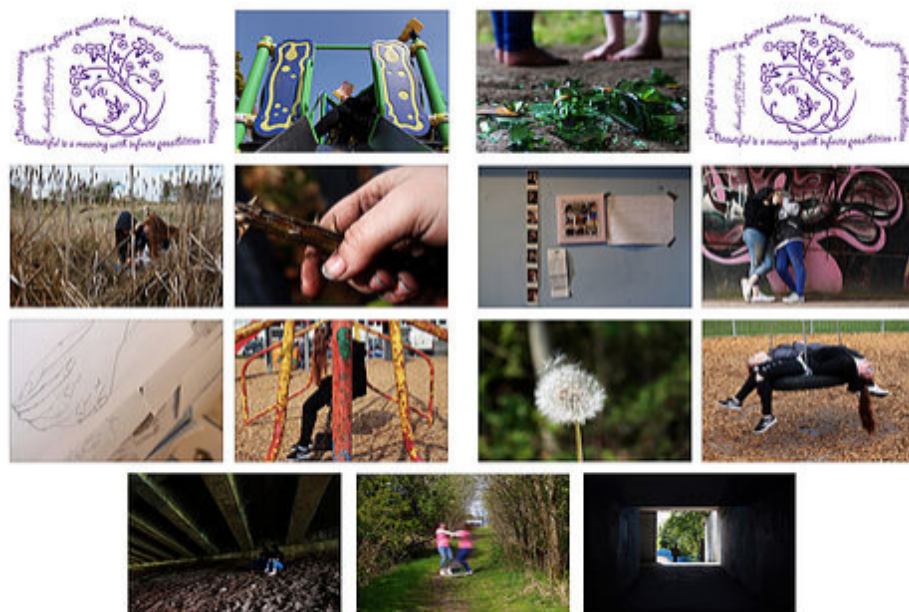


The Fortitude Project Founder & Photographer El Amethyst

Unity of Fortitude ***Survivors Unite*** ***#WeAreWarriors***

The Fortitude project began last year as a Reportage Series for my NC Photography course.



My original theme was 'Abuse' and my aim of the series was to communicate the emotional and physical experiences of "Life after Trauma" which was my original title. The emphasis was on Survival & awareness.

As described on my website, half way through the series I started to grasp the potential of the series.

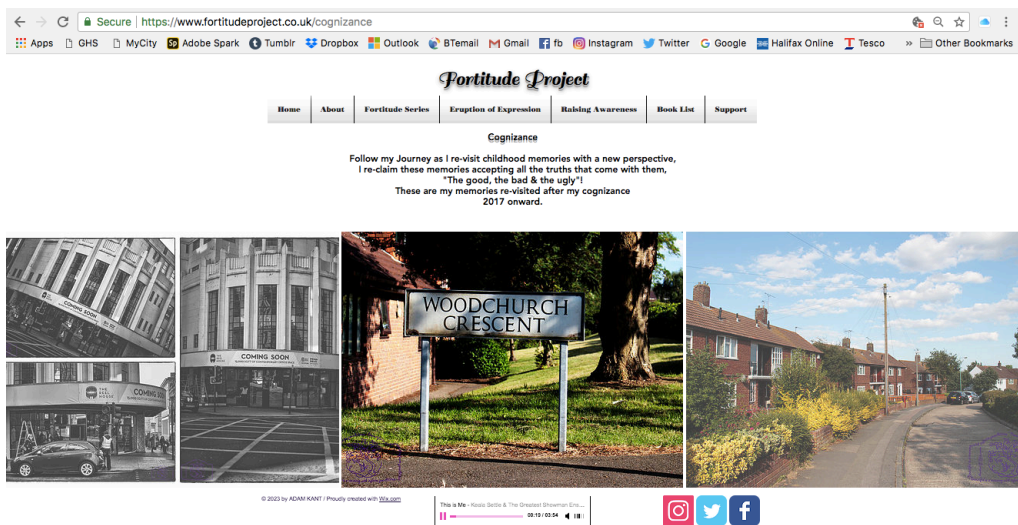
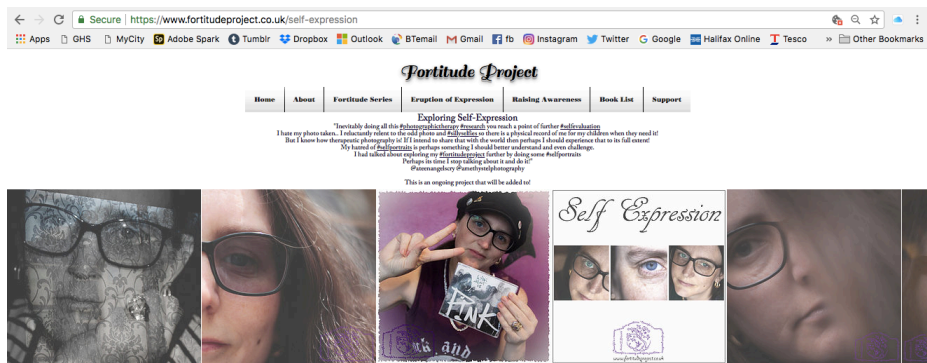
Fortitude Project

