

## **MSC in Family and Systemic Psychotherapy**

I received part funding from the FPSA for the MSc in Family and Systemic Psychotherapy at the Institute of Family Therapy. This is a qualifying training course which is 4 years in total and I completed the first two years as part of my social work training in 2016. The MSc course comprises of year 3 and 4 of the qualifying training and I have been grateful to be supported by FPSA for both years of the course. The course involved weekly clinical supervision groups, monthly training days and a number of theory, research and practice assignments over the course of the two years. IFT is the only standalone provider of systemic family psychotherapy training in the UK and it was established as a charity in 1977 with the aim of promoting systemic practice. The MSc is well-established but is also updated regularly to ensure that it keeps up with developments in the systemic field and leading systemic therapists and practitioners gave lectures, led seminars and provided tutoring and supervision.

The course comprised of a number of different elements, all of which are designed to develop knowledge and understanding of systemic theories and to support the use of theory in practice. Whilst Year 3 focused on developing our systemic skills, Year 4 focused on our maturing clinical practice and covered more specialised topics and assignments including case studies of clinical work and plenaries covering areas such as working with adolescent in-patients, young people with eating disorders and life-limiting conditions. In parallel to the plenaries, were monthly training days at the IFT head office which comprised of a reflective reading group in which participants delivered presentations and reflections on the plenary content and the papers that accompanied it. There was also a workplace consultation group in which we took turns to share dilemmas from our work contexts and used systemic approaches to creatively explore different approaches which we could take back to our workplaces. People came from a range of disciplines such as social work, charities, adult mental health and CAMHS settings.

The practice-focused part of the training continued to comprise of a weekly clinical supervision group with a systemic supervisor and four students. We worked together with one student delivering family therapy sessions and the other students acting as a reflecting team before, during and after the sessions, overseen by the supervisor. The clinic I worked in during Year 4 was in an in person clinical setting and involved families referred by mental health professionals. We used the reflecting team format which meant that the family were in the room with the lead therapist and the reflecting team was behind a two way mirror in another room, observing and contributing to the sessions through reflective commentary and feedback. We worked with a range of families including couples, parents with adult children and siblings where at least one family member had a mental health diagnosis and where they were experiencing difficulties in their family relationships. This context was very different to Year 3 where I had worked in an online private family therapy setting and I really valued gaining this clinical experience in an in person clinic using the reflecting team format. I was struck by how much families valued the reflecting team model once they got used to it and how important the relationship became with the whole team and families through the course of the year. I felt privileged to develop meaningful relationships with the families I worked with and felt moved by the changes that gradually took place in family dynamics and communication over time.

I feel that this final year of training has really enabled me to shift my identity from one of a social worker and manager training to be a therapist to a practising systemic family therapist in training. As part of the development of this identity, I moved roles to take on Clinical Social Work and then

Clinical Practitioners role in another London Borough that has a systemic practice model. I worked in locality teams which support families across the spectrum of children's services from initial referrals through to young people leaving care and was able to apply my systemic training directly through direct work, systemic consultation and joint therapeutic interventions. A proportion of the work involved working with families with adolescents including young people with additional needs such as diagnoses of ADHD and Autism and who were struggling with mental health difficulties. Other areas of the work was working with parents where there had been domestic violence which had impacted on children and where parents were struggling to parent teenagers who they felt had become beyond parental control and where children had become looked after by the local authority for that reason. Being able to apply my systemic training to a diverse range of families and situations in a social work setting really helped me to put systemic theory into practice and to support social workers working directly with families to use systemic ideas in social work practice as well.

I continue to have a particular interest in families where parents have complex trauma histories and in family relationships in situations where children are looked after by the local authority and intend to pursue these clinical interests further as part of my professional development. I would recommend systemic training to anyone considering it whilst noting that it is a huge commitment of time and effort that shouldn't be embarked on lightly! With the best will and preparation in the world, life can also put obstacles in the way that are completely unforeseen and I had to extend my finish date for the training for this reason. I was so grateful for the support and understanding of my colleagues and supervisors and found that my training was actually very helpful in a personal as well as a professional capacity during this time. Although the formal course training has now finished, I am continuing to gain my practice hours and complete my dissertation as part of qualifying as a systemic and family psychotherapist. I am extremely grateful to FPSA for supporting me on this journey and I am happy that I chose this route to qualification.