

Recovery Under Sail: Rehabilitation Clients' Experience of a Sail Training Voyage

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Acknowledgements

We acknowledge a grant from the Tectona Trust to the University of Exeter Medical School to conduct this evaluation. We thank Dr. Roger Crabtree of the Tectona Trust for his help and guidance. We thank Jessica Briggs for conducting some interviews. We also thank Ruby Newton from Phoenix Futures for their help in arranging interviews. We thank Cecilia Manosa Nyblon and Elizabeth Dodsworth who transcribed the interviews. The work was partially funded by the UK National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care of the South West Peninsula (PenCLAHRC) but the views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and not necessarily those of NIHR or the UK Department of Health. Authorial order represents extent of contribution.

Abstract

Sail training refers to sea voyages designed to foster personal and social change. Such training has mainly involved young people but may have the potential to enhance adults who are recovering from drug and alcohol addiction. During the “Voyage of Recovery”, clients in drug rehabilitation centres across the UK were given the opportunity to participate in a five-day sail training voyage. Pre- and post-voyage interviews were conducted with 11 clients to explore their experiences of being selected and participating in this voyage. Clients enjoyed the experience and found it to be beneficial, promoting, self-insight, new life plans and social skills development. Living in an unfamiliar, potentially dangerous and inescapable environment necessitating close proximity to others and teamwork under the supervision of expert authority figures generated bonding and caring for others as well as development of new competencies and greater self confidence. The findings suggest that sail training can be beneficial to clients in recovery and highlight key features that may optimise effectiveness.

Key Words: Recovery, Addiction, Drug and Alcohol, Sail Training, Outdoor Education

Introduction

Sail training refers to sea voyages designed to foster personal and social change. Such voyages, present participants with physical and emotional challenges which demand adoption of new daily routines, co-operative working, acceptance of novel rules and authority figures, management of physical danger and development of psychological and physical stamina. Sail training is part of a wider outdoor education movement rooted in the philosophy Kurt Hahn (Hahn, 1957) who contributed to the development of many such programmes worldwide, including the original “Outward Bound” and the popular, UK “Duke of Edinburgh Award” schemes. There is some evidence that such programmes can create positive psychological change and that this can be sustained over time; but less clarity about how they work and what distinguishes effective from ineffective programmes (Cason & Gillis, 1994; Hattie, Marsh, Neil & Richards, 1997). A key component of sail training is empowering people to cope with a challenging natural environment. A developing evidence base suggests that “nature therapies”, more generally, can help people face and overcome a range of physical and mental health challenges (see Annerstedt & Wahborg, 2011 for a review; Frumkin, 2001).

It is claimed that sail training can enhance participants’ self-confidence, their sense of personal responsibility and their perceived and actual social skills and promote mental health. Consequently, sail training may have the potential to create personal recovery capital (White & Cloud, 2008) among those recovering from dependency on alcohol and drugs.

Few evaluations of the effects of sail training are available. Most have focused on young people and the majority have used surveys focussing on changes in self-esteem and psychological health. For example, Norris and Weinman (1996) compared 43 twenty-year-olds who had undertaken a 3 month sail across the Atlantic with 60 comparable controls. Assessed outcomes included satisfaction with life, psychological distress, coping strategies, generalised self-efficacy, self esteem and optimism. The study found that immediately after the voyage trainees had higher self esteem (than controls) and that this was especially evident among women. Similarly, Growcott and Hunter (2009) assessed the effects of 10-day voyages in a before-after, no-control-group study of 193 trainees with measures taken three to four weeks pre-voyage, at the end of the voyage and at three months post-voyage. They found statistically significant increases in global self esteem from the beginning to the end of the voyage which were maintained, but not further increased, at three months follow up. Similar findings were reported for self esteem in relation opposite sex relations, evaluation of one's own physical appearance and emotional stability.

Finkelstein (2005) assessed whether a sail training programme could enhance "civic-mindedness". Telephone interviews with 160 young trainees showed that most believed their voyages had enhanced their (i) social skills, (ii) trust of others (iii) tolerance of others (iv) capacity to make friends (v) ability to join groups and (vi) their travel competence. Finkelstein concluded that sail training can develop 'civic-mindedness' by fostering networks and alliances can cultivate leadership and co-operative working.

One of the largest evaluations was undertaken by researchers at Edinburgh University (McCulloch, McLaughlin, Allison, Edwards & Tett, 2010). Interviews were conducted with 325 young trainees (from 34 voyages in 17 vessels) at the beginning of, or early in, their voyages. Follow up interviews were conducted with 173 of the initial sample approximately 3 months later. Assessment included before and after completion of a social confidence scale on which participants reported measurable improvement. This improvement was more marked in first time participants than it was in those who had undertaken sail training voyages before. The latter group had initial social confidence scores similar to those collected from first time sail trainees at 3 month follow up. However, not all evaluations find enduring effects of sail training. Carpuso and Borsci (2013) report that immediate, post-voyage self-concept enhancement was not maintained at three month follow up.

