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Way to practise: The Brighter Days Project

Summer 2025 | Practice

Kelly Turnbull & Roy Haitzin

Members: East Sussex

Sometime around the end of 2023/start of 2024, Member Fiona Murdoch started giving free acupuncture treatment to local people in real need. And so The Brighter Days Project was born.

Our Community Interest Company (CIC) – The Brighter Days Project – runs from The Sun Clinic in Brighton. This quote from the *Huangdi Neijing Suwen* chapter 8 just about sums it up:

The Heart is the ruler of the Organ networks and the Spirit derives from it.
If the ruler is bright, the whole kingdom is at peace.

The project arose organically when Fiona started offering free acupuncture treatments to some local residents in the mews where her clinic is situated.

One such resident was in recovery from drug addiction and was experiencing insomnia. Another was a neighbour who cared for her disabled adult daughter and was in physical pain. Thus the seed was sown for a different type of community acupuncture service.



The two of us local acupuncturists – Roy Haitzin and Kelly Turnbull – also wanted to offer free or low cost treatment to our community, so we were quickly brought into the fold.

The referrals

Together we decided that our format was to work with referral only clients – aiming to reach those in our area that needed help the most. We started to get in touch with local charities and organisations.

We currently now get referrals from a wide range of support groups including for: recovery from drug and alcohol addiction, carers, refugees, sexual assault and/or abuse, cancer, LGBTQ+, local council, housing, the NHS, and psychological services.

The funding

The three of us were unpaid, and we tweaked the format of our business until we found what worked best for us.

At first we settled on offering clients six treatments – free of charge or by donation– and we created a JustGiving fundraising page so that people could donate to pay it forward.

Then we heard about Source Point Community Health CIC in Devon. Since 2016, they have been awarded two Big Lottery Grants to offer free acupuncture – for patients on low income with chronic pain and chronic illness.

Keeping our fingers firmly crossed, we decided to try for the National Lottery Fund ourselves. And after nine more unpaid months, we got the amazing news that our application had been successful. Tweaking again, we now offer 12 treatments to our people.

The people

All of our clients have varying levels of trauma, no matter where they have been referred from. And because of how their trauma has impacted their lives, they are generally unemployed and unable to pay for one-to-one treatment or try a multibed setting. Many have never experienced acupuncture before – apart from some with addiction who have had auricular treatments to aid sobriety.

The work that we are doing is so important – and our results speak for the power of our modality and format.

A weekly session of acupuncture for 12 weeks has shown incredible change in some of these people. They might come to us unable to make eye contact, experiencing crippling anxiety and fear – and end their treatments in a completely different space, feeling more hopeful and whole. For us, the work we are doing is the most powerful and rewarding of our careers.



We all have stories, but most of our Brighter Days patients have big stories. Heavy stories.

It seems that when the financial barrier is lowered, our clients are able to allow the space around their heart to open – even just a little – allowing their system to start to relax and soften. Week in and week out, we see the eloquence of the Suwen is played out in our clinic with these people.

The future

We are so overrun with referrals from charities we work with that we had to close our books for about six months to try and catch up with the waiting list. Currently we are receiving about 15 new referrals a week, without actively promoting our service.

We are now desperately trying to raise money from other funding sources, to allow us to keep going and expand our practice, bringing on more practitioners to reach the vulnerable.

We are also looking into ways to integrate evaluation tools such as MYMOP (Measure Yourself Medical Outcomes Profile), to demonstrate statistical evidence of our results to potential future funders.

Our dream is to have a synergistic relationship with other services, to enable a mutual referral scheme for clients in need of free or low cost treatment of any sort. This may include psychological or trauma support, different physical modalities, therapies or basic practical support. For example a local vegetarian café supports us by donating leftover food at the end of day, which we offer to refugees to come and collect.

Ultimately, it's all about supporting each other. As many of us can appreciate – without community there is no Heart.

A kind of a case study from Roy Haitzin

What follows is not really a case study of a specific patient in our practice. It is more of a reflection of a clinical approach that has evolved organically, through serving the particular community of the Brighter Days Project clients.

Everyone we see has issues. That's why they are patients. We all have stories, but most of our Brighter Days patients have big stories. Heavy stories. Some were torn from their land, some from their kin.

Many have paid a terrible price for years of masking horrible pain. Some have been betrayed by the ones who were supposed to be the guardians of their young lives, some were outcast because of their choice of who to love, and some are crushed by the relentless weight of caring for their sick loved ones. Some heroic souls carrying all of this and more on a single pair of shoulders.

Lots of stories waiting to be heard. But where do you start? And who do you tell?

So, initially, I don't ask.

Instead, when I meet a patient for the first time, I may ask briefly about their appetite, something about their bowel movement, sleep. Just broad basic brush-strokes of an interview. Sometimes I don't even bother with this. I mostly just ask if they have any pain or tightness in their shoulders or lower back.

All of them do.

I then usually needle SI 5 yang gu and BL 60 kun lun. Nothing special – jing river points to get the tai yang channel qi moving, to soften the calloused exterior and make contact with the heart and the kidneys.

I then needle some local tender points on the affected area, pull over the heat lamp, step away, and put on some music. Anything from Johnny Cash and Patsy Cline to Augustus Pablo or Toumani Diabate. Anything but new age music, Tibetan chimes or whale songs, that is. We all have our boundaries!

It doesn't take long for the patients to 'drop into the zone' – ten minutes or so. You can see it happening; their lower backs move rhythmically with their slow, steady breath. There's a softening, a relaxing. When they resurface, they look different. They rise lighter, fresher, smiling. Thirty minutes in a safe space, no judgement, no explaining, no thinking. Rest. Shelter from the storm.

Subsequently, communication flows. They volunteer their stories, and I try not to speak – only to listen. Only to witness.

And when they want me to say something I tell them that all these demons they have – the fear, the pain, the guilt, the loss, the corrosive self-doubt, and their caustic internal critic – are also alive and well in me and everyone I know. These are some of the universal aspects of the predicament of being human. And it's

OK, and it is allowed. And in some weird, fallible and crazy way, this is what makes us beautiful. This is what makes them beautiful.

They always appreciate this.

In the second visit they usually report an overall improvement to their headspace and health. Then we sit, together in our shared humanity. I complete relevant gaps in the case and treat what I see.

*You can read more about [The Brighter Days Project here on their website](#)
And to support them go to [JustGiving](#)*

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