

Diversity Working Group

“Diversity is not destabilising, but polarisation/ splitting is” (Mounk, 2022)

In September I attended a lecture by Marie-Anne Chidiac, a psychotherapist from Lebanon who now lives in London. This quote was shared at a lecture, and it was helpful, so I thought I would start by sharing these words.

In August Hanan Issa, the first Muslim National Poet of Wales was appointed. She is a Welsh-Iraqi poet, film maker, scriptwriter and artist. At her inauguration she wore a gown of Welsh flowers in the Arab room at Cardiff Castle. The photo touched me deeply. There is a link to the interview article in the Wales Arts Review below. In the interview she says “All the flowers and foliage were grown locally and were chosen for their significance to Wales. The broom meadowsweet and oak flowers are present as they were used to create the maiden Blodeuwedd of the Mabinogi legend. It was my way of saying I exist here, a hijabi Muslim woman cloaked in the blossoms of ancient Welsh folklore, but in a space that celebrates both my Welsh and Arab heritage”. At the time I heard many comments about her being a ‘diversity hire’. Having heard her spoken word and read her essays on belonging I am aware of her talent, so why do people still make those comments? Whilst watching Strictly Come Dancing I have heard people in my social circle make comments and roll their eyes when a large dancer speaks about body confidence, and state that there is always a ‘token’ disabled dancer to draw in the sympathy votes. You only have to see the clip of a little girl watching light up, and say excitedly “I have dwarfism too” to know how important it is for Ellie Simmonds, a British Paralympian swimmer to be visible and dancing on that show.

An educated white woman asked me the other day “have you heard the controversy about The Little Mermaid?”, and I asked what the controversy was, and she said “well she’s black in the new Disney film”. Is that still considered controversial? For that to be considered controversial pains me, but it still is. Yes, it is Black History Month, and whilst I am passionate about telling and re-telling stories about people who were not acknowledged in history, I am deliberately drawing attention to recent examples in the arts to demonstrate that this is still a live issue, these conversations still need to happen today and we, as Chroma therapists, need to be open to having these conversations openly within Chroma and out in the professional sphere. As therapists we are attuned to splitting and polarisation, let’s collectively name it.

Registered with OFSTED: 2571603

Diversity Report

You will be aware of the diversity survey Chroma sent out before the last team day. Jo has been very busy collating a report based on this data and comparing it to data nationwide. When this is completed, we will think about how best to share it with the organisation. It isn't surprising that Chroma's identity is in the majority white, middle class, female and able bodied. Overall, the message is that we need to be better at collating data about who our therapists are, who our clients are and the health needs of the families we interact with. This year we have become better at this but we need to improve. We know we have a responsibility to be a voice for the minority therapists and clients within our organisation, and if we don't know how to do that, to be honest and have a conversation, no matter how difficult it might feel. This month, on the 24th October some of our Chroma therapists and families and many people in the UK will be celebrating Diwali. Do you know how many days Diwali is celebrated for? Do you know why there are lights switched on and fireworks? When all that is happening around you do you make assumptions? Do you split off or do you try to connect somehow? 13% of our workforce have a non-visible disability. Are we identifying our therapists support needs enough and asking the right questions in case reviews and during onboarding?

This year the staff in Chroma's head office created a Diversity Working Group. This looks to build on the questions and learning from a Diversity training day we had as a senior team and decide how we can embed this thinking and awareness throughout the organisation. This is an ongoing process and includes the practical (ie reviewing what and how we gather data, how diversity is included in our Statement of Purpose, our recruitment etc), training and exploration of the areas we need to explore further. Some of this will lead to actions, others will be more about bringing this thinking and awareness into the different areas of our work; when having conversations with our referrers, families and in case reviews.

Focus Group

We have benefited from involving Hayley Southern and Tia Terefe so far by inviting them to our meeting, and we would like to build on this. We would like to invite Chroma therapists to form a Focus Group to help us continue these conversations, challenge our assumptions, and make sure that trying to meet everyone's diverse needs is at the core of what we practice. If you are interested in forming and joining and advising the Diversity Working Group, please send me an email. We envisage you meeting a couple of times a year but we would like to hear your ideas about what this could look like.

Registered with OFSTED: 2571603

We are keen to make changes and I am proud that Chroma listens and supports their therapists. For example, one of the protective characteristics within diversity is our socio-economic status. We have had lots of emails about the costs of materials and travel. Chroma responded and supported their workforce financially. However, we know we can do more. We are keen to listen, name our privileges and our differences and most importantly provide a space for these conversations. Chroma has enough soul and power to give The Little Mermaid her voice back.

<https://www.walesartsreview.org/hanan-issa-in-conversation/>

Mounk. Y (2022) The Great Experiment: Why Diverse Democracies Fall Apart and How They Can Endure

Seren Grime

Registered with OFSTED: 2571603