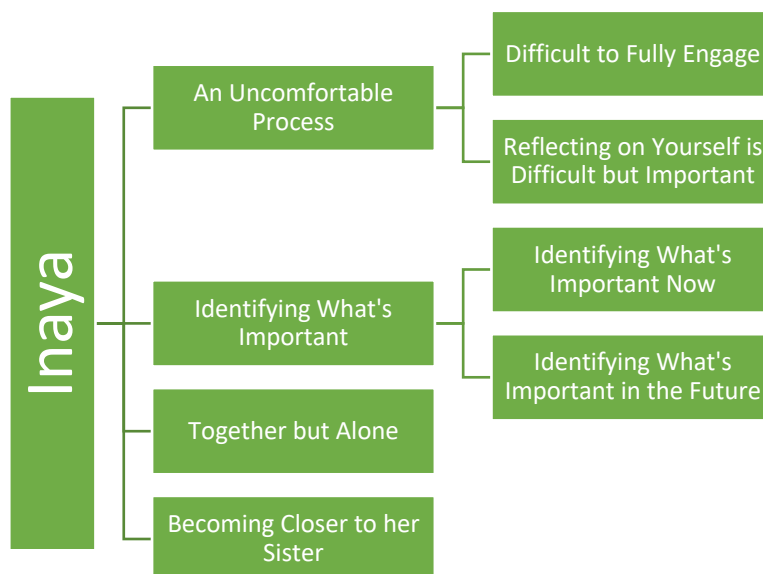


**Participant 2: Inaya**

Inaya was second to interview. She had her 18-month-old daughter with her at both the Tree of Life session and the interview, meaning that understandably her attention was split between engagement with these and caring for her daughter. Within her interview she spoke about how being a single parent can be lonely. Although she reported enjoying being with others, there was a sense of her feeling outside of the group, highlighted through the PET 'Together but Alone'. Inaya had the unique experience of taking part in the Tree of Life alongside her sister, Yasmin. For Inaya, this was central to her experience and she spoke about how the Tree of Life brought her closer to both Yasmin and another sister who was not present. Through the analysis it became clear that the Tree of Life was an uncomfortable experience for Inaya but it enabled her to identify things that are important to her; both in her present life and in the future.

**Figure 9**

*Inaya's PETs*



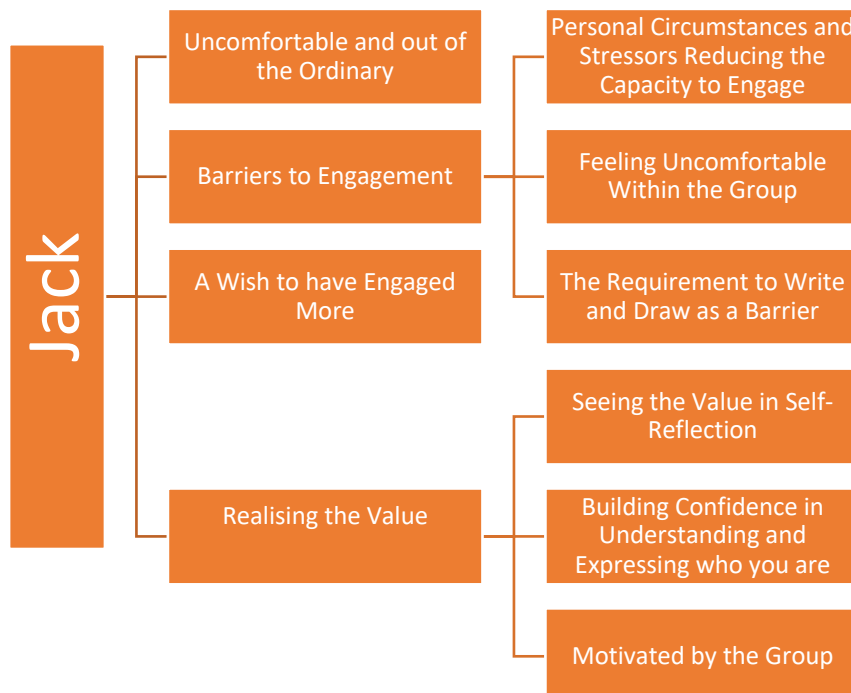


**Participant 3: Jack**

On the day of the Tree of Life workshop Jack had come straight from a nightshift in a bar and had not yet been to sleep. This may have influenced his ability to engage in the workshop. Within his interviews he struggled to remember particular aspects of the day. Overall, Jack appeared open and comfortable to engage in the interview. For him, the Tree of Life appeared to have been a particularly uncomfortable experience and there were a number of barriers to his engagement. However, there was the sense that as the day went on, and perhaps also the interview, he reflected on the value of the activity. A key theme from his interview was a wish that he had engaged more with the Tree of Life activity at the time and would value doing it again.

**Figure 10**

Jack's PETs

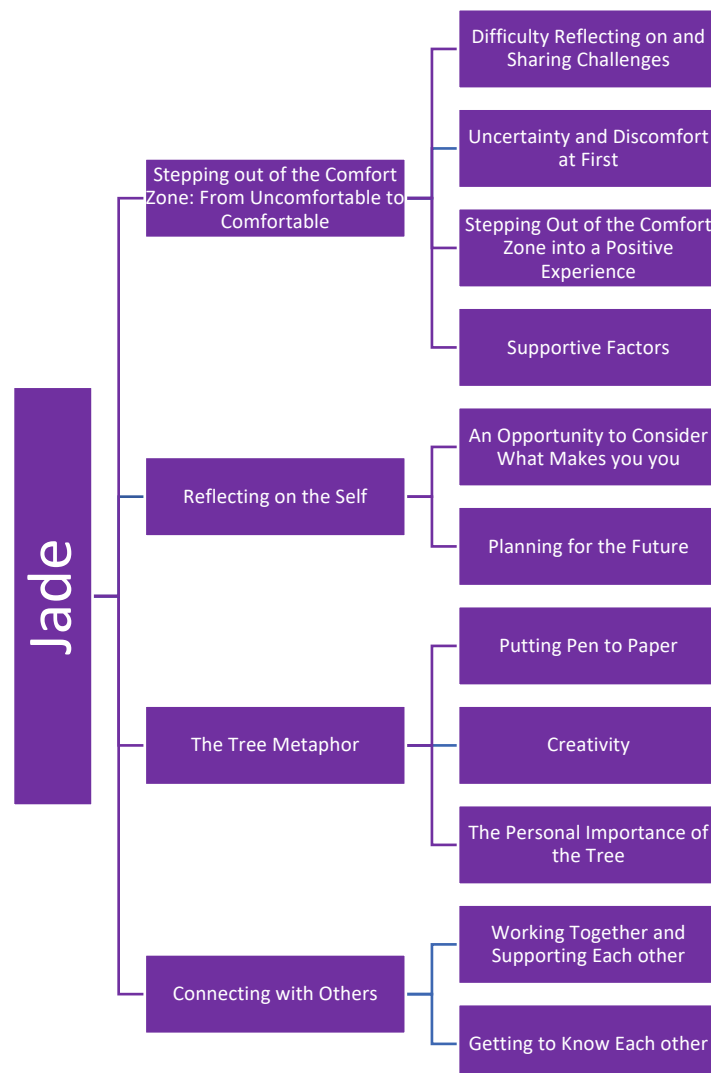


### Participant 4: Jade

Jade seemed relaxed and confident in the interview. The overall sense was that her experience of engaging in the Tree of Life was positive. She spoke about being unsure and somewhat uncomfortable at first. There was a sense of her stepping out of the “comfort zone” and then enjoying the experience and opportunity to connect with others. She particularly enjoyed the creative element of the Tree of Life, talking about how the process of putting “pen to paper” enabled her to reflect more deeply on herself.

Figure 11

Jade’s PETs

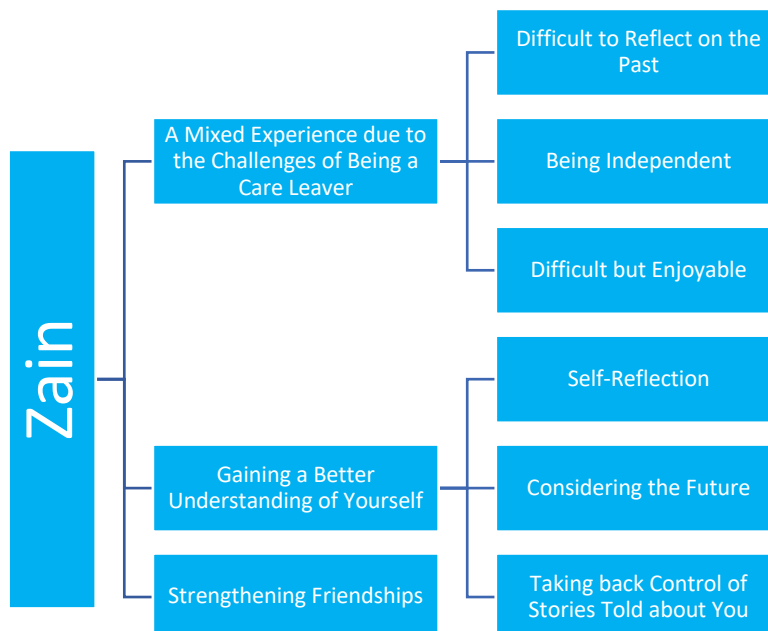


**Participant 5: Zain**

Zain's was the penultimate interview. He appeared to know the rest of the group well, referring to them within the interview as his friends. His answers did not always seem to clearly link to the question being asked. This meant that as a researcher, a greater level of interpretation was required for this participant in comparison to other participants who gave more explicit answers about their experience of the Tree of Life. Zain talked about some of his own personal challenges of being a care leaver. His experience of engaging in the Tree of Life appeared mixed. He found it difficult to reflect on the past but talked about gaining a better understanding of himself and his friends, which supported him to strengthen his friendships.

**Figure 12**

Zain's PETs

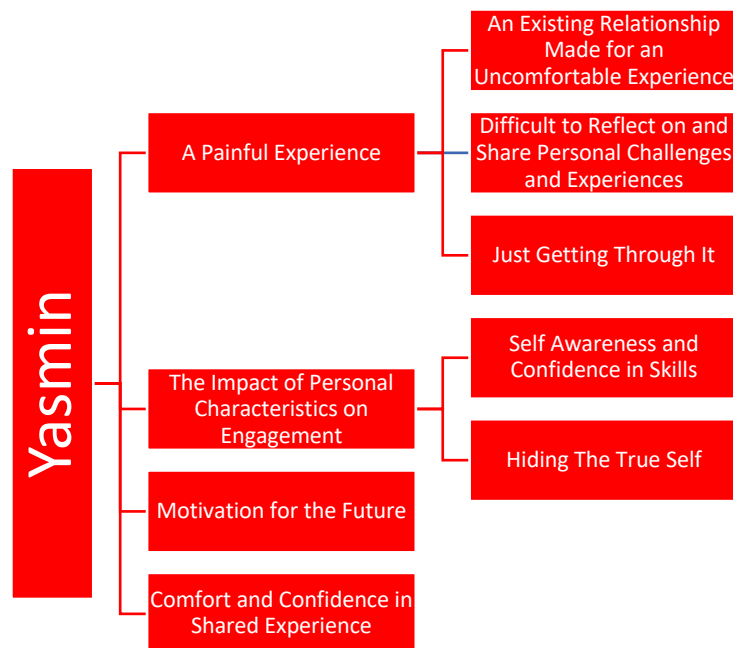


**Participant 6: Yasmin**

Yasmin took part in the Tree of Life alongside her sister, Inaya. She indicated that she knew some of the group members well and talked about how an existing relationship with another member of the group made her experience uncomfortable. Within the interview, Yasmin found it difficult to articulate her experiences and mentioned that she was finding the interview experience challenging. She talked about how she finds it hard to open up and express herself. This also impacted upon her experience of the Tree of Life. Yasmin found the Tree of Life useful in motivating her towards her chosen future and reported finding comfort in the realisation that she shared experiences with others.

**Figure 13**

*Yasmin's PETs*



## Group Experiential Themes

The PETs provide a springboard to consider patterns of similarity and difference between the participants, leading to the generation of a set of Group Experiential Themes (GETs). The role of the GETs is to highlight the “shared and unique features of the experience across the contributing participants” (Smith et al., 2022, p.100).

GETs were developed by a process of grouping participants’ PETs, as described within the methodology chapter.

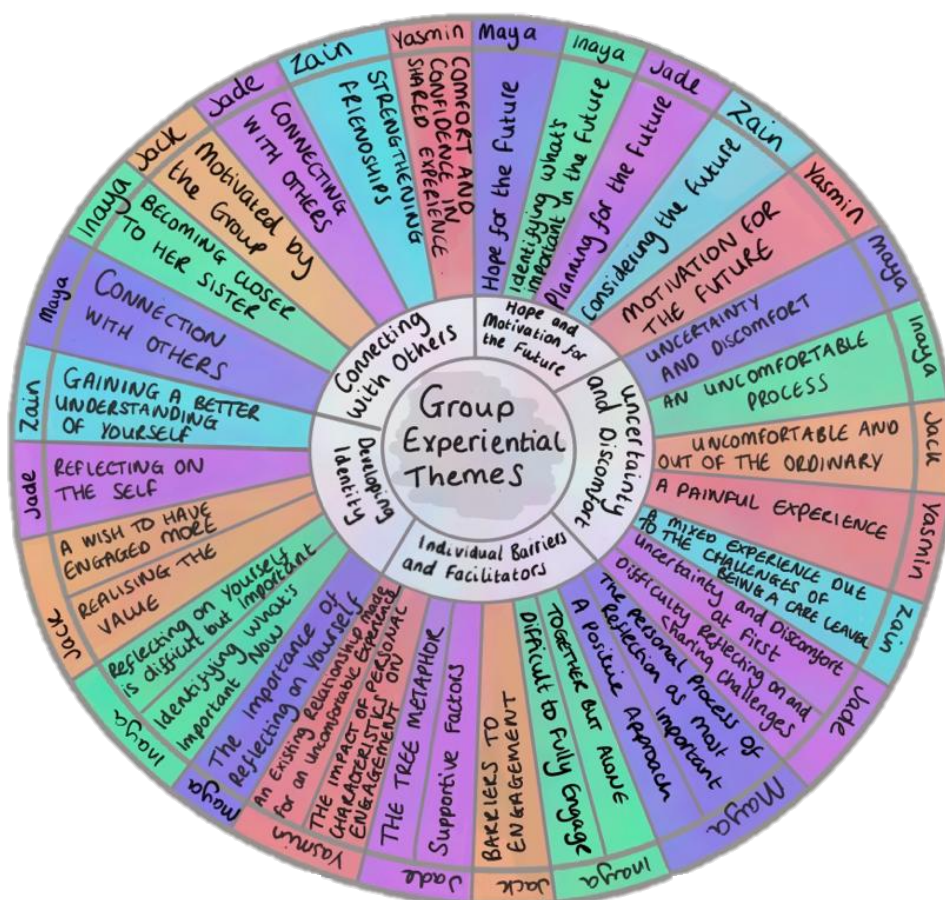
Smith et al. (2022) note that this is a dynamic process. While you may start at the overall PET level, the researcher will zoom in and out to examine particular subthemes or experiential statements more closely, moving back and forth between these layers. Smith et al. (2022) highlight that some of these may be scaled up versions of earlier PETs and others may be new entities that only emerge following examining all of the data.

The resulting GETs can be seen in figure 15. A different colour has been used for each participant and this corresponds to the colour used to illustrate their PETs in figures 8-13 This information has also been tabulated in appendix 13. Although Smith et al. (2022) highlight that there is no set rule as to what counts as an acceptable level of recurrence of a PET for it to form a GET, all of the GETs are derived from at least five of the six participants’ PETs or associated subthemes. Those in bold type and capitals relate to PETs and those in bold type alone relate to PET subthemes.

It could be viewed that there is some overlap between the GETs, for example with GET 2 and GET 4 both discussing the role of the group from a different angle. It was considered whether GET 2 could be amalgamated into the other the other GETs, however this GET tells an important part of the story for these participants: The Tree of Life is experienced differently, by different participants at different times. In line with the idiographic nature, it felt crucial to retain this GET, closely attending to aspects of convergence and divergence within the experience, a quality marker of IPA research (Nizza et al., 2021). Associated illustrative quotes were placed in the section that was felt to provide the most coherent account of the findings.

**Figure 14**

Illustration Demonstrating the Mapping of PETs onto GETs



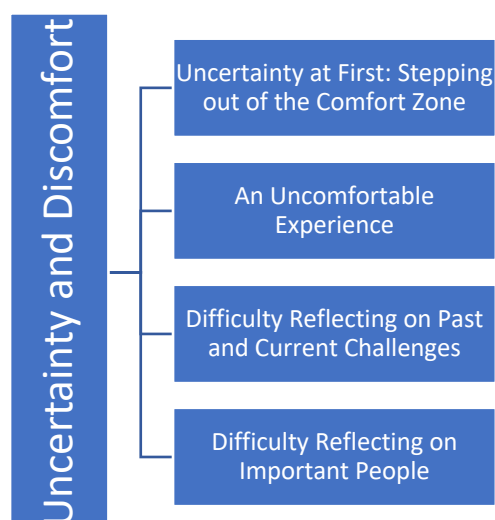
Four of the five GETs were further divided into subthemes during the write up of the findings. This enabled a more ordered reporting of the findings whilst ensuring that the individual voices of the participants can be heard. Subthemes are demonstrated visually throughout the chapter in figures 15-18.

### **Group Experiential Theme 1: Uncertainty and Discomfort**

All participants spoke about feelings of discomfort, particularly at the start of the day and with certain aspects of the task. This feeling of initial discomfort appeared to be mirrored within a number of the interviews themselves, with participants often starting off hesitantly and talking about more negative experiences of the Tree of Life activity, before appearing to reflect on some of the more positive aspects of the experience later in the interviews. The focus of this GET is with the more uncomfortable aspects. The shift to a more positive view that appeared to take place is discussed later in this chapter through GETs 3, 4 and 5: Developing identity, connecting with others and hope and motivation for the future.

**Figure 15**

*Subthemes for GET 1*



### ***Uncertainty at First: Stepping out of the Comfort Zone***

Jade and Maya both explicitly talked about being unsure about the Tree of Life activity at first, with Jade saying, "before I got there I didn't really know what it was gonna be about" (p.2). Maya expressed initial uncertainty about how to go about the task, she said:

I think at the start I wasn't 100% sure how to go about it, not because of any, like, lack of clarity. I was like, oh, what sort of, what do I put down? and just trying to think about it (p.3).

Her use of "not because of any like, lack of clarity" suggest that this uncertainty was due to the nature of the task being somewhat out of the ordinary for her, or out of her comfort zone.

Jade also spoke of uncertainty and related this to difficulty talking and writing about herself. She shared, "erm I think at first it was quite hard because sometimes you don't actually know what to write about yourself" (p.3), "I don't really like talking about myself. Erm, [pauses] especially like about my life and stuff" (p. 4) and "I don't really want to sit there and think about myself" (p.6). Her use of "at first" suggests that this was something that became easier as the session went on. Jade later spoke of how after stepping out of her comfort zone she was able to enjoy and appreciate the experience. She said:

I think at first I was a bit like mmm [pulls faces] [inaudible] do I really wanna talk about that? But no, I enjoyed it personally, because I feel like I like being creative and I like writing so. But I feel like putting me out of my comfort zone was talking about myself as well. I don't like doing that really. So it gave me a



chance to like step out of my comfort zone and like acknowledge myself in a different way so yeah... (p.4)

This sense of uncertainty remained throughout the session for Jack, who did not finish his tree on the day or choose to share it with the group. He suggested that it was only once he had finished the whole workshop, or perhaps within the interview itself, that he began to feel more comfortable with the task. He reflected that:

If I came to another workshop, I would probably be more likely to share it [his tree] then [...] because I've done it now. I've done it before. Now that if that happens again, I'm sure I'd be more confident, its more confidence. I'll be more.. because I've done it once. Because once I've done something once I'm fine to do it again (p.8)

For Jack, there was also a sense of needing to step out of a 'comfort zone' mentioned by Jade through his use of the phrase "push myself". He talked about finding it difficult to engage in the activity on the day but that once he was home, he completed the activity in his own time, reflecting on the experience of this within his interview. When asked about why he completed it at home he said:

To push myself really. All I thought was I didn't do enough. I felt like I didn't do enough. I didn't speak enough, I didn't show enough. I just. yeah. So I just thought I would get on it (p.4).

A shift from initial uncertainty and discomfort can be seen by comments made by participants such as "but when I got there I **actually** enjoyed it" (Jade, p. 2) "all the

bad to the.. it went from bad to good basically" (Jack. p.3) and "in the end amazing. That's all I can say" (Jack, p.15).

### ***An Uncomfortable Experience***

Of all the participants, the experiences shared by Maya and Jade were the most positive. For example, with them both repeatedly describing various aspects of the experience as "fun" throughout their interviews (Maya, p.1, 4 & 10; Jade p. 3, 7, 9 & 12). Although they shared feeling uncertain and uncomfortable both at the start and in relation to particular parts of the activity, overall, they seemed to become comfortable with and enjoy the experience. For others, this sense of difficulty and discomfort persisted throughout.

A feeling of discomfort was a particularly resonant theme within Jack's interview. For him, the experience of the Tree of Life was uncomfortable and out of the ordinary. He said "erm It was weird" (p.1) and it made him feel "a bit stressed but fine" (p.2). He elaborated, saying "well drawing a tree and writing things under it is not normally a nature thing for me to do or a normal, normal thing to do" (p.1). It appeared that the Tree of Life was challenging for him, demonstrated by the use of the word "managed", when he says, "well, I managed to finish it" (p.2). A sense of difficulty is also highlighted by him needing to "think really hard" when he says "when it was the tree you have to think really hard about what has to be put down [...] you had to think hard. Um it actually makes you use your brain, your mindset" (p.7). He indicated that some of this discomfort and difficulty may have been due to the challenge of expressing himself, with him saying "so normally it will be hard for people to express themselves" (Jack, p.3). He also indicated worrying about the group setting and how

engaging fully in the Tree of Life might make him feel. When referring to completing the Tree of Life later in his own time, he said:

Yeah, I felt it was because I was actually in my own space, I wasn't around so many people where I didn't have to worry about what people were thinking about or the way I feel what I'm doing because I know I'm not being watched.  
(p.6)

This quote indicates that the experience of the Tree of Life did not feel safe for him, with the use of the word "watched" indicating that he perhaps felt vulnerable or was worried about being exposed or embarrassed in some way within the group setting. Differences in how the group was experienced by participants is discussed further within PET 2.

This sense of the whole experience being somewhat uncomfortable was also prominent for Zain. Although he seemed to speak positively about the experience overall, some of his responses within the interview indicated difficulty. When asked "was there any bit that you didn't like about the day, anything you found a bit more difficult?" (Zain, p.8), Zain responded saying, "the whole thing. But because I'm in a good place I focussed on saying leave the past in the past and focussing on improving. Trying to get myself together..." (p.8). This also highlights a desire to focus on the positives, discussed further when considering the Tree of Life approach itself in PET 2.

For Yasmin, she described the Tree of Life as a "bit of a struggle" (p.2 & p.3). For her, there seemed to be a sense of her just trying to get through it. During the interview she had difficulty remembering some of the aspects of the day, perhaps

due to not fully engaging with them, saying "what are the roots again?" (p.2) and "could you be a bit more specific?" (p.7). There was a sense that she rushed through and avoided engaging with the activity on a deeper level. For example, she said "I feel like I was done quite quick I'm not going to lie" (p.6) but then contradicted this when she said, "oh I didn't get to that bit" (p.7) when asked about adding 'gifts' to her tree. This contradiction may have meant that she rushed through, but it could also be that she did complete this feature of the activity but did not want to engage in a discussion about it within the interview.

### ***Difficult to Reflect on Past Experiences and Ongoing Challenges***

All participants reflected that they found the personal nature of the task difficult at times. In particular, reflecting on and talking about their 'roots', important people in their lives, and 'storms' that they may face or have faced in their lives.

Maya explained how ordinarily, she wouldn't consciously reflect on her roots and that this was difficult at first:

I think you don't really spend much time consciously thinking, oh, what are my roots, you just sort of go through life. And obviously, they really define you and define how you are around people and who you are, and obviously, who you consider yourself to be. But I don't think we necessarily always ask ourselves that. It's almost a subconscious thing. And at the start, I really struggled with it. And I wasn't quite sure what to put down, especially as my like actual the root part, it was much easier to think about things that I like to do, which are sort of associated with my sense of self, like music, hobbies, friends (p.2).

Although appearing to struggle to articulate her feelings in relation to this within the interview, Jade implied that she also found completing the roots of her tree difficult.

When asked about this part she said:

I feel like [long pause] it was alright. Some parts were easier than others. So, I feel like that kinda stuck me [...] yeah that's what I'm saying, that's why I feel like it was a bit hard to do because I don't really like...again like when it comes to writing about certain things I don't...(p.13-14)

Jade seemed to experience some internal conflict over what to include on her tree and found herself "thinking about if I really wanna write that" (p.16). She explained how once she got into the task, a "different brain" took over, and she described writing about her roots without consciously realising what she was doing. When she then stopped and looked at what she had produced there was a sense of being overwhelmed by being faced with her life on the paper in front of her in that way:

[...] I feel like I have a different brain when I write. Because when I'm pen to paper it's like I can.. but it's like when I see it I'm like...why did I just write that? So the roots kind of like I think it scared me a bit [laughs]. I'm looking at **my** roots, it's like [laughs] ohhh [...] I think it's just like seeing about yourself on paper it's a bit like rah, that's too much. It kind of hits you in the face. (p.14-15)

This passage also indicates that writing seemed to remove barriers to her expressing her thoughts and emotions and this is considered in PET 2: Individual barriers and facilitators.

For Zain, the Tree of Life brought back some difficult memories of challenging times in his life. He said "I mean, it just gave me this memory. This memory just popped in my head it was going back to when I was kid, just me by myself, in my own room" (p.1). Within the interview he talked about the challenges of being a care leaver and expressed making a conscious choice not to focus on past experiences within the Tree of Life session in order to avoid the discomfort of thinking about his past. He said "erm, for me, I didn't write about my past on the tree. I wrote about what I'm dealing with now-ish" (p.3), "I didn't write anything personal I don't think. That will make me think about my past you know, yeah" (p.5) and "I focussed on saying leave the past in the past and focussing on improving" (p.8). He also expressed feeling as though his past experiences would be too shocking to share with others, saying:

You would have been surprised, you would have been like, wow, you know.

The stuff I've done, the stuff I've had to deal with yeah. All that. And it all starts. We all start gaining our confidence when we're young (p.5).

This quote also suggests that he has encountered a lot of difficulty in his life, has often had to deal with this independently, and that this has had an ongoing impact on his wellbeing.

Inaya also talked about finding reflecting on herself and thinking about the past an upsetting and emotional experience, saying "it made me feel a little bit like emotional" and " I don't actually like, look into my past too much because it upsets me" (p.3).

Some participants also spoke about struggling with, or not particularly engaging with the 'storms' component of the Tree of Life, in which participants are invited to think

about and share the challenges they face in their lives. Yasmin particularly struggled with this aspect. When asked about how she found the 'storms' activity she said:

A struggle I'm not gonna lie when that happened I kind of went a bit silent. I was like do I talk about this? I don't want to talk about this. I just sat there like I don't feel like I can talk about this. It was very nerve wracking. That's the word, nerve-wracking. (p.13)

Yasmin also found talking about the storms within the interview context difficult, when asked a follow up question she said: "I don't know what to say, erm. I'm not going to lie I don't really remember. I don't want to talk about the storms" (p.14). Maya shared similar feelings saying, "all of my storms have been obviously quite intense, and also very personal. And I think it's hard to share that" (p.13).

### ***Difficult to Reflect on Important People***

Some participants articulated finding reflecting on important people in their lives through the 'leaves' uncomfortable. Yasmin demonstrated a similar sense of internal conflict to Jade with regards to what to write, saying:

[...] There was a time when we was talking about that and the people that was important to us and I'll say a bit about that later but I found that a bit of a struggle as well [...] Because there was, there's only like two people in my life who I would have put. And it's like if I was to put them there are other people in my life that aren't with me anymore that I would have wanted to put more but I didn't know if I should or shouldn't. Because like, it's too personal. Yeah. (p.3)

Jade shared similar reflections, saying "I was stuck on the leaves for a while" (p.19) and "I think that was hard for me because I don't like have a lot of people close to me like that" (p.18).

Maya described completing the leaves as a conflicting experience, saying:

Like family members, I find it I find tricky to deal with. So when putting them down, it's like my parents, it's quite conflicting because obviously, I do care about them, but at the same time, like there's just stuff underneath the surface so it makes it sort of a somewhat conflicting experience. (p.5)

Zain also referred to the conflicting and confusing feelings that care experienced individuals may have about family saying:

Especially when we reach as an adult, we think that we need to separate, or we need to back with their family. Some people need to not have a family, you know. The people with family don't wanna be with family, the people without family wants to be with family (p.5).

Despite this, both Maya and Inaya implied that completing the leaves acted as a powerful reminder of the important people in their lives, with Maya saying "I think also sort of the people that you care about what was sort of interesting as well. I mean, didn't really get any... it wasn't like I didn't know who they were, but again..."

(p.5). Similarly, Inaya shared:

So, like when we when we like wrote down how the people we have in our life that are important to us. It made it seem like a lot more. And it made me understand that I'm not actually alone (p.4)



This quote also highlights the sense of loneliness and isolation experienced by Inaya.

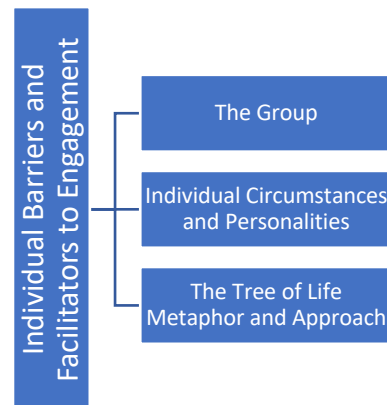
In summary, this PET highlights how for this group of care leavers, the Tree of Life was something that was out of the ordinary that they had not done before. This meant that some came into it feeling unsure about what it was they would be required to do, how it might make them feel and how they may be perceived by others. Participants were able to take up the activity to varying extents. Thinking about their roots, important people and storms they have faced were particularly challenging aspects, likely due to them having faced significant loss and change in their lives. For some, the experience was positive and enjoyable, but for others this sense of discomfort and disengagement persisted. Some of the reasons for this is discussed within the following PET: Individual barriers and facilitators.

### **Group Experiential Theme 2: Individual Barriers and Facilitators**

Each participant had a unique set of barriers and facilitators which either acted to hinder or promote their enjoyment and engagement with the Tree of Life. What may have acted as a barrier for one participant, was a facilitator for another. For some participants, something that initially acted as a barrier, acted as a facilitator later in the process.

**Figure 16**

*Subthemes for GET 2*



### ***The Group***

Participants expressed mixed feelings towards the group context, particularly at the start of their interviews. Although this was particularly difficult for some, all but one of the participants also reflected on positive aspects of the group setting. This is discussed further within PET 4: Connecting with others.

Zain, Jack, Yasmin and Inaya all referenced pre-existing relationships with each other. For some, this led to feelings of discomfort and negatively impacted their engagement with the Tree of Life. For example, Inaya said "um I don't really get on with everyone " (p.8). Although she did not explicitly talk about the impact of this on her experience, she referred to finding it difficult to share with others saying, "[...] like I didn't really open up" (p.1). This may have been a result of these existing relationships. Similarly, Jack expressed worry about what he shared due to the presence of others, saying, "just to feel like, my personal things might have gotten out there. And there was other people in the room that I didn't want to say things in

front of so, because of things that have happened" (p.2). Yasmin also expressed difficulty in "dealing with the people there. Dealing with one person there" (p.15).

For Jack the group initially appeared to act as a barrier but then transformed into something that supported his engagement. He was motivated to complete the activity in his own time after seeing the rest of the group step out of their comfort zone. He said, "normally it will be hard for people to express themselves. But people ended up. And it made me feel that I could express myself in the end and do certain things" (p.3) and "it worked out well, because I saw the way everyone else was doing it, and the way they felt and it made me feel happy to like complete it" (p.2).

Both Maya and Jade did not reference existing relationships with other group members. When asked about how they found the group setting they used neutral or ambivalent language, with Jade saying:

I think because it wasn't a big group it was alright. Because we don't have to say what we wanna write. So because everyone's focusing on their own one [tree] it wasn't really like oh yeah there's other people in the people in the room. It was more like they're doing the same thing as me so I'm having fun with it. Because we didn't have to say what we wrote either so it was.. it was fine. (p.7)

And Maya saying:

Umm I didn't really mind it, I thought it was quite chill. I think I liked doing in a group. Because not to say that you're talking directly to the people that like "oh, this is wonderful.. my tree and this is what everything little thing means"

but I just think the general feeling of just doing something together and shared experiences just nice. (p.12)

Despite not having strong feelings about the group setting, some of the comments in Maya's interview indicated that it was the personal process of reflection that was most important for her, as opposed to the group experience. For example, she talked about feeling "protective" of her tree and said, "I didn't really feel the need to share my tree" (p.8). The personal importance of her tree was also apparent for Jade who animatedly shared "I was looking at my tree like this is **important**" (p.19).

### ***Individual Circumstances and Personalities***

For some participants, their current personal life circumstances appeared to impact upon how able they were to engage in the Tree of Life. Others talked about their individual personalities within the interview and how this impacted upon their experience.

Individual circumstances were of particular importance for Inaya. As mentioned, during both the Tree of Life workshop and the interview, she was caring for her daughter. Through analysis of her individual interview, the personal experiential theme, 'together but alone' emerged, highlighting how although she enjoyed being with others, there was a sense of her feeling somewhat of an outsider to the group. She said, "I do feel quite lonely like that, obviously being a mum, and in a mother and baby unit and like family problems and stuff isn't it's not very nice" (p.5). This sense of being an outsider was also reflected in how she commented upon the skills of others, for example saying, "[...] a lot of people are really talented. Like their

drawings of the trees was amazing" (p.11) and "Jade as well, Jade is going to go really really far in life, I can see that. Very far" (p.8). She seemed not to include herself within the group, instead saying, "I mean, I don't really have any skills" (p.5).

Jack had come to the workshop straight from a nightshift in a bar, which no doubt affected his ability to engage within the Tree of Life. He also indicated that he had a lot going on in his life at the moment and that this perhaps impacted on how able he was to engage in the activity. He said, "I wasn't in the right time frame to be doing the thing at the time" (p.2) and "it's just I've got so much, so much..." (p.9).

Yasmin talked about her own personality, individual strengths and perceived areas of difficulty and how this may have interacted with her engagement with both the Tree of Life and her interview experience. Within the interview she expressed a self-awareness and confidence in her skills. She talked about how this meant that she found some aspects of the activity easy such as reflecting on her own skills:

So I don't mean to sound like one of those people, but I found it kind of easy because I know what my skills are. Like I know that I'm good at certain things and I know that I'm not good at certain things. (p.4)

This contrasted with Inaya and Maya's experience who found reflecting on their skills quite difficult, with Maya saying:

So, the talents part was hard (laughs). Because it's just, I think I think most of the time I feel like talent is sort of like, you know, you're **really** skilled at something like an Olympic level skilled or something like that. Like I'm good at this but I'm not...(p.4)

Writing supportive notes for others was also in line with Yasmin's perceived strengths. She said "writing for other people, that was easy. I'm good at complimenting other people's like work, and stuff that they've done, things that I think they did good at" (p.11).

Throughout the interview, Yasmin spoke of finding it difficult to express herself and open up to others, both within the Tree of Life workshop itself and within the interview. She often made comments such as "I don't know what to say" (p.14) and "Like right now I'm finding this conversation a bit of a struggle. But I'm trying" (p.8). Ironically, she expressed her inarticulateness articulately, saying:

I'm not good at talking. Like English is not good. Yeah, I can't speak properly. It just doesn't work. My brain doesn't comprehend the words. I can understand what people are saying and I can like give you a sentence back but it's like, my brain struggles to put the sentence together. (Yasmin, p.4)

This may partly explain why she expressed feeling "anxious" and "awkward" (p.10), finding it difficult to open up and share with others, saying:

[...] I'm a very closed off person. To a lot of people Like I can I can talk to people I can like, be friendly and kind and stuff. But I can't open up to people as well as I think I can. (p.8)

This led to a sense of her feeling as though she was perhaps hiding her true self. This was demonstrated through the use of language such as "I hide it" and "I don't seem it" when saying "I have a lot of anxiety, I'm not going to lie. I hide it very well though" and "like I don't seem like it but I'm very much a pessimist" (p.12).

### ***The Tree Metaphor and Approach***

Participants expressed mixed feelings towards the Tree of Life approach and the tree metaphor itself. Within Maya's interview she suggested enjoying the positive nature of the Tree of Life approach saying, "It was just a cool way to look at things" (p.1). She highlighted the positive focus of the approach in relation to the metaphor of gifts saying, "even if they're not really positive experiences, they can teach you a lot....so I think I've been given many gifts" (p.7). This positive focus also appeared to be present for Inaya and Zain with them saying "I feel like I focused more on the positive things. I don't know why " (Inaya, p.10) and "I focussed on saying leave the past in the past and focussing on improving (Zain, p.8).

