

SEDONA LIFE

SHAKIL SHOCK

Therapist helps soothe Columbine community with controversial treatment

by David J. Mitchell
Staff Writer

Sedona therapist Suzanne Connolly walked her fingers across rows of long, thin boxes she has packed horizontally in a larger packing box.

The thin boxes have the names of cities where she's delivered workshops on an untested type of therapy.

Those thin boxes store left over information and contacts from each of those conferences.

She was looking for a telephone number.

"Atlanta; Chicago; Sedona; New Orleans; Colorado Springs; Billings; Montana; Baltimore," she said.

"This is really killing me. I can't find it," she said.

Connolly gave up looking for the telephone number. Instead, she talked more about the

therapy she has taught to more than 1,100 other therapists and which has taken to dozens of cities in the five years she has known it.

It's called thought field therapy (TFT).

It has roots in Eastern medicine and is a type of acupressure, which has proven anecdotally to be effective with anxiety, addictions and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Similar to the method of acupuncturists, therapists, who use TFT, press their fingers and hands to stimulate the body and mind.

Connolly said after some discussion with the therapist, patients simply think of the problem troubling

them and tap, with their fingers, certain pressure points along the body.

Each problem has several symptoms, anxiety, depression, stress or others.

Each symptom requires a certain series of pressure points to be stimulated. The tapping can become involved.

The method takes advantage of the "energy meridians" which Eastern medicine says exist within the body and which tell acupuncturists where to place their needles.

TFT and Connolly's notoriety for workshops on the technique have attracted enough attention that Connolly was called to Littleton, Colo., in November to teach therapists working in the aftermath of the shooting that happened there last April.

"They called — me," Connolly said.

Many of the people in Littleton now are suffering from a type of post-traumatic stress disorder, what World War I soldiers called "shell shock," she said.

Officials at the Columbine Connections, a non-profit organization, said they sought out Connolly because they believed TFT might help people get past the



MERRY BARR and therapist Suzanne Connolly demonstrate the tapping technique of thought field therapy, left to right. Connolly said the therapy helps patients work through their problems without having to relieve them.

'It shortens the recovery process. Nothing is going to fill that space, but it will take the edge off of it'
— Suzanne Connolly



SUZANNE CONNOLLY taught thought field therapy to therapists working in Littleton, Colo.

tragedy there.

The organization has received more than \$1 million in federal funds to help Littleton residents deal with the shooting.

Connolly said she spent two days teaching the therapy, discussing the stages of trauma and what's needed to help with trauma and explaining how TFT fits in that process.

"They're weaving this in whatever else they're doing," she said.

"It's an important thing in their therapy."

The group has a staff of more than 300 people who are trying to help the students of Columbine High School, their parents and other community members move past the tragedy.

TFT has quick results in releasing people from their problems, Connolly said.

Therapies can work through problems in as little as a few minutes and as much as an hour.

"It shortens the recovery process," Connolly said.

"Nothing is going to fill that space,

but it will take the edge off of it."

That ability is important because Columbine Connections is dealing with a lot of people.

"They're overwhelmed with the volume of people coming in," Connolly said.

Post-traumatic stress disorder has a delayed reaction, and therapists at Columbine Connections have recently begun seeing the problem appear and seeking ways to deal with the problem, said Marguerite McCormack, the non-profit's clinical supervisor.

"You kind of numb out and then 6-8 months after the event all the way to 18 months after, you feel the effects," she said.

Connolly said she taught each of 29 therapists from the non-profit the technique by having the therapists work out their own anxieties with the therapy.

Many of the 29 therapists who performed the method on themselves felt some relief from their own anxieties but were still skeptical of the technique, she said.

"They were saying, 'I'm going to

have to wait and see if this lasts,'" Connolly said.

Although the method has been written about in professional magazines, it has not been tested in way which the medical community's peer review journals have accepted.

Being published in those journals mean more complete acceptance by orthodox Western medicine.

"What gets in the way is 'No such thing is quick fix,'"

But, Connolly said thought field therapy works.

"For psychotherapy, it has an extremely high success rate," she said.

The seasoned workshop giver said she has actually performed the therapy on herself earlier in her career.

"I had a fear of public speaking," she said.

Whether or not the medical community has accepted the method, McCormack believes the therapy will help.

"She did us a real service. She really did," McCormack said.