

Somatic Experiencing (SE) – Advanced Year

The training which I received the funding for was entitled 'Somatic Experiencing Advanced Year' training. This is the third stage of three levels of trainings which are each held over a year's duration. I completed the two previous years also. The Beginning Year in 2021 and then with the funding support from the FPSA I completed the Intermediate year in 2022.

This third year of training was again held in Northern Ireland in a beautiful place called Corrymeela, in Ballycastle. Corrymeela was established in the 1960s as a centre for peace and reconciliation. Each year to gain the certificate, attendance at 72 hours of training is required. The training was provided over two residential weeks in March and October 2023 providing six full days each of education contact hours totalling 36 hours per module. There is also a requirement to complete a number of personal SE sessions every year, which I completed 10 hours over the course of this year, along with Case Consultation sessions, of which I completed 20 hours during the residential training weeks and across the year in between the two training modules, some of which were individual and some group consult sessions. These sessions were really helpful as they offer the opportunity to reflect on individual case work with clients and to consider and release your own trauma history.

I work in a Child & Adolescent Mental Health clinic (CAMHS) in the city centre of Dublin. I am employed as a senior social worker and systemic psychotherapist having completed Systemic Family Therapy training and a masters in Psychotherapy training a number of years ago. My role in CAMHS involves therapeutic work with children and adolescents and their families. The somatic experiencing approach has really enhanced my work with the young people (mostly aged 11-18 years) attending our service in that it has built on and developed my skills repertoire when engaging in work with the adolescents, bringing the option to include the body at the core in the release of trauma often without the need for words i.e. using the body to naturally move through and process difficult life experiences. Using a bottom-up approach rather than a top down, such as those interventions with a strong cognitive focus, this somatic focus removes the temptation to try to use the mind to figure things out, instead focussing on 'leaning in' to noticing the body sensations and natural physiological change in the body which shifts towards release and recovery i.e deactivation.

The course is a post-qualification, advanced clinical training. The training is for psychotherapists, counsellors, body workers and with others with counselling skills, experience. It is an experiential training which focuses on enabling participants to practice and integrate the SE approach into their work. The previous levels I attended helped me to understand the physiological basis of trauma, to study tracking skills, titration (moving in and out of the trauma experience) and establishing continuity through the 'felt sense'. I also gained the insight and ability to identify and stabilise traumatic reactions and avoid the pitfalls of re-traumatisation. We looked at different categories and causes of traumatic shock and approaches to treating each category, such as physical injury; surgery; falls and inescapable attack, such as mugging, physical/sexual attack, war and torture.

This third year of training delved deeper into the relationship of trauma to the development of various clinical syndromes, such as clinical depression, anxiety and ADHD. Symptoms related to these diagnostic categories can be very challenging for the young people I see and their parents. Many experiencing emotional & behavioural difficulties and challenges manifesting in self-injurious behaviours.

We also gained insight and exposure to SE 'touch' work during this module. This work involves the use of physical touch to various parts of the body e.g on the joints/ diaphragms, as well as the

intention of touch and support. This is when the therapist directs their focus and attention to a particular area of the body that needs support and resourcing without the actual physical touch. Having completed this third year, the skills I have learned over the three years and in particular this final year adds hugely to my therapeutic toolbox and the richness of the therapeutic endeavour.

The 'art' of therapy is together weaving the possibility with our clients to evolve and grow in their recovery journey.

As noted, the young people I work with have been exposed to trauma of some sort which most people come to experience during their life-cycle. However, for these young people they have become stuck in that mind/body response (trauma response). My role is helping them to bring more 'ease and flow' in to their physiology and enable the release of this debilitating highly activating trauma response, manifesting in mood/anxiety symptoms, and ultimately removing the need or compulsion for release via self-injurious behaviour, bringing in more emotional regulation.

Peter Levine, who is the initiator of this approach to training, has written extensively on this approach and offers many in-person and online trainings, which will be really helpful for my continuous performance development and I would suggest others who may be interested in this approach take a look at his writings.

Much appreciation to this Foundation for the opportunity they have given me to train in and share this wonderful approach with my young clients.

Somatic Experiencing Practitioner (SEP)