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The Fortitude Project

Half way through the series of Photo Shoots I took for this project, I began to realize the huge potential the project has for effectively expressing and sharing the thoughts feelings and Experiences of Survivors. I intend to extensively explore this, not just for myself but for all Survivors. In the future I hope to work with other Survivors as I did with the two teenagers featured in the original Fortitude Reportage Series.

The first direction I started branching off with the series was self-portraits and self-expression. I also started visually documenting my exploration of old childhood memories re-visited after my "Cognizance"

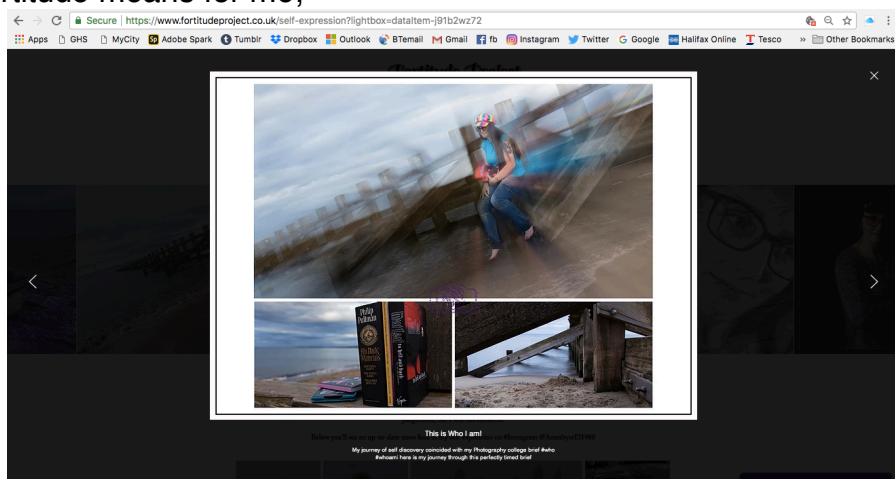


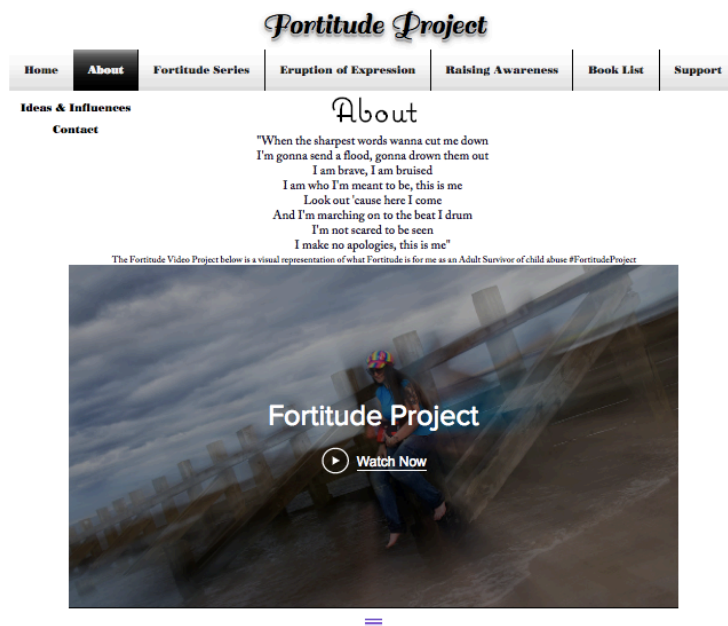
As I started my first year of HND Photography my personal project became tied with allot of my college briefs.