Jade talked about the creative nature of the approach suiting the "creative side" of her and expressed this several times throughout her interview saying "I liked like creating with all the different pictures and colours and stuff. I liked that" (p.3) and "you are thinking about creativity, you are thinking about making it look nice but at the same time you are thinking about what really makes you you" (p.2). She also spoke several times about the power of "putting pen to paper" (p.13) and indicated that the process of writing down her thoughts, feelings and reflections enabled a deeper reflection with the metaphor of the tree providing a helpful structure. She said:

It was easier because I'm not really like relying on my own knowledge to be like oh where do I put this? where do I put that? It's like straight into it you know? It's basically being given something, you just write about that. (p.3)

and:

I think it was more like because like I've never really sat there and thought like what makes me happy? what actually makes me happy? like what do I want to do? I mean like obviously I have, but not to an extent where I am writing it on a tree and that. (p.5)

She described how the creative nature of the activity enabled her to get 'in the zone', saying "I feel like when I'm in that zone, when I'm writing I feel like something takes over and I can just write whatever" (p.15).

Although the creative aspects of writing and drawing were a positive aspect for Jade, this acted as a barrier for Jack and Inaya. When asked about how he found drawing the tree, Jack said:

Horrible. I didn't like it. I don't like drawing. I can't draw. So I don't like drawing. I don't like to write either like. Because those are the top two things I hate in my life. Is writing, I don't like writing at all. (p.3)

Similarly, Inaya said, "I can't really draw [laughs]. So it was a bit like just scribbling all over the page [laughs]" (p.3).

Jade spoke within her interview about how having a choice over what to share and supportive facilitators promoted her engagement with the activity. She said:

You guys eased us into it. It wasn't like you know, do this, do that. It was more like you don't have to if you don't want to. It just eased us into it. I think that's why I kinda like hmmm. But once you guys did it I actually really enjoyed it. And you guys were really nice as well, so it wasn't like I felt pressured or anything. Yeah, it just felt like we were just doing a session like. (p.6)



When asked how she felt about sharing her tree she said “I think because obviously because it was off my own back. I was okay with it” (p.9)

Within the interviews, participants mainly focussed on the initial part of the workshop which involved drawing and sharing their trees. It seemed that aspects of the Tree of Life such as the storms and certificates were less central, with participants less engaged in the storms activity, as discussed in GET 1. Maya described the activity of writing and receiving certificates “somewhat meaningless” (p.15) saying “It just felt like I’ve done a Tree of Life... I don’t really need a certificate for it” (p.16). Their lack of importance was also demonstrated in Yasmin’s answer when she asked about the certificates. She said, “What the filling in the certificate [laughs]? It was just the last.. I don’t really know what to say [laughs]” (p.14).

PET 2 highlights how the particular aspects of the Tree of Life were experienced differently by participants, emphasising key points of divergence such as the group setting and the Tree of Life metaphor and approach. These acted to either promote or hinder both engagement and enjoyment of the activity and were influenced by other factors such as the participant’s individual personalities and personal circumstances/ The impact of these barriers and facilitators was dynamic. For example, with some participants becoming more comfortable and confident in the group as the day went on. Despite the feelings of uncertainty and discomfort and the differences in experience, for all of the participants the Tree of Life appeared to support them in developing their identity, allow them to connect with others and giving them hope and motivation for the future. This is discussed in the following three GETs.

### Group Experiential Theme 3: Developing Identity

Despite initial feelings of discomfort and uncertainty for some, and difficulty with particular aspects, all participants appeared to value the experience in some way or another. Many made comments around enjoying the experience. For example, saying, "I found it really fun. It was just a cool way to look at things [...] I really enjoyed it." (Maya, p1), "It took my mind off a lot of things, it did. I generally did really enjoy it " (Inaya, p.9) and "I loved doing it" (Jade, p.16). Participant interviews also indicated that the activity supported them in developing their sense of identity. This will be discussed in this section.

#### Figure 17

*Subthemes for PET 3*



#### ***A Valuable Opportunity for Self-Reflection***

The Tree of Life appeared to provide an important opportunity for reflection that wouldn't be part of everyday life for the participants. Maya described how it allowed her to consciously consider aspects of her identity:

I think because... I think you don't really spend much time consciously thinking, oh, what are my roots, you just sort of go through life. And obviously, they really define you and define how you are around people and who you are, and obviously, who you consider yourself to be. But I don't think we necessarily always ask ourselves that. It's almost a subconscious thing (p.2).

A process of personal reflection was also highlighted by Zain who described it as a way for individuals "to basically think deeply within themselves" (p.1) encompassing reflections on skills, goals and personal histories, adding "I done what I could, told them what I could do, told them what I wanna do, told them what I wanna achieve, my history, you know. Yeah" (p.1)

The idea of a new opportunity to consider aspects of identity that are usually outside of conscious awareness was also highlighted by Jade. She talked about a "chance to acknowledge myself in a different way" (p.4) and said, "I think it was more like because like I've never really sat there and thought like what makes me happy? what actually makes me happy?" (p.5).

This opportunity was seen as valuable by some participants, and something they would like to do more regularly. For example, with Maya saying "I think it's a really good thing to do. It's probably good to do for everyone every few years, just reflecting on yourself is a good exercise I'm sure"(p.17). Similarly, Jack said "if I'm honest it was good to jot it down on paper. I feel it's something I should do more regularly, or more more more often" (p.15). Jack also reflected that it might be a useful activity for other individuals to do, at the end of his interview adding, "oh one

other thing is that I think it would be good for younger children to do it to. I think it will help them out" (p.18). Although finding the Tree of Life difficult, Inaya felt she would benefit from further emotional support saying "I feel like I need like, I need therapy. I need counselling" (p.4)

### ***Learning About Yourself***

Several participants talked about making links between their lives and learning more about themselves. For example, Maya said:

Hmm well, I think it's always good to sort of reflect on yourself, because then you learn new things about yourself. And I just think that it sort of was an easier way to sort of think about your identity, really (p.1).

She highlighted how the Tree of Life enabled her to make connections between aspects of her life, saying:

We all have reasons for why we want the things that we want, and then probably also going to be embedded in our roots. So I think that's, again, how it sort of came back to it. Because all of the other stuff comes back to [the roots] (Maya p.3).

Links between his history and who he is today were also made by Zain. He said, "my history as well is is...you know it's fine, it makes me who I am you know" (Zain, p.8).

Inaya talked about learning more about herself and "what she is into" through the Tree of Life, saying, "I also know a little bit more, about what she's into [her sister] and what I'm into. Because like I wrote it down" (p.1). This quote also implies that the act of writing enabled a deeper reflection. She also talked about realising that there are activities that are therapeutic for her which has encouraged her to engage in

these more. This was illustrated through her saying "also therapeutic is reading and cooking. I like listening to music. Yeah, I wrote that down my tree" (p.7), "I've actually started reading ever since that's session" (p.1) and "I mean, I'm cooking a lot more since the session" (p.5).

Jade highlighted how the Tree of Life gave her a greater understanding of how she feels about herself and what makes her who she is, saying "I feel like it gave me insight into how like I feel about myself" (p,1) and "you are thinking about what really makes you you." (p.2). Similarly, Zain said, "I'm focusing on what I want to achieve, on what makes me me you know. What do I need to do in my spare time." (p.4).

Although Jack was disappointed in his level of engagement on the day, he reflected on the potential benefits of if he was to do it again saying, "If I was to do it again I would actually be happy to do it and take time with it (p.15) and "I would be able to express myself and express the way I feel and the way life has been for me. If I was to do it again " (p.1)

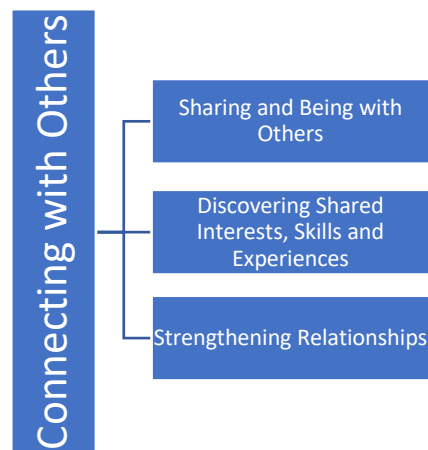
This GET highlights how for this group of individuals, reflecting on themselves and their lives in this way wouldn't ordinarily be a conscious process. The Tree of Life gave them a chance to acknowledge themselves in a different way, enabling them to develop their sense of identity. This process was seen as valuable, with several participants suggesting this was something they would like to do more often.

## Group Experiential Theme 4: Connecting with Others

All participants spoke about connecting with others in some way or another within the interview, with Zain describing the Tree of life as "the way how to gather everyone up to share experiences" (p.1).

### Figure 18

*Subthemes for PET 4*



### ***Sharing and Being with Others***

Maya and Jade said they enjoyed hearing other members of the group share their trees. Maya said, "which part did I enjoy the most? Probably listening to everyone talk about their trees. I really enjoyed that" (p.14) and "it was cool getting an explanation of everyone else's tree, because I think obviously it tells you a lot about and I know it was just a deeper look into people, which I found really interesting" (p.9). She highlighted how talking through their Tree of Life was a useful way to enable individuals to share, saying, "I think it's much easier to see into a person when they're explaining it themselves and saying, oh, this is why I put this on here

and this is what I really care about" (p.10). Jade also expressed enjoyment of this part of the activity saying, "it was nice to be able to see everyone else's" (p.8).

Jade reported enjoying sharing her tree with others "I think erm I, I did enjoy it because I get a chance to like tell like strangers, not strangers, I don't like know everyone know everyone but I know some people, but it was a chance to give people an insight on me (p.9). When asked why he had said he would like to do a similar activity again, Zain indicated that the Tree of Life provides an opportunity to enable individuals to be better understood by others. He said, "well one, for you guys to understand us better as young people, and that's just it" (p.11)

Several participants referred to enjoying the feeling of doing something together or a shared experience. For some, the opportunity to be with others was valued, with Zain saying, "you know, coming away from home for a bit, stuff like that." (p.10) and "It was just, it was just good to catch up" (p.8). Similarly, Inaya said, "I feel like getting together not being at home, alone. Actually having people around, you like company is really really nice" (p.10) and "it took my mind off a lot of things" (p.9). These quotes also indicate participants experiencing worries and feeling isolated in their everyday lives.

Maya shared that "I just think the general feeling of just doing something together and shared experiences just nice" (p.10). This sense of a shared experience was also commented on by Jade, with her saying "they're doing the same thing as me, so I'm having fun with it" (p.7). She described the group as "a nice little group" (p.12)

and said, "I didn't think everyone was going to take part and they did and I was like oh ok, this is nice, yeah it's nice." (p.11)

Jade also spoke of the supportive nature of the group, aided by activities such as the writing of notes of support or encouragement on post-it notes on other's trees. She said, "I just liked the fact that everyone was making each other feel better with the post-it notes and stuff like that" (p.12). She elaborated on this saying:

I liked the fact that we could give people advice or like messages. When I went up to mine I saw some messages and I was like aww that's nice [laughs]. So I erm yeah it made me feel happy that I could do that for someone else as well, yeah, it was nice (p.12).

Despite Yasmin finding the group aspect difficult, she said, "I liked that I was like able to be around people, like my friends and my sister" (p.15). She described them as being "able to make me feel comfortable in an uncomfortable situation [...] Just their presence, just being there" (p.15).

### ***Discovering Shared Interests, Skills and Experiences***

A number of participants mentioned surprise at similarities in interests, skills and experiences between members of the group. For some participants this was found to be supportive and comforting. The sharing of experiences was also suggested to strengthen existing relationships within the group.

Maya talked about surprise that another member of the group shared an interest with her, saying:



I mentioned D&D [dungeons and dragons] is one of the things I enjoy doing. And the girl next to me was like wow, that's like, so cool. Which I didn't expect anyone to say [...] so I think just to have someone be like, Oh, that's so cool. Like, I want to play and stuff, like that was just really fun (p.11).

This demonstrates the potential for relationships to form, with participants indicating they would like to socialise and play the game together outside of the workshop.

Jade spoke of how hearing others share their skills made her think more deeply about her own skills, realising that some of what they were sharing resonated for her personally. She said, "someone saying something might even spark up something that I think about myself.. because that's what.. because some people's trees when they read out theirs, I was like oh yeah I'm gonna put that down as well" (p.8).

A number of participants spoke about the realisation that the group shared difficult experiences in life, both past and present and this appeared to be a source of comfort. For example, Zain said, "everyone has their experience, a shared feeling no matter what way they place it, you know" (p.2) and "it's good to understand that we do share the same feelings" (p.4). Jade also referred to a realisation that others shared similar challenges and experiences to herself, saying "I feel like there's some things that I didn't realise that other people realise about what's wrong or like triggers and stuff like that" (p.10).

Yasmin expressed surprise at the extent of the similarities between experiences within the group describing it as "eye opening" and explained how this feeling enabled her to feel confident enough to speak in front of the group:

Eye-opening. Because like I didn't think..because I know that we've all come from similar backgrounds, but I didn't think that it would be like, so similar in a way. Like, when people read about what they like, what they had to say about their life and stuff, I was like, this is way too similar, nah. That's what.. that's what like, gave me the confidence to talk in front of the group. it was was like, it was so similar that was like..(p.9).

She described the shared life experiences as a “shared-trauma” and mentioned finding comfort in this. Saying, "I felt comfortable in a way. Like that shared trauma just helped. I don't know why" (p.9).

Inaya expressed shock at what others shared, saying “I was just a bit like woah. I was a bit shocked in a way [..] like how some people read out their stories and like [pauses]. It was just a bit like, I dunno, a bit speechless” (p.12). She said "you actually see like not everyone's lives are perfect. A lot of people like actually have been through a lot, so never really judge anyone" (p.11) and described the experience as “a little bit emotional” (p.12).

### ***Strengthening Relationships***

Inaya had the unusual experience of taking part in the Tree of Life alongside her sister, Yasmin. For Inaya, doing this alongside her helped her to gain a better understanding into her sister, bringing them closer together and enabling Inaya to feel more able to support her. She said, “it helps me understand a little bit more of how my sister feels about how she went into care as well. She did open up quite a bit” (p.1), “um I also know a little bit more, about what she's into” (p.1) and:

Yeah, it's actually pulled me a lot closer to my sisters, well two of my sisters. It's pulled me a lot closer because now I understand like how it is... because at the moment one of my sisters is going through a breakup and I'm there for her a lot (p.5).

The focus for Inaya was on her sister, and she wasn't particularly interested in the rest of the group, with her saying, "I didn't really pay attention to anybody else" (p.8).

Zain also spoke about his existing relationships within the group and how the Tree of Life enabled a deeper understanding of each other which he felt enabled their friendships to become stronger. He said:

It's good to hear from other people's point, friends' point of view of what they're dealing with. Either if it's in the past or the present. It's good to understand that. If you are going to be their friend, it's good to understand them. So that tree of life basically just made the friendship that one little bit stronger you know. So we can understand each other's history and try to change it you know. Try to change it or try to help them as much as we can you know (p.4).

For Jack, he did not speak about connection with the group in as much detail as some of the other participants, perhaps due to his limited engagement. However, he spoke of comfort in hearing other's perspectives, saying "that made me feel better because um it shows other people's thoughts and opinions and the way things are" (p.7).

This GET highlights how the Tree of Life was a valuable tool to share personal stories and experiences and some participants particularly enjoyed getting to know others in this way. Individuals realised that they shared similar interests, skills and experiences. The extent to which participants shared difficult life experiences appeared to be particularly surprising and acted as a source of comfort. For some, this enabled them to feel safe enough to share their own experiences.

Even at times where participants were not directly interacting with each other there appeared to be a supportive feeling of togetherness amongst the group, with participants valuing engaging in a shared experience of completing the Tree of Life. Writing messages on post-it notes for each other provided another opportunity to show support for one another. The Tree of Life enabled the group to get to know each other better, strengthening existing relationships and allowing the possibility for new relationships to form.

### **Group Experiential Theme 5: Hope and Motivation for the Future**

Five of the participants talked about how the Tree of Life had enabled them to think about and plan for their future. Maya, Jade, Inaya and Yasmin all spoke about how this was not something that they had really thought about or had the opportunity to consider prior to engaging with the Tree of Life

Maya talked about how previously, she “hadn't really put a massive amount of thought into sort of like I think it was dreams or future goals” (p.4) and any thoughts she did have were focussed on “pure business” (p.5), perhaps due to the challenges posed by being a care leaver. She talked about a shift in perspectives and an

opportunity to think about the “more fun side of things that I wanted to do with my future” (p.4). She talked about how these were things that “I've thought about before, but they haven't been something that I've sort of considered a goal really. Or really that important” (p.6). She said:

It was just stuff like, wanting to travel the world see places, there was also sort of small things like getting myself a cat at some point. It didn't have to be massive goals and dreams. And it was just, yeah, little, little things (p.6).

Inaya also spoke within her interview about her hopes for the future, and implied that the Tree of Life supported her to solidify her ambitions and goals:

So I.. I struggled a little bit because when I gave birth to [daughter]. I didn't ..like everything was just all over the place. I didn't understand where I wanted to go or anything. But now I understand like now I want to do an apprenticeship in health and social care. And I want to start working. But I'd have no idea I wanted to do that (p.6).

Inaya also appeared to have the opportunity to consider things outside of the “pure business” mentioned by Jade, such as getting a puppy:

And I, I think you said where do you see yourself in 5 years? I think you said that [...] And I said in my own place with [daughter] and a little puppy, with a job, and hopefully I will be in uni (p.7).

Yasmin also discussed the Tree of Life being a new opportunity to consider the future saying “I thought it was eye opening. Because there's a lot of things that were in the Tree of Life that I wouldn't have normally just thought about on a regular basis,

like, with the, my aspirations and stuff" (p.1). She talked about a new-found motivation for the future and described this as the biggest outcome of the Tree of Life for her, saying:

that's what actually helped me to do my college course. It's what like, pushed me a little bit because I want to be an airline stewardess, I want to be a flight attendant. I need to start doing stuff that gets me towards that goal, like I need to... And then I realised from that like I need to do this. I **want** to do this. I'm going to do this! (p.1).

and:

It just made me think like what I want to do with life and what I want to do in the future. And quite frankly, as I've said it's like made me go towards my goals more. That's what that has done for me. It's made me want to take action on what I want. (p.6).

Jade said that the Tree of Life gave her an "insight into how like I feel about myself, the way I see my goals, see my future" (p.1) and spoke about how the opportunity to write this down on the branches of her tree "was like a way to kind of manifest that I guess. Hmm and a way to kind of see and that's where you want to go." (p.17). She said:

Like I've never really sat there and thought like what makes me happy? what actually makes me happy? like what do I want to do? I mean like obviously I have, but not to an extent where I am writing it on a tree and that (p.5).

The Tree of Life provided an opportunity for Jade to think carefully about her future, with her saying "I remember I was like oooh [laughs][inaudible] it's making me think

about my life and whether I'm really going down the right path" (p.15). Similarly to Yasmin, this appeared to be motivating for her with her saying "I wanna grow, I wanna progress, I wanna become that" (p.5)

Within his interview, Zain considered the importance of carefully considering his future "saying to myself what do I wanna do, what do I wanna achieve." (p2) and implied that this was something that was of importance to him at the moment:

I mean because the place I'm in getting myself back together. I'm focusing on what I want to achieve, on what makes me me you know. What do I need to do in my spare time. I need to focus, start helping other people, friends you know (p.4).

In contrast to other participants, his account of this had a more serious feel with him highlighting the significance of any decisions he makes, the need to prepare for possible setbacks and prepare to work hard, saying:

In this world there are too many options for a young person to choose. I'll be honest. [...] But what I do believe is that if you wanna do something then you gotta study for it...you have to think of a plan C to get to plan A (p.6).

He also demonstrated a worry about what the future might hold for him, saying "am I going to get my own place and what's that going to be like for me? You know would I, would I relapse and go back to hospital or something like that, and things like that" (p.8).

Inaya and Maya also talked about hope for other's futures, with Maya saying:

I liked hearing people's dreams especially, like one of the boys wanted to open up his own nightclub. And one of the girls next to me wanted to become

a flight attendant. And I dunno it's just sort of exciting because they know what they want to do and you think that's so cool. And you really hope that they end up getting that (p.10)

Similarly, Inaya shared a sense of hope and pride for her friend Jade saying “and Jade as well, Jade is going to go really really far in life, I can see that. Very far” (p.8). Sadly, there was a sense of her leaving herself out of this discourse of hope and success when taken alongside some of the comments she made about herself such as “I don’t really have any skills” (p.5).

In summary, this GET highlights how the Tree of Life provided a novel opportunity for participants to reflect on their hopes and aspirations. The metaphor of the branches supported them to carefully consider their plans and motivated them towards their goals. They considered aspects of their future they had not thought about before such as getting pets and travelling. Participants enjoyed listening to the hopes of others, becoming excited for themselves and others in the group.



## Discussion

### Chapter Overview

This chapter provides a review of the Group Experiential Themes (GETs) in relation to psychological theory and existing literature. Implications for practice and a range of stakeholders such as Local Authorities (LAs), social workers and Educational Psychologists (EPs) are discussed. This chapter concludes with a discussion around the strengths and limitations of this research.

### Summary of Findings

The aim of this research was to explore the experiences of care leavers in engaging in the Tree of Life, answering the research question:

**What is the experience of care leavers in engaging in collective narrative practice through the Tree of Life?**

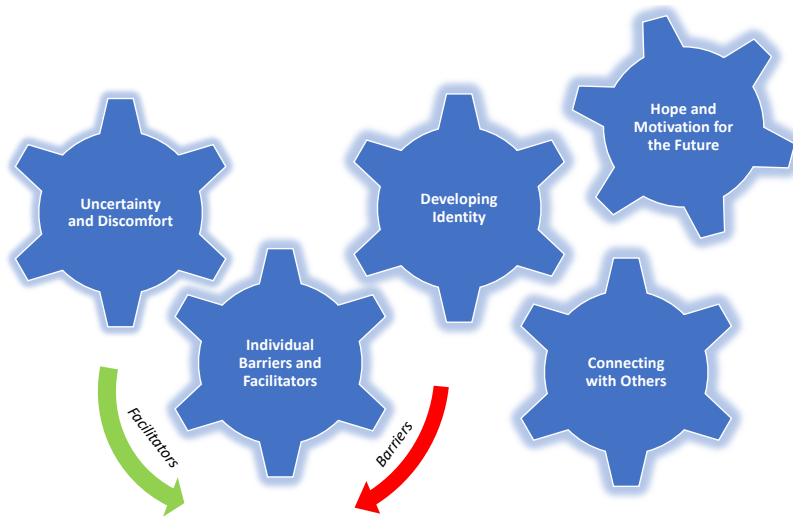
The analysis process generated 5 GETs:

1. Uncertainty and Discomfort
2. Individual Barriers and Facilitators
3. Developing Identity
4. Connecting with Others
5. Hope and Motivation for the Future

These are demonstrated visually in figure 19.

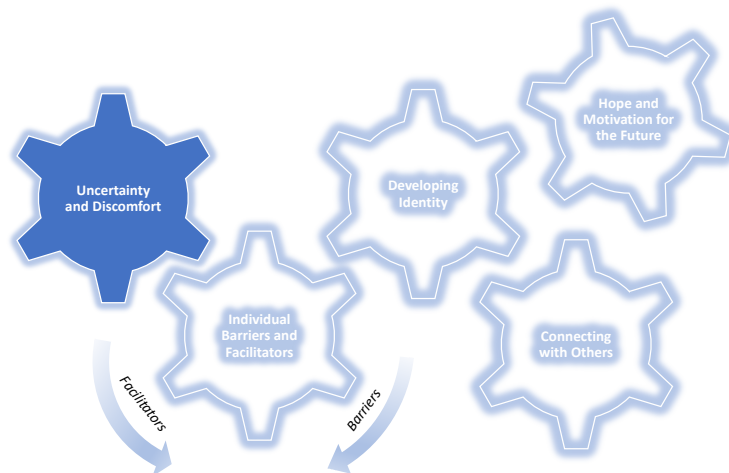
**Figure 19.**

Visual Summary of the GETs



Smith et al. (2022) highlight how Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is an iterative process, in which the researcher will move forward and back, considering the data in a range of ways. Within the findings section, although some overlap between the GETs was considered, they were seen as distinct entities. Engagement with the literature resulted in the interlinking nature of GETs being considered further. This is demonstrated in figure 19 and discussed in this chapter. The researcher's rationale for limiting further refinement of the initial themes and choosing not to alter the findings chapter in light of the literature is shown in an extract from the research diary in appendix 14.

## **GET 1: Uncertainty and Discomfort**



*"All of my storms have been obviously quite intense, and also very personal.  
And I think it's hard to share that" (Maya, p.13).*

The first GET, uncertainty and discomfort, highlights how participants found some aspects of the experience uncomfortable and were unsure about engaging in the Tree of Life, particularly at first. All participants appeared at times to experience feelings of discomfort. This was particularly in relation to reflecting upon and sharing aspects of the activity such as their roots, important people in their lives, and storms they may have faced.

This sense of uncertainty and discomfort was influenced by a range of barriers and facilitators unique to individual participants, impacting upon their engagement and enjoyment of the Tree of Life (GET 2). These unique factors influenced whether participants were able to move away from these initial feelings of uncertainty and discomfort, 'stepping out of the comfort zone' to reap the benefits of the approach:

developing their identity, connecting with others and enabling hope and motivation for the future.

### ***Difficulty Reflecting Upon and Sharing Experiences.***

The theme of uncertainty and discomfort is not something that has featured prominently in existing literature on the Tree of Life. Although Vitale et al. (2019) noted that all but one of the participants had “tremendous difficulty” with roots (p.27), this was not reported as one of their key themes or explored in detail. It was suggested that this difficulty was due to participants reporting painful and disadvantaged early life experiences. Although questions are raised within the literature review around why there may be a lack of reporting of more negative experiences within the existing literature, it seems likely that reflecting on and talking about difficult and personal aspects of their lives is particularly challenging for care leavers. This is probably for similar reasons to the participants in the Vitale et al. (2019) study. It is likely that care leavers have life stories and memories that include adverse experiences, loss and separation. This makes constructing a life story a complex task, with a need to balance both positive and negative memories, integrating them into their life story (Dovran et al., 2012; Tarren-Sweeney, 2013).

Participants referred to difficult experiences and memories within their interviews and considered how these were challenging to reflect upon and share. Discomfort was illustrated through the language used by participants to describe their experience, including words such as “conflicting” (Maya, p.5), “nerve-wracking” (Yasmin, p.13) “emotional” (Inaya, p.3) and “a struggle” (Maya, p.2 & Yasmin, p13). Two participants mentioned conflicting feelings about family, finding it hard to reflect upon these

relationships. Stein (2005) highlights how the idea of “family” often poses a dilemma for care leavers, with family relationships often either missing or problematic for this group. He also highlights how many young people can feel “drawn into counterproductive relationships with their families due to the centrality of the family in popular ideology, discourse and policy” (p.11).

### ***Avoidance of Harm.***

*"I don't actually like, look into my past too much because it upsets me" (Inaya  
p.3)*

Memories of the past can evoke a number of emotions and painful memories can be difficult to recollect, triggering emotions of the memory and resulting in stress responses. (Hanney & Kozłowska 2002; Steenbakkers et al., 2016). This was apparent in the current participant group, with the source of discomfort appearing to be caused both by the private act of reflection as well as the encouragement to share with others. It was clear within participant’s interviews that there was a drive to avoid thinking about and sharing these aspects of their lives and avoid the feeling of discomfort; both within the workshop and in participant’s everyday experiences. This idea of avoidance relates to existing research by Eldridge et al. (2020) and Steenbakkers et al. (2016). They examined Care Experienced Individuals (CEI) aged 16-25 decisions around whether they choose to confide in or share their memories with others. One factor identified in both studies was that choosing not to share with others may be to protect themselves and others from anticipated harm.

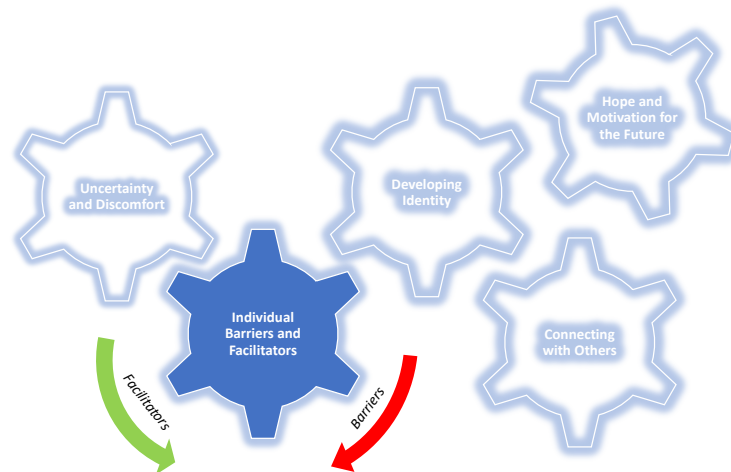
The avoidance of the Tree of Life may therefore have been a way to protect themselves from triggering negative emotions. This can also be termed avoidant coping (Billings & Moos, 1981) and is discussed later in this chapter. Anticipation of harm was demonstrated by Jack choosing to complete his tree at home rather than during the session, due to a worry about what emotions might be brought up for him, particularly in front of others.

Eldridge et al. (2020) highlights how this need to protect oneself can lead to an internal conflict between wanting to be open versus wanting to remain closed. This dilemma was clearly demonstrated by Jade when she expressed “thinking about if I really wanna write that” (p.16) and Yasmin sharing “I didn’t know if I should or shouldn’t. Because like, it’s too personal” (p.3). The notion of holding unacceptable identities (Eldridge et al., 2020) is also applicable for this group, with some participants implying that they felt as though they couldn’t share certain aspects of their life with others. Previous research has shown that at times CEI present particular identities to protect against revealing their true selves (McMurray et al., 2011 Madigan et al., 2013).

Steenbakkers et al. (2016) also underline how individuals could also be looking to protect others by not sharing as they may be worried about the potential to trigger emotions or memories in others. This is a consideration for the current study, with Inaya sharing that listening to others share their stories made her “a little bit emotional” (p.12). For participants, this desire to protect themselves led to feelings of uncertainty and discomfort and acted as an additional barrier to engagement with the

Tree of Life. Further barriers and facilitators are considered within the following section.

### **GET 2: Individual Barriers and Facilitators**



There were a number of individual barriers and facilitators that influenced participants' experiences when engaging in the Tree of Life. Facilitating factors supported participants to step out of the “comfort zone” described by Jade (p.4), engage in the activity and experience the benefits. On the contrary, barriers led to feelings of uncertainty and discomfort and limited engagement and enjoyment of the activity. Some of the factors shown might act as both barriers and facilitators at different times, for different participants.

The research highlighted in relation to GET 1 by Eldridge et al. (2020) and Steenbakkers et al., (2016) exploring factors that lead to CEI sharing memories of their past and confiding in others, supported further understanding of the individual barriers and facilitators identified. Although the focus of their research was specific to sharing, these factors could also be applied to the processes of self-reflection on memories and experiences required through the Tree of Life.

### ***The Group: Trust and Containment.***

*"There was other people in the room that I didn't want to say things in front of"*

*(Jack, p.2).*

A number of participants cited the group context as a source of discomfort or expressed mixed feelings in relation to this. This can be understood in relation to the concepts of trust and containment. Trusting the person(s) with whom you are confiding in is a key pre-requisite for sharing with others and could justify some of the uncertainty and discomfort experienced by participants (Eldridge et al., 2020; Steenbakkens et al., 2016). Participants' perception and experience of the group had a clear impact on them feeling sufficiently psychologically safe to share their personal experiences and life stories.

These notions of trust and safety relate to Bion's (1963) concept of the container/contained. Bion used analyst-patient and mother-infant pairings to understand how the presence of a thoughtful (containing) person can support an individual to make sense of their unprocessed experiences and tolerate distress and uncertainty, allowing thought and meaning to develop (Symington & Symington, 2002). Trust and containment can relate to the group, the facilitators and the environment and impacted upon participants ability to step out of their comfort zone and engage in the process.

Developing trusting relationships may be particularly difficult for care leavers.

Attachment theory highlights how disrupted early attachment relationships with



caregivers can undermine an individual's ability to trust others (Bowlby, 1969). This can contribute to care leavers preference for self-reliance and they may attempt to reject support from others as a protective mechanism against further relational harm (Berzin et al., 2014; Samuels & Pryce, 2008; Sapiro & Ward, 2020). This self-reliance was particularly prominent in one participant's interview. He shared, "it's hard because all these questions you have to answer them. You don't want to find them somewhere else you want it to come from you" (Zain, p.6).

Eldridge et al. (2020) describes how care experienced young people tended to trust peers and relationships where power dynamics were felt to be more equal and when confiding was reciprocated. This may explain why the sense of discomfort and uncertainty seemed to ease for a number of participants. Individuals became more trusting and confident to share themselves as the session proceeded and they saw others open up and realised there were shared experiences or "shared trauma" (Yasmin, p.9) among the group. This developing trust is shown in existing research, with Schweitzer et al. (2014) reporting that participants appeared to become more comfortable with each other as the sessions progressed.

The notion of trust also applies to the facilitators and the wider context and setting in which the Tree of Life workshop took place. Eldridge et al. (2020) reported that care experienced young people have reported feeling distrustful of environments within the care system, feeling as though they may have hidden agendas to elicit information from them. This might have been a factor in the initial uncertainty, with participants needing time trust both the activity and the facilitators.

Trust in the facilitators as an important factor was shared by Jade when she commented, "and you guys were really nice as well, so it wasn't like I felt pressured

or anything” (Jade, p.9). Research has highlighted the important role facilitators play in reducing anxiety (Ibrahim & Allen, 2018). Professional self-disclosure has also been shown to balance power dynamics, demonstrating that professionals are looking to build relationships rather than follow their own agendas (Eldridge et al., 2020). The role of the Tree of Life in reducing power imbalances between facilitators and participants is something that has been noted in existing research on the Tree of Life (Ibrahim & Tchanturia, 2018; Schweitzer et al., 2014). Although not explicitly mentioned by participants, facilitator transparency about their interest in the Tree of Life activity and sharing their own trees may have supported the development of a safer environment. This also highlights the potential for the use of peer-trainers, as demonstrated in existing research (Casadagli et al., 2017; 2021; Wellman et al., 2016).

### ***Individual Circumstances, Skills and Personalities.***

*“I wasn’t in the right [frame of mind] to be doing the thing at the time” (Jack, p.2)*

Participants’ experiences of the Tree of Life were influenced by their current life circumstances, individual skills and personalities. Many participants were at transitional times in their lives, navigating parenthood, moving house and starting new educational courses and jobs. These life circumstances impacted upon how able they were to engage in the Tree of Life. One participant shared the quote above, whereas another shared that they were able to engage in the activity “because I’m in a good place” (Zain, p.8). When offering support for care leavers, the

timing of this should be carefully considered in relation to current life circumstances and experiences.

Adley and Jupp Kina (2014) explored the role of emotional support for care leavers. They stress the importance of recognising the impact of current experiences on care leaver's feelings, perceptions and needs. They emphasise that professionals need to understand that 'no' does not always mean 'no' and should repeatedly offer support in a range of ways. They highlight a number of complex factors that mean that care leavers do not always engage with support and that mentors and professionals need to build trust through being patient and persistent. They highlight how often care leavers turned down support due to issues around timing, identity, lack of trust, pride and previous experiences of the care system. Participants in their study pointed out that saying 'no' to support might actually mean that the young person does not know how to say yes or that they mean "not now but later", or that they don't have the confidence or capacity to do this.

Participants experienced aspects of the Tree of Life activities differently. This was sometimes related to their skills and personalities, as well as their current emotional state. For example, one participant found writing about her skills difficult saying "I mean, I don't really have any skills" (Inaya, p.5). The creative nature of the activity was particularly useful and enjoyable for one participant, suiting her "creative side" (Jade, p.3) but for two others this was a barrier to their engagement with them finding the drawing aspect difficult.

Another condition for CEI sharing identified by Steenbakkers et al. (2020), was individuals possessing the 'skills' to tell their story. Participants in their study mentioned times when they felt they did not have the skills to share with others. For example, by being brought up to withhold their opinion or not knowing how to talk about their past. It may have been that the care leavers in this research had not had opportunities to develop their emotional capacity to explore, make sense and talk about the past and this was why the Tree of Life was at times uncomfortable. This being uncomfortable and out of the ordinary was reflected in quotes such as the Tree of Life being "not normally a [natural] thing for me to do or a normal, normal thing to do" (Jack, p.1) and "I feel like putting me out of my comfort zone was talking about myself as well" (Jade, p.4). Yasmin indicated feeling as though she lacked the skills to tell her story saying, "I can't open up to people as well as I think I can" (p.8) and mentioned that this made her feel somewhat "awkward" (p.10). However, another participant noted how the Tree of Life may provide them with the necessary skills and confidence to be able to share with others when he said "I would be able to express myself and express the way I feel and the way life has been for me. If I was to do it again " (Jack p.14). This demonstrates the potential for the Tree of Life to support care leavers to develop the capacity and confidence to talk and reflect upon their experiences.

The individual experience of the group context has already been discussed in relation to the idea of trust. However, it also appeared to differ in its importance for each participant for other reasons. For some, the group element appeared to be central to the experience, for example with Zain describing the Tree of Life as "the way how to gather everyone up to share experiences." (p.1). However, Wellman et

al. (2016) highlighted how the individual process of drawing the trees prompts personal reflection; and for some participants in the current research this appeared to be the most important aspect of the experience for them. One participant shared "I didn't really feel the need to share my tree" (Maya p.8). Steenbakkers et al. (2016) explain how for some participants, talking with others may be their preferred way to process the past, but for others they may prefer to do this privately.

### ***The Tree of Life Approach.***

*"I was looking at my tree like this is **important**" (Jade p.19)*

The Tree of Life allowed a new opportunity for participants to reflect on important aspects of their lives, with the metaphor of the tree providing a helpful structure and an opportunity for creativity. Some participants indicated that the process of writing and drawing enabled deeper reflection and Jack shared "if I'm honest it was good to jot it down on paper" (p.15). Schweitzer et al., (2014) suggests that the visual elements act as symbols for a richer internal experience. Participants created powerful images that were meaningful to them and towards which they felt protective.

