

# *Helping Young People Through Difficult Times*

Jacqueline Dysart  
Senior Clinician -Family Specialist and Generalist Counselor  
Headspace General and Youth Early Psychosis Program.

## Intersection



## Political Protest and Social Change



## Foucault, Trauma, Port Arthur and the Model prison



## Social exclusion

The new schools, juxtaposition and the importance of **context**

## Social work

Commitment to social change.

## Narrative Therapy

- The problem is the problem
- Outside witnessing conversations
- De-centred **position** in counselling
- Influential but de-centred.

## My own practice

Sometimes it doesn't work!

## What I noticed – Young People and Trauma Contexts

- Young People, mental health and *Protest*
- Young people had made brave attempts to isolate themselves from risky situations
- These choices had left them *isolated* from friends, schools and family.
- Despite their best efforts, young people were being exposed to trauma on a *daily basis*.
- Many of these young people were effected by issues of **race, class and gender**.
- These were the *contexts* young people were experiencing and their mental health concerns were directly related to these contexts.
- This called for a different way of working

## Jennifer's story

- School referral
- Greif and loss
- Witnessing Family violence
- Beaten on the bus – hospitalised
- Poor care from hospital – left in the night
- Intimate violence

*“We have always known. Race women, Two-Spirit and Indigenous women, US third world feminisms, women of color and trans people of color activisms, and sister outsiders have long understood and exposed the connection between intimate violence and the violence committed by social and state institutions.”*

*Durazo, A., Bierria, A., Kim, M. **Community Accountability: Emerging Movements to Transform Violence.***

## Palestinian Context

“The context of our work is very different than trauma centres in many countries. What our people experience is not ‘post-Traumatic stress Disorder’(PTSD). The trauma is not past, it is not ‘post’, it is continuing. We deal with what we have come to call continuing Traumatic stress Disorder (cTSD). more than 80% of our clients suffer from multiple traumas. it is not one single act of trauma that we experience and then try to recover from. for many individuals and families, events occur on a regular basis, if not on a daily basis, that remind them of past traumas. This has significant implications for the provision of psychological services.”

Dr Mahmud Sehwal

## Working with on-going trauma

- How can I work with trauma when there is very little time or space for that young person to heal or recover before the next trauma comes along?
- Would it be useful to pay more attention to adapting and learning on-the-go?
- How can my work more overtly express the notion that the **context** that is the problem, not the young person?
- How can personal therapy more strongly acknowledge that the person is not the problem?
- What do I really know about these specific contexts as a privileged white woman?

## Skills for working with ongoing trauma contexts with young people

- Resisting isolation and strengthening connections
- A tailored contextual approach
- Finding solid ground
- 'Treating' the context
- *Not throwing the baby out with the bathwater*; building a decentered position into the work

## Resisting Isolation – Working with Connections

- <https://youtu.be/t4gLIXnlw2I>

By working in ways that actively seeks to strengthen, develop and honour **connections** with young people, we resist the isolating effects of trauma.

## A Tailored, Contextual Approach

- Co-research with young people. Who, in their family, friendship group or community, might know something that is useful to moving forward?
- Who might help us understand why this problem exists? What might they say?
- Outsider witness conversations, at every opportunity.
- Alertness to anyone or anything that can assist us in our research
- Alertness to small acts of resistance to violence



## Solid Ground



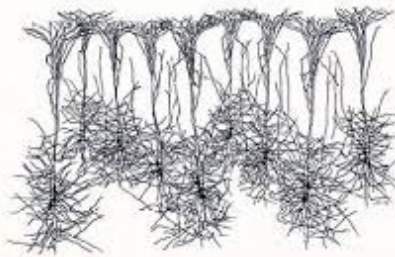
## Solid Ground – Questions for consultants

- What are some of the things that you see in Ben that you would like me to know about? What impresses you?
- Have you noticed any efforts he has made? What things have you seen him try?
- How is it that you have come to see these things, have you had to hold these qualities close in your own life?
- What does it mean to you to know that Ben is also working with these ideas?
- What hopes do you have for Ben in coming here?
- What do you think gets in the way of these hopes coming true now?

## Intersection



## Creating Connections



- Youth advisory group
- Letters to people who might know
- Paintings on the wall
- LGBTI book
- Dot point register – staying away from things to make life better
- Sharing information between clients (with permission)– good websites, good GP's, good breathing techniques.
- Other services
- Groups

## Letter to YouthSpace

Dear YouthSpace,

Jacqui said you like to help young people who are having hard times. I have a few questions to ask you. Any help you could give me would be appreciated:

- *Do you have any advice for people who are bullied?*
- *Do you have any ideas about how to stop the things that bullies say from getting in your head?*
- *How do you stop yourself from learning bullying ways and hurting others?*

Lilith



## Dot point register

- *Sometimes its like getting gum on your shoe, because it is hard to get away from people*
- *Saying no can be hard at first, especially if you are a 'yes' person.*
- *I have learnt I can also be a 'no person'.*
- *Sometimes I told myself, "just say it, Just do it"*
- *You have to be strong about it*
- *Don't look weak, and be stern.*

## 'Treating' the context

- Youth Space – making a difference
- Youth participatory groups – local councils
- Paper flowers
- Suicide prevention rallies and fundraisers
- Posters in schools
- Song writing workshops
- Early Psychosis Program – paid positions for young people to provide support to others
- Volunteering in preschool to translate into language
- Being a leader
- Websites against violence
- Sharing tips and skills
- Linking with others who have changed the world – ted talks, song lyrics.

## International ideas

- Palestine – human rights, victims do not become perpetrators
- New Zealand –Anti-Anorexia league
- Rwanda – genocide survivors living in the same communities with perpetrators.

## Keeping up the relationship

- Flexibility
- Accessible service (headspace model)
- Don't give up
- Gift cards
- Birthdays
- Indigenous engagement officer
- Involving the referrer
- Involving friends, family and teachers

## Notes about this work

- This is not a replacement for good therapy
- Young people generally ask for personal strategies to help them cope and this is essential.
- This way of working is about a therapeutic position: acknowledging that we may have some, but do not have all, the answers.
- Therapy is couched in the notion that young people are working with specific contexts that provide specific challenges and require specific solutions...and since we haven't worked out how to end disadvantage, poverty and abuse, we don't really have the answers for them. Perhaps the young people we meet could help us out with this?

*“The Intellectual project of decolonizing has to set out ways to proceed through a colonizing world. It needs a radical compassion that reaches out, that seeks collaboration, and that is open to possibilities that can only be imagined as other things fall into place.”*

Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2012)\_Decolonizing  
Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples.  
Zed Books, 2012



## Resources

- Epston, D. (199). **Co-research: The making of an alternative knowledge**. In *Narrative therapy and Community Work: A conference collection* (Chapter 16, pp. 137-157). Adelaide, Australia: Dulwich Centre Publications.
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- White, C., Mahmud Ahmad Rasras, K., & Denborough, D. (2014) Responding to trauma that is not in the past: Strengthening stories of survival and resistance. *Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Torture, Ramallah, Palestine*. Adelaide, Australia: Dulwich Centre Foundation International.
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