

Case study: school-based mental health support - Therapeutic Mentoring Rooms

Introduction

Therapeutic Mentoring Rooms was established in 2016, delivered by Betsy de Thierry Ltd, and is a complementary programme to The Trauma Recovery Centre (established 2011). The TRC provides trauma recovery-focused creative therapy for children and young people who have suffered trauma, and therapeutic support for their families.

The key problem this case study addresses

A significant proportion of refugee and asylum seeking children have experienced severe trauma, in their countries of origin, on their journeys to the UK, and in some cases, since arrival in the UK. This affects their learning at all levels, and teachers frequently report finding themselves managing symptoms including anxiety or panic attacks; inability to concentrate and complete tasks; severe sleepiness; withdrawal or aggression in the classroom. Education and wellbeing professionals from the refugee children's sector report that these symptoms are often misunderstood as straightforward behavior issues, and lead to inappropriate or premature disciplinary or exclusionary measures.

However, (as outlined on the Therapeutic Mentoring Rooms website)

“brain changes that occur in the aftermath of trauma create a different physiological approach to learning. Listening with focus, remembering what was taught, following sequential instructions, remaining focused and thinking can all be challenging for children whose brains are overtaken with the primary task of surviving. As such, when education staff expect the traumatised child to study subjects which seem irrelevant to survival, it can cause behaviour which experts recognise as trauma symptoms but can often be understood as defiant or naughty. When a child is happy they are curious and want to know about life. When the child is neurologically wired for survival due to experiencing terror and powerlessness, learning is painful and can cause significantly increased turmoil and then subsequent escalation of the trauma symptoms.”

To be able to learn well, refugee and asylum seeking children who have experienced trauma need high quality, therapeutic support - and yet many professionals working with these children report struggling to access prompt and appropriate help.

What they do

Therapeutic Mentoring Rooms operate within mainstream primary and secondary schools and attach a trauma recovery focused psychotherapist to a school to offer clinical supervision and assessment of significantly traumatised children.

The Therapeutic Mentoring Rooms offer frequent sessions of support from a known and specially trained staff member at school. These school staff members are trained as therapeutic mentors to work under the clinical oversight of a trauma informed creative children's psychotherapist who has years of experience seeing children's trauma symptoms reduce and healing facilitated.

To open a registered Therapeutic Mentoring Room, the school Head must proactively want their school to become a trauma informed school, and all school staff must attend a one day Introduction to Trauma Recovery Focused Training Pathway (©Betsy de Thierry). All staff working 1:1 with children within the school must attend an additional 3 hour training on approach and strategies to enable recovery for children, and two designated staff members must complete the full Certificate in Therapeutic Mentoring (delivered by ©Betsy de Thierry Ltd).

A suitable room within the school must be identified and kitted out with appropriate equipment, and work can then begin to identify children who need to access the space. The service is open not just to refugee and asylum-seeking children, but to any children within the school community who have experienced trauma of any kind. Once children are identified, assessments take place, and treatment plans are written by the supervising psychotherapist. These plans are then carried out by the trained, existing school staff members who have completed the full Certificate in Therapeutic Mentoring, under close supervision of the psychotherapist.

The difference this makes/why this is an example of good practice

Therapeutic Mentoring rooms are pioneering rooms that bring hope and healing to the most vulnerable children within the school system. The provision utilizes the benefit of the adult who is already known to the pupils, working within the safety of the familiar school environment. This facilitates access both at the emotional level, and also at the practical level, reducing the need for time out of school and transportation logistics. The intervention works from the premise that children who have suffered trauma can recover, not simply have their behaviour managed.

'The course has given me knowledge and skills to begin to understand and respond to children who have suffered or are suffering trauma. It has increased my beliefs that children can be repaired and can go on to lead the best life they can. It has given me hope for the future of our children.'

Headteacher of a Primary School in Wiltshire with a Therapeutic Mentoring Room

For more information:

<http://www.therapeuticmentoring.co.uk/therapeutic-mentoring-rooms.html>

www.betsytraininguk.co.uk

www.trc-uk.org