A number of studies (Gordon, Harcourt-Smith, Hay & Priest, 1996; Rogers 2004; McCulloch 2007; McCulloch et al., 2010) have used qualitative data from interviews and participant observation to explore trainees' experience of sail training, the significance of the onboard environment and variation between sail training providers. Suggestions from these studies include the potential benefit of pre-voyage briefings, and post voyage support (Gordon et al., 1996) and the value of a structured approach to learning and personal development (McCulloch et al., 2010). McCulloch (2007) suggests an analogy between the sail-training, onboard environment and a "total institution" (Goffman, 1961) as a way of understanding the influence of sail training. Similarly, Rogers proposes that

the confinement of a vessel at sea, creates unavoidable challenges such as living in close quarters, seasickness and other discomforts, that oblige trainees to draw upon their “true selves”, abandoning social pretences. Rogers suggests that this removal of “masks” is a key factor in establishing a sense of trust and community, a positive outcome that is widely reported in the sail training literature.

Thus a developing body of evidence indicates that sail training provides short term psychological benefits that, in some cases, are maintained over time. Using qualitative methods several authors have sought to deconstruct the sail training package to identify features and active ingredients that generate experiences prompting psychological change. However, important questions remain regarding what works best, under what circumstances and for whom. Answers to these question could help could help refine sail training practice and identify participants most likely to benefit.

“The voyage of recovery (VoR)”

Between August and October 2012, approximately 100 men and women recovering from dependency on drugs or alcohol crewed an 85-year-old, 74-tonne, wooden sailing vessel named “Tectona” on a 1500 mile voyage. The voyage was split into 12 legs, around England, Wales and southern Scotland, passing through the Caledonian Canal. Each leg lasted five days and included 10-12 clients selected by therapeutic communities specialising in work with drug and alcohol addictions. Thus each trainee spent five days at sea with 9-11 other recovering trainees and three professional crew members sailing Tectona to her next planned port of call.

The Present Study

The Voyage of Recovery provided an opportunity to study how clients in rehabilitation programmes experienced and understood sail training; the challenges it presented and the significance it had for them and their recovery. We used in-depth interviews from a small group of participants pre- and post voyage to explore the detail of their experiences.

This study is unusual in sampling adults in drug and alcohol rehabilitation, rather than young people to whom sail training is commonly offered. In addition, our methods focus on mapping the *processes* by which sail training may initiate psychological and social change rather than measuring outcomes.

Research Questions

The study, employed qualitative analyses of pre- and post- interview transcripts to examine the responses of a recovery population to sail training, focusing on (i) responses to being selected, (ii) experiences during the five-day voyage and (iii) perceptions of changes following from their involvement. The analyses sought to identify factors and processes underpinning individual change.

Method

Participants

We aimed to interview 12 of the voyage trainees prior to their departure and again after the voyage. Trainees were selected by the centres involved in the voyage. Scheduling

interviews was constrained by the varying availability of trainees and the limited opportunity for interviewers to visit centres. Nonetheless, we recorded and transcribed interviews from 10 trainees both pre- and post- voyage and one additional post-voyage interview. Of the 11 interviewees, two were female and 9 male, similar to the overall voyager population which was 77% male. The mean age of interviewees was 40.2 years, ranging from 26 to 61; compared to the overall voyager mean of 38.2 years, ranging from 24-67. Six of the 12 voyage legs and 5 of the 9 centres providing trainees were represented by the 11 participants. Thus our small sample was representative of the overall VoR trainee population.

Interviewees were fully informed and consented to recording and transcription of interviews. Ethical approval was granted prior to data collection and procedures followed the approved protocol. This included an interview question guide shown in Table 1.

Interviews

Interviewers were encouraged to allow trainees to speak freely about the voyage and to cross off questions as trainees answered them naturally in their descriptions but, nonetheless to return to questions that had not been yet been covered. Interviewers were also encouraged to ask for specific examples and to invite trainees to explain their response where appropriate. Thus the interviews were semi-structured. They lasted 30-40 minutes and were transcribed verbatim. All pre-voyage took place within two weeks of sailing. Post-voyage interviews were conducted at participants' convenience between one and 11 weeks after the voyage.

Analyses

A two-stage thematic analysis was undertaken (Abraham & Gardner, 2009; Bryman, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Initial coding proceeded by assigning preliminary conceptual labels to pertinent quotations with further refinement of these labels as coding progressed and new insights emerged. This constant comparison method was used to identify quotations which should be assigned to the same conceptual labels and to, iteratively, develop an understanding of the core properties of each concept as well as refining the attached labels. This coding was independently and separately undertaken by the first and second authors who subsequently discussed similarities and differences in their coding and agreed on a set of higher level categories that encompassed the initial coding results. We present these derived categories in chronological order highlighting trainees' anticipation of the voyage, their experiences on board and their attribution of voyage-induced change.