Many other Tree of Life studies have also commented upon the utility of the Tree metaphor and the structure and creativity this promotes (German, 2013; Ibrahim & Tchanturia, 2018; Rowley et al., 2020; Vitale et al., 2019; Wellman et al., 2016). In the current research Maya shared that the Tree of Life was "an easier way to sort of think about your identity really" (p.1) and Jade's reflection that "I have a different brain when I write" (p.14) mirrors the participant in Ibrahim and Tchanturia's (2018)

study who said “I find words really difficult to describe my feelings, but pictures are so much better” (p.8).

The creative aspects of the Tree of Life align with the benefits of art therapy which aims to explore feelings and experiences without reinforcing traumatic memories. It avoids the need for individuals to verbalise their experiences and emotions, allowing them to express them in a less direct manner (Malchiodi, 2015). Art making is often a relaxing and calming experience and can reduce arousal states, anxiety and depression (Jiang et al., 2020; Malchiodi, 2015).

*"Even if they're not really positive experiences, they can teach you a lot"*

*(Maya, p.7)*

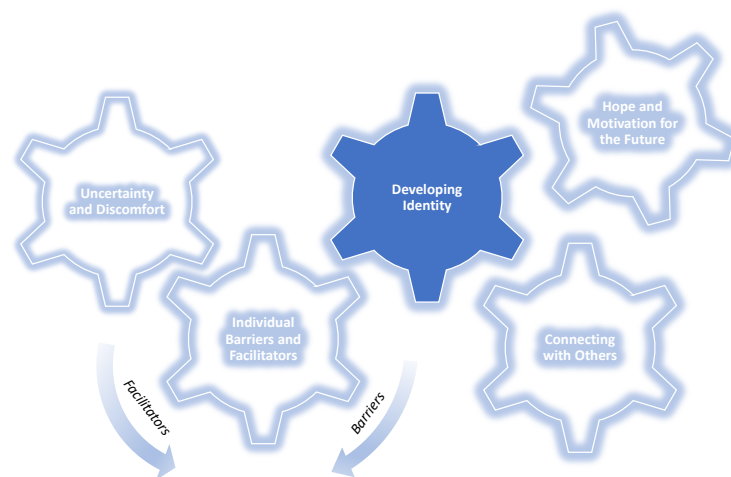
Participants also appeared to value the positive focus of the Tree of Life approach that supported them to see their experiences in a constructive way and focus on the future. In line with the goals of narrative therapy and collective narrative practice, the Tree of Life offered a space for individuals to share their life story in a way that is an affirmative rather than aversive experience (Denborough 2008; Gardener-Elahi & Zamiri, 2015)

From the interviews it transpired that the most important aspect of the experience was creating and sharing individual trees. Participants did not seem to value the storms activity particularly. This could have been due a general lack of engagement from the group, perhaps stemming from the discomfort and lack of trust and containment discussed in GET 1. Participants did not appear to value certificates,

which were viewed as “meaningless” (Maya, p.15). This supports Ryan and Walker’s (2007) argument that it is the process rather than the product that is most important in relation to life story work.

Denborough (2008) helpfully notes that the Tree of Life is a flexible approach that was designed to be adapted and existing studies have altered Ncube’s (2006) original structure in a range of ways. One study used final sessions to reflect upon learning instead of certificates (Ibrahim & Tchanturia, 2018) and another marked the ending with a shared meal (Wellman et al., 2016). How to best plan and adapt the Tree of Life for care leavers is clearly an important consideration in light of the findings of the current research. Some key considerations are discussed later in this chapter.

### ***GET 3: Developing Identity***



*“a chance to acknowledge myself in a different way” (Jade, p.4).*

GET 4, Developing Identity demonstrates the way in which participants reflected on the value of engaging with the Tree of Life activity in some way or another. It shows how it was an opportunity for them to “think deeply within themselves” (Zain, p.2) and consciously reflect on aspects of their lives which would normally be “almost a subconscious thing” (Maya, p.2). Yasmin commented, “there’s lots of things that were in the Tree of Life that I wouldn’t have normally just thought about on a regular basis” (p.1). This allowed participants to learn new things about themselves and consider other aspects of their identity beyond being a care leaver, giving them a space to recognise, appreciate and strengthen multiple facets of their identities (Pals, 2006; Willis & Holland, 2009). The Tree of Life supported participants to develop a sense of identity through “thinking about what really makes you you” (Jade, p.2), exploring, discovering and adopting new stories of their lives, in line with the principles of narrative approaches (White & Epston, 1990).

The role of the Tree of Life in helping individuals to think about things in a different way, reconnect with important aspects of their identity and construct a more positive view of themselves is a key theme from the literature (Casadagli et al., 2016; Haslehurst et al., 2021; Ibrahim & Tchanturia 2018; Rowley et al., 2020; Schweitzer et al., 2014; Wellman et al., 2016). A participant in the Rowley et al. (2020) study shared “so you reflect on everything...and it makes you more aware of yourself and you understand yourself better” (p.123). Randle-Phillips et al. (2016) comments that although there were a number of benefits of the Tree of Life group, individuals identifying aspects of themselves that they find most salient and meaningful is at the core of the approach.



The group setting added another layer to the development of identity as it is suggested that telling memories to others supports the meaning making process (Thorne, 2000). The group approach allowed participants to act as witnesses to each other's stories, enabling a *thickening of narratives* (Morgan, 2000). This also helped participants to connect with one another and some mentioned feelings of hope and excitement for each other's futures.

Development of identity through the formation of new self-narratives or life stories is particularly important for care leavers for a number of reasons. As discussed, care leavers have often faced trauma and many transitions, making the integration of a coherent and positive narrative of their life a challenging task (Dovran et al., 2012; Tarren-Sweeney, 2013). This is further complicated as CEI often encounter stigmatisation for being, or having been in care and there are dominant negative discourses surrounding them (Become, 2017; Madigan et al., 2013; Yuen, 2007).

These negative stereotypes give rise to what are termed *thin descriptions* within narrative therapy which define individuals in unhelpful and problem-saturated ways (Morgan, 2000). This puts them at risk of developing a stigmatised identity through internalising the negative expectations and descriptions of others (Kools, 1997). Thin descriptions can prevent individuals from living out their preferred lives and perpetuate distress and difficulties (White, 1995). Barn (2010) reports that perceived stigma for CEI can lead to feelings of low self-esteem which can increase the chances of young people engaging in risk behaviours such as criminality, substance misuse and/or self-harm. This is important given the disproportionately poor outcomes for this group in a range of areas (Brady & Gilligan, 2019; Clarke et al.,

2019). Ungar (2004) proposes that resilience is promoted through an individual maintaining their chosen identity rather than having one imposed upon them and for them to practice self-assertion. The Tree of Life provides an opportunity both to reflect upon and develop their chosen identity through the construction of the tree and the opportunity to practice affirming this identity through the sharing with others.

Existing research suggests that supporting individuals to construct more strengths-based narratives can improve self-esteem (Casadagli et al., 2017; German, 2013; Haslehurst et al., 2020; Vitale et al., 2019). Low self-esteem was demonstrated in the current participant group, with one participant sharing “I mean, I don’t really have any skills” (Inaya p.5). The Tree of Life gave participants the opportunity to step away from *problem-saturated stories* and acknowledge themselves in a different, more positive and hopeful way, with an emphasis on values and skills as opposed to problems (Morgan, 2000). The Tree of Life appeared to support participants to focus on positive aspects of their lives, demonstrated through GET 2. Wellman et al. (2016) suggests that the tree itself is a symbol of growth and positivity.

For some participants, the chance to reflect and acknowledge themselves in a different way led to them making positive life changes. One participant began to engage in activities she had identified as meaningful whilst completing her tree and another enrolled in a college course reflecting her interests and aspirations.

Schweitzer et al. (2014) discusses how participants exploring different aspects of their newly discovered identities supports integration of these new narratives.

Several studies noted in the literature review observed the Tree of Life leading participants to make changes in their lives. For example, with young people better

managing their diabetes and parents responding more helpfully to their children (Casadagli et al., 2017; Haslehurst et al., 2021; Rowley et al., 2020).

The Tree of Life appeared to provide participants with a chance not only to challenge their own negative discourses of their lives but begin to gain the confidence and skills to challenge that of others; through sharing their new, preferred self-narrative. Portnoy et al. (2015) explains how this allows others to see an individual's problems and distress in the context of other aspects of their life and potentially treat them with more positivity and hope. This aligns with existing research, with the Tree of Life showing utility in addressing internalised medical discourses and power differentials between staff and patients (Wellman et al., 2016). Although Jack had difficulty engaging with the Tree of Life at the time, he reflected on the potential for the activity to support him to develop the confidence in telling his own story. He shared that if he was to do it again "I would be able to express myself, and express the way I feel, and the way life has been for me" (p.14). The role of the Tree of Life in supporting individuals to share their own self-preferred stories was also mentioned by Zain when he said, "for you guys to understand us better as young people, and that's just it" (p.11).

The opportunity to engage in the Tree of Life is particularly meaningful for this group as care leavers are at a crucial age for identity development. The development of a sense of identity is a major psychosocial task of late adolescence and has implications for psychological development (Erikson, 1968). Identity development is also perhaps one of the most important factors in achieving good outcomes for looked after children (Moss, 2009) and it is recognised that there is a strong

relationship between good mental health and a positive sense of identity (Steffens et al., 2017). Development of identity and formation of a life story are interlinked, with McAdams (2011) suggesting that the process of attempting to understand yourself and process the past are meaning-making processes that form a life story. Unlike young people who have been adopted, care leavers may not have had the opportunity to engage in life story work, missing out on a valuable opportunity to meet some of their emotional needs, improve their self-esteem and develop their sense of identity (Adoption and Children Act, 2002; Willis & Holland, 2009). There has also been a need highlighted for more age-appropriate models of life story work to be developed that can be used throughout the life span (Baynes, 2008; Hammond et al., 2020).

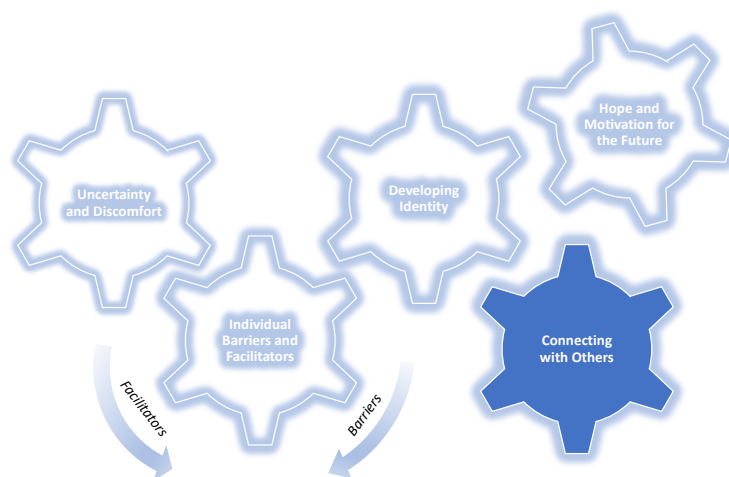
Opportunities to explore identity may have been restricted for this group due to pressures they may face such as navigating housing, managing finances, education and employment independently (Baker, 2007; Stein, 2019). Ward (2011) suggests young people are required to adopt a series of different identities when making the transition to adulthood. Examples include, from being students to members of the workforce, being dependent on others to being independent and perhaps being single to being a partner or a parent. These transitions were all apparent within the participant group. Matthews and Sykes (2012) highlight that for most young people, these transition periods can often be extended, with different identities being tested out gradually. However, for care leavers, these transitions are often compressed and accelerated, with an expectation of “instant adulthood” that leaves limited time for them to explore their identity (Stein, 2005). For care leavers all these new identities

need to be tested out simultaneously and Ward (2011) highlights that this can lead to a crisis of identity and self-destructive behaviours.

The Tree of Life appeared to give individuals a chance to carefully reflect on aspects of their lives, consider new identities and how these might link to their past, present and future selves. The participants particularly valued the opportunity to consider their future ambitions, as is discussed throughout GET 5: *Hope for the Future*. Participants sharing their stories and hopes with others also enabled them to thicken their preferred self-narratives, or life stories and connect with others.

#### **GET 4: Connecting with Others**

*“I just think the general feeling of just doing something together and shared experiences is just nice” (Maya, p.10).*



Research has highlighted that care leavers often experience loneliness and isolation when leaving care (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017; Barn, 2010; Matthews & Sykes, 2012;

Stein, 2005; Ward, 2011). Feelings of isolation were mentioned in the current research with two participants sharing that they did not feel as though they have many close relationships. This sense of isolation was particularly prominent for one participant who shared “I do feel quite lonely like that, obviously being a mum, and in a mother and baby unit and like family problems and stuff isn't it's not very nice” (Inaya, p.4). Care leavers report that emotional support networks are important to them (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017) and Stein (2005) explains that a combination of both personal and professional support networks are vital.

The GET, connecting with others demonstrates how the Tree of Life can help in developing relationships and reducing feelings of isolation. Participants valued spending the day together and engaging in a shared activity. One participant said, “I feel like getting together not being at home, alone. Actually having people around, you like company is really really nice” (Inaya, p.10).

Individuals reported enjoyment from sharing their trees and getting to know others. This allowed them to gain insight and understanding of each other and discover common interests, skills and experiences. This is a key theme from the literature, showing how the group context enables validation of experiences and formation of social networks (Casadagli et al., 2017; Ibrahim & Allen, 2018; Randle-Phillips et al., 2016; Rowley et al., 2020; Schweitzer et al., 2014; Vitale et al., 2019).

*“you actually see like not everyone's lives are perfect. A lot of people like actually have been through a lot, so never really judge anyone” (Inaya, p.11).*

For CEIs there is often a stigma around being or having been in care, and in some situations individuals may feel they need to conceal this aspect of their experience (Eldridge et al., 2020). Samuels and Pryce (2008) explained that care leavers report feeling as though they live in a different and more adult world and this can lead to them emotionally and psychologically disconnecting from others. Young people with care experience are reported to particularly value support and friendships with others in the care system and it has been suggested that this can also enable them to deal with stigma (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017; McMurray et al., 2011). Eldridge et al., (2020) discusses how assumptions, stereotypes and stigma surrounding a care experienced identity can be a barrier to opening up to others. In the current study, all participants were care leavers and this may have helped them to feel better able to share with one another. Participants in the Wellman et al. (2016) study reported that support and validation from others allowed them to share aspects of their lives that had previously felt un-shareable.

*"I know that we've all come from similar backgrounds, but I didn't think that it would be like, so similar in a way" (Yasmin, p.9)*

The Tree of Life appears to have enabled participants to build connections and share personal information with each other such as their histories, interests, skills and hopes for the future. Research has shown that confiding in this way supports the formation and development of interpersonal relationships (Derlega et al., 2008). Although individuals were aware that the group was made up of care leavers, some expressed surprise at the extent to which their experiences aligned, supporting them to feel less isolated. Zain shared "it's good to understand that we do share the same

feelings" (p.4), echoing a participant in the Ibrahim and Allen (2018) study who realised "I'm not on my own" (p.27). The sense of connection gained through sharing experiences led to feelings of comfort and confidence, allowing participants to feel able to open up themselves.

As highlighted within GET 2: Individual barriers and facilitators, the group context was experienced differently by individual participants and this seemed, at least in part to be related to existing relationships within the group. For some participants the process of sharing with others was noted to strengthen existing relationships, with Zain sharing, "If you are going to be their friend, it's good to understand them" (p.4). The potential for new relationships was highlighted with Maya mentioning the possibility of a friendship with someone who shared an interest in the game Dungeons and Dragons. This potential for the formation of new social support networks as an outcome of the Tree of Life has been shown in previous research (Rowley et al., 2020; Vitale et al., 2019)

However, for some, the existing relationships were a source of the discomfort described in GET 1. These barriers or facilitators of knowing or not knowing the group prior to the activity are explored within existing literature on the Tree of Life. For some groups, being strangers prior to the Tree of Life made it feel safer to share experiences (Haslehurst et al., 2021). However, with groups that already knew each other the Tree of Life was found to bring them together, enabling them to feel more connected (German, 2013; Ibrahim & Tchanturia, 2018; Wellman et al., 2016). This is an important consideration when using the Tree of Life with this group and the challenges posed by some of the existing relationships in the current study draws



attention to the importance of considering any existing group dynamics as part of the planning process.

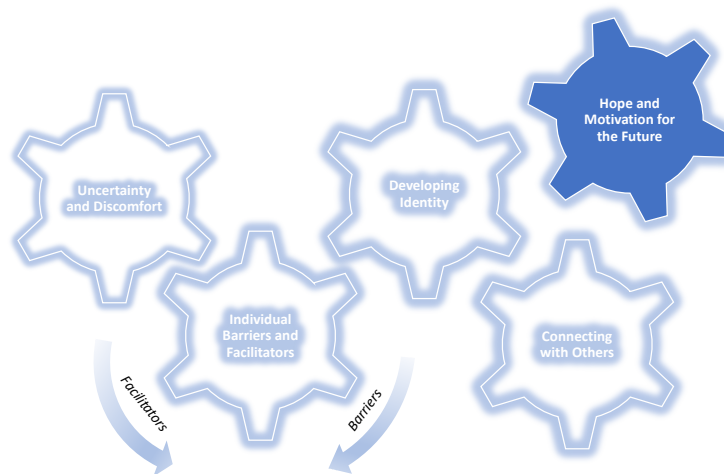
The findings demonstrate that the Tree of Life could be useful in supporting care leavers to feel less isolated and develop friendships and social support networks. This is of particular importance for care leavers who tend to rely on friendships for support than their peers (Sulimani-Aidan, 2019). Young people with strong friendships are more likely to feel content in their lives, have a more positive sense of wellbeing and be positive about their lives (Dixon, 2008). Some research suggests that keeping and making new friends is one of the most important factors in ensuring positive transition experiences throughout the lifespan, with care leavers reporting having an easier time if they have friends (Hartup & Stevens, 1999; Refaeli et al., 2019).

It is important to note however, that the social dimensions of the Tree of Life may not be something desired by all care leavers. This was apparent within the current study, with one participant saying for example, “I didn’t really pay any attention to anyone else” (Inaya, p.9). Katz and Geiger (2020) highlight how relationships between care leavers can be strained and the shared experience of being in care does not mean that they necessarily have other things in common. This underlines the importance of avoiding a ‘one-size fits all’ approach and ensuring support for care leavers is personalised and flexible (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017).

It is also of note that in research where participants have developed friendships (Vitale et al., 2019), the Tree of Life took place over a number of sessions allowing

participants a longer timeframe in which to grow these relationships. Martikke et al. (2019) found that although care leavers developed friendships through a volunteering project, these were viewed as “weak ties” as they did not have frequent contact with each other. This is an important consideration in the context of the current research exploring the experience of a workshop taking place over a single day. To build more solid foundations for friendship it may take longer to enable participants to develop the required trust and form connections.

### ***GET 5: Hope and Motivation for the Future***



Hope and motivation for the future was mentioned by all but one of the participants. Considering the future through the metaphor of branches on a tree gave participants time and space to visualise their future, which for many seemed to provide them with a sense of hope and motivation to strive to attain these goals. Jade shared “I wanna grow, I wanna progress, I wanna become that” (p.5) and Yasmin said “It’s made me want to take action on what I want. (p.6). Narrative psychology poses that individuals base their future expectations on their self-narratives (Morgan, 2000). The Tree of

Life supported participants to consider future goals that fit with their preferred self-narrative, instilling them with hope (White & Morgan, 2006; Schweitzer et al., 2014). Hope for the future is a recurring theme in the literature around the Tree of Life. Several studies report participants feeling more hopeful and positive about the future. This is attributed to individuals having the opportunity to move away from problem-saturated stories, consider their personal strengths and have the time and space to think about their future (Ibrahim & Allen, 2018; Ibrahim & Tchanturia, 2018; Schweitzer et al., 2014; Wellman et al., 2016).

Ibrahim and Allen (2018) found that the Tree of Life provided “a place for shared hope” (p.28). This was also visible in the current research, with participants sharing excitement at the possibilities for each other’s futures. Maya said “it’s just sort of exciting because they know what they want to do and you think that’s so cool. And you really hope that they end up getting that (p.10)”.

Having hope for the future is significant for adolescents who need to be able to consider and plan their futures; and is particularly important for care leavers who are considered at high risk during this transitional period (Stein & Munro, 2008). Hope for the future links closely to the participant’s development of identity. The negative expectations and thin descriptions of others adversely impact identity as well as the ability to consider and plan futures, limiting care leaver’s abilities to live out their preferred lives (Kools, 1997; Stein, 2005; Sulimani-Aiden, 2017; White, 1981).

*“I’ve never really sat there and thought like what makes me happy? What actually makes me happy? Like what do I want to do? I mean like obviously I have, but not to an extent where I am writing it on a tree” (Jade, p.5)*

Sulimani-Aiden (2017) highlight how the opportunities for care leavers to consider their futures is limited due to a lack of familial support, time and resources and this can narrow their hopes and expectations. It is important that care leavers are given the time and psychological space to explore their futures and this should involve both practical and emotional support from adults they trust and see as role-models (Stein, 2006; Sulimani-Aiden, 2017).

As discussed, care leavers often have very different transitions into adulthood with these young people becoming more independent, with more adult responsibilities than their peers (Stein, 2005). Zain expressed a worry about some of this independence, disclosing "am I going to get my own place and what’s that going to be like for me?" (Zain p.8). Therefore, when care leavers consider their future, it may be that there is a pressure to prioritise more practical aspects of their lives such as housing and finances and this may be what Maya was referring to as “pure business” (p.5).

*“they are things that I’ve thought about before, but they haven’t been something that I’ve sort of considered a goal really. Or really that important.”*  
*(Maya, p6).*

The Tree of Life provided an opportunity to move away from this “pure business” and as Maya stated, think about “more fun side of things that I wanted to do with my

future” (p.4). Participants talked about hopes for future careers and other aspects of their lives that they hadn’t thought about before such as getting pets or going travelling.

Participants in the study by Ibrahim and Tchanturia (2018) reflected that they previously had not felt able to consider their futures as they feared they may be setting themselves up to fail. The positive and strengths-based nature of the Tree of Life and the support from others provided them with an opportunity to consider their future, instilling them with hope and motivating them to reach their goals.

*“It just made me think like what I want to do with life and what I want to do in the future [...] it’s made me go towards my goals more. That’s what that has done for me. It’s made me want to take action on what I want” (Yasmin, p.6)*

### **Significance and Implications of Findings**

This section aims to consider the significance of the research findings and the implications for EPs and other professionals. This section will discuss the implications of the findings for the emotional support of care leavers more broadly, before highlighting four key considerations to make when planning and delivering the Tree of Life.

The Tree of Life appears to have many benefits for care leavers. It gives individuals an opportunity to reflect on their lives; past, present and future, helping to develop their sense of identity. This appears to support them to consider their future plans, leading to motivation and hope for the future. Engaging in the Tree of Life activity in

a group setting through collective narrative practice allowed individuals to connect with others, both through the shared act of completing the activity and the realisation that there were common experiences and interests within the group. This provided a source of comfort and confidence to share their own stories and experiences.

Eldridge et al. (2020) support this view, suggesting that providing CEI with safe, trusted and confidential spaces and positive experiences of confiding in others can support individuals to process and renegotiate aspects of their identity, develop and maintain social support networks and relationships, and build resilience.

Despite this, the experience appeared to be uncomfortable and out of the ordinary, particularly at the start, with some participants feeling uncertain and reluctant to engage. Participants were unsure what to expect, with concerns around how the activity might make them feel. This was particularly in relation to reflecting on and sharing difficult experiences and difficulties with others. The experience was unique for each participant; with aspects of their own personalities, skills, circumstances and relationships within the group impacting upon their level of engagement, enjoyment or discomfort. Different aspects of the activity were experienced differently, at different points, by different individuals.

### ***Supporting Care Leavers to Move out of the Comfort Zone***

The research findings raise important questions and pose a dilemma for professionals and other individuals wanting to provide support to care leavers. Should care leavers be encouraged engage in this approach, despite many finding aspects of the experience uncomfortable and upsetting? The participants may provide the answer through the following quotes:

*"In the end amazing. That's all I can say [...] I feel it's something I should do more regularly, or more more more often" (Jack p.15)*

*"it's probably good for everyone to do every few years" (Maya, p.1)*

*"I think it's an activity that you guys should consider doing again" (Zain, p.9)*

The concept of 'leaving the comfort zone' is a helpful metaphor for understanding the process embarked upon by many of the participants when engaging in the Tree of Life. Although explicitly used by Jade, it was implied by others through their journey from uncertainty and discomfort towards developing identity, connecting with others and developing hope and motivation for the future.

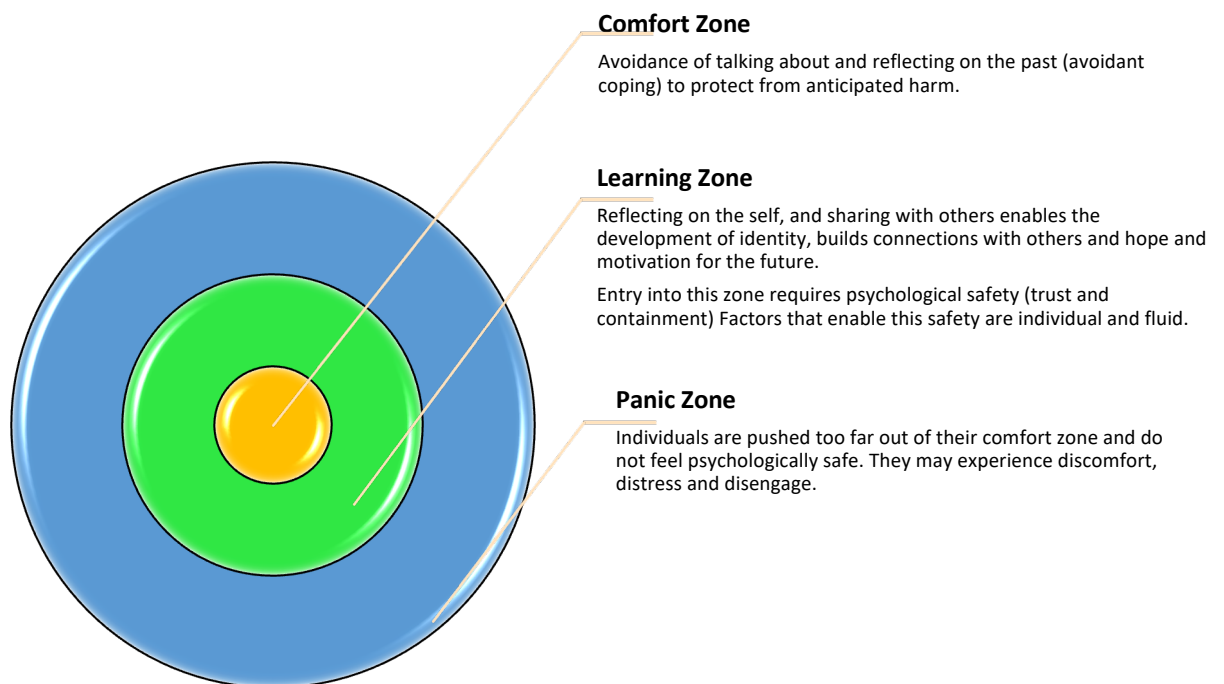
The phrase *comfort zone* can be defined as a psychological state where an individual functions in an anxiety-neutral state, using a narrow set of behaviours, without a sense of risk (Bardwick, 1991). This links to a number of psychological theories such as Yerkes-Dodson Law (1907) and Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Yerkes-Dodson Law (1907) suggests that human beings need a certain level of stress (or discomfort) to experience growth or optimum performance. Too little and you remain in the comfort zone, but too much and you may experience psychological arousal or distress that inhibits performance.

Senninger (2000) built upon Vygotsky's ZPD which states that individuals need an optimal level of support and challenge be able to learn through the Learning Zone

Model. Senninger (2000) suggests that individuals need to expand their comfort zones step-by-step through entering the learning zone. However, if this is too far outside their comfort zone, they risk entering the panic zone, which stalls growth completely. Figure 20 shows an adapted version of the Learning Zone Model illustrating how this applies to the current findings.

## Figure 20

Learning Zone Model (Senninger, 2000)



The comfort zone links to the idea of *avoidant coping* (Billings & Moos 1981).

Participants in the research routinely engaged in avoidant coping; avoiding talking about difficult experiences and emotions (Billings & Moos, 1981). This allowed them to feel safe and remain within the comfort zone but inhibited their growth and



learning through engagement with the approach. Although this comfort zone of avoidant coping may feel like a safe space to be, research has demonstrated that those who engage in avoidant coping are more likely to develop behavioural and emotional problems (Barendregt et al., 2015; Rosenberg et al., 2016). Instead, stepping out of the comfort zone and engaging in *active coping* involves discussing or reflecting on memories and emotions and allows individuals to process and make meaning of their experiences (Billings and Moos, 1981; Oppenheim & Koren-Karie, 2009).

The individual barriers and facilitators can be considered as factors influencing whether participants remain in the comfort zone, enter the learning zone or feel so unsafe that they enter the panic zone. Jack, for example faced a number of barriers such as difficulties with drawing, the group setting and lack of sleep. As a consequence, he rapidly moved from the comfort zone entering the panic zone and as a result he was not able to engage with the activity. He was able to later complete his tree once he was on his own, where he perhaps no longer felt so far out of his comfort zone.

Research shows that care leavers initially often have negative attitudes and perceptions of emotional support such as counselling at first, but this changes over time (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017). This emphasises the importance of supporting to expand their comfort zone through, actively reflecting on and talking about their experiences. The Tree of Life provides an opportunity to cultivate active coping strategies, supporting individuals to process their experiences, develop their identity and build their confidence to share their life story with others. Although

uncomfortable at times, all participants valued the activity in some way. The interview itself may have also offered a further opportunity to support the meaning-making process, allowing further reflection on their experiences and the benefits of the Tree of Life.

### ***The Need for Flexible Emotional Support***

Despite the clear need for further emotional support for care leavers and other CEI (Baker, 2017; Ofsted, 2022; Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017), the current research highlights the importance of considering the unique factors that may impact upon their ability to engage with these opportunities and respond to them flexibly. The findings of the current research support Adley and Jupp Kina's (2014) arguments that emotional support for care leavers should be individually tailored with the onus falling to the professional.

The Tree of Life provides a mechanism for care leavers to access therapeutic support. The group setting helps to normalise the experience. It may be of particular benefit to those who may not have accessed therapeutic support in other ways, or not reached thresholds for this support (Casadagli et al., 2017). Accessing mental health support can be particularly challenging for care leavers due to the transition from child to adult mental health services (Butterworth et al., 2017) and long wait times for talking therapies mean that small group interventions such as the Tree of Life may provide a cost-effective alternative (The Care Leavers Association, 2017). Schweitzer et al., (2014) helpfully points out that the Tree of Life should not be used as a substitute for those that require more substantial therapeutic input but that the two could be used concurrently.

### ***The Tree of Life as Life Story Work***

A number of aims and outcomes of the Tree of Life, particularly those surrounding the development of identity appear to align with those of Life Story Work (LSW). The intention of LSW is to enable individuals to make sense of previous, sometimes traumatic experiences, construct a narrative of their early life and create a sense of identity coherence. This is traditionally done through the creation of a life story book (Cook-Cottone & Beck, 2007; Baynes, 2008; Ryan & Walker, 2007). There have been calls for more flexible alternative tools that can be utilised across the lifespan (Hammond et al., 2021; Steenbakkens et al., 2016).

The Tree of Life has begun to be used on a 1:1 basis with Looked After Children (LAC) as a model of LSW (Shotton, 2020). However, no formal research has yet explored the experience or effectiveness of this approach. The focus of this is predominantly on utilising the tree metaphor to provide a child with information and consider their identity on an adult-led, 1:1 basis, rather than utilising collective narrative practice.

Within the current research, the Tree of Life provides an opportunity for meaning making whereby individuals can consider, reflect upon and construct their own life story, connecting this to their hopes and aspirations for the future, supporting their motivation. This is of particular importance given the transitional phase of life for care leavers. The current research highlights how collective narrative practice offers an additional layer of benefit to a 1:1 approach. Delivering the Tree of Life in a group setting provides an opportunity to bring care leavers together to witness and strengthen one another's identity stories, connect with each other, reduce feelings of

loneliness and stigma and offers the opportunity to develop and strengthen relationships.

### ***Implications for EPs and Other Professionals***

The findings of this research provide a valuable insight into how the Tree of Life was experienced by a group of care leavers. The Tree of Life delivers a potential answer to the numerous calls for further emotional support for this group and flexible, age-appropriate models of life story work (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017; Baker, 2017; Baynes, 2008; Hammond et al., 2020; Ofsted, 2022). It demonstrates the benefits of creative, strengths-based narrative approaches. This will be of interest to social workers, Personal Advisors (PAs), psychologists, and others within the LA with the responsibility as corporate parent (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). These findings are also of value to those with an interest in delivering the Tree of Life to a range of population groups.

The core components of the role of the EP are considered to be consultation, research, assessment, intervention and training and EPs operate at individual, group and systemic levels (Fallon et al., 2010; Scottish Executive Education Department, 2002). EPs are increasingly using the Tree of Life as an intervention within their work (German, 2013; Rowley et al., 2020) meeting the Health and Care Professionals Council proficiency of being “able to develop and apply effective interventions to promote psychological wellbeing, social, emotional and behavioural development” (HCPC, 2015, p.24). EPs are also well placed to upskill other professionals such as PAs or social workers through training and supervision (Ashton & Roberts, 2006).

It is clear that the field of social work needs to incorporate emotional wellbeing into its work with care leavers, enlisting the support of other professionals such as EPs (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). EPs are well situated to provide both direct and indirect support to care leavers. All children's services now come under the LA umbrella and EPs are increasingly commissioned by other teams such as Virtual Schools, with 18% holding a specialised Looked After Children role (Lee & Woods, 2017; Norwich et al., 2010).

The SEND Code of Practice (2015) broadened the scope of EP work to include young people up to the age of 25 and the implications of how this could impact upon the EP role in supporting care leavers is yet to be considered (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). Given their specialist knowledge of mental health, education and transitions, EPs are well placed, not only to provide direct support to care leavers but to support the development of the local offer for care leavers within LAs (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). The Tree of Life could be incorporated into the statutory pathway planning process for care leavers which involves gaining an understanding a young person's strengths, need and aspirations. There is clear potential for the Tree of Life to make this a more personalised, strengths-based and holistic approach, as opposed to the depersonalised 'tick box' exercise described by care leavers (Butterworth et al., 2017; Matthews & Sykes, 2012; Rogers 2011).

Rogers (2011) notes that there is a lack of clarity around who is responsible for supporting UK care leavers. The extent to which EPs are able to contribute to corporate parenting support is suggested to be limited by challenges with multi-disciplinary working and other professionals' understanding of the EP role (Bradbury,

2006; Norwich et al.,2010). It is crucial that joint professional responsibility is taken to support this group better. By not offering support or presuming that 'no' means 'no' when limited and inflexible support is offered (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017), professionals and systems supporting care leavers are complicit in encouraging 'avoidant coping' (Billings and Moos, 1981). Perhaps professionals are also anticipating harm (Eldridge et al., 2020; Steenbakkens et al.,2016) and therefore shy away from being bold in what is offered, ignoring the repeated calls for further emotional support from this group. The onus must be on the professional to encourage care leavers to accept offers of support, helping them through any possible discomfort (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017). Without supporting care leavers to step out of their 'comfort zone' and engage in therapeutic activities such as the Tree of Life, the benefits of this cannot be reaped, and the cycle of poor outcomes for this group may continue (Brady & Gilligan, 2019; Clarke et al., 2019)

### ***Considerations when Delivering the Tree of Life***

It is important to consider and work to minimise any potential harm or distress supporting participants to enter the learning zone (figure 20). Although the unique experiences of the participants highlight how this can be difficult to predict, the participants' experiences provide us with important considerations to lessen the discomfort and uncertainty and maximise feelings of safety and enjoyment.

Denborough (2008) states that there is no preferred way of developing and applying collective narrative practices. Given that the Tree of Life and other emotional support is experienced differently by different individuals at different times a rigid, 'one-size fits all' approach is unlikely to ever be appropriate (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017). The

following suggestions are not instructions for how to deliver the Tree of Life with care leavers but are posed as questions to consider, based upon the current findings and engagement with the wider literature.

### **Consideration 1: How?**

The first consideration when planning a Tree of Life group is **how** should the session(s) be structured? Should this be over a single day or over weekly sessions and what are the practical implications of this? Some of the participants in the current research cited travel and its associated costs as prohibitive to them accessing the interview so these should be considered. The findings of the current research suggest that a longer session or set of sessions may be helpful in allowing individuals adequate time to build trust with each other and the facilitators. For example, Schweitzer et al. (2014) noted it took up to the third session for the group to become cohesive and Rowley et al. (2020) discussed how weekly sessions appeared to facilitate the bonding process. This is particularly important for CEIs, who may need more time to become open and confide (Eldridge et al., 2021).

### **Consideration 2: Who?**

A second consideration is **who** is best positioned to facilitate the group and how can an effective therapeutic alliance be developed; with trust built between the participants and facilitators and power imbalances reduced? Could peer trainers be used (Casadagli et al., 2017; 2021)? Should facilitators complete and share their own tree as part of the process? Although collective narrative practices such as the Tree of Life are designed to be delivered by a range of individuals within a community context (Denborough, 2008), Wellman et al., (2016) suggests that it is important to

have a member of psychology staff to support management of group dynamics and provide supervision. An understanding or training in the approach and/or associated narrative principles also seems important here.

