Family Counselling in a Settlement Service

Creating Options for Refugee Families through Culturally Sensitive Family Counselling within a Trauma-Informed Framework.

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Presenters

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Presentation Outline

• SSI & RA NSW - what we do, our clients, community,
• Introducing Family Systems thinking at SSI
• The partnership with RA NSW
• Challenges and learnings of the family work
• Supervision themes and issues
• Case studies
• Questions
Our vision:

To achieve a society that values the diversity of its people and actively provides support to ensure meaningful social and economic participation and to assist individuals and families reach their potential.
Relationships Australia
Who we are...

• Relationships Australia NSW provides relationship support services for individuals, couples, families and communities in order to foster personal and social wellbeing

• We are a not-for-profit Australian organisation with no religious affiliations. Our goal is to promote relationships that are safe, healthy and resilient.

• Relationships Australia services are available to all people regardless of religious beliefs, cultural background, family structure, economic situation, gender or sexual orientation.
Introducing Family Systems thinking at SSI
Settlement • Support • Independence
The Partnership between SSI and RA NSW
Why the partnership?

1) Improved accessibility to family relationships counselling for SSI clients
The impact of the refugee journey on family relationships

**New Country (Resettlement)**

**Flight**
- Loss of, or separation from family members
- Experiences of DV
- Experiences of grief and loss
- Experiences of child abuse
- Experiences in first country of asylum
- Trauma

**Country of Origin**
- Family of origin
- Torture and trauma
- Biological pre-disposition
- Experiences of DV
- Experiences of grief and loss
- Experiences of child abuse
- Experiences in first country of asylum
- Trauma

**Cultural differences**
- Guilt and shame
- Basic needs not met
- Education barriers
- Language barriers
- Ongoing effects of past trauma
- Experiences of racism and discrimination

**Unemployment**
- Loss of personal belongings

**Housing**
- Refugee camps
- Experiences of racism and discrimination

**Social isolation (lack of family, social and community supports)**

**Mental health problems**

**Lost in Translation? Embracing the challenges of working with families from a refugee background**

*RAPS Adolescent Family Therapy and Mediation Service*
Why the partnership?

2) Capacity building of partnership organisations

**Relationships Australia**: Increased knowledge and experience in working with individuals and families from a humanitarian background
- Better fit therapeutic service delivery
- More skilled workforce

**Settlement Services International**: Increased knowledge and experience in providing family relationships support to clients from a humanitarian background
- More holistic service delivery
- Better settlement outcomes for clients
The partnership to date: Outcomes achieved

• Three SSI staff received scholarships for the Grad Diploma in Relationships Counselling with Relationships Australia
• RA Parramatta region staff received Culturally Responsive Practice training by SSI
• Outreach to Bankstown SSI office to see asylum seeker couples and families for relationships counselling
• SSI referrals to RAPS – Adolescent Family Therapy and Mediation Service for family counselling
• Mentoring and supervision of SSI Child and Family Counsellors by RA NSW
Themes emerging from the family work
Grief and Loss

• Often overlooked in assessment work, where there can be a huge focus on mental health issues
• Sometimes found that issues around grief, loss and change was effecting many women, men and children
Trauma and more complex issues

- Many clients referred to STARTTS with complex issues;
- Some referred to GP’s for referral to psychologists and mental health care plans
• Hopefulness and hopelessness
• Powerlessness and helplessness
• Broader challenges and implications of immigration policies
• Greater sense of responsibility to be helpful when from the same cultural background
• Difficulties in obtaining family therapy referrals
• Limited opportunities for live supervision
• Observing family therapy sessions at RAPS was useful for SSI family therapists
• Possible conflict of interest with dual role of ‘case manager’ and ‘family therapist’
Outreach to Bankstown SSI

What has worked well:

• Normalising experiences
• Extra tools for your parenting toolbox
• Balance between relationship building and connection (Blades of a pair of scissors)
Outreach to Bankstown SSI

• What type of a parent are you?

  • Brick Wall parent

  • Jelly fish parent

  • Backbone parent
Outreach to Bankstown SSI

• Involvement of SSI case managers – the referring agents
  - In setting up the appointments with the family
  - Encouraging the family to attend counselling
  - Being included in the first interview with the family
  - A source of information about the family

• OUTREACH

• Questions exploring culture and country of origin
  - Example, If you were back in Iraq and you had this concern, what would happen, who would you go to for help, what are they likely to advise you...
Challenges

• Contextual
• Interpreters that work well with us
• Complete information on families, using genograms well
• Educating case managers about the benefits of family sessions
Case studies
Questions?