

Phototherapy: Reflecting on the bigger picture

DP INVESTIGATES

The application of combining photography with therapy is a path that shouldn't be missed. Phototherapy may sound like a surreal concept, but it's a tried-and-tested technique, providing essential help for troubled minds to seek solace. If used correctly and professionally, it can be a way of exploring memories to heal mental health needs, deciphering a person's self-construct through reflection of the images they've taken.

As phototherapy teacher Judy Weiser (www.phototherapy-centre.com) explains, "Phototherapy techniques use people's own personal snapshots, family albums and pictures taken by others (and the feelings, memories, thoughts, beliefs and other information these evoke) to deepen and enhance their therapy or counselling process, in ways that words alone cannot do."

Triggering lost thoughts or feelings by using phototherapy can be a great method of introspection and mental healing, but to give another perspective on this subject, the practical uses of photography can also be applied to improve a person's mental state and disposition due to a physical disability, or to heal their lost engagement with real life.

Teaching and involving people into using the art can help enthuse personality and confidence, opening an interesting realm of mental health care and giving a new voice to those in need. Therapeutic photography is another concept, different to phototherapy, incorporating photo-based activities initiated by an individual or a group, using the method in non-therapy conditions.

The Nailsworth Natural Health Centre, Gloucestershire, is home to

5- the number of core techniques used in phototherapy



Cygnus Rising, providing many forms of therapy and health care. Fiona Firth, a doctor within Cygnus Rising, teaches therapeutic photography, collaborating her healing skills with her passion for photography.

Firth is a photography tutor to people who are physically or mentally disabled. The class gives the opportunity for individuals to push forward their creativity and talent, giving hope to their needs. A person's disability does not prevent them using photography as therapy, as Firth explains, "Many disabled people believe that they cannot take pictures because of 'the shakes', hand holding problems or because they are restricted to their wheelchair. These can all be easily overcome with care and adaptability." (Photography for therapy, Gloucestershire, UK - www.cygnusrising.co.uk).

Photography is undeniably one of the most powerful communication tools in society, holding many other meanings than what's just on its flat exterior. Phototherapy and therapeutic photography draw on using the hidden meanings and connotations to explore the human psyche. Though the two methods should be treated differently, therapeutic photography can be used by anyone without professional training. Both do rely on one major consideration, however: exploring what photographs mean other than just the process of taking them.

Photography used for physical and emotional therapy can be traced back to 1941, during World War II. An organisation known as Volunteer Service Photographers was co-founded by Josephine U. Herrick. This unique service provided treatment for wounded soldiers returning to

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YOUR OPINIONS

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VALERIUS

It's not the photography which is successful in the therapy, it's the

giving back of the individual his or her self-belief. The feeling that they do have value, they do have purpose, they do have a reason to exist and there is a value and purpose to that existence.



DEBBI

Photography is therapy - it's great to get out and about with your camera and just

create something beautiful. It makes you appreciate the small and big things in life and allows you to share these with others. It certainly keeps me sane!



ROSIE

Anything that gets you out in the great outdoors and gets your brain in gear is great therapy...

although that's not to say photography is not without its frustrations! I think it's more the action of getting out and doing something fulfilling or interesting.

APOLOGY

In issue 67 of *Digital Photographer*, we wrongly stated that Bytestock offered a free submission service. This service is, in fact, paid for. We apologise to Bytestock for any inconvenience caused.

GOT A STORY?

If you want the DP team to investigate a photographic story, drop us a line or post a forum thread online

military hospitals, and found that by instigating the use of portable darkrooms in wards, patients could learn to develop and print their own photographs. Reports found that they unconsciously used muscles and nerves that were previously thought to be unusable. The organisation was renamed Rehabilitation Through Photography, and is designed to give people a boost of self-esteem and to help them function in the world.

PhotoVoice, (www.photovoice.org) a London-based charity, is an organisation working globally

with local and international bodies, bringing positive social change using photography. It helps minority and marginalised communities to explore the art form and express themselves creatively. Vulnerable groups can work in safe environments, receiving help with their difficulties or trauma. Shy individuals or ignored or overlooked communities are suddenly given the opportunity to have their say.

There's always a concern for less privileged communities to make their stand and rise against contrasting social groups, and an effective answer is by the power of photography.

Mencap, the voice and support for people with learning disabilities, undertakes an annual photographic competition, Snap, in which members are given the chance to express themselves and give others a unique insight into their lives.

It can be argued that when used alone, phototherapy can only provide a minor insight into deep-seated concerns or complex situations, and may not provide clients with a complete solution. However, when used with other professional forms of psychoanalysis, the road to recovery can become a whole lot clearer. ➔

■ "I am Anita, I am a widow and HIV+, my husband also died from Aids. Now I don't even have his photo"

© From *Deborah's Voice*, *Visible Lives*: photography of women in the group in an HIV epidemic in India, edited by *Deborah's Voice*

Phototherapy – Five core techniques in phototherapy, sourced from phototherapy-centre.com

The following five techniques outline how phototherapy can be used, giving you a look at the procedure. These, however, aren't set in stone and every therapist can adapt the techniques according to their patients' needs. They naturally overlap, but are most effective when all of them are used. Find out further details at www.phototherapy-centre.com.

Phototherapy methods:

■ 1. Clients' own photos: Imagery that the client takes, creates, or collects from other sources are used. Therefore every image is a self-portrait,

providing answers to why they took the image, revealing what matters most in their life. When time is spent deciphering the psychological code, inner feelings are revealed.

■ 2. Photos of the client taken by others: This method lets the client see their self from another perspective. By looking into other people's photography, a comparison of yourself in this image can be made to how you see yourself otherwise. The client's self-image is now seen differently and they realise how they present themselves to others around them.

■ 3. Self-portraits: Having the client take a self-portrait, with no influence from others, opens the door to self-representation. Proving to be greatly therapeutic, a self-portrait will allow the client to reflect on their 'inner self', and also realise how much of their own self-judgments exist due to other people's perceptions of them.

■ 4. Using photography in family albums: Sharing photo albums is a great way for people to reconnect with their past, and young people to learn where they've come from. Psychologically, by collecting

photographs of a person's history, a bigger picture is formed and can allow them to look at their roots for identity.

■ 5. Photo-projectives: Therapists use this technique to find the reasons why a person reacts to a photograph in a certain manner, or even why they had taken it, and to gather information about that person's deeper unconscious values. Photo-projectives can allow the person to confront their own characteristics and interpretations of the world around them without being judged by others.