



# Centre for Treatment of Sexual Abuse & Childhood Trauma

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Autumn 2004 • Number 12



Lalita Salins - Igloolik

## Centre Therapists in Nunavut

Late in 2003, funding from the Aboriginal Healing Foundation was approved for the Qauma Mobile Treatment Program, a proposal put together by the Nunavut Government to offer therapy and workshops for individuals and communities working to overcome the legacy of residential schools. The Centre accepted the invitation of the Nunavut government to have our therapists involved in the month long workshops. These workshops are to be held, four each year, with a total of twelve communities being served. In February, 2004, Susan Oke and Lalita Salins spent a week in Igloolik, a small island in the Foxe Basin, and in May, Susan and Mary Hogan-Finlay traveled to Taloyoak, the northernmost community on the North American continent. In late August, Brenda Saxe and Lalita worked in Sanikiluaq, in the Belcher Islands.

Treatment has included process work, EMDR, insight and psycho-educational models. Participants were offered individual and group sessions. Major issues included trauma, PTSD, cultural identity adjustment, dealing with grief, loss, and anger, and relationship difficulties. Other therapists and Inuit healers are also involved, offering participants a variety of healing modalities and opportunities during the month-long workshops. Those who have participated so far have been impressed by the acceptance by the Inuit people and moved their willingness to engage in the healing process. Even though we used interpreters for many of the workshops, participants attended with commitment, supported one another, and were willing to work hard to understand and process the issues connected to the residential school experiences which affect the whole community. The Centre is very proud to be involved and excited to continue our participation in this important program for the next two and a half years.

## Centre Update

It is hard to believe that a year has passed since our last newsletter. When I was thinking about how to start my update of the Centre's activities, my mind went back to a breakfast meeting that I had this Spring with a prospective new Board member, and Barry Lett, our longest serving Board member. I was trying to explain the structure and internal workings of the Centre. I stopped talking for a minute, very unusual for me, and passed the conversation over to Barry to continue the explanation. I expected Barry to continue talking about the structure of the Centre and how we operate as a not-for-profit charitable organization although we are fee-for-service, something I have always had difficulty explaining. Instead, Barry began talking about "process" rather than structure, and the process that makes the therapists of the Centre into the cohesive, capable, and dedicated group that we are. His generous words made me very thoughtful and reflective, and the more he spoke, the more I realized what a unique place the Centre is.

I certainly am proud of all that the Centre provides both to the community and to our courageous clients. Our internship programs with the University of Ottawa and Saint Paul University will continue this year with three new students, Dino Zuccarini and Matthew Kerr from Ottawa University, and Carol Motuz from Saint Paul University. These students have regular supervision, and see a limited number of clients who would not otherwise be able to afford therapy. Our annual conference brings to our city opportunities for new learning to all therapists in the community of Ottawa-Carleton. This past year our conference with Dr. John Briere was a wonderful success. The proceeds allowed us to continue to enrich our subsidy program, which allows clients who fall on difficult financial times to apply for and access a monetary subsidy in order to continue their therapy, until they can resume this responsibility on their own. The therapists at the Centre have been chosen to bring their knowledge and expertise to Canada's Northern communities. The Centre continues to provide clinical services for individuals who are working through very difficult life issues, whether they be related to early childhood trauma, or to present traumatic or problematic experiences. I really am proud and honoured to be part of this caring and wonderful organization; everyday I appreciate my colleagues, their sensitivity, their loyalty, and their dedication to making the Centre the warm and welcoming place that it is. We hope that you will come and visit us in the near future and join in our ever increasing circle of friends and colleagues. Have a productive and peaceful year.

