

FPSA Report MSc Family Therapy Year 1 2023-2024

Whilst being a children's Social Worker by background I am currently based in a neurodevelopmental Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) for children with Autism Spectrum Condition and Learning Disabilities and I am employed as a CAMHS clinician. I completed the first two years of the Systemic Psychotherapy Training at the Institute of Family Therapy and decided to apply for the MSc in Systemic Psychotherapy at the Tavistock and Portman Clinic in September 2023. I am incredibly grateful for the funding that I have received from FPSA as without this funding I would not have been able to progress into the qualifying years.

The course is made of different components, which has offered a rich and varied learning opportunity. Alongside being required to complete seventy-five hours of clinical work within my own organisation, the course has been comprised of monthly training blocks, which have focused on developing knowledge and understanding in relation to systemic theoretical concepts and where conversations about race, culture and diversity have remained very much at the fore. The teaching has deepened my own understanding of different theoretical modalities (e.g., Narrative Therapy, Structural Family Therapy, Milan) and has helped to develop my own therapeutic agility where I have begun to appreciate and draw upon an integrative approach when working with children and families. The training has not only enabled me to consider the myriad of contexts that children and families bring, but has enabled me to develop my self-reflexivity – encouraging me to reflect upon my own stories, beliefs, assumptions and prejudices and the impact this may have on the therapeutic system.

The training also consists of a weekly supervision group as part of a clinical placement, which offers a space for Trainees to embed and experiment with applying theoretical idea to practice. The Reflecting Team model that is used is not only a strengths-based approach, but offers the Lead Therapist and the family multiple perspectives; giving the family the power to “choose” what ideas they connect and lean into whilst aiding the Trainee Therapists own thinking and curiosity. Whilst this has been at times an exposing experience, live supervision and working alongside a Reflecting Team has been so helpful to my practice; it has allowed for different lens (gender, ethnicity, ability etc) to be held in mind, but where conversations within the Team have enabled new ideas to be co-constructed together and for the “problem” to be thought about in different ways. I have noticed, and have been somewhat surprised by how much the children look forward to the Reflecting Team's conversation and have been able to learn news ways to invite creativity and playfulness into the room in order to enhance engagement with children and young people.

The children and young people who I have seen within my work organisation as well as my clinical placement all have a diagnosis of autism spectrum condition and or a Learning Disability. Alongside their diagnosis, they are experiencing difficulties within the context of their mental health (e.g., depression or anxiety). These difficulties impact on their social relationships both within their family, and often outside of their family (e.g., school, peer relationships). By widening the frame and by considering different contexts, a systemic approach has at times enabled the problem to be viewed within a relational sphere rather than being located within the child/ and or their mental health. In circumstances where problems have been longstanding, children and young people often develop negative stories about themselves. Within my clinical work, I have noticed that unvoiced feelings of shame and embarrassment often run alongside the negative stories that young people tell about themselves, which can make it difficult to talk about the “problem”. Systemic ideas and concepts can inject creativity and playfulness, which can create a new language around the problem and has enabled children and parents to begin to talk about the problem in a different way. Drawing upon

Narrative ideas I have been able work alongside children and parents to begin to co-construct alternative narratives, which has in turn helped to support young people to develop a more positive story about themselves.

Feedback is an important part of systemic thinking and is closely linked to self-reflexivity. I have tried to create a culture of feedback within my own practice; checking out the helpfulness of conversations, asking how the family / child are finding the work together, talking about what we could be doing more of and less of etc. At times this has made space to alter the direction of the conversation / work, but on other occasions it has made room for young people and families to reflect on the usefulness of a systemic space and the differences that they have begun to notice in themselves, but also within the context of family relationships.

This is a rigorous and intensive course – it has stretched, pushed and challenged me, personally as well as professionally, but I feel incredibly privileged to have been able to complete another year of the training. Thank you again for the funding!