

MA in Systemic Psychotherapy – Year 1 – 2017/18

I would like to start by expressing I am so grateful for the funding I received from the FPSA to complete my first year of my MA in Systemic Psychotherapy. This has been an amazing learning experience that has also enabled me to step up my work with young people at a time that has been challenging. I would not have been able to do this without the support provided by you.

I currently work in a Functional Family Therapy (FFT) Team in the London Borough of Waltham Forest. I work under the “Troubled Families programme”, a Government scheme supporting the most disadvantaged families. FFT specifically works intensely with teenagers from the ages of 10 to 17 presenting extremely emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. Examples of these are self-harm, gang involvement, suicide attempts, being verbally or physically abusive, school exclusion and engaging in worrying sexual relationships and being at risk of child sexual exploitation. Generally the teenagers belong to families that have been labelled as “hard to reach”, meaning they have not engaged with services. These young people usually present a myriad of mental health issues like ADHD, ODD, substance misuse, anxiety, depression, or are on the spectrum of autistic disorders (ASD).

The vast majority of my clients are involved in gangs or at risk of being recruited into them. This has been an extremely difficult year for these children as many of the stabbings that have taken place in London have occurred in this borough. This has been challenging, and painful, on many levels and the course equipped me in many different areas of my professional practice.

Systemic theory provides insight and awareness on how systems enable or, unfortunately, sometimes disable change. The majority of the young people I work with have very wide networks with whom they hardly engage. A simple example is supporting conversations between young people and their school settings about how, if they are related to gangs, when they say they can't walk to school they are really worried for their lives, they are not truanting. They know they might be victims in retaliation for one of the stabbings. This has a serious impact on their mental health. Many schools I have been working with have therefore supported children in attending school and also provide different meanings to some of the behaviour they might display. This enables young people to feel heard and supported. The course equipped me to position myself in ways that I can invite different conversations between families and networks, and thus change.

During the training we have discussed how dominant discourses and narratives shape the way we see the world and how this translates into the way we work with our clients. I have been striving to pay attention to these issues and to self-reflect about how these might inform my practice in order to become a better practitioner and to be able to support the young people we work with.

Whilst on training one of my clients was stabbed and died. This was an extremely painful time. I continued to work with the family and his sisters (also teenagers). I strongly believe that support and space to self-reflect and carefully think about my practice enabled me to support the family.

The course has also benefited my team as I have been able to share my knowledge and support my colleagues. I will soon be delivering a teaching morning to them that I would have not been able to do without the training.

The number of young people affected by mental health is increasingly growing and the services offered cut. This is a very challenging time for our practice. The course has certainly supported me in developing my practice, acquiring skills and ideas and therefore improving my chances of having a positive impact on young people's lives.

I can't say **Thank you** enough.