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Healing Spaces

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Healing Spaces

by Theresa Fraser CYW, MA, CPT-S

Healing Spaces is an ongoing article in Playground. If you would like your playroom featured please contact theresafraser@rogers.com. Theresa is particularly interested in hearing from therapists from other provinces. Thus far therapists from Nova Scotia, Ontario, Manitoba, British Columbia and the North West Territories have been featured in Playground. This edition of Healing Spaces is focused on Donna Cuthbertson who practices in the Whitby/Oshawa area of Ontario.

As a little girl, Donna Cuthbertson knew that she wanted to work with children. She grew up in the Durham region and has developed a well-respected Play Therapy practice in the Whitby/Oshawa area of Ontario.

Donna began her journey as a Child and Youth Worker and has worked in school systems, consulted in early intervention programs, mental health programs and pediatric hospital programs all over the past 36 years. Donna specializes in working with children who have exceptional needs.

Donna gained her initial training at the University of North Texas in 1993 from her primary mentor Dr. Gary Landreth as part of his extensive supervision group. She also remembers Dr. Marie Dhase whom she describes as easily recognizable for her warmth and passion. Dr. Eliana Gil's work has also influenced Donna's style of work as well as Dr. Rise Van Fleet who Donna trained with at her Filial Therapy Enhancement Centre in Boiling Springs, Pennsylvania in the 90's.

Donna also trained with Dr. Gisela Schubach De Domenico in 5 levels of Sandtray-Worldplay and has done extensive training and supervision with Dr. Dan Hughes in Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy. In addition to all of these formalized training programs she has attended many international Play Therapy conferences.

Donna emphasized that the understanding of neuroscience research and the effect of trauma on the brain has been instrumental in the supportive



and educational work she does with families. She identified that Dr. Bruce Perry's research and training has been influential to her work in this field. She believes that Play Therapists should learn from highly skilled clinicians in order to subsequently develop a theoretical style and method of presentation that works best with their personality.

Donna's relationship with CACPT goes way back to the early days. She was the Membership Chair for CACPT in the 1990's. She, along with Dr. Betty Bedard-Bidwell, Bridget Revel and Greg Lubimiv, were part of the committee which determined CACPT's initial certification qualifications. Donna later co-authored, Hand in Hand and contributed Chapter

10, Implementation of Play and Art Therapy Programs in Schools. Donna later shared her wisdom in the first Play Therapy certificate programs held at Kings College in London, Ontario.

In 1995 Donna became a Certified Child Psychotherapist and Play Therapist. Donna will be forever grateful to Lilia Day, her CACPT supervisor, who brought her together with Brian Nichols, Hannah Sun Reid and Sandra Webb whom she has developed great friendships with and continues to get together with for peer supervision. Lorie Walton is also a mentor she is grateful for. Donna has a Certificate in Infant Mental Health from York University as well as certification as a Trauma Specialist.

Since 1995 Donna has maintained a private practice in Play Therapy as well as agency work. In 2009 Donna did a mission in St. Petersburg Russia with 3 Play Therapist colleagues; Hannah Sun Reid, Sandra Webb and Brian Nichols to provide a week of training at Raoul Wallenberg University about Play Therapy and to consult at an Orphanage. Donna's presentation was called 'The Therapeutic Relationship: Heart Work'. In 2010 Donna traveled to China with Hannah Sun Reid and Sandra Webb to vacation and to visit orphanages. Donna chose to retire in 2010 from agency work and to maintain her private practice part time, allowing more time for her 2 young grandchildren.

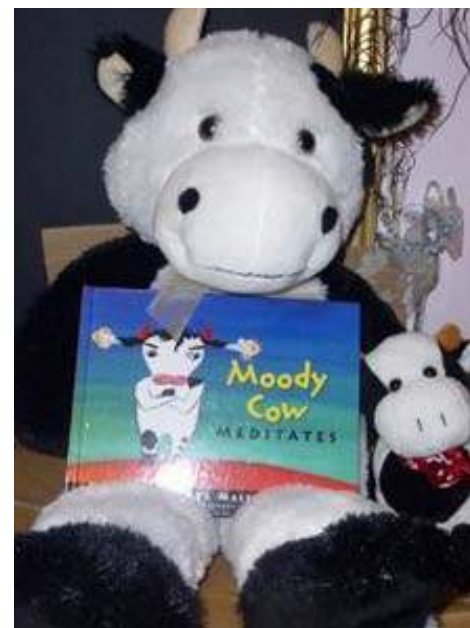
Donna's play therapy has evolved over the years into an eclectic theoretical approach depending on the needs of her clients. Donna utilizes her skills in Theraplay, Filial Therapy, Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Directive and Non-Directive therapy, Puppetry, Sandtray, and other various Expressive Art modalities.