My Who Am I Brief was launched at a time, I was still timid with self-portraits as a photographic self-expression, this was important in learning to explore what worked and what didn't.

I learnt allot about myself and how my thoughts and feelings affected my photography both positively and negatively.

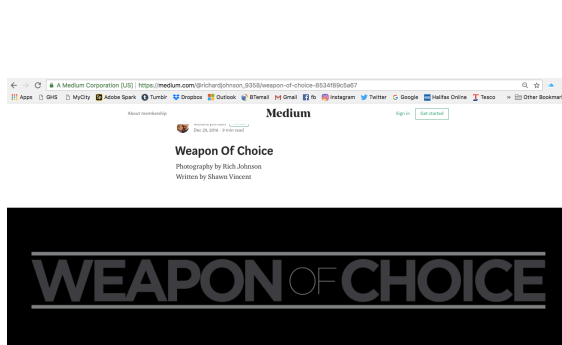
I expanded my Fortitude into Moving images when we were introduced to the "Move It" Brief, but again this was focused on my own self-exploration and self-expression of what Fortitude means for me;





The first volunteers of the original series were someone I'm very close to and her friend, I then expanded to self-expression as I quote *"But I know how therapeutic photography is! If I intend to share that with the world then perhaps I should experience that to its full extent!"*

I have always intended to expand the project to involve other volunteer Abuse Survivor collaborators similar to the two photographers & their projects I researched originally;



In my original series though I focused on the two teenagers and their story, the images were led allot and definitely at first by my own interpretation of their world based on my own experiences. This time I want to collaborate with Abuse survivors and allow them to take more of a lead on self-expression if that is what they choose, so it becomes less about how I interpret their world and more about them expressing their world.

Project Aims:

The aim of the project is to use Photography as a tool to express the thoughts feelings and experiences of collaborating abuse Survivors. This could potentially consist of Portraiture, Still Life, Landscape, fine art & Reportage. My own experiences as a Survivor & a photographer put me in a unique position, to be able to understand the fundamental thoughts and feelings of my fellow Survivors, to understand therapeutic power of photography and I have the technical skill to be their tool of expression. This experience will help the communication between “photographer” myself and Survivor, which may in some situations be somewhat difficult, my own experiences will allow me to connect with the Survivor and understand their story and personal aims for the Fortitude Project without extensive details and questions, making it a more comfortable experience allowing the focus to be solely on the expressive and therapeutic aims of the project.

By the end of the Project each Survivor collaborator will walk away with not only a series of personal and expressive images that have empowered them but an introduction to creative expression which helps them connect with and process the truth of their thoughts feelings and experience. They will understand the therapeutic power of expressing through photography and potentially be able to incorporate that into their everyday self-care. Those that decide to share their visual Story online will have the knowledge that their experiences will help other survivors without a voice and become part of the visual campaign of raising awareness.

Research:

I will be researching other photographers who have used Photography in a therapeutic manner & Photographers who have collaborated with Survivors to create a series of images. As part of my research, due to the sensitive nature of the subject I will be convening with specialists in the field to help me write up a clear code of conduct & guidelines to protect the Survivors and myself throughout the work. I will also research briefly the Therapeutic qualities of Photography.

Researching this area takes allot of sifting through information to get to the photographers who have created work in this field.

