



INTERLAKE ACTION THERAPY

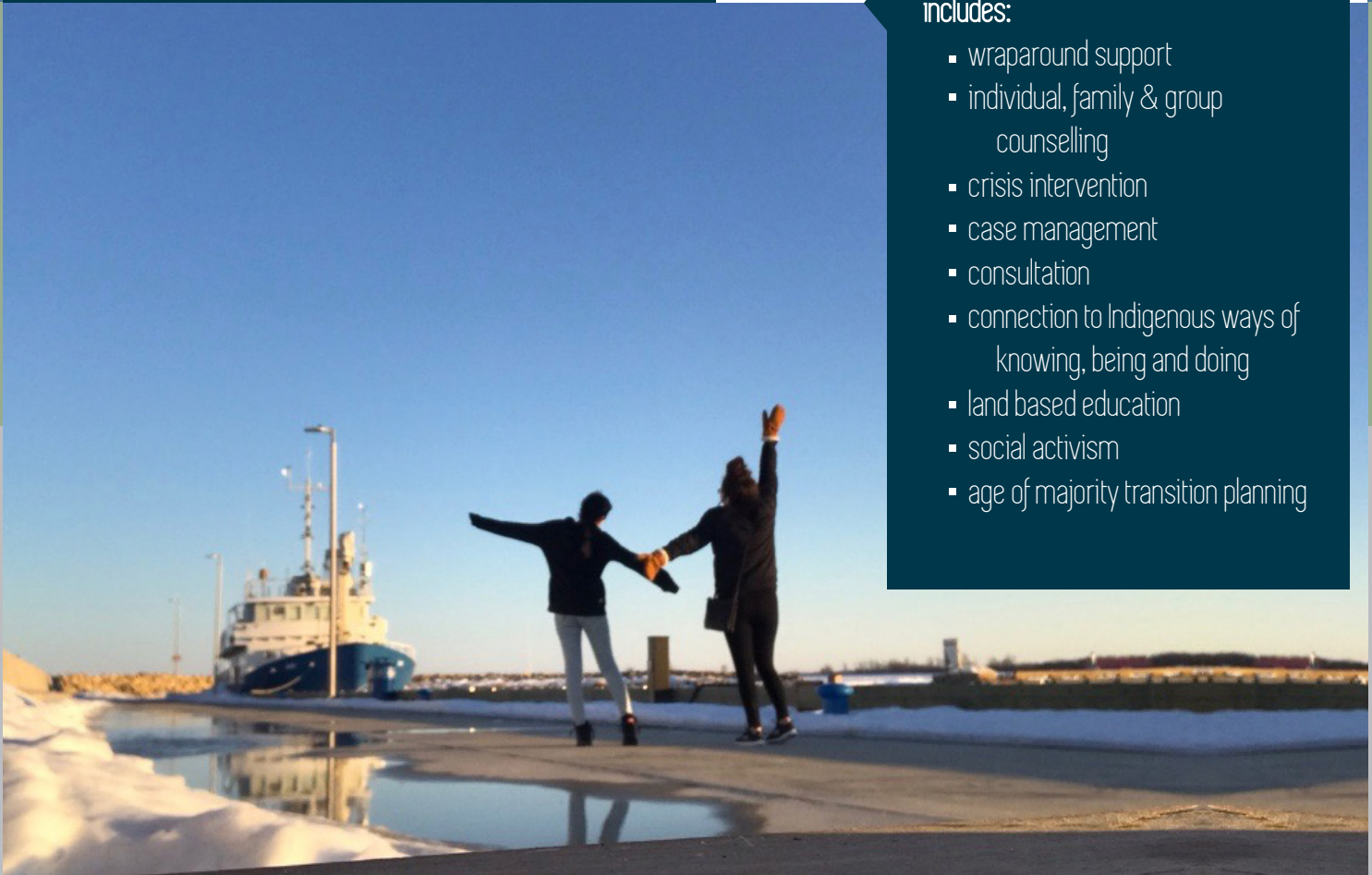
What Is It
and How Does It Help Our Youth?

