



CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES COMMITTEES
COISTÍ NA SEIRBHÍDÍ DO LEANAÍ & DO DHADINE ÓGA

Dublin City South
Cathair Bhaile Átha Cliath Theas

Healthy Ireland Funding Round 3 activities

TRAINING IN THE PRACTICE OF THERAPLAY

This action delivered 5 x 3-day **Group training programme** in the licenced practice of THERAPLAY© with community services in the Dublin South City area. The Practice of Theraplay© is a child and family therapy for building and enhancing attachment, self-esteem, trust in others, and joyful engagement. It is based on the natural patterns of playful, healthy interaction between parent and child and is personal, physical, and fun. The training includes 2 hours post training -supervision (per group) on the implementation of the practice. There was an adaptation to this training which delivered the classic 2-day Group Theraplay training programme with an added a bespoke 3rd day that would speak directly to the experience of homelessness as a trauma.

Group Theraplay Programme: Creating Cooperation, Connection and Community for Children in Groups

Group Theraplay training is for professionals who want to use Theraplay in classrooms, day care, residential settings or with family groups.

A Theraplay Group is an adult-directed, structured play group that incorporates playful, cooperative and nurturing activities that enhance the emotional well-being of children. Unlike other play group approaches, Theraplay learning takes place on a non-verbal level. Instead of talking about positive social behaviour, the group leaders and children DO positive social interaction. Positive messages from the group interaction gradually become a part of the child's internal sense of self.

Why is Theraplay good for children in group settings:

- Creates an atmosphere that is warm, nurturing, engaging and challenging
- Meets the basic needs of children so they can be freed emotionally to explore their world
- Engages hard-to-reach children
- Brings fun and exuberance into the lives of children
- Builds healthy relationships among individuals in a group
- Places emphasis on cooperation between children
- Encourages children to learn and practice self-control
- Enhances trust of others through concrete, personal and positive experiences
- Helps children with regulatory disorders and tactile issues
- Simultaneously addresses cognitive, social and emotional development

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Training Programme Content:

- *Principles of attachment theory on an intellectual and experiential level*
- *The Four Dimensions of Theraplay for child development*
- *How to quickly assess which of the dimensions a particular child might need*
- *Strategies for incorporating Theraplay in daily interactions with children*
- *The importance of touch for children's well-being and regulation*
- *The effects of complex trauma on a child's brain and behaviour*
- *Applying Theraplay principles to children's groups*
- *Adapting Theraplay Groups to different populations*
- *Leadership skills for implementing a Theraplay group*
- *Addressing resistant behaviour within the Theraplay group*
- *Experiential practices of both being a participant and a leader*
- *Strategies for successful implementation*

Learning Objectives:

- *Describe the four dimensions of Theraplay, a modality of play therapy*
- *Apply Theraplay play principles to group treatment*
- *Develop play therapy skills in using the group rules and group techniques through practice*
- *Demonstrate how to adapt the use of group Theraplay, a modality of play therapy, with various populations*
- *Describe how nurturing and regulating physical connection can assist a child to feel calm and more organized in a play therapy group setting*
- *List three effects of complex trauma on a child's brain and behaviour*
- *Describe three techniques for managing resistance and problem situations in play therapy groups*
- *List a variety of materials and activities that are appropriate for the group Theraplay model*
- *List three essential strategies for successful implementation*

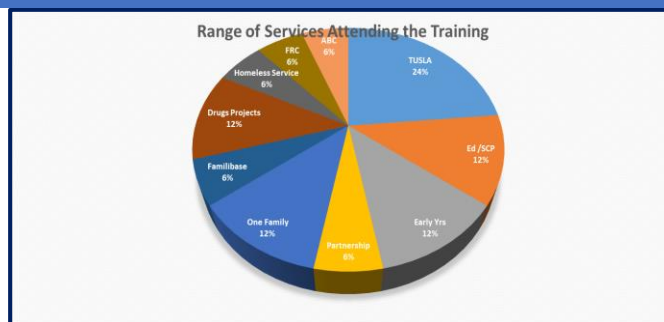
Group *Theraplay + training model* included classic 2-day Group Theraplay training programme with a bespoke 3rd day that targeted directly to the experience of homelessness as a trauma. Frontline services supporting the needs of Homeless families provide basic needs and are not trauma-based services. For the most part they are not in a position to provide access to long-term or ongoing psychotherapy to service users. The training we delivered aimed to build an attachment environment within all support services to equip staff with skills and a practical toolkit that would be therapeutic without crossing into therapy.

The training was offered to all services whose work supports children who are homeless and/ or Social Inclusion supports from the Community, Voluntary & Statutory agencies in Dublin South City Area. 2 of the 5 training programmes were run in 2020 (pre Covid) and 3 ran in 2021.

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TRAINING BREAKDOWN

Training x3 days	No. of attendees
March 2020	16
March 2020 (2nd)	16
July 2021	16
September 2021	16
October 2021	16



FEEDBACK, EXAMPLES OF

Training

Very Happy with the training, trainer was full of information and delivered the topic in a very interactive and interesting way. Delivered in a way that was very easy to understand and connect to current job. Location and timing of training were also very good.