Results

Analysis of pre-voyage interview transcripts generated 3 key themes characterising trainees' responses to being selected for the VoR. Analysis of post-voyage transcripts generated 6 themes referring to trainees' experiences during the voyage. One of these ("Influences on Trainees' Social and Personal Experiences") characterised how physical and work aspects of the on board environment shaped their experiences. This theme was divided into 3 sub-themes. Post-voyage interviews also generated 5 themes illustrating

psychological changes attributed to the voyage. A map of the emerging themes is presented in Table 2 and illustrative quotes are presented below.

Pre-voyage Anticipations

Gaining a place

Most interviewees commented on the significance of gaining a place on the voyage, often referring to excitement and challenge:

It's just keeps me busy, kept me focussed. It's given me good things to think about.

Really looking forward to it. [Joe]

and occasionally to ambivalence:

there is something telling me I don't want to go, but I'm going... I'm excited to see if I can do it...because I never push myself, I always put myself down and say I can't do it and I think doing that pushing myself will [make me]... feel great no matter what, even if I can't manage everything on it. I'll just feel great that I pushed myself to go [Liz]

Several voyagers saw the timing of the voyage as particularly meaningful for them:

this voyage is just like it's just come at a perfect time, it's going to just finish off my journey through Phoenix." [Jon]

or as validating changes the respondent had made in their life:

From a life, well from 30 years of making the wrong choice, I'm actually making the right one. And to prove it, that I am, to be on the voyage of recovery in the first place. [Betty]

Being prepared

In pre-voyage interviews, most respondents commented on the extent to which they felt prepared for the voyage commenting how time spent in the rehabilitation unit would be useful to them at sea

I live with nine other people where I am at the minute. I've spent nine months living here so ... not having much personal time, you know, I'm quite used to that. [Les]

I think once you are on the boat, it's like being in the programme really. You are all on the same boat for the same reasons so you've got nothing to not agree with.... Because you are all there for the same reasons, you have that thing in common, you literally are all on the same boat so to speak [Frank]

Expectations, hopes and apprehensions

In pre voyage interviews several people voiced misgivings about being at sea and the possibility of seasickness

I've been thinking about the sea... if it's rough, I'm thinking (laughs) what are we going to do? I know they've (the professional crew) had years of experience but... [Liz]

(Do you have any worries?)... Just seasickness because it does turn people; it does turn them nasty because it's horrible [Andy]

There were also concerns about being in the confined space of a small boat at sea and about meeting and spending time with unfamiliar people:

Oh, it's going to be crammed into.(unclear), sleeping quarters are only small, I think will get to sleep for like four hours at a time. I think something's been said about that. Absolutely crammed together in there Yeah. [Les]

as long as the crew are OK and get on and stuff with each other, don't want there to be an atmosphere in the boat [Jack]

Despite such misgivings, expectations at pre voyage interview were mainly positive, and often took account of possible difficulties as part of an overall picture of a significant and worthwhile challenge. References to challenge were made by most interviewees:

...it's going to be tough, but that's what I like about it, I like the challenge. That's what recovery is all about, challenges. And I am pretty optimistic, but, there's a fear factor [Betty]

I think it's going to be a challenge of a lifetime... you don't know how'll you cope with it. It's just that situation at that time; you have to learn to deal with it.
[Morris]

Positive expectations of friendship, trust, teamwork and mutual support were also common:

We'll have a good laugh; we'll have a laugh so we will... [Jack]

...when it's quite rough, you have to clip each other on in case someone comes loose, make sure that everyone is clipped on and again that is a sense of teamwork, looking after each other. ...Just a little action like that can really bring people together, it's a massive trust issue as well. So I'm sure I think that as time goes on throughout the voyage everyone will become a little close and start looking after each other a bit more.[Frank]

Most voyagers had expectations of the voyage as a learning experience and anticipated personal psychological changes following the voyage:

The challenge it's gonna be, learning to sail the boat. That's gonna be good.

[Les]

I won't really know until the going gets tough I suppose about my determination, about me... like you say the cramped conditions and stuff, where my limits are, ... and equally what I can cope with. I might surprise myself. [Jon]

I'll be setting goals to work as part of the team... To work on my own initiative as well, my confidence as well, I'll be setting goals for my confidence my self esteem and stuff like that... to be assertive with other people as well... to get on with people to see how people think ..., and act [Jack]

I'll reckon it'll build your confidence up for when you go out for interviews for jobs... I'll get to know myself more, how to deal in a tricky situation. [Morris]

The voyage was also seen by some as a significant milestone in their recovery:

...from a shop doorway with a blanket and a can of 9% lager to being at sea, that's a big difference, isn't it? [Betty]

to finally know that I could go out for five days, nearly a week, not needing alcohol, not even needing to think about alcohol will be really rewarding, will be a massive reward[Frank]

Generally prospective voyagers felt ready for the forthcoming challenge and, despite some apprehensions, had strongly positive expectations including social, psychological and rehabilitative benefits.