FOR WORKERS/AGENCIES

By Shannon Foster, MSW, RSW, FOT &
Jahna Hardy, MSW, RSW, RPT, FOT

Action therapy was developed in Manitoba to provide intensive mentorship through partnering an Action Therapist with a youth and includes:

- wraparound support
- individual, family & group counselling
- crisis intervention
- case management
- consultation
- connection to Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing
- land based education
- social activism
- age of majority transition planning

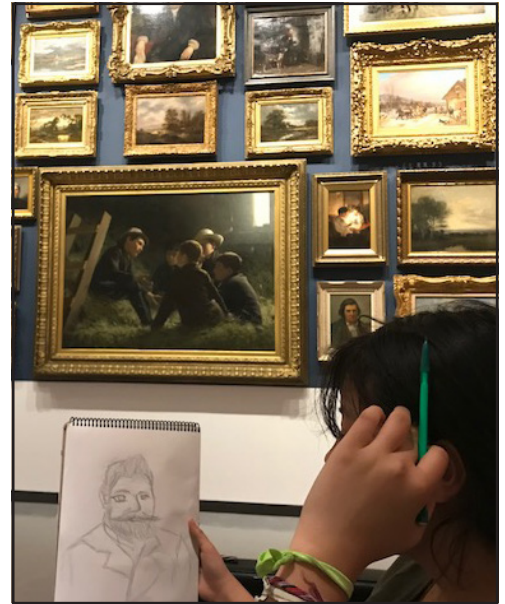


Action Therapy, like many other therapeutic approaches that are newly developed, has not had the benefit of ongoing research to support its unique effectiveness. Examination of its framework and practice implications, suggest that this model is grounded in empirically supported best practice principals and it is currently being used with many youth and families to achieve reported success. It is for these reasons it has become a popular and widespread phenomenon in Manitoba with demonstrated ability to promote the positive development of young people and impact whole communities.

So, what exactly is Action Therapy and how is it therapeutic?

ACTION THERAPY – Mitch Bourbonniere, creator and founder of Action Therapy, first developed the therapeutic model in 2010 to meet the unique needs of Indigenous children in care and it has been increasingly used in the province of Manitoba since that time.

Action Therapy is an integrative and holistic framework that was influenced from an Indigenous lens. The four guiding pillars of Action Therapy are: ceremony, positive activism, land based education and volunteerism - fostering a sense of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity. Therapeutic interventions encourage supportive connection, develop resiliency, enhance protective factors and build positive coping skills that have advantageous impacts on health and wellbeing.



FACILITATION OF GROWTH AND HEALING THROUGH MENTORSHIP

There is a growing body of research around mentorship, the inherent basis of Action Therapy, which argues that positive role models help youth to build strengths, develop new interests, and connect them to community while aiding in social skills intervention, reducing deficits in social interaction and increasing the number of positive relationships with peers.

Mentorship with a caring and supportive non-parental adult provides individualized time, validation and role modeling for a youth through guidance, coaching, emotional reassurance and encouragement while demonstrating social skills, communication and providing a dependable and supportive person in a youth's life. Mentorship has been shown to improve academic performance, self-worth, self-determination, self-esteem, feelings of accomplishment, insight and personal gain and building new life skills.

The value of the relationship is what guides the connection between the youth and Action Therapist. Knowledge is co-created through these relationships by sharing listening and experiencing together. A kinship model between the youth and Action Therapist exists in that the relationships continue long after funding has stopped.

