

**With thanks:**

The grant given to me by the FPSA paid for the bulk of my academic fees for Yr. 1 of the BACP accredited Postgraduate Diploma in Integrative Counselling and Psychotherapy at the University of South Wales. There are numerous other costs associated with this course (residential weekend, personal therapy, membership of the BACP, insurance, placement costs) so I have been immensely thankful for the monies that were granted to me, enabling me to undertake this training.

**The training:**

The first year of the Postgraduate Diploma has given me a grounding in the core approaches (humanistic, relational psychodynamic and cognitive behavioural) which make up this integrative qualification. I have passed all assignments, been assessed as fit to practice and am working in two separate counselling agencies with clients as part of my requirement to undertake 100hrs work with clients.

The approaches have been taught through a mix of lectures, experiential learning groups and supervised weekly skills triads and what I have learnt so far has impacted directly on my working practice with young people who are affected by having a family member with a life-threatening illness. Learning to build a therapeutic relationship with these young people, so that they feel safe and 'held' whilst they go through enormous uncertainty in their lives, has been invaluable. As a result of gaining a deeper understanding of therapeutic processes I am now more confident in working alongside the young people as they navigate this emotional time in their lives and to reflect on my own feelings, ensuring I have the necessary resilience for this work. The core focus of my training is on working relationally and placing the relationship at the heart of the work I do means that the young people have a consistent and safe space in which they can explore the massive changes they and their families are going through.

Many of the young people I work with are experiencing mild to moderate mental health issues of their own; most commonly anxiety. The cognitive behavioural part of my training means that I now have a wider range of tools to use with young people, helping them to recognise the impact of their thoughts on their emotions; I am able to support them to learn how to challenge these thoughts and employ strategies to deal with their anxiety. I have been able to share this learning within the wider team in my workplace, so that they are able to use these approaches in their work too.

The aspect of the course this year which has perhaps had the most profound impact on my practice, has been the programme of personal development which runs through it. Through weekly reflections and personal development and experiential groups I have been able to recognise where my own experiences, attachment style and behaviours impact on my counselling work and relationships. In doing so, my self-awareness has dramatically improved and I am a safer and more client-focused practitioner, as a result.

As I move into the final year of this training course, I look forward to examining, in more depth, the three approaches and continuing to support, through therapeutic relationships, the young people with whom I work.