

# **Children's Therapy Centre**

## **External Examiner Report 2017-2018**

### **1 The Evidence Considered**

This was my fourth and final year as External Examiner at CTC. Once again, I was given an effective orientation, access to all relevant written as well as practical examples of student materials, as well as any other information I required throughout my visit. The highly organised layout of all materials, including Student Assignments and Handbooks, Assessment Criteria, Marking Schemes, and Programme Evaluation Reports enabled an exacting task enjoyable. I found the environment of CTC to be highly congruent to the purpose and ethos of the programme. The standard of materials prepared by staff and the student work evidence the purpose, principles and presence relevant to providing nationally and internationally acclaimed training in play therapy and integrative psychotherapy and in my view over these four years fulfills the mission statement of CTC to achieve excellence.

### **2 Minimum Intended Programme Learning Outcomes**

The range of programmes provided by CTC meet national and international standards relevant to the level, learning objectives and outcomes set across the range of relevant categories from personal development, academic theory, play therapy, humanistic and integrative psychotherapy practice, trauma informed practice, etc. This observation is grounded in 28 years of experience teaching and assessing learning at various levels including Bachelors, Masters and Ph'D levels at Queens University, Belfast; the Open University, UK; Dublin Business School; Metanoia, London; and adult and community education providers. This observation and judgement is also grounded in knowledge of European and international standards of training for psychotherapy, and organisational development.

### **3 Actual Attainment of Learners**

My informed perception of the actual attainment of learners at CTC indicate that the Centre fully walks its talk, and provides the atmosphere, structure and other appropriate resources relevant to the field that enables students to develop the necessary knowledge, skills, competences and living ethos of child psychotherapy at the range of levels provided. In order to arrive at this conclusion, I spent many hours reading selected samples of student work from each year including low, average and high marks, as well as in depth reading of each years work. This included examining all relevant evidence, assessment

criteria, theoretical models, placements, reports, and practical materials created by the learners in the creative peer development games of the 'market' bazaar that supported practical engagement and learning across a range of themes including rage and hate, low self esteem, anxiety, obsession, fear, and loss. It is clear that these games are of such a standard as to be developed further for both public and clinical populations should CTC consider this beneficial and have the resources necessary. It is also clear that the learners at all levels of achievement and grading are attaining a high level of knowledge, skill and competence that is excellent, and at least, and often more than comparable with other national and international trainings that I have been engaged with. The evaluation from students is an additional source of data, and demonstrates this with feedback such as:

'Superb training for child and adolescent psychotherapists.. the balance between theory and practice is perfect...The requirement for personal therapy was most important as for me to be able to meet my clients without my stuff interfering, I have to deal with my stuff. CTC is conscious of both potential clients and potential therapists and care for both equally.'

'It was a joy to return to CTC for further training and to find such a development in the integrated approach to learning, as well as to return to find the supportive environment that I had experienced the first time around still being a huge part of what makes training in CTC so rich.'

#### Final Year MA Students

Moreover, in reading some of the Masters dissertations, I noticed that the work was of widespread clinical interest and internationally applicable, addressing themes of significance for the well being of current and future generations (i.e. working with shame, working with parents, and working with those on the autism spectrum).

## 4 The Programme

The notable strength of this programme is in its coherence and fitness for purpose in integrating high quality play therapy and humanistic psychotherapy practice where practitioners are equipped to be both confident and competent in whatever setting they choose to work. This year, a change was made to the second year case study, giving a single, in depth, detailed case focus, rather than a broader base. This is offering the students a more solid, graded foundation, readying them for a broader case study in year three. Feedback from staff and from students indicates that the change to a single case study has been beneficial, has simplified and increased the integration of complex learning from year one. The attention to detail and commitment to continuous improvement, informed by national and international developments, as well as playing a lead role in such up to date developments, makes the programme a world class training. One that can if and as resources become available, consolidate and continue to PhD levels under the right external and internal conditions. Further evidence of fitness for purpose was provided by students from each of the training years who commented on how the programme has facilitated 'a range of teaching methods', 'different locations', an

'online portal', and 'library service'. The students commented on the lecturers as 'excellent' and motivating the students to 'creativity' and to 'be as best as therapist as I can be.' In sum, 'I feel in terms of therapy courses it would be very difficult to surpass it.' (Students from Year Two). 'Very supportive and comfortable teaching conditions, lovely surroundings.' 'Excellent course...I have found the staff to fully support our needs. I have loved the process and felt guided and safe.' (Students from Year One). 'Excellent, well rounded, appropriate and in-depth learning of psychotherapeutic issues, needs and healing.' (Student from Year Three). 'Excellent training, incorporating both the experiential, theoretical and academic aspects of training. An all encompassing method of learning.' (Student from Year Four). Writing for publication has continued to develop, with much potential for clinical and other applications.

#### **4. Assessment Procedures**

My conclusion from the External Examiners visit this year is that CTC demonstrates open, fair, consistent, and reliable assessment procedures, and that the organisation is highly responsive to feedback from learners, staff, and others, including the External Examiner. I was completely immersed in the experience of assessing the quality of practice and the overall environment at CTC, and my own experience and the evidence from participants demonstrate that CTC creates the essential and desirable conditions conducive to building creative and purposeful relationships, processes and tasks through its design and application of assessment procedures.

Assessment criteria are clear, robust and comprehensive. They provide both students and staff with clarity of outcome and process. For example, the use of two A4 detailed sheets for students and staff to use as guidelines for dissertations. The holistic approach to assessment ensures a whole child in context approach, personal process, models of play therapy, trauma informed practice, parent and system considerations, relevant theoretical approaches, use of self, experiential approaches, creativity, psychopathology, ethics and professional practice. The structured and sequential nature of the assessment, that includes supervisors reports, supports the essence of the practice of play therapy and psychotherapy in supporting the development of the practitioner in context. Further evidence was provided by the innovative blind marking exchange with Deakon University, Victoria, Australia, which verified coherence to international standards. In conclusion, I find the work of CTC with regard to assessment standards, procedures, reviews, and ongoing adjustments as needed, to be outstanding, and congratulate the Centre and staff.

#### **5 Trends**

The recommendations in the previous reports have been acted on and integrated as follows:

- i. Expand the staff team according to need.
- ii. Widen access to the Play Therapy Bazaar.

## 6 Conclusions and Recommendations

The evidence I observed and engaged with strongly validates the view that CTC continues to provide an excellent standard of Play Therapy and Psychotherapy Training from Foundation, Diploma and Masters levels, a range of other trainings and workshops, and writing for publication in local and international publications.

There is a coherence throughout the programme that is recognised by students, with 100% of students participating on the programme recommending CTC to others. Finally, as it is my last year, it has been an honour to be an External Examiner to CTC.

Recommendations for next year are:

- i. To explore the uses of media and social media in relation to the work of CTC, including the possibility of interviewing students regarding outstanding dissertations, and use of poster presentations for conferences.
- ii. To consider and explore how CTC can continue to influence, including the development of apprenticeship, co authored articles for peer reviewed journals.
- iii. To explore the possibilities of further inclusion of ecological/nature based play given the growing importance of environmental issues for us all.

To conclude with the words of one participant seems the best way to conclude this report:

*'Superb training for child and adolescent psychotherapists.'* (Final Year Student).



26<sup>th</sup> July 2018

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**External examiners' signature, date**