Other '**who**' considerations relate to the group number and existing relationships. Ncube-Mlilo (2022) suggests that Tree of Life group should consist of 6-8 young people. The current research highlights the importance of considering existing relationships within the group and whether the group should be made up of individuals who already know each other or not.

### ***Consideration 3: Preparing Participants.***

It is important to prepare individuals for what the group will involve in order to minimise feelings of uncertainty and forewarn them of possible feelings of discomfort. It may also be helpful to share the benefits of the approach whilst acknowledging that it may feel out of the ordinary or uncomfortable at times (Steenbakkers et al., 2016).

To maximise feelings of trust and safety and promote engagement, participants should be informed and reminded of confidentiality and reassured that there is no expectation to share anything that they do not wish to. As a facilitator it is important to remember that for some participants it is the personal process of reflection and creating their own individual tree that is central.

### ***Consideration 4: Flexibility and Adaptations.***

The literature review considers a range of adaptations that can be employed and the Tree of Life has been successfully combined with other activities and interventions



(German, 2013; Ibrahim & Allen; 2018). The current findings suggest that a longer period may be helpful in enabling participants to build trust and feel sufficiently safe to engage in conversations about 'storms'. Participants in the current research voiced valuing the positive focus of the approach and the individual process of completing their personal trees appeared to be the most salient aspect for many. The drawing and sharing of trees should therefore be the aspects that are prioritised where time may be limited and the storms component should perhaps only be included as part of longer programmes. Thought should also be given to how to mark the ending of the sessions. The current participants did not value the certificates. This could be replaced with reflecting on learning or sharing refreshments (Ibrahim & Tchaturia, 2018; Wellman et al., 2016).

Adaptations should be considered to ensure accessibility. For some participants the requirement to write and draw was a barrier. One participant suggested that participants could be given a print-out of a tree to remove this barrier (Jack, p14). Although this was not raised by participants in the current research, it is important to consider adaptations and support where there may be varying levels of literacy and/or where English may not be a first language (Randle-Phillips et al., 2016; Rowley et al., 2020). Support may be necessary as care leavers may have gaps in their knowledge of their own life stories. Again, although not explicit in the current research, it may be possible to link young people with those who can help them to access further information should they wish.

## **Strengths and Limitations**

This section will discuss the strengths and limitations of the current research with consideration given to generalisability, the dual researcher-facilitator role, the Tree of Life workshop itself and the interview context, before an appraisal of the research using the four markers of quality IPA studies (Nizza et al., 2021).

### ***Generalisability***

A common criticism of IPA research is the small sample size and the associated implications for generalisability (Smith et al., 2022). This study involved in-depth exploration of the experiences of a small number of care leavers residing in a single LA. They were also members of a participation group, which may be linked to particular circumstances or characteristics. Participants may not mirror the general population of care leavers and any generalisations from the findings should be treated with caution. This is considered further within the directions for future research section in this chapter.

### ***Dual Researcher-Facilitator Role***

An important limitation of the current research is that one of the facilitators of the Tree of Life session was also the researcher and therefore conducted the individual interviews. This may have influenced what the participants felt able to share. In order to develop trusting relationships with the young people at the workshop, the researcher was transparent about their interest in the Tree of Life and was open about the aims of the research. The researcher was clear that she wanted them to be honest about their experience. However, power differentials may have led to participants telling the researcher what they thought she wanted to hear. Despite

this, all participants were able to share negative aspects of their experience within their interviews and appeared to be open and comfortable doing this. Many of the participants frequently gave open and honest feedback as part of the participation group for care leavers. This suggests they were experienced and comfortable in sharing both positive and negative views.

### ***Limitations of the Tree of Life Workshop***

As mentioned, the roles of facilitator and researcher cannot be completely separated and there were a number of reflections that arose following the workshop. Although the workshop appeared to be positively received generally, there were several challenges that arose. All participants were over one hour late. This had a significant knock-on effect on the workshop. As a consequence, there was limited time for sharing individual trees and exploring narratives as a group e.g., through the use of narrative questioning by the facilitators and participants found it difficult to engage within the 'storms' activity. With hindsight, a series of weekly sessions may have been better. However, poor attendance over multiple sessions is a common theme in the literature (Ibrahim & Allen, 2018; Randle-Phillips et al., 2016; Wellman et al., 2016).

### ***Interviews***

A potential limitation of the current study is that five of the six interviews were conducted over one evening. It was challenging to arrange a suitable time to interview the eight participants who consented to interview. Considerable flexibility from the researcher was required to enable attendance of participants. The researcher arranged to meet one participant at an existing participation group meeting and four further participants whom she had been able to arrange a time

with, offered to interview if they could do it that evening. This was suboptimal as interviews needed to be arranged around other participation group activities. It felt important however, to honour the time and place in which participants chose to share their views and there was no guarantee that an alternative session could be arranged. Conducting interviews in this way limited reflections on and refinement of the researcher's interview technique.

Smith et al. (2022) suggest the in-depth interviews are likely to be around an hour in length and the interviews in this research averaged 20 minutes in length. However, it is worth noting that the first interview which took place without these time constraints was of the same length. A natural end was reached at around this duration and appeared to be sufficient time for participants to share their experiences. Further prompting was considered to be potentially influencing on what participants might share. Some participants indicated discomfort. The researcher had an ethical responsibility to allow the interview to end or move on from a particular line of questioning.

### ***Quality Markers of IPA***

As highlighted in the methodology chapter, Nizza et al. (2021) highlights four quality markers that can be used to appraise IPA research: Constructing a compelling, unfolding narrative, developing a vigorous experiential account, close analytic reading of participants' words and attending to convergence and divergence. This section will consider these in light of the current research.

### ***Constructing a Compelling, Unfolding Narrative.***

Nizza et al. (2021) explains that the findings of an IPA study should present an “orderly yet dynamic and persuasive narrative” (p, 384), conveying a *story* or a sense of progression which gives the analysis coherence. In the current research this was done through the careful selection of participant quotes presented alongside the researcher’s interpretation. The progression of this *story* was developed throughout the write up of the analysis and into the discussion chapter. The themes are tightly connected, telling a story which is also conveyed visually in figure 19.

### ***Developing a Vigorous Experiential Account.***

The aim of phenomenological enquiry is to explore subjective lived experience (Smith et al., 2022). Quality IPA research aims to develop a vigorous experiential account of this experience. Nizza et al. (2021) highlights how in IPA research this is often an experience that is outside of the norm and thus requires reflection from the participant. The analysis sheds light on the experiential significance of engaging in the Tree of Life for participants, through the double hermeneutic process of the researcher making sense of the participant’s sense-making.

### ***Close Analytic Reading of Participant’s Words.***

Linked to the development of a vigorous experiential account, Nizza et al. (2021) assert that commitment to interpretation and idiographic depth require engaging in a close analytic reading participant words. The quotes within the research are analysed in order to reveal a fuller meaning, “bringing to light that which lies at least partly hidden” (p.383). This is clearly demonstrated throughout the findings chapter and through a closer look at the analysis process in appendices 11-13 which further provides transparency to the researchers claims. When engaging in this process

consideration was given to both individual quotes and the context of the wider transcript.

### ***Attending to Convergence and Divergence.***

Attending to convergence and divergence is a core feature of quality IPA (Nizza et al., 2021). Within this research patterns of connection were considered in addition to exploring the uniqueness of each participant's experience, in line with the idiographic nature of IPA. This balance between "commonality and individuality" (p.376) is highlight throughout the findings chapter with the GET, individual barriers and facilitators further ensuring that individuality remains at the core of this research.

### **Dissemination of Findings**

A summary of the findings will be shared with the Educational Psychology team in the LA within which the research took place. The researcher will also present the findings to the Virtual School and Leaving Care Team, which consists of PAs and other professionals that support care leavers. The participants will have the opportunity to hear about the findings and implications from the researcher who will be attending an upcoming participation meeting. The research may also be written up for submission to a research journal.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Due to the limited research around emotional support for care leavers and the Tree of Life more broadly, there are a number of avenues for future research. These could include adaptations such as the use of peer facilitators or the use of the approach as part of the pathway planning process alongside PAs could be explored. Further

research could explore outcomes as a result of engaging in the Tree of Life utilising pre and post outcome measures. Insights could also be gained from exploring the use of the Tree of Life with other population groups such as LAC. Finally, the current study did not focus on other characteristics such as care leavers who may have been unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people, those from a range of ethnic communities or identifying as LGBTQI+. Further research is needed to explore how a range of intersecting identity characteristics may impact the experience of engaging in the Tree of Life.

## **Conclusion**

This study aimed to explore the experience of care leavers in engaging in collective narrative practice through the Tree of Life, addressing a gap in the literature.

Interviews with six individuals were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to answer the research question: What is the experience of care leavers in engaging in collective narrative practice through the Tree of Life?

The experience of the group was encapsulated through the five Group Experiential Themes (GETs): Uncertainty and discomfort, individual barriers and facilitators, developing identity, connecting with others and hope and motivation for the future.

The findings demonstrate the utility of the Tree of Life with care leavers, delivered in a group context. The approach has the potential to answer calls for further emotional support for care leavers, as well providing a potential alternative model for life story work. The findings also add to the literature base on the Tree of Life more broadly, supporting its value as a flexible, arts-based intervention. The implications of the findings for those with a responsibility for supporting care leavers is discussed. This

research highlights the need for professionals to consider how to create the optimal conditions of safety; providing flexible, personalised support to allow individuals to step out of the comfort zone and begin to develop the confidence and emotional capacity to reflect upon and share their experiences.

It is important that work in this area continues to grow and thought is given to how to provide care leavers with the emotional support, something that is consistently highlighted as missing for this group. The current research highlights the importance of building trust and support individuals to feel psychologically safe when engaging in something that may be out of their comfort zone.

Word Count: 38,263



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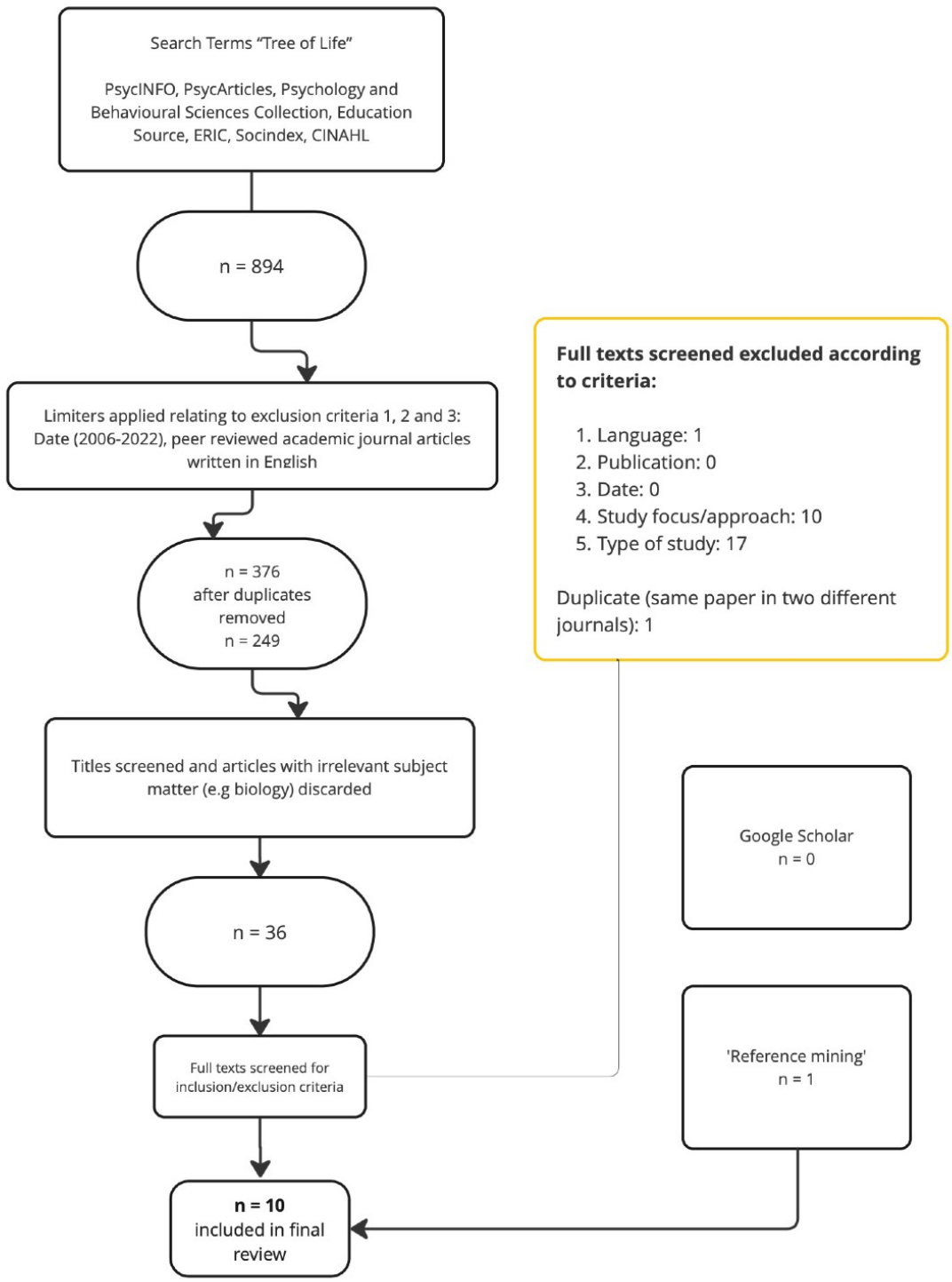
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# Appendix 1: Literature Search Flowchart



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## Appendix 2: List of Excluded Studies and Rationale for Exclusion

Reference	Reason for Exclusion
Butera-Prinzi, F., Charles, N., & Story, K. (2014). Narrative family therapy and group work for families living with acquired brain injury. <i>Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy</i> , 35(1), 81-99.	Descriptive
Carmichael, L., & Denborough, D. (2015). Listening for alternative stories: Narrative practice with vulnerable children and young people in India. <i>International Journal of Narrative Therapy &amp; Community Work</i> , (1), 57-100.	Descriptive
Campillo, M. (2021). Terapia Narrativa: respondiendo al duelo y la perdida con el árbol de la re-asociación. <i>Revista de psicoterapia</i> , 32(119), 181-195.	Not published in English
Casdagli, L., Fredman, G., Huckle, E., Mahony, E., & Christie, D. (2021). The contribution of peer trainers to the Tree of Life project for young people living with Type 1 Diabetes: Building community. <i>Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry</i> , 26(1), 39-50.	Descriptive
Chao, S. (2020). Walking in sunshine: Collecting insider knowledge about detaching from depression. <i>International Journal of Narrative Therapy &amp; Community Work</i> , (1), 67-75.	Descriptive Focus on a range of arts interventions
Chamberlain, C., Clark, Y., Hokke, S., Hampton, A., Atkinson, C., & Andrews, S. (2021). Healing the Past by Nurturing the Future: Aboriginal parents' views of what helps support recovery from complex trauma: Indigenous health and well-being: targeted primary health care across the life course. <i>Primary health care research &amp; development</i> , 22.	Focus not on the Tree of Life
Chimpén-López, C. A., Pacheco, M., Pretel-Luque, T., Bastón, R., & Chimpén-Sagrado, D. (2021). The couple's tree of life: Promoting and protecting relational identity. <i>Family Process</i> .	Couples Therapy
Christensen, K. (2022). From tree of life to the sun of life. <i>International Journal of Narrative Therapy &amp; Community Work</i> , (2), 33-37.	Descriptive and looks at different art interventions not just ToL.
Darewych, O. H., & Riedel Bowers, N. (2018). Positive arts interventions: Creative clinical tools promoting psychological well-being. <i>International Journal of Art Therapy</i> , 23(2), 62-69.	Descriptive
Denborough, D. (2012). Responding to survivors of torture and suffering-survival skills of Kurdish families. <i>International Journal of Narrative Therapy &amp; Community Work</i> , (3), 18-49.	Descriptive

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Denborough, D. (2015).Part 2: Tree of Life approach. The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work, (1).	Descriptive
Denborough, D. (2015). PART FOUR: Narrative approaches to therapy, group work and community work'. The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work, (1).	Descriptive
Dyurich, A., & Oliver, M. (2019). Using narrative therapy's Tree of Life to promote exploration and insight for unaccompanied refugee children. Crossing Borders/Crossing Boundaries, 39.	Not a peer reviewed Journal Reflective
Jacobs, S. F. (2018). Collective narrative practice with unaccompanied refugee minors:"The Tree of Life" as a response to hardship. Clinical child psychology and psychiatry, 23(2), 279-293.	Descriptive
Gardner-Elahi, C., & Zamiri, S. (2015). Collective narrative practice in forensic mental health. Journal of Forensic Practice.	Study references the Tree of Life but the focus of the research was on 'The Knowledge Group'
Hirschson, S., Fritz, E., & Kilian, D. (2018). The tree of life as a metaphor for grief in AIDS-orphaned adolescents. American Journal of Dance Therapy, 40(1), 87-109.	Focus of the paper was on Grief rather than the use of the Tree of Life itself.
Hughes, G. (2014). Finding a voice through 'The Tree of Life': A strength-based approach to mental health for refugee children and families in schools. Clinical child psychology and psychiatry, 19(1), 139-153.	Descriptive
Hung, S. L. (2011). Collective narrative practice with rape victims in the Chinese society of Hong Kong. International Journal of Narrative Therapy & Community Work, (1), 14-31.	Descriptive
Ken, T. (2022). Bringing narrative practices to work with Anangu people. International Journal of Narrative Therapy & Community Work, (2), 18-24.	Reflective Article ToL a small aspect of the article. Did not involve individuals actually engaging in ToL
Martin, D. (2022). A tree of spirituality: Exploring insider knowledges of balancing Catholic and first nations identities using narrative practices. International Journal of Narrative Therapy & Community Work, (2), 25-32.	Descriptive Structure of Tree of Life approach unclear

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<p>Méndez, G. A., &amp; Cole, E. M. (2014). Engaging Latino families in therapy: Application of the tree of life technique. <i>Journal of Family Psychotherapy</i>, 25(3), 209-224.</p>	<p>Descriptive</p>
<p>Milbrath, S. (2009). The Tree of Life Project. <i>SchoolArts: The Art Education Magazine for Teachers</i>, 108(8), 48-49.</p>	<p>Not Peer Reviewed No reference to Ncube's (2006) Tree of Life. Does not follow that structure.</p>
<p>Ngwenya, D. (2016). " Our Branches Are Broken:" Using the Tree Of Life Healing Methodology with Victims of Gukurahundi in Matebeleland, Zimbabwe. <i>Peace and Conflict Studies</i>, 23(1), 2.</p>	<p>No reference to Ncube (2006). Refers to a methodology developed in 2001.</p>
<p>Pipe, T. B., Mishark, K., Hansen, R. P., Hentz, J. G., &amp; Hartsell, Z. (2010). Rediscovering the art of healing connection by creating the tree of life poster: a pilot program for hospitalized older adults. <i>Journal of Gerontological Nursing</i>, 36(6), 47-55.</p>	<p>Involved the creation of poster. No reference to Ncube's (2006) Tree of Life.</p>
<p>Portnoy, S., Girling, I., &amp; Fredman, G. (2016). Supporting young people living with cancer to tell their stories in ways that make them stronger: The Beads of Life approach. <i>Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry</i>, 21(2), 255-267.</p>	<p>Beads of Life rather than Tree of Life</p>
<p>Stiles, D. A., Alaraudanjoki, E., Wilkinson, L. R., Ritchie, K. L., &amp; Brown, K. A. (2021). Researching the effectiveness of tree of life: An imbeleko approach to counseling refugee youth. <i>Journal of Child &amp; Adolescent Trauma</i>, 14(1), 123-139.</p>	<p>This article is a research proposal.</p>
<p>Tamasese, T. K., Bush, A., Parsons, T. L., Sawrey, R., &amp; Waldegrave, C. (2020). <i>Asiasiga i A'oga ma Nu'u</i>: a child and adolescent post-tsunami intervention based on Indigenous Samoan values. <i>Australasian Psychiatry</i>, 28(1), 34-36.</p>	<p>Descriptive</p>

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### Appendix 3: Critical Appraisal Skills Programmes (CASP) Checklists

Critical Appraisal Skills Programmes (CASP)	Study Author(s)									
	Key: Yes No. Can't tell									
Appraisal Question	Casadagli et al., (2017)	German (2013)	Haslehurst et al., (2021)	Ibrahim and Tchanturia (2018)	Ibrahim and Allen (2018)	Randle-Phillips (2016)	Rowley et al., (2020)	Schweitzer et al., (2014)	Wellman et al., (2016)	Vitale et al.,
Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	No.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Is a qualitative method appropriate?	Can't tell	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	Can't tell	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Can't tell	Yes
Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	Can't tell	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Yes	Yes
Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issues?	Can't tell	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	Can't tell	No.	Yes	Yes	Yes	No.	Yes	Can't tell	Can't tell	Can't tell
Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	Can't tell	Can't tell	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	Can't tell	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	No.	No.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Is there clear statements of findings?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
How valuable is the research?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes



**Appendix 4: Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool [MMAT] (Hong et al., 2018)**

**German (2013)**

Category of study design	Methodological quality criteria	Responses			
		Yes	No	Can't Tell	Comments
Screening questions (for all study types)  <i>Further appraisal may not be feasible or appropriate when the answer is 'No' or 'Can't tell' to one or both screening questions.</i>	Are there clear research questions?				
	Do the collected data allow to address the research questions?				
Mixed Method	Is there an adequate rationale for using a mixed methods design to address the research question?				
	Are the different components of the study effectively integrated to answer the research question?				
	Are the outputs of the integration of qualitative and quantitative components adequately interpreted?				
	Are divergences and inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed?				
	Do the different components of the study adhere to the quality criteria of each tradition of the methods involved?				

## Appendix 5: Tree of Life Workshop Structure and Example Slides

10:30-11:15: Introductions, Icebreakers and Introducing the Tree of Life

11:15-2:15: Completing individual trees

12:15-1pm: Sharing trees with others

1-1:45 Lunch

1:45-2:00: Forest of Life

2:00-2:30: Storms of Life

2:30-3pm: Certificates and Close

### Parts of the Tree



Roots



Ground



Trunk



Branches



Leaves



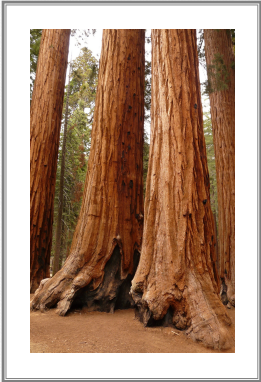
Fruits



### Roots

- Important places to you
- Where you are from
- Different places you may have lived
- Culture
- Religion
- Ethnicity
- Your history

# Trunk



- What skills are you good at?
- These could be practical talents and skills (e.g. cooking, dancing, sport) and they could also be skills like caring, sharing, supporting friends and family members, standing up for yourself and others.



Are storms always present in life?	How do you know when a storm is coming?	What skills do you have that help you to get through stormy times?
What can you do to protect yourself and others?	Who can help or support you during storms?	What did you notice others do during the storms and who stood out for you?
Who do you see standing with you during stormy times?	What would you like to share with other people who could be going through storms or going through hard times?	What do you do when the storms have passed?

# Certificates

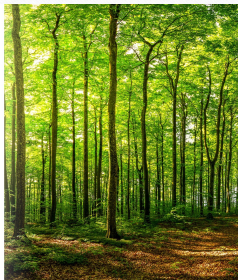
## Tree of Life Certificate

Awarded to \_\_\_\_\_  
 For engaging in the Tree of Life workshops, and sharing their history, skills and hopes and dreams with others.

Their skills and abilities include

And their hopes and dreams for the future are

Date: 17.08.22      Signed



## Appendix 6: Confirmation of Ethical Approval

The Tavistock and Portman   
NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement  
Directorate of Education & Training  
Tavistock Centre  
120 Belsize Lane  
London  
NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 8938 2699  
Fax: 020 7447 3837

Lucy Tobin

### By Email

16 May 2022

Dear Lucy,

### Re: Trust Research Ethics Application

**Title:** An Exploration of Care Leavers Experience of Engaging in Collective Narrative Practice Through the Tree of Life

Thank you for sending your response to the conditions set by the Assessor with regards to your TREC application. I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

**Please note that any changes to the project design including changes to methodology/data collection etc, must be referred to TREC as failure to do so, may result in a report of academic and/or research misconduct.**

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,



### Paru Jeram

Secretary to the Trust Research Degrees Subcommittee

T: 020 938 2699

E: [academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk](mailto:academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

cc. Course Lead, Supervisor, Course Administrator

## Appendix 7: Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC) Application

### Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC) APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW OF STUDENT RESEARCH PROJECTS

This application should be submitted alongside copies of any supporting documentation which will be handed to participants, including a participant information sheet, consent form, self-completion survey or questionnaire.

Where a form is submitted and sections are incomplete, the form will not be considered by TREC and will be returned to the applicant for completion.

For further guidance please contact Paru Jeram ([academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk](mailto:academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk))

#### **FOR ALL APPLICANTS**

**If you already have ethical approval from another body (including HRA/IRAS) please submit the application form and outcome letters. You need only complete sections of the TREC form which are NOT covered in your existing approval**

Is your project considered as 'research' according to the HRA tool? ( <a href="http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/research/index.html">http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/research/index.html</a> )	<b>Yes</b>
Will your project involve participants who are under 18 or who are classed as vulnerable? (see section 7)	<b>No</b>
Will your project include data collection outside of the UK?	<b>No</b>

#### **SECTION A: PROJECT DETAILS**

<b>Project title</b>	An Exploration of Care Leavers Experience of Engaging in Collective Narrative Practice Through the Tree of Life		
<b>Proposed project start date</b>	March 2022	<b>Anticipated project end date</b>	August 2023
<b>Principle Investigator:</b> Dale Bartle			
<b>Please note: TREC approval will only be given for the length of the project as stated above up to a maximum of 6 years. Projects exceeding these timeframes will need additional ethical approval</b>			
<b>Has NHS or other approval been sought for this research including through submission via Research Application System (IRAS) or to the Health Research Authority (HRA)?</b>	<b>YES (NRES approval)</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	<b>YES (HRA approval)</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	<b>Other</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	<b>NO</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>If you already have ethical approval from another body (including HRA/IRAS) please submit the application form and outcome letters.</b>			

#### **SECTION B: APPLICANT DETAILS**

<b>Name of Researcher</b>	Lucy Tobin
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<b>Programme of Study and Target Award</b>	Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology (M4)
<b>Email address</b>	ltobin@tavi-port.nhs.uk
<b>Contact telephone number</b>	07974630996

### **SECTION C: CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

<p><b>Will any of the researchers or their institutions receive any other benefits or incentives for taking part in this research over and above their normal salary package or the costs of undertaking the research?</b></p> <p>YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If YES, please detail below:</p>	
<p>Is there any further possibility for conflict of interest? YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p><b>Are you proposing to conduct this work in a location where you work or have a placement?</b></p> <p>YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If YES, please detail below outline how you will avoid issues arising around colleagues being involved in this project:</p>	
<p>The project is being undertaken in a separate part of the local authority. The researcher is on placement in the School Psychology Service and the research will take place as part of Future's First, an organisation for care leavers within the local authority.</p>	
<p><b>Is your project being commissioned by and/or carried out on behalf of a body external to the Trust? (for example; commissioned by a local authority, school, care home, other NHS Trust or other organisation).</b></p> <p><small>*Please note that 'external' is defined as an organisation which is external to the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust (Trust)</small></p> <p>If YES, please add details here:</p>	<p>YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
<p><b>Will you be required to get further ethical approval after receiving TREC approval?</b></p> <p>If YES, please supply details of the ethical approval bodies below AND include any letters of approval from the ethical approval bodies (letters received after receiving TREC approval should be submitted to complete your record):</p>	<p>YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>If your project is being undertaken with one or more clinical services or organisations external to the Trust, please provide details of these:</p>	
<p>N/A</p>	
<p>If you still need to agree these arrangements or if you can only approach organisations after you have ethical approval, please identify the types of organisations (eg. schools or clinical services) you wish to approach:</p>	
<p>NA</p>	


<p><b>Do you have approval from the organisations detailed above? (this includes R&amp;D approval where relevant)</b></p> <p>Please attach approval letters to this application. Any approval letters received after TREC approval has been granted MUST be submitted to be appended to your record</p>	<p>YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> NA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
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**SECTION D: SIGNATURES AND DECLARATIONS**

<p><b>APPLICANT DECLARATION</b></p>	
<p>I confirm that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The information contained in this application is, to the best of my knowledge, correct and up to date.</li> <li>• I have attempted to identify all risks related to the research.</li> <li>• I acknowledge my obligations and commitment to upholding ethical principles and to keep my supervisor updated with the progress of my research</li> <li>• I am aware that for cases of proven misconduct, it may result in formal disciplinary proceedings and/or the cancellation of the proposed research.</li> <li>• I understand that if my project design, methodology or method of data collection changes I must seek an amendment to my ethical approvals as failure to do so, may result in a report of academic and/or research misconduct.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Applicant (print name)</b></p>	<p>Lucy Tobin</p>
<p><b>Signed</b></p>	
<p><b>Date</b></p>	<p>8.2.22</p>

**FOR RESEARCH DEGREE STUDENT APPLICANTS ONLY**

<p><b>Name of Supervisor/Principal Investigator</b></p>	<p>Dale Bartle</p>
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<p><b>Supervisor –</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the student have the necessary skills to carry out the research? <b>YES</b></li> <li>▪ Is the participant information sheet, consent form and any other documentation appropriate? <b>YES</b></li> <li>▪ Are the procedures for recruitment of participants and obtaining informed consent suitable and sufficient? <b>YES</b></li> <li>▪ Where required, does the researcher have current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance? <b>YES</b></li> </ul>	
<p><b>Signed</b></p>	
<p><b>Date</b></p>	<p>15.3.22</p>

<p><b>COURSE LEAD/RESEARCH LEAD</b></p> <p>Does the proposed research as detailed herein have your support to proceed? YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p><b>Signed</b></p>	
<p><b>Date</b></p>	

## **SECTION E: DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH**

**1. Provide a brief description of the proposed research, including the requirements of participants. This must be in lay terms and free from technical or discipline specific terminology or jargon. If such terms are required, please ensure they are adequately explained (Do not exceed 500 words)**

The proposed research will involve care leavers engaging in semi-structured interviews regarding their experience of engaging in a workshop using the collective narrative approach, The Tree of Life (ToL).

The Tree of Life is a tool developed by Ncube (2006). It is informed by Narrative Therapy, a therapeutic approach centred on individuals being the experts in their own lives, drawing upon their individual skills, values and beliefs. It is most commonly used as a group approach known as collective narrative practice. The Tree of Life aims to empower participants to become experts in their own lives, with a focus on creating opportunities for people to tell and witness one another's preferred identity stories.

The Tree of Life Approach consists of 4 parts:

- Part 1: Drawing the Tree
- Part 2: The Forest of Life
- Part 3: The Storms of Life
- Part 4: The Ceremony

The structure is flexible and previous research has conducted the activities successfully over varying numbers of sessions e.g. one day workshops or weekly sessions (Casdagli et al., 2017; German, 2013). The researcher will be delivering a one day Tree of Life 1-day workshop for care leavers who are part of the group Click Plus. Click Plus is a group of care leavers who engage in a range of activities with the aim of influencing positive changes in the services they receive.

The researcher has had some teaching on the approach as part of the Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology and has undertaken a further two-day training course on the ToL, it's methodology and running groups, facilitated by Nzaelo Ncube who designed the approach.

Following the workshop, Participants be invited to engage in a semi-structured interview, with the aim of exploring their personal experience engaging in the ToL . It is hoped that up to 8 participants will take part in the workshops, and 5-8 in the subsequent interviews. Interviews will be semi-structured and up to an hour in length.

The interview data will then be analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

### **References**

Casdagli L, Christie D, Girling I, Ali S, Fredman G. (2017). Evaluating the Tree of Life project: An innovative way of engaging children and young people with type 1 diabetes. *Diabetes Care for Children & Young People* 6: 9–15



German, M. (2013). Developing our cultural strengths: Using the "Tree of Life" strength-based, narrative therapy intervention in schools, to enhance self-esteem, cultural understanding and to challenge racism. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 30(4), 75-99.

Ncube, N. (2006). The tree of life project. *International Journal of Narrative Therapy & Community Work*, 2006(1), 3-16.

**2. Provide a statement on the aims and significance of the proposed research, including potential impact to knowledge and understanding in the field (where appropriate, indicate the associated hypothesis which will be tested). This should be a clear justification of the proposed research, why it should proceed and a statement on any anticipated benefits to the community. (Do not exceed 700 words)**

There are currently approximately 80,000 looked after children in the UK (Department for Education, 2019). Outcomes for care experienced children and young people are consistently poorer than their non-looked after peers. They experience poorer educational, emotional and mental health outcomes and 63% of children enter the care system due to abuse and neglect, so have often experienced trauma (Department for Education, 2019). The unaddressed mental health needs of care experienced young people contributes to poor lifelong outcomes and improving support for this group is a priority (NICE, 2017).

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 defines a care leaver is someone who has been in the care of the Local Authority for a period of 13 weeks or more spanning their 16th birthday. The Act also highlights that the care system also has a role in promoting recovery, resilience and wellbeing. Due to their circumstances, such as the number of placement moves, traditional mental health services have not always best addressed their needs (Healthy London Partnership, 2020). In October 2020, The Children's Commissioner for England (2020) published "Ten asks for care leavers" One of these was improved mental health support, as "care leavers are likely to have experienced trauma and adversity in their lives".

The Tree of Life (ToL) is an tool informed by Narrative Therapy (White & Epston, 1990). Narrative Therapy is a therapeutic approach which is centred on individuals being experts in their own lives, drawing upon their individual skills, values and beliefs (Morgan, 2000). The ToL can be used as a tool with individuals, but is most commonly used as collective narrative practice. Collective narrative practice promote connections with others and seeks to support groups who have experienced social suffering in contexts where traditional therapy may not be appropriate or culturally resonant (Denborough, 2012).

The ToL was developed by Ncube (2006) and used to support children who had lost parents due to HIV/AIDS. Ncube (2006) found it to be a safe way to creatively allow children to tell their stories in a way which celebrates strength and individuality, rather than a focus on problems. It does not rely entirely on spoken word, instead allowing participants to produce rich descriptions and stories about their lives through drawing. The positive, strengths based approach focusing on hopes and dreams for the future ensures that the approach does not retraumatise young people who may have experienced trauma.

The ToL approach was initially developed for working with children, but the majority of research has focused on the use of the ToL with adults. For example, it has been used

with a range of clinical groups in the UK (Parham et al., 2019), refugee mothers (Hughes, 2014) and parents from ethnic minorities with children with special educational needs and disabilities (Rowley, Rajbans & Markland, 2020). Five published studies in the UK have looked the use of the ToL with children:

- With a group of children at a shelter for unaccompanied refugee minors in Greece (Jacobs, 2018)
- As an intervention with a class of 30 children in a primary school (German, 2013).
- Two further papers document case studies of using it with groups of young people with Type One Diabetes (Casadagli et al., 2017; 2021).
- With children and young people subject to sexual exploitation (Farooq et al., 2021).

The findings from these qualitative pieces of research has been positive but it is clear that more research needs to be conducted in order to explore the ToL and its use with a wider range of individuals and settings.

There is a clear need for Educational Psychologists and other professionals to enact change in order to promote positive outcomes for care experienced young people. The ToL is an innovative therapeutic approach which aims to build connections with others and give young people the opportunity to tell their story using arts based methods. It can be implemented flexibly in a range of settings and has the potential to be used as an accessible intervention to support the emotional wellbeing of a range of vulnerable groups.

The proposed study aims to explore the utility of the ToL as an intervention for care leavers through exploring how it is experienced by this group of young people.

## References

Casadagli L, Christie D, Girling I, Ali S, Fredman G. (2017). Evaluating the Tree of Life project: An innovative way of engaging children and young people with type 1 diabetes. *Diabetes Care for Children & Young People* 6: 9–15

Casadagli, L., Fredman, G., Huckle, E., Mahony, E., & Christie, D. (2021). The contribution of peer trainers to the Tree of Life project for young people living with Type 1 Diabetes: Building community. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 26(1), 39-50.

Denborough, D. (2012). A storyline of collective narrative practice: A history of ideas, social projects and partnerships. *International Journal of Narrative Therapy & Community Work*, (1), 40-65.

Department for Education. (2019). *Children looked after in England (including adoption), year ending 31 March 2019*: Department for Education. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/850306/Children\\_looked\\_after\\_in\\_England\\_2019\\_Text.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/850306/Children_looked_after_in_England_2019_Text.pdf)

Farooq, F., Addy, C., Smyth, G., Appiah, & Kennedy, P. (2021). 'Mo one's gonna tell your story better than you are': The use of a narrative therapy approach informed by the Tree of Life with young people subject to sexual exploitation. *Clinical Psychology Forum*, 342, 25-35.

Healthy London Partnership. (2020). Looked After Children and Care Leavers Outcome Report. <https://www.healthylondon.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Looked-After-Children-and-Care-Leavers-Outcome-Report-FINAL.pdf>

Jacobs, S. F. (2018). Collective narrative practice with unaccompanied refugee minors: "The Tree of Life" as a response to hardship. *Clinical child psychology and psychiatry*, 23(2), 279-293.

Morgan, A. (2000). *What is narrative therapy?*. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications.