Dr. Brenda Saxe, Clinical Director

## Who we are

The Associate Therapists at the Centre for Treatment of Sexual Abuse and Childhood Trauma are:

Dr. Jan de Crespigny, Psychologist  
Janice Fraser Mitchell, MSW RSW, Therapist  
Margo Hall-Lemelin, MPs, Psychotherapist  
Dr. Mary Hogan-Finlay, Psychologist  
Dr. Cathy Kerzner, Psychologist  
Karen McCallum, Dip. C.S., Psych. Associate  
Susan Oke, Bsc, Occupational Therapist  
Wendy Paterson, M.Ed., Psychotherapist  
Lalita Salins, MA, RMFT, Therapist  
Dr. Brenda Saxe, Psychologist

## The Role of Couple Therapy in Trauma Work

Those who are sexually abused are only too often violated in the context of what should be a safe relationship. They are hurt and betrayed by someone who should have offered protection and loving care. Not surprisingly, when it comes to finding and sustaining healthy, intimate, adult relationships, someone who has been abused often has difficulties trusting and feeling safe. Making an intimate relationship work is hard work, even if one does not have a history of childhood trauma, as the high rate of divorce in our society indicates.

When a couple is struggling to cope with the aftermath of childhood trauma, a vital part of the long-term healing process may involve couple therapy. It takes courage to expose one's intimate relationship to a therapist and it is very important that the therapist be trained not only in the full range of interpersonal dynamics but also that he or she understands how trauma plays itself out in relationships.

Many couples, where one or both have experienced trauma, struggle with recurring issues around anger. For instance, a partner may complain that the other's anger seems out of proportion to the behaviour which evokes it. One partner reported feeling stunned when his wife screamed at him and pushed him because he had forgotten to bring home a carton of milk. It helps for the couple to understand that when a one is feeling vulnerable and weak, perhaps tired or not well, the fears from the time of the abuse are aroused. Unconsciously, their feeling is "if I am weak and can't protect myself, something really bad will happen again". Rather than reveal vulnerability, one can often become extremely angry which helps them feel stronger and more in control. Unfortunately, the other partner feels unfairly attacked and sometimes retaliates so that the couple interaction escalates into an ugly fight.

It is also common that both partners have a history of abuse in their background. When both partners have been traumatized, it is often difficult for them to listen to each other in an open loving manner. Efforts in reaching for support can lead to a competitive, blaming exchange that further reduces safety and evokes triggers from past trauma. Couple therapy can help to explicate patterns of interaction like this so that both partners understand what is happening at a deeper level. This gives them a chance to handle everyday interactions in a more compassionate and effective manner.

More generally, couple therapy aims to help each partner talk about the issues that leave them feeling insecure and distressed in the relationship. The therapy session provides a place of safety where each person can access emotions and express them in such a way that the partner is able to listen without becoming defensive and reactive. Over time, the couple becomes better able to express specific needs and wants, trusting that the other will hear them and try to respond in a caring way.

A loving and safe intimate relationship can provide the space for life-long healing after an early trauma, and couple therapy can make a major contribution toward this end. Many of the therapists at the Centre for Treatment have received specific training in couple therapy above and beyond their training in trauma work and a call to the Centre will put a couple in touch with one of these therapists.

### Dr. Jeremy Safran

#### "Negotiating the Therapeutic Alliance: A Relational Treatment Guide"

April 1 and 2, 2005

Those who work in the mental health profession know that the quality of the therapeutic alliance is the most robust predictor of treatment success with clients, no matter what issues they bring in to therapy. This year, the Centre is pleased and honoured to present **Dr. Jeremy Safran**, noted author of "**Negotiating the Therapeutic Alliance: a Relational Treatment Guide**", as our annual conference speaker. Dr. Safran is a skilled clinician and a distinguished author and researcher who will combine the practical with the scientific to give the audience a clear description of how to negotiate the highs and lows of the working relationship with our clients. Dr. Safran will be with us April 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2005 at the Health Sciences Auditorium on the General Campus of the Ottawa Hospital. You will be receiving a registration form in the mail early this winter. If you wish early registration information, please contact Krista Guntzel at the Centre.