

Evaluation of Use of TIFF® with SUSie Project Beneficiaries

Introduction

The SUSie Project (**Survivors Supported Into Empowerment Education Employment**) offers women survivors of domestic violence/abuse support to regain their self esteem and focus on the future through a range of options. The women can choose their level of participation from informal, drop-in groups to one-to-one support and a 12-week accredited 'Recovery Toolkit' programme. TIFF was offered through the group sessions. An interactive group workshop was delivered to enable the women to learn about the Functional Fluency model and find out about the process involved to undertake TIFF individually, before having to make any commitment. To date 31 women have completed TIFF questionnaires and received feedback. For full information about the TIFF personal development tool see www.functionalfluency.com

Study of the SUSie Project TIFF Profiles

This evaluation outlines the sort of conversations that developed in the feedback sessions, and how the women developed their powers of self-reflection using the positive emphasis of the TIFF framework. It also identifies some of the issues that were particularly important for this group.

Through the feedback process, using joint exploration of how effectively they used their energy, the women were able to learn the crucial differences between:

- guiding and directing that is empowering and that which is coercive and belittling
- care that benefits and care that is damaging
- co-operation and compliance in their relationships
- spontaneity of self-expression and impulsive behaviours that are not age and context appropriate.

Overall, the profiles showed that these women used more energy on behalf of others, in their various roles of 'being in charge' (including parenting), than they used on their own behalf.

Scoring on guiding and directing people

The profiles identified, in the main, their continuing effective use of positive guiding and directing behaviours. However, their lack of confidence often hindered the women from thinking that they could be helpful to others, and themselves, and many were keen to address this. Their negative guiding & directing scores tended to split between those which more strongly related to themselves, and those which were about putting others down. Some women, however, realised that their tendencies for self-blame and punishment were more of an indication of how they had previously reacted. On reflection, they thought they were reducing these tendencies now. They sometimes found fault in others, particularly their ex-partner, as a way of boosting themselves, but were also at times very self-critical. The women were often uncompromising in thinking that they now knew what was best for themselves and their children, partly as a reaction to previous experiences that had undermined self-confidence and esteem. Most recognised that this swing needed to settle back and that growing confidence would allow them to be more accepting of other ideas. One woman reported that when finally leaving a Refuge for a place of her own, she had wanted everything done her way and had even argued with the family member who was helping them move in.

Scoring on caring for people

When considering their effective energy usage in looking after others - responding to their needs, it was important to emphasise for these women how well they were already caring in ways that enabled and encouraged recovery and growth. An aspect that many acknowledged they needed to work on was that of being able to be accepting of others. They often found it difficult to separate 'response to a particular behaviour' from their negative feelings about the person as a whole. This was understandable given their experience of past, often repetitive, negative and/or damaging behaviours from others. Some of the women wanted also to be more empathic. They reckoned they were not always good at picking up the subtleties of non-verbal communication as their abusive relationship had taught them to be fearful of the consequences of getting it wrong, and they lacked confidence and skill.

The negative aspect of care indicated the highest score of the negative modes of behaviour in the profiles. Nearly half of the women recorded a high tendency to self-deny and were keen to continue to address this. They were still finding it difficult to appreciate their own self-worth, but many felt that the support of SUsie project was really helping this, including their TIFF profile which highlighted the positive behaviours that they could learn to develop and use. The other high scores for this mode related mainly to over-compensation concerning their children to try to make up for what they had suffered. One woman said that she knew she was over-tolerant of her children's bad behaviour and inconsistent in her responses when they had returned from visits to their father, which always proved an unsettling experience for them. Discussion around who was benefiting from her behaviour helped her to understand that she needed to adopt a more 'firm but fair' approach in order to benefit her children in the long term.

Scoring on relating to others

The lower scores for relating to others in a positive way indicated the women's lack of self-esteem in not being able to stand up for themselves, and lack of know-how in relating to others in socially acceptable ways. They acknowledged that their domestic abuse/violence experience had severely knocked their self-confidence. They often guarded against showing too much initial friendliness as they were concerned over having trust betrayed again. They tended to take criticism personally, lacking the self assurance to recognise when it was unjustified and the resilience to help them bounce back. Their past fear of a psychological or physical put down meant they lacked assertiveness in expressing their own view point. They found it difficult to see ways of adapting without risking losing out. Several women recognised that for the time being, not adapting made them feel safe and in control and they were often unwilling to compromise in relation to their children (access rights etc). They realised, however, that they would need to look to shift this in the future.

For almost all the women their high negative scores when relating to others were more about making concessions and trying to please rather than being obstinate or aggressive, which indicated a perspective of 'You're OK - I'm not OK'. Almost two-thirds of the women tended towards placating and submissive behaviour and felt anxious about not handling situations well. Several of the women recognised that these behaviours had been learned from childhood and speculated that this was likely to have contributed to them becoming victims of domestic abuse/violence. One woman had, only since joining the SUsie Project, understood that she had been psychologically abused by her father and recognised that she had become a high achiever to strive to prove her worth. She had subsequently married a man who became equally psychologically domineering.

Scoring on self-expression and doing one's own thing

The lower scores for positive natural self behaviours seemed to relate to a suppression of creativity, imagination and playfulness as a result of their past experiences. They tended not to express feelings of sadness or being fed up as they had learned to keep these hidden from their partner so as not to antagonise or show weakness. Through their SUSie Project involvement and from having it highlighted in their TIFF profiles, the women were beginning to have the confidence, and to give themselves permission, to use energy on behalf of themselves in this way. They were making time for themselves to enjoy treats and taking pleasure in being with their children.

Those women whose TIFF profiles showed that they seemed to find it difficult to organise things in their own lives for their own benefit often scored more highly on self-denying behaviour as well. These tendencies together indicated once again their overall lack of self-worth. On a different note, those women whose profiles showed a tendency towards childish or reckless behaviour admitted that they were perhaps going too far with their new found freedoms and that they needed to find freedom and personal satisfaction in more 'grown-up' ways.

Scoring on accounting

When taking account of the reality of situations by being sensitive and receptive to both internal and external stimuli, many of the women seemed not to do this enough. They acknowledged that they sometimes reacted in an emotional way, without thinking through the implications and consequences of their options before choosing how to respond.

Conclusion

During the TIFF feedback sessions, a powerful initial response from almost all the women was surprise and appreciation of the emphasis on their positive behaviours. It gave them reassurance that they were moving on from the emotional impact of their domestic violence experience. Many had not appreciated how far they had come, in what for several, was a relatively short time. It enabled them to evaluate the effectiveness of their involvement with the SUSie Project and to realise and affirm their own determination to recover. Their TIFF profiles provided a framework for the practical changes they were seeking. The women were able to understand how to continue to practice and develop effective parenting which was warm and affectionate as well as giving their children clear expectations and boundaries. Their enhanced self awareness helped to rebuild their self-esteem and confidence, so that they felt ready to explore learning and work opportunities and make better lives for themselves and their children. One woman commented "The positive aspects were stronger than I had believed possible, which has boosted my self-worth. It has given me encouragement to work on both positive and negative aspects of my behaviour – I have a brighter outlook of who I am".

Jane Hicks
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email – jane@latenttalent.co.uk