The training was excellent! I would have perhaps liked a little more practical hands on demonstration or rather experience of trying out the different games, but totally understand the time restraints and the fact that I can experience these at home/in work through practice

Implementation

I look forward to implementing this practice into my current service

Yes, I will definitely implement the practice into my work especially when my co-worker completes her training. Unfortunately we are unable to do group work presently due to Covid .

Recommend training

I have recommended Thereplay to my colleagues and one is on the waiting list for the next round of training

Yes, I would and have done. I have also recommended it in my partner who is working with

Comments

We are so thankful to have been included in this course and welcome any other opportunities there are to support the children, families, and staff in our service.

It has been amazing being part of a training like this, thank you.

Thanks very much for "adding a new string to my bow". Hoping to embed these skills into my daily professional practice so that Theraplay techniques and strategies can/will be used within homes of families I'm working with. Using Theraplay as a catalyst for creating opportunities for trauma recovery, relational reciprocity among child and carer and meaningful moments of joy within peoples days, despite adversities and challenges.

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Group Theraplay Training +1 day of Trauma informed Group Theraplay skills

The provision of this training to services /staff who support families who are homeless /disadvantaged communities, was identified through ongoing work with partners in DCS CYPSC. Most of the staff working in the homeless sector are not trained/qualified psychotherapists or psychologists. The services working in this sector are services responding to basic needs of those experiencing homelessness. They are not able to provide access to long-term or ongoing psychotherapy to service users. Through this training, a model we tested that aimed to build an attachment environment within the services and equip staff with skills and a practical toolkit that would be therapeutic without crossing into therapy.

Theraplay group training supports structured play group that incorporates playful, cooperative and nurturing activities that enhance the emotional well-being of children. Unlike other play group approaches, Theraplay learning takes place on a non-verbal level, but actively supports positive messages from the group interaction gradually become a part of the child's internal sense of self.

The steps taken in the process:

Step 1: Stakeholder Meeting this an initial meeting was with those in decision making roles within all organisations working within the homeless sector /services supporting homeless families within our geographical area. The Theraplay trainers outlined the case for this model within homeless services as well as detailing the group Theraplay model itself and being Theraplay the practice was modeled by a balloon relay being as part of this initial presentation!

Step 2: Funding confirmation— An application was made by Dublin City South CYPSC to the Healthy Ireland funding programme to facilitate the full roll out of the programme that includes delivery of the training but also a follow-up day approximately 6 weeks after the training to provide a reflective space to process initial learning and challenges of getting groups started. Our learning is that it is very easy to underestimate the administrative work/time in liaising with multiple organisations. Our ongoing relationship with the Theraplay trainers invaluable in this regard.

Step 3: Clinical vs Community application – This is an area of complex trauma and as such we anticipated, and this has borne out, that a standard 2-day group Theraplay training would not have fully met the needs of this sector. The additional 3rd day –which is trauma focused material partly taken from our broader Theraplay training content but also content that is specific to the trauma of homelessness written for this group by Joanna Fortune MICP; MIFPP; Reg Pract APPI; CTTTS; Ap Sup PTI was essential for integrating the model into the organisational ethos.

Step 4: Deliver the training programme— Dates were booked and confirmed and then re-confirmed well in advance. The venue being provided is adequate for delivery of group Theraplay program. Adequate breaks are provided for the group with access to outside areas were available, we found that this helped with co-regulation of the group particularly on trauma day resulting in people needing to leave the room for the bathroom a lot less.

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Step 5: Follow-up Consultation day – We felt strongly from the outset that it would be invaluable to check in with participants approximately 6 weeks post training to provide a reflective space to share early learning and challenges and allow group participants to learn from each others experiences. The feedback from those who have participated in this aspect (the majority of those trained) has been very positive and seems to have served as a motivational space for some.

Step 6: Organisational Policy review – In order for the Group Theraplay Model to be fully integrated into the organisation and for those staff rolling out the group Theraplay programme to feel fully supported we believed that this would be helpful. It would allow us to identify any incongruencies between the model and the organizational policies but also to suggest Theraplay statements and touch positive statements that could be added to organisational policy manuals.

Conclusion

Most participants felt they could run a targeted parent-child group (single parents/first time parents/1st time homeless/long-term homeless etc.) or a targeted child group (set number of sessions with specific age range and presenting symptom such as anxiety/school refusal/parentified children etc.) We also explored and planned for the provision of an open-ended group format. This would be a general Theraplay group that would run on a set day/time each week and whatever families were in the Hub/Centre could attend and participate. This would be open ended and run indefinitely offering a positive play experience on premise that play itself is transformative. Our conclusion, thus far, is that community-based Group Theraplay can be done very successfully within complex populations.

A Chapter of the programme of activities *The case for Theraplay within homeless and transient housing services*¹ was written up by Joanna Fortune MICP; MIFPP; Reg Pract APPI; CTTTS; Ap Sup PTI and submitted to [The Theraplay Institute](#). This was endorsed by TTI and is now embedded as practice model in their training delivery worldwide.

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