



FREIA

FINDING RECOVERY & EMPOWERMENT FROM ABUSE

FREIA's first Outreach to Caregivers

Demonstrating it's possible to heal from traumas

JULI STEINOCHE MA
LMHC, LMT, CPT

Finding Recovery and Empowerment From Abuse (FREIA) offered its first outreach training - **Tools for Self-Care Workshop** in October 2016 to the staff and volunteers of CASA – Community Action Stops Abuse – a domestic violence center in St Petersburg FL.

2017 marks the 40th anniversary of CASA's existence. Over the past 12 months alone, CASA provided 37,000 nights of safety at its shelter, 18,000 Outreach services such as support groups, courtroom advocacy and economic empowerment programs: and the crisis hotline answered 5,000 calls. In addition, 3,700 children in Pinellas County schools participated in CASA's Peacemaker anti-bullying and personal safety curriculum.

FREIA's four-hour workshop was designed to teach caregivers self-care techniques for de-stressing and dissolving the effects of abuse. We used the "Heal the Healers" model: helping caregivers to personally experience the benefits with the intention that they will share the techniques with those they advocate for – survivors of abuse.

FREIA wants to ensure that public health care workers and therapists have the opportunity to both witness and experience how they can free emotional traumas and stress – for themselves and for those they support. Merely talking about issues and traumas does not resolve them. However, a growing body of research is now showing that energy therapies can be very effective in resolving the effects of trauma.

Our mission is to support, educate and empower people to free themselves from the shadows of sexual abuse. We chose to partner with an organization that provides services to victims of domestic violence since 40-45% in abusive relationships are also being sexually assaulted during the course of their relationship (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence – NCADV).

This workshop was the "official" debut for FREIA. Additionally, it served as a powerful healing experience for me as well.

Personal Journey

My professional career as a corporate trainer, licensed mental health counselor and licensed massage therapist (with trainings in Energy Medicine, Energy Psychology, and trauma work) has evolved into a career path I love -- teaching others how to dissolve stress and traumas in order to feel better – both physically and emotionally.

In retrospect, this path truly began when I was in college. It was then that I became a statistic of sexual abuse like far too many young women (and young men). I was sexually abused by a “boyfriend” the day I was ending the relationship and also by another man after he drugged me – like similar cases of drug-induced sexual abuse in the media.

In my professional (and personal) experience, most victims of sexual abuse do not seek help and carry their painful secret of abuse the rest of their lives. A few reasons for not reporting or seeking help, include:

- Worry no one will believe them
- Too embarrassed to talk about what happened
- Concern for what people will think of them
- Fear they will be blamed or ridiculed.

Keeping quiet however doesn't make the emotional pains go away and it definitely doesn't help other victims of abuse. Creating and conducting this training and speaking out on behalf of FREA has resulted in my own additional healings – all of which I hadn't even realized were an issue for me:

1. realization that I'm a statistic of sexual abuse
2. anxiety of sharing my story to a large group (on camera)
3. deciding to finally tell my mom what happened after all these years
4. overwhelming feelings while watching a documentary about Bill Cosby's 48+ accusers being drugged

Fortunately, there are new ways to heal from abuse – and it's not by telling the story to a compassionate therapist or an audience full of caregivers – but by using techniques to calm the mind/body as we think or talk about the abuse.

Statistics

While the statistics of sexual abuse are staggering, the numbers are likely higher since it is estimated only 31% of sexual assaults get reported (RAINN – Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network).

According to National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV),

- 1 in 5 women and 1 in 33 men will be victims of sexual abuse in their lifetime
- 1 in 4 women will have experienced sexual abuse before age 18
- 14-25% of women are sexually assaulted by intimate partners in their lifetime

FREA Partnered with CASA

While in graduate school, I volunteered at CASA by answering calls on their crisis hotline. I became familiar with the history of the incredible lifesaving support CASA provides to women, men, and children living with domestic violence (since 1977).

In 2015, CASA opened its new shelter - consistently at full capacity with 133 people, mostly women and children (and a few men). Almost half of those in shelter are children, many who have witnessed abuse - which can perpetuate an unfortunate and needless cycle of abuse.

FREA submitted a proposal to CASA to work together to launch this caregiver training. The leadership at CASA accepted our offer and helped design the criteria and outline for training their staff and volunteers.

Many are drawn to this line of work due to what happened to those close to them or what happened to them personally. While healing can come from helping others, hearing these types of stories on a daily basis can in fact, re-traumatize a person.

Caregivers dedicate their lives to serving others; many times at a price of neglecting themselves. They report feeling "they can never do enough to put an end to the traumas" and feel overwhelmed when victims return to the shelter after receiving the best support possible. It begins to feel like a constant uphill climb with little relief, resulting in a profession known for a high burnout rate.

Training Offered

The purpose of the ***Tools for Self-Care Workshop*** was to provide simple yet highly effective techniques staff and volunteers can use to:

- **dissolve** their personal stress
- **minimize** the impact of hearing horrific stories of abuse - known as "secondary trauma"
- **calm** others when they are feeling upset or stressed
- **empower** survivors and children by teaching the self-calming techniques.

