

Report for FPSA 2014-2016

MSc Systemic Family Psychotherapy – IFT

I am most grateful for the funding from FPSA, which has allowed me to undertake this level of training. As a parent of two children, living in London the funding has been crucial to allow me this opportunity.

Context to my choice of training

I have been working with children, young people and families for 23 years in a variety of contexts including residential care, play work, advocacy and social work. Since qualifying as a social worker in 2006, I have worked in a number of settings including those at the forefront of incorporating systemic principles into social work practice such as the Reclaim Social Work movement in Hackney (Goodman& Trowler 2012). More recently, I have been working as a Systemic Practitioner in a clinical team within a Child Protection Service as part of a tier 2 CAMH's service and as a systemic consultant for social workers. I also train social workers and social work students on incorporating systemic ideas into their practice as well as offering casework consultation in a variety of authorities. Within these roles I have observed social workers and their managers experience what I perceive as anger, distress, frustration, anxiety, panic and empathy and yet this emotional response was rarely discussed or even acknowledged. It is this experience that has given rise to my interest in how Systemic ideas can support the work of Social workers, often being faced with highly charged, complicated and morally precarious situations to navigate. I am passionate about families receiving high quality intervention should they come into contact with Statutory Social care and am committed to being part of a shift in the public narrative of 'social workers' to one that recognizes the good work they often do. Teenagers are often referred to Social Care in regards to a myriad of concerning behaviours, from self-harm to criminality, non-school attendance to being at risk of sexual exploitation. A group often experienced as hard to reach or engage with by workers, they are often experienced as being 'beyond control' and hard to help.

Self-Reflexivity

My Systemic training has developed my understanding of how my own experiences contribute to my own work with families. Subsequently my ability to use self-reflexivity both 'in action' and 'on action' has significantly increased. Not only have I been able to develop this ability for myself and any work that I do directly with children, young people and their families, I have been able to use this in my role as a consultant. This has allowed me to support those working with families to consider their own SOCIAL GRACES (Burnham 2012) and how they affect their understanding and communication with the families with whom they work. When working with teenagers and their families, often during crisis, it is all too easy for workers to get caught up with linear explanations of 'behaviour'. Using a systemic approach allows for a more holistic understanding of the complexities families are often facing and that teenage behaviour is often a vehicle of expression for other issues going on in and around families.

Working with teenagers and young people

Systemic approaches to working with teenagers and young people allow the practitioner to hold on to the young person being part of a wider system. All children and young people are part of a heritage and culture, which has its own rules/stories and experiences. When we are faced with often frightening or confusing behaviour from young people it can be hard to stay curious and to 'think' about the logic of the behaviour. Strengths and resilience is often over looked. I found elements of our training around the SHIFT research (working with self-harm) and MST and manualised approaches, most interesting when thinking about working with teenagers.

This training has made me consider the importance of undertaking further training in the future. I am particularly interested in developing my understanding of trauma and the brain as I think this significantly affects young people who have witnessed or been victims of harmful, neglectful and frightening behaviours.