The Voyage experience

Six themes characterising voyagers' onboard experiences emerged from the analyses.

A Different World

Most voyagers reflected on the novelty of the environment in which they found themselves. Many initially felt some sense of restriction through being on board and commented on how they adjusted to the onboard environment:

Initially I was thinking I expect something bigger. Where are we sleeping? Oh, my goodness me. Are we sleeping in that room? I got used to that. There was just enough room. [Peter]

...you've got to pump up (water), put the water into the kettle and boil them for twenty minutes and then get your bowl, [and] wash up....if you had to do that

really everyday you'd be like... but because it was on there, I don't know, it was just good... [Liz]

Many voyagers commented on the stark difference between everyday life and being on board, surrounded by the sea, and literally “at sea” in an unfamiliar environment.

It was just weird being out at sea and getting up on deck of the boat... very different... it was good different but... I really enjoyed it. [Jack]

I just loved it... there's nothing there's no cars, there's no noise and the stars at night, the sun coming, up the moon; you just appreciate everything more [Betty].

Voyagers discussed how being at sea entailed real risk and necessary hardship and regulation in dealing with those risks.

... of course health and safety's a massive thing ... it literally is lives at risk if it's done wrong and the gravity of that sort of played on you as well. [Jon]

There were three or four of us who were very scared and seasick [but] we just got on with it.... I was scared but also awed by the ferocity of the storm [Peter]

It was hard through the nights just sitting upon on the deck on the watch for 4 hours, boats just going straight quite mundane that time of night, absolutely freezing cold up there as well... cold, dark, being miserable really at night
[Les]

... making sure you had your life jacket on when coming upstairs, making sure you are clipping on during rough seas They [the rules] were there to keep us safe. They were common sense. [Frank]

Voyagers also became aware that their work was essential to the operation of the vessel, not the result of arbitrary rules:

...you knew you had to get the sails up else you weren't getting there. [Morris]

Work, Teamwork and Responsibility

Many quotations illustrate how crewing a sailing ship required teamwork. This is apparent both in the demands of sailing and in activities of daily living:

When you're bringing the sails in, you have to do it in time and you have to wait. Like that person starts and when they give you the nod, that person, it's all timing, in time with each other [Morris]

At one point I was helping one of the ladies that came up with us ...the sea was that rough and I was actually holding her up in front of the cooker while we was cooking the breakfast...[Les].

Voyagers embraced their individual responsibility to contribute to the work of the team so tasks were not seen as chores. They were also conscious of having real responsibility for their own and others' safety.

And nothing was hard work... you wouldn't put it down to...that's hard work, that's a chore we've got to do today, you just did it because you enjoyed doing it.
[Liz]

I had a lot of responsibility on the boat putting up the sails and stuff like that and you're on a rope and ... if you let that rope go the whole sail comes down on top of you it's dangerous ... you know what I mean. [Jack]

Professional Crew and Authority Figures

The presence and competence of the professional crew provided reassurance and security and, as might be expected, the skipper was seen as the ultimate authority and leader of the voyage.

you knew they were in charge... you knew you could go to them if you were struggling with something ... but just the sense that you didn't have to worry on the boat, you didn't have to be scared at any point.[Frank]

There was times when the skipper needed to show us he was the skipper you know and sort of pull us all together because as I said earlier these things needed doing right now you know not when you've finished your chat or finished your cigarette or... it's now. [Jon]

As well as authority and security the professional crew also taught voyagers new skills and supported them in exercising these skills thus fostering a sense of achievement and competence.

the crew themselves made it. They taught you but also kept pushing you to make sure that you remembered your knots and things like that. [Frank]

[I] felt really confident because they trusted us to run boat. [Andy]

While there was a distinction between voyagers and the professional crew this was not a rigidly hierarchical division, voyagers and professional crew could meet on an equal footing.

We all got on really well as I said. We very quickly bonded as a team, crew, staff and peers. We all became one group. [Peter]

[Being with the skipper on night watch] I enjoyed it we bonded quite quick and got on with him right away. [Jack]

the captain was amazing... you can have a good sensible chat with him. [Morris]

The professional crew, their personal commitment and competence and their social skills also provided important role models

[the skipper...] wanted everyone to... feel how he feels about sailing and his enthusiasm kind of spilled over onto us all. [Jon]

It shows what I can be, a couple of years down the line or even now. [Peter]

Emotional and Social Experiences

All voyagers gave positive reports of their emotional experience on board and this often included enjoyment of time for personal reflection on board:

Completely [happy] it's not like I forgot about it all... (i.e. life ashore) it was just make the most of what you've got here now and make the most of it so I was just constantly happy. Having a laugh and everything every night every day. [Liz]

The stern - I used that [for] my time for reflecting... when the sun was going down and I think it puts it into perspective for me... I seemed to be able to accept them [past losses] and think... how pleased they'd [my parents] be for me to be in recovery and to be in a position like that. [Betty]

