



TRAUMA INFORMED CARE EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM

An increased level of impact for the
Boys' and Girls' Clubs of Delaware

DR. GRACE HARLOW KLEIN

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AN INCREASED LEVEL OF IMPACT FOR THE BOYS
AND GIRLS CLUBS OF DELAWARE



Dr. Grace Klein in Library of The Center for Human Encouragement
Photo credit to Michelle Macriella, Luminaria Photography

I am Dr. Grace Harlow Klein and I am excited to share with you the focus for the Trauma Informed Care Empowerment Program which began as a creative dialogue between Chris Basher and me and has already been responded to and begun to blossom from the involvement of some of your staff.


Listening to Chris sharing about the challenges you face in working with the children who come to the Boys and Girls Clubs, I heard how complex your work is:

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- The children's needs are intense and escalating with trauma they bring from poverty, dysfunctional homes, violence, drug use, abandonment and many other factors.
 - Increasing numbers of children come with diagnosed and undiagnosed special needs, the reluctance of parents to acknowledge the needs.
 - Overwhelmed parents who bring the children but have no energy to engage with staff to talk about what is happening in their children's lives.
 - The regulations that limit what you can do, creating stress about your jobs and the threat of legal action against the organization and its staff.
 - The threat of lawsuits
 - A limited labor pool of youth development professionals and the high turnover, in part from the stress of the work environment.

You have very challenging roles in the work that you do, and you have my greatest respect.

The tragedy of what these children experience may lead to the loss of their own dreams; they may mimic the relationships they have experienced in their lives; they may parent as they were parented, creating generations of trauma in children.


– unless there is intervention. And you are there.



Fast forwarding, I connected with the childhood trauma my clients open to in their healing when they come for psychotherapy in my practice:

- the feeling of abandonment by parents who weren't there
- the anxiety that keeps them awake at night, terrified of being alone, unable to breathe
- the depression and hopelessness they feel about their lives, their fear of others, and the paralysis they feel about being able to change
- the pain of invisibility when they were never seen by the adults who were supposed to be there for them as children
- the manipulation of parents using or ignoring children's needs to meet their own needs
- the failure of relationships in their inability to connect with others, unable to follow their own dreams in an increasingly complex and demanding world
- The memories of abuse – physical, emotional, sexual

All of these things stay with them, getting in the way of their lives until they come to therapy and begin to release it, sharing and exploring about their lives.



In our therapy work, when my clients finally connect with that childhood trauma, giving voice to it, their brains release the pain they have carried all their lives, they grieve for what they have lost, but find relief, freedom and energy to be all that they have the capacity to be as they move forward to create the lives they want.

I recognized that I know about trauma informed care from my clients, and also about empowerment from the twelve years I designed and taught an empowerment workshop for nurses, helping them gain their voices and power to act in the challenging environments of health care.

And I heard something else: You are there with the children in the thick of it, your mission “to inspire and enable all young people, especially those who need us most, to realize their full potential as productive, responsible and caring citizens.”

What if I could share with you, the staff, the qualities in you that would help children express their pain so that more of them could grow to meet their full potential. Adversity is not a life sentence. People do amazing things from the pain in their lives – when there is recognition and support for their continued growth.

That is how Chris and I came to create the Trauma Informed Care Empowerment Program for the Boys and Girls Clubs of Delaware.

I will share with you how we plan to go about this but first about myself.



THE CENTER FOR HUMAN ENCOURAGEMENT

This is the Center for Human Encouragement, a place of healing, connection and community which began in 1978 when Armin Klein, a psychologist, who later became my husband, bought this old house for his living and practice, four years before I met him.

It has been my home since 1983 and the home for my practice as a psychotherapist since 2002. I see individuals, couples and families whose lives are in trouble, coming because of their anxiety, depression, loss and grief.

At the
Center For
Human Encouragement,
our work is a gift of caring
and a meeting of our hearts.

Our logo was a gift of glass
hearts. It conveys that our work is about caring,
the meeting of our hearts.


