

Supporting Children's Recovery: Systemic and Holistic work with Refugee Children, Families and Schools

Dr. Esme Dark



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The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc.

The Child Adolescent and Family Programme (CAF)

The CAF programme was set up to provide tailored programmes of support to particular schools with high numbers of refugee background students for a two year period. Trauma counsellors work in partnership with teachers and leadership teams to assist schools to support refugee background students more effectively and to take a trauma informed approach. We provided :-

- **Specialist trauma counselling and advocacy** to individual students and their families.
- **Secondary consultation** to staff members (pre-referral chats, consultations regarding students of concern, general questions regarding refugees and asylum seekers).
- **Meetings with wellbeing staff** to discuss students of concern, referrals, program development, staff needs
- **Consultation regarding whole school processes** (wellbeing protocols, prep enrolment)
- **Group work interventions**
- **Professional Development** for staff in the areas of working with refugees and asylum seeker students



Refugee and asylum seeker - Context

A Refugee

Is **outside their country**

- Cannot return to that country because of a **well-founded fear** of persecution for race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion (*UNHCR Convention on Refugees 1951*)



An Asylum Seeker

Is **outside their country**

Is a person **who has applied for refugee protection and is awaiting a decision**



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Refugee children and adolescents seen by FH

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Annual report

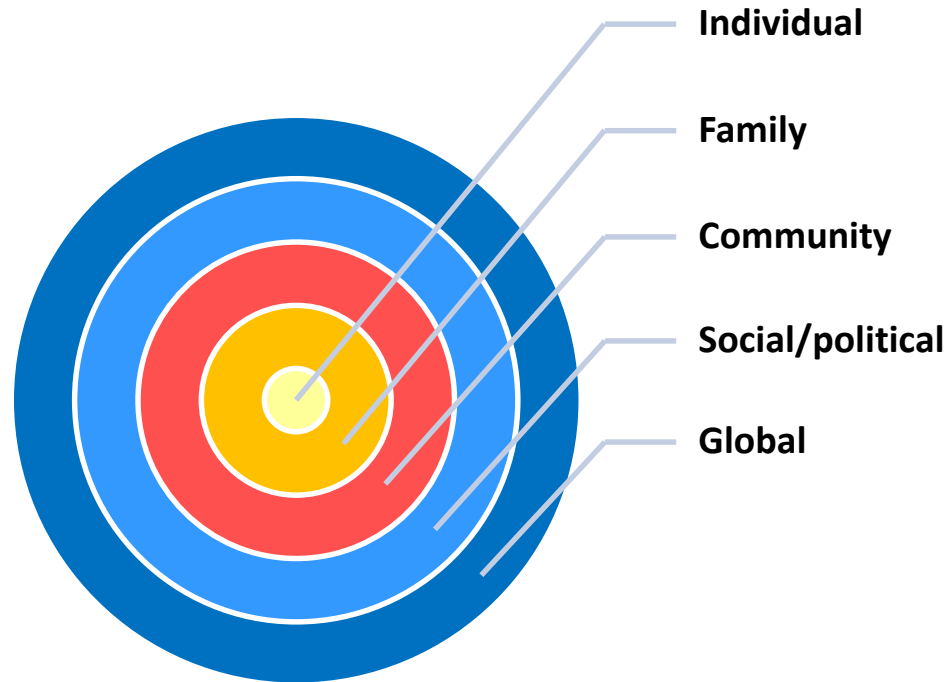
- 54% Experienced dangerous flight
- 19% disappearance of family/friends
- 37% forced separation from family
- 55% Threat of harm to family
- 45% witnessed physical violence
- 12% witnessed others killed