In most cases group interaction on board was experienced very positively with several voyagers referring to themselves as a family and a team. Unsurprisingly there were some references to disagreements.

we just got on with everybody and everybody boosted everybody up because it was such a great atmosphere.... The camaraderie worked really well we laughed from getting on boat to getting off I've never had another time like this one. ... we're all friends.... it's just it's like a big family. [Andy]

Just keeping each other's spirits up, talking to each other, having a laugh [Les]

Loved it, yeah. Challenging. Not too much. If you work as a team, it's easy innit. If you all communicate and support each other. It was good. [Morris]

... There was a bit of an argument onboard. Not such an argument but a little fall out that wasn't nice but I wasn't around it but you could feel the atmosphere. [Betty]

Influences on Emotional and Social Experience

As well as describing their experiences on board, voyagers identified aspects of the onboard environment that affected their emotional and social experiences. In this theme we highlight 3 commonly identified influences as sub-themes. These, “Proximity and Bonding”, “Shared Enterprise” and “Helping and Caring for Others” link the physical and working environment with the character and quality of social relationships.

Proximity and Bonding

The close quarters of life at sea were acknowledged as a potential stressor but also seen as a positive influence on social relationships:

Interacting with each other and everybody helps everybody it's fantastic atmosphere and it were more intense on boat because we were right close together it were it seemed to be more intense.... it were powerful. [Andy]

I think 'cos we're all together like you know being in a smaller area it just gelled people we got to know each other and that. It was quite upsetting leaving them all. [Peter]

...being in that one room ... fifteen people ... for five days ..., getting on, it is hard ... it's not easy....but it worked somehow with the boat 'cos it's all new, we're out at sea, no distractions...[Joe]

... talking to each other ... about each other's experiences ..., I think that more or less brought us together ... I think more [so] on the boat , being in close quarters.[Terry]

Shared Enterprise

Work on board facilitated relationships, team work and a sense of shared identity.

You know anything could have gone wrong but we was just all working together and it was just amazing how everyone could do it... and it made... us feel proud [Joe]

Everyone took it in turns, nobody getting out of doing the washing up, nobody getting out of helping out with the anchor or the sails. [Frank]

We all gelled together and that we were a great team... Yeah pulling the anchor up there had to be four of us on it and you had to get in the rhythm. [Terry]

Nice being there together, all working together, doing something together as a group, don't know... it works, ...whatever it does; worked for me. There's no way to get away from each other. We all helped each other. [Les]

Helping and Caring for Others

Integral to the development of a shared team identity was the experience of helping others and being helped, especially to ensure safety in a potentially dangerous environment.

*We were all making sure that each one of us [was] safe, including the crew
[Peter]*

*... this old[er] guy ... everywhere he went- I was like, “are you clipped on”, and I
would be holding the back of him. Things like that just automatically come [to]
you... you didn't have to but I just [did] ... just to help people. [Liz]*

Achievement and Developing New Competencies

All those interviewed post-voyage reported gaining a sense of achievement through participation in the voyage. This included exercising new skills and, thereby, being able to imagine new social identities and picture how significant others would view them.

*...we drove the boat we put the sails up we navigated we wrote log in we did
everything. We actually sailed the boat between us. [Andy]*

Even got to drive [helm] the boat and everything so that was fantastic.... I felt like a captain. [Terry]

I was just thinking of my brother ... my family ... I would love them to see what I'm doing ...They'd be gobsmacked, instead of (me) sitting at home in a flat getting drunk.... well I wish he'd seen me on that boat. [Liz]

I kept on coming out of my comfort zone; I found myself pushing myself... the anchor was hard work. .. I pushed myself to continue on with it... The sense I got afterwards.... of reward... is a very positive thing... knowing I have achieved something I wouldn't normally push myself to do. [Frank]

Self-Attributed Changes

All interviewees reported that the voyage had changed them in some way. Below we highlight 5 categories of self-attributed change, namely, “Self-Insight, Perseverance and Inner Strength”, “Social Skills”, “Increased Confidence”, “Impact of the Voyage on Recovery” and “New Plans and Horizons”.

Self-Insight, Perseverance and Inner Strength

Several voyagers identified new learning about themselves, recognising personal qualities they were unaware of. The demands of sailing in all weathers could reveal voyagers' capacities to keep going in challenging circumstances

Patience, I'd say. I didn't know I had it. [Peter]

I should... not expect too much of myself but accept... that I am a strong person.

[Betty]

[I] can work as part of a team.... Work as an individual as well [and] stand up as an individual. [I have] realised that I am a hard working person. [Jack]

some of the challenges that the voyage threw up like you know trying to tie ropes off when it is absolutely peeing it down and you can't see your hand in front of your face it's got to be done and there are things in life that have got to be done whether we want to do them or not [Jon]

I'd never have dreamed of myself doing it. ... I were thinking I'm actually going to do this I am going to push myself. And without stopping; doubting, myself I just got on and did it. And that meant a lot to me. I felt happy afterwards. [Frank]

Social Skills

Several voyagers described how the voyage had changed the way they might relate to others in future, including offering others' support, deferring judgement of others, trusting others to offer support and feeling more relaxed about others' evaluations.

