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Theresa Fraser

Sheridan College, theresa.fraser@sheridancollege.ca

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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 The Northern Aurora Counselling Centre in Leduc Alberta.

The Northern Aurora Counselling Centre in Leduc Alberta provides clients with Play Therapy, Attachment based interventions, family counselling and group counselling. There are six clinicians who share the two Play therapy rooms one of which is an observation one way mirror. Three colleagues are Registered Psychologists, one a Provisional Psychologist one a Clinical Counsellor and a Masters of Counselling student. All utilize playful approaches to support the healing process of their clients. Therapist Tanya Johnson states that, "healing, laughter, tears, growth create new perspectives and all are experienced within the warmth and safety of a beautiful play therapy room that contains puppets, a sandtray, a dollhouse, an art center and much, much more! I cannot think of another career path that would be so incredibly rewarding, not to mention fun."

Tanya, who grew up in South Africa, received her first level training at Rocky Mountain Play Therapy Institute but had also participated in other introductory workshops. While completing her graduate degree she worked with clients from the Cancer Treatment Centers of America. She also has training in Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy Art Therapy and Traumatology to name a few.

She suggests that new clinicians volunteer in therapy centres so they make connections with other therapists and can gain supervision and experience. Tanya and her colleagues agree that working with the child's family is pivotal to



their work so they meet with families/caregivers approximately every 3-5 sessions. Tanya supports many children who have grief and loss issues. If needed, she will invite different family members into the therapeutic process in order "to optimize and nurture growth and development".

Tanya identifies that she utilizes Client Centred approaches as well as Narrative and Mindfulness based approaches. The centre's sandplay tools are well used. She states that "children tend to love the sandtray figurines which sometimes are used in the sandtray, and sometimes used as part of elaborative play that encompasses the large carpeted area in the play room. Her colleague, Tammy Schamuhn,

also shares the belief that children find the sandtray healing given “when a psychological injury has occurred, the use of sandplay creates a platform for healing and increased consciousness. Sandplay provides an opportunity to make abstract psychological processes more concrete and allow a space for client’s move towards a place of healing and resolution”. Tammy also shared that as her family work has increased she is “adding blankets and pillows as a place for children to seek comfort and to expand the play space to utilize aspects of Filial Play Therapy and Theraplay activities.”

Tammy trained at Rocky Mountain Play Therapy Institute (Calgary) with Lorri Yasenik and Ken Gardner - both CACPT and APT Supervisors. Ken is Tammy’s current Play Therapy Supervisor. Tammy identifies that supervision is key to clinician growth. She recommends that Play Therapy Interns get a supervisor they can trust and connect with for Supervision and Case Consultation. She also recommends recording sessions to use in supervision so you increase and enhance your Play Therapy skills.

Director Aspen Gowers did all three levels of the Canadian Association for Child and Play Therapy Play Therapy Certificate Program in Ontario in 2009. She has also completed all of her theoretical training to become a Sandplay Therapist through the Canadian Association for Child and Play Therapy. She is preparing to be certified with both organizations having Dr. Amanda Bell (CPT-S) provide supervision as well as Bea Donald (CAST). Aspen is the centre’s founder and feels that the team is able to share the therapeutic space because they “understand how sacred it is.” Though Aspen shared that Sandplay work is the main focus of her therapeutic work, she identified it really depends on where the client’s psyche takes them during each session. The “clients participating in Play/ Sandplay Therapy tend to become very familiar with the collection and tend to notice if something has been moved or changed”.

Agreeing with what colleagues have shared she suggests to therapists beginning their practices



that they can be mindful to choose warm colors and calm lighting when creating healing spaces so clients feel welcome and not overwhelmed or over-stimulated.

All staff at the Northern Aurora Counselling Centre agrees that in order to effectively share a healing space, clinicians need to work “collaboratively to be very respectful of the space and of one another’s needs within the space. Realistic issues like scheduling time, adding new toys, taking away toys, and maintaining a clean, beautiful space need to be addressed in a manner which honors the integrity and healing energy of the play therapy room”. With this in mind the Northern Aurora centre offers support to their clients in many issues including attachment challenges, parent-teen conflict, divorce/separation, grief and loss, anxiety/ depression, identity issues and relationship issues.

If you are interesting in visiting the centre go to: <http://auroracounsellingservices.com/>