There is a small list that I have discovered;

As mentioned “Unseen Scars” by Sarah Hosseini & Photographer Melanie Mercogliano and “Weapons of Choice” by Photographer Rich Johnson

“A Thousand Words Project” Photographer Laura Dodsworth

“Project Unbreakable” Photographer Grace Brown

“Us Project” Photographer Megan Bowers-vette

“Unconventional Apology Project” Photographer Chantal Barlow

“What were you wearing” Photographer Katherine Cambareris

The Bristlecone project by Dr David Lisak

Then You have Photographer Jo Spence, though her work isn't on abuse, she is one of the pioneers of Photographic therapy as she discovered and shared the therapeutic power of photography when she visually documented her struggle with cancer.

Fstoppers, among various other sources has looked into and produced articles, books and research on the Therapeutic power of Photography. Photovoice is an organisation specializing in using photography for social change.

The Hostage Project by Marsha Foster, she was quoted in saying “I find it interesting that photography heals from both side of the lens”

<https://fstoppers.com/originals/using-photography-way-heal-sexual-violence-154674>

There are also Project collaborations which survivors provide their own photos such as the “voices & Faces”, “Strength of a Survivor Photo Project” and “The forgiveness Project” www.bigvoicepictures.com

Research: “A Thousand Words Project” Photographer Laura Dodsworth



www.lauradodsworth.com/a-thousand-words/

Laura Dodsworths 'A thousand words project' was commissioned by Scottish Woman's aid & Zero Tolerance, the aim of the project was to realistically portray domestic abuse and coercive control, this would hopefully change the medias miss-representation and cliché imagery of domestic abuse.

Laura Dodsworth interviewed the Survivors and it was their unique experiences that shaped the artistic direction and powerful storytelling of the photographs. The Photographer calls the Survivors “Art directors” of the photographs. She used a wide variety of models to show that abuse can occur from all walks of life.

The campaign has successfully challenged the media & societies miss-interpretations of Domestic abuse.

I chose this series of images to research because they are simple powerful messages which successfully portraying more than just the violence of domestic abuse. The emotion, body language and genuine adversity the survivors suffer is visually clear in the images, they are powerful but not cliché nor over the top as some campaigns in this area can be. The true sinister effect of domestic abuse is coming through in these images. The images draw you in and make you study them, question what is going on, really think about the message. This is something I would like to achieve with my project. Though the Photographer used models for the purpose of this campaign, understandably so as some of those recreations is not something a survivor should face even if its pretend, the psychological impact would be ethically questionable. My personal project will focus more on the Survivors world now as a survivor, allowing their visual story to be explored and shared, empowering them and others whilst connecting to the therapeutic power of photography, but like in 'A thousand words' the volunteer Survivors will be "Art director" but to their own story. Researching this series has allowed me to see how another photographer has represented the subject, get ideas from her work but also define where my work will be different.



Research; Jo Spence & her Therapeutic Photography

Jo Spence started her photography career as a Photography Assistant to commercial Photographers, but she quickly began her own agency which specialized in actor portfolios, wedding and family portraits. In the early seventies, her work took a new direction into more inquisitive and analytic documentary style. The economic uncertainty of the time is portrayed in her work, she also had a desire to counteract the cliché photographic imagery that society was exposed to in advertising. Her growing political awareness put her on the path to her chance meeting with Terry Dennett who would become a lifelong collaborator. They founded the Photography Workshop Ltd. She

worked collaboratively throughout her career co-establishing two other companies. She also maintained her careers as a writer, educator, organiser and broadcaster. She was deeply immersed in the photographic discussions of her time and appeared in a range of journals.

In 1979, she created "beyond the family album" which was an exploration of self-discovery by deconstructing her roots. She believed that she could not possibly begin to properly represent others if she didn't explore how she had developed her view of herself.

Between 1980-82 She was working in collaboration with Terry Dennett on “Remodelling Photohistory”

She published her book “Putting myself in the picture” in 1986 which was a compilation of her personal raw and revelatory work aim to inspire a younger generation of photographers. Her direct and confrontational style was intended to be both educational and induce a deep emotional response.