Understanding, if someone's not having a good day...knowing how to help that person through or knowing how to take a step back to give that person space, which is hard to do when you are on an 84 ft yacht. It's knowing how to give the right... level of support to someone who is struggling. [Peter]

To not be as quick to judge ... and try and reserve them judgements for when you actually get to know people 'cos sometimes we don't see people 'til there is a bit of a testing time and they show a bit of their character that nobody's seen before [Jon]

*I don't need nobody to help me. I can do it myself, very stubborn. Even to my own downfall at times but...you **can** rely on other people can't you? Sometimes you need to. [Les]*

... something must have happened to me on the boat because I'd never (normally) walk round (the) garden in wellies ... (I am) always thinking too much"oh I look stupid everyone's going to laugh". [Liz]

Increased Confidence

Through meeting onboard challenges, many voyagers gained increased confidence in their own potential and capacities to meet future challenges.

That I'm strong enough to tackle Tectona and come through this the way I do then I'm strong enough to tackle the other decisions and things I've got to face in me life now. [Betty]

It's helped me a lot, it's got me to know me more better... patience, confidence. I am a lot more confident than what I was [Morris]

It's given me the experience to go out there and try and find a job and get working again that's what it's given me. The confidence to go out there and do interviews and that. [Terry]

You know you can go out and do anything in life, it's just that feeling... you've expanded and you're stronger and bigger and more able to attack life instead of just laying back and letting life attack you. [Andy]

Impact of the Voyage on Recovery

For some voyagers the experience consolidated their ongoing abstinence and gave them new reasons to avoid alcohol and drugs.

It's just instilled in me that... [during] substance misuse ... none of this would be possible I wouldn't be able to do the things I do ... it just gives you a lot of focus just to keep going forward... and keep learning new things and keep changing... I

wouldn't even contemplate going back to substances 'cos everything would just be gone [Joe]

There are better things without drugs and alcohol. If I would have been on drugs or drink on that boat I wouldn't have remembered any of it. Because I am clear minded I can remember everything what went on. [Morris]

New Plans and Horizons

Many voyagers reported that the voyage experience had helped them think more positively about the future. For some this was a general reframing of life opportunities and for others it related to particular decisions.

For me it was like a complete turnaround in life ... something like that happening at 50 years of age you know most people are starting to wind down then... and I'm only just coming to life. [Betty]

...it just instils something in you that if you put your mind to it you can do anything. I've come off there and I've signed up for the IT course... when I come back ... I thought right ... I've got to start ticking things off now just short term goals ... achievable ones. [Joe]

I've got a job interview here tomorrow so it's up to me now and I did bring that back from the voyage... the best way I can describe it is that voyage was so

different from my normal day to day life and I didn't want to come back and things be the same... the voyage kind of gave me the impetus to want to retain that feeling and continue to change my life. [Jon]

Discussion

To our knowledge, this is the first study of how an adult recovery population responded to a sail training experience. Participants valued this add-on rehabilitative intervention and reported personal changes attributed directly to their onboard experiences. Fourteen themes emerged from our thematic analyses of 10 pre- and 11 post-voyage interviews. These highlighted the importance of pre-voyage experiences and particular features of the onboard environment as instigators of positive psychological change. Interviewees also detailed types of personal change promoted by the voyage.

Ten pre-voyage interviews highlighted the impact of being selected, the extent to which interviewees felt prepared as well as apprehension regarding the onboard experience. The post-voyage interviews emphasised the novelty and restrictions of the onboard environment, the nature of the work required, relationships with other voyagers and the professional crew. Trainees reflected on how proximity, teamwork and interdependence and reliance on one another led to bonding and development of a shared purpose and identity and facilitated rewarding, co-operative social interactions and positive emotional experiences. The post-voyage interviews also revealed ways in which voyagers felt these new experiences had generated personal change. Five emergent themes described distinct

types of self-attributed change, including new self insights, enhanced social skills, and increased confidence in general and in relation to recovery from alcohol and drug abstinence. A number of interviewees emphasised how the voyage had given them a new start from which to build their recovery and improve their everyday lives.

Few previous studies have considered trainees pre-voyage experiences. McCulloch et al. (2010) compared voyager expectations to voyage experiences and found that expectations were typically fulfilled. However, Gordon et al. (1996) speculate that the experience of sail training could be enhanced by pre-voyage briefings designed to engender realistic expectations. Our interviewees, from rehabilitative communities, appeared to be well briefed and prepared. They emphasised the psychological impact of selection itself and their positive pre-voyage expectations. Such preparation and expectations may well have shaped their onboard experiences.

