

From Chaos to Containment: Messy Art Interventions for Children Grieving Murder and Community Violence — A School-Based Case Study

Despite extensive experience working with trauma, high-risk, and complex presentations—including mandated clients through Project HOPE (Salvation Army) and the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre—and almost two decades in school-based settings, my first year at an inner-city primary school presented an unprecedented professional challenge. Following a critical incident involving the murder of a child known to the school community, therapeutic responses were required at both individual and cohort levels. This case study explores the use of trauma-informed, creative therapeutic approaches, including expressive and sensory-based interventions such as paper mâché and piñata making, to support emotional regulation, meaning-making, and psychological safety. Individual work was complemented by cohort-based interventions that intentionally drew on shared strengths, values, and collective symbols of hope to promote connection, containment, and recovery within the year level.

Presenter: Hilda Hallinan



Hilda Hallinan has a professional background in nursing across emergency care, oncology, and paediatric hospitals in Australia and the UK. Hilda brings a nuanced understanding of crisis, complexity, family violence, and resilience to her counselling practice. She holds a Master of Counselling from Monash University, with further

training in art and play therapy, child and adolescent counselling and trauma-informed care. She supports children, young people and adults navigating life transitions, emotional distress, and recovery from trauma. Her experience includes school-based counselling, the Salvation Army HOPE program for court-mandated clients, and therapeutic work with refugees and asylum seekers affected by torture, trauma, and displacement at the Asylum Seekers Resource Centre. Her approach is trauma-informed and strengths-based and she is passionate about utilising creative therapies in trauma recovery integrating Person-Centred, CBT, ACT and Narrative approaches.

Presenters Professional Affiliations

PACFA

AHPRA

Member of Sydney Centre for Creative Change

