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**Playing for Real:**  
**Play therapy with children**  
**traumatised by maltreatment**  
**– a pilot study**

*A thesis presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirement for the degree of  
Master of Science in Psychology  
at Massey University,  
Albany, New Zealand.*

Louise Jayne Woolf  
2002

## **Abstract**

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The aim of the present study was to develop and pilot a play therapy manual for use with maltreated children presenting with trauma symptoms or post traumatic stress disorder. Four children (aged 6-8 years) with trauma symptoms and their caregivers participated in the study. Pre and post-treatment measures included a structured diagnostic interview with the children to determine PTSD diagnosis, parent report, teacher report, and child self-report measures. While some treatment gains were observed, these were most evident where there was greater PTSD symptomatology. The play therapy manual developed for the study appeared to allow the processing of trauma for the four children involved in the study, with children responding well to the therapeutic tools utilised. Findings offer preliminary support for manualised, trauma-specific play therapy intervention with maltreated children, with further research indicated to determine both effectiveness and efficacy.

## Acknowledgements

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Thanks to God, my mountain, source and strength

Thanks to my family and friends, the banks of the river, who hold me in  
check and provide guidance and support

Thanks to the children I have worked with, the stones and pebbles who  
provide the song of my journey...

Special thanks to all who have helped make this a reality: Thanks to my supervisor, Cheryl Woolley, for her encouragement and enthusiasm; to my Manager at Specialist Services Unit, Mary Dawson, for making this research possible; to my work supervisors, Jackie and Maureen, for wisdom and insight; to Ngaire and Paora, for cultural supervision; to my colleagues, especially Fran and Angela, my fellow students, for helping me to keep going; to Ginia Tamanui, for editing my first draft; to the library staff both at Massey University and the Department of Social Welfare, especially Adrienne Fletcher and Alison Druce, for their fantastic support in finding articles; to my many friends who have provided much needed help with childcare in the final weeks of writing; and especially to my husband Allan, for all the hours of taking out the girls to allow me to write, and to Zoe and Sophia for putting up with no mum on numerous occasions.

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## **Outline of Thesis**

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This thesis presents a pilot study of a manual based play therapy intervention for children traumatised by maltreatment. Due to the volume of information, the thesis has been divided into seven chapters. Each chapter discusses a particular area of focus.

Chapters one to three, together form the introduction and literature review. The first chapter provides an overview of the philosophical underpinnings and guiding principles informing the study. Trauma, and the links between child maltreatment and post-traumatic stress disorder are discussed in chapter two. Chapter three outlines treatment, both in terms of current research regarding treatment of PTSD in children, and play therapy in particular. These two areas of research guide the play therapy manual developed and implemented by the researcher in this study, described in detail in chapter four.

The method utilised in the current study is presented in chapter five, including a description of participants, methodology, and psychometric measures used. Chapter six presents the results, via both pre and post-test measures, and anecdotal descriptions of the play therapy process in addressing trauma. Finally, chapter seven discusses the findings, including strengths, limitations, complexities, and implications for clinical practice and future research. In order to weave together these strands, an analogy of psychotherapy with maltreated children is offered in the form of a closing summary.