

Summary Report from External Clinical Supervision supported by funding from FPSA

I really appreciate the funding received from FPSA to access External Clinical Supervision sessions in 2013-2014, in order to support my clinical work as a Clinical Psychologist, working psychotherapeutically with adolescents with severe and / or complex mental health difficulties.

An essential part of my professional development has been accessing an External Clinical Supervisor Abigail Whyte, Senior Clinical Psychologist, every eight weeks, in order to discuss my clinical case work, team work issues, and how to develop new better ways of working with the adolescents. Accessing clinical supervision is very important to ensure the quality of the clinical work and the safety of practice, especially since general clinical best practice guidelines need to be applied to this specialist population with caution. In addition, it is challenging to find relevant training courses or workshops in Ireland for this specialized population I work with.

Accessing this supervision has helped in using a combination of methods and techniques in my work, such as creative art psychotherapy methods and dialectical behavior therapy techniques, for example. This supervision has allowed me to meet the Continuing Professional Development requirements as mandated by the Psychological Society of Ireland. This kind of supervision has not been available internally, and overall it is important to find a supervisor who is not part of the line management system, as the psychotherapeutic work is process work in nature.

The supervision sessions could be described as a reflective meeting, a safe space where to reflect on how I work with difficult case material and behaviors, explore possible triggers, underlying meanings, maintaining factors, and impacts on myself and colleagues of handling such situations and feelings. This meeting has also been a space to develop self-awareness and to celebrate what works well, and to explore how this “working well” came to be. For example, it has encouraged me to expand the group psychotherapy service, to try new ways of working, and to take more positive risks.

My supervisor has modeled a warm and reflective stance in all interactions with her. I feel that her experienced and compassionate manner has allowed me to become more and more open to feedback, and to tolerate affect better. She has created a space where spontaneity and creativity are encouraged. I have always left the sessions feeling validated, inspired, and refreshed. The sessions are also important for avoiding burn out and a sense of isolation, and for maintaining effective professional boundaries in team work situations. My supervisor has shown genuine enthusiasm and skill to see work situations in a flexible way, using multiple different perspectives, and being open to the unconscious factors. Without the supervision, it would have been hard to sustain the demands of the case load, and to have enthusiasm for service development.

I am very thankful to FPSA for this opportunity. It has made a big difference to my clinical work with the adolescents and their families.

Meria Dolan, Clinical Psychologist.