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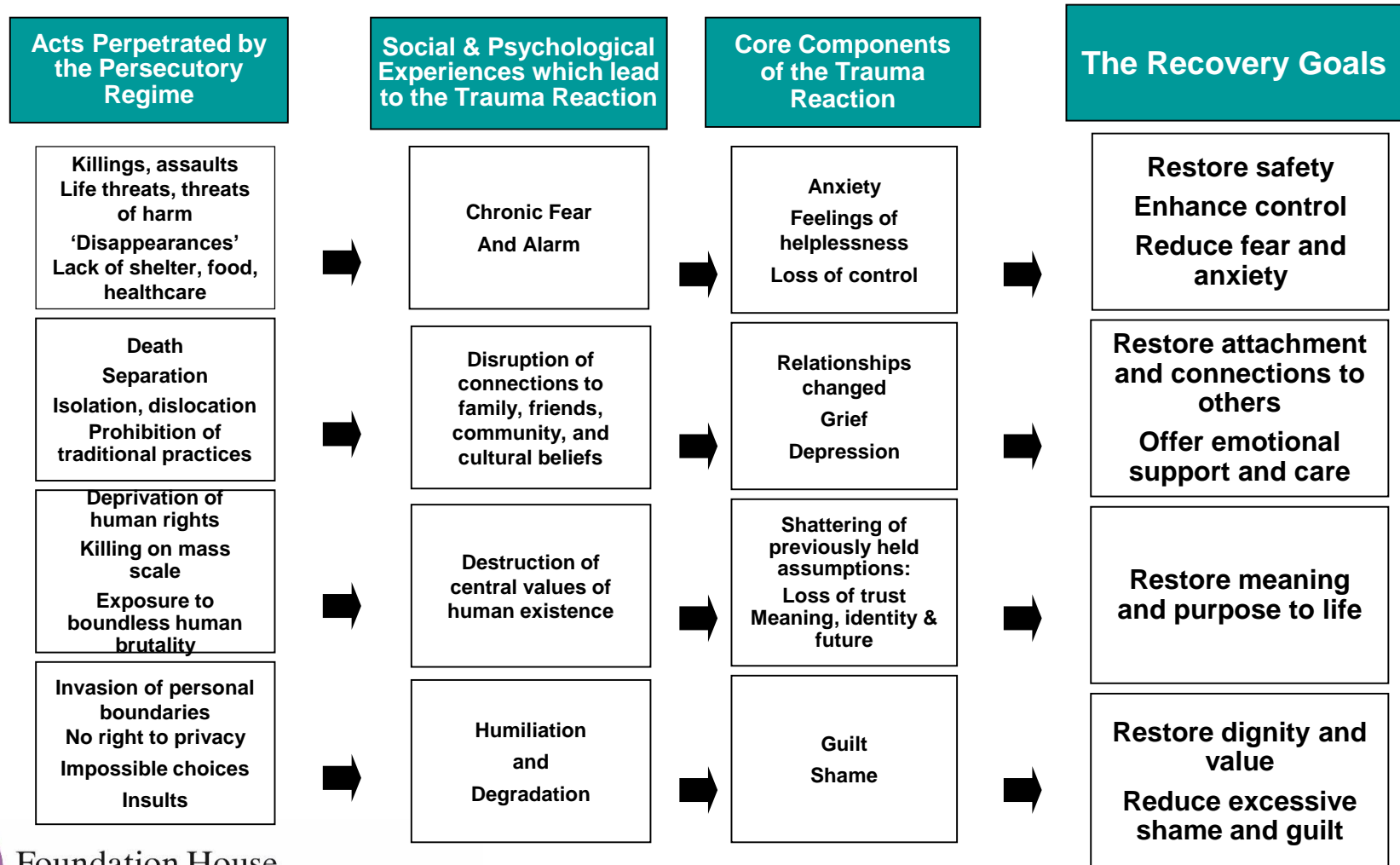
The context of working with refugees and asylum seekers



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A Framework for Recovery



Importance of working systemically

- There is now a growing body of evidence showing that trauma is healed in the context of relationships, *Perry et al (2001)*.
- Traumatic life events in childhood are found to be a predictor of poor outcomes in physical and psychological health, *Perry et al (2001)*.
- *Perry et al* looked at adults with adverse life events and found that those with good relationships and strong links to culture and community had better outcomes in physical and psychological health despite their adverse life events.

