THE SYSTEMIC IMPACT
OF HOLDING,
EXPERIENCING AND
WITNESSING THE
AVIGUK VALUES AND
BELIEFS

Past, Present and Future
12th January 2018
Helen Gibson & Claske Houwing
Claske Houwing has worked in Youth Care in the Netherlands over the last 30 years. In 1989 she started training in Video Home training and became a supervisor. She was involved in moving residential placements into day care services. For 10 years she worked for SPIN (at that time the national institute for VIG). Being in management as well as being involved in the changing process in the Youth care, her interest shifted from working with families to working with teams in organisations. These teams operate on a regional and national level. Currently she works as the Manager at Intermetzo (a youth care organisation) that operates on a regional and national level. Responsible for an out-patient clinic, FACT team and daycare centre, specialising in trauma and attachment disorder.
HELEN GIBSON

Helen Gibson is a Family Therapist, supervisor and National VIG Supervisor. I have worked in CAMHs for 25 years, the last 5 years being in a secure forensic adolescent service. It was particularly within this setting that I became interested in team work and having introduced VERP into the service, begun to consider the wider impact of VIG on teams. For the past 5 years worked independently supervising into education, health and social care and has become interested in the systemic impact that VIG can have on organisations.
VALUES

Respect  Trust  Hope

Compassion  Co-operation  Appreciation

Connections  Empathy
BELIEFS

- Everybody is doing the best they can at the time
- All people, even in adverse situations, have the capacity to change
- People have an innate desire to connect with others
- People must be actively involved in their own change process
- Affirmation and appreciation of strengths is the key to supporting change
- Recognition and empathetic regard for what people are managing builds trust
WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT TO US?

The Systemic Impact of Holding, Experiencing and Witnessing the AVIGuk Values and Beliefs
Since beginning my VIG training 25 years ago, I have embraced these values and beliefs in my work. I am not saying that holding them with the families I have worked with has been easy but I embraced them with a 'knowing' that it was THIS that would support change.

However, I believe that in order to be able to hold them in our work for others (both client’s and professionals), particularly within the current climate we work in, we have to also experience others holding them for us.

It has been incredibly important for me to remain close to the VIG community over the last 25 years whilst working in the NHS, as it has been predominantly this community where I feel others have held these values and beliefs about me and with me.

That has given me the opportunity to continue to experience the impact of the values and beliefs on myself, and helps me to continue to hold them for others within my professional life.

I have witnessed the impact of these values and beliefs on others, not just as I supervise others in VIG but in my systemic supervision. I have seen how a relationship and trust can develop when a supervisee begins to experience and trust that this is the culture in which they are being held.

The systemic impact of this, is very exciting to me.
In our professional training there has been a lot of emphasis on assessing problems in order to have an understanding of what is going wrong. But if we go back to the core of the VIG and the work of Colwyn Trevarthen and primary and secondary intersubjectivity, we learn that if children’s initiatives are met they will develop. If we get into a ‘no’ cycle we risk developing dysfunctional behaviour. We have learned that if you point out to families where they are succeeding with their children, they also can get into a learning mode and are able to reflect on the more dysfunctional patterns, and then change is possible.

These experiences shaped us as clinicians in how we look at families and shaped us in how we have developed as professionals.

In the same period that VIG was developed in 1989, there was a movement called the International Initiative that wanted to change how health professionals worked. This group included Harry Biemans and they took on VIG as an intervention as it fitted with the principles that they had developed. They supported VIG for 5 years in the Netherlands.

Without the theory of Colwyn and the profound understanding how children develop in relationship with their parents, the knowledge about attachment, the change in policy in how to achieve change in troubled families it is easy to lose the fundamental factors of the work and the attunement principles can end up to be a simple technique that loses its power.

The AVIGuk Values and Beliefs are very important and it is vital for them to be privileged and maintained in our work.
SO.... THE PAST
CLASKE MEETS HILARY (1991)

Colwyn Trevarthen invited the team from Netherlands to speak in Scotland in March 1991.

Hilary Kennedy (educational psychologist) and Raymond Simpson (family therapist) started practicing from what they had seen at the conference but realised they needed further training.

In May 1991 they travelled to the Netherlands to begin training with Claske. Hilary and Raymond travelled to the Netherlands for the next two years.
CLASKE MEETS
HILARY (1991)

Netherlands

Scotland, that way

All beginnings are difficult – but with a little bit of guidance, Hilary did find her course!
HELEN MEETS HILARY AND CLASKE (1996)

- 1995 Hilary presents in Salisbury
- I remember listening to this talk, I remember the room, where I sat. It was a significant day. (I am sure most of us here can remember where and how we heard of VIG)
- 1996 ITC with Hilary and Claske
- Hilary travelled to Salisbury once a month from Scotland.
- I felt my confidence grow as I realised that what I brought to the families in and out of VIG was ‘good enough’ and there was a safe, appreciative space to develop.
WHEN HELEN AND CLASKE RECONNECT (2018)

- 22 years later we met again
- However, I felt like I knew her much better than this as Hilary spoke of her often both as a friend and supervisor.
- Bonding over the anticipation of presenting at the VIG international conference.
THE PRESENT

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Compassion  Co-operation  Appreciation

Connections  Empathy
THE PRESENT

- Everybody is doing the best they can at the time
- All people, even in adverse situations, have the capacity to change
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All Staff/supervisors/managers:

- Are doing their best with the knowledge they hold and the context in which they work.
- Have the capacity to be working differently despite their context (constraints, culture)
- Have a desire to be connecting and working alongside their colleagues.
- Must be actively involved in their own change process.
- Make changes through affirmation and appreciation of their own strengths.
- Build trust with one another through recognition and empathetic regard for what people are managing.
ARE DOING THEIR BEST WITH THE KNOWLEDGE THEY HOLD AND THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THEY WORK

Claske: Professionals choose to work in this field, they have been educated so we may trust that they are skilful people and they can become even better if we provide them with a learning environment.