McCulloch's (2007) findings emphasises the importance of limitations of space, movement and privacy in developing social bonds between trainees. Both McCulloch (2007) and Rogers (2004) characterise sail training vessels as institutions that impose inescapable, daily requirements and routines on trainees. Our results also highlight how the physical and social environment of the vessel created an imperative for trainees to learn new ways of working and interacting and to manage themselves both physically and psychologically in the context of high social interdependence. This is evidenced in quotes describing work, teamwork and responsibility and in proximity and bonding, shared enterprise and helping and caring for others. Thus constraints of the onboard environment

facilitated personal change by resetting the social structure and dynamics within which trainees live. These findings are consistent with clinically significant decreases in drug and alcohol addiction in adolescents who participate in outdoor intervention programs (e.g., Bennett, Cardone, & Jarczyk, 1998). These programs emphasise the importance of developing team work and resilience skills by being involved in adventure-based programs such as extreme ropes courses and wilderness camping (see Annerstedt & Wahrborg, 2011 for a review).

We found strong evidence of emergence of shared social identity between trainees. This was consistent across interviewees on different voyage legs and may have been facilitated by the composition of the crews. On each leg of the voyage, trainees were drawn from one or sometimes two residential facilities. Some trainees saw themselves as representative of their therapeutic community or, more widely, of people in recovery and what they can achieve. Many trainees began with a strong positive anticipation of the potential of the voyage as a helpful change agent in a journey of recovery to which they and their fellow trainees were committed. Thus we cannot assume that the psychosocial impact of the VoR mirrors that of other sail training programmes where trainees do not share a strong initial identity and may not be seeking or anticipating personal change.

Post-voyage interviews highlight the intensity of the VoR experience and suggest that trainees increased what White and Cloud (2008) would describe as the human element of their personal recovery capital. The five themes representing self-attributed changes include many quotes illustrating skill development, new problem-solving capacities,

greater self-awareness, increased self-esteem and self-efficacy, greater optimism, better interpersonal skills and an enhanced sense of meaning and purpose. Positive interpersonal and emotional experiences are reported on board; including acknowledgement of being competent, successfully enacting leadership and co-operative roles, caring and helping others and being cared for and nurtured. Thus the trainees' construction of their personal development during VoR is consistent with increased recovery capital; which aligns with recent studies indicating that increases in physical and human capital predict successful recovery (see Best et al., 2012).

Positive as they are, interviewees responses cannot be taken to indicate long lasting change. As Growcott and Hunter (2001) note post-voyage assessments may be affected by "post-group euphoria" and Carpuso and Borsci (2013) did not find sustained change among their adolescent trainees. Most of our interviews occurred just one week after the voyage. However, these did include self-reported behaviour change as in the case of Joe's having signed up for an IT course and Liz's relaxation about what others' will think of what she wears (see "Social Skills and New Plans and Horizons"). Three interviews were delayed and took place 10- 11 weeks after the voyage. In these interviews trainees spoke of applying for jobs and attending interviews and of awareness of continuing change attributed to VoR. Further longer term follow up interviews would have been informative.

The interviews themselves may be seen, not just as data collection exercises mining memories of past events, but as opportunities to process and explore experiences. In one

pre-voyage interview a trainee repeatedly rehearsed their sense of ambivalence, moving swiftly between anxious forebodings, self-reassurance and rehearsal of positive outcomes. Another trainee used the pre-interview to position themselves as a person who would be a core member of the group with the ability to help and support others, in contrast to another trainee who they expected to be an outsider and a negative influence. Such rehearsal is likely to begin the process of developing coping strategies and planning responses to potentially anxiety-provoking situations. Similarly, there was some evidence that post-voyage interviews prompted further processing of the voyage experience and that this could have an important emotional component. One interviewee apologised for becoming emotional during the post-voyage interview when discussing achievements on the voyage, noting that while he had talked about the voyage before he had not had the opportunity to think about it in depth. Thus pre- and post-voyage interviews of the kind we conducted may provide useful pre-voyage preparation and post-voyage reflection that could enhance the impact of sail training. Consequently, the impact of sail training on personal change cannot be separated from the construction of those experiences through dialogue.

Our analyses focused on individual experiences and changes but interventions such as the VoR need to be conceptualised in a broader social context that includes trainees' personal situation before and after the voyage and the therapeutic construction of the intervention by trainees and others prior to participation. Thus sail training as an element of a therapeutic programme may be quite different from sail training for young people who do not self identify as being in need of personal change. A wider ethnography of such

interventions could be developed by interviewing managers, shore-based therapeutic staff, professional crew and others. Such investigations could identify cultural and structural elements that optimise the effectiveness of sail training in rehabilitative contexts.

