

June 2009



# Action for Children briefing

## Research update: Holding the Space

### Finding new ways to support children and young people in residential care

Action for Children understands that children in residential care can feel powerless in their lives. They may have difficulties in forming relationships because of past experiences such as families that have let them down or foster placements that have broken down. They may feel like outsiders at school and have no sense of identity. Action for Children's Holding the Space programme gives young people a sense of belonging and can help them find an identity.

#### What is Holding the Space?

Holding the Space is a training programme to support social care workers in residential homes, helping the staff and young people to work as a community. By working with residential workers, the course uses therapeutic methods to help change the culture in residential homes and create teams who can respond therapeutically to children and young people who have high levels of need.

#### How does it work?

Three therapeutic tools are introduced in the Holding the Space training programme:

- ▶ **The Way of Council** – a group-work method
- ▶ **Creative Arts Therapy** – to help workers think psychologically about young people in their care
- ▶ **Carl Rogers' Core Conditions of Empathy, Congruence and Unconditional Positive Regard** – to enable deep-listening skills to be developed.

**The Way of Council** is the core element to the programme. Councils can also be called at any time and are especially useful at times of crisis and transition but also celebration. The group sits in a circle and has specified guidelines at the start:

- ▶ to speak from the heart
- ▶ to listen in a non-judgemental way

- ▶ to only say what is relevant
- ▶ to be spontaneous

Participants take turns to speak about how they feel by using a 'talking piece', and only the person holding it is allowed to speak. The young people who sit in Council have equal power to the staff and this is very important.

*as long as it takes*



## Residential homes using Holding the Space have found:

- ▶ the relationships between the staff and children improve, as well as relationships between staff and between the children
- ▶ there are fewer incidents of bullying
- ▶ there is less need for physical intervention
- ▶ a sense of community develops, enabling children and staff to solve problems and celebrate successes together
- ▶ a safe space is created for children and staff to share important feelings and listen to each other
- ▶ staff are able to think more psychologically about the children in their care, enabling them to manage conflict differently

## Why is the programme being evaluated?

The results of the Holding the Space programme have been recorded anecdotally by staff in our residential homes. Action for Children has now commissioned a formal evaluation to determine the difference in quality of daily life when Holding the Space has been introduced.

The research is being carried out in two parts:

1. a case study of a home that has been using the Way of Council for several years, and where staff have completed Holding the Space training

2. follow a cohort of homes embarking on the new one-year Holding the Space training programme

Part one has five main objectives:

- ▶ to describe the environment, staff and young people in the chosen home
- ▶ to describe and analyse the process of Way of Council
- ▶ to outline when it is used
- ▶ to identify the immediate outcomes of Way of Council
- ▶ to analyse and evaluate the overall impact of Way of Council in one home

Part two has three main objectives:

- ▶ to describe the environment and composition of the homes prior to the training
- ▶ to identify the content and process of the Holding the Space training
- ▶ to evaluate and analyse the impact of the training on staff, young people and environment

This evaluation is being undertaken by the Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care (SIRCC) at the University of Strathclyde.

## Key dates

The Holding the Space evaluation will be published in spring 2010.

## Talk to us

If you would like to be kept up to date with the research, please contact:

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