

The Trauma Transformation Trial – one year on

The Trauma Transformation Trial program funded in this past financial year by the WA Primary Health Alliance was a humbling experience for all of us involved. This psycho-educational program was developed around trauma-informed practice and the Shanker method self-regulation framework.

There were 5 programs run throughout the trial period and we appreciated the courage shown by those Phoenix clients who participated, along with their willingness to be a part of this trial. The participants comprehensive feedback throughout the trial was invaluable in terms of refining and developing the program further, and it became a process of continuous improvement.

The educational aspects of the program focused on providing information about the impact of traumatic experiences such as child sexual abuse on brain development and the autonomic nervous system. In addition, the impact of stress and trauma on self-regulation in the five domains namely biological, emotion, cognitive, social and pro-social helped participants to make sense of their experiences and their day to day challenges, and consequently provided hope for their healing and recovery.

Everyone is unique in terms of what they may find to be 'self-regulating', so the program gave participants the opportunity to experiment with and explore self-regulation strategies such as art, music, mindfulness, relaxation techniques and trauma-informed yoga practices. In between workshop sessions, participants applied some of these strategies and practices at home and then reported back on their experiences. Follow up one to one counselling was also provided to ensure ongoing support and the opportunity to discuss specific needs.

Educational aspects of the program also touched on the myths and facts about child sexual abuse and the 'grooming' process which for many of the participants was 'liberating' in terms of understanding therefore how this happened to them and why it was not their fault which often survivors of sexual abuse are led to believe. This insight certainly reduced the burden of shame imposed upon them and helped to shift responsibility to where it truly belonged.

One of the side benefits of the program was that being part of a group reduced the participants sense of isolation and linked them with others that had experienced trauma. Participants appreciated that it was not necessary to retell or relive those traumatic experiences, and that healing was possible in the here and now as they focused on reducing the impacts of trauma in the present rather than return to events of the past.

Participants reflected how the group program had felt safe and respectful, and there was a sense of camaraderie and support throughout the period they were engaged in the program. There were also some friendships forged beyond the life of the trial period. Participants reported a range of improvements in their ability to self-regulate as a result of the program and testimonials to this are quoted throughout this report. The positive program outcomes were even beyond our hopeful expectations.

From the perspective of the clinical staff and I, it was an absolute privilege to be a part of this trial and we cannot thank enough the Phoenix clients who participated and for everything they gave to the process and for what we learned from them. We were inspired and touched by their courageous spirits. We look forward to what emerges from Chapter 2 of Trauma Transformation.

Louise and the Clinical team