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. (2017). Child abuse and neglect: NICE guideline [NG76]. <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng76/chapter/Recommendations#therapeutic-interventions-for-children-young-people-and-families-after-child-abuse-and-neglect>

Ncube, N. (2006). The tree of life project. *International Journal of Narrative Therapy & Community Work*, 2006(1), 3-16.

Parham, S., Ibrahim, J., & Foxwell, K. (2019). Could the Tree of Life Model Be a Useful Approach for UK Mental Health Contexts? A Review of the Literature. *Narrative Works: Issues, Investigations, & Interventions*, 9(2), 44-70.

Rowley, J., Rajbans, T., & Markland, B. (2020). Supporting parents through a narrative therapeutic group approach: a participatory research project. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 36(2), 115-132.

The Children's Commissioner. (2020). Ten asks for care leavers. <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/2020/10/29/10-asks-for-care-leavers/>

White, M., & Epston, D. (1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. New York, NY:W.W. Norton

**3. Provide an outline of the methodology for the proposed research, including proposed method of data collection, tasks assigned to participants of the research and the proposed method and duration of data analysis. If the proposed research makes use of pre-established and generally accepted techniques, please make this clear. (Do not exceed 500 words)**

This research will utilise a qualitative methodology, underpinned by a relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology. From a constructivist perspective, it is thought participants who engage in the Tree of Life workshops will experience this in unique ways, dependent on their individual experiences and contexts. The research does not aim to discover a single, generalisable finding, instead exploring insights into individual experiences from participants unique perspectives.

Between 2-4 weeks after participants have engaged in the Tree of Life workshops, they will be invited interviews using a semi-structured approach, in line with the exploratory purpose of the research. The interviewer will use a guide which will act as a checklist of possible topics (see Appendix 1). This will be used flexibly in order to give participants a sense of agency over the interview, explore particular topics in varying levels of depth and allow for the exploration of any unplanned topics that may arise (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

The interviews will be conducted by the researcher, who will have also facilitated the Tree of Life workshops. The interviewer will therefore already be familiar to the interviewee and enable them to feel at ease in the interview scenario, with the semi-structured approach further allowing it feel like a 'conversation with a purpose' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p. 57).

The audio from the interviews will be recorded with consent from the participants for this gained beforehand. This will be transcribed and analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is concerned with obtaining and describing individuals personal experiences of a particular phenomenon. The aim is that rich, contextualised information will be gained. IPA recognises that experiences will be unique to individuals and does not seek to make broad generalisations (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). IPA values the influence of the researcher, acknowledging that any findings are an interpretation of a participants account. The analysis will follow the 6 steps outlined by Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009 with steps 1-4 being applied to individual transcripts and 5-6 considering themes across transcripts.

1. Reading and re-reading
2. Initial noting
3. Developing emergent themes
4. Searching for connections across emergent themes
5. Moving to the next case
6. Looking for patterns across cases

#### References

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. London, England: SAGE.

### **SECTION F: PARTICIPANT DETAILS**

**4. Provide an explanation detailing how you will identify, approach and recruit the participants for the proposed research, including clarification on sample size and location. Please provide justification for the exclusion/inclusion criteria for this study (i.e. who will be allowed to / not allowed to participate) and explain briefly, in lay terms, why these criteria are in place. (Do not exceed 500 words)**

Participants will have been identified through CLICK Plus, which is part of the Futures First (Care Leavers Service) within the Local Authority of which the researcher is on placement with. CLICK plus is a group of 18+ care leavers that get together to create a stronger voice to influence positive changes in the services they receive.

Young people will be approached to join the ToL workshop through email and attendance at existing Click Plus Meetings. o. Young people will be invited to participate in the research after they have taken part in the workshop.

Participation will be on a voluntary basis and individuals who express an interest will be given information sheets and consent forms and the opportunity to ask questions.

Inclusion criteria:

- Aged 18-25

- Care leavers, as defined by Futures First (those who have been in care for at least 14 weeks since their 14<sup>th</sup> Birthday)
- Can communicate verbally in English

The detail of analysis involved in IPA means that it is usually conducted on a relatively small sample of around 5-16 participants (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The sample size for this study is intended to be between 5-8 due to the time constraints of a Doctoral thesis and the appropriate size for the ToL group itself. Participants will be reminded will have the right to withdraw both from the research at any time.

**5. Please state the location(s) of the proposed research including the location of any interviews. Please provide a Risk Assessment if required. Consideration should be given to lone working, visiting private residences, conducting research outside working hours or any other non-standard arrangements.**

**If any data collection is to be done online, please identify the platforms to be used.**

The workshop will take place at the Training and Resource Centre within the Local Authority, where the Click Plus group usually meets. If restrictions due to any outbreaks of the Covid pandemic mean that this is not possible, the workshops will instead take place online using Microsoft Teams. However, the research participants will be recruited after the workshop

Research interviews will take place either in person, in a room booked at the town hall, or online over Microsoft Teams. Participants will be given the choice as to which they would prefer.

**6. Will the participants be from any of the following groups?(Tick as appropriate)**

- Students or Staff of the Trust or Partner delivering your programme.
- Adults (over the age of 18 years with mental capacity to give consent to participate in the research).
- Children or legal minors (anyone under the age of 16 years)<sup>1</sup>
- Adults who are unconscious, severely ill or have a terminal illness.
- Adults who may lose mental capacity to consent during the course of the research.
- Adults in emergency situations.
- Adults<sup>2</sup> with mental illness - particularly those detained under the Mental Health Act (1983 & 2007).
- Participants who may lack capacity to consent to participate in the research under the research requirements of the Mental Capacity Act (2005).
- Prisoners, where ethical approval may be required from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).
- Young Offenders, where ethical approval may be required from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).
- Healthy volunteers (in high risk intervention studies).
- Participants who may be considered to have a pre-existing and potentially dependent<sup>3</sup> relationship with the investigator (e.g. those in care homes, students, colleagues, service-users, patients).
- Other vulnerable groups (see Question 6).
- Adults who are in custody, custodial care, or for whom a court has assumed responsibility.
- Participants who are members of the Armed Forces.

<sup>1</sup>If the proposed research involves children or adults who meet the Police Act (1997) definition of vulnerability<sup>3</sup>, any researchers who will have contact with participants must have current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance.

<sup>2</sup> 'Adults with a learning or physical disability, a physical or mental illness, or a reduction in physical or mental capacity, and living in a care home or home for people with learning difficulties or receiving care in their own home, or receiving hospital or social care services.' (Police Act, 1997)

<sup>3</sup> Proposed research involving participants with whom the investigator or researcher(s) shares a dependent or unequal relationships (e.g. teacher/student, clinical therapist/service-user) may compromise the ability to give informed consent which is free from any form of pressure (real or implied) arising from this relationship. TREC recommends that, wherever practicable, investigators choose participants with whom they have no dependent relationship. Following due scrutiny, if the investigator is confident that the research involving participants in dependent relationships is vital and defensible, TREC will require additional information setting out the case and detailing how risks inherent in the dependent relationship will be managed. TREC will also need to be reassured that refusal to participate will not result in any discrimination or penalty.

**7. Will the study involve participants who are vulnerable? YES  NO**

For the purposes of research, 'vulnerable' participants may be adults whose ability to protect their own interests are impaired or reduced in comparison to that of the broader population. Vulnerability may arise from:

- the participant's personal characteristics (e.g. mental or physical impairment)
- their social environment, context and/or disadvantage (e.g. socio-economic mobility, educational attainment, resources, substance dependence, displacement or homelessness).
- where prospective participants are at high risk of consenting under duress, or as a result of manipulation or coercion, they must also be considered as vulnerable
- children are automatically presumed to be vulnerable.

**7.1. If YES, what special arrangements are in place to protect vulnerable participants' interests?**

If YES, a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check **within the last three years** is required.

Please provide details of the "clear disclosure":

Date of disclosure: 16/08/2019
Type of disclosure: Enhanced
Organisation that requested disclosure: Update Service (Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust)
DBS certificate number: 001669523982

(NOTE: information concerning activities which require DBS checks can be found via <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dbs-check-eligible-positions-guidance>). Please **do not** include a copy of your DBS certificate with your application

**8. Do you propose to make any form of payment or incentive available to participants of the research? YES  NO**

If YES, please provide details taking into account that any payment or incentive should be representative of reasonable remuneration for participation and may not be of a value that could be coercive or exerting undue influence on potential participants' decision to take part in the research. Wherever possible, remuneration in a monetary form should be avoided and substituted with vouchers, coupons or equivalent. Any payment made to research participants may have benefit or HMRC implications and participants should be alerted to this in the participant information sheet as they may wish to choose to decline payment.

**9. What special arrangements are in place for eliciting informed consent from participants who may not adequately understand verbal explanations or written information provided in English; where participants have special communication needs; where participants have limited literacy; or where children are involved in the research? (Do not exceed 200 words)**

NA

**SECTION F: RISK ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT**

**10. Does the proposed research involve any of the following? (Tick as appropriate)**

- use of a questionnaire, self-completion survey or data-collection instrument (attach copy)
- use of emails or the internet as a means of data collection
- use of written or computerised tests
- interviews (attach interview questions)
- diaries (attach diary record form)
- participant observation
- participant observation (in a non-public place) without their knowledge / covert research
- audio-recording interviewees or events
- video-recording interviewees or events
- access to personal and/or sensitive data (i.e. student, patient, client or service-user data) without the participant's informed consent for use of these data for research purposes
- administration of any questions, tasks, investigations, procedures or stimuli which may be experienced by participants as physically or mentally painful, stressful or unpleasant during or after the research process
- performance of any acts which might diminish the self-esteem of participants or cause them to experience discomfiture, regret or any other adverse emotional or psychological reaction
- Themes around extremism or radicalisation
- investigation of participants involved in illegal or illicit activities (e.g. use of illegal drugs)
- procedures that involve the deception of participants
- administration of any substance or agent
- use of non-treatment of placebo control conditions
- participation in a clinical trial
- research undertaken at an off-campus location (risk assessment attached)
- research overseas (please ensure Section G is complete)

**11. Does the proposed research involve any specific or anticipated risks (e.g. physical, psychological, social, legal or economic) to participants that are greater than those encountered in everyday life?**

YES  NO

If YES, please describe below including details of precautionary measures.

The research involves a potentially sensitive topic. So care will need to be taken throughout in order to minimise risk of psychological distress. The informed consent and right to withdraw highlighted goes some way to addressing this, however there is a possibility that participants may become distressed during the interview and it will not be possible to predict how participants will react to topics that arise.

Participants will have the opportunity to talk about personal experiences during the interviews and this may cause distress to participants or remind them of a difficult period of their lives. This is particularly pertinent to care leavers as it is likely that they have experienced adverse life events such as abuse or neglect or placement changes (Department for Education, 2019).

Interview questions will remain open to allow participants to be in control of how much information they share. If any sensitive issues come up unexpectedly, oral consent will be sought for further exploration. Participants will be made fully aware of the aims and process of the research to ensure informed consent is gained. The participants will be invited to contribute as much or as little as they wish and will be reminded of their right to withdraw from the research at any time.

Throughout the process the researcher will aim to be attune to signs of distress in the participants and terminate the interview in order to support reduce any psychological distress caused. Further steps that may be taken are highlighted in question 15.

**12. Where the procedures involve potential hazards and/or discomfort or distress for participants, please state what previous experience the investigator or researcher(s) have had in conducting this type of research.**

As a Trainee Child and Educational Psychologist it is felt that the researcher has the skills to be able to identify and support with any signs of distress including verbal and body language.

The researcher has experience in working with vulnerable people, including care experienced young people and those who may have experienced trauma, both prior to training as an Psychologist and in the Trainee role.

**13. Provide an explanation of any potential benefits to participants. Please ensure this is framed within the overall contribution of the proposed research to knowledge or practice. (Do not exceed 400 words)**

**NOTE:** Where the proposed research involves students, they should be assured that accepting the offer to participate or choosing to decline will have no impact on their assessments or learning experience. Similarly, it should be made clear to participants who are patients, service-users and/or receiving any form of treatment or medication that they are not invited to participate in the belief that participation in the research will result in some relief or improvement in their condition.

As highlighted, there is an urgent need for more interventions to support care experienced young people and improve outcomes for this group (NICE, 2017). Educational Psychologists have a key role in advising on and delivering interventions to support the social, emotional and mental health of children and young people 0-25 in a range of settings.

The ToL is a promising therapeutic tool with the potential to be used flexibly in a range of settings. In this context it may support with care experienced young people's sense of identity and belonging and allow them to positively reauthor negative narratives of their past. The small amount of research so far into the ToL has been positive but further research is needed to explore it's feasibility and acceptability for this particular group. Findings may be of interest to the fields of Educational Psychology and Social Work.

Furthermore, it is hoped that participating in the research will participants the chance to reflect upon and share their experiences, identify their goals for the future, build connections with others have their voice heard.

## References

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. (2017). Child abuse and neglect: NICE guideline [NG76]. <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng76/chapter/Recommendations#therapeutic-interventions-for-children-young-people-and-families-after-child-abuse-and-neglect>



**14. Provide an outline of any measures you have in place in the event of adverse or unexpected outcomes and the potential impact this may have on participants involved in the proposed research. (Do not exceed 300 words)**

The research involves a potentially sensitive topic. So care will need to be taken throughout in order to minimise risk of psychological distress. The informed consent and right to withdraw highlighted goes some way to addressing this, however there is a possibility that participants may become distressed during the interview and it will not be possible to predict how participants will react to topics that arise in both.

Participants will have the opportunity to talk about personal experiences during the workshop and this may cause distress to participants or remind them of a difficult period of their lives. This is particularly pertinent to care leavers as it is likely that they have experienced adverse life events such as abuse or neglect or placement changes (Department for Education, 2019).

The activities during the workshop and interview questions will remain open to allow participants to be in control of how much information they share. If any sensitive issues come up unexpectedly, oral consent will be sought for further exploration. Participants will be made fully aware of the aims and process of the research in addition to some of the topics that may come up through the information sheet to ensure informed consent is gained. The participants will be invited to contribute as much or as little as they wish and will be reminded of their right to withdraw from any aspect of the research, including both the workshop and interview at any time.

Throughout the process the researcher will aim to be attune to signs of distress in the participants and terminate the workshop or interview in order to support reduce any psychological distress caused. Further steps that may be taken are highlighted in question 15.

**References**

Department for Education. (2019). *Children looked after in England (including adoption), year ending 31 March 2019*: Department for Education. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/850306/Children\\_looked\\_after\\_in\\_England\\_2019\\_Text.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/850306/Children_looked_after_in_England_2019_Text.pdf)

**15. Provide an outline of your debriefing, support and feedback protocol for participants involved in the proposed research. This should include, for example, where participants may feel the need to discuss thoughts or feelings brought about following their participation in the research. This may involve referral to an external support or counseling service, where participation in the research has caused specific issues for participants.**

The researcher will be attuned to signs of psychological distress throughout the interview process and will terminate the interview if necessary.

The researcher will check in with participants after the interview to check on their emotional wellbeing. If participants would like to speak further about any thoughts or

feelings brought about following their participation in the research the researcher will offer a further space for reflection, separate from the research.

The researcher will support the participant to identify trusted people whom they can contact for additional support, such as their personal advisor at futures first. Their personal advisor will be able to refer them to the counsellor at futures first if this would be appropriate.

Participants can also be signposted to the local authorities family information service page for care leavers which signposts young people to a range of organisations, both within and external to the local authority which participants can access for further, specific support in a particular area.

**16. Please provide the names and nature of any external support or counselling organisations that will be suggested to participants if participation in the research has potential to raise specific issues for participants.**

If required, participants can be signposted to a range of services which are highlighted in this link.

<https://fis.wandsworth.gov.uk/kb5/wandsworth/fsd/advice.page?id=QKlzk4guqz8>

**17. Where medical aftercare may be necessary, this should include details of the treatment available to participants. Debriefing may involve the disclosure of further information on the aims of the research, the participant's performance and/or the results of the research. (Do not exceed 500 words)**

N/A

**FOR RESEARCH UNDERTAKEN OUTSIDE THE UK**

18. Does the proposed research involve travel outside of the UK?

YES  NO

If YES, please confirm:

I have consulted the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website for guidance/travel advice? <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/>

I have completed a RISK Assessment covering all aspects of the project including consideration of the location of the data collection and risks to participants.

All overseas project data collection will need approval from the Deputy Director of Education and Training or their nominee. Normally this will be done based on the information provided in this form. All projects approved through the TREC process will be indemnified by the Trust against claims made by third parties.

If you have any queries regarding research outside the UK, please contact [academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk](mailto:academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk):

Students are required to arrange their own travel and medical insurance to cover project work outside of the UK. Please indicate what insurance cover you have or will have in place.

19. Please evidence how compliance with all local research ethics and research governance requirements have been assessed for the country(ies) in which the research is taking place. Please also clarify how the requirements will be met:

NA

## **SECTION G: PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND WITHDRAWAL**

20. Have you attached a copy of your participant information sheet (this should be in *plain English*)? Where the research involves non-English speaking participants, please include translated materials.

YES  NO

If NO, please indicate what alternative arrangements are in place below:

21. Have you attached a copy of your participant consent form (this should be in *plain English*)? Where the research involves non-English speaking participants, please include translated materials.

YES  NO

If NO, please indicate what alternative arrangements are in place below:

**22. The following is a participant information sheet checklist covering the various points that should be included in this document.**

- Clear identification of the Trust as the sponsor for the research, the project title, the Researcher and Principal Investigator (your Research Supervisor) and other researchers along with relevant contact details.
- Details of what involvement in the proposed research will require (e.g., participation in interviews, completion of questionnaire, audio/video-recording of events), estimated time commitment and any risks involved.
- A statement confirming that the research has received formal approval from TREC or other ethics body.
- If the sample size is small, advice to participants that this may have implications for confidentiality / anonymity.
- A clear statement that where participants are in a dependent relationship with any of the researchers that participation in the research will have no impact on assessment / treatment / service-use or support.
- Assurance that involvement in the project is voluntary and that participants are free to withdraw consent at any time, and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.
- Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.
- A statement that the data generated in the course of the research will be retained in accordance with the [Trusts 's Data Protection and handling Policies](https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/).:
- Advice that if participants have any concerns about the conduct of the investigator, researcher(s) or any other aspect of this research project, they should contact Simon Carrington, Head of Academic Governance and Quality Assurance ([academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk](mailto:academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk))
- Confirmation on any limitations in confidentiality where disclosure of imminent harm to self and/or others may occur.

**23. The following is a consent form checklist covering the various points that should be included in this document.**

- Trust letterhead or logo.
- Title of the project (with research degree projects this need not necessarily be the title of the thesis) and names of investigators.
- Confirmation that the research project is part of a degree
- Confirmation that involvement in the project is voluntary and that participants are free to withdraw at any time, or to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.
- Confirmation of particular requirements of participants, including for example whether interviews are to be audio-/video-recorded, whether anonymised quotes will be used in publications advice of legal limitations to data confidentiality.
- If the sample size is small, confirmation that this may have implications for anonymity any other relevant information.
- The proposed method of publication or dissemination of the research findings.
- Details of any external contractors or partner institutions involved in the research.
- Details of any funding bodies or research councils supporting the research.
- Confirmation on any limitations in confidentiality where disclosure of imminent harm to self and/or others may occur.

**SECTION H: CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY**

**24. Below is a checklist covering key points relating to the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Please indicate where relevant to the proposed research.**

- Participants will be completely anonymised and their identity will not be known by the investigator or researcher(s) (i.e. the participants are part of an anonymous randomised sample and return responses with no form of personal identification)?
- The responses are anonymised or are an anonymised sample (i.e. a permanent process of coding has been carried out whereby direct and indirect identifiers have been removed from data and replaced by a code, with no record retained of how the code relates to the identifiers).
- The samples and data are de-identified (i.e. direct and indirect identifiers have been removed and replaced by a code. The investigator or researchers are able to link the code to the original identifiers and isolate the participant to whom the sample or data relates).
- Participants have the option of being identified in a publication that will arise from the research.
- Participants will be pseudo-anonymised in a publication that will arise from the research. (i.e. the researcher will endeavour to remove or alter details that would identify the participant.)
- The proposed research will make use of personal sensitive data.
- Participants consent to be identified in the study and subsequent dissemination of research findings and/or publication.

**25. Participants must be made aware that the confidentiality of the information they provide is subject to legal limitations in data confidentiality (i.e. the data may be subject to a subpoena, a freedom of information request or mandated reporting by some professions). This only applies to named or de-identified data. If your participants are named or de-identified, please confirm that you will specifically state these limitations.**

YES  NO

If **NO**, please indicate why this is the case below:

**NOTE: WHERE THE PROPOSED RESEARCH INVOLVES A SMALL SAMPLE OR FOCUS GROUP, PARTICIPANTS SHOULD BE ADVISED THAT THERE WILL BE DISTINCT LIMITATIONS IN THE LEVEL OF ANONYMITY THEY CAN BE AFFORDED.**

## **SECTION I: DATA ACCESS, SECURITY AND MANAGEMENT**

**26. Will the Researcher/Principal Investigator be responsible for the security of all data collected in connection with the proposed research? YES  NO**

If **NO**, please indicate what alternative arrangements are in place below:

**27. In line with the 5<sup>th</sup> principle of the Data Protection Act (1998), which states that personal data shall not be kept for longer than is necessary for that purpose or those purposes for which it was collected; please state how long data will be retained for.**

1-2 years  3-5 years  6-10 years  10> years

**NOTE: In line with Research Councils UK (RCUK) guidance, doctoral project data should normally be stored for 10 years and Masters level data for up to 2 years**

**28. Below is a checklist which relates to the management, storage and secure destruction of data for the purposes of the proposed research. Please indicate where relevant to your proposed arrangements.**

- Research data, codes and all identifying information to be kept in separate locked filing cabinets.
- Research data will only be stored in the University of Essex OneDrive system and no other cloud storage location.
- Access to computer files to be available to research team by password only.
- Access to computer files to be available to individuals outside the research team by password only (See 23.1).
- Research data will be encrypted and transferred electronically within the UK.
- Research data will be encrypted and transferred electronically outside of the UK.

**NOTE:** Transfer of research data via third party commercial file sharing services, such as Google Docs and YouSendIt are not necessarily secure or permanent. These systems may also be located overseas and not covered by UK law. If the system is located outside the European Economic Area (EEA) or territories deemed to have sufficient standards of data protection, transfer may also breach the Data Protection Act (1998).

Essex students also have access the 'Box' service for file transfer:

<https://www.essex.ac.uk/student/it-services/box>

- Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, e-mails or telephone numbers.
- Collection and storage of personal sensitive data (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political or religious beliefs or physical or mental health or condition).
- Use of personal data in the form of audio or video recordings.
- Primary data gathered on encrypted mobile devices (i.e. laptops).

**NOTE:** This should be transferred to secure University of Essex OneDrive at the first opportunity.

- All electronic data will undergo secure disposal.

**NOTE:** For hard drives and magnetic storage devices (HDD or SSD), deleting files does not permanently erase the data on most systems, but only deletes the reference to the file. Files can be restored when deleted in this way. Research files must be overwritten to ensure they are completely irretrievable. Software is available for the secure erasing of files from hard drives which meet recognised standards to securely scramble sensitive data. Examples of this software are BC Wipe, Wipe File, DeleteOnClick and Eraser for Windows platforms. Mac users can use the standard 'secure empty trash' option; an alternative is Permanent eraser software.

- All hardcopy data will undergo secure disposal.

**NOTE:** For shredding research data stored in hardcopy (i.e. paper), adopting DIN 3 ensures files are cut into 2mm strips or confetti like cross-cut particles of 4x40mm. The UK government requires a minimum standard of DIN 4 for its material, which ensures cross cut particles of at least 2x15mm.

**29. Please provide details of individuals outside the research team who will be given password protected access to encrypted data for the proposed research.**

NA

**30. Please provide details on the regions and territories where research data will be electronically transferred that are external to the UK:**

NA

**SECTION J: PUBLICATION AND DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS**

**30. How will the results of the research be reported and disseminated? (Select all that apply)**

- Peer reviewed journal
- Non-peer reviewed journal
- Peer reviewed books
- Publication in media, social media or website (including Podcasts and online videos)
- Conference presentation
- Internal report
- Promotional report and materials
- Reports compiled for or on behalf of external organisations
- Dissertation/Thesis
- Other publication
- Written feedback to research participants
- Presentation to participants or relevant community groups
- Other (Please specify below)

**SECTION K: OTHER ETHICAL ISSUES**

**31. Are there any other ethical issues that have not been addressed which you would wish to bring to the attention of Tavistock Research Ethics Committee (TREC)?**

NA

**SECTION L: CHECKLIST FOR ATTACHED DOCUMENTS**

**32. Please check that the following documents are attached to your application.**

- Letters of approval from any external ethical approval bodies (where relevant)
- Recruitment advertisement
- Participant information sheets (including easy-read where relevant)
- Consent forms (including easy-read where relevant)
- Assent form for children (where relevant)
- Letters of approval from locations for data collection
- Questionnaire
- Interview Schedule or topic guide
- Risk Assessment (where applicable)
- Overseas travel approval (where applicable)

**34. Where it is not possible to attach the above materials, please provide an explanation below.**

**Appendix 8: Participant Information Sheet**

**An Exploration of Care Leavers Experience of Engaging in Collective Narrative Practice Through the Tree of Life**



**What is the purpose of the research?**

The aim of this research is to explore your experience of joining the Tree of Life workshops.

**Why is this important?**

1. The Tree of Life has been used with different groups of people, but there is very little research. There has been no research using it with young people who are care leavers.
2. Your views are important and should be heard. This will help to inform if and how these workshops are used in the future.
3. The findings will be helpful to pass onto other professionals such as social workers, and psychologists.

**What to expect**

After joining in the Tree of Life workshops I will contact you to organise a time to interview you between 2-4 weeks after the workshops. This can be in person or online, it's up to you. I will record the audio of the interviews and this will be transcribed (changed into words) so I can analyse it later. This will be kept anonymous and in a secure location.

**What are the benefits of taking part?**

As mentioned, there is no research looking at the Tree of Life with Care Leavers. The research will provide you with an opportunity to express your views, allowing others to learn from your experience with the aim of improving support for care leavers in the future. The research will aim to be a positive and informal experience and will give you a chance to talk about and reflect on your experience.

**What are the risks of taking part?**

It might be that talking about your experience feels uncomfortable and/or reminds you of difficult times in your life. The questions will be open ended to allow you to share as much or as little as you want. Your wellbeing will be prioritised and we can stop our discussion at any time.

**Who has given permission for this research?**

I study at the Tavistock and Portman NHS trust and they have given permission for this research to take place. The research has received formal approval from the Tavistock Research Ethics Committee (TREC).

If you have any concerns about this research please contact [academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk](mailto:academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk).

**How will the research be reported?**

The research is for my doctoral studies in Educational Psychology so it will be written up for that. I may also write a shorter account for a professional journal article.

**Will anyone know what I have said?**



What you say during the interview will be confidential. However, confidentiality is subject to legal limitations. For example, information may be passed on if I am worried about the safety of you or someone else. When I write up the research your name will be changed so no one else will know exactly what you have said. I will be asking several young people, so although all names will be changed, some experiences might be recognisable.

**What if I don't want to take part or change my mind?**

You don't have to take part in the research, it's your choice. If you decide you want to take part and then change your mind later on that's okay too. You can change your mind at any time without giving a reason.

Choosing to take part or not will have no impact on any of the support you receive from the local authority.

**If you are happy to take part in the research please complete the form and return it to me.**

**Thank you!**

**Lucy Tobin**

**Further information and contact details**

If you have any questions or concerns about any aspect of the research, please contact me or my supervisor.

**Lucy Tobin**

Email: [ltobin@tavi-port.nhs.uk](mailto:ltobin@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

Research supervised by **Dale Bartle**

Email: [dbartle@tavi-port.nhs.uk](mailto:dbartle@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

## Appendix 9: Participant Consent Form

**Research Title:** An Exploration of Care Leavers Experience of Engaging in Collective Narrative Practice Through the Tree of Life

**Please initial the statements below if you agree with them:**

	<b>Initial here:</b>
I have read the information sheet and have had the chance to ask questions	
I understand that I can change my mind about participating at any time	
I agree to meet with the researcher on Microsoft Teams or in person	
I agree for my interview to be audio-recorded	
I understand that my name will be anonymised (changed)	
I agree for my drawing (anonymised) to be included in the write up.	
I understand that my interview will only be used for this research and will not be shared with anyone else, unless the researcher is concerned about the safety of myself or someone else.	
I understand that this research is part of the researchers degree and the findings from this research will be published in a thesis and might also be in a presentation or journal.	
I agree to take part in the research	

**Name:** ..... **Date:**.....

**Signature:** .....

**How would you prefer to be contacted? (please circle):** Text      email      phone call

**Email:** ..... **Telephone number:** .....

**Researcher name:** Lucy Tobin      **Researcher Signature** .....

## Appendix 10: Example Interview Schedule

## Interview Schedule

- Can you tell me about your experience of the Tree of Life workshops?

Possible prompts if not brought up by participant:

- How did you find:
  - Part 1: Drawing the Tree
  - Part 2: The Forest of Life
  - Part 3: The Storms of Life
  - Part 4: The Ceremony
- How did you find drawing your tree? How did it feel?
- How did you find sharing your tree with the group?
- How did it feel when other people shared their tree?
- Which parts did you enjoy most?
- Where there any parts that you did not enjoy or found difficult?
- Is there anything else you would like add?

Possible probes

- What was that like?
- Can you tell me more?
- How did that feel?

## Appendix 11: Interview Transcripts and Analysis

### Interview 1: Maya

Experiential Statements	Interview Transcript	Initial Notes (Descriptive, <i>linguistic</i> , <u>conceptual</u> )
<p><b>A positive experience and enjoyable experience</b></p> <p><b>A different way of looking at things</b></p> <p><b>It's important to reflect on yourself</b> <b>Learning about yourself</b></p> <p><b>A safe way to think about your identity</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: So I guess I've kind of got one main question, really and that's just, you know, can you tell me a bit about your experience of doing the tree of life? How you found it?</p> <p>Maya: Yeah, I found it really fun. It was just a cool way to look at things. I don't know, I feel like I done somewhat similar things with a social worker in the past, but I can't really remember it that well. But no, I really enjoyed it.</p> <p>Interviewer: You enjoyed it on the whole, that's good to hear. Okay, what was it that you enjoyed about it?</p> <p>Maya: Hmm well, I think it's always good to sort of reflect on yourself, because then you learn new things about yourself. And I just think that it sort of was an easier way to sort of think about your identity, really.</p>	<p>Overall an enjoyable experience Done something similar before. Can't really remember it <u>implies that it was a long time ago</u> and is something that has not been revisited since. <i>Cool way to look at things– <u>Something a bit different?</u></i></p> <p><i>Hmm well – thinking about response? Reflecting on yourself Learning about yourself Thinking about your identity <u>Easier – Safer?</u></i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Maya p1</b></p>

<p><b>An opportunity to consciously reflect on who you are</b></p> <p><b>Asking questions of ourselves</b></p> <p><b>Not something that you would do ordinarily</b></p> <p><b>Being unsure what to write at first</b></p> <p><b>A struggle at the start</b></p> <p><b>Difficult to start with the roots</b></p> <p><b>Your roots define who you are</b></p> <p><b>Easier to think about hobbies</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: What was it... What was it that kind of made it easier do you think?</p> <p>Maya: What made it easier? Hmm.</p> <p>Interviewer: I guess, tell me a little bit more about kind of what you said about it making it a bit easier to think about your identity.</p> <p>Maya: I think because..I think you don't really spend much time consciously thinking, Oh, what are my roots, you just sort of go through life. And obviously, they really define you and define how you are around people and who you are, and obviously, who you consider yourself to be. But I don't think we necessarily always ask ourselves that. It's almost a subconscious thing. And at the start, I really struggled with it. And I wasn't quite sure what to put down, especially as my like actual the root part, it was much easier to think about things that I like to do, which are sort of associated with my sense of self, like music, hobbies, friends. And so all of that stuff was much easier to do. Um And</p>	<p><i>Hmm – carefully considering the question?</i></p> <p>Reflecting on roots is something that's not normally conscious. <u>Its good to think about this consciously.</u></p> <p>Asking questions of ourselves we don't usually ask</p> <p>Just go through life – <u>a sense of just having to get on with things.?</u></p> <p>Your roots and where you have come from define who you are.</p> <p>Some parts easier than others</p> <p>Coming back to the roots – <u>it was important to do things in your own time</u></p> <p>Thinking about roots is difficult</p> <p><i>I really struggled with it – a difficult experience</i></p> <p>Thinking about hobbies and interests makes it feel safer to think about our roots</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Maya p2</b></p>
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<p><b>A negative perception of oneself and skills</b></p>	<p>of what do I put down? and just trying to think about it. So the talents part was hard (laughs). Because it's just, I think I think most of the time I feel like talent is sort of like, you know, your <b>really</b> skilled at something like an Olympic level skilled or something like that. Like I'm good at this but I'm not...</p> <p>Interviewer: So it was a bit harder to think about? Okay, that makes sense. So it sounds like the roots were a bit difficult. It sounds like it was easy to think about the bits on the ground that were like your hobbies and stuff, but talents a bit harder. How about kind of the top bit and the other bits of the tree? How, how was that for you?</p>	<p>Thinking about skills as particular talents rather than personality traits. Difficulty thinking about skills and talents – <u>negative perception of oneself?</u></p> <p><i>like I'm good at this but I'm not.. <u>good enough?</u></i></p>
<p><b>Hadn't thought about future before</b></p> <p><b>Thinking about self and future in a new way</b></p> <p><b>Stepping away from serious: Thinking about enjoyment rather than career</b></p>	<p>Maya: So, again, I didn't really..I hadn't really put a massive amount of thought into sort of like I think it was dreams or future goals, I hadn't put a massive amount of thought into that before. And I think also if it was it was sort of, I think very job orientated. It wasn't really sort of general life orientated. So I thought that was cool and fun because it sort of helped me</p>	<p>The opportunity to think about something that she hadn't thought about before. The opportunity to reflect on more 'fun' goals was seen as positive. <i>In the context of being a care leaver so much "pure business" – <u>so much of the time support is focused on career,finance,independence, not on enjoyment?</u></i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Maya p4</b></p>

<p><b>The pressure of being a CL means there is less time to focus on enjoyment.</b></p> <p><b>A reminder of important people in your life</b></p> <p><b>Reflecting on family members as a tricky and conflicting experience</b></p> <p><b>Things left unsaid about family members</b></p>	<p>explore the sort of more fun side of things that I wanted to do with my future. Rather than sort of pure business basically.</p> <p>I think also sort of the people that you care about what was sort of interesting as well. I mean, didn't really get any... it wasn't like I didn't know who they were, but again..</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, how did it feel kind of writing about those, those people that you care about, did that bring up anything in particular for you?</p> <p>Maya: I think it did because I think also like family members, I find it I find tricky_to deal with. So when putting them down, it's like my parents, it's quite conflicting because obviously, I do care about them, but at the same time, like there's just stuff underneath the surface so it makes it sort of a somewhat conflicting experience.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, yeah, I can completely understand that...And then you were saying a bit about kind of the branches and how</p>	<p><i>Sort of interesting Mixed feelings about this – both positive and negative? wasn't like I didn't know who they were but – implying a nice reminder?</i></p> <p>Mixed feelings when reflecting on people</p> <p><i>Underneath the surface: Things left unsaid when engaging in this experience. Conflicting to put family members on the tree when likely to be a number of negative experiences related to them.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Maya p5</b></p>
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<p><b>A realisation of what's important</b></p>	<p>Maya: Yeah, I think there has because I was just like, oh, wait, no, I do. Like, really want to go travelling, or just see a bunch of places and yeah...</p> <p>Interviewer: That's pretty cool. So we spoke about kind of the roots, the ground, which was skills and stuff. And the ground which was hobbies. The trunk is obviously skills and things, and then the people on the leaves. What about did you do the gifts? How was drawing that?</p>	<p><u>Oh wait no – implies a sudden realisation</u> Goals such as travel are important</p>
<p><b>Reframing negatives as learning opportunities</b></p> <p><b>Experienced a lot of negative experiences in her life</b></p>	<p>Maya: Well, weirdly, I just drew the gifts, but I didn't actually name them, mainly because I made the fruit so tiny so I couldn't actually write in them. But I think the thing is, is that I feel like you get so many gifts from people. Even if they're not really positive experiences, they can teach you a lot. And in a way, that's also a gift. So I think I've been given many gifts, and it'd be hard to write them all down.</p>	<p>Seeing all experiences as lessons that you can learn from and therefore these are gifts. <u>Maya has had many negative experiences but has learnt from those and so sees these as positives.</u></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Maya p7</b></p>























play like super upbeat things. But I think generally.. it's definitely calming, but I don't think many people found it enjoyable to listen to. Like, it wasn't anything extreme, but I think maybe finding some music that is obviously both, like calming, but maybe a bit more palatable to the general demographic could be a good idea.

Interviewer: Sounds good. Any anything else you can think of?

Maya: No.

Interviewer: Anything else for you personally? That you want to add?