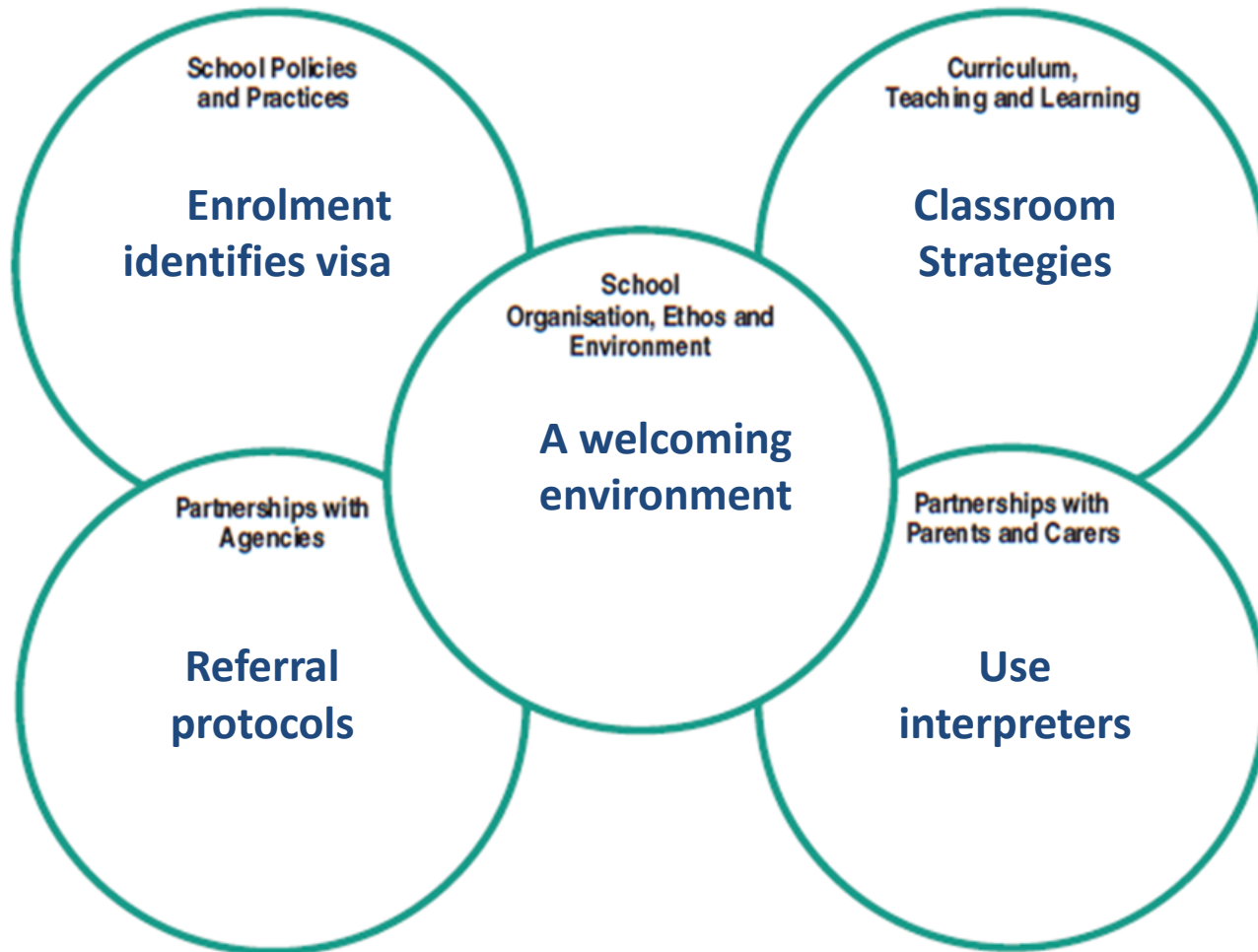


School as a key factor in recovery

- Ross and Wu (1995) found that success in education was associated with a greater sense of control, higher levels of social support and inclusion, improved economic conditions and overall psychological wellbeing.
- Participating effectively in formal education in a supportive environment can improve self esteem, promote social inclusion, develop resilience and potential, build on strengths and create pathways for future employment (Downey 2007).
- It is therefore critical for schools to provide appropriate tailored whole school interventions for refugee and asylum seeker students and their families (Block *et al* 2014)



