

FPSA FUNDING REPORT

I completed my EMDR for children training on 10th and 11th December 2020. In my capacity as a Specialist Senior Educational Psychologist, working with looked after children who are in care to Stoke-on-Trent City Council the training has been invaluable. Currently Stoke have over 900 children in care and this figure is rising in the current Covid-19 crisis. Over half these young people are placed outside of Stoke in a variety of placements all over the UK. This means it is often very difficult to access mental health services for our young people due to their circumstances and the transitory nature of their placements, which often result in them moving on to other regions before a referral to the relevant services are progressed through to completion.

During my training I have been able to offer EMDR therapy to a number of children and young people who have experienced an array of difficulties ranging from: neglect, developmental trauma, abuse, domestic violence, assault, bullying, trauma associated with sexual exploitation and gang involvement, as well as those who have lost their homes and family members due to war and other challenges in their countries of origin. The age range that I have worked with has been between 5 and 16 years of age requiring a range of the techniques covered during the training.

As the main theoretical influence on my work is Attachment theory the EMDR therapy training has proved to be an excellent resource that is both compatible and enriching when used within this paradigm. The training emphasised attachment, loss and trauma as the three major wounds that might be experienced by an individual, where attachment is the most fundamental of these. As the majority of my clients have experienced all three of these elements, the training provided a clear path to follow using the repair of the attachment wound as the priority to make subsequent work on loss and trauma more effective and less challenging. By adopting this strategy, I have been able to work collaboratively with both carers and school staff to resource them in establishing, safe and consistent relationships and environments as a basis for further work. I have been able to share models from the training in a form that can be understood by carers and school staff to develop their awareness and skills when handling children and young people who have experienced disruptions to their attachments and trauma.

The EMDR training has been particularly effective in supporting children and young people whose difficulties lie at a pre-verbal level. This was illustrated by an eight-year-old boy who had experienced severe neglect and abuse and had a number of care placement breakdowns due to his inability to regulate his emotions. Having achieved a level of calm at his new carer's home and in his new school through the use of EMDR, his anxiety was reignited when he had to return to school following the first lockdown. Through the use of psychoeducative narratives, the Constant Installation of Positive Orientation and Safety (CIPOS), body scanning, alternate bilateral stimulation and cognitive interweaves he was supported by me and his teaching assistant to stay safe within the arrangements imposed by the Covid-19 restrictions.

The training has enabled me to support a number of children and young people who would not have had access to any therapeutic input otherwise. It has also enabled me to work with carers and educators in a creative, collaborative and constructive way that has contributed to their skills and knowledge as well as my own.

I look forward to using and gaining confidence in the skills that I learned during the training and to use other techniques such as the EMDR Integrative Group Treatment Protocol (IGTP) in more creative and effective ways in the future.

May I offer my sincere thanks for the funding that I was awarded and assure the FPSA that the investment in my training will be put to the most effective use possible.

Specialist Senior Educational & Child Psychologist for Children in Care