The work we do is challenging, it is complex and there is seldom just one right answer. If we make mistakes it can have a big impact on the lives of our clients. Therefore it is important to create a working atmosphere where professionals are able to build on their knowledge, where they meet colleagues who support each other and where there is willingness to learn.
HAVE THE CAPACITY TO BE WORKING DIFFERENTLY DESPITE THEIR CONTEXT (CONSTRAINTS, CULTURE)

Claske: Organisations are different from families. In organisations we are together because we have a collective goal.

It depends in what position we are in what kind of influence we can have. There are different roles, and different levels of power.

In organisations where there is neglect; meaning no long-term guidance, lack of support and supervision towards organisational development, - dysfunctional interactions appear and influences the quality of the work.

But as Ruth Cohn says; You are always partially powerful. There is always a choice to be made. You can ask yourself the question ‘where can I make the difference? are there others who can help me?’
There are choices to make regarding ‘how’ things are done. In systemic practice we talk about three domains of working:

- Domain of production (the rules and regulations),
- Domain of explanation (the engagement, the assessment, the intervention)
- Domain of aesthetics (how these other two domains are carried out).

The ‘domain of aesthetics’ speaks about respect, love, creativity, collaboration etc.)
HAVE A DESIRE TO BE CONNECTING AND WORKING ALONGSIDE THEIR COLLEAGUES

Claske: We learned from the work of Colwyn that children grow in interaction, that is probably true for adults as well. People who work in care are interested in people, somehow they want to contribute to the lives of others. To develop as a person in this field, dialogue is important. We learn in relationship.

That means that we have to ask each other questions, that we postpone judgements, that we have to listen to understand, that we respect differences and that we speak from the heart. Then we are connecting and building on a professional environment where our clients benefit
What we discovered a long time ago

Co-creating new meanings, solutions, change

Own hopes, beliefs, thoughts, motives and experience

Own hopes, beliefs, thoughts, motives and experience

Creating space for attuned dialogue

Naming, exploring, reflecting, appraising, challenging

New views, ideas and possibilities appear

HAVE A DESIRE TO BE CONNECTING AND WORKING ALONGSIDE THEIR COLLEAGUES

Helen:

- We do not want to work in isolation. We do not want to be isolation within our own organisation systems or want our system to work in isolation from other systems but this is often what happens.

- When I worked in CAMHS and when I supervise within all of these systems, I hear so frequently ‘blame’ of other services. It seems familiar to how I hear family members blaming each other for things that go wrong.

- I think this is because we are not ‘experiencing’ the values and beliefs ourselves and we are therefore not able to hold them for each other.

- We move into ‘camps’ where we experience connection with our own workforce but isolate ourselves within the wider system.
Claske: We are living in an era where there been a shift in the way we are organised. This time asks for a different type of leadership. It ask for more collaborate development instead of the top down approach. There is more and more written in management literature about the importance of a shared or collective leadership process in which leaders and employees, together, take responsibility for the effectiveness and the development of the team and the organisation. The insight we have developed in our work with families, is nowadays as true for organisations and the professionals within.

Helen - Like family members, professionals often know what would work better, how they would like to be within the work context. They will have many thoughts and ideas about how they would like to change, work differently. They need to be involved in the dialogue around change and find a space to talk safely about change.
AFFIRMATION AND APPRECIATION OF STRENGTHS IS THE KEY TO SUPPORTING CHANGE FOR PROFESSIONALS

Claske:

The success of an intervention depends on the internal conditions of the intervener. (quote by William O’Brian CEO of an insurance company).

That means that we have to think about supporting systems. Do we create circumstances in which people are able to work on their internal conditions? So often in organisations the emphasis is on result, targets etc. But we do know that in an atmosphere of collaboration we achieve so much more.

I have recently seen it working when we started to invest in our teams. Where we shifted from telling people what to do and giving them assignments to ask them what they feel is necessary in their daily work and how they can achieve that.
PROFESSIONALS BUILD TRUST WITH ONE ANOTHER THROUGH RECOGNITION AND EMPATHETIC REGARD

Claske:

Quote by Wouter Hart (author of Twisted Organisations):

“The true meaning of the organisation is not to deliver education or care, to perform the primary process. It is a deeper level. It is about the meaning the care has in the life of the other person”.

If that is true we have the responsibility to create an environment where professionals are recognized for what that are managing to do at that time in these circumstances. Working with troubled families and their children asks a lot of the professional. You bring yourself into the work. The way you feel or are managing at that time in your live is always present. To realise that and to give that space in the daily life routine will help to create working conditions in which people feel seen, trusted and can take responsibility for their task.
SO….WHAT KEEPS THE SOUL OF THE ORGANISATION?

Relationships
Love, Play, Work,
Experiencing and Holding, the AVIGuk values and beliefs
Congratulations on your 70th Birthday Hilary and Thank you for everything you represent in VIG