

My Pain Story: A young person's metaphor for their chronic pain journey

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References & Bio

Queensland Interdisciplinary Paediatric Persistent Pain Service (QIPPPS)
As statewide leaders, we support children, young people experiencing persistent pain, and their families, to connect with life one step at a time

Introduction

At QIPPPS persistent pain is addressed through a health and wellbeing framework with a focus on young people engaging in tailored and recovery-oriented treatment. Research demonstrates that building on a young person’s own narrative, and concept of pain in therapy can support conceptual and behavioural change (Lindstrom, et al., 2021 & Pate, et al., 2015) . Capacity building and self-management of health can be considered a key developmental task representing steps towards individuation for young people (Neto, 2015 & Lerch, et al. 2019). QIPPPS clinicians recognise that during this period of significant identity exploration and formation treatment is most effective when it addresses the biopsychosocial influences of pain and development.

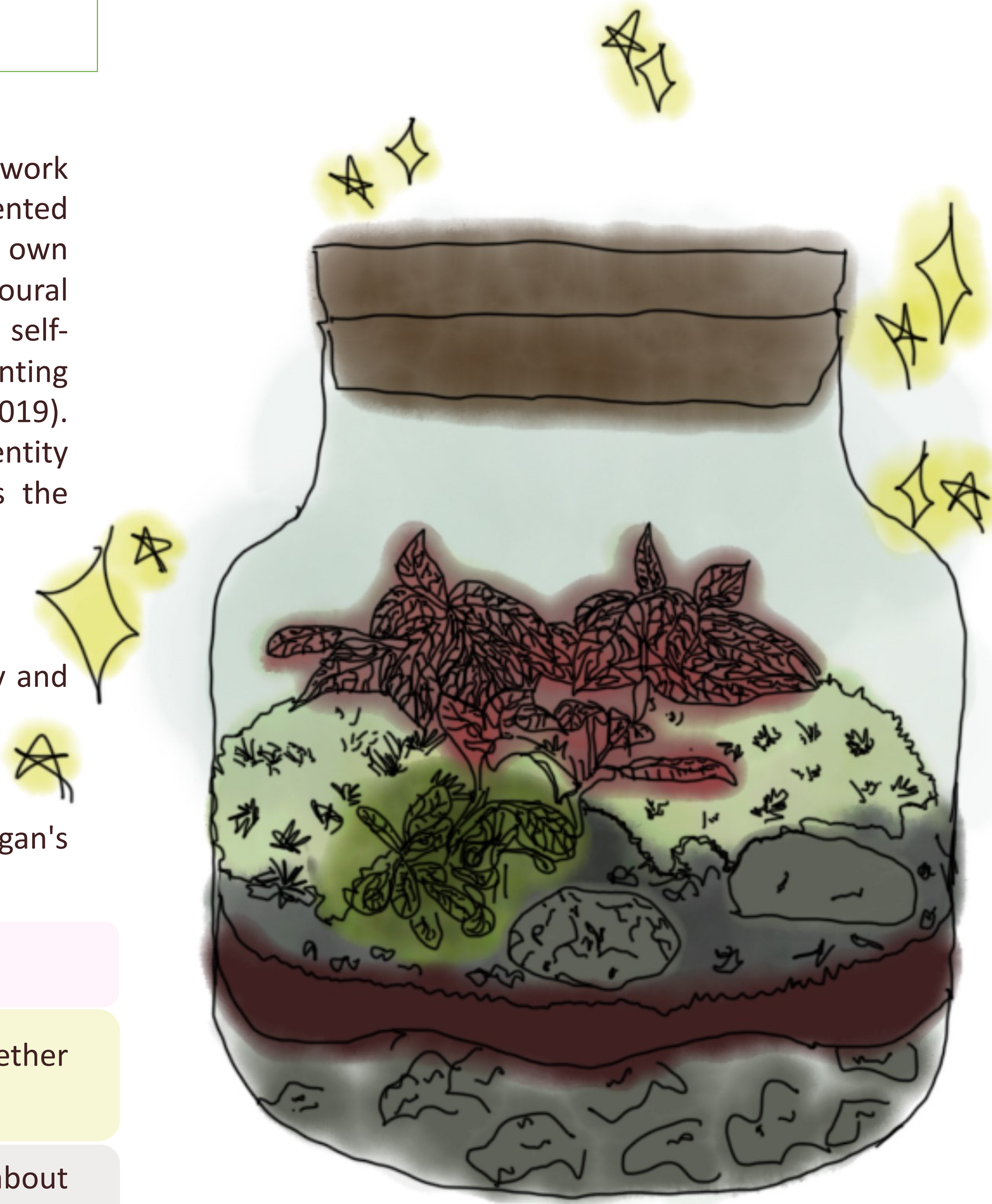
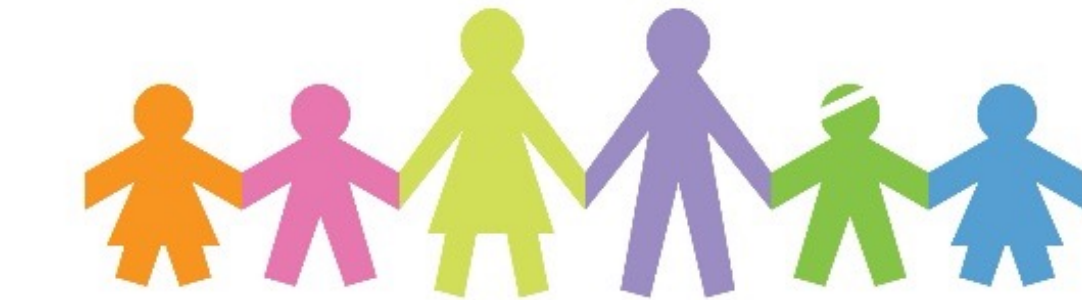
Methods

Tegan collaborated with QIPPPS clinicians to reflect of her treatment journey and create the following narrative and metaphor of her pain recovery.