Maya: No

Maya p18

Interview 2: Inaya

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Notes
<p><b>Interesting</b></p> <p><b>Better understanding of why she went into care</b></p> <p><b>Better understanding of how her sister feels</b></p> <p><b>Her sister opened up quite a bit</b></p> <p><b>Unable to open up fully</b></p> <p><b>The opportunity to talk about the past enabled her to become closer to her sister.</b></p> <p><b>Learning more about what I'm into</b></p> <p><b>Learning more about what my sister's into.</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: So, if we Yeah, can you tell me about a bit about how you found during the tree of life?</p> <p>Inaya: Yeah, I found it really interesting. It actually made me understand a little bit more about why I went into care. And it helps me understand a little bit more of how my sister feels about her how she went into care as well. She did open up quite a bit. But as for me, I didn't really. Like I didn't really open up.</p> <p>Interviewer: Can you tell me more about kind of why you found it helpful?</p> <p>Inaya: I feel like it's because we were talking about our past. We don't really talk about our past. And um I also know a little bit more, about what she's into and what I'm into. Because like I wrote it down. And I've actually started reading ever since that's session.</p> <p>Interviewer: No way, that's nice.</p>	<p>Interesting</p> <p>Better understanding of self – why she went into care.</p> <p>Better understanding of how her sister feels about going into care</p> <p><u>Not something that had talked about much before.</u></p> <p>Her sister opened up more than her.</p> <p><u>A feeling that she didn't really open up – more difficult for her to open up, didn't feel comfortable, didn't want to?</u></p> <p>Helpful to talk about our past</p> <p><i>We – me and my sister</i></p> <p>We don't really talk about our past.</p> <p>Learned more about myself and what I like and what my sister likes.</p> <p><i>Because I wrote it down – writing it down helps to learn about myself.</i></p> <p>Starting reading more since the session – <u>why? Reading what?</u></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Inaya p1</b></p>







<p><b>Would like further emotional support</b></p> <p><b>Upsetting to look into the past</b></p> <p><b>Ordinarily avoids thinking about the past</b></p>	<p>Inaya: It made me feel a little bit like emotional. but I don't like feeling.. I feel like I need like, I need therapy. I need counselling. I want to, I don't actually like, look into my past too much because it upsets me.</p> <p>Interviewer: So that felt quite difficult at times.</p> <p>Inaya: Yeah. So I'm just like, yeah, let me just distract myself.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay. So was that particularly when you were doing the roots then, because that's when we think about kind of the past. How about the other bits. So I do remember the other bits of the tree, but there was kind of the ground, which is hobbies and the trunk, which is your skills, and then thinking about hopes and dreams for the future? How did you find doing those other bits?</p> <p>Inaya: Um Usually, I feel like quite lonely. So like when we when we like wrote down how the people we have in our life that are important to us. It made me seem like a lot more. And it made me understand that I'm not actually alone. But I did. I do feel quite lonely like that, obviously being a</p>	<p>It's upsetting to think about the past too much. Tends to avoid this.</p> <p>Usually distracts herself from thinking about the past.</p> <p>Usually feel quite lonely Writing the important people to her showed her that she is not alone. <i>But I did.</i> – even though lots of people she still feels lonely. A sense of life currently being difficult <i>not very nice</i> - Additional pressures above being a care leaver.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Inaya p4</b></p>
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<p><b>Has a lot going on in her life and can often feel alone in this.</b></p> <p><b>Writing down import people as reminder that she is not alone</b></p> <p><b>Brought her closer to her sisters</b></p> <p><b>Is now better able to be there for her sister</b></p> <p><b>Better understanding of what her sisters have been through and are going through</b></p>	<p>mum, and in a mother and baby unit and like family problems and stuff isn't it's not very nice.</p> <p>Interviewer: It sounds like that bit of drawing the people was one of the positive bits as even though it doesn't always feel like it it's a reminder that there are people there.</p> <p>Inaya: Yeah, it's actually pulled me a lot closer to my sisters, well two of my sisters. It's pulled me a lot closer because now I understand like how it is... because at the moment one of my sisters is going through a break up and I'm there for her a lot.</p> <p>Interviewer: How do you think.. How do you think the two are connected? Kind of doing it and being closer to them?</p> <p>Inaya: um I don't know. I think it just made me understand a lot more. [pauses] yeah.</p> <p>Interviewer: That makes sense. How about the other bits? So kind of doing that was writing about your skills and hobbies and things you do now?</p>	<p>Process of doing the tree of life made her feel closer to her sisters as she has a better understanding of how they feel. It has enabled her to be there for her sister more whilst she is having a difficult time.</p> <p><u>Better understanding of her sisters and what they have been through and are going through</u></p> <p><i>I don't have any skills</i> <u>Low self esteem</u></p> <p><b>Inaya p5</b></p>
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<p><b>Feels she does not have any skills</b></p>	<p>Inaya: I mean I don't really have any skills</p> <p>Interviewer: I'm sure that's not true.</p> <p>Inaya: I mean, I'm cooking a lot more since the session [pauses] but other than that...</p> <p>Interviewer: Do you remember kind of in the session what to do those bits whether that was how that felt?</p>	<p>Been cooking more since the session. <u>Why? A realisation that she does have skills</u>  <i>But other than that – suggestion that it hasn't really changed anything. Did she have an expectation that there would be a huge change her and her life after doing the session? High expectations that did not materialise?</i></p>
<p><b>Cooking more since the session</b></p>	<p>Inaya: [inaudible as daughter shouting mummy]</p>	<p>Didn't complete it properly, skipped over some parts.</p>
<p><b>Did not complete all parts of the session</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: Okay, so you kind of skipped over those bits, fair enough. How about the hopes and dreams for the future? How did you find that?</p>	<p>Hard to think about hopes and dreams for the future. Everything all over place once she had her daughter. <u>Hasn't really had a chance to think about herself since?</u>  <u>Difficult to focus on anything else as she took priority? Big life change/adjustment</u></p>
<p><b>Having a child made it hard to think about her own future.</b></p>	<p>Inaya: So I.. I struggled a little bit because when I gave birth to X [daughter]. I didn't ..like everything was just all over the place. I didn't understand where I wanted to go or anything. But now I understand like</p>	<p>Had a realisation that she wants to start working. <u>Realised this because of the session?</u>  Has come up with a specific goal – health and social care apprenticeship.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Inaya p6</b></p>





<p><b>Sharing trees helped to understand more about her sister.</b></p> <p><b>Not particularly interested in hearing from the rest of the group.</b></p> <p><b>Excitement and pride when thinking about a friends future</b></p> <p><b>Pre-existing relationships with group members – does not get on with everyone.</b></p>	<p>Inaya: That helped me like understand a lot more about like my sister, but I didn't really pay attention to anybody else [laughs]</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, any particular reason?</p> <p>Inaya: And Jade as well, Jade is going to go really really far in life, I can see that. Very far. Um I don't really get on with everyone.</p> <p>Interviewer: Ok so there was something about the group maybe that [interrupted by Inaya]</p> <p>Inaya: Yeah</p> <p>Interviewer: Do you want to say a bit more about that?</p> <p>Inaya: Yeah. So like Jack was making unnecessary comments like all the time. And literally everyone like even X [participation group leader] had to tell him to stop and it just put me off a little bit. But Like I think if that didn't happen, I would be like concentrated. But he kept on doing silly things. [says be careful to daughter who is banging and shouting]</p>	<p>Listening to her sister share helped her understand more about her sister and this was important to her, but wasn't interested in anyone else in the group. Didn't pay attention when they shared their trees.</p> <p>One other person in the group she was interested in – Jade. A sense of excitement for Jade's future, feeling proud of her Doesn't get on with everyone in the group – <u>perhaps why didn't pay attention to their trees.</u></p> <p>The makeup of the group was difficult</p> <p>One person in the group was disruptive and this was off-putting.</p> <p>Would have been easier to concentrate if one member of the group was being disruptive – <i>doing silly things</i>. <u>Says this impacted her concentration but could it be more about everyone needing to take the session seriously? Blaming someone else for her not engaging fully</u></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b><u>Inaya p9</u></b></p>
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<p><b>One of the group members was disruptive</b></p> <p><b>Would have been able to engage more without disruption from other group members</b></p> <p><b>Enjoyable to be with other people, doing something different.</b></p> <p><b>Good to be out the house and have company</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: Is there anything else about the group setting? Not necessarily individual people but doing it in a group?</p> <p>Inaya: So umm.. It got.. It took my mind off a lot of things, it did. I generally did really enjoy it.</p> <p>Interviewer: can you say a bit more about what you enjoyed?</p> <p>Inaya Just erm like I feel like getting together not being at home, alone. Actually having people around, you like company is really really nice.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, another thing that we did in the afternoon was talking about storms and the storms of life. How did you find that bit?</p> <p>Inaya: Erm I don't really remember.</p> <p>Interviewer: Yeah. Fair enough. You were looking after a little one.</p>	<p><u>Lots of hesitation</u> The group took her mind off a lot of things Did enjoy it – <u>saying this to please me?</u> <u>Good to be out of the house, doing something different with other people?</u></p> <p>Ordinarily is quite lonely so is good to get out and connect with others. Nice to have people around you.</p> <p>Didn't really remember storms aspect</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Inaya p10</b></p>
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<p><b>Shocked to hear about what people have been through</b></p>	<p>perfect. A lot of people like actually have been through a lot, so never really judge anyone.</p> <p>Interviewer: How did that feel for you to see that?</p> <p>Inaya: I was just a bit like woah. I was a bit shocked in a way.</p> <p>Interviewer: What was it that shocked you?</p> <p>Inaya: Like how some people read out their stories and like [pauses]. It was just a bit like, I dunno. A bit speechless.</p> <p>Interviewer: Do you remember how you felt as people did that?</p>	<p>Speechless – <u>good or bad way?</u> Struggling to articulate</p>
<p><b>Emotional to hear other people's stories</b></p>	<p>Inaya: A little bit emotional [pauses]. I think my sister is also coming as well. She will tell you about it too.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay. Is there anything else we haven't spoken about that you would like to share?</p>	<p>Emotional to hear other's stories. <u>Struggling to share or articulate for herself. Indicating she would like to stop by talking about her sister?</u></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Inaya p12</b></p>

Inaya: I don't think so. I think I have said everything.

Interviewer: Well, thank you so much. I really appreciate you giving your time. And thank you! [to child] I'm going to have a lovely soundtrack of you chatting away whilst I type this up!

Inaya: [laughs] say bye !

**Inaya p13**

**Interview 3: Jack**

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Notes
<p><b>A weird experience</b></p> <p><b>A relaxing experience</b></p> <p><b>Reflecting on my own life</b></p> <p><b>Thinking about other peoples perspectives</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: Okay, so the first thing that I asked you is, you know, can you tell me about what it was like to do the tree of life?</p> <p>Jack: Erm It was weird. But it was actually kind of nice. It was relaxing, it kind of made me think about the circle of life and how life actually is and like. How do you say it.. like the way you get chances and the way you think about it, and other people's perspectives, really.</p> <p>Interviewer: Can you tell me a bit more?</p> <p>Jack: um like How? [laughs]</p>	<p><i>Weird – different, unexpected, uncomfortable?</i></p> <p><i>Kind of nice – implies an overall positive experience</i></p> <p><i>Relaxing- therapeutic?</i></p> <p>Think about the circle of life - <u>Reflecting on his own life?</u></p> <p>Get chances – <u>considering opportunities for the future? Or reflecting missed chances previously?</u></p> <p>Other people’s perspectives –<u>learning how others experience life?</u></p> <p>Struggle to articulate self in the interview</p>
<p><b>Not a natural thing for him to do</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: So you said the first thing you said was that it was kind of weird, Can you tell me a bit about what you meant by that?</p> <p>Jack: Well drawing a tree and writing things under it is not normally a nature thing for me to do or a normal, normal thing to do.</p>	<p>Not something he would normally do</p> <p><u>Uncomfortable? Just the drawing and writing unnatural or the personal reflection and sharing? Difficult to reflect on yourself</u></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Jack p1</b></p>

<p><b>A bit stressful Fine in the end</b></p> <p><b>Holding back from sharing personal information due to existing difficult relationships with group members</b></p> <p><b>Pre-existing relationships made the experience difficult.</b></p> <p><b>Pressure to contribute</b></p> <p><b>A feeling of being watched</b></p> <p><b>Wasn't in the right headspace to engage</b></p> <p><b>It wasn't easy</b></p> <p><b>Finishing the tree at home</b></p> <p><b>Seeing the benefit to others motivated him to complete it himself</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: How did it feel for you to do that?</p> <p>Jack: [exhales] I'll be honest, a bit stressed but fine, in the end. Just to feel like, my personal things might have gotten out there. And there was other people in the room that I didn't want to say things in front of so, because of things that have happened. But..</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, you tell me a bit about what felt a bit stressful?</p> <p>Jack: Just the people, like certain people that were there. Just like pressure of everyone just looking at me. I wasn't in the right time frame to be doing the thing at the time.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, that makes sense. That makes sense. Thank you. You said in the end, it was it was okay. What was okay about it In the end? Can you tell me a bit more about that?</p> <p>Jack: Well, I managed to finish it. When I got home actually, not when I was there. Um but it's just, it worked out well, because I saw</p>	<p>Stressful, but okay in the end.- <u>A process</u> Difficult to feel like people know more about him. Previous relationships with others in the group made it difficult to open up. There were things that he held back. <i>But..more he wanted to say on this but changed his mind or struggled to articulate?</i></p> <p>Pre-existing relationships with others in the group made the experience difficult. <i>Pressure</i> – felt like he had to contribute but didn't feel ale to. Everyone looking at me <i>Time frame</i> – means frame of mind? Needed to be in the right headspace to engage and he wasn't. <u>Mood on the day influences how you engage in the process</u></p> <p><i>Managed to finish it</i> – implies wasn't something that was easy and was proud of? Finished his tree at home – <u>indicates this was something he wanted to do and was important.</u></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Jack p2</b></p>
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<p><b>Difficulty with drawing and writing negatively impacted the experience.</b></p> <p><b>Thinking hard about what went on the tree</b></p> <p><b>A difficult task</b></p>	<p>Jack: Horrible.</p> <p>Interviewer: Horrible, ok</p> <p>Jack: Horrible. I didn't like it. I don't like drawing. I can't draw. So I don't like drawing. I don't like to write either like. Because those are the top two things I hate in my life. Is writing, I don't like writing at all.</p> <p>Interviewer: How about thinking about what would go on your tree?</p> <p>Jack: You had to think hard. Um it actually makes you use your brain, your mindset. Because its structureadely..? Yeah.</p> <p>Interviewer: So it was hard, you had to think about it.</p> <p>Jack: Nah a lot yeah, I had to think about it a lot.</p>	<p>Drawing the tree described as a <i>horrible</i> experience. Strong negative reaction</p> <p>Didn't like the drawing aspects as struggles with drawing and writing. <i>Top two things I don't like</i> - Very strong negative feelings towards this.</p> <p>You had to think hard about what was going on your tree. <u>A challenging and thought provoking process.</u> <i>Unsure what is meant by structuradely. He also seems to be finding it hard to articulate himself.</i></p> <p>A difficult task – thinking a lot.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Jack p3</b></p>
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<p><b>Doesn't remember much about the structure.</b></p> <p><b>Feels he should look back at his tree</b></p> <p><b>Wanting to push himself so finished at home</b></p> <p><b>Disappointed that didn't do enough and engage more on the day</b></p> <p><b>Was able to do it at home by tracing</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: So we did, if you remember there were different parts of the tree. so we did the roots, the trunk..[Jack interrupts]</p> <p>Jack: the branches, the leaves.. yeah</p> <p>Interviewer: yeah. Do you remember much about any of those bits?</p> <p>Jack: Not really if I'm honest [laughs] I've not looked back since but I should really do it.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay. So you said you finished it when you when you got home? What made you want to do that?</p> <p>Jack: To push myself really. All I thought was I didn't do enough. I felt like I didn't do enough. I didn't speak enough, I didn't show enough. I just. yeah. So I just thought I would get on it. Did it. And then since then I've just left it I've not looked at it since.</p> <p>Interviewer: Can I ask what you did when you were at home and what that was like?</p>	<p>Perhaps worried about what I might ask – wanting to show he remembers what we were doing?</p> <p>Doesn't remember much about the structure. Suggests he should look back it it – <u>why?</u> <u>Because I'm asking him about it or because he wants to/it's important to him?</u></p> <p>Wanted to push himself by finishing at home. A sense of disappointment that he didn't contribute more during the session. Not looked at it since? <u>It's been ticked off – I've done it now and it doesn't need further thought? Its painful to look at it again?</u></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Jack p4</b></p>
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<p><b>Felt happy whilst completing it at home</b></p> <p><b>Important to be in your own space to complete it</b></p> <p><b>A feeling of being watched</b></p> <p><b>Worried about what people were thinking</b></p> <p><b>Worried about how the task might make him feel</b></p> <p><b>Enjoyed the post-it notes</b></p>	<p>Jack: well, I finished of the tree. I actually.. the way I finished up the tree was I kind of sketched over another tree. Like you know that you put the paper and you go through some trace through it and just that's how I kind of did it and then coloured it in and just kind of in brown and greenish that's it</p> <p>Interviewer: How did you feel when you were doing it?</p> <p>Jack: Happy!</p> <p>Interviewer: Yeah?</p> <p>Jack: Yeah, I felt it was because I was actually in my own space, I wasn't around so many people where I didn't have to worry about what people were thinking about or the way I feel what I'm doing because I know I'm not being watched.</p> <p>Interviewer: How about when it came to.. so obviously we drew the trees and then..[Jack interrupts]</p>	<p><u>At home he traced to finish the tree – this wasn't available to him on the day and perhaps made the drawing aspect easier</u></p> <p>Felt happy whilst completing it at home</p> <p>Wanted to be able to do it in his own space Easier to do when in his own space. Wasn't worrying about what other people were thinking. <u>The way I feel – worried about what the activity might bring up for him?</u> Felt like he was being watched on the day? <u>Judgement, not a safe space?</u></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Jack p5</b></p>
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<p><b>Hearing other people's thoughts and opinions</b></p> <p><b>Uncomfortable about not having shared his tree</b></p> <p><b>If he could have another go he would share it</b></p> <p><b>Would be more open to share now he knows what to expect and is more confident</b></p>	<p>Interviewer. Ok, So you talked a little bit about when other people were sharing and that made you feel [Jack interrupts]</p> <p>Jack: That made me feel better because um it shows other people's thoughts and opinions and the way things are. So</p> <p>Interviewer: how did it feel when you shared your tree?</p> <p>Jack: I didn't share it [laughs]</p> <p>Interviewer: Oh you didn't that's ok. But you enjoyed hearing [Jack interrupts]</p> <p>Jack: I mean if it came to another workshop I would probably be more likely to share it then</p> <p>Interviewer: Why do you think that is?</p>	<p>[had done a nightshift and came straight to the session with no sleep!]. <u>it was important to come, wanting to connect with other people?</u></p> <p><i>Interrupting a lot during the interview</i> Other people sharing made him feel more comfortable. hearing the opinions and thoughts of other people.</p> <p>Did not want to share his own tree – <u>difficult to talk about self/personal + difficulty with drawing and writing.</u> <i>Laugh suggesting he is uncomfortable/embarrassed that he didn't share</i></p> <p>Would share tree if there was a second workshop. <u>Needed more time to get used to the activity and feel safe? Needed to know what to expect? Has since recognised the potential value of this.</u></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Jack p7</b></p>
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<p><b>Reminding that he did it at home</b></p> <p><b>Pre-occupation with the difficulty of the drawing aspect</b></p> <p><b>Talking about drawing rather than metaphorical structure of the tree</b></p> <p><b>Understands the metaphorical structure of the tree</b></p>	<p>something but I felt like I didn't put enough... I feel like I didn't do enough to earn it I feel like.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay. That makes sense. So I'm going to go back a little bit just to drawing the tree. So we drew the different bits like the roots, the trunk, the branches the leaves, fruits etc.</p> <p>Jack: Did we do the fruits?</p> <p>Interviewer: that was the end, not everyone quite got to that bit.</p> <p>Jack: Oh I don't even think I did that part at home to be honest.</p> <p>Interviewer: That's fine. You said you found some bits quite hard to think about. Where there any bits that were a bit easier?</p> <p>Jack: It depends about what part of the tree you're on about and.. what are you talking drawing-wise or writing down wise?</p> <p>Interviewer: Both</p>	<p>Didn't remember the fruits</p> <p>Had forgotten to do the fruits at home. <u>Wanting to remind me that he did it at home?</u></p> <p><u>Quite pre-occupied with the requirements of the task to need to draw. Wondering if I'm asking about whether the actual pictures were difficult to draw as opposed to me asking about the process of reflection.</u></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Jack p10</b></p>
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<p><b>Feels uncomfortable that he can't remember the different aspects</b></p> <p><b>The trunk and ground easier to think about</b></p> <p><b>Worried about being bad/good at the activity</b></p> <p><b>Reflecting on why his life has been happy and he is able to do the things he enjoys.</b></p>	<p>Jack: I feel like the easiest part was leaves and the branches because its just simple, colouring and writing part is just...It depends on what part is for what I was writing for. So the roots we had to write something different to what we would write on the trunk so it as completely different aspects of things we would have to write down so I don't know which part is which [laughs].</p> <p>Interviewer: Is it helpful for me to remind you which parts were which?</p> <p>Jack: [laughs] yes please.</p> <p>Interviewer: So the roots were about our history, the ground was our hobbies and the things we enjoy the trunk was the things that we're good at [Jack interrupts]</p> <p>Jack: Maybe the trunk and the ground, like the hobbies and the things I'm good at I would say.</p>	<p>Again talking about the drawing rather than the metaphorical structure of the tree.</p> <p>Struggling to remember which aspects of the tree corresponded to what but does show understanding that there was a metaphorical structure - <i>had to write something different to what we would write on the trunk</i></p> <p><i>Laugh suggests he feels a bit awkward/uncomfortable that he can't remember.</i></p> <p><u>Seems as though he can't quite remember actually doing this. But this bit sounds like it would be easier to think about?</u></p> <p><b>Jack p11</b></p>
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<p><b>Felt good to write about him self on paper</b></p> <p><b>Feels he should jot down reflections on paper more often.</b></p> <p><b>Reflecting on yourself builds confidence</b></p> <p><b>Difficult to articulate how he feels</b></p> <p><b>Would like to be more confident in expressing how he feels and sharing his life experiences.</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: What about them?</p> <p>Jack: I was good at writing those bits down, I think.</p> <p>Interviewer: What made those bits easier do you think?</p> <p>Jack: I just think because most of my life has been happy. So there's a lot of things I enjoy doing because I'm happy and there's a lot of hobbies that I have or I might not have because I was raised by the right people I guess.</p> <p>Interviewer: How did it feel to do those bits?</p> <p>Jack: Decent really, if I'm honest it was good to jot it down on paper. I feel it's something I should do more regularly, or, more more more often.</p> <p>Interviewer: Why do you feel you should do it more often?</p>	<p><u>I asked about easier but he's talking about what he was good at doing. Worried about being a good/bad participant?</u></p> <p><u>A sense that he is grateful about how his life has been.</u> He was raised by people that enabled him to be happy most of his life. This enables him to do things and hobbies that he enjoys. A feeling that without these people he would not engage in enjoyable activities. <u>Making links within the interview between the parts of the tree and thinking about the sorts of things that he/others may have reflected on during the sessions.</u></p> <p>Felt good to write about himself on paper Feels he should do this more often</p> <p>Feels as though it would bring out a more confident and better side of him <u>if he was to reflect on himself more?</u></p> <p><b>Jack p12</b></p>
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<p><b>What he wanted to put down had changed by the end of the session</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: No! you were brilliant, absolutely brilliant honestly. Thank you. I know it's a bit odd but you did really well. I really appreciate it.</p> <p>Jack: Oh one other thing is that I think it would be good for younger children to do it to. I think it will help them out. Or make them see themselves differently. So things they would put down might change by the end of the session. Do you know what I mean.</p> <p>Interviewer: Ok, I understand. Do you think it would be helpful for young people. Is there anything else?</p> <p>Jack: No</p> <p>Interviewer: Thank you</p>	<p><u>A wish that he had done this when he was younger</u> will help them out – it was a helpful experience</p> <p><u>Talking about his own experiences but framed as talking about if younger people were to do it</u></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Jack p17</b></p>
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**Interview 4: Jade**

<p><b>Experiential Themes:</b></p>	<p><b>Interview Transcript</b></p>	<p><b>Exploratory Notes</b> (Descriptive, <i>Linguistic</i>, <u>Conceptual</u>)</p>
<p><b>Insight into how I feel about myself.</b></p> <p><b>Thinking about my goals and the future.</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: Yeah so can you tell me about your experience of doing the tree of life?</p> <p>Jade: I feel like it gave me insight into how like I feel about myself, the way I see my goals, see my future. I suppose...</p> <p>[Inaudible as eating] sorry..</p> <p>Interviewer: Don't worry [laughs]</p> <p>Jade: [Laughs] Sorry</p>	<p>Gave a better understanding of how she sees herself, how she feels about herself. How she sees her future. <i>I suppose – <u>processing her experience through the interview?</u></i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Jade p1</b></p>

<p><b>Uncertainty at first</b></p> <p><b>Pleasantly surprised</b></p> <p><b>Enjoyable</b></p> <p><b>“Thinking about what really makes you you”</b></p> <p><b>Process of drawing and writing allows deeper understanding of self.</b></p> <p><b>Tree allowing creativity</b></p> <p><b>Considering what you like and don’t like about yourself.</b></p> <p><b>Motivated to make the tree look good</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: Don’t worry, there’s no rush, we can have pauses for mouthfuls [laughs]</p> <p>Jade: Yeah, I feel like before I got there I didn't really know what It was gonna be about. But when I got there I <b>actually</b> enjoyed it because I feel like hearing about yourself pen to paper, like seeing about yourself pen to paper it’s easy to acknowledge what you like about yourself, what you don’t like about yourself. So I like that we did it in a tree form as well because at the same time I you are thinking about creativity, you are thinking about making it look nice but at the same time you are thinking about what really makes you you. So that’s why I liked it, yeah, mhm.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, can you tell me a bit more about what it's like to draw your tree and write about those things?</p>	<p>Unsure at first. Uncertainty <i>Use of the word actually implies didn’t think she would like it.</i></p> <p><i>‘pen to paper’ – value the process of writing down and drawing reflections on self. <u>Writing it down allows clearer reflection.</u></i></p> <p><i>Hearing about yourself – from who? <u>As a care leaver used to hearing about yourself from others rather than telling own story?</u></i></p> <p>also acknowledged what she didn’t like about herself.</p> <p>Tree enables creativity.</p> <p>Thinking about lots of things at once</p> <p>Thinking about making it look nice – motivated to produce a finished article that looks good.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Jade p2</b></p>
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<p><b>Difficult at first</b></p> <p><b>Supported and guided by facilitators</b></p> <p><b>Tree metaphor provides structure</b></p> <p><b>Appreciation of the creative resources</b></p>	<p>Jade: Erm I think at first it was quite hard because sometimes you don't actually know what to write about yourself. But I think that the more that you guys show.. like explained and showed us the slides and stuff it was easier for me to like..like having you lot there and asking questions like oh what was the roots meant to be like it was easier because I'm not really like relying on my own knowledge to be like oh where do I put this? where do I put that? Its like straight into it you know? It's basically being given something, you just write about that. And that's why I liked doing the tree. It was fun as well I liked like creating with all the different pictures and colours and stuff. I liked that.</p> <p>Interviewer: How did it feel to write about it. Obviously its all about you it's quite personal?</p>	<p><u>Still uncertain about the task at first?</u> It can be hard to write about yourself. <u>Why? negative perception of yourself?</u> <u>Like..like.. a sense of still processing her experience or struggling to articulate it</u> Having "you lot there" <u>supportive people around. A safe space?</u></p> <p>Examples helpful and being able to ask questions. Not relying on own knowledge and being given something - <u>something being the structure of the tree?</u></p> <p>Fun</p> <p>Good to have different resources to use. Allowed more creativity.</p> <p>Leading Q</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Jade p3</b></p>
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<p><b>A chance to think about what really makes me happy.</b></p> <p><b>Writing down hopes and dreams allows for deeper reflection.</b></p> <p><b>Motivation for the future</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: You are perfectly answering the question, don't worry.</p> <p>Jade: [laughs]</p> <p>Yeah no, I felt relieved, it was nice...</p> <p>Interviewer: What do you think that relief was about?</p> <p>Jade: I think it was more like because like I've never really sat there and thought like what makes me happy? what actually makes me happy? like what do I want to do? I mean like obviously I have, but not to an extent where I am writing it on a tree and that. Like I wanna grow, I wanna progress, I wanna become that. So that's why I liked it as well.</p>	<p>A good feeling to write and reflect on self</p> <p>First chance to really think about what makes me happy. What <b>Actually</b> makes me happy.  <i>Valued the chance to think more deeply about what is important.</i> Writing it down helped to think more about it. Not had the chance to really think deeply about that before?  Opportunity to think about aspirations for the future.  I wanna grow, I wanna progress, I wanna become – <u>realisations she had whilst doing the tree?</u></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Jade p5</b></p>
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<p><b>Don't usually like talking about myself, especially my life.</b></p> <p><b>A feeling of not wanting to do this at first.</b></p> <p><b>No pressure, being eased in</b></p> <p><b>Nice facilitators</b></p> <p><b>The uncomfortable made comfortable</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: Thank you. At the start of your answer you said oh at first I was a bit like me hmm [pulls same face] Can tell me a bit more about that?</p> <p>Jade: Because it's just the fact that I don't really like talking about myself. Ermm, [pauses] especially like about my life and stuff. I think that's why I was like.. when there was like the tree and I was like ooh I don't really want to sit there and think about myself. But I think once I went into it and that you guys eased us into it. It wasn't like you know, do this, do that. It was more like you don't have to if you don't want to. It just eased us into it. I think that's why I kinda like hmmm. But once you guys did it I actually really enjoyed it. And you guys were really nice as well so it wasn't like I felt pressured or anything. Yeah it just felt like we were just doing a session like. So erm yeah.</p>	<p><u>Don't like talking about myself – lack of confidence? Not wanting to share personal information. Upsetting to go through it again?</u></p> <p>Difficult to talk about your life.</p> <p>The idea of reflecting on your life is scary at first but once you go into it its not so bad.</p> <p>Freedom to do it in your own way or not at all</p> <p>Eased into it – the Tree metaphor? Ice breakers beforehand?</p> <p>No pressure</p> <p><u>Facilitators building a relationship is important – “you guys were nice”.</u></p> <p><u>Felt like we were just doing a session – made something that could have felt uncomfortable feel normal?</u></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Jade p6</b></p>
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<p><b>Unsure about the group setting</b></p> <p><b>Size of the group</b></p> <p><b>Having choice over what you share</b></p> <p><b>Focusing on your own tree</b></p> <p><b>Everyone in the same boat</b></p> <p><b>Fun</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: How did you find doing it in a group setting?</p> <p>I think because it wasn't a big group it was alright. Because we don't have to say what we wanna write. So because everyone's focusing on their own one it wasn't really like oh yeah there's other people in the people in the room. It was more like they're doing the same thing as me so I'm having fun with it. Because we didn't have to say what we wrote either so it was.. it was fine.</p> <p>Interviewer: How about when it came to sharing the trees, and some people spoke through their tree. How did you find that?</p>	<p>Small group safer than a big group.  <i>Alright – neither good nor bad.</i>  You can write something on your tree but you don't have to say it – might not want to share everything on your tree (said this twice). <u>More about the reflective process of doing it alone rather than the sharing?</u>  Focusing on own tree, everyone doing the same thing. Feeling of doing something together. – safer.  “They're doing the same thing as me so I'm having fun with it’.  <u>Its okay to enjoy this because we are all doing the same thing.</u>  <i>Fine – again implies neither good or bad.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Jade p7</b></p>
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<p><b>A chance to gain insight into others.</b></p> <p><b>Opportunity to ask people about themselves</b></p> <p><b>Noticing similarities with others</b></p> <p><b>Nice to see other peoples' trees</b></p>	<p>Jade: I found it very insightful because it lets you like hear about other peoples like dreams, passions and stuff and you get a chance to ask people about them and stuff... just get to know people and that.</p> <p>Someone saying something might even spark up something that I think about myself.. because that's what.. because some people's trees when they read out theirs I was like oh yeah I'm gonna put that down as well. So I feel like, it was nice to be able to see everyone else's.</p> <p>[hiccups] [laughs] I'm so sorry.</p> <p>Interviewer: That's alright [laughs] are you alright, would you like some water?</p> <p>Jade: No no, I'm good. [laughs].</p>	<p><u>Insightful – gaining a better and deeper understanding of others.</u></p> <p>Hearing about dreams and passions of others.</p> <p>Opportunity to ask people about themselves - get to know people better.</p> <p><u>Making connections between themselves and others.</u></p> <p>Sharing ideas</p> <p>Getting to know self better.</p> <p>Enjoyed hearing about other peoples lives and seeing their trees.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Jade p8</b></p>
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<p><b>Having a choice over what to share</b></p> <p><b>A little uncomfortable</b></p> <p><b>Strangers but not strangers</b></p> <p><b>A chance to give people an insight on me</b></p> <p><b>Pride and excitement</b></p> <p><b>Fun</b></p> <p><b>Supporting each other</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: Okay, and what about when it came to sharing your tree?</p> <p>How did that feel?</p> <p>Jade: I think because obviously because it was off my own back. I was okay with it. I think erm I, I did enjoy because I get a chance to like tell like strangers, not strangers, I don't like know everyone know everyone but I know some people but it was a chance to give people an insight on me. Erm also I just wanted to show people what I drew [laughs] I was so excited I won't lie I wanted to show my tree. But yeah I had fun with it I won't lie. And I liked the post-it notes as well.</p> <p>Interviewer: Can you say a bit more about that?</p> <p>Jade: The post it notes? When we got erm...when we was doing that I liked the fact that we could give people advice or like messages. When</p>	<p><i>'off my own back' – had a choice in whether to share and what to say. Was okay with it – implies perhaps not a totally comfortable experience?</i></p> <p><i>Strangers – people she knows but doesn't really know</i></p> <p><i>Opportunity to get to know people better. Opportunity to give people an insight into her. Chance – implies not something that is usually possible.</i></p> <p><i>Excited to share what she had drawn – proud of the tree?</i></p> <p><i>Creative aspect was fun. "I won't lie" – almost like she thinks she should have enjoyed it or was surprised she enjoyed it?</i></p> <p>Liked writing notes of support</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Jade p9</b></p>
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<p><b>Connecting through shared difficulty</b></p> <p><b>Unexpected shared experiences</b></p> <p><b>Better understanding of self</b></p>	<p>I went up to mine I saw some messages and I was like aww that's nice [laughs]. So I erm yeah it made me feel happy that I could do that for someone else aswell, yeah, it was nice.</p> <p>Interviewer: Thanks So we you know, there was some of the bits of the day, so we talked about kind of storms of life as well. How did you find that bit?</p> <p>Jade: I think I'm gonna say insightful again, because I feel like there's some things that I didn't realise that other people realise about what's wrong or like triggers and stuff like that.</p> <p>I remember when we was talking about it and I was like oh yeah that actually does like.. that does get under my skin or like that's actually a</p>	<p>Enjoyed opportunity to give advice or supportive messages to others.</p> <p>Liked both giving and receiving the messages.</p> <p><i>Aww – a warm feeling? <u>Building self-esteem</u>. Felt happy to be able to offer this to someone else.</i></p> <p><i>Insightful - Storms allowing a deeper understanding of the difficulties faced by others.</i></p> <p><i>Didn't realise other people realise – connecting with others through shared difficulty, didn't expect this to be a shared experience.</i></p> <p>Better understanding of herself and what bothers her.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Jade p10</b></p>
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<p><b>Making each other feel better</b></p> <p><b>A supportive and friendly group</b></p> <p><b>Everyone had fun</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: What was nice about it?</p> <p>Jade: Yeah because I liked seeing them. I don't know I just liked the fact that everyone was making each other feel better with the post-it notes and stuff like that. It was a nice little group as well so like everyone had fun.</p> <p>Interviewer: Thank you, I'm just gonna go back a bit to kind of drawing the tree. And the different bits of the tree. Because like you said, the different bits of the tree represented different bits of your life. Can you tell me a bit about how it was drawing the different bits and how the different bits felt?</p>	<p>Enjoyed supporting each other through the positive notes. Felt that everyone had fun, not just her. <i>A nice little group – previous comments about the group earlier in interview implied more neutral feelings towards group 'alright'. Nice/fun – supportive and friendly</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Jade p12</b></p>
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<p><b>Tree belonging to the individual</b></p>	<p>forgetting what I need to write on roots. I remember asking you guys</p>	<p>Asking facilitators questions</p>
<p><b>Support from facilitators</b></p>	<p>[inaudible]. I thought that I could put the roots, some parts I put in else I could put somewhere else. Somethings I didn't know where to put but I thought you know what even if it goes somewhere else, it's still on there and I can see it.</p>	<p>Stuck – ‘freeze’ as a response to needing to write down and think about the roots?  <u>Kept forgetting what to write? A defence against actually doing it.</u>  <i>Sounds a bit muddled when talking about where things go. Sense that even talking about drawing the roots feelings difficult/uncomfortable</i></p>
<p><b>Talking about roots is difficult</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: Yeah it doesn't matter. It's your tree you can do what you want with it, So the roots was about your history, your past and where you're from.</p>	<p>putting things in different parts of the tree – make it your own.</p> <p><i>“I can see it” – this is for me, not for other people. It doesn't matter where it goes.</i></p>
<p><b>You can say more when you draw/write (a different brain)</b></p>	<p>Jade: Yeah that's what I'm saying, that's why I feel like it was a bit hard to do because I don't really like..again like when it comes to</p>	<p><u>“That's what I'm saying” – that's what I was trying to say, that it was the content of this bit that made it difficult.</u></p>
<p><b>Hard to see roots on paper</b></p>	<p>writing about certain things I don't... But I feel like I have a different brain when I write. Because when I'm pen to paper It's like I can.. but its like when I see it I'm like..why did I just write that? So the roots</p>	<p>Don't really like... talking about self/past?</p> <p>Different brain when I write – <u>process of writing allows you to say more, open up more. Did it without thinking (Why did I just write that?)</u></p>

