

June 2010



# Action for Children briefing

## New 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*



## What has been the effect of the Holding the Space training programme on the daily lives of the children in care?

The evaluation found that the culture of the home is very positive; there is a warm and caring atmosphere and openness in communication. In addition, relationships have improved between staff and the young people.

When there are potential conflicts, they are being dealt with in a caring and consistent manner. Both staff and young people report that the 'Way of the Council' has had an extremely positive influence on their lives.

The evaluation shows that there has been:

1. better attendance at school
2. less incidents of verbal and physical aggression
3. less bullying
4. less absconding
5. fewer restraints
6. less property distribution
7. less alcohol misuse

'...feeling strangely happy. Better place, better than home. Glad. It's simple. Accept it Admit it. I'm happy.'

A quote from a young person



Five themes emerged from the Holding the Space training programme:

- ▶ quality of relationships
- ▶ openness among staff and young people
- ▶ positive atmosphere
- ▶ reflection
- ▶ sense of community

This evaluation has been undertaken by Dr Stevens at the Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care (SIRCC) at the University of Strathclyde.

### 'It's all about relationships and communication'

A quote from a member of the residential childcare team

Please find further details on the case study online at [www.actionforchildren.org.uk/residentialchildcare](http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/residentialchildcare)

### Key dates

The Holding the Space training is currently being implemented in six services in Scotland. A full report on outcomes will be published in February 2011.

### Talk to us

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

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