

Foundation PSA Training Grant Report

DipHE in Children nursing/BSc (Hons) in contemporary Healthcare Issues/Professional Nurse Advocate

Course Completed with the funding provided by the Foundation

Postgraduate Certificate in Mental Health, Trauma and Attachment – University of Chester

1. Training undertaken

Training: Postgraduate Certificate (PG Cert) in Mental Health, Trauma and Attachment

University: University of Chester

Duration: One year (540 hours)

Qualification achieved: Postgraduate Certificate in Mental Health, Trauma and Attachment

I was very grateful to receive funding from the Foundation PSA towards the cost of completing my Postgraduate Certificate in Mental Health, Trauma and Attachment at the University of Chester.

2. Date of completion

I completed the Postgraduate Certificate in September 2026.

3. Professional background and current role

I am a Registered Children's Nurse and currently work as a Band 7 Mental Health Practitioner within a Children and Young People's Urgent Support Team (UST).

My previous career was predominantly within emergency care, where I worked for almost 20 years in a busy Major Trauma Centre, including in a senior nursing role. Moving into children and young people's mental health has provided an opportunity to develop my understanding beyond the immediate physical presentation of a child or young person and to consider the psychological, developmental, relational and environmental factors that may influence their wellbeing.

The PG Cert was therefore particularly relevant to my current role and provided an opportunity to develop my knowledge at postgraduate level while directly relating the learning to my clinical practice.

4. Summary of the training

The PG Cert explored mental health through the interconnected perspectives of trauma, attachment, development and relationships. The course developed a deeper understanding of how early experiences and relationships can influence emotional development, coping strategies, behaviour and mental health across the lifespan.

A significant area of learning for me was understanding how trauma can influence a young person's emotional and behavioural responses and how their response to distress may be influenced by previous experiences and attachment relationships. This encouraged me to look beyond the presenting behaviour and consider what experiences may have contributed to the presentation and what the young person may be communicating through their behaviour.

The course also explored the relationship between trauma and neurodiversity, which has been particularly relevant to my clinical practice. It reinforced the importance of not assuming that every presentation can be explained by a single diagnosis or experience. Instead, consideration needs to be given to the individual young person, their developmental history, neurodevelopmental needs, relationships and lived experiences.

As part of the course, I undertook academic work exploring neurodiversity and trauma, which enabled me to critically consider how these areas can overlap and how easily a young person's needs can be misunderstood when viewed through only one lens.

The course also developed my skills in critical appraisal of research, reflective practice and applying theoretical knowledge to clinical situations. This has strengthened my ability to consider evidence alongside clinical experience when assessing and supporting children and young people.

5. My experience of the training and impact on my practice

The PG Cert has been extremely valuable to both my professional development and my current clinical practice.

One of the biggest changes in my thinking has been learning to look beyond “What is this young person doing?” and consider “What experiences may have contributed to this presentation, what are they experiencing, and what are they communicating through their behaviour?”

This is particularly important within an urgent mental health service, where young people are often seen at a point of significant distress. There can understandably be a strong focus on managing the immediate crisis and ensuring safety. The learning from the course has helped me to maintain this focus while also considering the wider context and meaning behind the presentation.

The attachment element of the course has been particularly useful when working with young people and their families. It has increased my awareness of how relationships, previous experiences and patterns of interaction can influence how a young person responds to professionals and to those supporting them. It has also encouraged me to consider how our own interactions with young people can either help them feel safe and understood or, unintentionally, increase their sense of threat.

My learning around trauma and neurodiversity has also had a direct impact on my practice. Young people can present with overlapping emotional, behavioural and neurodevelopmental difficulties, and it is important that one explanation does not automatically overshadow another. The course has encouraged me to consider the whole young person rather than focusing solely on a diagnosis, behaviour or immediate crisis.

The course also developed my thinking around individualised care and inclusion. As part of my learning, I explored the use of one-page profiles for staff, which could be shared with a young person before their appointment. The purpose was to introduce the professional they were going to meet, provide some information about them and help reduce some of the uncertainty that can accompany an appointment with a mental health service.

This was particularly relevant when considering young people who may experience anxiety, difficulties with unfamiliar people or environments, or who may have neurodevelopmental differences. Providing information about the practitioner in advance can help make the first contact feel more predictable and familiar and may support the development of a sense of safety before the appointment takes place.

This work reinforced for me that inclusion is not simply about adapting what we do once a young person arrives; it is also about considering what we can do before contact takes place to make accessing a service easier and less intimidating. It is a relatively simple intervention, but one that has the potential to make a meaningful difference to a young person's experience of accessing mental health support.

The course has also increased my confidence in sharing trauma-informed and attachment-aware thinking with colleagues. As a Band 7 practitioner, I have opportunities to influence practice beyond my own individual clinical contacts, and I hope to use the knowledge gained to support colleagues to consider trauma, attachment, neurodiversity and inclusion within their own assessments and decision-making.

Importantly, the qualification has not simply added to my academic knowledge; it has changed the way I think about and understand the young people I work with. It has encouraged me to remain curious about behaviour, to consider the wider context and to recognise that the same presentation can have very different meanings for different young people.

Future application

I intend to continue applying the learning from the PG Cert within my current role and to share it more widely within the service. I am particularly interested in developing trauma-informed and inclusive approaches that help young people feel understood and reduce the risk of their needs being overlooked or misunderstood.

I would recommend the course to professionals working with children and young people, particularly those working within mental health, nursing, education, social care, safeguarding and emergency care. An understanding of trauma and attachment is relevant across all of these settings and can fundamentally change how we understand a child's behaviour, relationships and emotional needs.

Completing the PG Cert has been a significant part of my professional development, and I am very grateful to the Foundation PSA for providing the funding that made it possible. The financial support enabled me to undertake postgraduate study that is directly relevant to my clinical role and has provided knowledge that I can continue to apply in my work with children, young people and families.