Between 1982-86 Jo Spence worked on one of her projects she is now famous for. Shortly after being diagnosed with cancer she began her self-initiated Phototherapy work “Cancer shock” and “Picture of Health?”



In 1984 Jo Spence developed “Photo-therapy” alongside Rosy Martin. Photo-therapy adopted the techniques from co-counselling and its greatest achievement was to reverse the traditional relationship between Photographer and the subject, Photo-therapy completely shifted the dynamics, the subject was able to be “art director” to their own imagery maintaining control over their story and how it is perceived & told. www.jospence.org

I chose to research Jo Spence because of her pioneering exploration of Photo-therapy after her self-initiated exploration of expression through self-portraiture as a coping mechanism for dealing with and coming to terms with being diagnosed with cancer. Her extensive self-evaluation which she believes is important to properly represent others, is something I have discovered, documented and explored myself, I can connect to the importance of this. Her “Cancer shock” images are powerful, controversial Raw and leave a lasting impact on the viewer. Something I would also like to achieve in this project.

In this photo from Jo Spence “Picture of health?” series, it portrays the Raw and powerful affects her ordeal has had on her, both negatively and positively. Her use of the mirror to self-reflect, allowing her to see her own progress whilst taking her self-portraits and also allowing her to be uninhibited because a mirror unlike another person holding the camera cannot judge. Freeing her to be truly herself.



In my Project, I aim to emulate the freedom and feeling of being unjudged as closely as humanly possible, being as unobtrusive as possible allowing the Survivor collaborator to freely express their story unreserved and without fear of reprisal or discrimination.

Project Development;

An initial introduction meeting will be arranged with each Survivor collaborator to discuss how the Project will be approached with each person. Due to the nature of the project, it will be personal, unique and adapted to the Survivors individual lives. This will be the final part of the research that will allow a finalized plan of how the project will develop for each individual. I aim to collaborate with 3 Survivors individually, one of the three will be male, as I find it important that the project represents the scale and impact fully, male survivors speak out less due to fear of reprisal & discrimination, I would like to help change that through my Photography Project.

Based on previous experience it is estimated that between 3 to 5 planned shoots will be required to complete the project for each person, each shoot can range from 30 minutes to 3 hours, depending on what is involved and the location.

The project may consist of but not exclusive to, on location Portrait, Landscape & still life, studio portrait & still life, natural candid shots, reportage, staged photos including sets and / or make-up, hair & fashion, conceptual & symbolic fine art. The direction of each individuals project will be discussed and planned in the initial meeting, but can be subject to change as the project progresses, but strict guidelines and boundaries will be discussed and followed throughout the project, to ensure the safety and comfort of those participating. Risk assessments will be evaluated and discussed for each planned shoot.

Potential Shoot Ideas;

*Sometimes it is empowering especially for woman Survivors to have a “makeover & photoshoot” controlling how they present themselves to the world this can be from basic make-up and styling to acting out something more extravagant, this is of course an acquired opinion, not for everyone but a potential shoot to be considered.

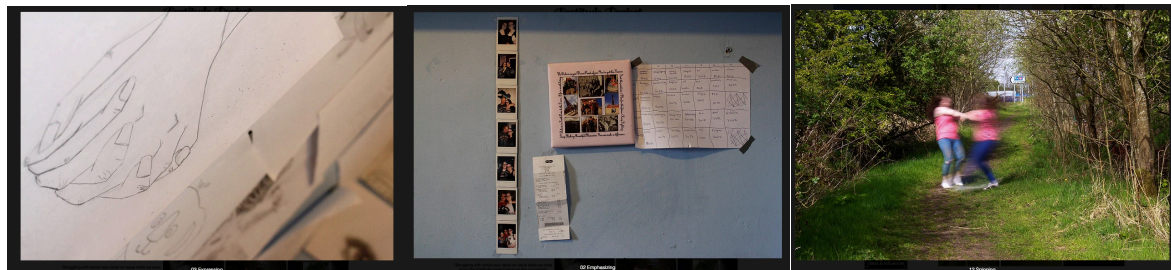




*Recently in my personal work I experimented with taking a self-portrait photo shoot whilst a song that I find personally empowering was playing, this produced confident and empowering body language and portraits that normally I would struggle with.