Some limitations of our study methods warrant caution in generalising these findings. We were able to interview only a small sample of trainees and these were self-selected so, although our interviewees represented many of the journey legs and participating centres, we cannot know whether their responses were representative of the majority of voyage participants. Our interviewees felt that the voyage had helped them develop skills integral to recovery capital and that these experience would strengthen their resolve and capacity on their recovery journeys. We cannot infer from this that a sail training experience such as VoR enhances current rehabilitative services. This question could only be answered by a controlled trial, ideally including sophisticated process evaluation and cost effectiveness analyses (Denford et al., 2014). Finally most of our post-voyage interviews took place within a week of the voyage. Three and six month follow up interviews would have provided insight into the durability of self-attributed VoR changes. Nonetheless, these interviews do emphasise the potential of sail training as a therapeutic component of drug and alcohol rehabilitation.

In conclusion, these sail training participants clearly enjoyed and valued this add-on rehabilitative intervention. Moreover, they reported positive personal changes and attributed these directly to their onboard experiences. These data do not demonstrate that

sail-training enhances the effectiveness of standard rehabilitative drug and alcohol services but illustrate that this sail-training intervention had a powerful effects on these interviewees. Our results identify key physical, social and organisational aspects of Tectona that shaped voyagers' experiences. Some of these, such as restricted space, may be common to all sail-training interventions but others, such as the interactive styles of professional crew, may vary across interventions. This variability may be critical to psychological outcomes. The impact of sail training on personal development and recovery from substance misuse may be dependent on the extent to which the experience engenders self reflection, particularly appraisal of competences and coping strategies relevant to the world beyond the vessel. In addition, the milieu from which participants embark, in this case the reflective context of therapeutic, rehabilitative communities, is likely to shape the personal impact of sail training. Finally, of course, the social environment to which trainees return may or may not support sail-training-initiated changes and so support or undermine maintenance.

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Table 1: Interview Question Guide for Voyage-of-Recovery Trainees

Thank you for agreeing to talk to me. Are you happy that I record this interview? If so, the recording will be transcribed (written out) but your name will be replaced by another name so the data remains confidential. The recording will be deleted and we will not keep any records which name you after the end of the study.

1. What is your name?
2. What has being at sea been like for you / meant for you?
3. What if anything did you like most about the trip?
4. Has anything been particularly difficult for you during the voyage?
5. What if anything helped you to cope with that / those things?
6. Did you feel that you were making decisions and setting goals on the voyage?
7. How much responsibility did you feel you had on the voyage?

Was that more or less than you would have liked?

8. What did you think of the sail training ship Tectona?

Have you had any particular feelings, positive or negative, towards the ship?

9. How did you get along with others on Tectona?
10. How much have people on board helped or cared for each other?

Can you think of examples of how people have helped or cared for each other?

11. Did people have fun together? Can you think of any examples?
12. What will you remember about the skipper and other staff on Tectona?

Was there anything about the skipper and other crew that you particularly appreciated?

Was there anything you felt you'd have liked them to do differently?

What did you feel about the way the skipper and crew took charge of things?

13. Being on a boat with other people for a week is quite a big commitment: and could possibly feel quite restrictive at times; is that something you felt at any time?

(if "yes") What if anything helped you cope with that?

(if "yes") Overall do you think that making a commitment to be on the boat with others for a week was a good thing to do?

14. Have there been aware of any particular rules or regulations during the trip?

(if yes) What did you think of those?

What about the way rules were applied?

15. Have you learned anything new on the voyage (if so) - what?

Have you learned anything new, not concerned with sailing, on the voyage?

(if so) - what?

16. On this trip have you learned anything about how people can get on and work together?

17. Has the voyage changed how you feel about yourself? In what way?

18. Do you think that the voyage will have any lasting effect for you personally?

19. If so, what experiences have made a difference and how have they changed you?

20. Do you think the voyage will have a lasting effect on the way you see other people?../ the way you relate to other people? If so, how?

21. Do you think any of your experiences on the voyage will influence your on-going recovery from drug and/or alcohol dependency?

(if so) - what experiences and how will they affect your recovery?

22. Taking the voyage overall how happy were you?

Thinking about a 1-10 scale where 10 is as happy as you can be how happy were you in general on the voyage?

How does this compare your usual levels of happiness?

23. Overall was the voyage useful/ valuable to you? If so, how?

What particular experiences on the voyage were most valuable/... least valuable to you?

24. Do you feel that anything should be changed on future voyages of recovery?

25. Is there anything that you would like to add?

Table 2 Theme Map

Pre-voyage Anticipations (pre-voyage interviews)

Gaining a place

Being prepared

Expectations hopes and apprehensions

The Voyage Experience (post-voyage interviews)

A Different World

Work, Teamwork and Responsibility

Professional Crew and Authority Figures

Emotional and Social Experiences

Influences on Trainees' Social and Personal Experiences

Proximity and Bonding

Shared Enterprise

Helping and Caring for Others

Achievement and Developing New Competencies

Self-Attributed Changes (post-voyage interviews)

Self-Insight, Perseverance and Inner Strength

Social Skills

Increased Confidence

Impact of the Voyage on Recovery

New Plans and Horizons