Jade p14

<p><b>Overwhelming to see yourself on paper</b></p>	<p>kind of like I think it scared me a bit [laughs]. I'm looking at <b>my</b> roots, Its like [laughs] ohhhh.</p> <p>Interviewer: Can you tell me a bit more about what was scary about it?</p> <p>Jade: I think it's just like seeing about yourself on paper it's a bit like rah, that's too much. It kind of hits you in the face.</p>	<p><u>Roots – scary. Hard to see it on paper. Didn't want to put it all on paper but almost did it by accident? Caught up in the creative process?</u></p> <p>Oh - Unsure as to whether this is a good or a bad thing.</p> <p>Seeing yourself on paper is also really difficult. Overwhelming. Hits you in the face – <u>something she doesn't usually think about but can't ignore when its on the paper in black and white.</u></p>
<p><b>Feeling of relief putting the roots on paper</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: How did that feel?</p> <p>Jade: it was alright, relieving.</p>	<p>Relieving to get it out on paper. <u>Cathartic? Therapeutic?</u></p>
<p><b>Being in the zone</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: Can you tell me a bit more about having a different brain when you write?</p>	<p><b>Jade p15</b></p>

<p><b>Mixed feelings - Do I really want to write that?</b></p> <p><b>I like pen to paper</b></p> <p><b>Making it look pretty</b></p> <p><b>Loved doing it</b></p> <p><b>Suits creative personality</b></p> <p><b>Struggling to articulate self In interview</b></p>	<p>Jade: Because I feel like when I'm in that zone, when I'm writing I feel like something takes over and I can just write whatever. Like when I was writing the tree I knew what I wanted to write but it was like where to place it , and then thinking about if I really wanna write that. It was like that. But I feel like when I write music and stuff I feel like I can just do that, it's like that kind of thing. Because I feel like, I like pen to paper, I like writing so its like being able to write and make it look pretty. I loved doing it.</p> <p>Interviewer: So it's like the creative..[Jade interrupts]</p> <p>Jade: Yeah like that's the creative side of me. The way I worded it was a bit scary [laughs and inaudible speech]</p>	<p><u>Wasn't thinking about anything else.</u>  <u>Wasn't worried about what people think</u>  Knew what she wanted to say.  <i>Contradictory - I knew what I want to write/ Do I really wanna write that? Mixed feelings</i>  Thinking about if I really wanna write that  – <i>why? Because other people might see?</i>  <u><i>Because she doesn't want to think about it?</i></u></p> <p>Enjoyed the process of writing about self and make it look nice.</p> <p><i>Loved - much stronger than previous use of 'liked' and 'fun'</i></p> <p>She is a creative person so enjoyed the creativity of the task.  <i>Scary - unsure what she means by this.</i>  <i>Unclear? Too wordy? Struggling to articulate herself in the interview</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Jade p16</b></p>
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<p><b>Hard to think about important people</b></p> <p><b>Can't just put anyone on your tree</b></p> <p><b>Caring about others more than they care about me</b></p> <p><b>Out comfort zone</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: That makes sense, So the leaves were [interrupted by Jade]</p> <p>Jade: Important people</p> <p>Interviewer: Yeah, the important people. How was doing that?</p> <p>Jade: I think that was hard for me because I don't like have a lot of people close to me like that. Umm Enough where I feel comfortable to be like yeah this person can go on my tree. I feel like.. I feel like that that was probably one of the most hardest parts because I have to think about people who care about me as much as I care about them as well. Because it's not. That's not [inaudible] So that was hard for me. But I did it. But it was a bit hard.</p> <p>Interviewer: Hard in what way?</p>	<p>Hard to think about important people as doesn't have many people close.</p> <p>Or close enough to go on tree – can't just put anyone on there.</p> <p><i>Says hard a number of times.</i></p> <p>Feeling of caring about people more then that care about hers. An uncomfortable feeling to be reminded of.</p> <p>But I did it – brave. Out of the comfort zone again?</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Jade p18</b></p>
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<p><b>No judgement from facilitators</b></p> <p><b>A nice environment made it safe to share</b></p> <p><b>From uncomfortable to comfortable</b></p>	<p>Jade: Um, I just, I guess I like the fact you guys, you were easy to talk to. It didn't seem like there was any judgement or like any, like if we said anything. It just seemed nice, it was a nice environment so it was easy for me to get comfortable and be able to write about myself. So I guess just like [inaudible].</p> <p>Interviewer: Anything else?</p> <p>Jade: No, I think that's it.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, thank you so much. That's so helpful. It's really interesting to hear about your experience.</p>	<p>Relationship with facilitators important. No judgement, it was ok to say anything</p> <p><i>Nice - <u>Safe environment</u> – more able to reflect and share</i></p> <p><i>Trailing off again at end of what she said.. gives sense that processing and reflecting upon the experience within the interview.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Jade p20</b></p>
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Interview 5: Zain

Experiential Statements	Interview Transcript	Exploratory Notes
<p><b>The experience is difficult to articulate</b></p> <p><b>A process of self-reflection.</b></p> <p><b>Coming together to share experiences</b></p> <p><b>Allowing individuals to be better understood by others</b></p> <p><b>The experience brought back difficult memories of childhood</b></p> <p><b>Acknowledgement that everyone has experienced difficulty in their life.</b></p> <p><b>Individuals should be able to share as much or as little as</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: So can you tell me a bit about how you found doing the tree of life what your experience was?</p> <p>Zain: Tree of Life was hard to explain. The way how to gather everyone up to share experiences. To basically think deeply within themselves. So that you guys can understand them individually. But yeah tree of life was good, tree of life was good. I done what I could, told them what I could do, told them what I wanna do, told them what I wanna achieve, my history, you know. Yeah.</p> <p>Interviewer: How did you find doing that? What did I feel like?</p> <p>Zain: I mean, it just gave me this memory. This memory just popped in my head it was going back to when I was kid, just me by myself, in my own room. Never used to think about mum or a dad or anything like that. Mum used to have to force herself to come into my room to check up on me, you know. I used to keep myself to myself. Yeah. So,</p>	<p><i>Hard to explain – difficulty articulating his experience.</i></p> <p>Think deeply within themselves <u>a process of self-reflection</u></p> <p>A good experience</p> <p><i>I done what I could</i> – I engaged as much as I could with the process.</p> <p>Told them what I could do, wanna do, <i>achieve, history</i>: the way his says this makes it seem as though the process itself was quite straightforward.</p> <p>The experience brought back some difficult memories. Reminders of difficult experiences in the past.</p> <p>He needed to reflect on his life to address each aspect of the tree. This was difficult at times.</p> <p>Everyone has their experience – <u>we all experience difficulty in our lives.</u></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Zain p1</b></p>

<p><b>they want about their life experiences. Being asked direct questions can be difficult for people.</b></p> <p><b>The importance of spending time understanding yourself and considering the future.</b></p> <p><b>It is important to put difficult experiences and relationships behind you and focus on working out who you are as an individual on your own.</b></p> <p><b>It's important to break free from the stories told by others and "let people see who we are".</b></p> <p><b>Highlighting the collective experience faced by care leavers in being independent, difficult relationships with family.</b></p> <p><b>It's hard not having control over your own life and stories told about you.</b></p>	<p>answering them questions really had to make me think. But the thing is, I could tell you don't worry because everyone has their experience, a shared feeling no matter what way they place it, you know. Obviously you discussed your path, you know, I don't wanna bring it up just in case. That's basically what I've been doing but in a different way. I had family around me but I didn't treat them like family. More like I kept myself in a room locked up, trying to just discover myself. You know, saying to myself what do I wanna do, what do I wanna achieve. Is you know, there's some arguments in the house and you get the blame all the time. That's normal, that's normal. Sometimes. You just gotta break free from all of that and then just see who you really are when you're by yourself. And hopefully we do get the help that we need when we go through them stages. We get to let people see who we are, instead of people controlling us and telling the people a different story. You know. Its just, its hard, it's hard. You know.</p> <p>Interviewer: How did you find the process of sitting and drawing the tree and thinking about the different aspects of your life in that way.</p>	<p>Referring to the fact that I had about shared my own experience- <i>don't want to bring it up incase</i> implies its important not to make people talk about their experience or ask too many questions. They should be able to share what they want.</p> <p>?Blaming himself for some of his negative experiences and/or implying that he has been blamed. <i>That's normal – reassuring himself? He has spent time trying to understand himself better and consider his future. Something that is personally important to him.</i></p> <p><i>Break free from all of that and see who you really are when you're by yourself– focus on putting difficult experiences behind you and focus on your own future. An acknowledgement that care leavers often need to be independent at a younger age and need some support with this.</i></p> <p><i>Use of 'we' – collective experience of care leavers?</i></p> <p>Important to let people see who we are instead of pre-conceived ideas or narratives that they may have from other people. Controlling – both life and narratives told by others.</p> <p><i>It's hard – being a care leaver, independent at a younger age, having difficult relationships with family, figuring out who we are on our own</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Zain p2</b></p>
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<p><b>Focussing on what I want to achieve and what makes me me.</b></p> <p><b>Experience helped to consider what he needs to do to reach his goals and “get himself back together”</b></p> <p><b>Understanding that we share the same feelings.</b></p> <p><b>It’s important to understand other’s points of view and what they’re dealing with in order to be a good friend and be able to support them.</b></p> <p><b>The Tree of Life strengthened friendships.</b></p>	<p>Zain: I mean, because the place I’m in getting myself back together. I’m focusing on what I want to achieve, on what makes me me you know.</p> <p>What do I need to do in my spare time. I need to focus, start helping other people, friends you know, along the way, things I’ve done.</p> <p>Interviewer: How did you find when we came together to share the trees, and people talked through what they've written on their tree?</p> <p>Zain: I mean its good to understand that we do share the same feelings. And it’s good to hear from other people's point, friends’ point of view of what they're dealing with. Either if its in the past or the present. It’s good to understand that. If you are going to be their friend it’s good to understand them. So that tree of life basically just made the friendship that one little bit stronger you know. So we can understand each other’s history and try to change it you know. Try to change it or try to help them as much as we can you know.</p> <p>Interviewer: How about when you shared when you shared your tree? How did that feel to do that?</p>	<p>Not quite answered the question I asked. Instead referring to what the activity helped him to do?</p> <p>Working on himself Focusing on the future Focussing on what makes me me Talking about the desire to focus, support other people. <u>The Tree of Life helped him to think about what he needs to do to reach his goals and ‘get himself back together’?</u></p> <p>Understanding we share the same feelings. Important to hear other’s points of view. Important to understand out friends past and present. You need to understand someone if you are going to be friends. We need to know about each other’s pasts so that we can try and change it and support them. Made friendships stronger.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Zain p4</b></p>
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<p><b>Has been through a lot in his life and this has impacted his confidence.</b></p> <p><b>Ideas about family life are complex and confusing when you have been in care.</b></p> <p><b>Difficult experiences leave you with unanswered questions and difficult feelings which you have to work for yourself.</b></p> <p><b>You need to work hard and plan carefully to meet your goals, being prepared for setbacks.</b></p> <p><b>Important decisions to be made about the future</b></p>	<p>both going the same way, you know. I mean it's hard, it's hard. It's hard because all these questions you have to answer them. You don't want to find them somewhere else you want it to come from you so you could achieve you know. Go have a nice a nice hot bath, glass of wine you know [laughs]. Things are good you know, yeah I'm having a good time today, it's good night, you know.</p> <p>Interviewer: Can I ask how it was to do.. So on the branches, we wrote about kind of hopes and dreams for the future.</p> <p>Zain: Not all of them. hopes and dreams just that's just my.. Hopes and dreams, those are just dreams. Dreams really don't come true. You know. I'm not going anymore blowing a birthday cake and saying my wish will come true. Don't believe in that anymore. But what I do believe is that if you wanna do something then you gotta study for it and you have to make. You have make, you have to think of a plan C to get to plan A. So you have to have a plan C of doing whatever you wanna do. Handle it, get in the routine, and then from here move onto plan B and level up from where you was. And then boom you can reach where you wanna reach. In this world there are too many options for a</p>	<p><i>We're both going the same way – <u>both outcomes (staying with or away from family) aren't good. You don't have a chance?</u></i></p> <p><i>This leaves you with a lot of difficult feelings to reflect upon and work out for yourself. You can only find the answers within yourself.</i></p> <p>Unsure what he means by this part about the bath and wine. <u>It's important to have time to yourself and relax?</u></p> <p>Not all of them?  Dreams don't come true – you have to work hard towards your goals.  Used to believe in dreams but not anymore.  <u>You need to be prepared for setbacks when considering goals and come up with different routes to get to the same goal, as it likely won't work out first time around?</u>  <i>Routine and level up</i> - Hard work and consistency.  Hard to decide what you want to do as there are so many options.  Routine is important to him – considering joining the army.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Zain p6</b></p>
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<p><b>It was good to catch up with friends.</b></p> <p><b>It is important to understand other people's histories if you are to be their friend.</b></p> <p><b>It's important to understand our histories as they make us who we are.</b></p> <p><b>Found the whole experience difficult.</b></p> <p><b>A difficult experience was made easier by currently 'being in a good place' and not dwelling on the past.</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: You can't remember, ok don't worry. Ok is there anything that you remember that you would like to share about how that was for you?</p> <p>Zain: It was just, it was just good to catch up and understand people's history you know. If you're gonna be friends with that person then you must know what their histories like you know. My history as well is is..you know it's fine, it makes me who I am you know.</p> <p>Interviewer: Was there any bit that you didn't like about the day anything you found a bit more difficult?</p> <p>Zain: The whole thing, but because I'm in a good place I focussed on saying leave the past in the past and focussing on improving. Trying to get myself together. Trying to know if the place I'm in is right for me, you know. Am I going to get my own place and what's that going to be like for me? You know and all it rains and things and all of that comes to me. You know would I, would I relapse and go back to hospital or something like that, and things like that. I think you know, I think like if you don't do stuff like go into hospital its just like I don't wanna go</p>	<p>Good to catch up with others  Good to understand other people's history.  You need to know about a person's past in order to support them as a friend.  <i>Fine</i> – not good not bad. <u>Not as difficult as what other's had shared?</u>  <u>Come to accept his history?</u>  <u>Even though pasts may have been challenging it makes us who we are.</u></p> <p>Found the whole experience difficult  <u>Has realised it's better for his wellbeing to not dwell on the past?</u>  Wants to work on himself.  Wants to focus on moving forward and making sure what he is doing currently is working towards his goals.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Zain p8</b></p>
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<p><b>Difficult but enjoyable</b></p> <p><b>Good to be away from home</b></p>	<p>Zain: I just, I just don't know. It's not for me to say what other people enjoy.</p> <p>Interviewer: Ok</p> <p>Zain: I don't wanna be the person that's try to you know..</p> <p>Interviewer: What about for you then, what did you enjoy about it?</p> <p>Zain: Everything to be honest. You know, coming away from home for a bit, stuff like that.</p> <p>Interviewer: anything else?</p> <p>Zain: that's just it</p> <p>Interviewer: You mentioned we should change it up a bit, can you say a bit more about that?</p>	<p>A desire not to speak for other people, They could share for themselves. <u>Perhaps as others have previously spoken for him in the past?</u></p> <p>Somewhat contradicts his earlier comment about finding everything difficult. <u>Difficult but enjoyable.</u> Good to get away from home and do something different.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Zain p10</b></p>
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**Would be open to doing a similar thing again with the same group.**

Zain: Change it up a bit.. I mean don't do the same session another time, do a different one that's what I mean.

Interviewer: Ok so you mean if it was with the same group.

Zain: Yeah

Interviewer: So you would like to do something again, with the same group but different activity.

Zain: Yeah

Interviewer: Ok, that makes sense. And why is it you would like to do something else?

Zain: Well one, for you guys to understand us better as young people, and that's just it.

Interviewer: Ok. Great. Is there anything else that we haven't talked about that you would like to share.

**As a group, care leavers can be misunderstood. Activities such**

Would be open to doing a similar thing again with the same group. Would like more opportunities to connect with others in this way.  
Ongoing process/needed more time?

Feels that care leavers are misunderstood.  
Activities like this are a good way to help others to understand you?

**Zain p11**

**as this enable them to be better understood.**

Zain: Nope, no, no

Interviewer: Ok, brilliant well I guess we will finish there.

Zain: Thank you

Interviewer: No, thank you. Thank you for your time it's been really helpful to hear about your experience.

**Zain p12**

Interview 6: Yasmin

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Initial Notes
<p><b>Being encouraged to think about things I would not ordinarily think about allowed a new insight into herself</b></p> <p><b>Thinking about aspirations and the future pushed her towards doing a college course.</b></p> <p><b>Considering what she needs to do to reach her goals</b></p> <p><b>A new found motivation for the future</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: Can you tell me a bit about your experience of doing the tree of life and what that was like?</p> <p>Yasmin: I thought it was eye opening. Because there's a lot of things that were in the tree of life that I wouldn't have normally just thought about on a regular basis, like, with the. My aspirations and stuff, that's what actually helped me to do my college course. It's what like, pushed me a little bit because I want to be an airline stewardess, I want to be a flight attendant. I need to start doing stuff that gets me towards that goal, like I need too..</p> <p>And then I realised from that like I need to do this. I <b>want</b> to do this. I'm going to do this!</p>	<p><i>eye opening – a new insight into myself and others.</i></p> <p>Encouraged to think about things that she would not ordinarily think about such as aspirations.</p> <p>Thinking about aspirations in the tree of life pushed her towards her current college course.</p> <p>Thinking about what she wants to do in the future.</p> <p>Encouraged to think about what she needs to do to reach her goals.</p> <p><u>A new found motivation for the future</u></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Yasmin p1</b></p>

<p><b>A mixed experience</b></p> <p><b>Discomfort due to pre-existing difficult relationship with one of the group</b></p> <p><b>Difficult with the open-ended nature of the questions</b></p> <p><b>Difficulty remembering specific aspects</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: That's great, that's so nice! Can you tell me a bit more about how it was? [long pause from Yasmin] the whole day?</p> <p>Yasmin: hmmm ok the, the whole day was a bit [makes sighing noise and pulls a face] because of someone that was there. But never mind. Um I don't know I just feel like eye-opening</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, so if I ask you about kind of, so the tree was split into different parts that represent different parts of your life. Can you tell me a bit about how it was to, to think about some of those different parts and draw that on a tree? [long pause from Yasmin] so like the roots for example.</p> <p>Yasmin: What are the roots again?</p> <p>Interviewer: So the roots are about your history and your kind of past?</p>	<p><i>Seemed to struggle with just how open ended the question was.</i></p> <p>Almost complete contradiction in the positivity and motivation in first answer. Suggests that the activity itself was positive but the day was challenging due to someone else who was in the group (ex-boyfriend).</p> <p>Again struggle with the open ended nature of the question? Needed further prompting.</p> <p>Difficulty remembering specific aspects.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Yasmin p2</b></p>
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<p><b>Difficulty articulating herself</b></p> <p><b>Difficult to know what to write or share about her past</b></p> <p><b>Not had a great past</b></p> <p><b>Would rather not talk about or think about the past</b></p> <p><b>The Tree of life was a struggle</b></p> <p><b>Difficult to think about the important people in her life</b></p>	<p>Yasmin: I know my past and it's not a great one but I can talk about it. I just prefer not to. Its like yeah I don't know what to say about that.</p> <p>Interviewer: So how did you find doing that?</p> <p>Yasmin: A bit of a struggle, I'm not going to lie. There was a time when we was talking about that and the people that was important to us and I'll say a bit about that later but I found that a bit of a struggle as well because I didn't really know who to put.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay</p> <p>Yasmin: Because there was, there's only like two people in my life who I would have put. And its like if I was to put them there are other people in my life that aren't with me anymore that I would have wanted to put more</p>	<p>Difficult to know what to write for her past. <u>A worry about sharing with others or what others would write? Hard to put it into a few words?</u></p> <p>Her past is 'not great' she is able to talk about it but would prefer not to.</p> <p><i>Struggle – a difficult task I'm not going to lie – wanting to be honest about it. Found it difficult to think about the important people in her life. I'll say a bit about that later – <u>not ready to talk about it yet or not sure if she needs to wait to be asked?</u></i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Yasmin p3</b></p>
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<p><b>Not having many people close to her. Some important people aren't with her anymore</b></p> <p><b>Too personal and difficult to think about the people that should go on the tree</b></p> <p><b>Writing the skills was easy</b></p> <p><b>A sense of confidence in her skills</b></p> <p><b>Self-awareness as to what she is and isn't good at</b></p>	<p>but I didn't know if I should or shouldn't. Because like, its too personal.</p> <p>Yeah.</p> <p>Interview: That makes sense thank you. Um and then the other bits that we thought about.. so the trunk was your skills, how did you find doing that bit?</p> <p>Yasmin: So I don't mean to sound like one of those people but I found it kind of easy because I know what my skills are. Like I know that I'm good at certain things and I know that I'm not good at certain things. [pauses]</p> <p>I'm not good at talking. Like English is not good. Yeah, I can't speak properly. It just doesn't work. My brain doesn't comprehend the words. I can understand what people are saying and I can like give you a sentence back but its like, my brain struggles to put the sentence together.</p>	<p><i>Only like two people - I don't have many people close to me.</i></p> <p><i>Difficult to decide who should go on the tree and why. Felt too personal too difficult for her to think to much about? Difficult to think about people who are no longer in her life.</i></p> <p><i>Should or shouldn't – an internal conflict or about the rules of the task?</i></p> <p><i>Doesn't want to seem big headed or over confident.</i></p> <p><i>Confident in her skills and abilities and also the things that she is not so good at. Found this aspect straightforward.</i></p> <p><u>Is self aware, confident and has good self esteem.</u></p> <p><b>Yasmin p4</b></p>
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<p><b>Finds it difficult to articulate herself</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: You're making perfect sense to me! Perfect sense.</p> <p>Yasmin: I don't know if it's my dyslexia or not, but yeah the words struggle to come to me.</p> <p>Interview: That's ok, don't worry. Um so we talked about the skills, and you said you found it quite easy. How did it feel then to write them down.</p> <p>Yasmin: I dunno, erm just.. easy. easy</p> <p>Interviewer: Ok</p> <p>Yasmin: I feel like I was done quite quick I'm not going to lie</p>	<p>Feels as though she struggles with expressing herself. Linking the interview context to the skills aspect of the Tree of Life.</p> <p><u>Seemed quite uncomfortable within the interview and was letting me know she was struggling to articulate herself.</u></p> <p>Has dyslexia and wonders if this is linked to her difficulty expressing herself? <u>May have impacted her during the activity? Could have struggled to write on her tree and articulate herself when sharing with others</u></p> <p>Nothing more to add.</p> <p><b>Yasmin p5</b></p>
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<p><b>Found the group setting uncomfortable</b></p> <p><b>Does not like to open up to others</b></p> <p><b>A realisation that opening up is more difficult for her than she thought</b></p> <p><b>Finding the interview difficult due to needing to open up</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: Okay, great. Can I ask you how you found doing it in a group setting what that was like?</p> <p>Yasmin: Uncomfortable. I'm a very closed off person. To a lot of people Like I can I can talk to people I can like, be friendly and kind and stuff. But I can't open up to people as well as I think I can.</p> <p>Interviewer: Yeah</p> <p>Yasmin: Like right now I'm finding this conversation a bit of a struggle. But I'm trying.</p> <p>Interviewer: You're doing brilliantly. If there's anything that you don't want to answer, that's, that's absolutely fine. You're doing great.</p> <p>Okay, so you found it a bit of a struggle doing it in a group. How did you find it when other people shared their tree?</p>	<p>Finished with the important people. Had not realised there was a gifts part</p> <p>Felt uncomfortable doing this in a group. <i>Closed off person</i> – does not like to share with others. Happy to have general conversation with people but more difficult to open up. <i>As well as I think I can – <u>thought it would be easier to share and she would be ok with this but the Tree of Life made her realise that this was quite difficult. Or was difficult within this context.</u></i></p> <p>Finding it difficult to open up about herself within the interview.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Yasmin p8</b></p>
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<p><b>Eye opening to hear similarities in backgrounds of the group</b></p> <p><b>Knew there would be some similarities but the extent of this was overwhelming</b></p> <p><b>Realising there were shared interests within the group</b></p> <p><b>Similarities between the group members gave her the confidence to share</b></p> <p><b>Found comfort in the shared trauma of the group</b></p>	<p>Yasmin: Eye opening. Because like I didn't think..because I know that we've all come from similar backgrounds, but I didn't think that it would be like, <b>so</b> similar in a way. Like, when people read about what they like, what they had to say about their life and stuff, I was like, this is way too similar, nah. That's what.. that's what like, gave me the confidence to talk in front of the group. it was was like, it was so similar that was like, I felt comfortable in a way. Like that shared trauma just helped. I don't know why.</p> <p>Interviewer: How did it feel?</p> <p>Yasmin: What to talk in front of everyone?</p> <p>Interviewer: Yeah</p>	<p><i>Eye opening - Surprised at how similar their backgrounds were. Knew there would be some similarities but was shocked at the extent of this. Shared interests Nah – almost too much to deal with and process?</i></p> <p>Other people sharing and noticing the similarities to her own experiences gave her the confidence to talk in front of the group.</p> <p>Earlier in the interview she spoke about finding it difficult to open up but used the word comfortable here – the shared experiences enabled this shift to happen. <i>Shared Trauma</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Yasmin p9</b></p>
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<p><b>Awareness of what she is good at</b></p> <p><b>Writing notes for other people was easy and felt natural</b></p> <p><b>A confidence in being able to do whatever she puts her mind to</b></p>	<p>Yasmin: I didn't read what other people wrote for me.</p> <p>Interviewer: Ok</p> <p>Yasmin: But writing for other people, that was easy. I'm good at complimenting other people's like work, and stuff that they've done, things that I think they did good at. Because I don't think it's hard for people to do well at something. They just have to try.</p> <p>Interviewer: How did you feel doing that? That kind of writing the notes for people?</p> <p>Yasmin: I didn't really feel any kind of way it was just like, natural.</p>	<p>Didn't read other's messages – why? Embarrassment? A worry about what they would say?</p> <p><i>I'm good at – <u>self awareness of the things she is good at. Good self esteem.</u></i></p> <p>Highlighting the importance of trying your best.</p> <p><u>Feels confident in her ability to do what she puts her mind to</u></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Yasmin p11</b></p>
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<p><b>Was worried that the notes written on her tree may say something bad</b></p> <p><b>Feels as though she is a pessimist</b></p> <p><b>A sense of hiding her true self</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: Ok sounds good. Is there any reason that you didn't read the notes that people have written for you?</p> <p>Yasmin: I didn't want anything to be bad.</p> <p>Interviewer: Ok, so you were worried [Yasmin interrupts]</p> <p>Yasmin: Mhmm, I'm a pessimist.</p> <p>Interviewer: Ok</p> <p>Yasmin: Like I don't seem like it but I'm very much a pessimist.</p> <p>Interviewer: There was definitely nothing bad on any of any of those trees.</p> <p>I can, I can promise you so you don't need to worry about that. But okay, you were worried that they were going to be bad.</p>	<p>Felt easy to write notes to others <i>Natural – something that came easily to her</i></p> <p>Worried about what people would have written on her tree. <u>Perhaps due to the pre-existing relationships within the group.</u></p> <p>Feels as though she is pessimistic. Feels like it contradicts other aspects of the interview which suggest that she is quite positive and confident.</p> <p><u>A sense of hiding her true self. Coming across as quite confident but on the inside struggling to articulate herself and feeling anxious.</u></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Yasmin p12</b></p>
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<p><b>An extreme discomfort and nervousness around the topic of storms</b></p> <p><b>An internal conversation about whether or not to engage with the storms resulted in a decision not to</b></p> <p><b>Storms too painful to talk about</b></p>	<p>Yasmin: Mhmm</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay. And a bit later on in the day, we kind of talked about storms of life and storms that we might experience. How did you find that part of the day?</p> <p>Yasmin: A struggle I'm not gonna lie when that happened I kind of went a bit silent. I was like do I talk about this? I don't want to talk about this. I just sat there like I don't feel like I can talk about this. It was very nerve wracking. That's the word, nerve-wracking.</p> <p>Interviewer: How did you how did you feel when other people kind of shared some things at that point, or the group discussions? How did you find those?</p>	<p>Seems unconvinced by me trying to reassure her</p> <p><i>Went silent – powerless, uncomfortable, shut down?</i></p> <p><u>Confusion about whether to contribute to the discussion. A sense of deep discomfort. Does she have to talk about this? A strong feeling that she doesn't want to.</u></p> <p><u>Even if she wanted to talk about it doesn't feel as though she physically could – too uncomfortable/painful</u></p> <p><b>Yasmin p13</b></p>
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<p><b>Uncomfortable with talking about the storms within the interview.</b></p>	<p>Yasmin: [Long pause] I don't know what to say, erm. I'm not going to lie I don't really remember. I don't want to talk about the storms.</p> <p>Interviewer: That's ok, don't worry at all</p> <p>Okay, we did come towards the end of the day and we filled in certificates for people based on their trees. Can you tell me a bit about the how that was?</p> <p>Yasmin: What the filling in the certificate [laughs]? It was just the last.. I don't really know what to say [laughs].</p> <p>Interviewer: Ok, don't worry. Was there anything else that you found difficult about the day?</p>	<p><u>Very uncomfortable with thinking about or talking about the storms.</u></p> <p><u>Don't remember – doesn't want to talk about, genuinely doesn't remember or has actively tried not to remember.</u></p> <p>A sense that she feels as though this part wasn't of any importance and wasn't sure why she was being asked about.</p> <p><b>Yasmin p14</b></p>
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<p><b>Relationship with one person in the group made the overall experience uncomfortable</b></p> <p><b>Enjoyed being around other people</b></p> <p><b>The presence of friends and her sister allowed her to feel comfortable in an uncomfortable situation</b></p>	<p>Yasmin: Dealing with the people there. Dealing with one person there.</p> <p>Interviewer: Ok. In what way did that make it difficult can I ask?</p> <p>Yasmin: Erm, It made me uncomfortable.</p> <p>Interviewer: Ok, that makes sense. Was there anything else that you particularly enjoyed about the day?</p> <p>Yasmin: I liked that I was like able to be around people, like my friends and my sister. And they were able to make me feel comfortable in an uncomfortable situation</p> <p>Interviewer: Ok</p> <p>Yasmin: Yep</p>	<p>Corrected herself from the people to one person. Existing relationship with one person made the day difficult.</p> <p>Made her feel uncomfortable to be attending with this person.</p> <p>Enjoyed being around her friends and sister. Others around her were able to make her feel comfortable in an uncomfortable situation.</p> <p><b>Yasmin p15</b></p>
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<p><b>Uncomfortable talking about herself and sharing her thoughts in the interview</b></p>	<p>Interviewer: Honestly, there's no right or wrong answers. I know it's a bit different, but you were great, honestly.</p> <p>Yasmin: Thanks</p>	<p>Found the interview situation quite uncomfortable</p> <p><b>Yasmin p17</b></p>
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## Appendix 12: Tables of Personal Experiential Themes

### Personal Experiential Themes: Maya

PERSONAL EXPERIENTIAL THEMES	Page Number	Illustrative Quotes
<b>Subthemes</b>		
Experiential Statements		
<b>A: A PROCESS OF PERSONAL REFLECTION</b>		
<b>The Importance of Reflecting on Yourself</b>		
An opportunity to consciously reflect on who you are	p2	"I think you don't really spend much time consciously thinking, Oh, what are my roots, you just sort of go through life"
The importance of regular self-reflection	p1	"I think it's always good to sort of reflect on yourself"
Everyone should reflect on themselves regularly	p17	"I think it's a really good thing to do. It's probably good to do for everyone every few years, just reflecting on yourself is a good exercise I'm sure. "
Learning about yourself	p1	"then you learn new things about yourself"
A good way of reflecting on yourself	p17	"I think it's really a really good way of reflecting on yourself. I mean, yeah. I think it's good way of looking. Yeah, it's just a good way of looking into yourself. "
Asking questions of ourselves	p2	"I don't think we necessarily always ask ourselves that"
Your roots define who you are	p2	"And obviously, they really define you and define how you are around people and who you are, and obviously, who you consider yourself to be."
Making connections between parts of our lives	p3	"we all have reasons for why we want the things that we want, and then probably also going to be embedded in our roots. So I think that's, again, how it sort of came back to it. Because all of the other stuff comes back to"

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A safe way to think about your identity	p1	"it sort of was an easier way to sort of think about your identity, really."
<b>The Personal Process of Reflection as Most Important</b>		
The process of doing the tree individually is most important	p8	"I didn't really feel the need to share my tree"
The Tree is personal and needs to be protected	p8	"I guess it is quite personal thing"
	p12	"Because not to say that you're talking directly to the people that like "oh, this is wonderful..my tree and this is what everything little thing means"
	p8	"I was sort of somewhat protective of it. "
Presentation of the Tree important	p8	"Because it worked for my tree better"
Important to be able to come back to different parts in your own time	p3	"it's only sort of once I've done that, that I thought it was I could come back to the roots and think."
Mixed feelings about the group setting	p12	"Umm I didn't really mind it"
	p16	"perhaps because they didn't know each other massively. Well, so it's just like, what's your name again?"
Worried about what others might think	p8	"Actually, I think I felt somewhat embarrassed about it"
	p8	"I actually don't think I read that many of what people wrote on my tree"
It's difficult to share personal challenges	p13	"of my storms have been obviously quite intense, and also very personal. And I think it's hard to share that"
	p12	"mainly just stuck to the general topics rather than the personal"
Being brave and putting up the tree	p8	"it wasn't a big enough deal that I didn't put it up"
Certificates unimportant	p15	"Somewhat meaningless"
	p16	"It just felt like I've done a Tree of Life... I don't really need a certificate for it"

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## **B: FOCUSING ON THE POSITIVES**

### **A Positive Approach**

A focus on the positives	p17	"people can feel the need to work on things that they don't need to. So that might like, be more negative than positive"
Wanting to stick to positive themes	p14	"I think maybe it's not so good to dwell on them and keep coming back to them"
Don't want to be reminded of negative experiences	p13	"I don't particularly like, thinking about generally or dwelling on"
Reframing negatives as learning opportunities	p7	"Even if they're not really positive experiences, they can teach you a lot....So I think I've been given many gifts"
A reminder of important people in your life	p5	" it wasn't like I didn't know who they were, but again.."
A positive and enjoyable experience	p1	"I found it really fun"
	p1	"I really enjoyed it."
	p4	"I thought that was cool and fun"
	p10	"that's why it was fun"
	p1	" It was just a cool way to look at things"
<b>Hope for the Future</b>		
Thinking about the future	p4	"I hadn't really put a massive amount of thought into sort of like I think it was dreams or future goals, I hadn't put a massive amount of thought into that before."
Change perspectives on what's important for the future	p7	"oh, wait, no, I do. Like, really want to go travelling, or just see a bunch of places and yeah..."
	p7	"they are things that I've thought about before, but they haven't been something that I've sort of considered a goal really. Or really that important."