As a result of this self-exploration I have another potential shoot idea for this project which will help relax and empower the Survivor collaborator should they choose to explore this.

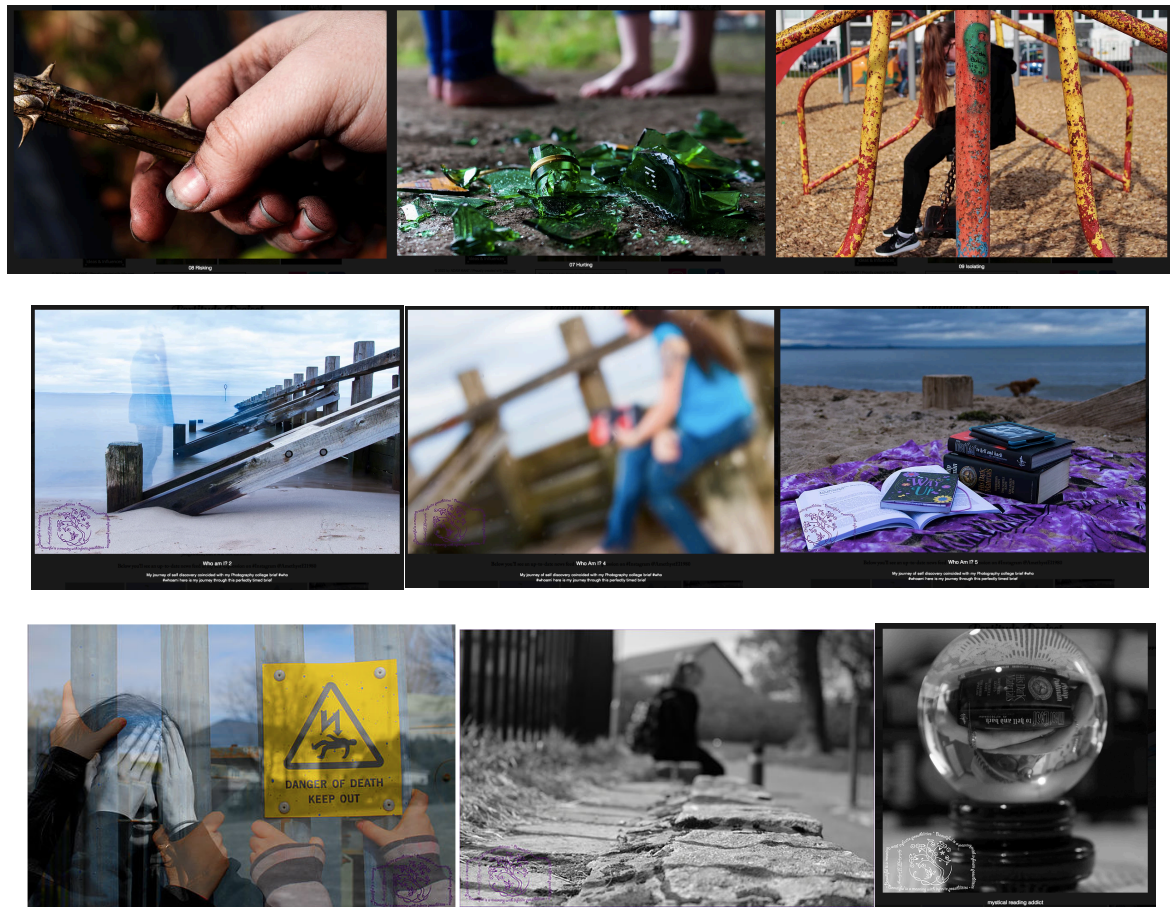
*A documentary style shoot following the Survivor collaborators life and routine, the things in life that enable them to cope, the moments when things are overwhelming, things and places that hold memories of importance. Similar to the original reportage series.



