

## **MSc in Family and Systemic Psychotherapy**

I have been fortunate to receive part funding for my third-year training for an MSc in Family and Systemic Psychotherapy from FPSA. It takes four years to qualify as a family therapist and the MSc is made up of the third and fourth years of training which consolidates and develops therapeutic skills using a systems lens. If I pass at the end of the course, I will be able to register as a qualified family and systemic psychotherapist.

At the moment, I work as a social worker for a local council. My job is to safeguard children and young people. Where I work, a lot of the children who come to my attention are criminally exploited young people. Safeguarding children who are involved in county lines or gang activity is what I do most of the time. As a social worker I'm very used to working with families however, when you work with young people who are being exploited, there are other systems that you need to develop relationships with. These include many professionals but also the friends and associates of the young person you're seeking to support. I have found developing my skills in systemic therapy supported me to understand the holistic needs of these young people and those around them.

The course has been a fully comprehensive experience! In addition to my role as a social worker, I have attended monthly training days, a weekly supervision group and written thousands of words for my assignments. I've been fortunate enough to receive training from leaders in the field including John Burnham who has written extensively about systemic practice. The weekly supervision group involved providing therapy online with a group of other trainees and the supervisor. Being watched all the time by my team was tough and exposing however, it was a rich opportunity to provide meaningful feedback to up skill my practice. I have learnt a range of different therapeutic techniques including dialogical approaches which have particular relevance to multiagency working in crisis and narrative practice which is a playful approach to those who find finding a language about their adversity difficult.

I've been completing my training at the Institute of Family Therapy (IFT). Several organisations offer this MSc however, I chose IFT because of their commitment to anti-oppressive practice. I work for an inner city council and support young people from many different backgrounds. It's critical for me that I support and empower young people in a way that recognises inequality and difference. I have not been disappointed. We have spent the significant amount of time exploring protected characteristics. Race has been a consistent focus. Given that the majority of the young people that I work with are black or brown it has been useful to develop my skills in exploring their experiences of exclusion and discrimination to build relationships to support them to feel safe and optimistic about their future.

My systemic training supported me to help one young person in particular. He was being criminally exploited into selling drugs. The young person had suffered losses in his life and witnessed a lot of violence. When I first started working with him, he had a very difficult relationship with his mum as she would get very angry with him. Working together, mother and son were able to learn more about the context that the young person was operating in and how few choices he had when he was being criminally exploited. Using my systemic training, we were able to explore together the different influences on his decision-making. This helped the young person to reflect on the impact of trauma in his life and it helped his mum to understand better ways of keeping him safe and showing love. Because they were able to understand each other better, the family were able to move away to a secret location where the young person is much safer and has returned to school.

Going into my fourth year, I have remained in my role as a social worker and would like to have more conversations like this. I would like to use my skills to strengthen familial relationships and support professional networks to provide meaningful intervention when it is most needed. I also teach other social workers and provide consultations. As I develop my own skills, I can provide better support and advice to them so that this training I receive can benefit many families not just those I directly work with.