In the past 6 years Donna has increased her knowledge and experience in working with Bereaved families. In her practice, now located at Hearth Place Cancer Support Centre in Oshawa, Ontario she receives increased referrals for children experiencing many types of grief. In addition to individual support Donna facilitates groups for children living with a loved one with cancer or who have lost a loved one to cancer. In addition to contract work with Hearth Place Donna receives referrals from families and agencies

for children with anxiety disorders, depression, anger, trauma, high conflict divorces, grief and other related issues affecting day to day function. Donna works with children with dual diagnosis and has found the therapeutic relationship along with play therapy to be effective. Donna also runs peer support groups for siblings of children with special needs. Donna is a member of Bereavement Ontario and in October 2012 presented at their provincial conference and in October 2012 she was requested to participate as part of an expert panel at Hospital For Sick Children's annual Palliative Care conference.

Over the past 17 years since certification, Donna has worked in a variety of therapy environments. Regardless of the space though, Donna identifies that the materials, and more importantly the 'self', impact clients the most. For example, when Donna worked for 10 years with a school board as a Counsellor between 1990 and 2000 she recalls turning over a garbage can on a gym stage for a puppet show and on other occasions traveling to schools with a portable sand tray and miniatures. Though having the miniatures in an orderly fashion set out on many shelves may be ideal, a qualified therapist should utilize the healing resources at hand.

Donna noted that though many people want to be generous in donating materials, it is important to be selective and know why each item is present in your healing space, so that it facilitates a child's freedom of expression. Given she trained with Dr. Gary Landreth, it is not surprising that she believes that materials need to be "selected" and not "collected". That said, she believes that the therapist's heart plays a larger role than tools/materials, as so eloquently stated in Landreth's book:





"This kind of relating, of truly experiencing being with a child with the permission of the child to know the child's inner world, is not learned by training or by sharpening our intellect. It is a learning open only to the heart."

The importance of responding out of one's heart in a relationship with a child was described by the Tin Woodman in his conversation with the Scarecrow in the Wizard of Oz.

"I didn't know enough." Replied the Scarecrow cheerfully. "My head is stuffed with straw, you know, and that is why I am going to Oz to ask him for some brains."

"O, I see" said the Tin Woodman. "But, after all, brains are not the best things in the world...Have you any?" inquired the scarecrow. "No, my head is quite empty" answered the Woodman "but once I had brains, and a heart also: so having tried them both, I should much rather have a heart."

Donna recommends that new interns should have a solid understanding of child development, the effects of trauma, family systems, and therapeutic approaches for related issues that impact families who are referred for therapy. There are many courses, resources and/or conferences to gain this knowledge. Belonging to organizations such as Association for Treatment & Training in the Attachment of Children (ATTACH), The Theraplay Institute, Infant Mental Health (IMP), Association for Play Therapy (APT) and CACPT offer many opportunities for training and literature. One of the most economical ways to receive supervision would be to work or volunteer for

an agency that provides clinical supervision approved by CACPT or to participate in group supervision approved by CACPT.

In regards to professional development within Canada there is so much more available now than 10 years ago. To be economical in professional development there are opportunities to volunteer at registration or elsewhere at conferences and get free registration to attend workshops. Donna finds networking with others is a way of gaining knowledge and building on resources. She recommends that before developing a private practice it would be beneficial to have a variety of experiences within systems you may need to work with later. Developing a reputable relationship within the community you hope to set up your practice in will further enhance the success of your referral base.

Being in private practice requires much self-motivation and an awareness of ongoing research and continued learning. Ongoing individual or peer supervision and the capacity for self-reflection are crucial to the integrity of the Play Therapists work. Donna states "I will always remember a valuable magical word I learned many years ago from Greg Lubimiv at his workshop about "how to get unstuck when you are feeling stuck in therapy". The magic word was 'BELIEVE'."

*** ANNOUNCING ***

CACPT Research Award for Active Research in Play Therapy

Approved By An Ethics Board - to be
granted in 2013

Award Amount: \$500.00

Submit Inquiries and Interest to
nrbowers@aol.com (Research Chair)