

**With a heart for helping and qualifications in the social sciences, criminology and counselling, Lorelai Burns spent two decades as a mental health nurse before opening her own private practice as a counsellor to give more one-on-one care.**

*"Even as a kid, I always knew I wanted to work with people in some sort of helping capacity."*

## Challenge: The "Big gap"

Lorelai worked in acute care, rehabilitation and forensics during her time as a mental health nurse, mostly with adults and adolescents. Lorelai found the same demographic spread reflected in the people she counselled in her private practice, and after working with young children for the first time realised there was a "big gap" in what she was delivering.

**In a pivotal decision to reposition the focus of her practice, Lorelai set out to expand her therapeutic skills and provide more comprehensive support for children.** The first step was completing a child and youth mental health graduate certificate, which gave her a solid foundation and a stepping stone to further training.

Lorelai then delved into researching Play Therapy and began to appreciate the significance of giving children space to express themselves and respecting their autonomy. The approach deeply resonated with Lorelai – someone for whom creative expression did not feature largely in her childhood - leading her to see the value of incorporating Play Therapy into her practice.

*"I realised how respectful Art and Play Therapy was and how little power children generally have in the world."*

However, as a self-described "logical, not very creative thinker", Lorelai knew the out-of-the-box methodology would be challenging.

"My reliance on verbal expression and cognitive reinforcement has always fuelled my practice. I recall asking so many questions to try to gain an understanding of what was going on for the client, relying on their verbalising to satisfy my need to 'help'. **While my motivations were driven by a deep desire to be effective, my interventions were not optimal.**"

## Solution: Creatively changing lives

Enter the **Sydney Centre for Creative Change** and their Graduate Certificate in Play and Art Therapy, led by Psychologist and Play Therapist Jacki Short. The certificate is a 12-month online program (6 months training + 6 months supervision) for mental health

professionals who want the confidence and skills to help their clients **express, explore and resolve challenges in ways that go deeper than words.**

## Hands-on approach

One of the most impactful parts of the program for Lorelai was the experiential learning aspect Jacki has built into the modules. "You're actually doing what you're going to deliver," Lorelai explains. Her journey through the Play Therapy program marked a significant shift in her therapeutic perspective as she began understanding the importance of presence over technique.

By actively engaging in the therapeutic methods they were learning, such as art therapy, Lorelai not only comprehended the techniques on an intellectual level but also experienced their profound impact on a personal and emotional level.

*"Jacki explaining why we do what we do was one thing, but experiencing it solidified why it's important. I didn't fully understand it till I had those moments of deep reflection."*

## Self-discovery

Lorelai's exploration of play and art therapy, along with the guidance provided, led to her own therapeutic breakthroughs. Understanding both the theoretical and practical applications made the knowledge more meaningful. And experiencing the depth of therapeutic work first hand underscored the significance of providing clients with the space to explore their emotions and experiences. Lorelai's journey of personal growth and transformation during the program revealed the power of creative expression as a means of processing and healing.

*"In a way, it was hard because it made me realise how deep things go."*

## Online flexibility

One significant benefit was the flexibility offered by the virtual format, particularly when the program participants were encouraged to delve into their inner selves. Each person could comfortably explore their personal thoughts and emotions without the pressure of sharing. Lorelai found this privacy invaluable in understanding the depth of therapeutic work.

*"We went deep in our own heads during the art therapy, and you didn't have to share anything. You were just in your own space. I don't know*

*that I would have understood the value of what I could deliver to others if I didn't experience that myself."*

Truly enjoyable

Jacki's program was genuinely fun compared to other more dry and rigid courses Lorelai had taken. "It was probably the most fun course I've ever studied," she says.

Focusing on understanding the underlying concepts and a more relaxed evaluation approach created a refreshing and engaging learning experience.

*"Jacki is so knowledgeable, experienced and respectful. She's got the ability to listen and adapt to what you need. After having so many teachers over the years, I rate her very highly."*

Result: Lorelai's practice transformed

*"I really learned a lot more about how to communicate effectively with younger people. It's given me better language to use with them and a clearer understanding of what I'm delivering."*

Participating in the program profoundly impacted Lorelai's understanding of the therapeutic process and her approach to working with children. **She now sees providing the right support for children as a way of being, not doing.**

*"It doesn't matter how many tricks you have up your sleeve; if you're a super genuine person in how you come across and absolutely respect that child, that's the key to success."*

Lorelai sees that by giving children choice and control of their therapeutic journey it enhances their self-esteem. **This understanding brought a new dimension to her practice and allowed her to create a more inclusive and child-centred therapeutic environment.** "It's giving kids the authority to choose," Lorelai explains, "In handing over that power to children, I've seen how great it is for their confidence when someone's not telling them what to do. It's their space."

*"The learnings, gains, and development this program has given me have been so rich and beneficial. It's helped me shape what I do with younger people to be more respectful and effective."*