Results

The following are reflections that align with key stages in Tegan's treatment journey from the perspective of her treating therapists

1. Create Safety and work on keeping safety
2. Take time to explore. Make play (challenge and mastery) safe
3. Knowledge is power BUT the learning and application of knowledge together is the superpower that reaches beyond the pain and into recovery
4. Let the patient guide their experiences and learning. Be curious about the meaning of each step
5. As long as we are confident in our interventions, then the young person will find their own unique mix of ingredients to create balance
6. Creative expression of a pain journey can be a space to allow young people to integrate their pain journey into their young adult identity in a way that promotes flourishing



Terrarium Metaphor –Tegan Smith

Terrariums all have to start with some sort of container- whether that be a jar, a vase, or an old gravy pot, all life needs a safe space to flourish and heal. This was my home.

Step one- drainage. Positioning a layer of rocks at the bottom of the container establishes a run-off system. During my recovery I often pushed myself too far. I’d try too many things too quickly in order to yield quick results and end up overflowing my possibilities leading to setbacks. Drainage systems allow for mishap, as recovery is never perfect

Next find the right substrate. Using established nutrient rich potting mix from other plants can be a perfect base for a new little world. Gaining knowledge of my diagnosis was extremely important in my experience, as it kept me sane knowing that there are others who experienced similar things to what I did. Knowledge was the nutrients for building my ecosystem. Learning about the nervous system from my hospital team ensured that I had a safety net to fall back on every time I felt like something was wrong.

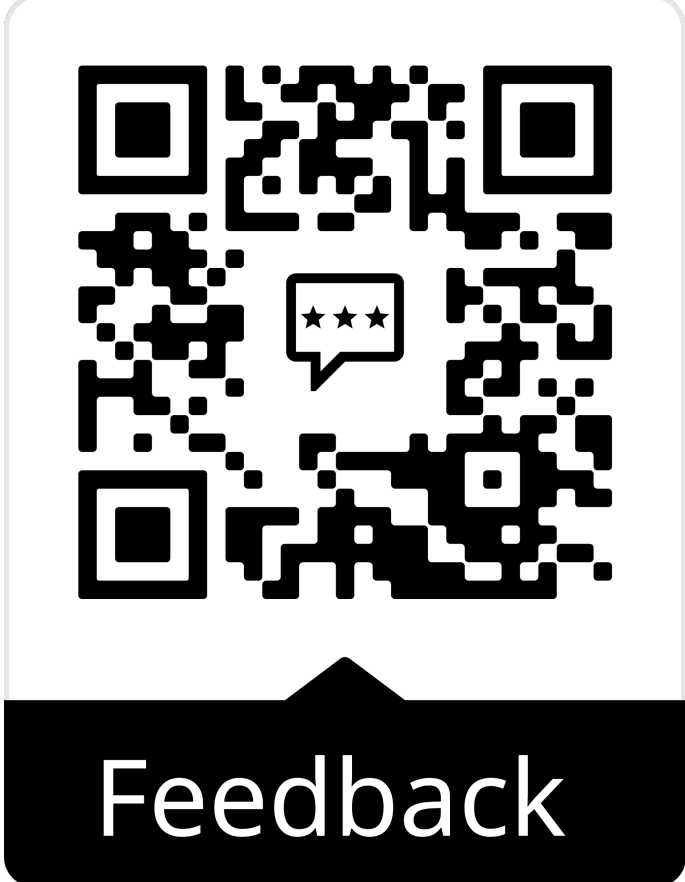
After a thick layer of soil is placed on the bottom, you can start to get creative. There are plenty of different types of plants and moss you can use for your terrarium- but it’s a case of trial and error. Plants will die, and sometimes it will feel like your terrarium is never going to work. These are just setbacks when building new life, so you must keep trying. No two terrariums are the same, so it’s up to you to find what works for yours. As a patient, you’re often told what will and won’t work for your recovery, but unfortunately there’s no way of knowing. I introduced some bizarre rituals into my routine to ease the pain, and later learned that many other patients had strange methods too. Many people will recommend their favourite plants and moss, assuming they’ll work well but remember; it’s your terrarium- not theirs

Identifying the right routine for upkeep is vital for the health of your terrarium. How much water is enough? My routine was a crucial element to ensuring a steady recovery. When I was 16, pausing my life to focus on my health was the last thing I wanted to do but it’s what eventually quickened my recovery. I’m not sure if I ever found the perfect balance of mental wellbeing and physical health, as every time I wanted to experience “normal teenage things” my support system would always tell me to slow down. However, I must have done something right as I’m fully recovered while writing this.

Sticking with your routine will slowly allow for signs of growth to be revealed. Soon you will have a fully established ecosystem and the confidence to seal off your little jar-world. The most satisfying part of my entire experience with pain was the ending. Knowing that I could move on with the rest of my life and live with the confidence that I have an entire ecosystem’s-worth of support to keep me going was the best feeling in the world. The terrarium is fully established and self-sustaining. It’s time to put it aside with the confidence that it will survive on its own. At times things will go wrong, but your terrarium can rely on your new-found background of experience and knowledge to keep it thriving.

Conclusion:

Tegan’s expression of the multifactorial approach to improving her health and wellbeing may provide an accessible way of understanding biopsychosocial therapy processes for other young people. This is in line with the expressive and narrative approaches being employed in other paediatric and adolescent persistent pain services.



Feedback