During these years I have established
relationships with my clients by listening to
their stories. Almost all of them have
experienced childhood trauma, carrying feelings
of fear, isolation, anxiety, abandonment,
aloneness, failure, guilt and shame into failed
marriages – or no relationships – difficulties
parenting children and inability to create the
lives they wanted, their dreams in shreds. They
come reaching out for help but bringing with
them a lot of pain, hopelessness and
helplessness. I begin with, “Tell me why you
have come.”
Then, I listen.





THERAPY WITH GRACE ...

- * Connecting with your feelings
 - * Finding your voice
 - * Connecting with others
 - * Making the life you want



Those words sound simple but are based on the way we heal, our brains rewiring from trauma to healing. When we speak from that place of congruence with our feelings, we are authentic, empowered, and able to take action to create the life we want, to pursue our dreams.

What I also hear from my clients is that sometimes there was someone there for them when others were not: a grandparent, a teacher or school nurse. There are many examples I might share, but one of a bright young girl, a middle child in a home with only a mom, but also an abusive brother. She was always helping but when things got too confusing, she would escape to a special aunt and uncle. He would take her fishing with him; she was always there for her with warmth and love. They were her grounding that she was loved in a more simple but direct way.

We are resilient, able to find ways to move forward in our lives, but we take the pain of trauma with us until there is space for healing, not only space but persons who will listen.

My Approach

I am a Person-Centered psychotherapist; my work is influenced by Carl R. Rogers a noted psychologist of the last century. Finding his work gave me language for my own trauma and life experiences, informed my teaching/learning with my students first at Georgetown University and later at Syracuse University and became the foundation for my practice. It was also at the First International Forum on the Person-Centered Approach in Mexico where I met Armin Klein! So you can hear that his work influenced my life.

I want to share an observation by Rogers which is relevant to our project.


Rogers, trying to understand about people and the struggles in their lives, remembered the potatoes stored in the basement when he was young. The potatoes were in the dark but sprouting toward the one source of light in a window across the room. He realized that the potatoes were trying to be what they inherently were, but the environment was prohibiting them from reaching that potential. In the absence of dark rich soil with water and sunlight, the potatoes would never produce new potatoes.



POTATO IN A BASEMENT GROWING TOWARDS THE LIGHT

The relevance he attributed to humans is that we all have a growth drive or Life Force in us, to be what we are capable of being and becoming. But the environment either supports or inhibits that growth or more often is a mixture of the two, creating confusion and pain in children.

He also studied in his ground-breaking research what happens in therapy and noted that:




“People heal from pain when they experience relationships with therapists, characterized by empathy, respect or positive regard and congruence in the therapist.”

~ Carl Rogers

Congruence meaning what I feel matches what I say and the reverse – what I say comes from a connection with my feelings!

“So too, he demonstrated that children learn more effectively when they experience those same conditions in teachers.”

~ Carl Rogers



Let me explain now a framework for understanding children's trauma and their capabilities.

- For the most part, children are born whole, though there are sometimes genetic issues and the impact of a mother's use of drugs or alcohol during pregnancy which affects infants.
- When we are born, we have the capacity to see, hear, eat, respond to touch and make our needs known – even though we must depend on parents or adults to figure out exactly what we need when we cry. An essential part of what we need is the connection and security that someone is there who responds and provides what we need. When that is there, infants and children relax and sleep peacefully and grow. These are the sensitive feeling right side parts of the brain, the way we take in our experiences.

Children's options in the presence of pain are limited to:

1

Shutting
down and
withdrawal


2

Blaming
themselves

3

Acting
out


It is not a choice that children exercise these options. The brain either shuts down or they actively deal with the pain. Each is a coping strategy to blunt the pain but does not help them to resolve the pain or address the problem. Children carry those coping strategies into adulthood with loss of self-respect, impaired identity in how they see themselves, impaired relationships, unable to use their authentic voices because they are not connected with their pain.



There is also the left side of the brain which is the source of critical thinking and problem-solving. While children may still carry the pain, they may also move forward with intellectual and problem-solving agendas which have meaning for them.

What is important to understand is that children's feelings are valid, even when they do not have the language to speak them or are not yet capable developmentally to put language and meaning together to handle their pain.