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	p6	"It didn't have to be massive goals and dreams. And it was just Yeah, little, little things."
	p4	" it sort of helped me explore the sort of more fun side of things that I wanted to do with my future. Rather than sort of pure business basically."
Pressure of being a care leaver means there is less time to focus on enjoyment	p5	"Rather than sort of pure business basically"
Hope and excitement for other's	p10	"I liked hearing people's dreams especially"
	p10	"it's just sort of exciting because they know what they want to do and you think that's so cool. And you really hope that they end up getting that"
	p9	"there was this one girl talking about her singing. Yeah. And I was like, that's really cool. And sort of that I hoped that she kept that up and continue to sing and stuff like that. "
<b>C: CONNECTION WITH OTHERS</b>		
Enjoyed gaining a deeper understanding of others	p10	"I think it's much easier to see into a person when they're explaining it themselves"
	p10	"it was cool getting an explanation of everyone else's tree, because I think obviously it tells you a lot about and I know it was just a deeper look into people, which I found really interesting."
	p9	"I thought other people's tree was really cool"
	p14	"which part did I enjoy the most? Probably listening to everyone talk about their trees. I really enjoyed that. And yeah, that's probably the thing I enjoyed most. "
Happy to share with others	p9	"I didn't massively mind sharing my tree that way"

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A good way to tell your story	p10	"I think it's much easier to see into a person when they're explaining it themselves and saying, Oh, this is why I put this on here and this is what I really care about"
Supporting each other	p13	" it kinda seemed to be the same for her."
	p12	"Neither of us, like me and my partner did not talk about it"
	p9	"I sort of knew that that it would be nice things as well so it wasn't gonna be an issue."
The feeling of doing something together	p12	"but I just think the general feeling of just doing something together and shared experiences just nice. "
Discovering unexpected shared interests	p11	" I mentioned D&D [dungeons and dragons] is one of the things I enjoy doing. And the girl next to me was like wow, that's like, so cool. Which I didn't expect anyone to say"
The possibility of building friendships	p11	"I think just to have someone be like, Oh, that's so cool. Like, I want to play and stuff like that was just really fun"
<b>D: UNCERTAINTY AND DISCOMFORT</b>		
Negative perception of self	p4	"I feel like talent is sort of like, you know, your really skilled at something like an Olympic level skilled or something like that. Like I'm good at this but I'm not"
Reflecting on family members is a conflicting experience	p5	" like family members, I find it I find tricky to deal with. So when putting them down, it's like my parents, it's quite conflicting because obviously, I do care about them, but at the same time, like there's just stuff underneath the surface so it makes it sort of a somewhat conflicting experience. "
Roots difficult	p2	"I wasn't quite sure what to put down, especially as my like actual the root part"
	p15	"I think maybe a couple of examples of like what you can put as a root"

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Uncertainty at first

p3

"I think at the start wasn't 100% sure how to go about it"

p2

"But I don't think we necessarily always ask ourselves that. It's almost a subconscious thing. And at the start, I really struggled with it"

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**Personal Experiential Themes: Inaya**

<b>PERSONAL EXPERIENTIAL THEMES</b>	<b>Page Number</b>	<b>Illustrative Quotes</b>
<b>Subthemes</b>		
Experiential Statements		
<b>A: AN UNCOMFORTABLE PROCESS</b>		
<b>Difficult to Fully Engage</b>		
Unable to open up fully	p1	"I didn't really. Like I didn't really open up. "
	p9	"So like Jack was making unnecessary comments like all the time. And literally everyone like even X [participation group leader] had to tell him to stop and it just put me off a little bit. But Like I think if that didn't happen, I would be like concentrated"
Would have been more able to engage without disruption from other group members	p3	"I can't really draw [laughs]. So it was a bit like just scribbling all over the page [laughs]"
Found the drawing aspect of the activity difficult	p8	"Um I don't really get on with everyone. "
Pre-existing relationships with other group members was a barrier to being able to cooperate and share		
<b>Reflecting on Yourself is Difficult Important</b>		
Reflecting on herself and thinking about the past felt emotional	p3	"It made me feel a little bit like emotional"
Avoidance of thinking about the past	p3	" I don't actually like, look into my past too much because it upsets me"
A desire to stick to activities with a positive focus, rather than think about challenges.	p10	"I feel like I focused more on the positive things. I don't know why. I don't really focus on the negative. "
Emotional to hear other people's stories	p12	"A little bit emotional"

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Shocked to hear about what people have been through	p11	"It was just a bit like, I dunno. A bit speechless."
	p11	"I was just a bit like woah. I was a bit shocked in a way. "
The opportunity to talk about the past enabled her to become closer to her sister	p1	"I feel like it's because we were talking about our past"
	p3	"I feel like I need like, I need therapy. I need counselling. I want to, I don't actually like, look into my past too much because it upsets me."
Would like further emotional support		
<b>B: IDENTIFYING WHAT'S IMPORTANT</b>		
<b>Identifying What's Important Now</b>		
The process of writing it down allows a better understanding of what I like	p1	"I also know a little bit more, about what she's into and what I'm into. Because like I wrote it down."
Identifying activities that are therapeutic for her during the session and beginning to do these more	p1	"And I've actually started reading ever since that's session."
	p2	"I don't know its just its really therapeutic"
	p5	"I mean, I'm cooking a lot more since the session"
	p7	"Also therapeutic is reading and cooking. I like listening to music. Yeah, I wrote that down my tree."
<b>Identifying What's Important in the Future</b>		
	p6	"But now I understand like now I want to do an apprenticeship in health and social care. And I want to start working. But I'd have no idea I wanted to do that"
Coming up with goals for the future		
	p7	"And I, I think you said where do you see yourself in 5 years? I think you said that....And I said in my own place with X [daughter] and a little puppy, with a job, and hopefully I will be in uni. "
Coming up with a long term plan for the future		

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	p7	"I know I wrote down like, I want to be a millionaire. I want to like do it and apprenticeship and social care. Just help me help my family out really. "
Mixed feelings about the future	p7	" its exciting.. but nervous.. nerve-racking?"
<b>C: TOGETHER BUT ALONE</b>		
Has a lot going on and can often feel alone in this	p4	"Um usually, I feel like quite lonely" "I do feel quite lonely like that, obviously being a mum, and in a mother and baby unit and like family problems and stuff isn't it's not very nice."
Having a child makes it hard to think about her own future	p6	"I struggled a little bit because when I gave birth to X. I didn't ..like everything was just all over the place. I didn't understand where I wanted to go or anything"
Feels she does not have any skills	p5	"I mean I don't really have any skills"
	p8	"And Jade aswell, Jade is going to go really really far in life, I can see that. Very far. "
Excitement and pride about friend's future		
Feeling as though others' drawings are better than hers	p11	"Like a lot of people are really talented. Like their drawings of the trees was amazing"
Enjoyable to be with others, doing something different	p9	"It took my mind off a lot of things, it did. I generally did really enjoy it. "
Good to be out the house and have company, connecting with others who have some shared experiences	p10	"I feel like getting together not being at home, alone. Actually having people around, you like company is really really nice. "
Realising everyone has faced difficulty and important not to judge others	p11	"you actually see like not everyone's lives are perfect. I lot of people like actually have been through a lot, so never really judge anyone"
	p4	"So like when we when we like wrote down how the people we have in our life that are important to us. It made me seem like a lot more. And it made me understand that I'm not actually alone. "
Writing down important people reminded her that she is not alone		

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**D: BECOMING CLOSER TO HER SISTER**

A better understanding of what her sister has been through and how she feels	p5	"I think it just made me understand a lot more. "
	p8	"That helped me like understand a lot more about like my sister, "
	p1	" it helps me understand a little bit more of how my sister feels about her how she went into care as well. She did open up quite a bit"
Upsetting to hear how her sister felt	p2	"It was really upsetting, I wanted to cry. "
Learning more about what my sister is into	p1	"um I also know a little bit more, about what she's into"
Talking about the past allowed them to understand each other better	p1	"I feel like it's because we were talking about our past. We don't really talk about our past"
	p5	"Yeah, it's actually pulled me a lot closer to my sisters, well two of my sisters. It's pulled me a lot closer because now I understand like how it is"
Brought her closer to her sister		
	p5	"at the moment one of my sisters is going through a break up and I'm there for her a lot. "
Is now better able to be there fore her sister		
The focus for her was on her sister, she was not particularly interested in hearing from the rest of the group	p8	"but I didn't really pay attention to anybody else "

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## Personal Experiential Themes: Jack

### PERSONAL EXPERIENTIAL THEMES

#### Subthemes

Experiential Statements

#### **A: UNCOMFORTABLE AND OUT OF THE ORDINARY**

A bit stressful

p2

"I'll be honest, a bit stressed but fine"

It wasn't easy

p2

"Well, I managed to finish it"

Challenging experience for everyone to talk about themselves

p3

"so normally it will be hard for people to express themselves"

Thinking hard about what went on the tree

p4

"You had to think hard. Um it actually makes you use your brain, your mindset"

p7

"when it was the tree you have to think really hard about what has to be put down "

A weird experience

p1

"Erm It was weird"

Not a natural thing to do

p1

"Well drawing a tree and writing things under it is not normally a nature thing for me to do or a normal, normal thing to do"

A worry about how the task might make him feel

p6

"was around so many people where I didn't have to worry about what people were thinking about or the way I feel"

#### **B: BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT**

##### **Personal Circumstances and Stressors Reducing the Capacity to Engage**

Not being in the right headspace to engage at the time

p2

"I wasn't in the right time frame to be doing the thing at the time."



Lots of other things going on in life	p9	"it's just I've got so much, so much..."
<b>Feeling Uncomfortable Within the Group</b>		
Pre-existing relationships made the experience difficult	p6	"was around so many people where I didn't have to worry about what people were thinking about or the way I feel"
	p2	"Just the people, like certain people that were there"
Holding back personal information	p2	"Just to feel like, my personal things might have gotten out there. And there was other people in the room that I didn't want to say things in front of so, because of things that have happened"
Pressure to contribute	p2	"Just like pressure of everyone just looking at me."
Worried about what people were thinking	p6	"was around so many people where I didn't have to worry about what people were thinking about or the way I feel"
Important to be in your own space	p6	"I felt it was because I was actually in my own space "
A feeling of being watched	p6	"because I know I'm not being watched."
<b>The Requirement to Write and Draw as a Barrier</b>		
The requirement to draw was a barrier	p4	"Horrible. I didn't like it. I don't like drawing. I can't draw. So I don't like drawing. I don't like to write either like. Because those are the top two things I hate in my life. Is writing, I don't like writing at all."
	p15	"I think the whole drawing thing was a stress, ill be honest just the whole drawing thing. Because the writing thing.. that is s something that needs to be done but the whole drawing thing.. I feel like the tree could have been printed out"
<b>C: A WISH TO HAVE ENGAGED MORE</b>		
Completing the Activity in his own Time	p2	"I managed to finish it. When I got home actually, not when I was there."

	p5	"To push myself really. All I thought was I didn't do enough. I felt like I didn't do enough. I didn't speak enough, I didn't show enough. I just yeah. So I just thought I would get on it."
Felt happy whilst completing it at home	p6	"Happy!"
Disappointed in self for not completing it	p10	I felt like from my perspective I felt like I didn't achieve it until I actually finished it at home. So, which was a let down
	p10	"I felt like I didn't put enough... I feel like I didn't do enough to earn it"
Regrets rushing through it	p15	"Instead of rushing it and not thinking about how I'm going to do it so like yeah. "
Uncomfortable about not having shared his tree	p8	"I didn't share it [laughs]"
Would like to do this again	p14	"I would be able to express myself, and express the way I feel and the way life has been for me. If I was to do it again. "
It would have been more positive if he had done it properly	p17	"And if I was to do a family tree I would be happy and I would know where things are going."
Would try harder if he could do this again	p15	"If I was to do it again I would actually be happy to do it and take time with it. "
If he could have another go he would share it	p8	"mean if it came to another workshop I would probably be more likely to share it then"
	p8	"Because I've done it now. I've done it before. Now that if that happens again, I'm sure I'd be more confident, its more confidence. I'll be more.. because I've done it once. Because once I've done something once I'm fine to do it again. "
<b>D: REALISING THE VALUE IN THE END</b>		
From bad to good	p3	"all the bad to the.. it went from bad to good basically."
In the end amazing	p15	"in the end amazing. That's all I can say"
Fine in the end	p2	"fine, in the end"

A wish that he had done this when he was younger	p18	"Oh one other thing is that I think it would be good for younger children to do it to. I think it will help them out"
<b>Seeing the Value in Self Reflection</b>		
A relaxing experience	p1	"But it was actually kind of nice. It was relaxing,"
It makes me think	p17	"It just makes me feel. It makes me think. "
Helpful in thinking about the future	p17	"if I was to do a family tree I would be happy and I would know where things are going"
Encouraged him to reflect on his own Life	p1	it kind of made me think about the circle of life and how life actually is and like. How do you say it.. like the way you get chances and the way you think about it,
Reflecting on why his life has been happy and he is able to do the things he enjoys	p13	"I just think because most of my life has been happy. So there's a lot of things I enjoy doing because I'm happy and there's a lot of hobbies that I have or I might not have because I was raised by the right people I guess. "
Reflecting on family, connections with others and the importance of this	p17	"the whole tree actually reminds me of like a family tree. I know it doesn't make sense but it reminds me of a family tree. "
Felt good to write about himself on paper and would like to reflect on himself more	p13	"Decent really, if I'm honest it was good to jot it down on paper. I feel it's something I should do more regularly, or, more more more often. "
<b>Building Confidence in Understanding and Expressing who you are</b>		
The potential to see yourself differently	p18	"I think it will help them out. Or make them see themselves differently"
Consideration and confidence in expressing thoughts and feelings	p16	"So normally, I wouldn't think before I do things but nowadays I'm actually, since then, I've actually been thinking about things that I'm doing. So normally, if I say something, I won't think I'll just say it. but now I'll say what I'm thinking, and I'll say what I feel like."

Helpful in building confidence	p16	"Just the confidence [laughs]. Confidence it's all about the confidence really. "
Reflecting on yourself builds confidence	p13	"I feel like it would bring out a more confident side of me a more better side of me. "
What he wanted to put down had changed by the end of the session	p18	"So things they would put down might change by the end of the session."
<b>Motivated by the Group</b>		
Seeing others challenging themselves was motivating and gave him confidence	p3	"normally it will be hard for people to express themselves. But people ended up. And it made me feel that I could express myself in the end and do certain things"
	p3	"More confident yeah "
Other people sharing made him feel more comfortable	p7	"That made me feel better because um it shows other people's thoughts and opinions and the way things are"
Seeing the benefit to others motivated him to complete it himself	p2	"it worked out well, because I saw the way everyone else was doing it, and the way they felt and it made me feel happy to like complete it."
Good to hear the perspectives of other's	p1	"and other people's perspectives, really."

**Personal Experiential Themes: Jade**

PERSONAL EXPERIENTIAL THEMES	Page Number	Illustrative Quotes
<b>Subthemes</b>		
Experiential Statements		
<b>A: STEPPING OUT THE COMFORT ZONE: FROM UNCOMFORTABLE TO COMFORTABLE</b>		
<b>Difficulty Reflecting on and Sharing Challenges</b>		
Hard to think about important people	p18	"I think that was hard for me because I don't like have a lot of people close to me like that."
Some parts easier than others	p13	"I think some parts are easier than others"
Getting stuck with more difficult aspects	p19	"I was stuck on the leaves for a while"
Mixed feelings – do I really want to write that?	p16	"thinking about if I really wanna write that"
Thinking and talking about roots is difficult	p13	"I feel like [long pause] it was alright. Some parts where easier than others. So I feel like that kinda stuck me"
	p14	"Yeah that's what I'm saying, that's why I feel like it was a bit hard to do because I don't really like..again like when it comes to writing about certain things I don't... "
	p13	"I kept forgetting what I need to write on roots."
Hard to see your roots on paper	p14	"So the roots kind of like I think it scared me a bit [laughs]. I'm looking at <b>my</b> roots, Its like [laughs] ohhhh"
Overwhelming to see yourself on paper	p15	"I think it's just like seeing about yourself on paper it's a bit like rah, that's too much. It kind of hits you in the face"
<b>Uncertainty and Discomfort at First</b>		

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Uncomfortable talking about self	p4	"I don't really like talking about myself. Ermm, [pauses] especially like about my life and stuff."
The uncomfortable made comfortable	p6	"But I think once I went into it"
	p6	"Yeah it just felt like we were just doing a session like"
Uncomfortable at first	p4	"I think at first I was a bit like mmm [pulls faces] [inaudible] do I really wanna talk about that?"
Uncertainty at first	p2	"before I got there I didn't really know what It was gonna be about"
Difficult at first	p3	"Erm I think at first it was quite hard because sometimes you don't actually know what to write about yourself"
A feeling of not wanting to do this at first	p6	"when there was like the tree and I was like ooh I don't really want to sit there and think about myself. But I think once I went into it"
<b>Stepping Out of the Comfort Zone into a Positive Experience</b>		
Stepping out the comfort zone	p4	"But I feel like putting me out of my comfort zone was talking about myself as well. I don't like doing that really. So it gave me a chance to like step out of my comfort zone"
	p18	"So that was hard for me. But I did it. But it was a bit hard.
from uncomfortable to comfortable	p20	"it was easy for me to get comfortable and be able to write about myself"
A feeling of relief putting the roots on paper	p15	"it was alright, relieving."
A relieving experience	p5	"I felt relieved, it was nice..."
	p4	"No, relieving"
A positive, fun experience		"But when I got there I <b>actually</b> enjoyed it"
	p16	"I loved doing it."
	p3	"It was fun as well"
	p9	"I had fun with it I won't lie"

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	p12	"Everyone had fun"
	p7	"so I'm having fun with it"
<b>Supportive Factors</b>		
Supported and guided by facilitators	p20	"I like the fact you guys, you were easy to talk to."
	p14	"I remember asking you guys"
	p6	"And you guys were really nice as well"
No pressure, being eased in	p6	"it wasn't like I felt pressured or anything"
	p6	"you guys eased us into it. It wasn't like you know, do this, do that. It was more like you don't have to if you don't want to. It just eased us into it"
No Judgement	p20	"It didn't seem like there was any judgement or like any, like if we said anything."
Size of the group	p7	"I think because it wasn't a big group it was alright."
Having a choice over what to share	p7	"Because we don't have to say what we wanna write."
	p7	"Because we didn't have to say what we wrote either so it was.. it was fine."
	p9	"I think because obviously because it was off my own back. I was okay with it."
 <b>B: REFLECTING ON THE SELF</b>		
<b>An Opportunity to Consider What Makes you you</b>		
Learning more about yourself	p17	"so you kind of learn more about yourself as well"
	p2	"acknowledge what you like about yourself, what you don't like about yourself"

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	p10	"we was talking about it and I was like oh yeah that actually does like.. that does get under my skin or like that's actually a problem"
	p1	"I feel like it gave me insight into how like I feel about myself"
A chance to think about what really makes me happy	p5	"I've never really sat there and thought like what makes me happy? what actually makes me happy"
Thinking more deeply about myself	p13	"I remember I was like ooh [laughs][inaudible] its making me think about my life"
	p13	"Because some things you have to kind of think about by yourself."
A chance to acknowledge myself in a different way	p4	"and like acknowledge myself in a different way so yeah..."
<b>Planning for the Future</b>		
Manifesting hopes and dreams	p17	"I have a lot of hopes and dreams so It was like a way to kind of manifest that I guess."
Coming up with a path for the future	p17	"and a way to kind of see and that's where you want to go."
Thinking about my goals and the future	p5	"like what do I want to do?"
	p1	"the way I see my goals, see my future"
Am I going down the right path?	p13	"its making me think about my life and whether I'm really going down the right path"
Motivation for the future	p5	"Like I wanna grow, I wanna progress, I wanna become that."
<b>C: THE TREE METAHPOR</b>		
<b>Putting Pen to Paper</b>		
The process of putting "pen to paper"	p2	"I feel like hearing about yourself pen to paper, like seeing about yourself pen to paper"
	p15	"like seeing about yourself pen to paper it's easy to acknowledge"
	p13	"it was nice to be able to like write pen to paper. It was nice to see."

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	p2	"you are thinking about creativity, you are thinking about making it look nice but at the same time you are thinking about what really makes you you"
You can say more when you draw and write compared to talking	p14	"like when it comes to writing about certain things I don't... But I feel like I have a different brain when I write. Because when I'm pen to paper It's like I can"
Being in the zone	p15	"I feel like when I'm in that zone, when I'm writing I feel like something takes over and I can just write whatever"
Tree metaphor provides structure	p3	"it was easier because I'm not really like relying on my own knowledge to be like oh where do I put this? where do I put that? Its like straight into it you know? It's basically being given something, you just write about that"
Writing down hopes and dreams allows for deeper reflection	p5	"I think it was more like because like I've never really sat there and thought like what makes me happy? what actually makes me happy? like what do I want to do? I mean like obviously I have, but not to an extent where I am writing it on a tree and that"
<b>Creativity</b>		
Appreciation of the creative resources	p3	"I liked like creating with all the different pictures and colours and stuff. I liked that"
The forest of life as an art gallery	p11	"it was a nice little art gallery"
Tree allowing creativity	p2	"you are thinking about creativity, you are thinking about making it look nice"
Making it look pretty	p16	"its like being able to write and make it look pretty"
Suits creative personality	p16	"Yeah like that's the creative side of me."
<b>The Personal Importance of the Tree</b>		
My tree is Important	p19	"This is my tree. So this is who I want on my tree".

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	p19	"Because I was looking at my tree like this is <b>important.</b> "
	p14	"even if it goes somewhere else, it's still on there and I can see it"
Pride in the tree and excitement to share	p9	"I was so excited I won't lie I wanted to show my tree"
Focussing on your own tree	p7	"everyone's focusing on their own one"
<b>D: CONNECTING WITH OTHERS</b>		
<b>Working Together and Supporting Each other</b>		
Everyone in the same boat	p7	"they're doing the same thing as me so I'm having fun with it"
A supportive and friendly group	p12	"It was a nice little group as well so like everyone had fun."
Surprise that everyone took part	p11	"I didn't think everyone was going to take part and they did and I was like oh ok, this is nice, yeah its nice."
Supporting each other	p12	"liked the fact that we could give people advice or like messages. When I went up to mine I saw some messages and I was like aww that's nice [laughs]. So I erm yeah it made me feel happy that I could do that for someone else as well, yeah, it was nice".
	p12	I just liked the fact that everyone was making each other feel better with the post-it notes and stuff like that. It was a nice little group as well
<b>Getting to Know Each other</b>		
Strangers but not strangers	p9	" did enjoy because I get a chance to like tell like strangers, not strangers, I don't like know everyone know everyone but I know some people"
Unexpected shared experiences	p10	"because I feel like there's some things that I didn't realise that other people realise about what's wrong or like triggers and stuff like that"
Noticing similarities with others	p8	"Someone saying something might even spark up something that I think about myself.. because that's what.. because some people's trees when they read out theirs I was like oh yeah I'm gonna put that down as well"
Nice to see other peoples trees	p8	"it was nice to be able to see everyone else's."

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An opportunity to ask people about themselves	p8	"you get a chance to ask people about them and stuff... just get to know people and that."
A chance to gain insight into others	p8	"I found it very insightful because it lets you like hear about other peoples like dreams, passions and stuff"
A chance to give people an insight on me	p9	"a chance to give people an insight on me"

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## Personal Experiential Themes: Zain

### PERSONAL EXPERIENTIAL THEMES

#### Subthemes

Experiential Statements

#### A: A MIXED EXPERIENCE DUE TO CHALLENGES OF BEING A CARE LEAVER

##### Difficulty Reflecting on the Past

Found the whole experience difficult

Page  
Number

Illustrative Quotes

p8

"Interviewer: Was there any bit that you kind of didn't like about the day anything you found a bit more difficult?"

Zain: The whole thing"

The experience brought back difficult memories of childhood

p1

"I mean, it just gave me this memory. This memory just popped in my head it was going back to when I was kid, just me by myself, in my own room"

A choice not to focus on the past

p3

"Erm. For me, I didn't write about my past on the tree. I wrote about what I'm dealing with. Now-ish."

A difficult experience was made easier by "being in a good place" and not dwelling on the past

p8

"I focussed on saying leave the past in the past and focussing on improving"

A choice not to share anything too personal about himself that may remind him of the past

p5

"I didn't write anything personal I don't think. That will make me think about my past you know, yeah."

Past experiences would have been too shocking to share with others

p5

"You would have been surprised, you would have been like, wow, you know. The stuff I've done, the stuff I've had to deal with yeah"

Individuals should be able to share as much or as little as they want about their life experiences, being asked direct questions can be difficult

p2

"Obviously you discussed your path, you know, I don't wanna bring it up just in case. "

Has been through a lot in his life and this has impacted his confidence	p5	"The stuff I've done, the stuff I've had to deal with yeah. All that. And it all starts. We all start gaining our confidence when we're young. "
Ideas about family life are complex and confusing when you have been in care	p5	"Especially when we reach as an adult, we think that we need to separate or we need to back with their family. Some people need to not have a family, you know. The people with family don't wanna be with family, the people without family wants to be with family"
Highlighting the collective experience of care leavers in being independent, difficult relationships with family	p2	"And hopefully we do get the help that we need when we go through them stages. "
<b>Being Independent</b>		
If something goes wrong I need to sort it out for myself	p8	
Difficult experiences leave you with unanswered questions and difficult feelings which you have to work out for yourselves	p6	"You know and all it rains and things and all of that comes to me. "
Working out who you are on your own	p2	"It's hard because all these questions you have to answer them. You don't want to find them somewhere else you want it to come from you" "just see who you really are when you're by yourself."
<b>Difficult but Enjoyable</b>		
Difficult but enjoyable	p1 p10	" But yeah tree of life was good, tree of life was good" "Interviewer: What about for you then, what did you enjoy about it?  Zain: Everything to be honest"
The group appeared to him to be engaged in and enjoy the experience	p9	"everyone enjoyed doing it. Everyone enjoyed doing it. And as you could see everyone was engaging to everything what you said. That, that was good "
The experience is difficult to articulate	p1	"Tree of Life was hard to explain. "
Would be open to doing it again	p9	"I think it's an activity that you guys should consider doing again. "

	p11	"I mean don't do the same session another time, do a different one that's what I mean. "
The metaphorical structure of the tree was easy to follow and the drawing itself was easy	p2	": The drawing was easy. It was just a basic one. Erm everything detailed was, everything presented was... Every point was understandable so that everyone could basically you know respond to, you know. So the questions was easy for someone to respond to"
Difficulty remembering some aspects of the Tree of Life suggests that some parts were less important	p7	"Can't remember" (response given to three questions)
<b>B: GAINING A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF YOURSELF</b>		
<b>Self-Reflection</b>		
A process of self-reflection	p1	"To basically think deeply within themselves..I done what I could, told them what I could do, told them what I wanna do, told them what I wanna achieve, my history, you know. Yeah."
Focussing on what I want to achieve and what makes me me	p4	"I'm focusing on what I want to achieve, on what makes me me you know. What do I need to do in my spare time. I need to focus, start helping other people, friends you know, along the way, things I've done."
It's important to put difficult experiences behind you and focus on working out who you are as an individual on your own.	p2	"More like I kept myself in a room locked up, trying to just discover myself. You know, saying to myself what do I wanna do, what do I wanna achieve...You just gotta break free from all of that and then just see who you really are when you're by yourself. "
It's important to understand our histories as they make us who we are	p8	"My history as well is is..you know it's fine, it makes me who I am you know. "
<b>Considering the Future</b>		
The importance of spending time understanding yourself and considering the future	p2	"saying to myself what do I wanna do, what do I wanna achieve."

The experience helped consider what he needs to do to reach his goals and "get himself back together"	p4	"I mean, because the place I'm in getting myself back together. I'm focusing on what I want to achieve, on what makes me me you know. What do I need to do in my spare time. I need to focus, start helping other people, friends you know,"
Would like to join the army, looking forward to routine and learning new things in the future	p7	"The path I'm going to choose that I spoke to my PA about was joining the army. Getting some, you know outside routine, getting myself in a routine, getting disciplined you know, learning new stuff, you know."
Important decisions to be made	p6	"In this world there are too many options for a young person to choose. I'll be honest. "
A worry about what the future holds	p8	"Am I going to get my own place and what's that going to be like for me? ....You know would I, would I relapse and go back to hospital or something like that, and things like that"
You need to work hard and plan carefully to meet your goals	p6	"Hopes and dreams, those are just dreams. Dreams really don't come true.....Don't believe in that anymore. But what I do believe is that if you wanna do something then you gotta study for it...you have to think of a plan C to get to plan A"
<b>Taking Back Control of Stories Told About You</b>		
It's hard not having control over your own life and stories told about you.	p2	"We get to let people see who we are, instead of people controlling us and telling the people a different story. You know. Its just, its hard, it's hard. You know. "
It's important to break free from the stories told by others and "let people see who we are".	p2	"there's some arguments in the house and you get the blame all the time. That's normal, that's normal. Sometimes. You just gotta break free from all of that "
As a group, care leavers can be misunderstood. The Tree of Life enables care leavers to be better understood by others	p11	"Well one, for you guys to understand us better as young people, and that's just it. "

The Tree of Life enables care leavers to be better understood by others	p1	"So that you guys can understand them individually."
<b>C: STRENGTHENING FRIENDSHIPS</b>		
It was good to be away from home and catching up with friends	p10	
	p8	"You know, coming away from home for a bit, stuff like that."
Coming together to share experiences	p1	"It was just, it was just good to catch up"
A feeling of relief when sharing with others	p5	"The way how to gather everyone up to share experiences."
Understanding that we share the same feelings	p4	"It was a stress relief. I felt like let it be open."
Acknowledgement that everyone has experienced difficulty in their life	p2	"I mean it's good to understand that we do share the same feelings."
It is important to understand others points of view and what they are dealing with in order to be a good friend and be able to support them	p4	"because everyone has their experience, a shared feeling no matter what way they place it, you know. "
	p4	"And it's good to hear from other people's point, friends' point of view of what they're dealing. Either if its in the past or the present. It's good to understand that. If you are going to be their friend it's good to understand them. "
	p4	"So we can understand each other's history and try to change it you know. Try to change it or try to help them as much as we can you know. "
The Tree of Life strengthened friendships	p4	"So that tree of life basically just made the friendship that one little bit stronger you know"

**Personal Experiential Themes: Yasmin**

**PERSONAL EXPERIENTIAL THEMES**

**Subthemes**

Experiential Statements

**Page  
Number**

**Illustrative Quotes**



## **A: A PAINFUL EXPERIENCE**

### **An Existing Relationship Made for an Uncomfortable Experience**

Relationship with one person in the group made the overall experience uncomfortable	p2	"hmmm ok the, the whole day was a bit [makes sighing noise and pulls a face] because of someone that was there. But never mind. "
	p15	"Dealing with the people there. Dealing with one person there."
Finding the group situation uncomfortable	p8	"Uncomfortable."
A worry that the notes written on her tree may say something bad	p12	"I didn't want anything to be bad. "

### **Difficult to Reflect on and Share Personal Challenges and Experiences**

Not had a great past and would rather not talk about or think about this	p3	"I know my past and it's not a great one but I can talk about it. I just prefer not to. Its like yeah I don't know what to say about that. "
Difficult to know what to write or share about her past	p3	"hmm [long pause]. I'm not going to lie I don't really know what to say. "
Difficult to think about the important people in her life	p3	"A bit of a struggle, I'm not going to lie. There was a time when we was talking about that and the people that was important to us and I'll say a bit about that later but I found that a bit of a struggle as well "
Not having many people close. Some important people aren't with her anymore	p4	"Because there was, there's only like two people in my life who I would have put. "
Too personal and difficult to think about the people that should go on the tree	p4	"And its like if I was to put them there are other people in my life that aren't with me anymore that I would have wanted to put more but I didn't know if I should or shouldn't. Because like, its too personal. "
An internal conversation about whether or not to engage with the storms	p13	"I was like do I talk about this? I don't want to talk about this. I just sat there like I don't feel like I can talk about this"

Storms too uncomfortable and painful to talk about	p13	"A struggle I'm not gonna lie when that happened I kind of went a bit silent."
	p13	"It was very nerve wracking. That's the word, nerve-wracking. "
Discomfort in talking about storms within the interview	p14	"[Long pause] I don't know what to say, erm. I'm not going to lie I don't really remember. I don't want to talk about the storms."
<b>Just Getting Through It</b>		
The Tree of Life was a Struggle	p3	"A bit of a struggle, I'm not going to lie" "I found that a bit of a struggle as well "
A mixed experience	p2	"hmmm ok the, the whole day was a bit [makes sighing noise and pulls a face] because of someone that was there. But never mind. Um I don't know I just feel like eye-opening"
Avoided engaging with the activity on a deeper level, instead rushing through	p6	"I feel like I was done quite quick I'm not going to lie"
Difficulty remembering specific aspects	p2	"What are the roots again."
	p7	"Could you be a bit more specific?"
Did not complete the 'gifts' aspect	p7	"Oh I didn't get to that bit"
Certificates not important	p14	"What the filling in the certificate [laughs]? It was just the last.. I don't really know what to say [laughs]. "

**B: THE IMPACT OF PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS ON ENGAGEMENT**

**Self-Awareness and Confidence in Skills**

Self awareness and confidence as to what she is and isn't good at	p4	"So I don't mean to sound like one of those people but I found it kind of easy because I know what my skills are. Like I know that I'm good at certain things and I know that I'm not good at certain things."
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	p11	"But writing for other people, that was easy. I'm good at complimenting other people's like work, and stuff that they've done, things that I think they did good at"
Writing notes for other people felt easy and natural	p11	"But writing for other people, that was easy...I didn't really feel any kind of way it was just like, natural."
A confidence in being able to do whatever she puts her mind to	p11	"I don't think it's hard for people to do well at something. They just have to try."
<b>Hiding The True Self</b>		
A sense of hiding her true self	p12	"Like I don't seem like it but I'm very much a pessimist. "
	p10	"I have a lot of anxiety, I'm not going to lie. I hide it very well though."
A realisation that opening up is more difficult for her than she thought	p8	" But I can't open up to people as well as I think I can."
Feeling awkward and anxious when sharing with the group	p10	"Awkward. I felt really awkward...Anxiety. I have a lot of anxiety"
Does not like to open up to others	p8	"I'm a very closed off person."
Finding the interview difficult due to needing to open. Up	p8	"Like right now I'm finding this conversation a bit of a struggle. But I'm trying. "
Difficulty articulating herself	p4	"I'm not good at talking. Like English is not good. Yeah, I can't speak properly. It just doesn't work. My brain doesn't comprehend the words. I can understand what people are saying and I can like give you a sentence back but its like, my brain struggles to put the sentence together."
	p5	"but yeah the words struggle to come to me."
	p3	"Its like yeah I don't know what to say about that."
	p14	"[Long pause] I don't know what to say, erm."

	p14	"I don't really know what to say [laughs]."
Difficulty with open ended nature of the questions	p2	[long pause from Yasmin] x2
Uncomfortable talking about herself and sharing her thoughts within the interview	p17	"Interviewer: I feel like you seem really nervous about it"
		"Yasmin: Yeah I am [laughs] "
<b>C: MOTIVATION FOR THE FUTURE</b>		
A new found motivation for the future	p1	" I need to start doing stuff that gets me towards that goal, like I need too.. And then I realised from that like I need to do this. I want to do this. I'm going to do this!"
Being encouraged to think about things I would not ordinarily think about allowed a new insight into herself	p1	"I thought it was eye opening. Because there's a lot of things that were in the tree of life that I wouldn't have normally just thought about on a regular basis, like, with the. My aspirations and stuff"
The motivation to take action on reaching her goals is the most important outcome of the Tree of Life	p6	"It just made me think like what I want to do with life and what I want to do in the future. And quite frankly, as I've said its like made me go towards my goals more. That's what that has done for me. Its made me want to take action on what I want. "
Considering what needs to be done to reach her goals	p1	"because I want to be an airline stewardess, I want to be a flight attendant. I need to start doing stuff that gets me towards that goal, like I need too.. "
Thinking about aspirations and the future pushed her towards doing a college course	p1	"that's what actually helped me to do my college course. It's what like, pushed me a little bit "
<b>D: COMFORT AND CONFIDENCE IN SHARED EXPERIENCE</b>		
Similarities between the group members gave her the confidence to share	p9	"That's what.. that's what like, gave me the confidence to talk in front of the group. it was was like, it was so similar that was like, "

Knew there would be some similarities but the extent of this was eye-opening and almost overwhelming	p9	"Eye opening. Because like I didn't think..because I know that we've all come from similar backgrounds, but I didn't think that it would be like, so similar in a way. Like, when people read about what they like, what they had to say about their life and stuff, I was like, this is way too similar, nah. That's what.. that's what like, gave me the confidence to talk in front of the group. it was was like, it was so similar that was like, "
Finding comfort in the shared trauma of the group	p9	"I felt comfortable in a way. Like that shared trauma just helped. I don't know why."
Enjoyed being around other people	p15	"I liked that I was like able to be around people, like my friends and my sister."
The presence of friends and her sister allowed her to feel comfortable in an uncomfortable situation	p15	"they were able to make me feel comfortable in an uncomfortable situation...Just their presence, just being there."

Appendix 13: Table of Group Experiential Themes

Group Experiential Themes (GETs)					
	GET 1: Uncertainty and Discomfort	GET 2: Individual Barriers and Facilitators	GET 3: Developing Identity	GET 4: Connecting with Others	GET 5: Hope and Motivation for the Future
Maya	<b>UNCERTAINTY AND DISCOMFORT</b>	<b>The Personal Process of Reflection Most Important</b>  <b>A Positive Approach</b>	<b>The Importance of Reflecting on Yourself</b>	<b>CONNECTION WITH OTHERS</b>	<b>Hope for the Future</b>
Inaya	<b>AN UNCOMFORTABLE PROCESS</b>	<b>Difficult to Fully Engage</b>  <b>TOGETHER BUT ALONE</b>	<b>Reflecting on Yourself is Difficult but Important</b>  <b>Identifying What's Important Now</b>	<b>BECOMING CLOSER TO HER SISTER</b>	<b>Identifying what's Important in the Future</b>
Jack	<b>UNCOMFORTABLE AND OUT OF THE ORDINARY</b>	<b>BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT</b>	<b>A WISH TO HAVE ENGAGED MORE</b>  <b>REALISING THE VALUE</b>	<b>Motivated by the Group</b>	
Jade	<b>Uncertainty and Discomfort at First</b>	<b>THE TREE METAPHOR</b>	<b>REFLECTING ON THE SELF</b>	<b>CONNECTING WITH OTHERS</b>	<b>Planning for the Future</b>

**Difficulty Reflecting on and Sharing Challenges**

**Supportive Factors**

Zain

**A MIXED EXPERIENCE DUE TO CHALLENGES OF BEING A CARE LEAVER**

**GAINING A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF YOURSELF**

**STRENGTHENING FRIENDSHIPS**

**Considering the Future**

Yasmin

**A PAINFUL EXPERIENCE**

**An Existing Relationship made for an Uncomfortable Experience**

**COMFORT AND CONFIDENCE IN SHARED EXPERIENCE**

**MOTIVATION FOR THE FUTURE**

**THE IMPACT OF PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS ON ENGAGEMENT**

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#### **Appendix 14. Research Diary extract 20.03.23**

*I initially visualised the GETs as a linear process or journey. With participants starting with feelings of discomfort and uncertainty, then experiencing different factors that impacted upon whether they were able to engage with the Tree of Life or not.*

*However, through my reading as part of the write up of the discussion I came across two papers which talk about the factors that cause care experienced young people to open up to others. These shed a new light on what I had found and I began to see how some of the barriers and facilitators could be re-conceptualised and grouped. For example, supportive facilitators and the mixed experiences of the group setting can both be understood within the context of trust. I also began to see the GETs as more interlinked than initially thought with the barriers and facilitators being multidirectional.*

*I considered whether I needed to re-group or rewrite my findings as a result of this, including a more interlinked visual and grouping these factors together. However, I felt that the analysis process should not be impacted by literature and I should be 'bracketing this off' whilst engaging with the participants transcripts. Seeing each transcript as a discrete entity and engaging fully in the analysis the process without these influences. It is tempting to alter it to make it 'neater' but it feels more authentic for my findings to remain as they were, generated by my analysis process alone, rather than my engagement with the literature.*