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Healing Spaces

by Theresa Fraser CYW, M.A., C.P.T.

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 and the North West Territories have been featured in Playground. This edition of Healing Spaces is focused on Robin Pucci who practices in Bradford, Ontario.



Robin in the playroom.

When Robin Pucci was a high school student at Holy Trinity High School in Bradford Ontario – an inspiring Play Therapist was invited to speak to her **Introduction to Psychology** class on Play Therapy and the career of a Child Psychotherapist Play Therapist. This presentation inspired Robin to learn as much as she could about the role that a Play Therapist plays in the life of children and families whose lives have been touched by trauma or attachment disruptions.

Robin identified that she was instantly captivated by what seemed to be the best job in the world. She decided then and there to become a Child Psychotherapist Play Therapist.

Seven years later, after graduating from her undergraduate degree in psychology, Robin contacted that same Play Therapist to inquire about future steps. The first recommendation was to enroll in the CACPT certificate program which Ms. Pucci promptly did while pursuing her Master's degree in Counselling Psychology.

The inspiring Play Therapist was CACPT Past President Lorie Walton (who owns and operates Family First Play Therapy Centre Inc in Bradford Ontario). Lorie explained the certification process to Robin and then later interviewed Robin for an Internship position.

Robin has enjoyed learning different approaches to play therapy and how to use techniques with children who have various issues. She stated that after attending Level One of the Certificate program she has met "inspiring instructors who are engaging and have an extensive knowledge in the field". Robin has also participated in Introductory Theraplay training given Theraplay is a big part of the work that is done at Family First. It helps to create nurturing relationships between children with attachment issues and their parents as well as support in the regulating of the child's emotionally dysregulated presentation.

Robin is gaining her clinical hours and supervision hours from working at Family First under the supervision of Lorie Walton. She also identified feeling very fortunate to be working in her chosen field in her home community.

This Intern's supervised practice includes clients who are between the ages of infants to 16 years of age. These children are referred for a variety of reasons, such as, attachment issues (pre or post adoption or foster care) neglect, physical abuse, ADHD, anxiety, depression, sexual abuse, PTSD, autism, medical or developmental issues. Consequently therapists at Family First are trained and certified to use evidence-based models such as: Cognitive Behavioural Play Therapy (CBT), Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP), Theraplay, Sandtray, Filial Therapy and client centered (non-directive) to name a few. Parent counselling and psycho-educational support is also provided along with incorporating the caregiver/parent into sessions is a main practice.

Family first has several play therapy rooms as well as a Theraplay room utilized by a team of clinicians. When using a therapy room, Ms. Pucci stated that she has been trained about the importance of keeping the therapy room tidy and clean. Each therapist is trained to put away anything that was used during the session, such as refilling paint containers, cleaning paint brushes, and making sure all items are placed on the shelves where they belong so that the room is ready for the next therapist and client. One of the philosophy's at Family First is that if the clinicians show respect for the therapy rooms and the items in them, then the child clients will model that respect as well...because 'all things and people are 'safe' and are taken care of at Family First.'

Robin finds that the female client's who attend Family First tend to gravitate towards the dollhouse. She has observed that the dollhouse helps children express and play out their perception of their family's experience. She has many male clients who tend to gravitate towards the sandtray, where they most often engage in fantasy play.

Ms. Pucci is working on her Masters of Counselling Psychology degree (MA) through Yorkville University and is happy to be practicing Play Therapy at the Family First Play Therapy Centre Inc while working on her dream of becoming certified as a Child Psychotherapist and Play Therapist.



Robin with Mentor Lorie Walton from Family First Play Therapy Centre.

Robin wants other CACPT Interns to know that getting started can be scary which can sometimes mean aspiring Play Therapists doubt their capabilities.

Her mentor, Lorie Walton, has told her that it takes experience to be a confident therapist but you will get there if your intentions are good and your goal is to help children and families. She has found it easy to find mentors because she has found CACPT members and supervisors to be helpful and supportive. She also identified that she has found that while learning how to help others, it is amazing how much you learn about yourself in the process.

When Robin was asked which resources she likes to refer to in her practice she shared articles and books by Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, Dr. Bruce Perry, Paris Goodyear-Brown and Garry Landreth. She has found that these authors/therapists/scientists offer important direction to the aspiring Play Therapist about supporting the healing process of the children who often attend Play Therapy.

If you wish to contact Robin Pucci to dialogue further in regards to her journey in becoming a Certified Child Psychotherapist, you may contact her at: r.pucci@rogers.com