You are there as a resource to children, engaging them in activities to support their growth. It is frustrating and challenging when you provide those activities and children do not respond or act out to disrupt your efforts and those of other children. It is a challenging role and agenda that requires support but is also an opportunity for a distinctively new approach.



One of my clients is a gifted teacher for children with special needs. She shared with me about the six year old boy who said to her one day: “I am not loved at home.” There are several ways she might have responded. She chose, “You are loved here.” She is present – as you are – when the trauma is happening. You can be the one who validates with listening, caring and empathy what that child is experiencing – not to fix it – but to hear and respond. It is a vulnerable, even sacred place – to be present with that child’s pain.

That is why I am here – to share what I have learned with you – you who are there – earlier – immediately – in these children’s lives.

The focus of this Trauma Informed Care Empowerment Program is to increase the positive impact of your responses to children's trauma by:



Listening to children




Developing skills in observing children's behaviors.



Developing empathic responses



Providing avenues and activities for creative expression in writing, art, journaling, music, theater




The focus of this trauma informed care empowerment program is to increase the positive impact of your responses to children's trauma by:

1. Listening to children
2. Developing skills in observing children's behaviors, processing those observations to understand what the child might be experiencing that could account for his/her behavior, in order to understand and have empathy for the child's needs
3. Developing empathic responses, communicating to children that their feelings are valid and heard, that they are respected
4. Providing avenues and activities for creative expression in writing, art, journaling, music, theater so that children develop their ability to speak in their own voice, adding to and enhancing their own natural growth drive --- activities that you already provide but with an enhanced focus. You are also providing activities for learning, developing those critical thinking and problem-solving skills which will help them succeed in education, finding their place in the world of work – a place which is rapidly changing as to the skills which will be needed as they mature.

It is important to realize that helping children with their trauma also frees energy for them to learn, to be curious, to observe and find meaning in the world outside themselves.

I hope this framework helps you to see new possibilities in how you might enhance your work with children.



Now let me share how we plan to go about this new approach.

Our model is to select people in roles in crucial places in your organization to bring about this increased impact. I will be meeting with them today for the next steps in the process. We will continue to meet by video conference over the next year and develop support groups for them to stay connected with each other throughout the process.

Actually the process has already started. I want to acknowledge the four women who worked with Chris to select a pioneer group of your colleagues to work with me in this initial phase. Their role was very important for helping to ensure a strong start. I would like to acknowledge our pioneer Empowerment Team. Their role is critical to creating a strong program

Congratulations to all of you who are any part of the pioneer team! You were selected for the leadership role and potential for growth as the Empowerment Team in this initial phase of the program. I look forward to meeting and working with you. I know I will learn a great deal about your work, the challenges you face. I will be modeling with you the process

Thank you! I look forward to working with you!

WE CAN MAKE A CULTURE CHANGE ALL OF US WORKING TOGETHER.

When I read Chris' descriptions from the meetings and the persons in the roles you so strategically selected, I thought, "We could make a culture change from all of us working together."

Recognizing Everyone

I have great respect and admiration for the vital work that each of you do for young people as a part of this organization. I am honored to be able to share some of what I have learned to enhance your impact in supporting the growth of the children. No matter your job title or work responsibilities, your contribution and the energy you bring are essential in maximizing the impact and success of this organization as we move forward.

In order to have such a higher level of impact on the young people you serve, it will take an organization-wide awareness and support of these efforts. The organization is not some vague, insensitive entity. It is every one of you here today, together, doing what no one person could possibly do alone. It is a community effort, fueled by respect for each other, listening when someone reaches out, speaking up when you see an opportunity or need, taking seriously the ideas that are generated and working together to see how they can be implemented.



It is this human connection that all of us need which makes our collective efforts so powerful.

Each one of you will have a role in bringing these Boys and Girls Clubs to being an effective responder to children's trauma, of supporting youth development for your children to become all that they are capable of being.

I am excited to be a part of this process with you, working with your administrative team, the Empowerment Team, and, at least indirectly, every one of you to expand our pilot program to the entire organization.

Thank you for being a part of this Trauma Informed Care Empowerment Program and for allowing me to share in it with you.