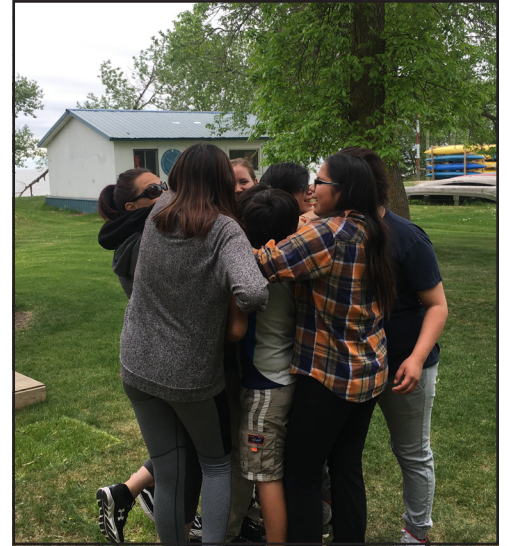


DEVELOPMENT OF MORE EFFECTIVE CASE MANAGEMENT THROUGH WRAPAROUND SUPPORT

Tribe functioning and perceived social connectedness promote youth sense of belonging, identity, confidence, interpersonal communication and attachment and have been indicated as protective factors for children transitioning to adolescents. Strong, healthy clan connections serve as a foundation for youth to bond and attach to others in their world. Wraparound circle of care-centered therapy programs, like Action Therapy, have reported increased group satisfaction, multi-agency cohesion and communication, positive improvements in the behaviour of youth and decreased caregiver stress.

ENCOURAGING DEVELOPMENT OF POSITIVE SOCIAL INTERACTION WITH PEERS AND ADULTS

Action therapy provides a safe base for youth to explore social situations and increased access to social and recreational interaction through guided and supportive social environments. Social inclusivity is a building block of Action Therapy, facilitated and supervised in a variety of ways including social activism, group events, family therapy, volunteering, ceremony and cultural activities and engagement. This instinctive sense of belonging leads to increased positive emotions, psychological and physical benefits as well as positive outcomes in well-being, attitudes, and increased social interactions. Youth learn to work cooperatively, join in discussions, share attention, show sensitivity to others, and compromise. Action Therapist's intentionally model positive social interaction and create opportunity to practice ongoing socialization to strengthen new social environments for youth.



INSPIRATION OF INDIVIDUALITY, FLEXIBILITY AND RESILIENCY

There is a common thread within the current research around interventions for youth – the need for individualized, tailored and flexible programs that recognize youth as unique beings who come with their own strengths and challenges. Action Therapy reflects resiliency based practice by highlighting and inspiring the strengths, abilities, talents and interests within each youth.

Action therapy is founded upon flexibility in service delivery by recognizing the value of therapeutic interventions in a natural, organic fashion. Youth have increased access and communication with their Action Therapist, allowing for support when needed. Goal setting, decision making and problem solving are all explored to foster growth and help move youth forward in productive ways.



CONNECTION TO INDIGENOUS WAYS OF KNOWING AND THE LAND THROUGH ADVENTURE AND WILDERNESS THERAPY

Action Therapy aligns with mental health research in working with Indigenous youth as it explores the connection of identity and land. It is through a process of personal experiences offered through Action Therapy that youth have opportunities to gain knowledge through their relationships with others and the context of the environment. Empowering and utilizing traditional Indigenous healing practices and the deep connection to land has been shown to improve health, strengthening identity, self-worth and self-determination.

Action Therapy provides opportunities for youth to build connections with and receive teachings from Elders and Knowledge Keepers, participate in ceremony, beading, drumming, ribbon skirt or regalia making, medicine picking, survival on the land, and traditional methods of cooking and hunting. These activities promote contact with mother earth and facilitate cultural connection, healing and ways of being for all youth who are interested in participating.



WHO ARE ACTION THERAPISTS

Action Therapists are qualified, educated, and many are clinical therapists, all holding professional liability insurance and who receive clinical supervision. Similar to individuality of youth, Action Therapists are celebrated for their diverse backgrounds, education, life experiences and strengths.

Action Therapy carefully partners an individual Action Therapist with a youth based on many qualities and needs, spending a minimum of 10 hours a month in therapeutic interventions together.

Action Therapists create service plans with goals and objectives and monthly progress reports are submitted along with billing.