



Lutheran Family Services *of Nebraska, Inc.*

Initiating EMDR Practice in a Faith Based Non-Profit: *A Profile of the Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska*

Jennifer was in therapy at our agency to heal from sexual abuse as a child. Intrusive memories, anger with her abuser and self-blame were wrecking her life. She attending sessions with her primary therapist for almost a year when the therapist suggested that EMDR therapy could help. Jennifer saw Cyndi for 5 EMDR therapy sessions. After the 2nd session Jennifer was able to identify that it was her abuser who was to blame for what happened, that she was not at fault and didn't deserve to suffer. Jennifer reported that she knew this "in her head" to be true, but in her heart she'd always thought that the fault was hers. As she progressed, she no longer blamed herself and was able to move on with her life. Her relationships improved and much of her anxiety was gone. By the 5th session, Jennifer was no longer reporting intrusive thoughts related to past abuse and was able to remember positive things about her childhood that she had completely forgotten. Her outlook was changed: she could take care of herself and she would be OK. EMDR therapy treatment was complete so Jennifer returned to her primary therapist for a few more sessions where an assessment revealed she no longer met criteria for PTSD. Her goals were met.

Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska is a 124-year old faith-based, not-for-profit, multi-service human care organization with locations across Nebraska and in Council Bluffs, Iowa. The mission of Lutheran Family Services (LFS) is to express God's love for all people by providing quality human care services that build and strengthen individual, family and community life. Their vision is safety, hope and well-being for all people. LFS' three core competencies are Community Services to new populations, Children Services and Behavioral Health. The agency has integrated EMDR therapy into their program and have had tremendous success with this treatment.

Development of EMDR therapy to its current state as a recognized protocol of behavioral therapy at the Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska was initiated by Ben Czyz and Cyndi Muhlbauer who now share the title of Statewide EMDR Program Coordinator. Ben is also Mental Health Therapist and Cyndi is also Omaha Community Support Supervisor, a program in Omaha which assists adults with severe and persistent mental illness to live independently in the community. Together, they supervise and train other EMDR therapists, track outcomes, develop processes, do presentations in the community on mental health and trauma and provide EMDR therapy to clients.

Their work in a program called Urgent Care inspired Ben and Cyndi to have EMDR therapy integrated into the LFS agency. These clients were homeless, had no insurance and long histories of complex traumas. They would receive treatment and achieve a precarious stability which they were in constant danger of losing. Past memories of abuse and trauma reactions often trapped clients in dysfunctional cycles and discouragement. Searching for a better way, Ben and Cyndi heard about EMDR therapy and decided to be trained to see if it could make a difference. Once they started using EMDR therapy they saw how quickly it helped their clients heal from past traumas and achieve higher levels of stability than they ever had before.

Nonetheless, there were significant challenges in getting EMDR therapy accepted by LFS. There was a lot of skepticism on the part of other clinicians and management. There were no other trained EMDR therapists at LFS and nobody knew what it was. The community and stakeholders in the community really did not understand what emotional trauma was or the

effects of unhealed trauma on a person's life. Another persistent problem was getting enough emotional regulation so that EMDR therapy could be useful. The LSF general trauma process had to be improved so that clients could be treated more effectively.

The key to getting the agency to support EMDR therapy was their commitment to making it accessible and their success in developing an Adjunctive Protocol tailored to the strengths and resources of their agency. Ben and Cyndi were able to engage their immediate supervisor in husbanding the adoption of EMDR therapy at LSF through the amazing outcomes they were getting. She helped them design an Adjunctive Protocol which took into account issues with payer sources and managing caseloads. The protocol is a team treatment approach where a non-EMDR therapy trained primary therapist does the initial stabilization, history taking and psychoeducation work with clients and refers the client to an EMDR therapy-trained therapist for 6-8 sessions. The primary therapist continues to work with the client throughout, assisting the client to process the traumatic material and helping to ensure that the client has the adaptive information they can access and generalize across the neural network as the emotional pain of their trauma lessens.

A great deal of planning and preparation went into making adjunctive process successful. Ben and Cyndi obtained advanced training in EMDR therapy and also in trauma treatment. This enabled them to train other clinicians on trauma specific treatment, assessments and interventions as preparation for a client to receive EMDR therapy. To ensure informed consent, they meet with the client and primary therapist to discuss EMDR therapy and how it works and answer client questions. This meeting and the collaborative relationships give the client more confidence in the process and contribute to achieving the desired outcomes.

In addition to the development of the protocol, internal training was offered for all therapists at LSF on how to assess and prepare clients so they could be referred for EMDR therapy. As clinicians saw clients being successful, confidence in the program grew. Other therapists were inspired to get EMDR therapy-trained.

To embed EMDR therapy in your agency, Ben and Cyndi counsel from their experience, that it is essential to

have at least two people working on this. Not only to divide up the duties, but also to provide encouragement and challenge each other. Form follows function, so assess the particular hurdles in your agency and never underestimate the power of management to make or break a program. Help higher ups at your agency to understand what EMDR therapy is, the benefits it brings and why it needs to be an integral part of your programs. Find managers who are supportive, work closely with them, seek their advice and take it.



Figure Ben Czyz and Cyndi Mulbauer Statewide EMDR Program Coordinators of LFS of Nebraska