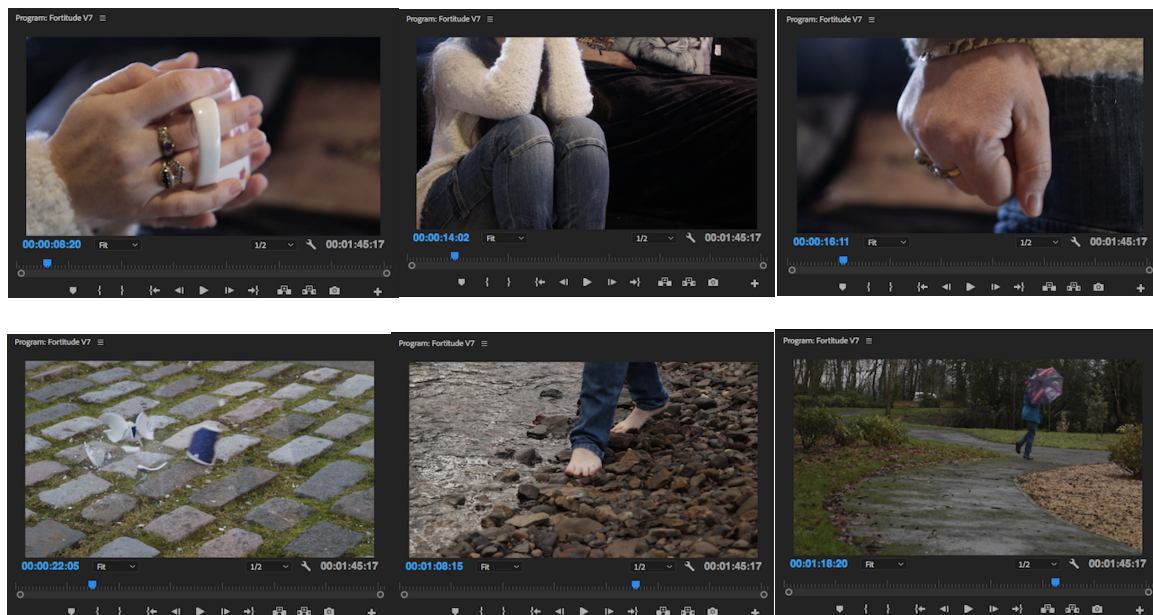
*Some Survivors are against their photo being taken and may recoil from the idea of the project. But this can be worked around by getting in close, documenting activities they do, things that are important to them, places that hold meaning to them, on location shoots that only outline them, through silhouette, blurred motion or use the environment to strategically hide them. Focus on hands and / or feet, close angles that allow them to remain anonymous. Use of reflections to distort images or shallow depth of field to deliberately miss focus. The above 3 images and those that follow are examples of Photography work that maintain anonymity.

Below is a series of images showing techniques and ideas I have used in previous work that I can incorporate into this Project.

These are previous Photographs from the Fortitude Project so far;



The following images are some still screenshots from my Fortitude Video project;



The following are from the Calendar work;



You can see a variety of expressive techniques that can if needed maintain the Survivor's anonymity whilst still telling their story.

Risk Assessment:

- *Risk of injury in studio with electrical equipment & tripping hazards from wires, tripod and lighting stand.
- *Location shoot will present a whole new series of risks that will need to be assessed once shoot is planned before proceeding.
- *Ethical and Confidentiality guidelines will need to be clearly established and produced before commencing the project, this will include potential mental health risk assessment and do's & don'ts guideline. Code of conduct will need to be established and agreed upon with each Survivor.

Final Result:

By the End of this project I will have Ten final images portraying a complex mix of thoughts, emotions and experiences of abuse Survivors. Evoking a powerful response from the viewer, raising awareness and empowering, encouraging and inspiring others.