With the support of my colleagues; psychologists Holly Timberlake (Ohio) and Kristin Miller (California); and FREA Film Producer Eric Huurre (Toronto), we conducted two separate trainings at CASA each lasting four hours. Both workshops were video-taped for training purposes to be shown on FREA's website and on social media channels.

The training was highly experiential. We invited the attendees to think about their own personal upsets - stress and trauma related. The trainings included tapping on acupressure points, mindfulness meditation, and energy medicine techniques for reducing stress and overcoming trauma.

No talking is necessary for these techniques to be effective which makes the techniques ideal for organizations such as CASA who are trained to be ADVOCATES rather than counselors. In addition, many survivors don't feel comfortable talking about the abuse, and prefer to keep this personal. The techniques are a form of practical self-care for both staff/volunteers and the survivors they serve.

Teaching caregivers and survivors self-care techniques is a radically different approach to treating and healing from sexual abuse. Rather than talking and rehashing the abuse and problems, over and over again, caregivers and survivors now have tools they can use to actually heal themselves.

Workshop Attendees' Experiences

The feedback from those attending the ***Tools for Self-Care Workshop*** was overwhelmingly positive. We asked attendees to write down their subjective unit of distress (SUD) at the beginning of training as well twice during the training and then again at the end of the training.

Every evaluation form collected showed a reduction of stress levels (on average) of at least 50% to as much as 78%. Most reported their levels of stress reduced to a 0, 1, or 2 even though they started at stress levels between 4-8 (on a scale of 0-10 with 10 being the worst).

Testimonials

Grandma/Foster Mom to grandchildren

One woman shared how stressed she had been feeling about the reasons her grandchildren are under her care. By the end of the training, she reported being able to think calmly about the situation and even think of possible solutions whereas prior to the training she was unable to think beyond the upset.

From Skeptic to Excited Group Leader

One skeptical attendee shared she did some personal work during the training on something that happened earlier in her life. To her amazement, she was able to substantially reduce the distress felt in her body. She experienced benefits first-hand and was excited to share with the groups she leads. She introduced the techniques that evening to a group and was thrilled when the attendees reported feeling much calmer. Many were excited to share the techniques with others in their lives.

Leader uses tools before training ended

One of the administrators was called out of the training to help a person in severe distress. She returned to the room, grabbed her 2-sided illustrated document with the calming techniques. She showed the woman how to do one of the techniques and within moments the woman was noticeably calmer. We later overheard the administrator telling her team how effective the tools were. The excitement (and shock) in her voice is something I will personally never forget.

Day Care Workers - changed "time outs" to "tap outs"

Two women providing day care to the children at the shelter were thrilled to have techniques easy enough to share with children. They now have "tap outs" rather than "time outs" with any behavioral issues and children have learned simple ways to self-soothe.

Quotes from two attendees:

"I have used the techniques personally and, at times, with participants. Every time I have personally used the tapping technique, it has been very effective in reducing the emotional discomfort of the memory.

"Professionally, when I have shared the self-calming techniques, the participant has seemed to benefit from it. Many have commented on it being effective."

- Lola Belvins Outreach Lead Advocate

"These tools are so effective at reducing stress and upset that we will be using these during every group now"

- Lydia Rodriquiz Outreach Advocate

The staff and volunteers with CASA may have signed up for a training titled **Tools for Self-Care Workshop** with the idea they would use these techniques with those they support. However, what happened is that they got to use them on themselves first; and experienced firsthand their simplicity and effectiveness.

For several, we could see a spark of excitement that they now had techniques to share with others that helps on a deep and profound level -- without the need to "talk" about the problem -- whether it's a current or prior stressful memory or situation.

For myself, I proved I could tell my story to a large audience without any discomfort in my body. Initially, even the thought of telling my story was scary. I used the techniques while preparing for the workshop, as well as just before that part of the workshop. Writing this article also presented its own set of mini-hurdles I was able to work through. I now have a new sense of power that has evolved from sharing my story, along with a strong conviction that keeping quiet only helps the abuser continue to have power over the person they abused.

I continue to be in awe of how simple yet profoundly helpful these techniques are for dissolving stress and traumas. After the abuse (many years ago), I never in my wildest dreams thought I'd be sharing the stories I felt forbidden to discuss.

These simple **tools give us all hope** – and with the support of organizations such as CASA, caregivers can empower survivors of domestic violence and sexual abuse to regain their power by helping themselves to heal from the nightmare of abuse.

Survivors of sexual abuse are now able to re-write their own story. Practicing these techniques empowers them to become the HERO of their own story – They are the ones who can now heal themselves by dissolving the chains of sexual abuse, even many years later.

JULI STEINOCHER, LMHC, LMT, HEALTH COACH
EDEN ENERGY MEDICINE PRACTITIONER (EEMP),
DIPLOMATE IN COMPREHENSIVE ENERGY PSYCHOLOGY (DCEP),
AND LEAD FREA TRAINER
St Petersburg FL. juli@mindbodylab.com