

Biannual Report
The South Iceland ART Project

Spring Term 2014

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Introduction

The South Iceland ART therapy team trained 27 children and their families in the spring term of 2014. The families have attended family-ART therapy and the children have simultaneously had ART training in their school. The ART therapy team has trained and guided the school staff in charge of the children's training in school, both where the the children are part of family therapy and where the school staff are training groups of children without family therapy in sessions we usually referred to as class-ART. In class-ART students get ART training three times a week and where there is family-ART therapy the family attends one training sessions per week additionally for a twelve week period.

ART (Aggression Replacement Training) is a cognitive behavioral therapy method and includes three major focuses: social skills, anger management and moral reasoning training. It is imperative that trainers work on all three focuses simultaneously. Today ART is used as a therapy model where ART training for parents is provided in small groups as well as being used as a preventive approach, class-ART, which also supports the family ART-therapy. The class-ART sessions not only support children with behavioural problems, they also strengthen all the children's social skills, self-control and moral reasoning skills. ART training supports the basic elements of the Icelandic national curriculum for kindergarten, elementary and secondary school levels.

Purpose and aims

The purpose of ART training has two major aims. Firstly the aim is to enable children to live a richer life – to strengthen their social skills, their self-esteem, their communication skills and adjustment in their social surroundings. Not all children have the same needs and therefore each child has individual aims. The ART-therapy helps families who are having trouble dealing with their children's upbringing as well as communications with others regarding their children. The therapy strengthens the parents' abilities to deal with difficult behaviour and to improve communications, both within the family and with others outside the family.

Methods

Children who receive training from the ART therapy team attend family-ART twelve times over a period of four and a half months. After the first session a ten week programme commences, where the parents come for the first four weeks without the children and learn the ideology and methods. The following six weeks the children come along and work with their parents and siblings both in the sessions and at home. The parents then continue to work with their children under the guidance of the ART therapy team and the family attends two additional sessions, with a months interval each time, to exchange experiences with the other families from the ART therapy group. In most cases the school runs class-ART sessions simultaneously.

The children who have been attending ART therapy with the ART therapy team in the spring term of 2014 are born 1998 to 2008 and attended class-ART as well as attending family-ART sessions. The children have all been diagnosed with some of the following disorders:

- ADHD
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Oppositional Defiant Disorder
- Substancial Differences in Intellectual Ability
- Language Development/Speech Disorder
- Autism
- Children with social skills problems but without having some kind of social disorder.

The work itself

For families to receive family-ART therapy the family needs to apply for admission. The applications go before an admission council which decides which applications are accepted. The admission council consists of a pediatrician and a child psychologist from the local health care unit and the ART therapy team's project manager. The admission council came together on December 13th 2013 and discussed the 33 applications received. 27 were accepted and work with the families in question started in January 2014.

The ART therapy team gives two ART training courses for future ART trainers in the spring term, one in Reykjanes and the other in the South of Iceland. Seven courses are booked for the autumn term 2014 for kindergarten and grunnskóli[1]. Three are in the South of Iceland, two in Reykjanes and two in the North of Iceland. If all goes as planned Reykjanesbær will start using family-ART therapy in the autumn of 2014 and the ART therapy team will educate and guide specials to carry out the family-ART therapy there.

The team is constantly working on various developmental projects. ART training has been adjusted to different age groups in kindergarten and grunnskóli and now the team is working on a developmental project in cooperation with Neskaupstaður's College and Vocational School. The school has been developing ART training as a school subject in the last three years. The training has served students in risk of dropping out of school well and reduced numbers of drop-outs considerably.

The ART therapy team in the South of Iceland has now trained 570 people to train students; teachers who are able to train students in kindergarten, grunnskóli and colleges/vocational schools and staff doing other work with children in school-, social- and health service all around the country.

The ART project in the South of Iceland is one of the projects in the *Regional Strategies for the South of Icelands 2020*. The Ministry of Welfare agreed to sponsor the project in the years 2013, 2014 and 2015 but expects in return that the services of the team be offered outside the South of Iceland and the team to work nationwide. The result has been that

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[1] The Icelandic grunnskóli is a ten year compulsary school from the age of 6 to 16.

demand for the services of the ART therapy team all around the country in educating, guiding and supporting local school staff and others working with children has increased considerably.

Summary

The team's staff members see great improvement in parents' parental abilities where they make use of the new tools they receive in ART therapy, not only in raising and controlling their children but also in communicating with school staff. Where there have been communication problems between parents and school staff ART therapy improves communication considerably.

There is a notable difference in childrens' improvement where their teachers are active ART trainers and the children receive ART training in school along side the training and therapy provided in the family-ART therapy. The cooperation of all the parties working with the child is a key factor in the success of the training programme.