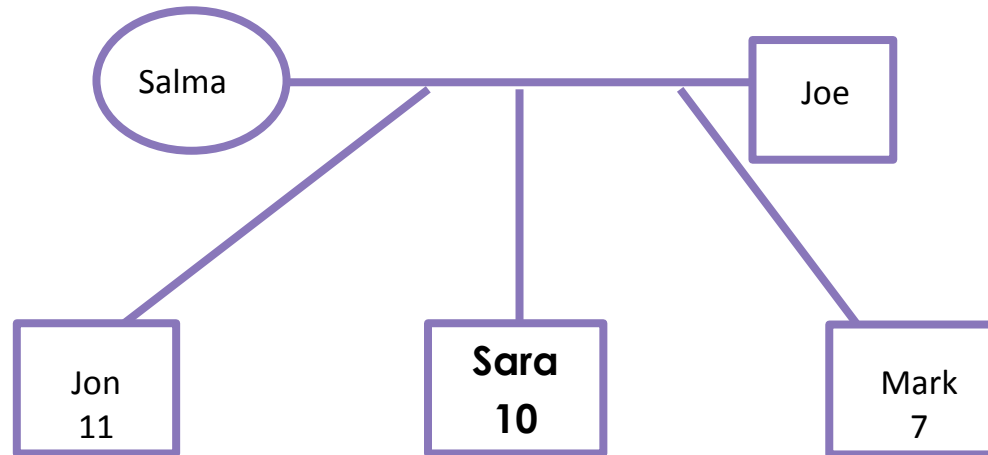
A Whole School Approach



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Hana Family Genogram



Hana family

- The Hana family are Iraqi Christians, who have been persecuted throughout the multiple conflicts in the region due to their religious beliefs.
- The family fled Iraq four years ago following an incident where a bomb also went off at the children's school. No one in the family was hurt but they feared for their lives.
- They left and fled to Syria but when conflict intensified there they had to leave. They were then resettled in Melbourne.



“Sara”

- During a home visit Sara’s parents identified concerns about being very quiet and said that she seemed “sad all the time”. Once she started school her teacher observed that she was withdrawn in class.
- She was referred and a full assessment was carried out
- Included classroom observation, talking with teachers, family meeting, a parent session and individual sessions with Sara.



How the joint approach supported the recovery goals and allowed early intervention

- Work with CAF led to more focus on building relationships with the community
- Home visits and use of interpreters helped this family feel connected to the school.
- If the school hadn't had training about the impact of trauma on learning or known which students were of refugee background it's likely that she would have been referred later, when difficulties were more severe.
- Consultation with teachers allowed her to engage in the classroom.



Evaluation

- 3 schools took part in interviews and surveys

88 % of teachers felt more confident supporting students of refugee background

77 % felt their school now supported refugee students more effectively



What staff said about the programme

- *“The work of FH staff has been exceptional and professional. Strategies have been shared, behaviours identified and understood”*
- *“There has been a change of culture with more parents at the school, we have learnt the importance of families being able to have their say.”*
- *“It has brought the refugee experience to our awareness, updated us, provided practical strategies for teachers to use”*



What is the Purpose of our work with Children?

- Complex, but not rhetorical question
- A therapist might see a child for one hour in their 168 hr week (0.6% of their week)
- How is recovery supported in the rest of their week, growing roots in the systems and relationships around them?



Contact Details and Further Reading

darke@foundationhouse.org.au

- Schools In for Refugees, A Whole-School Approach to supporting students of refugee background. VFST (2011)
- <http://www.childhood.org.au/for-professionals/smart-online-training>. Paper 16. Window of tolerance
- Making Space for Learning – Trauma Informed Practice in Schools”, 2010, Australian Childhood Foundation, Victoria, Australia
- Downey. L. (2007) Calmer Classrooms: A Guide to Working with Traumatized Children. Melbourne: Child Safety Commissioner. Victoria



References cont.

Block, K., Cross, S., Riggs, . and Gibbs, L. (2014): Supporting schools to create an inclusive environment for refugee students. International Journal of Inclusive Education

Ross c. e., and C. Wu (1995) The link between Education and Health.” American Sociological review 60 (5) pp. 719-745

<http://www.foundationhouse.org.au/rebuilding-shattered-lives/>

Perry, B. D. (2001). The neuroarcheology of childhood maltreatment: The neurodevelopmental costs of adverse childhood events. In K. Franey, R. Geffner, & R. Falconer (Eds.), The cost of maltreatment: Who pays? We all do (pp. 15–37). San Diego, CA: Family Violence and Sexual Assault Institute.

